

The Sacred and the Profane in Fr. Andrew M. Greeley's *Passover Trilogy*

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Abstract:

Using the concept of the sacred–profane dichotomy by Emile Durkheim which is found in his *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912), the author attempts to prove the existence of the sacred and the profane elements in Fr. Andrew Greeley's *Passover Trilogy*. After dissecting the novels, the article found out that, as per Durkheim's concept, sacred and profane elements existed. However, the dichotomy of the sacred and the profane was advertently fused. This harmonious fusion of the sacred and the profane is important in shaping the characters' lives (who are representations of real people) especially in terms of their moral rebirth and sense of renewal, and that the dichotomy of the sacred and the profane would only create chaos and confusion, among others.

Keywords: Andrew M. Greeley, Sociology of Literature, the Sacred and the Profane, *Passover Trilogy*, Sociology of Religion

Introduction

Religion is one of the many topics that one should avoid tackling in any context of a conversation. Religions, as thought of by sociologists, are better understood when looked upon in a sociological context. However, studying religion from a sociological point of view seems more tabooed than just talking about it. The idea that religion is a social product instead of a divine gift is irreverent, if not blasphemous to most people.

Primarily, realizing the importance of Emile Durkheim's *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1915), the researcher has seen it fit to use it as a lens in reading Greeley. Seeing the world of religious people slowly crumble down into decadence, as seen by these sociologists, it is rather timely that one faces these questionable issues that surround the representative and leaders of the church. Probably, though studying religion through a sociological microscope seems taboo, and coming-up with formulas or similarities in religions from all over the world appears to the average layman as irreverent, sociologists consider

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this endeavor of studying religion as a must in understanding better the nature, not only of religion, but also of humanity itself.

Though always mentioned in loudest whispers, the leaders of the Catholic religion have shown wanton profanity in many situations. Father Andrew M. Greeley, an Irish-American Roman Catholic priest, who was also a sociologist, journalist and novelist, has dared narrate the stories of the clergy. He has put these profanities into the light. Following the tradition of Graham Greene, he was able to show the light and dark side of the seminarians' and full-fledged priests' life in his novels. In his stories, he has shown the world about the horrid reality behind the men of the Catholic Church. With his fictions, he has become one of the most controversial novelists of his time – probably more controversial than D.H. Lawrence, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and James Joyce combined. Sadly, Greeley's novels have yet to impact on the (Catholic) sensibilities of his readers. Although he was a leader of the Catholic Church, one sees in his novels that priests like his main characters are very vulnerable to temptations. This choice of the author's subject matter is deeply disturbing, especially for narrow-minded and closed-minded individuals, when one thinks that the author is himself a priest.

Discussion

The sacred and the profane are not something to be identified as good or evil. The sacred is something that represents the interests of the society, usually made flesh in sacred symbols. Consequentially, anything that shows individuality or rebellion against the norms of the society is considered profane. This theory further shows the possibility that sacred things may appear or be held evil in the same manner that profane things good.

In other words, the concept of good and evil is highly subjective. Even Sartre's (1976) *Morality without Religion* explicitly says that a religious man is not a moral man necessarily. For Durkheim, anything that considers the interest of the society is the sacred element.

Fidelity to Commitment, as embodied in Marriage Vows and Priestly Vows

Greeley's *Thy Brother's Wife*, which is basically a story about forms of commitment, represents the Holy Thursday liturgy. The novel reminds us the story of Jesus, two thousand years ago during the Feast of the Unleavened Bread – also the Holy Thursday among the Catholics – when He *committed* Himself to the apostles.

Although the theme of the Holy Thursday is the fidelity to the Father's will, as upheld in the Catholic Church, Greeley obviously

emphasizes the theme of commitment in the novel – appropriately making the first sacred component – the fidelity to commitment.

Moreover, most of the important events in the novel happen during the Holy Thursday, the eight books that divide the events in the novels under study start with the verse from Book of John – except Book VIII, which also includes the Prayer of Priestly Recommitment – most of it from Chapter 13 which talks about Jesus’ washing His disciples’ feet – a sign of commitment, as much as humility of God.

From the Catholic stance, the Holy Thursday is a celebration of commitment, as much as the day of renewing the commitments of priests to the Holy Catholic Church and to the priestly works of the men of the cloth.

Among the events in the novel, the most striking and the most memorable Holy Thursdays are the ones when Sean has been offered the position of Archbishop of Chicago. Although he has rejected the position many times before for feeling unworthy of it, especially after touching Nora, he accepts it later – on a Holy Thursday.

