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The Whorl list — 3 messages, 3 voices, 27 Feb 2001

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Christopher Culver — 27 Feb 2001, 18:01

For the record, I'm Catholic. I was an atheist when I was younger, but Graham Greene's novel The Power and the Glory and a great deal of prayer brought me into the Church. The BotNS had its part in that whole process, too, especially such things as Severian's epiphany beside Ocean.

gerbil <james.kellar at quantel.com> wrote:

<<Just a thought - What do you think about the possibility that Wolfe's work is intended, if not to convert people, but at least to make them think more favourably of his own religion?>>

Although that was addressed to Blattid, I'd like to add my own two cents.

The Catholic elements in Wolfe's works are almost entirely concerned with the sacraments, and with the relationship between *individuals* and the Pancreator. There are none of the "political" elements that make the Church unpleasant for many non-Catholics. It is the Catholic (universal) Church not because it has a universal presence among (and responsibility to) the human community, but because the sacraments are represented everywhere in the universe, bound to natural law. Issues of Church hierarchy, and that whole supreme pontiff thing that makes many critics unsatisfied with Catholicism, are not present in Wolfe's work. With such a technique, Wolfe can't help but make Catholicism look a little more palatable.

Christopher CULVER <new_sun at hotmail.com>

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 27 Feb 2001, 11:12 · follows Christopher Culver

CC wrote:

For the record, I'm Catholic. I was an atheist when I was younger...

Innarestin. Three RCs in the group, and we're all adult converts. Do we have enough data points to establish a pattern? Is there a cradle Catholic in the group? (Even better, an "adult survivor of Catholicism" as one friend calls himself?)

The BotNS had its part in that whole process, too, especially such things as Severian's epiphany beside Ocean.

Oh, man, you just picked my probably favorite scene in all of Wolfe. "I took off my boots and cast them into the sea, so that I might not walk shod on sacred ground." Wow...

FWIW, I was already a(n unChurch'd) Christian when I read tBotNS, but I wouldn't be surprised if that scene played its part in my journey to Rome.

The Catholic elements in Wolfe's works are almost entirely concerned with the sacraments, and with the relationship between *individuals* and the Pancreator.

I'd state it differently: The religious (and specifically Catholic) elements in Mr Wolfe's work are concerned primarily with the Sacraments, the soteriological "process," and the imitatio christi, especially when the individual is not aware of it. (One might compare on this level Flannery O'Connor, and especially WISE BLOOD.)

There are none of the "political" elements that make the Church unpleasant for many non-Catholics.

As an amateur apologist, I have to say that there's a lot more than politics that many non-Catholics, and especially non-Catholic Christians, find troubling in Catholicism; there are some fairly deep theological issues that separate Catholicism, and eastern Orthodoxy, from the Protestant churches. (Not to mention the Protestant churches from each other...) In fact, it's been my experience that non-Christians who are incredibly hostile to Protestant churches often admit to a soft spot for Catholicism -- possibly because, at least in this country, Catholicism tends less toward in-yer-face evangelization.

It is the Catholic (universal) Church not because it has a universal presence among (and responsibility to) the human community, but because the sacraments are represented everywhere in the universe, bound to natural law.

Bingo on the antecedent, but I think you're mistaken to negate the precedent. In fact, the Catechism (CCC) that was issued a few years ago claims all humanity as part of the church, separated in various degrees. Or something like that.

I think one of Wolfe's most awesome accomplishments is the way the SUN books seem to dramatize the working-out of Christ's salvific work in people who have never even heard of Him.

[Irrelevantly he asked: Does anybody out there remember Scott Card's "Secular Humanist Revival Meetings?"

Pastor Scott: Do you BELIEVE?!?!]

Audients: Yes, we BELIEVE!!!

Pastor Scott: No, no, no... You're supposed to say "In what?"

]

Issues of Church hierarchy, and that whole supreme pontiff thing that makes many critics unsatisfied with Catholicism, are not present in Wolfe's work.

Actually, I think it's worth thinking this through again. The structure of the Chapter in SHORT is clearly based heavily on the Catholic clergy; and there is _some_ kind of religious hierarchy on Urth, though we don't quite find out what it is.

*This is WHORL, for discussion of Gene Wolfe's Book of the Long Sun.

Alex David Groce — 27 Feb 2001, 15:10 · follows Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

Blattid said:

FWIW, I was already a(n unChurched) Christian when I read tBotNS, but I wouldn't be surprised if that scene played its part in my journey to Rome.

I'd say Wolfe was pretty instrumental in my conversion (raised Southern Baptist) as well. Wolfe introduced me to Chesterton, and then I began to say "you know, these Catholics can write," and sought out O'Connor, Waugh, Spark, Percy, and Newman.

Nutria said:

I don't really think so. Long ago I wrote to ask him if he thought of himself as a Christian writer, and he wrote back to say that no, he is a writer who is a Christian. I don't think "evangelization" is part of his intention, though I'm sure he'd be happy if it were part of the result. BTW, I also asked him, in the light of *Peace,* if he thought of himself in any degree as a Southern writer (a la Walker Percy), and he responded by saying he that is more of an urban than a rural writer.

Interesting. I don't see PEACE as a Southern novel. There is the scene at Grandfather's house, and the Gothic of Smart's story (anyway, Florida isn't really "the South," Florida is its own little terra incognita) but those are definitely set in a "foreign" place, not "home." However, I gave a copy to a friend for Christmas, and she's halted her reading because it brings to mind "many bad memories of self-forced readings in high school of faulkner before i was ready."

"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." John 8:32

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