

Commercialization of Religion in Galway Kinnell's Poem *The Avenue Bearing The Initial Of Cross Into The New World*.

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Abstract

Since the Bible, the Christian religion has been deeply rooted in the commercialization of religion in society. The poem *The Avenue Bearing the Initial of Cross into the New World* is an attack on the Church and its followers for practising commercialization in society. Ironically, it also attacks Christian beliefs and practices. Kinnell presents shops, market places, restaurants, and bars to link with religious marketing. He portrays the characters as sellers and buyers, a product, and income. He even presented Christ as income to boost the Roman taxes. Marketing in religion affects both the spiritual and emotions of the followers. The religious sacred is regarded as a product that is exchanged by prices and goods. Kinnell rejected the Christian worshipping of idols. Thus, this paper presents the commercialization of religion in Galway Kinnell's poem *The Avenue Bearing the initial of Cross into the New World*

Keywords: Commercialization, The Historical Facts of Consumer Society, Sacrificial, The Christian Cross as a Product, Books, and Language.

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INTRODUCTION

During the later of the 19th century onwards, we come across so many artistic expressions to explain faith deterioration in religion. With science taking roots in the ordinary life of the individual's materialism has taken the upper hand. Destruction of the forest to construct concrete jungle, the introduction of mechanization even in day to day affairs of the individuals, and searching for the utility of things are few among many causes of losing the grip over religion. Places of worship have become an ordinary centre of the celebration. Religious celebrations are held by spending enormously. So, by and large, the faith in religion is replaced by looking for the cause and effects of episodes. The erstwhile belief system is shaken, giving rooms for constructing a convenient reason to lead an extraordinary life. It is also echoed in the poetry of W.B. Yeats, Auden, Dylan Thomas, and T.S. Eliot. Thus, it also echoed in Galway Kinnell's poem *The Avenue Bearing the initial of Cross into the New World*.

Galway Kinnell was born on February 1, 1927, in Providence, Rhode Island, and he was the fourth child of Elizabeth Mills and James Scott England. They

have been migrated from several places like London, Ireland, Edinburgh, and Scotland, respectively. He was grown up in a city called Pawtucket, Rhode Island. During his childhood days, Kinnell was introverted and muted. He lacks interest in school, and thus, he spends most of his childhood days wandering through the nearby Seekonk Woods.

Once, he got a copy of *Golden Treasury* written by Francis Turner Palgrave, where he encountered Edgar Allan Poe's hypnotic poems. Since the age of twelve, Kinnell has found his occupation and career in poetry. He can express his views more through his poetry rather than vocal.

MEANING OF THE CHURCH COMMERCIALIZATION

According to Nwanganga, the Church commercialization defines two things, and they are:

Firstly, the application of commercial principles in running the Church or running of it as a business to make an economic gain. (Nwanganga 2017, p. 30-38)

Secondly, Fidelis also says that commercialization of the Church also means manipulation of the Church. Exploiting the church members through spiritual and emotions with the intentions for economic gain is another meaning for church commercialization. (Fidelis 1998 p. 23)

THE SELLERS AND BUYERS

Sellers and buyers are the main reasons for the commercialization of religion. Kinnell displays markets, shops, restaurants, and bars to display commercialization. Section 3 of the poem deals with sellers and buyers. The Bloszteins Cutrate Bakery, Peanuts Dried Fruit Nuts & Canned Goods, Appetizing Herring Candies Nuts, Little Rose Restaurants, Happy Day Bar & Grill, which is purchased and full by the Puerto Ricans, the blacks, and the Jews "Puerto Ricans, blacks, Jews, / Baby carriages stuff with groceries and babies, / The old women...Eating freshly killed chicken, productos tropicales, /Appetizing herring, canned goods, nuts; They puff out smoke...puff like Blony Bubblegum" (*The Avenue Bearing the Initial of Cross into the New World*, 85-92).