Sean’s acceptance for the work as an archbishop is not the disturbing one, but the number of times he rejects it – even other positions earlier in the story which he accepts are much against his will or better judgment. He only accepts them finally, after much agonizing, because of his commitment to the Church. However, he has tried several times to get out of the priesthood by giving harsh and public comments and reactions against other priests and the politics of the Catholic Church. For instance, when he is interviewed by reporters about his stance on birth control, he frankly tells the reporters that it is the couple’s choice (163). Also, when Sean reacts to the promotion of a colleague who has an issue on homosexuality, he says fervently that God “deliver [them] from a faggot bishop” (164) in front of his colleagues. Another form of resistance against the strict catholic dogma is reflected in his letter to Paul and Nora where he writes: “... the Church has lost its touch with the problems and needs of contemporary human beings... I find that I’m against everything” (136).

And the worst, as an ordained priest, when Sean frankly and openly questions the Pope’s authority (166). Ironically, instead of being kicked out of priesthood, as he silently, fervently wished, he is being promoted for his sense of forthrightness; better yet, “honesty”.

He has become painfully honest and open about his feelings, after he had shown his physical intimacy with his brother’s wife, Nora. After he and Nora have consummated their love, Sean was never the same stable, committed priest. He wishes to sever his connection with the Church, but he would not do it out of his own volition. He would like other people to kick him out, and not destroy his own commitment.

Eventually, although he has “imperfectly kept” his promise and commitment, as Greeley said, he kept it. He wants to marry Nora so much that he has done everything to be defrocked, apostatized, and ousted from the Church. Yet, in the end, it is Nora herself who helps Sean settle his mind down on his commitments rather than his love for Nora he kept bottled up inside his heart. She strongly holds that their commitments are much holier than the love they feel for each other. Being together with the person he loves is not worth it, if the price exacted calls for the banishment from the Church and from everything he believes in.

The commitments that Sean keeps are sacred to him; however, many are the times when he has been tempted to quit the priesthood – the most striking moment is when he finally possessed Nora. Before that critical moment, anybody who would try to seduce and sleep with him fails, but when Sean and Nora give in to their passion in the absence of her husband on a similar illicit affair, Sean does not hesitate either. They make love on the beach. He does not feel guilty about it though, at least for a while. Only at the last night together does Sean feel remorse in him, saying “Oh God, what have we been doing Nora? What terrible things have we been doing?” (173). Nora believes, though, that they are not committing any sin, “I refuse to think that this is wrong. We’re not committing sin...” (173). Her statement only shows two things: first, her character appears stronger than Sean’s; and second, she feels that they have the right love at the right time. However acceptable her rationalization regarding their sin, she cannot still hide the fact that they have committed adultery – this sin is crystal-clear.

After Sean’s epiphany, he then remembers his promises and Nora’s. Sean feels so confused that he does not know what to do with their broken promises: his promises to the Church and Nora’s to her husband. “Neither one of us is going to give up our commitments, Sean. I’m going back to Paul. You’re going back to your Church” (173), insists Nora, as though she controls the situation. She even thinks she knows how God thinks by claiming, “I’m sure God doesn’t think it’s wrong” (173).

This momentous event in their existence has brought an aftereffect on their lives. Sean, by contrast, has become an outspoken and liberal priest, probably, his explicit way of being out of the Church. He does not want it to come from him, so he shows that he is a voluble, renegade kind of priest to instigate the Church to cast him out, but the irony of it all is, when he is even promoted as an Auxiliary Bishop of Chicago.

Before, much against his disbelief in God, he talks to God in his journal as if He is nearby. Sean even says his reason why he is so keen in keeping his commitments to the Church, although he claims he has no

faith, “not believing in you (God), I tried to believe in the Church... Not able to make a commitment to you, I made a commitment to the priesthood...” (149). At this point, Sean is struggling. He is confused about the sacredness of his commitments, since the Church he believes in is “collapsing” all around him, “not able to make a commitment to you (God), I made a commitment to the priesthood; and the priesthood is crumbling. I wonder if I ought not to leave like everyone else? I wonder if commitments – any commitment and every commitment – are not tragic mistakes”. In the context of the social milieu, this incident points to how a number of religious people have left the church, engaged in politics and become sexually active.

And now that Sean has failed to keep his commitments to the Church, he wants out. He feels guilty, yes, but not because he believes he sins against God, but because of his overweening hybris – pride. When he admits to Jimmy McGuire about his adultery, his friend only says “The truth is, you damn fool, that what bothers you is not the sin, which God forgives, but the mark on your stainless white record. Sean Cronin isn’t perfect” (205).

