



LANDSCAPES OF ENCOUNTER: THE PORTRAYAL OF CATHOLICISM IN THE NOVELS OF BRIAN MOORE

by Liam Gearon

ISBN 978-1-55238-663-7

THIS BOOK IS AN OPEN ACCESS E-BOOK. It is an electronic version of a book that can be purchased in physical form through any bookseller or on-line retailer, or from our distributors. Please support this open access publication by requesting that your university purchase a print copy of this book, or by purchasing a copy yourself. If you have any questions, please contact us at ucpress@ucalgary.ca

Cover Art: The artwork on the cover of this book is not open access and falls under traditional copyright provisions; it cannot be reproduced in any way without written permission of the artists and their agents. The cover can be displayed as a complete cover image for the purposes of publicizing this work, but the artwork cannot be extracted from the context of the cover of this specific work without breaching the artist's copyright.

COPYRIGHT NOTICE: This open-access work is published under a Creative Commons licence.

This means that you are free to copy, distribute, display or perform the work as long as you clearly attribute the work to its authors and publisher, that you do not use this work for any commercial gain in any form, and that you in no way alter, transform, or build on the work outside of its use in normal academic scholarship without our express permission. If you want to reuse or distribute the work, you must inform its new audience of the licence terms of this work. For more information, see details of the Creative Commons licence at: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>

UNDER THE CREATIVE COMMONS LICENCE YOU **MAY**:

- read and store this document free of charge;
- distribute it for personal use free of charge;
- print sections of the work for personal use;
- read or perform parts of the work in a context where no financial transactions take place.

UNDER THE CREATIVE COMMONS LICENCE YOU **MAY NOT**:

- gain financially from the work in any way;
- sell the work or seek monies in relation to the distribution of the work;
- use the work in any commercial activity of any kind;
- profit a third party indirectly via use or distribution of the work;
- distribute in or through a commercial body (with the exception of academic usage within educational institutions such as schools and universities);
- reproduce, distribute, or store the cover image outside of its function as a cover of this work;
- alter or build on the work outside of normal academic scholarship.

Part I

Introduction

This page intentionally left blank

Chapter 1

Landscapes of Encounter: The Portrayal of Catholicism in the Novels of Brian Moore

The quest for a doctrine appropriate to the landscape may be taken as an image of the development of Catholic theology since Vatican II: it symbolises the way in which Catholic theology in the post-conciliar period is dependent upon the Council's readjustment of contemporary Catholic identity. In addition, it presents a theme that will become central to post-conciliar theology: the priority of the "landscape" of lived experience in the articulation of theological doctrine. As the features of Catholic faith-experience were altered by the Council, the consequent theological reflection followed contours different from those that preceded it.¹

If the Second Vatican Council (1962–65)² radically changed the public persona of Roman Catholicism,³ it is as fair to say the late Brian Moore (1921–1999) is one of the few novelists whose literary portrayal of Catholicism trenchantly investigates the period prior to and following this Church Council.⁴ Moore's novels represent a distinctive literary contribution to our understanding both of the portrayal of Catholicism in twentieth-century fiction in English and of the changing theological face of Catholicism in the same period.⁵ From the publication of *Judith Hearne* (1955) until his final novel, *The Magician's Wife* (1997), the religious and specifically Catholic themes of Brian Moore's fiction place him firmly on the interface of literature and theology.⁶

If intertextuality—the notion that a text is always part a wider social, cultural, and historical milieu—has origins as an explicit term in contemporary criticism, its vast historical precedence in literary-theological writing predates *de facto* its origins in twentieth-century theory in figures

Landscapes of Encounter

like Saussure and Bakhtin, and certainly before the term was coined by Kristeva.⁷ Debate on the question of the Catholic novel as a product of Catholic belief is set aside here too, as is the wider relation between authorial faith and literary output—biocritical considerations unnecessarily detract from an understanding of the novels *as texts*, especially when dealing with the presence or absence of the personal religious faith of the author.⁸ What is indisputable is the prevalence of Catholic themes throughout Moore's major literary works. It is from a consideration of these Catholic themes, which have surprisingly evaded systematic critical attention, that most benefit may be derived in understanding Moore's considerable oeuvre. The present task is to make explicit the literary-theological intertextuality within Moore's fiction.