In section 4 and section 6 of the poem, the two crones, the speaker, the Puerto Ricans, blacks, and the Jews, played sellers and buyers' role. In section 4 of the poem, Mother Mary is portrayed as an old crone selling the *Mirror* newspaper and a pickle. The speaker, the Puerto Ricans, blacks, and the Jews purchased *Mirror* newspaper from Mary "She has forgotten her children's whereabouts, / Or how many there were, or what the *News* / And *Mirror* tell about that we buy them with nickels" (122-123). Kinnell ironically portrays mother Mary as an old widow selling *Mirror* newspaper and pickle on an orange cart. Kinnell presented Mary as the mother of murderers, madmen, and a hideous woman. Whereas in the *Bible*, Christ meets His mother, Mary, in the 4th Stations of Cross, known as Mother Mary, Virgin Mary, and Virgin Mother. Hence, the portrayal of Mother Mary is reversed from the *Bible*.

Section 6 of the poem portrayed Veronica as an old crone purchasing pickle and later staring at the pickling stain which was wrapped in *Mirror*

newspaper "A crone buys a pickle from a crone / It is wrapped in the *Mirror*, / At home she will open the wrapping, stained, / And stared and stared and stared at it" (173-176). Veronica is presented as the consumer who purchased pickles from Mary. The *Bible*, "Mathew chapter 9: 20-22," says that on the way to Calvary, Veronica wipes the spit and mud from the face of Jesus with her veil. So, the remnant of Jesus's face is left on the cloth. Thus, Kinnell ironically portrays the character of Veronica as a "crone" and the stain of Jesus as a "stain of pickle."

THE HISTORICAL FACTS OF CONSUMER SOCIETY

The *Bible* "John 2:14-16" have evidence of religious marketing. The selling of sheep, oxen, and dove has been practising since from the history of the *Bible*. In section 6 of the poem, religion marketing can be found in an Old Jew. The twelve children metaphors of twelve tribes. The twelve tribes were the Twelve Disciples of the Christ or Twelve Apostles from the Holy *Bible*. They are Simon Peter, Andrew, James, the son of Zebedee, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Mathew, James, the son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot. The old man, the Father of the twelve children, is the metaphor of Iscariot Judas. He was the twelfth disciple of Jesus Christ. Judas betrayed and sold Jesus for 30 silver coins. Later, Judas was replaced by the disciple Mathias. Judas took Christ as a commodity and a product to sell. According to Rassuli and Hollander (1986), a consumer society is a society in which services were exchange rather than self-production. Thus, Christ exchanged for 30 silver coins by Iscariot Judas in the *Bible*.

In the poem, Mathew, Philip, Bartholomew, and Thomas were the sons of an old Jew. They were portrayed as unemployed, and thus, their Father was expecting God to bless them with a job "With the help of the Lord they will one day become / Courtiers, thugs, rulers, rabbis, asses, adders, wrestlers, baker, poets, carpushers, infantrymen" (38-40). Whereas, in the *Bible* "Mathew chapter 9:9" it says that the disciple Mathew was a tax collector "And as passed forth from thence he saw a man, named Mathew, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he saith, Follow

me. And he aroused and followed him" (*Mathew 9:9, The Holy Bible, KJV*). In another chapter of the *Bible*, "Mathew chapter 10:3" says that the disciple Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, and Mathew were publican "Philip, and Bartholomew; Thomas, and Mathew the publican; James the son of Alphaeus, and Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddaeus." During those days, the publicans or tax collectors were regarded as a traitor and despised person. Their money cannot be tithed to the temple as it is considered unclean by their own people.

ISAAC AS A SACRIFICIAL COMMODITY AND JESUS AS PRODUCT TO FLOW THE TAXES OF ROME

The *Bible* "Exodus 12:21" says that Moses order to kill a lamb for Passover, and in "Genesis 22: 8" Abraham told his son Isaac that God will provide the lamb for the sacrifice. The beginning of the *Bible* itself speaks of the sacrificial lamb to perform a ceremony as an exchange of Isaac. Since the time of Moses and Abraham, the exchange method has occurred, and an innocent lamb became a victim of a commodity. The lamb was easily sold in temples, which became easier to perform the sacrificial ceremony. John 2: 14-16 clearly says commercialization in religion:

And found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves,

and the changers of money sitting: And when he had made a scourge

of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen;

and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables;

And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence;

make not my Father's house an house of merchandise.