Nora, not much unlike Hester Prynne in Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* (1988), on the other hand, has faced the consequences of her actions bravely. She is unsure whose son is Mickey. But as she tells Sean, “he is a Cronin”, the father does not matter. She realized that, after all, she is a mere human being, “welcome into the human race” (194). She finally finds peace after the Funeral Mass for Sean’s mother.

She comes to us readers the only one to have felt the Presence of the Holy Spirit. Instead of feeling it, Sean realizes in the end that the sign (Nora) he has been asking long before is already given him. He wrote in his journal, “You damn fool! You missed God’s sign for thirty years” (302). It dawns on him that God has always answered his prayer about the most sought for.

For the commitments they have, despite their chance and rights to be married, they do not choose to be married. Although Sean shouts that he does not believe in them anymore, Nora makes him realize gradually that the commitments they have should always be honored: Sean’s commitment as a priest and Nora’s in discharging the duty of a president in the family company.

However, although Nora and Sean are vital parts of the sacrality of commitments, the main keys in identifying the sacred and the profane in the first part of the trilogy probably lie in the brothers’ representation: Sean and Paul – who metaphorize the sacred and the profane respectively – are obvious symbols of the dichotomy, which are inseparable and dependent on each other like the brothers in the story.

As for Paul Cronin, he never honors any commitment he makes – he even makes “commitment” so that he would go away with something. From the beginning of the story, he has a number of relationships that he does not honor, like friendship with their childhood friends, his camaraderie in the army and his marriage. Even the commitments of other women to their husbands are not honored either by these women or by Paul. Also, one of the worst dishonored commitments done by Paul is his supposed abandonment of his troops in the war – the one which always haunts him in his nightmares, be he alone or abed with his paramours.

Paul, figuratively, the man of little faith, is the antinomy of Sean, and vice versa, like the profane is identified by identifying the sacred.

The Catholic Church

The Catholic Church is also a vital part of the novel *Thy Brother's Wife*. The most sacred symbol that can easily be seen in the novel is the Church herself. However, she seems to be under attack by societal changes, as secularization, “de-churchification”, and conversion to other religion (David, 2013). By contrast, the members of the society, in the novel, seem so radical and liberal. The novel, written in 1982, deals with issues that are being dealt with by Filipinos of today among others: Reproductive Health Bill, population control, scandals by pedophile priests, allowing women to be priests, gay clergy, charismatic movements etc.

Being a Catholic priest himself, Sean Cronin is duty-bound to the rules, law, and doctrines of the Church. Ironically, Sean can be seen fighting the sacred Catholic Church. At first, however, he does not welcome any change in the Church. For him, the Church is crumbling. Sean feels that he is losing everything he believes in, his faith in the Church. As mentioned earlier, he feels the church is disintegrating because of these changes; later, Sean welcomes change and questions every hypocrite priest.

The sacrality of the Church cannot be questioned here for the novelist and the main protagonists are Catholic priests; however, the revelations about the happenings behind the altar are, indeed, scandalous, let alone liberal.

From one point of view, Greeley seems to be profaning the sacred. Why would he disclose the humanity of the priests in his novel? Although we know that this act is only a means to an end, is it worth it? For instance, in the novel, Greeley shows the faithlessness of Sean, not only in God he believes but also in the Church he belongs to. He does priestly works at St. Jadwiga Parish, where he has to “educate four

hundred kids a year... salvage a couple of dozen juvenile delinquents every year... and visit the people of the neighborhood when they're in the hospital or in jail" (90). But he, at the same time, cynically holds that the "Catholic Church has ever done a better thing", as compared to what he is doing. Sean may be just one priest, but readers know better that a single character represents a few people, if not a marginalized group.

Another example for this seeming act of profaning the sacred is the loudest whisper of the presence of homosexuality in the priesthood. As Sean and a minor character, Roger Fitzgibbon, talks about the next archbishop of Chicago, Sean fervently says, "deliver us from a faggot bishop" (164). Roger's remark, however, to what Sean says seems so ambiguous that Sean himself wonders whether it is an agreement or a disagreement: "Oh, come now, Sean. That's not fair. Martin's taste is impeccable, of course, and he has a wonderful eye for line and texture, but you're sophisticated enough to know that doesn't mean anything" (164).

Although the homosexuality of the character Martin Quinlan is not proven, nor discussed thoroughly in the novel, the smoke of that conversation has, certainly, manifests a fire in the Church, so to speak.

