



UNIVERSIDAD DE JAÉN
Centro de Estudios de Postgrado

Master's Dissertation/
Trabajo Fin de Máster

DEDOGMATIZATION THROUGH LITERATURE. REBELLION, ART, HUMOUR

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Dpt.: English Philology

July, 2017

ABSTRACT

According to some scholars, the religious phenomenon began in prehistoric times. With the development of civilizations, religion became more complex and combined forces with the political power for the subjugation and control of people. Later on, the invention of writing allowed the clerical class to write down the religious teachings, which would develop into a canon. The expansion of civilization and growth of population demanded a permanent interpretation of the canon for guidance, which would produce the dogmas.

The search for knowledge and rational explanations of the world around us has been constant in history, especially since the Enlightenment. This would eventually lead to a questioning of religious teachings and dogmas. Literature has had a major role in lessening the rigour of dogmas and the three works studied in this work have tried to explain how man lessens this rigour with three postures: rebellion under oppression, redemption through art and pathos through humor. That is, dedogmatisation through literature as seen through the prism of rebellion, art and humour.

The conclusions of this essay will indagate on how the dedogmatised mind works and also on the need to conciliate religion with freethinking and easygoing stances. It will also reflect on the role of religion in a world dominated by pragmatism and scientific thought.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Having had, and in many ways (though not as in previous ages and lives) still having a major role in our society, religion is a matter of great controversy across all social strata, circles of acquaintances or age groups. We have our ration of it on a daily or weekly basis through the media (in the case of conservative media the appearance of religious matters is significantly more frequent) and is still a casual topic of daily conversation among friends, or even in a bus stop among strangers.

But even acknowledging that there is a fraction of believers in the present day, statistics and, more blatantly, attendance rates to masses on Sunday, show us that the Christian religion is on the wane. What can possibly have caused this? Evidently, one of the major reasons for it is the fast pace of modern lives, with science and clear facts having a preponderant role in establishing a mindset that questions everything and assumes that what others have established as truth today is not guaranteed to be valid tomorrow.

One of the major aspects of the Christian religion (and especially of the Catholic Church and Puritan sects) is the tendency to believe sternly in the Word of God, as taught by its prophets and made explicit in the Scriptures, as well as in the interpretation of these Scriptures and the canon for the firm establishment of truths, moral and social rules and rites. This is commonly known as the dogma, the process towards its establishment is called 'dogmatization' and the verb describing the process is 'dogmatise'.

The phenomenon of the dogma is a sort of subtly enhanced enforcement of the status and power of the religion institution (commonly hand-in-hand associated with political power) and its teachings that pervades all advanced forms of religions, typically those of more or less advanced civilizations and with varying intensity in its application and effects. It typically has led towards forms of religious extremism when it has clashed with scientific theories or free thinking, such as the Spanish Inquisition, Cromwell's rule or the most puritan communities.

But what do dogmas imply for us as individuals? Typically it carries us to a regression in the way of thinking, being more stern and radical about our views and opinions, more intolerant towards residual (or not) types of behaviour and to adopting immovable positions towards those who doubt the message and rules propagated by the dogma. Being confronted with people who believe sternly in what dogmas declare, we cannot but desist in our attempts to transform them into enquiring and people curious to know what is behind established truths.

Be it as it may, it is an undoubted reality that there are more and more people everyday who doubt dogmas and embrace a skeptical life with no established and firm truths. It is also a way of dealing nowadays with the uneasiness of our insecure lives, in which everything is subject to sudden and unexpected change or modification.

So what does 'dedogmatization' mean? This is a question that must be answered clearly before we move forward in this essay. There is no such word in any

dictionary, not a single Google search match. So I must be clear from the beginning: I made up this word to serve the study I am going to make because I felt that there is literature that insinuates you to doubt the dogmas. Dedogmatization means the process of regressing our firm belief in the dogma and embracing freethinking. I personally must have been a very poor Catholic believer, as I have not attended many Church masses and really doubt the truth behind almost every word religion says. But there was still a remnant in me that believed sternly in some things such as The Golden Rule.

But I think I am not alone in this. Many people suffer nowadays because they feel they doubt the once and for a long time held belief in Christian dogmas. It is necessary to give a response to those who embrace the belief in science as well as those who do not want to give their belief in God completely up and still want a sort of mindset that includes a milder religious belief. Only then can we be truly and firmly establish a true perception of the self in relation with our contemporary, millennial society of the 2000, as well as in relation with religion.