(*Holy Bible, KJV*)

The lamb symbolizes innocent. When a person commits sins, they take a lamb to the temple for sacrifice. It will clean his sin. But in Kinnell's

version, Isaac became a sacrificial commodity. Section 9 of the poem tells that children laughed when Isaac was burned:

A child lay in the flames

It was not the plan. Abraham

Stood in terror at the duplicity.

Isaac whom he loved lay in the flames.

The Lord turned away washing

His hands without soap and water

Like a common housefly

The children laugh.

Isaac means he laughs.

(*The Avenue Bearing the Initial of Christ into the New World, 256-263*)

Kinnell has oppositely desecrated the myth of Abraham and Isaac. Section 9 of the poem alludes to the *Bible* story of Abraham sacrificial towards God. During the period of A.D, the lamb was used for sacrificial for God, and thus in the Bible "Genesis 22: 1-19," God tested Abraham's faith, and instead of lamb, He asked Abraham to sacrifice his own begotten son Isaac. The Lord said to take Abraham, his son, to the land of Moriah for sacrifice. And thus Abraham obeyed Lord and went to the mountain with his son. Finally, when Abraham was about to burn Isaac, suddenly the angel of the Lord from Heaven called Abraham for a second time and stops Abraham. Thus, Lord swore to Abraham for his obedience that He will bless Abraham with multiples like countless stars in heaven, the tons of sand in the seashore and will become the seeds of Abraham will be blessed in all earth (*The Holy Bible, King James Version Genesis 22: 1-19*). Thus, the sacrificial of Abraham made the Lord, the consumer, happy and blessed Abraham with multiple blessings, which means a multiple income or profit.

The Lord turned his head symbolizes King Pilate for turning head and washing his hands as a symbol of refusal to take the blame of Christ crucifixion:

Pilate saith unto them, What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ?

They all say unto him, Let him be crucified. And the governor said, Why, what

evil hath he done? But they cried out the more, saying, Let him crucified.

When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made,

he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying,

I am innocent of the blood of this person: see ye to it.

(*The Holy Bible, King James Version, Matthew 27: 22-25*)

The Lord was turning his head from Isaac and washed his hands, alludes to Pilate washing his hands before the multitude. The above biblical reference designates that Jesus Christ was handed over to Jews by King Pilate for crucifixion. King Pilate is a victim of political stigma by Church leaders and their followers. King Pilate was the Roman governor who was responsible for the Jerusalem area. He has to maintain peace to keep the taxes flowing in Rome. Therefore, Jesus became a valuable product for the profit of Rome. Pilate does not want to crucify Jesus, but he was bound by Jews and taxes. It is difficult to govern without satisfying them, and thus, Pilate symbolically washed his hands, indicating refusal to take the blame of executing an innocent man Jesus Christ. Kinnell ironically attacks the Divine Lord and Pilate as political mongers who land themselves in a comfort zone by "washing his hands."

In section 10 of the poem, the Gold house burns and the remnants of the holocaust reveal that "everything / That may abide the fire made to go through the fire." (298) Here, the word fire means destruction that destroys the gold house. Whereas the Bible says, the destruction of fire is Hell. The Bible propagates,

"And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both body and soul in hell" (*The Holy Bible, King James Version, 10-28*). Thus, the burning of the gold house by fire is an allusion to a sinner burning in Hell.