Greeley could have kept quiet about these issues inside the Church where he belongs, but he did not. Although spoken in innuendos, no priest dares speak of these moral, psychological problems. Even the issue inside the seminary where nobody should be "too good at anything, much less successful at a number of things... Intellectualism (is) taken to be almost a sure sign of pride" (46). In other words, one of the problems that Greeley implied in the novel (at the time it came out in the 1980's) is the lack of creative seminarians, and even if there are, creativity and academic success are not to be welcomed, better yet, frowned upon – a stance that has been connected now in the dispensation of Pope Francis, the incumbent pope, who even has thought of a team of think-tanks coming from different disciplines to help him administer the Church well.

Most probably, the aim of Greeley here, as all writers' desire, is positive change. He exposes these ticklish, problematic issues inside the seminary, the priesthood and in the Church to spark a call for change. Sadly, the effect is his "notoriety" with his colleagues; some are even accusing him of betraying the priesthood, worshipping Mammon and Money, and "engaging" in sexual activities (for all we know, the confessional box may prove an endless source for his fiction).

When interviewed by Pasquariello (1988), Greeley said that mails are coming from readers who have left the Catholic Church. These correspondences reveal that many are coming back to the Church after reading his novels. Although, the priest-sociologist-novelist still offends many of his colleagues with his novels, many former Catholics return, because they could grasp the message of Greeley's novels, i.e. indeed,

the priests are mere humans; that the Church is made up of human beings, and since they are composed of men, they are vulnerable to human errors. The focus and object of worship nonetheless does not focus on the people who make up a Church. Such stance re-echoes Boccaccio's singular story in *The Decameron* (1348–1353) to the effect that although Abraham, the Jew, has seen all kinds of evil, corrupting things done by the clergy in Rome, such as lust, greed, gluttony, deceit, envy, arrogance, etc., he still wants to be baptized as a Christian. Abraham, later baptized as Giovanni, realizes that with these kinds of corrupt leaders, still the Catholic Church stands unruffled, the religion continues to radiate blazingly, making him realize that there is something greater than men at work in it.

Sadly, unlike Abraham-turned-Giovanni from *The Decameron*, seven centuries after Boccaccio's milieu, most of these Catholics in the present who ventured outside the Church are disappointed with the (c)overt corruption in it, such as pederasty among some clergy, dangerous liaisons of a few, even misuse of parishioners' funds – problematic issues which Greeley exposes as well in his trilogy. Greeley indicts how a few parish priests saddled with finances to support their work abscond with parishioners' funds.

Although this example is indeed a complex one, like Robin Hood who robs the rich and gives to the poor, actually a Machiavellian stance in that it is better to set aside morality for the benefit of the people, the manipulation of the Sunday collection and the issue of church money are still irreverent, sacrilegious and unpleasant to the ears. Especially, when Sean told the Cardinal that “third of the parishes engage in practices like this” (192).

Admittedly, the Catholic Church is the highest institution for a Catholic; however in the novel, the high priests seem to lack ascendancy, the moral authority to govern. Most of the time, the priests in the novel appear, or act as mere politicians controlling their parishes and the monetary benefits or that coveted positions in the Church hierarchy could be bought, if the price is right. For instance, when Paul has “visited” Cardinal Eamon McCarthy about sending Sean to graduate school so that he can leave the poor parish he is assigned to. Paul thinks then that he would have reminded them of Michael Cronin's “generosity” to the Archdiocese of Chicago if the cardinal had not released Sean. This representation of politicking probably is another of the many reasons why Greeley is controversial among his peers.

The Seven Deadly Sins

Another most striking part in the novel is Greeley's inclusion of some of the seven deadly sins as “found in the works of several spiritual

writers and theologians, including Saint Thomas Aquinas, a leading Roman Catholic theologian during the 13th century” (Microsoft Encarta 2009, retrieved September 30, 2012).

At first reading of the novel, one may not really identify the seven deadly sins; however, when one tries to look at the profanities present in the novel, the extremities of the character’s attitudes, especially those of Paul and Sean, seem to mirror these deadly sins. Despite the absence of some in the novel, like gluttony and sloth, the sins of wrath and avarice are vividly shown.

As seen, Paul Cronin, who represents all that is profane, personifies most of the deadly sins, if not he himself is envy and lust incarnated. For Durkheim, however, Paul is not profane because he does mean and engages in evil things, but because the things that he does are socially unacceptable. He does things in the dark, so to speak, so that the society would not see him acting differently from the group. Most especially, as a politician, he should hide these unspeakable deeds, for politics is all about perception, as they say.