The theory of cognitive dissonance can help to explain the mechanism in our psyche when we do an action that is contrary to our beliefs, ideas or values or are confronted with ideas that clash with our own perceptions. Also, it can also help explain the mechanisms behind dedogmatization. A person who experiences cognitive dissonance according to the English Wikipedia:

“tends to become psychologically uncomfortable, and so is motivated to reduce the cognitive dissonance: either by changing parts of the cognition, to justify the stressful behavior; or by adding new parts to the cognition that causes the psychological dissonance; and by actively avoiding social situations and contradictory information that are likely to increase the magnitude of the cognitive dissonance.”

The mental or psychological processes treated in this essay have much in common with the psychological mechanisms to overcome cognitive dissonance. The psychological mechanisms to overcome it have been described by Festinger in *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* and they are basically four:

- Change the behavior or the cognition (for example, “I won’t do this again as it is against my ideas and creed”)
- Justify the behavior or the cognition, by changing the conflicting cognition (for example, “I can sin occasionally, but not in excess”)
- Justify the behavior or the cognition by adding new cognitions (“This miracle could actually have happened if we consider that...”)
- Ignore or deny information that conflicts with existing beliefs (“This idea, creed or dogma is totally wrong”) (Festinger 1957: 2)

The appearance and response in literature towards these worries in each individual goes hand-in-hand with the appearance of Enlightenment in Western society. Every and each groundbreaking social or scientific theory that would make every religious believer doubt in their faith seems to have been accompanied by literary works that

state clearly these new views. And what is more important, they give voice to the public scepticism and restlessness.

Dedogmatization means liberation. Would it also mean rejecting religious thought completely? Maybe that would be the case for those relentless believers in science, though it does not provide solace for those who believe in transcendentalism or are unable to deny completely what they have been taught to believe as a rational order of the cosmos.

This way, the geological and the Darwinian theories find their echo in the skeptical passages of Samuel Butler's novel, only as a faithful testimony of a religious man about what was trendy in science. Religious repression and dogmas are rejected and replaced by art when the protagonist ages in *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. And Moore's interpretation of the figure of Jesus Christ wants to make us laugh as we become acquainted with a really humanized description of one of the central characters of Western civilization.

In my essay I will study these three novels and examine how a man raised in a Puritan family rebels against religion, how art is a liberating replacement of proselytism and how humour can calm the uneasiness of the 21st century citizen, be it an uneasiness caused by religious dogmas or of any other kind. I will analyze the critical style of these authors, how they say what they say and what this implies and means for freethinking, religious dogmas and dedogmatisation.

2. REBELLION AND DEDOGMATIZATION: *THE WAY OF ALL FLESH*

2.1. Family upbringing and dedogmatization

In the case of *The Way of All Flesh* we are confronted with a quite religious and puritan family across generations. The figure of Theobald, Ernest's father, is a predominating and overruling presence in the family. It is a repressive father that would regulate every aspect of his offspring's life with an iron fist. It is a quite relevant character, who influences the behaviour and mindset of his family. Theobald transmits subtly his way of thinking, for example, to his wife:

He was fond of his mother, too, but as regards his father, he has told me in later life he could remember no feeling but fear and shrinking. Christina did not remonstrate with Theobald concerning the severity of the tasks imposed upon their boy, nor yet as to the continual whippings that were found necessary at lesson times... she was fond of her boy, which Theobald never was, and it was long before she could destroy all affection for herself in the mind of her first-born. But she persevered. (Butler 1995: 85-86).

Passages such as this could indicate us how hard the author's life (the novel is in fact autobiographical) must have been while he was living in the same roof as his parents. Taking into account that it is a clerical family and that Ernest is instilled into accepting the strict moral codes and unquestionable dogmas of religion, it is quite easily surmised that this submission will end either on acceptance or rebellion. The parents are prone to invent excuses or bright futures for Ernest to justify his repression: "For Ernest, a very great future--she was certain of it--was in store. This

made severity all the more necessary, so that from the first he might have been kept pure from every taint of evil.” (Butler 1995: 86).