This intertextuality is most clearly demonstrated in terms of an historical theology in which Moore's portrayal of Catholicism reflects developments in pre- and post-Vatican II Catholicism. A religious tradition etymologically defined by its universality (the Greek derivation of Catholic meaning "universal"),⁹ Moore's literary treatment of such developments is accentuated through the particularities of culture and place, just as this becomes increasingly crucial within post-Vatican II Catholicism itself.¹⁰ In the novels of Moore, geographical location and theological history are key factors for understanding personal and cultural identity. Moore's narratives, plotted as they are in an immensely diverse range of settings—literary constructions preoccupied with the metaphysical as much as the physical dimensions of place—are as representative of ideological and theological landscapes as they are of geographical and historical worlds.¹¹

Yet there are a few critical obstacles that need to be surmounted before unfolding the detail of this interpretation. And it is useful to begin with Sullivan's attempt in *A Matter of Faith* to counterbalance a perceived trend in Moore's fiction:

As is the case with most writers in the "classic realist" tradition, especially modern or contemporary writers, most attention has been paid to Moore's thematic concerns at the cost of his stylistic innovations. In the work of such writers, in contrast to the modernists, say, or the defamiliarizing metafictionalists, language is a "transparent window on reality," so there is little or nothing to discuss. Yet within this realist philosophy of belief in

the reader's ability fully to recover experience "through" language, a classic realist like Moore can display a fair amount of stylistic ingenuity. (118)

Even if assertions of Moore's literary experimentation are less controversial than might at first appear, their interpretative importance needs to be restricted here for reasons relating to the thematic rather than stylistic content of Moore's work, and in particular to challenge the implication that the contemporary classical realism of Moore's fiction leaves "little or nothing to discuss."¹²

In an interview dating from the 1960s with Dahlie, Moore asserts the primacy of story over its literary form, and narrative content over the technique of its portrayal.¹³ In another early interview, with Sale, Moore elaborates further:

I think that I have an interest in clarity and the sort of mind that doesn't want my reader to be deceived or awed by technique. I think a good story tells itself, as Mann said that's the truth of it that if you find the perfect way to tell it nobody will even notice that there's technique.¹⁴

In this regard, a persistent critical lapse surfaces in the interpretative foci on Moore's fiction. In the main, there is a presupposition that a thematic and content-led approach has largely exhausted its interpretative possibilities. Consequently, commentators seek alternative critical options, either stylistic treatments of formal literary technique (O'Donoghue, Sullivan) or biocritical analyses (Dahlie, Flood, Sampson). The latter alternatives all retain useful insights into Moore's work, yet any holistic hermeneutic—for which so many have searched¹⁵—remains elusive. I want, then, to reassert the primacy of a content-led approach and re-examine the possibilities for a thematic unification in Moore's fiction. Amidst such diverse, preceding commentary, I want to focus on two major (and as yet insufficiently inter-related) thematic strands, which are central to an understanding of Moore's canon: the representation of place and the portrayal of Catholicism.¹⁶

The prominence of place as a theme in studies of Moore's fiction most often appears in biocritical studies where its importance lies in the correlation between the author's own migrations and his writing.¹⁷ Most critically, many—especially since Dahlie—have used Moore's emigration from Ireland

Landscapes of Encounter

to North America as a key to understanding Moore's fictional portrayal of "Old World" Europe—especially Ireland—and the "New World" of North America – both the United States and Canada. Some critics are more thoroughly dependent upon the author's life as a key to his fiction than others but all those cited have depended upon the biocritical approach to a degree, even those providing more formal stylistic analyses. Such an approach may well be appropriate for Moore's early Belfast novels (*Judith Hearne*, *The Feast of Luperca*, and *The Emperor of Ice-Cream*) or the early North American works (especially *An Answer from Limbo* and *The Luck of Ginger Coffey*). After all, Moore *was* a writer who formerly lived in Belfast, who moved to North America, and whose portrayal of both Ireland and America is prominent in these early novels. The biocritical approach here has, then, a degree of basic credence. Thus, by way of example, in an interview with Moore by Adair, published under the appropriately biocritical title of "The Writer as Exile," Moore identifies Belfast itself with the beginnings of his disenchantment with organized religion and Catholicism in particular:

I didn't reject those influences in quite such an idealistic way. You see I started going to Confession as child and I now date a lot of my troubles to that. I was a child who was incapable of confessing things to a stranger in a box: I was a very highly sexed child and, to be perfectly frank about it, when people say my work is erotic it's because sex has played a big part in my life.... So I had trouble with Confession and I started telling lies, and that was a mortal sin, so automatically I thought there was something wrong with me.... I began to think of myself as someone concealing something. And that unhappiness—you can't blame poor Belfast for that—that unhappiness is the thing which starts the unhappiness with Belfast and led me to criticise the Church itself and also my parents' political and religious ideals.¹⁸