For instance, his illicit affairs, with Chris Waverly and the mother and daughter, Maggie and Nicole Shields, to mention a few, have brought him so much carnal pleasure that he no longer thought of the consequences of his indiscretions. His unquenchable thirst for the call of the flesh has almost brought one of his daughters to her death when he left them on the beach, while he enjoyed his clandestine affair. In the end, his own *hamartia* has brought him his own downfall, when he let Nicole Shields die in the burning hotel, during his campaign. He is already considered a hero because he has helped others escape the burning hotel, like when he is given the Medal of Honor for his “bravery” in the war where many died, supposedly because of his heroic deed of fighting off the enemies and staying alive. Nobody knows, except one, that he survived the attack because he was too scared to fight and ran off.

However, in trying to wake the drugged Nicole, he realized that the naked Nicole would spark another issue, if not a scandal, so he just leaves her in the hotel. Unfortunately, a certain Helen Colter, a junior staff aide to the Congressman Cronin, knows that Nicole is with Paul. When Chris Waverly discovers this fact, she devours it. She almost releases the scandal to the media, but has a sudden change of heart after speaking with Father Sean.

However, Paul’s conscience drives him to a state of confusion which eventually leads him to his anomic suicide, to use Durkheim’s own classification.

Nevertheless, Paul may not be the only one committing the despicable deeds in the novel, as Greeley implies that politicians do the

same, if not worse. He is a representative for the corrupt politicians, and even the lustful ones. Other politicians are doing it covertly, especially those politicians and priests in the novel. Still the same, they do things under cover of darkness, because the society does not condone these profane and hedonist deeds.

Besides, Sean personifies some of the sins which make him more human than what other people expect from priests like him. He exhibits and practices lust, pride and wrath. For instance, the way he lusts after his brother's wife: "his hands traced the outline of her face, her shoulders, her arms, her body, slowly, as if he were unveiling a statue; he undressed her until she stood naked before him. He lifted her long auburn hair back over her shoulders so that nothing hid her from him. Again, his fingers gently outline her body" (172); the way he is proud of his priesthood: "the truth is, you damn fool, that what bothers you is not the sin, which God forgives, but the mark on your stainless white record" (205); and, the way he reacts when he discovered that his mother is still alive and exiled by his father in a hospital, even when he is warned by Nora that he would regret it for the rest of his life: "He deserves to be killed" (222).

At that moment, Sean is not a priest but a son who longs for his mother, who wishes that his mother were alive, who just discovers his mother is alive after all these years he has suffered the loneliness of "motherlessness" since childhood. What factors would drive a man to kill?

Although, Mike Cronin does not die after Sean rages about his mother's exile in the mental institution and the secrecy of this exile from him. Mike has never spoken again after his stroke.

The Physical Act of Love, sex or lovemaking

Whether Greeley views the idea of the physical union of men and women from a religious', sociologist's or fictionist's construct is moot and academic. In his very own words, using Father Sean as his mouthpiece, Greeley avers: "Lovemaking between a man and a woman can mean many different things. Through lovemaking, lovers forgive one another, show their gratitude to one another, declare their love, renew their vows, chase their anxieties and their anger, re-establish communication, make life livable for one another, challenge, stimulate, excite, and reassure one another. Also, of course, it is the means for continuing the human race" (226).

Conservative Catholics would reject this statement, for when Sean himself declares these words in a forum-consultation many have been outraged. Coming from a priest, this stance is not welcome, most especially by the members of the clergy. However, Sean explicitly states these words about lovemaking, he and Nora have already made love to

each other. This speech nonetheless does not spark a doubt on the celibacy of Sean. Moreover, such discourse results in Sean's and Nora's eventual lovemaking and leads to the former's negative attitude towards the Church. Somehow, he talks in such condescending tone to be cast outside the fold of the Church, let alone freed to his heart's content to be with Nora. Ironically, as stated before, these techniques Sean uses only increase, unconsciously, or paradoxically his popularity to the Vatican.

Indeed, this very much opposed element by the clergy appears too difficult to label. Is lovemaking sacred or profane? Greeley himself, through Sean Cronin, believes that the act itself is sacred. He reinforces the thoughts Moore, an ex-religious Trappist monk, musicologist, psychologist, states in *The Soul of Sex* (1998): "Matrimony is a form of soul work, and marriage is the most potent alembic available to us where we can become initiated into the rudiments of community and the basics of intimacy. In this context sex is the primary ritual. It's one thing to resolve arguments and tensions in a marriage through conversation and counselling, but it's another to perform the mysterious rite that addresses the deepest mysteries of the union" (203).

In the novel under study, however, the physical act of love appears much profaned. Most of the acts done by lovers in the novel are by unmarried couple – especially Paul and his women, even between a priest and his sister-in-law, between a priest and a married parishioner, between a politician and a hooker, or between pedophile priests and victimized youth.