The education Ernest receives is marked by strict adherence to everything that his father says. They are fanatics of religion. In the case of his mother, she is vain and dreamy. The author laughs at her character and thoughts as she daydreams of miracles in her family and signs indicating a prosperous future for her and her family. In a paragraph in chapter XXI, she contrasts the character of other members of the family with those of Theobald and herself:

Dr Jones was certainly worldly--very worldly; so, she regretted to feel, had been her father-in-law, though in a less degree; spiritual, at heart, doubtless, and becoming more and more spiritual continually as he grew older, still he was tainted with the world, till a very few hours, probably, before his death, whereas she and Theobald had given up all for Christ's sake. They were not worldly. At least Theobald was not. She had been, but she was sure she had grown in grace since she had left off eating things strangled and blood... (Butler1995: 87)

Fanaticism such as this instilled into a child from his very early age is likely to define much of his way of thinking. The possibility of an isolated and enclosed character within families in that age (how far from our age of Internet and globalization) would also ensure that these ideas are securely preserved. But as the novel progresses, we learn of many changes and of the protagonist getting in contact with other's ways of life or new scientific theories. This can only lead to his separating himself from what he has learnt previously or taught to respect. Only if he has not undergone a great

cognitive dissonance conflict that requires him to preserve his religious thinking. From an early stage we learn of his aversion to some things, such as the learning of classical languages. In a passage we read "I must insist on two things: firstly that this new iron in the fire does not distract your attention from your Latin and Greek"-- ("They aren't mine," thought Ernest, "and never have been")" (Butler 1995: 136).

On another passage the narrator criticises the mindset of Christians and compares it to some bees that are deceived by flowers on a wallpaper:

As I thought of the family prayers being repeated night and morning, week by week, month by month, and year by year, I could not help thinking how like it was to the way in which the bees went up the wall and down the wall, bunch by bunch, without ever suspecting that so many of the associated ideas could be present, and yet the main idea be wanting hopelessly, and for ever. (Butler 1995: 94)

The narrator is the author's adult, detached alter ego (as contrasted with Ernest, who is the alter ego of his early years), and he reflects on those times he spent in prayers everyday in his family to criticise what he deems as a loss of time. This is done in a subtle way, perhaps so as not to hurt the feelings of his contemporaries:

Then my thoughts wandered on to those calculations which people make about waste of time and how much one can get done if one gives ten minutes a day to it, and I was thinking what improper suggestion I could make in connection with this and the time spent on family prayers which should at the same time be just tolerable. (Butler 1995: 94)

This is an insinuation to a dedogmatisation process. Likewise, the author rebels against the message to be submissive and good of religious discourse:

I noted that Theobald prayed that we might be made "truly honest and conscientious" in all our dealings, and smiled at the introduction of the "truly." Then my thoughts ran back to the bees and I reflected that after all it was perhaps as well at any rate for Theobald that our prayers were seldom marked by any very encouraging degree of response, for if I had thought there was the slightest chance of my being heard I should have prayed that some one might ere long treat him as he had treated Ernest. (Butler 1995: 94)

This two last extracts are clear instances of a dedogmatised mindset, one that rejects both the rituals and mass congregation as void, as well as one that feels that time is gold and must be intelligently made use of.

Such upbringing, such familiar context, provokes a most radical stance against the familiar institution from the part of the author through the narrator's voice. In fact, Butler's harsh upbringing may have triggered a clear aversion to the familiar institution (he never married). In Chapter 24 he clearly expresses one of the major reasons why a clergy's household may be unhappy:

One great reason why clergymen's households are generally unhappy is because the clergyman is so much at home or close about the house. The doctor is out visiting patients half his time: the lawyer and the merchant have offices away from home, but the clergyman has no official place of business which shall ensure his being away from home for many hours together at stated times. (Butler 1995: 96-97)

He continues his criticism expressing how he felt when his father was present and absent: "As soon as his back was turned the air felt lighter; as soon as the hall door opened to let him in again, the law with its all-reaching 'touch not, taste not, handle not' was upon us again." (Butler 1995: 97). The said passage full of criticism against the fatherly figure extends to, in my opinion, a clearly misguided and prejudiced attack on the familiar institution:

"It seems to me," he continued, "that the family is a survival of the principle which is more logically embodied in the compound animal—and the compound animal is a form of life which has been found incompatible with high development. I would do with the family among mankind what nature has done with the compound animal, and confine it to the lower and less progressive races. (Butler 1995: 97)

