

## II. THE WHISKY PRIEST'S SOCIAL CONFLICT

### A. THE PRIEST AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT

As the only remaining priest in a Mexican area that forbids religious leaders to perform their duties, the whisky priest faces many problems. He wants to do his duty well but the circumstances at that time does not allow him to do so.

The conflict between the whisky priest as God's representative and the lieutenant as the government's representative reveals that there is a conflict between two worlds. However, this only shows that religion cannot be destroyed, because man is basically religious. The following is an instance of the people's religiousity.

..... 'Father will you hear our confession?'

He said, 'Yes. Yes. In Senor Lehr's barn. Before the Mass. I will be there at five. As soon as it is light.'

'There are so many of us, father ....'

'Well tonight too then ..... At eight.'

'And, father, there are many children to be baptized. There has not been a priest for three years.' <sup>8</sup>

Since there is no religious tolerance, the whisky-priest cannot serve well for he does not have a church where to say mass. The knowledge that he is needed and must help people find God's salvation, causes him to serve

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<sup>8</sup> Graham Greene, The Power And The Glory, Penguin Books, (Great Britain : Cox & Wyman Ltd., Reading, 1971), p. 166

secretly. He disguises as a beggar in order not to be recognized by the authorities and starts to wander and serve wherever he is. He is regarded by the government as a traitor of the state since to perform religious activities is against the law. He is pursued to be killed. The priest learns that in their efforts to catch him, the lieutenant has taken hostages and offers rewards, if they are able to find and deliver the priest. Hostages are threatened to be killed if they could not give a report of the priest's whereabouts and surrender him within a certain period of time. The lieutenant regards anybody who protects the priest as a traitor too. However, nobody is willing to betray him. The situation seems hopeless yet the priest is not caught. He suffers a lot in his efforts to escape from the lieutenant. In spite of that, he realizes that he will one day be captured and be shot to death.

"Are you going to shoot me now ?"

The lieutenant said again sharply, 'I am not a barbarian. You will be tried ..... properly.'

'What for ?'

'For treason.' 9

As a citizen he must obey the law but as a servant of God he is bound by unwritten regulations to serve as a priest even though it threatens his life. He is aware that he is in a difficult position for he is pursued by the lieutenant. His efforts to perform his duty well is hindered by the

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government's regulation which is anti-religious. Churches are burned and a law is passed that priests must get married.

To the lieutenant, the priest is a traitor, and is considered as a dangerous man in society. The lieutenant himself tells the priest that "you're a danger. That's why we kill you. I have nothing against you, you understand, as a man." <sup>10</sup> He is regarded even more dangerous than the gringo, who has committed several crimes.

'You heard what he did in Houston. Got away with ten thousand dollars. Two G men were shot.'

'G men ?'

'It's an honour - in a way - to deal with such people.' He slapped furiously out at a mosquito.

'A man like that,' the lieutenant said, 'does no real harm. ....' <sup>11</sup>

The priest knows that the lieutenant is determined to capture him. The lieutenant has "hatred and contempt for a different way of life, for ease, safety, toleration, and complacency." <sup>12</sup> He hates the Jafe who lacks discipline, Captain Fellow, an irresponsible man who always lives in self-deception, and the whisky priest who violates the law. The priest is hated by the lieutenant because his idea and his conception of life are against the government's. To the lieutenant, sufferings should be abolished. He, therefore,

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<sup>10</sup> Greene, p. 193 .

<sup>11</sup> Greene, p. 23

<sup>12</sup> Greene, p. 36

disagrees with the priest who says that people can be happy in the midst of sufferings. However, in reality the priest is afraid of pain and tries to avoid suffering. Hence, the lieutenant hates him very much, for he notices the priest is an hypocrite, who pretends to be what he is not. The priest always encourages people to regard sufferings as nothing, although he himself hates to suffer.

The whisky priest often feels disappointed when he faces many problems during his escape. At times he wishes to be caught soon, although he is afraid to suffer. In his frustration, he says, "I'd rather be caught." 'But ..... there is the pain. To choose pain like that - it's not possible. And it's my duty not to be caught. ....' " 13 . He then starts to imbibe in order to overcome his cowardice. Neither the government nor the society sanctions his bad habit. The government forbids the people to drink alcoholic beverages. It is against the law but to the priest it is the best remedy to overcome his cowardice and weaknesses. - " 'A little drink,' he said. 'will work wonders in a cowardly man, with a little brandy, why, I'd defy - the devil.' " 14 What the priest does is contradictory to the government's regulations. He indulges in alcohol as well as performs religious activities secretly. All of these are against the law. Besides, his duties are against those of the lieutenant's. They oppose each other. The priest's

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<sup>13</sup> Greene, p. 40

<sup>14</sup> Greene, p. 42

duty is to spread religion while the lieutenant is to make a better state and abolish religion.