THE CHRISTIAN CROSS AS A PRODUCT

The selling of Christian products like Rosary, Cross neck chain, Cross finger ring, and earrings boosts religious marketing. It is sold by both Christians and non-Christians. It is sold both in Churches and in an open market. Due to spiritual and emotional bonding, the followers never hesitate to buy the products even at an expensive rate. Especially, the "Rosary" is important for the Catholics to attend Churches or to attend Christian ceremonies. They also wear even at an outside of the Church to symbolize their Christianity and the Catholic. When such religious brands are sold in the market, it makes zero spirituality. It became a product to increase income and profit. According to G. Jeffrey MacDonald in the article *USA Today* the growth of religious marketing in religious services and products entice people back to Church. Marketing religion is not good for spirituality.

Thus, Kinnell condemns the Christian way of idol worship. He is an iconoclast. The term "Iconoclasm" is a Byzantine word, meaning "breaking of images." It is dynamically motivated by the Protestant attitude towards the divine images and idol worships that were practised during the Reformation Period. It also means rejecting the cherished beliefs in institutions and their practices. The term iconoclasm has intentionally desecrated the religious icon as heretical. Controversy on iconoclasm has had shook the Byzantine Empire for more than 100 years. The Roman Empire gave importance to idol worship and thus gains its popularity, but such practices were strongly condemned, especially in Asia Minor. Leo 111 was an iconoclast, the Byzantine emperor in 726. He opposes and stands against idol practices, and thus in 730, it was officially prohibited. Thus such religious prohibition contradicts both political and economic divisions in Byzantine society.

Like Emperor Leo, Kinnell rejected the initial "C" in section 14 of the poem, the initial "C," which is secret and holy for Christians. It has two meanings in Christianity "Christ and Cross." Generally, the Cross is known for crucifixion, the Rosary, and the Christ. Kinnell says that there is no transformation because the initial C refers to God-forsaken. Kinnell does not believe in the initial "C," which refers to two meaning "Christ and Cross." The reject on initial "C" also means Protestant rejecting Catholic Churches for idol worship. It has been clearly written in the Bible, Book Of Exodus 20: 4 in the Ten Commandments of the Holy Bible, and Reverend Martin Luther was the first leader who opposed Catholic Churches for idol worship :

Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image,

or any likeness of aby thing is in heaven above, or that is in the earth

beneath, or that is in the water under the earth

(Holy Bible, King James Version, Exodus 20:4)

Thus, the above 4th Commandment has been strictly restricted by the Bible that one shalt does not make any image under earth and heaven. But this Commandment was not followed by the Catholic institution, and in the Bible, it is said that whosoever avoid any of the commandments shall have no reward in heaven. He displays initial "C" as God-forsaken who has no power and careless, and thus he writes, "This God-forsaken Avenue bearing the initial of Christ/ Though the haste and carelessness of the ages, / The sea standing in heaps, which keeps on collapsing, / Where the drowned suffer a C-change, / And remain the common poor" (500-504). Kinnell presented Christ and Cross as powerless from which he does not gain any economic power or help.

According to Post-modernism, a text is open to all, and thus, Kinnell can express his view freely. The term Postmodernism was coined by Arnold Toynbee, the well-known historian of the twentieth century, in 1939 in his *A Study of History Vol.1*. Post-modernist writers create an open discussion for readers to come up with their new ideas and interpretations. They

trusted on self-help rather than any external beliefs or religion.

A MARKETING FISH IS COMPARED TO CHRIST CRUCIFIXION

Section 11 explores varieties of fishes selling in the fish market: butterfishes, Spanish mackerels with buttercups on the flanks, Pot-bellied pikes, and two-tone flounders. Kinnell portrayed Jesus as fish. The crucifixion of Jesus has been ironically compared to fish nailed to the wood "Fishes are nailed to the wood, / The fishmonger stands like Christ, nailing them to the wood" (*The Avenue Bearing the Initial of Christ into the New World*, 360-31). A fish personifies Jesus Christ. The stripping of fish has been compared to the stripping of Jesus' clothes. He mockingly says:

He scrapes the knife up the grain

Scrapes and the scales fly. He lops off the heads,

Shakes out the guts as if they did not belong in the first place,

And they are flesh for the first time in their lives.

first time in their lives.