2.2. Formal education and inner conflicts

2.2.1. The teaching panorama in Butler's time

Samuel Butler's novel reverberates with rebellion against the current educational system of his time. We have already referred to the protagonist's aversion to classical languages. More likely than not, the author's stance reflects an aversion towards any kind of education that is not appealing, attractive or enticing to students. In our days there are many who advocate for this, what we have commonly termed 'meaningful learning'. Even if he does not use this very term, Butler is an advocate of this type of learning and is completely against the types of education, such as those infused with the Utilitarian philosophy, that was also criticised by others of his

contemporaries, such as Dickens in his *Hard Times* and *Dombey and Son*. His was still the age of grammar schools where extinct languages (ie. Ancient Greek and Latin) and the study of the classics played a prevailing, core role in the curriculum.

2.2.2. The pursuit of hobbies and dedogmatisation

Samuel Butler's personal voice is heard through the story's narrator expressing his opposition to the teaching of dead languages and regretting that there was not a subject on music, which is one of the most remarkable hobbies of the protagonist and one to which he dedicates most of his idle time while boarding at Dr Skinner's school. This passion is done secretly so that his father does not notice it. For example, he buys a whole set of music scores as soon as they are published, even if that means selling some of his school material to get the money:

About this time cheap editions of the great oratorios began to appear, and Ernest got them all as soon as they were published; he would sometimes sell a school-book to a second-hand dealer, and buy a number or two of the "Messiah," or the "Creation," or "Elijah," with the proceeds. (Butler 1995: 148)

This behaviour is clearly against what his father and mother would have wished him to do, which the author makes clear: "This was simply cheating his papa and mamma, but Ernest was falling low again – or thought he was – and he wanted the music much, and the Sallust, or whatever it was, little." (Butler 1995: 148).

While his aunt Alethea is alive, he is given the chance to build his own organ. This is regarded quite critically by his father, who does not waste every opportunity to vex him with new rules regarding his coming home after having done carpentry works.

And after Alethea's death he is finally commanded to discontinue building the organ he had already begun to build. Facing this new rebuke, he is nonetheless able to continue secretly pursuing this hobby of his: he covertly visits a church within the parish of his school to hear its organ (sometimes he is even allowed by the organ player to play himself).

It is interesting to note the fact that even at the end of the 19th century most music was about religious themes. There was also music on other topics, but religious themes were still greatly focused on. The intense focus on these topics could be regarded as a means of the higher classes and the church to subdue people and avoid them thinking of what they would most naturally think of: merriness, sexual desire, free thinking, etc. By means of monopolising the thoughts in their mind with religious topics or avoid that they could think most of the time by themselves, they achieved to control people and the masses. Regarding this, the rise of popular music genres about love or commonplace topics that are of near interest to any hearer could be seen as a nearby process or subprocess of dedogmatisation in history. As Nobuo Masataka and Leonid Perlovsky proved in their study on cognitive dissonance *The Efficacy of Musical Emotions Provoked by Mozart's Music for the Reconciliation of Cognitive Dissonance* (2012) (essay posted online at goo.gl/AeF5Yo), music might reduce cognitive dissonance and reduce the constraints the mind can develop and create interest in experimenting, discovering and discerning. The control of topics for music at that historical stage could perhaps have been influenced by those in power so that the effects of music were not so strong or

disagreeable. In other words, control and restraining over a cultural aspect that could lead to much freedom and merriness.

In other passages, Ernest feels like he wants to emulate some of his school partners, for example their ability to write poetry. He is showing something of his true self and it is this kind of early glimpses into his inner character that make us reflect on how irrational the purpose of trying to impose everything on a youngster and not allowing him or her to develop his inner skills or interests is.

The future life of Ernest shows a predestination to accomplish and pioneer in those things he felt an interest in from a very early age rejecting everything that their parents wanted him to be (basically, being a cleric of the Church of England). Thus, he has the chance once he has become broken all bonds between his parents and him to play music and finally he turns to become a writer. These are interpreted by the reader as the 'natural' paths that Ernest was to follow sooner or later, the natural course of his life.

An inherent characteristic of dedogmatisation and its related psychological development would suggest that as the subject rethinks religion and dogmas, he unleashes his mind and develops an interest in everything that can lead to a more fulfilling life, an enquiring life full of possibilities. He would have the mind of the philosopher that questions everything, also the mind of the artist that creates imaginatively, free from bonds, be they moral codes or imposed truths that are not to be questioned.