Knowing that he is already caught, the priest realizes that this is his last moment. He cannot escape anymore. He says to the officers, "What a lot of trouble I had getting across those mountains, and now ..... here I am ....." 15  
The capture ends his conflict against the government.

#### B. THE PRIEST AGAINST THE VILLAGERS

As mentioned earlier, the priest is very disappointed by the government's new regulation. This makes it difficult to minister to the spiritual needs of the people, since he is always pursued by the authorities. He decides to escape where he can exercise religious freedom. He moves from one village to another believing the people need him and will help him. In reality nobody wants to share what they have to him. This is because the villagers know the government's law against priests and the punishment if they disobey. Realizing the difficult and dangerous situation, he speeds up his journey to find a peaceful place where people are free to worship the way they want to. Contrary to his desire, he meets many hindrances which forces him to stay and delays his escape. The lieutenant has given an announcement to the villagers about his decision to take hostages in order to threaten them. He announces that "I

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15 Greene, p. 190

would take a man from every village in the state as a hostage. If the villagers didn't report the man when he came, the hostages would be shot - and then we'd take more," 16 The priest feels guilty when he learns that the government has taken hostages in their efforts to capture him. The villagers can do nothing. They need the priest but they are afraid of the consequences. They neither want to let him stay nor betray him. Later on in their need of a priest, they are willing to accept the reality that one of them might be taken as a hostage and never comes back.

When he arrives at his homeplace, all of the villagers seems unwilling to have him stay, even Maria, his woman, does not want him to stay long in her house. He realizes that he must leave soon in order not to involve the villagers.

It wasn't the welcome that he had expected : a small knot of people had gathered between huts and watched him from a safe distance - there was a little decaying bandstand and a single stall for gascosas-people had brought their chairs out for the evening. Nobody came forward to kiss his hand and ask his blessing. 17

This shows that he is no longer welcomed. They need a priest but they do not want to risk their lives. The priest is ready to help them but the situation makes it difficult to minister them. The whisky priest longs to serve the villagers who need religious service, but the condition

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16 Greene, p. 24

17 Greene, p. 62

creates a problem which he must struggle against. Since he is always pursued, he performs the service secretly in order not to endanger the villagers and to fulfill their need for religion.

### C. THE PRIEST AGAINST THE MESTIZO

Although the whisky priest has succeeded in disguising his identity for years, yet he knows that one day he will be captured and killed. In his first encounter with the Mestizo, he senses that the Mestizo is a Judas. Sooner or later the Mestizo might deliver him to the authorities. As such he tries to get rid of him. He is not prepared to die but the Mestizo wants to deliver him for a reward. Although the Mestizo plans to betray him, yet the whisky priest does not hate him. At first, he tries to ignore the Mestizo. He even let the Mestizo suffer in his struggles to follow him. Later he feels sorry for him and begins to realize that as a priest he should not treat someone like that. Seeing the Mestizo's sick condition, he changes his attitude towards him and asks him, " 'Do you feel better now ? Not so cold, eh ? Or so hot ?' and pressed his hand with a kind of tenderness upon the shoulders of God's image." <sup>18</sup> The priest thinks that both he and the Mestizo are betrayers just for their own sake. The Mestizo wants to betray him for a reward. This is reflected in his conversation with the

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<sup>18</sup> Greene, p. 101

Mestizo:

'Are you my enemy ?'

'That's what you think. You think I want seven hundred pesos - that's the reward. You think a poor man like me can't afford not to tell the police ...'

'You're feverish.'

The man said in a sick voice of cunning,  
'You're right, of course.' 19

While, he as a priest has betrayed the sacred trust of his priestly role. He has committed adultery and indulged in alcohol. A priest should not do that. However, as human being, both the priest and the Mestizo have the same tendency that is to survive. "A man detached from society may still survive physically" 20 The priest tries hard not to be killed by the government and the Mestizo tries to get the reward. He does not blame the Mestizo instead he regards it as the latter's privilege to get the reward in order to survive. So the Mestizo betrays him for the sake of his life, and the priest has betrayed God for the sake of himself. He drinks just to find consolation and he escapes to save his life although he is not sure if he will succeed. Both are struggling although their struggles are opposed against each other. The whisky priest struggles for his own salvation and the Mestizo struggles for the reward to survive. "This man intended to betray him for money which

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19 Greene, p. 99

20 Albert B. Casuga, Man In Search Of Meaning, (Manila: De La Salle College, 1978), p. 33



he needed, and he had betrayed God for what ?. Not even for  
real lust. 21

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21 Greene, p. 99