As implied in the novel, God wants His people to cherish physical intimacy. Conversely, the other priests are horrified by Sean's stark statements to the effect that lovemaking should be enjoyed. For others, it should only be used to procreate and deriving pleasure would be tantamount to sin.

Following the thought of Durkheim on the sacred and the profane, we may place the physical act of love on an ambiguous situation. Some would say it is good and enjoy it (shades of Raul Manglapus' (1918–1999) notorious statement); some would say it is not to be enjoyed and should be used for procreation. Still, from the moral construct of the characters in the novel, as well as those who agree with Sean, this physical act is a sacred symbol for love – supported by Marsden (1987) that, "the more satisfying the sexual relationship with one's spouse, the more gracious is one's image of God – Saint Paul has finally been empirically validated: sex is the Great Sacrament" (176).

Suffering, as a means of cleansing the soul

In *Ascent into Hell*, the most emphatic sacred element is suffering, the main theme and subject matter of this novel, since the

second novel in the trilogy echoes the Good Friday liturgy. Becker (2000) says it in a more metaphorical way: “it portrays the crucifixion and spiritual death of a man who eventually rises from a spiritual death to a new life in Christ”.

The protagonist’s (Hugh’s) suffering, however, is self-inflicted. The Donlons’ belief that anything pleasurable is sinful seems to be the antinomy of hedonism which implies that every pleasurable activity is good. Tom and Peg Donlon have taught this belief to their son Hugh who takes it hook, line and sinker. This point of view on suffering – the Weberian concept of theodicy of suffering – made their lives complicated. For instance, the animalistic sensuality and passion of Peg towards sex makes her life complex. She presents herself as a pious Catholic, while hiding her lust for her husband. Though she only lusts for her husband, she feels guilty whenever her hunger for sex gets fulfilled. She believes that she should not feel that pleasure in marital sex, and feeling that pleasure is sinful. By contrast, when one is faced with great pressure, for instance Hugh, when he realizes that he has this craving to be loved by women, he has turned to the priesthood just because it is “the hardest thing to do”. Such decision reinforces the Donlon’s stance: the one thing that you do not want to do is the one thing that one should do to please God.

However, this belief brought Hugh to his own downfall. When he opts to be a priest rather than to marry Maria, because being a priest is the “hardest thing to do”, just after realizing that he wants to be with women, he is bound to suffer. From the beginning of the novel, there is this mood that makes the reader uncannily sense that Hugh is not called for priesthood. Nonetheless, the his parents’ teachings which he has carried throughout his life goad him to think that he is doing the right thing, the moral thing, and the will of God.

Another instance is when Hugh subsequently impregnates Sister Liz; he prefers to marry her, despite the advice of his mother, sibling, and friends not to. They consider marrying Liz as a wrong turn for Hugh; especially he plans to leave the priesthood. Also, they pronounce and intuitively feel that Liz is a bad woman for Hugh, which is proven right much later in the story. Regardless of all the admonitions, Hugh still marries Liz, because it is again to him “the hardest thing to do”; therefore, it is the will of God, as he has contended from the very beginning.

Promises, broken and kept

Although promises are the main concerns of *Thy Brother’s Wife*, promises also abound in *Ascent into Hell* and bound it. For instance, when Hugh Donlon promises (158) that he will not sleep with Sister Liz

again, he is very much guilt-stricken that he vows he will never be that bestial again. Unfortunately, the reader sees a few pages later that the pledge has become conditional. His conviction softens and later plunges him into the abyss of sin with complete abandon.

He knows full well that he has violated his priestly vows of celibacy and abstinence. Although Sean Cronin has equally done so, he is able to keep his promises and priestly vows, but when Hugh has committed adultery, he regrets at first and seems to have remorse, yet later put himself further into sinning. He leaves the priesthood, much against the advice of his colleagues and friends (and consternation of his parents and sibling) to marry the impregnated nun, Sister Liz.

This marriage, however, is also bound to crumble down. While Liz has joined a group of ex-nuns and ex-priests, she has also estranged her two children from their father. This makes Hugh feels alienated from his own children, as he feels alienated from God.

Lustful Characters

As also seen in *Thy Brother's Wife*, lust pervades the second novel of the *Passover trilogy*. Although this is just one of the Seven Deadly Sins, the other sins are not that emphatic, if ever present, in it.