(*The Avenue Bearing the Initial of Christ into the New World*, 350--354)

The stripping of Jesus' clothes also comes under the 11th Stations of Cross. In Kinnell's poem, Jesus died in 11 sections. Whereas in the Bible, Christ died on 12 Stations of Cross. (*Mathew 27:29-56*)

The *Bible Mathew 27:63, Mathew 28:6-20* conveys that Jesus was resurrected after three days. Whereas, in Kinnell's poem, Jesus was dead, and He is portrayed as a soldier. The cablegram ironically attacks Christ's resurrection and displays a final death certificate:

Dear Frau _____ :

Your husband, _____ , died in the Camp Hospital on _____ . May I express my

sincire sympathy on your bereavement. _____ was admitted to the Hospital on

_____ with severe symptoms of exhaustion, complaining of difficulties in breathing and pains in the chest. Despite competent medication and devoted medical attention, it proved impossible, unfortunately, to keep the patient alive. The deceased voiced no final requests.

Camp Commandment, _____ (355-362)

The line "Your husband" (356) ironically portrays Jesus as a married man. Here, in this section 11, Jesus is described as a fish, a soldier, and a husband. The signature Camp Commandment is Kinnell himself, who declared Jesus dead, and there is no resurrection.

Section 12 suggested that the whole world mourns for the death of Christ and "expecting the visitation" (396), which means the resurrection of Christ from the grave. But there is no resurrection in Kinnell's version.

In section 13, there is a garbage truck that carries away the remains. In the penultimate paragraph 14, Jews are laughing sarcastically at Christ's death because His kingdom is finish:

In the nighttime

Of the blood they are laughing and saying,

Our little lane, what a kingdom it was !

oi weih, oi weih

(487-490)

BOOKS AND LANGUAGE

Christian books became attractive to Christians. People purchase due to spiritual and emotional connections between religions. Sometimes people buy by judging the book's cover, and later they found that the book is reverse from the said title. The poet himself gave an example of commercialization of religion by identifying the poem *The Avenue Bearing the Cross's* initial introduction into the New World, which attracted the readers by thinking that it talks about the Cross. It is an ironic poem that attacks Christian beliefs and practices.

Language became an integral part of both a book and a human being. While judging Kinnell's poem, maximum critics followed Lionel Trilling. Naturalistically one assumes that religious references are symbolic, not to be considered as contributing to meaning. Kinnell's use of the Christian language makes readers misinterpret that he wrote on God. But during an interview, Kinnell has cleared the misconception who judge his poetry on Christian language and called him religious. The interviewer asked Kinnell, "I'm thinking of your poem, *'The Olive Wood Fire'* in which you're holding your son. You end the poem with the word 'God.' Is it a leap into unknown, an over-enthusiastic father, or an indication of where you find God?" to which Kinnell replied, "In that poem, I've called my son God." And he also replied, "So I certainly abandoned a Christianity; however, the language of Christianity remains with me. It's a language that wasn't invented by Christianity; the Christians borrowed it from elsewhere. So I don't feel that in using the Christian language I am appropriating Christianity or implying that I still am a Christian" (*Being with Reality: An interview with Galway Kinnell*, pp. 174-1750).

Kinnell said, "Of course I was raised as a very devout Christian, and I believed very much in God, so the word God has a resonance for me that can never be taken away." (175), and finally he revealed that "I have in the sense that I'm not a Christian now; I certainly don't believe in Christianity. I regard it as a system; a complete invention of the species to make life and especially death more comfortable. So I certainly abandoned Christianity" (75).

CONCLUSION

Therefore, the commercialization of religion has started from the origin of the Bible. Thus, Kinnell has represented it through his poem to realize that marketing in the Christian faith is truly unacceptable. It misguides the followers to abandon Christianity, which the poet himself has already submitted. Thus, the ironic message through the poem *The Avenue Bearing the Initial of Christ into the world* has clearly remarked that this paper did justice to the titled "*Commercialization of Religion in Galway Kinnell's*

poem *The Avenue Bearing the Initial of Christ into the New World.*"

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