Still, such a treatment is too limited in scope to provide a full appraisal. It is especially inadequate for an understanding of Moore's fiction over the full span of a writing career in which overtly autobiographical elements have become systematically subsumed by more universal, and thus inevitably less personal, religious and ideological themes. The biocritical approach hampers our effective understanding of Moore's writing. In this regard,

Sampson's use of Moore's citation of Tolstoy is unintentionally ironic: "There is no point in visiting a great writer for he is incarnate in his works."¹⁹

Place nevertheless retains its usefulness as a means of understanding Moore's major fictional works. Yet its chief significance lies not in worn biocritical correlations but in the features of the texts themselves, that is, in the manner in which cultural representations—of ideology, of theology, and so forth—are reinforced by narrative location. It is for this reason that I have preferred on the whole the use of the term "landscape," for geography in Moore's novels conveys a complexity of intertextual resonance which the term "place" seems to lack. Moore's novels, then, *as texts*, are concerned with the writing of worlds which, I argue, are as metaphysical as they are physical. It is this pervasive preoccupation, with correlations between place, culture, and textual representation,²⁰ that leads us to an overview of the second critical thematic strand: the preoccupation with religious, especially Catholic, themes.

The lack of extended analysis of Moore's portrayal of Catholicism is surprising; more so given the centrality of religion throughout his novels.²¹ To focus on one substantial study, O'Donoghue rightly suggests that Moore is writing on Catholicism even when his themes are overtly secular.²² Yet again O'Donoghue's biocritical dependency detracts from our full understanding of Moore's portrayal of Catholicism. Thus she makes reference to how Moore (still psychologically scarred by his own schoolday experiences at St. Malachy's) changed in his attitude to Catholicism, on two counts: first, subsequent to a transformation in the Catholic Church especially since the 1960s and, second, in regard to Moore's dawning recognition that people must believe in something.

I want to deal with the second point—religion as favourite metaphor—first. O'Donoghue cites Moore:

We go along in life with some belief held in front of us which keeps us going. Most of my novels investigate the period in someone's life when that belief is withdrawn, when they're forced to examine their whole life. . . . I found that, while I'm not religious myself, religion is a wonderful metaphor for belief. (139–40)

O'Donoghue adds the following comment: "Moore may not be religious himself, but the last section of the above remark does not give credit to the

Landscapes of Encounter

seriousness with which he has treated religious belief in his recent novels or the increasingly high value he has placed on it" (140). Lamentably, opportunities for further analysis here are neglected indeed consciously so. O'Donoghue's perspective is in this regard seriously misplaced. On the one hand, Moore supposedly understates his fictional portrayal of Catholicism, and then on the other, O'Donoghue suggests that, since *Catholics* (that is, from 1972), "the direction taken by the Catholic Church as regards doctrine and ritual has concerned Moore no further" (143). This is shown to be palpably untrue when we look at Moore's subsequent fiction. O'Donoghue chooses to cite other author-derived interview material to suggest that the belief in question is more metaphorical than simply (or substantively) Catholic, opting to assess the metaphor of religion as a form of human belief without the necessary analysis of Catholicism. The point about the primacy of text over biocritical interpretation, then, holds here too. Moore may well use the theme of faith metaphorically, but the context is so often explicitly Catholic that any analysis of faith outside of its very specific socio-cultural, ideological, and theological context is bound to lead to superficiality in the treatment of belief.

So O'Donoghue remains largely over-dependent upon Moore's own statements about his changing attitudes toward Catholicism; thus, when biocritical prompts for further analysis of Catholic tradition arise such opportunities are neglected. For example, O'Donoghue cites Moore on the contrast between the Belfast Catholicism of his upbringing and developments later in the century: "But then, of course, you had Pope John XXIII and things started to change and then I became very interested.... One of the greatest revolutions of this century has been the revolution within the Catholic Church" (142). O'Donoghue neglects too the opportunities present for further theological analysis even when comments directly relate to texts; that *Catholics* establishes the author's "attitude towards changes in the institutional Church during the 1960s and the early 1970s" (142) is entirely correct but the nature of this intertextuality is not really explored.

Similarly, Sullivan, while certainly dealing with Catholic themes, again neglects both the theological detail and historical transformations within Catholic tradition over the period of Moore's writing. At a fairly basic level, there is no substantial reference to the Second Vatican Council. Thus Sullivan attempts to show that "allied to personal quest for some form of certainty,

Moore's work—especially after *Catholics*—becomes concerned in more complex ways (although such concern is present in Judy Hearne's demand for a "sign") with what could be called a semiotics of belief" (xiii). But by the same token Sullivan has ironically neglected that system of signification at the heart of modern Catholicism: the Second Vatican Council, an event defined through its textuality.