2.2.3. Dejection or depressed states and dedogmatisation

The protagonist undergoes (perhaps unavoidably, as we feel after reading the submission to strict moral codes and things he does not like) a long period of his life in which he feels dejected and guilty for not being able to be as people tell him he should be: a moral, obedient and submissive person. His aversion to dead languages and learning that is not practical or necessary is perhaps reflecting how the author himself passed from these dejected states to a liberated way of thinking of his own in adulthood. Regarding those useless subjects that one must learn he has a clear mind: "Never learn anything until you find you have been made uncomfortable for a good long while not knowing it." (Butler 1995: 123).

The narrator's voice is the own voice and opinion of the author, but he also expresses how Ernest feels about it: "We were put into this world not for pleasure but duty, and pleasure had in it something more or less sinful in its very essence." (Butler 1995: 122). And who imposes this way of thinking? Another passage in chapter 31 reveals how the way of thinking of society is imposed by a few in eminent positions of power or ideological influence:

'... the more he disliked a thing the greater the presumption that it was right. It never occurred to him that the presumption was in favour of the rightness of what was most pleasant, and that the onus of proving that it was not right lay with those who disputed its being so.' (Butler, 1995: 122)

The narrator sometimes speaks his own voice and gives us some insights into his critical stance towards this type of education. For example, he has a critical stance towards an education based on learning from books by youngsters that neglects their physical development, which he finds of utmost importance at this age. Again, we read in chapter 31:

‘spend your time in growing bone and muscle; these will be much more useful to you than Latin and Greek, nor will you ever be able to make them if you do not do so now, whereas Latin and Greek can be acquired at any time by those who want them.’ (Butler 1995: 123)

It seems plausible to think that most children will feel a great conflict within themselves till they decide to think on their own when imposed a repressive schooling system and a stiff set of moral rules based on intolerance, submission and obedience. The new role of families (so unlike that of Ernest’s) make it possible that children are mostly happy nowadays with a sound upbringing that is suitable for them. Basically, the role of families has turned to love their offspring and boost their potential by facilitating them the means to do so. These families are in most cases non-religious or at least families with a quite dedogmatised mindset with a not so strict set of moral codes. The strict or repressive heads of family are on the wane.

This repressive moral and schooling system can only be based on the presumption that subduing people to obey is the only way to ensure their obedience. In my view, it is only a repressing the inner self and its personal way of development, which is a way that can lead to an enriching existence. Thus, the protagonist, innocent as he is,

ends up acquiring a set of habits and unhealthy vices which lead him to a dejected state. But this can not ultimately hinder the evolution of the protagonist to become what he has always wanted to be or to live for.

It makes us wonder greatly when observing the educative system nowadays. We can still observe how children feel dejected and can not find the subject or topics they are being taught interesting at all. Nevertheless, the role of the all-powerful source of information of the Internet is not to be despised: children can have now access to all types of knowledge, particularly those that suit them best and in the blink of an eye. The role of schools should shift in time from one based on instruction to one based on self-discovery, the fulfillment of projects or tasks, teachers as facilitators of learning and self-discovery... Everything should be aimed at boosting the pupil's capacities in the digital era. And they should approach dogmas with a questioning mind, allowing them to believe or disbelieve. It is the eternal matter of discussion between those advocating for teaching religion at schools and others that prefer that children are taught education in values and another example of the likely tension between dogmatisers and dedogmatisers.

Be it as it may, it seems that formal education is in any case faulty. Ernest is not able to establish firm grounds for his personal development as a person, which may have to do with his character (and that is not to be doubted, as children have generally a frail mind). But educational authorities may also be held responsible for not providing good guidance in worldly matters. Thus, Ernest is unable to determine what his religious beliefs should be 'If next day he had taken a walk with Mr Hawke, and heard

what he had to say on the other side, he would have been just as much struck, and as ready to fling off what Pryer had told him, ...' (Butler 1995: 218).

2.2.4. Contacts with other people and first personal steps towards dedogmatisation

Ernest's upbringing in enclosed environments where religion had a major role has hindered him from taking contact with the real world of real people. And the fact is that there are people at this stage in history who really do not care about religion much. This can only lead once more to missteps, which in the case of Ernest are of serious consequences. He has initially some disposition to approach religion in a certain way that enables him not to lose an overall picture of reality.