Not only in Tom and Peg, but most of all in Hugh, lust seems to be the air they breathe, so to speak. Yet, the gravity of concupiscence is emphasized because they find extreme pleasure in it. And as the reader is made aware, the Donlons believe that all pleasure is wrong, but the more they fight against this carnal feeling, the more they succumb into sin. The situation seems to tell the reader as well that this pleasure makes it difficult for these people to feel remorse. As the American critic Kelly (1998) says “fornication is an ambiguous sin: it is difficult to feel sorry for something so pleasurable” (161). Traditional Catholics, though, would term it a callous conscience, the carnal sinners fit in Dante's second infernal circle in the inferno.

But, as cited earlier, Marsden claims that “the more satisfying the sexual relationship with one's spouse, the more gracious is one's image of God” (176). This statement only supports the statement by Hugh's confidant that the reason behind his lustful nature is his search for God (246). Reworded, ironically, as he sins continuously, he is looking for God's presence in his profane lifestyle. This paradox only supports the implication that Greeley seems to say that in order to fully experience sacrality, one should pass through profanity.

The Family, the most sacred of all relationships

Ironically, in *Thy Brother's Wife*, Paul Cronin has manifested one good quality, which is also shared by other characters in the novel,

i.e. his loyalty, love and respect for family. Paul has demonstrated this trait all throughout the novel. For instance, when his brother Sean has faced difficulty in the politics of their place, Paul secretly helps him. Even in the politics of the Church, Paul has tried his clout and has succeeded in helping his little brother by influence peddling, if not by frustrated bribery.

However, this treatment for the sacred has its limitations for Paul. When he has heard of the truth that his long-missed mother was still alive and confined in asylum, he just holds his peace and does nothing, for after all the news and his involvement should not affect his political career. He fears that if the voters would know the family's skeleton in the closet he will lose his electoral bid as a senator.

As for Sean, family is everything. Even if Nora is not his real sibling, but an adopted sister, he treats her as family.

The sacrality of family relations is also mirrored in *Ascent into Hell*. Although Tim and Marge Donlon, siblings of Hugh, seem to be distant from their Irish-American parents, the love and respect for their parents still pervade in the novel. The two, however, do not want to be enclosed by their control-freak parents so they rebel in their own ways seeking their individual emotional space. Hugh, though, has been oriented and prepared to be a priest from the moment he was born so that invariably he is programmed or pre-conditioned to obey his parents "for this is right." It is not seen in the entirety of the story, however, that he chooses to obey them, because it is the most difficult thing to do, i.e. the Donlon belief.

After being an apostate, on account that Liz is pregnant, Hugh marries Liz, only to find out after the ceremony that Liz is not pregnant at all.

Since Hugh no longer has any source of income, he has joined the company of his brother not only as a business partner but also to act as his brother's keeper (186). In 1979, he is appointed as the Ambassador of the United States of America to the People's Democratic Republic of the Upper River in East Africa. However, when Tim's company gets bankrupt (because of his workings) and money from the Commodity Futures Trading Commission has gone "missing," the FBI does not fail to see the conflict of interest that made Hugh a suspect for concealing or hiding million dollars' worth of silver. Hence, Hugh Donlon is jailed.

From here, the readers see the difference between Paul Cronin and Tim Donlon as brothers, though they are portrayed as profane characters.

To worsen Hugh's feeling of dismay, Tim Donlon together with a woman and her children died in a plane crash – only to find out later that the woman and children who died with Tim are Hugh's children and

his wife, Liz, who are planning to live together before the plane crash. This event, though horrible, shows only that for Tim and Liz family is not sacred or even significant as long as they follow their pleasures.

More pointedly, the family is a recurrent sacred element in the trilogy, but what makes *Lord of the Dance* different from the two other novels is the gravitas – the burden of weight – and effect of the family secrets present in the final volume.

In *Thy Brother's Wife*, the readers see the family's secrets that are kept for the sake of the family's name, i.e., the real father of Sean Cronin is a fallen priest and his still alive, presumed dead mother stays in an asylum. The only negative impact after the discovery is the cardiac arrest of patriarch Mike Cronin, which is triggered off by Sean's wrath, as he confronts his father (223). The scene smacks of stichomythia of Greek tragedy:

How did you and Jane do it, Dad? How many people did you bribe? How many cops and doctors and undertakers did you have to pay off?"
Mike Cronin was shaken by every word spoken by his son, "It was easy," he said, his voice weak.

Mike Cronin then explains how he has decided to put away Sean's mother after the third attempt of Mary Eileen, his wife, to kill their baby, Sean. He has paid the doctors, police, undertakers, and chauffeur and had a closed casket wake.