One might have expected Sampson's *Brian Moore: The Chameleon Novelist*, as the first full-length literary biography, to provide greater consideration of the cultural diversity in Moore's portrayal of Catholicism. The thematic treatment of Catholicism, though, is one characterized again by significant absence: Sampson's index contains no reference to Vatican II, and the occasional reference in the main body of the text is insufficient. Take, for instance, the following:

In the summer of 1967 or 1968, on the annual visit to Jean's family home in Kentville, Nova Scotia, the Moores had been walking one Sunday morning when they overheard a church service in progress. The evangelical style of the vernacular singing led Moore to think that it was a Baptist church, but Jean pointed out that it was, in fact, the post-Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) Catholic service. (208)

Sampson *is* strong on the literary intertextuality inherent in Moore's European destinations; and as a biocritical study it is understandable why Sampson makes so much of Moore's personal post-War European discovery of the Paris of Joyce and the France of Flaubert, only dreamt of as a Belfast teenager (52–64). But predictable is the manner of Sampson's interpretation of Moore's Catholic interests. These take a biographical turn when, commenting on *The Statement*, Sampson claims that in this novel "one can see his continuing interest in the mentality of those Catholics, such as his father, who were prepared to overlook the actions of the fascists because they placed the preservation of the Catholic ethos above politics and the rule of law" (54–55). Further:

While the Catholic ethos of French politics fascinated him, the pleasures and freedoms of the culture generally also became part of his permanent attachment to France.... His love of French literature might have been

Landscapes of Encounter

sparked at St. Malachy's perhaps, or through his awareness of his aunts' education in Caen, or his father's holiday there. At any rate, Catholic France was given a special status in the Moore household. (55)

The neglect of the broader social and cultural, and especially the ideological and theological, contexts for Catholicism provides yet further impetus for the focus of this present study.

I suggest, then, that two thematic strands—Moore's fictional landscapes and his portrayal of Catholicism—do form that elusive and coherent hermeneutical whole. I contend that a critical approach which combines consideration of representation of geography and place (simply put, landscape) needs to be integrated with an emphasis on Moore's portrayal of Catholicism—a move which represents a critical unity incorporating the full corpus of Moore's novels. Key here is the manner in which literary text and religious tradition persistently interact, that intertextuality between Moore's fiction and Catholic theology. Still, if the relative critical neglect of the detail of Catholicism is evident from our review of the literature on Moore, then perhaps less obvious is the manner in which these two strands—of landscape and Catholicism—achieve their interpretative unity. Key *here* is the manner in which both the novels of Brian Moore and Catholic tradition itself increasingly reflect a theological and cultural diversity in the latter half of the twentieth century and beyond. This diversity is most clearly manifest in the local and through the culturally (that is, geographically and historically) particular—a plurality which is fictional and metafictional, physical and metaphysical. Moore's fictional landscapes shift too from early portrayals of cultural hegemony in his portrayal of Catholicism to an increasing heterogeneity of religious and ideological diversity. "Landscapes of encounter" conveys then something of the historical dynamism, geographical diversity and cultural plurality present both within Catholicism and Moore's fictional portrayal of this tradition.

I am arguing, then, for a place for Moore's novels within a Catholic world. Moore's novels reflect a particular convergence of fictional narrative and what Lyotard would term the grandnarrative of Catholic tradition.²³ However, it is a Catholic world which has changed considerably in the time covered by Moore's literary output. This is necessarily reflected in a changing dialectic between Catholicism and the fiction which represents this tradition

and deals with themes relevant to it as a worldview, particularly in terms of pre- and post-Vatican II Catholicism's relationship to fiction. In his introduction to *Catholics on Literature*, Whitehouse thus comments:

In Catholic thought there was a shift in apologetics and the notion of the *magisterium* and the consequent introduction of a new lexis. In the Catholic novel, there was a movement away from a picture of human beings working out their own destiny towards a representation of them in a dialectical and critical relationship to their formative culture.²⁴

If to date, "there is no clear sign of the emergence of what may come next, a totally post-Vatican II novelist,"²⁵ Moore, in so effectively portraying both pre- and post-Vatican II eras, indicates something of this narrative shift.