... at this time he was something of a Saul and took pleasure in persecuting the elect, not, as I have said, that he had any hankering after scepticism, but because, like the farmers in his father's village, though he would not stand seeing the Christian religion made light of, he was not going to see it taken seriously. (Butler 1995: 193)

This could hint initially to a certain predisposition to consider religion from a more practical point of view. The fact is that Ernest has passed too much time under the shadow of his parents' ideas and the instruction of establishment teachers. This could be seen as a first glimpse of how the self dedogmatizes or reduces the importance of religion for one's own self. It goes hand in hand with coming of age, becoming independent and the natural ages of rebellion in most human beings (teenage being the most remarkable stage): undoing others' work in instructing us in

order to get one's own set of ideas. The degree of cognitive dissonance the subject undergoes is going to determine how independent and liberated he feels.

When coming to London, he enters into contact with people who are more like his aunt Alethea. His lack of interest in these kind of people is something that makes us wonder because in our contemporary society of mass information and democracy contact with other people and the subsequent change in opinions is something almost universally extended (with exceptions, too, in any case). The narrator speaks about himself and compares with Ernest's landlady:

... to borrow the words of Ernest's landlady, Mrs Jupp, "am not a very regular church-goer"— I discovered upon cross-examination that Mrs Jupp had been to church once when she was churched for her son Tom some five and twenty years since, but never either before or afterwards; not even, I fear, to be married, for though she called herself "Mrs" she wore no wedding ring, and spoke of the person who should have been Mr Jupp as "my poor dear boy's father," not as "my husband." (Butler 1995: 224-225)

The narrator has managed to form a sound opinion of Mrs Jupp after a first (we must suppose routine and short) visit to Ernest. But Ernest continues being ignorant of Mrs Jupp's views or those of the people around him. It is almost something to be wondered at. The next we read about his relationship with neighbours is a conversation he has with Mr Shaw, a tinker lodging at Mrs Jupp's block of apartments. He is taken aback at his answers. The first of them is his view's on *Historic Doubts*. Mr Shaw's retorts: 'If you really want to know,' said Mr Shaw, with a

sly twinkle, "I think that he who was so willing and able to prove that what was was not, would be equally able and willing to make a case for thinking that what was not was, if it suited his purpose.' (Butler1995: 239).

The climax of the scene is Shaw questioning Ernest about John's account of the Resurrection. Ernest puts himself in evidence by mixing the accounts of the Gospels and Shaw gives him a piece of advice:

You know nothing of our side of the question, and I have just shown you that you do not know much more of your own, but I think you will make a kind of Carlyle sort of a man some day. Now go upstairs and read the accounts of the Resurrection correctly without mixing them up, and have a clear idea of what it is that each writer tells us, then if you feel inclined to pay me another visit I shall be glad to see you. (Butler 1995: 240)

The other encounters with the rest of inmates of the house are quite comical: a brutal husband who beats his wife and has rough manners, women of questionable reputation, etc. He finally sexually harasses a girl and is arrested by Law Enforcement. The narrator speaks of how misguided Ernest has been to follow a reckless way of thinking and trying to convert his neighbours:

Pryer had done well to warn Ernest against promiscuous house to house visitation. He had not gone outside Mrs Jupp's street door, and yet what had been the result?

Mr Holt had put him in bodily fear; Mr and Mrs Baxter had nearly made a Methodist of him; Mr Shaw had undermined his faith in the Resurrection; Miss Snow's charms had ruined--or would have done so but for an accident--his

moral character. As for Miss Maitland, he had done his best to ruin hers, and had damaged himself gravely and irretrievably in consequence. (Butler 1995: 244-245)

The fault is not completely Ernest's according to the narrator. Much of it has been caused by his parents' narrow views and their causing their child not to have much contact with society or women:

Poor people! They had tried to keep their ignorance of the world from themselves by calling it the pursuit of heavenly things, and then shutting their eyes to anything that might give them trouble. A son having been born to them they had shut his eyes also as far as was practicable. (Butler 1995: 251)

This falling into disgrace is a sort of revulsive for him that leads him to his right path in life. From this point onwards he will separate more and more of every aspect of his former life. One of his first decisions is never to be a curate again: "Whatever happened he would be a clergyman no longer... He hated the life he had been leading ever since he had begun to read for orders; he could not argue about it, but simply he loathed it and would have no more of it." (Butler 1995: 255). In another passage we read about how he has always felt about this kind of occupation: "It puzzled him, however, that he should not have known how much he had hated being a clergyman till now." (Butler 1995: 256).