In *Ascent into Hell*, the only secret held in the family is the passionate love and marital sex between Tom and Peg, a secret that does not affect anyone but the couple themselves for, in their Puritan upbringing, they feel they sin, as they feel pleasure from their physical intimacy.

Interestingly, the *Lord of the Dance* – like a detective, mystery novel – is full of secrets worth tracking or unravelling. The reader is hooked on as s/he follows the investigations of Noele and just like any mystery and detective novel, the clues to the puzzle bring the sacrificial lamb of the Farrells inevitably closer to the fringe of danger. Seemingly, nobody from the family is telling the truth, for they have their own relative versions of the fateful night Uncle Clancy died. In the end, the reader has seen that everyone was lying and Clancy's death appeared far from being the only intriguing death in the family. Also, in the process of looking for truth, triggered off by a simple school homework, Noele ends up brutally gang-raped by three mobsters whose bosses have connections with the death of Florence Farrell.

Ironically, these secrets are needed to be unearthed and searched for by Noele, and even the suffering she has inevitably experienced is very crucial for the resurrection motif pushed in the story.

Nevertheless, the secrets kept in the family have created a huge ordeal not only for them, but more distinctly for Noele herself who is an

innocent victim of the sins of her relatives, short of saying to the effect that the parents' sins are visited upon the children. Secrets, indeed, should not be welcomed in the family; however, if secrets unavoidably pull down or desecrate the family instead of holding it sacred; their discovery is equally inevitable.

Resurrection, and its other forms

Correspondingly, *Lord of the Dance*, the last part of the trilogy, celebrates the feast of the Resurrection, specifically the Easter Vigil Liturgy, in which fire and water, symbols of the sexual union between a man and a woman, stand for the new life of Jesus Christ generated by his resurrection and offered to all in His name through His Church (Becker, 2000).

Although a priest exists in the novel, the story no longer revolves around his kind but gravitates towards Noele Marie Brigid Farrell. Greeley describes her as “a Celtic goddess of nineteenth-century illustrations of Irish folklore books, strange, unreal, almost unearthly. Her long, bright red hair contrasting sharply with her pale, buttermilk skin, swept across the room after her like moving fire” (p. 11).

Conceived on Easter, she was born on Christmas making her a metaphor, if not a probable analogy, for the Catholic Church. Besides, her Frenchy name literally means Christmas.

Many kinds of death – from physical to psychological, even social to the spiritual – exist in the novel to imply the religious, eschatological constructs of revival and resurrection. Everything starts with a simple homework of Noele about the family, but this research on family history becomes a search for the truth in the Farrell family. Many questionable deaths apparently occurred in the Farrells' lives, like the death of Florence Farrell, Noele's grandmother, of Clancy Farrell, father of John and Roger Farrell. Realistically however, these deaths are biologically irreversible.

However, the death of Noele's Uncle Danny, who turns out to be her real biological father, is overcome when Danny returns from the dead, so to speak, he is far from being considered clinically dead, but a prisoner of war.

The same thing happens to Noele herself when she has been kidnapped, violated, and sodomized. Although she does not really die in the novel, an equivalent to spiritual or emotional death, but true to her personality, she “resurrects” as a much stronger, better person. Through her as well, the Farrells are able to face squarely the true problems of their family. The “duplicity, deception and death” that marred down their family have been removed by a sixteen-year-old who rises from the ashes of emotional and spiritual degradation and humiliation.

Analogically, the sufferings, humiliation and death of Jesus Christ may be seen in the tribulation, humbling and “demise” of Noele. As she represents Jesus and the Church, she, indeed, needs to undergo what she has experienced to open the eyes of her family, and in some sense, save them from themselves. Also, the “emotional” resurrection of Noele is, indeed, analogous to the resurrection of Jesus. True to the theme of the novel and the message of Easter Sunday, Noele needs to be reborn to be stronger than before and to save her loved ones, even if it means saving them from themselves.

Conclusion

Greeley has shown in his *Passover Trilogy* that the harmonious fusion of the sacred and the profane is ultimately relevant in shaping the lives of the people, i.e. the characters in the novels, especially in terms of their moral rebirth and sense of renewal. The dichotomy of the sacred and the profane, however, would only create confusion and chaos. In fact, because of their sense of humanity and spark of divinity, the characters are drawn to commit or engage in the sacred and the profane, as much as they tend to demonstrate antimonies of love and hatred, courage and moral cowardice, compassion and nonchalance.

Greeley, through the sacred and the profane, also metaphorizes and personifies the Church by showing the motherly principle of love of God in the characters of his heroines, therefore, making the divine feminine acceptable in the perspectives of the laity.

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