Besides resisting any overarching, formalist analysis, I am nevertheless following the definition of the literary as *fiction* here and this I think is appropriate to my thematic approach to Moore's work. I am also in part following Moore too by giving priority to narrative rather than the technique of the telling. But crucially I give priority, as far as possible, to the intertextual content of Moore's novels and not (as with biocritical approaches) the authorial motivation which might underlie them. While I acknowledge Moore's intertextual relation with Catholicism, two *forms* of textuality—literature and theology—remain distinguishable. Yet if I am asserting the rightful, cultural place of the text in the world—here Moore's novels in the context of the world of Catholic theological history—Moore's fictions remain fictions. Literature and theology, then, themselves both defined by their textuality, retain their distinctiveness as cultural forms, despite their intertextual relation.²⁶ In terms of ecclesiastical and theological history, the defining moment for twentieth-century Catholicism was the Second Vatican Council. A preliminary task, then, is to demonstrate both the distinguishing features of pre- and post-Vatican II Catholicism and the intertextuality of Moore's diverse portrayal of this tradition.

Theologically, pre-Vatican II Catholicism was well-defined, and if its ecclesiological self-definition provided sharply set boundaries between itself and other churches, other faiths, and the world at large, it was at least a worldview in which both laity and hierarchy knew their place. On this

Landscapes of Encounter

period immediately prior to the Second Vatican Council, in “The Council and the Church,” Rausch comments:

When Pope Pius XII died in 1958, the Catholic Church was, to all casual observers, in excellent shape. In the first half of the twentieth century the Church had been led by a number of strong popes, particularly Pius XII himself, who guided the Church through the Second World War and focused its energies against the postwar threat of Communism. The Church was continuing to grow in numbers and influence. Seminaries, convents and monasteries were filled to the bursting point.... Catholic theology, if not very creative, was very orthodox; here almost no dissent, no public disagreement. Catholics knew who they were; they were proud of their Church and had a clear sense of their own identity.²⁷

As Rausch goes on to comment, however, the surface situation barely concealed its authoritarianism, its hierarchical domination, and its fundamental insularity in the face of the modern world:

The Catholic Church in the middle of the twentieth century considered itself very much a Church under siege. Deeply suspicious of the modern world, the Church was on the defensive. Catholic scholarship had been crippled by the atmosphere of suspicion and mistrust that followed the Modernist crisis at the beginning of the twentieth century.... Books by Catholic authors were rarely published without a review by ecclesiastical authorities; they had to obtain an *imprimatur* from the bishop or a *nihil obstat* from an official censor of books.... The Catholic Church was officially not interested in ecumenism ... in the years immediately before Vatican II most Catholics were warned not to attend a Protestant service....²⁸

In brief, the major inheritance of Roman Catholicism in the first half of the twentieth century was from Vatican I (1870) in which the doctrine of papal infallibility was established. There is a degree of irony in that the loss of secular influence perhaps may have stimulated an authoritarian ecclesiastical backlash. But the Modernist crisis was at its most fundamental a reaction of the Church against modern developments in scholarship. Still,

the sense of siege and the boundaries between the Church in the modern world which Rausch describes were an inheritance of the Church's self-definition originating from the nineteenth century—but one which could be traced back to the Counter-Reformation and the sixteenth-century Council of Trent (1545–63).²⁹ The collective consciousness of the Catholic Church in the period prior to Vatican II was in this sense little different from that prior to Vatican I. The sense of separation of Church and world is nowhere better illustrated than by Pius IX's publication of the *Syllabus of Errors* in 1864. This represented a systematic condemnation of the "errors" of the modern world, which rejected any notion of accommodation with "progress, liberalism, and recent departures in civil society." It was a lack of accommodation mirrored in the condemnation of Modernism in Pius X's encyclical *Pascendi* and the Holy Office's decree *Lamentabili* (both 1907).³⁰

Such a Catholic world is portrayed in Brian Moore's early Irish novels—*Judith Hearne* (1955) *The Feast of Lupercal* (1958) and *The Emperor of Ice-Cream* (1965). It is a model of Catholicism which persists in Moore's early North American novels—*The Luck of Ginger Coffey* (1960), *An Answer from Limbo* (1962), *I Am Mary Dunne* (1968), and *Fergus* (1971). In the novels in these phases, Irish and American characters variously confront an authoritative model of Catholicism with its unaccommodating stance set dogmatically against the modern world. Such differentiation between Church and world allowed for Moore's fictional search for religious substitution to be equally well demarcated. In Moore's portrayal of the pre-Vatican II Church, the limits between Church and world are easily defined and allow Moore's characters the freedom to accentuate their rebellion in seeking other forms of meaning and worldview. This takes varied forms: economic success with Ginger Coffey; psycho-sexual self-definition with Mary Dunne; aesthetic endeavour with Brendan Tierney and Fergus. And the portrayal of landscape is always integral here to the portrayal of Catholicism: Ireland, at least Belfast, becomes a landscape synonymous with a narrow pre-Vatican II Catholicism; America, by contrast, becomes a secular antithesis, a landscape which represents both a physical and theological move away from Irish Catholicism. However, in all of the novels, emerging historical realities within the Catholic Church, particularly of Vatican II and its still unfolding theological aftermath, are not so distant. It would seem opportune to outline the main features of this transformation.