Another plausible determination is to follow the hints thrown at him by Mr Shaw and indagate on the truth behind the narrations of the Gospels. Thus, while he concludes that some accounts in them could reflect what actually happened, some of them are

not acceptable as reflecting the truth: "... his belief in the stories concerning the Death, Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus Christ, and hence his faith in all the other Christian miracles, had dropped off him once and for ever." (Butler 1995: 255).

This is the consequence of having been told all his life to accept some unlikely facts as truth. The passage is a turning point in the novel and reflects clearly the climax of a process of dedogmatization, perhaps the more clear and categorical in the three novels under study. The process of dedogmatization in this novel shows clearly a spirit of rebellion and impassioned feeling. Till this point in the novel only a passive and indolent demeanour has been shown by the protagonist with sparse rebellious acts now and then, but only of a minor impact (like his buying secretly musical scores of oratorios). Basically, he has always done and acted as he has been told. Ernest's stance now is one of rigorous analysis and scepticism: "...he made the New Testament his chief study... as one who wished neither to believe nor disbelieve, but cared only about finding out whether he ought to believe or no." (Butler 1995: 255).

A next step is finding how his future should be shaped, at least professionally. This new determination of his will not be deterred by minor professions unsuitable to a former gentleman. His passion for manual work, shown already in his carpentry works to build an organ when his aunt Alethea still lived, is determining in his choice of a new profession. He decides to become a tailor and he feels enthusiasm for the first time at his new professional prospects: "...overjoyed at the thoughts of seeing his way again, and confident of rising some day if he could only get a firm foothold to start from." (Butler 1995: 271).

2.2.5. Dedogmatisation in deeply indoctrinated individuals with cognitive dissonance

Ernest's rebirth to a new life will not be separated from God. He has become dedogmatized of stiff views, strict moral codes, etc., but his relationship with a spiritual God is still there. He feels his presence very close, even as he accepts that God does not reveal himself or herself to us and also that he may have a different nature as we deem him to be: "As he thought further he remembered that all things work together for good to them that love God." (Butler 1995: 273).

He also feels that the strict moral code created by the Christian Church under which he has been oppressed does not suit his new life. But be it as it may, he still feels the need for a moral code. Although Butler is careful not to mention exactly the word moral, which can be used pungently by those wanting to dogmatise, he needs in any case a clear distinction between what is good and what is bad, that at least he is aware of: "He had lost his faith in Christianity, but his faith in something--he knew not what, but that there was a something as yet but darkly known which made right right and wrong wrong--his faith in this grew stronger and stronger daily." (Butler 1995: 273).

3. ART AND DEDOGMATIZATION: A PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST

3.1. Family upbringing and dedogmatisation

The environment where Stephen Dedalus is upbrought as narrated in the renowned novel by James Joyce is landmarked by welfare and affluence at his infancy. But as time passes the fortune of his father sways and declines and he will suffer penuries. His familiar upbringing is marked by a careful and permissive education infused with the duty to abide by the Catholic religion and the respect of the Irish culture landmarks and its people.

The family takes utmost care of providing everything necessary to their first-born, including allowing him to go the best Catholic schools (even in times of penury) and ultimately to University, the later despite a strong opposition on his mother's part. The tension between his mother and him is caused by their different opinions regarding religion, so great that in the end Stephen Dedalus feels for the first time a personally felt separation from his mother when he is about to enter University:

Yes, his mother was hostile to the idea, as he had read from her listless silence. Yet her mistrust pricked him more keenly than his father's pride and he thought coldly how he had watched the faith which was fading down in his soul ageing and strengthening in her eyes. A dim antagonism gathered force within him and darkened his mind as a cloud against her disloyalty and when it passed, cloud-like, leaving his mind serene and dutiful towards her again, he was made aware dimly and without regret of a first noiseless sundering of their lives. (Joyce 2000: 138-139)