While it is important to see the Second Vatican Council in the context of the preceding Councils, and to recognize the distinctiveness of Vatican II itself, any attempts to draw distinctions which are too hard and fast would be inappropriate.³¹ Still, it is indeed difficult to overstate the transformation which resulted from the Council initially instigated by John XXIII whom most observers expected to be a merely caretaker pope.³² When he called for the Council soon after his election in 1958 with a quest for renewal, *aggiornamento*, a “bringing up to date” of the Church, it was a call to a Church which had largely atrophied in its insular response to massive changes in contemporary global society. By the time the Council had concluded its work in 1965, decrees of the Church’s teaching authority, the *magisterium*, here the Collegiality of bishops, indicated change on a scale probably never before seen in the Church’s history. What distinguished this Council from others was its foundational outlook as a pastoral rather than a doctrinal council. Most, if not all, previous councils, from the early Church through to Trent and Vatican I, had arisen in response to supposed doctrinal or other perceived challenges either to the Church’s teaching or its authority. Vatican II recognized the need to adhere to tradition and to re-present itself to the world in the light of changes which had occurred over history. This meant a modification—if not reversal—of the ecclesiological and theological tone established by Vatican I and followed so assiduously by the Church from the late-nineteenth to mid-twentieth century. For such reasons, the Second Vatican Council is often referred to as a “pastoral” rather than a “doctrinal” Council.

The teaching of the Council is represented in sixteen key documents. Cited here in the order of their official approval, the documents of the Second Vatican Council are:

- **4 Dec 1963**

- Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy**

- *Sacrosanctum Concilium*

- Decree on the Mass Media

- *Inter Mirifica*

- **21 Nov 1964**

- Dogmatic Constitution on the Church**

- *Lumen Gentium*

Decree on Eastern Catholic Churches

– *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*

Decree on Ecumenism

– *Unitatis Redintegratio*

• **28 October 1965**

Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church

– *Christus Dominus*

Decree on the Sensitive Renewal of Religious Life

– *Perfectae Caritatis*

Decree on Priestly Formation

– *Optatam Totius*

Declaration on Christian Education

– *Gravissimum Educationis*

Declaration on the Relation of the Church to non-Christian Religions

– *Nostra Aetate*

• **18 Nov 1965**

Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation

– *Dei Verbum*

Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity

– *Apostolicam Actuositatem*

• **7 Dec 1965**

Declaration on Religious Freedom

– *Dignitatis Humanae*

Declaration on the Missionary Activity of the Church

– *Ad Gentes*

Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests

– *Presbyterorum Ordinis*

Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the World of Today

– *Gaudium et Spes*.

For the non-theologian, the Latin terms can appear confusing. The Latin is the most commonly used short way of referring to individual documents and is taken from a key word or phrase from the opening of each document.

Landscapes of Encounter

So, for example, *Gaudium et Spes* alludes to the opening sentence of this document which talks about the “hopes and fears” of the modern world being the hopes and fears of the Church too. The best indicator of a document’s purpose is its formal English title. In the case of *Gaudium et Spes*, this is the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the World of Today. It is nevertheless easier to refer to the Latin as a shorthand. It is also potentially confusing that the different documents from the Council are variously named as constitutions (as in *Gaudium et Spes*, for instance) or decrees or declarations. In terms of theological weight, commentators agree in broad consensus that “the most important documents are the Constitutions, since they provide the keys to unlocking the basic meaning of the Council. The Decrees and Declarations depend on the Constitutions and show the practical implications of these for the Church.”³³ As one might expect, more than thirty years after the conclusion of the Council, much theological comment has accumulated.³⁴ It is not intended here to duplicate such commentary or replicate analysis on the development of particular Council documents. The intention here is to assess the reception of the Council documents, and to an extent on post-Conciliar pronouncements, as an integral part of the literary reflection on such developments by an author who, while no theologian, was nevertheless preoccupied with contemporary and historical Catholic thought. Still, while many of these Vatican II texts transformed the Catholic world, clearly not all these documents—either in technical, theological, or more general senses—can be said to have influenced the content and themes of Moore’s novels. But what will become apparent is the pivotal importance of these Church documents for understanding the ecclesiastical and theological trends which followed their publication.

While integral to the traditions of preceding Councils, many of Vatican II’s pronouncements presented so different an outlook that it might be easy to argue that its pastoral emphasis had doctrinal implications, and key areas of the Council’s pronouncements are worth highlighting. Amongst the most important was definition of the Church itself. This shifted from a rigidly authoritarian model in which hierarchy predominated to one in which the Church was defined not simply by magisterial authority but also by its laity. The latter ecclesiology emphasized the wider world community of the Church as well as Her hierarchy, the Church as the “People of God.”³⁵ Important too, and most publicly noticeable of all changes, was that the

Latin liturgical forms switched to the vernacular in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*.³⁶ The removal of this universality in language signalled a further democratization in the Church, the distinctiveness of peoples and individual cultures achieving priority in terms of the medium of worship. In the study of scripture, modern biblical methods were formally encouraged in *Dei Verbum*,³⁷ a move which itself provided impetus for the other steps towards ecumenism.³⁸ Further, *Dignitatis Humanae*³⁹ proclaimed the right to religious freedom for all, even the right of the non-believer. *Nostra Aetate* (concerned with Catholic Christian relations with “other” faiths)⁴⁰ removed the traditional “no salvation outside the Church” to present a model of universality of salvation, including those religious traditions beyond Christianity and, again, those with no religious belief.⁴¹ The Church also focused its attention beyond the theological to the political and the social and faced the plight of many societies in contemporary times: *Gaudium et Spes*⁴² provided the momentum for the Church’s wider social, cultural, and political involvement and, as we shall see, was a major impetus for theologies of liberations. The separation of the Church from the world, so marked by the century of Church history preceding Vatican II, had ended, and the implications of this are, of course, still being worked out. We certainly see elements of the Church’s new thinking reflected in the novels of Brian Moore.

In essence, the separation of the Church from the world—accentuated since Vatican I—was brought to an historical close by the Second Vatican Council. Still, setting Vatican II as part of the history of previous Councils of the Church, the post-Vatican II Church retains its notion of historical continuity. Overly rigid distinctions between pre- and post-Vatican II Catholicism are therefore unhelpful if the continuities are ignored. The notion of a radical continuity seems to encompass both the continuity through tradition and the discontinuity with the more negative aspects of the Church’s past together with a more positive view of its relationship with the world in the future. In literary terms, traces of pre-Vatican II Catholicism remain in Moore’s novels even twenty or thirty years after the Council’s close. Yet traces of the beginnings of a transformation in theological history are also apparent, as we shall see, in works set and written in periods prior to the Second Vatican Council.

Nevertheless, the massive transformation within Catholicism resulting from the Second Vatican Council provided Brian Moore with an

Landscapes of Encounter

extraordinary range of material which, in subsequent post-Conciliar times, has been used in a suitably wide-ranging manner in Moore's novels. The resultant portrayal of Catholicism within his fiction thus mirrors the significant changes (as well as both stasis and conflict) within the Church itself. But this relationship between religion, more properly here Catholic theology, and literature becomes considerably more complex after Vatican II. Moore's fictional portrayal of a monolithic post-Vatican I Church reflects an ecclesiastical and theological outlook in which hierarchy and authority defined the boundaries of Church and world so clearly. A post-Vatican II Catholicism which redefined the relationship between Church and world—and indeed the definition of the Church itself—had the effect of making Moore's portrayal of Catholicism ever more plural and diverse.

Critically, an ambitious attempt is made here to evaluate Moore's novels in complex intertextual relation with the theological and ideological histories of Catholicism which his oeuvre so consistently portrayed through a lifetime of writing. Again, also of critical importance here is the Church's redefinition of itself through the Second Vatican Council, making this a pivotal event in Moore's intertextual relations with Catholic tradition. Here, the increasing theological and ideological plurality of post-Vatican II Catholicism—crucially through the priority given to laity and as a consequence to individual cultures—allowed for a diversification in the geographical settings for Moore's portrayal of Catholicism. But it reflected too the manner in which the universality of post-Vatican II Catholic theology had increasingly become determined in its form by the historical particularities of both geography and culture.

If a defining moment in twentieth-century Catholicism, then, was the period marking the Second Vatican Council between 1962 and 1965, Moore's fiction in the post-Conciliar period is equally affected by changes in the Catholic Church. Thus the futuristic *Catholics* (1972) charts the fictional progress of the Catholic Church after Vatican II. The radical changes in the Church's thinking, both in its view of itself and its mission of salvation in the modern world become projected in *Catholics* onto the aftermath of fictional revolutions after an imagined Vatican IV. That Moore chose to portray such revolution in Catholic thinking in the context of Ireland is significant. That Ireland was the main focus for Moore's fictional rejection of Catholicism in his early Belfast novels only adds to the significance of

his latterly sympathetic presentation of the island in his novella of “post-Vatican IV” Catholic Church.

Moore’s fictional defence of Catholic tradition in Ireland heightens our awareness of a major development in his thinking not only about the Church but about the Church’s role both within contemporary society and, given *Catholics’* futuristic setting, the society of the future. Centrally, Ireland’s landscape is integral to the portrayal of an encounter within Catholicism’s own ranks: *Catholics* becomes the vehicle for the fictional analysis of change within the Catholic Church but just as importantly represents a development in Moore’s fictional portrayal of Catholic religion in Ireland vis-à-vis the early Belfast novels. And in this novella, many preoccupations of Vatican II are reflected directly: the renewal of liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*), the accommodation of Catholicism with other world faiths (*Nostra Aetate*) and the search for social justice (*Gaudium et Spes*). And other of Moore’s later Irish novels continue to deal in various ways with the representation of post-Vatican II Catholicism. In these novels—*The Doctor’s Wife* (1976), *The Mangan Inheritance* (1979), *The Temptation of Eileen Hughes* (1981), and *Lies of Silence* (1990)—both Ireland and Catholicism are revisited.

And, increasingly if anything, Moore’s fictional portrayal of Catholicism in the post-Vatican II era demonstrates further dependence upon the representation of place. And in this revisitation of North America—in a period largely overlapping with the later Irish novels, including *The Great Victorian Collection* (1976), *Cold Heaven* (1983), and *Black Robe* (1985)—Moore’s fictional encounters between Catholic religion and a range of alternative (secular and other-faith) perspectives eventually allow for an increasingly sympathetic portrayal of Catholicism, a transition in many ways facilitated by the transformation effected by Vatican II. Indeed, even with the historical *Black Robe*, theological perspectives which this book contains are thoroughly, even if anachronistically, “contemporary.” Accordingly, *Black Robe*, for its critique of colonial and missionary enterprise, is the proper context in which to view Moore’s long literary experimentation with North America and appropriately indicates a closure of the novelist’s preoccupation with it.

Black Robe represents too a transition in Moore’s treatment of Catholic theological landscape beyond which Moore’s drawing of key Vatican II themes are reflected in an increasing diversity of geographical setting. The portrayal of the Church which predominates in Moore’s final fictions—*The*

Landscapes of Encounter

Colour of Blood (1987), *No Other Life* (1993), *The Statement* (1995), and *The Magician's Wife* (1997)—therefore variously re-presents Catholic tradition as finding new ways of involvement with rather than, as in pre-Vatican II days, separation from the world. So, in *The Colour of Blood* we see the Church aligned against political oppression and as a rallying point against injustice in Eastern Europe. In *No Other Life*, the Church in Latin America is also very much on the side of the poor and the politically oppressed. Yet Moore's final novels maintain a characteristic ambivalence, and this has as much to do with historical inheritance as contemporary reality. Thus Moore examines areas where a post-Vatican II Church still needs to reflect, and critically so, on its past: in *The Statement* upon Catholic-Jewish relations, especially during and directly after the Holocaust in Europe, and, in *The Magician's Wife*, upon Catholic relations with Islam.

In the post-Vatican II era, the Catholic Church still retains of course an adherence to its fundamental historical tradition over two millennia and one should bear this in mind when considering the two Church Councils which have predominated in this present discussion. It should also be borne in mind that some of the more radical aspects of the Second Vatican Council have, arguably, been restricted through a conservative reaction in the last years of the twentieth century and the early part of the twenty-first.⁴³ Nevertheless, along with an attachment to the fundamental and universal in its Christian teaching, in the post-Vatican II Catholic world, cultural difference and local religious integrity achieve greater significance. Consequently, Moore's last novels contain portrayals of Catholicism as diverse theologically as they are geographically—from Eastern and Western Europe (*The Colour of Blood* and *The Statement*, respectively) through the Caribbean (*No Other Life*) to North Africa (*The Magician's Wife*). Such cultural and historical plurality enhances the conflict-ridden nature of these landscapes of encounter, a process of portrayal which begins in Belfast.