His growing skepticism regarding religion at that time is causing this sundering. As Stephen states in *Stephen Hero*, the embryo novel of *Portrait*, he “would live his own life according to what he recognized as the voice of a new humanity, active, unafraid, and unashamed.” (Joyce 1944: 194). This has its parallel in *A Portrait of the Artist*, in the scene where he is offered to become a priest and his rejection of the idea, which is followed by a scene by the seaside where he feels joy and ecstasy, even an orgy of the senses, and finally determines he will become an artist, which is a turning point in his separation from the church. As Pat Cairney properly proposes in his thesis *James Joyce’s Quarrel with Catholicism*, the cold, inhuman or essentially practical priestly characters, such as Father Dolan or Father Butt, leave no space for imagination and individuality. And this hardly suits an artist who wants to express freely what his soul and mind feel. Stephen perceives that this obstruction by the Church to personal development so that the individual and society show no creativity or individuality has made the Irish a failed society, so much that at the end of the novel he decides to emigrate to the continent, presumably in a society without these types of shackles.

3.2. A close look at a clear instance of the dogmatisation process

Stephen has passed through different stages in his relation to religion throughout his life. He has always been instructed by the Jesuits and told to be a moral and good Christian, as well as been terrified with stories of hell and damnation. His temporary moral and sexual depravity at an early stage of teenage is followed by repentance and an extreme piety to atone for his sins. This is followed by an ongoing growing

skepticism. It will lead to another clash between his mother's wishes and his. He tries to speak about this problem with a friend (and his rival in love affairs): "— Cranly, I had an unpleasant quarrel this evening. / — With your people? Cranly asked. / — With my mother. / — About religion? / — Yes, Stephen answered." (Joyce 2000: 201). He next explains what the quarrel was about, and this enlightens us into how the dedogmatisation process has led our protagonist into atheism: "— ...She wishes me to make my easter duty. / — And will you? / — I will not, Stephen said. / — Why not? Cranly said. / — I will not serve, answered Stephen." (Joyce 2000: 201).

In a passage after this one, Cranly indagates on why he has become so skeptical or even atheist, and Stephen affirms that he 'was someone else' when he was a child:

— It is a curious thing, do you know, Cranly said dispassionately, how your mind is supersaturated with the religion in which you say you disbelieve. Did you believe in it when you were at school? I bet you did.

— I did, Stephen answered.

— And were you happier then? Cranly asked softly, happier than you are now, for instance?

— Often happy, Stephen said, and often unhappy. I was someone else then.

How someone else? What do you mean by that statement?

— I mean, said Stephen, that I was not myself as I am now, as I had to become. (Joyce 2000: 202)

Asked whether he loves his mother, Stephen feels uneasy because he does not feel sure he has really loved anyone, but his answer gives us insights about why he has turned into an skeptical or even an atheist:

— ...Do you love your mother?

Stephen shook his head slowly.

— I don't know what your words mean, he said simply.

— Have you never loved anyone? Cranly asked.

...

— I tried to love God, he said at length. It seems now I failed. It is very difficult.

I tried to unite my will with the will of God instant by instant. In that I did not always fail. I could perhaps do that still— (Joyce 2000: 202-203).

In this answer we can see that he has not really become an atheist completely. He is just in no-man's-land between belief and disbelief. This could hint to a process of dedogmatisation, a process of questioning across time which results in a freer mind or at least a mind that looks up to religion with a practical mindset. The conversation continues and it is in a certain passage that we see how this process of dedogmatisation, how this process of questioning religious beliefs could take place, this time questioning the actual character of Jesus:

— Jesus, too, seems to have treated his mother with scant courtesy in public but Suarez, a jesuit theologian and Spanish gentleman, has apologized for him.

— Did the idea ever occur to you, Cranly asked, that Jesus was not what he pretended to be?

— The first person to whom that idea occurred, Stephen answered, was Jesus himself.

— I mean, Cranly said, hardening in his speech, did the idea ever occur to you that he was himself a conscious hypocrite, what he called the jews of his time,

a whited sepulchre? Or, to put it more plainly, that he was a blackguard?—
(Joyce 2000: 204)

This is really the clearest example of dedogmatisation in this novel and shows us how much youngsters yearn for critical thinking and questioning on what they have been told not to doubt, typically the dogmas. The tension is perhaps between turning back to be a firm believer or going on in a process of dedogmatisation (which must not always end in stern atheism). This can be seen in Stephen as he still doubts on the actual meaning of Eucharist:

— ... you will not communicate, Cranly asked, because you are not sure of that too, because you feel that the host, too, may be the body and blood of the son of God and not a wafer of bread? And because you fear that it may be?

— Yes, Stephen said quietly, I feel that and I also fear it.

...

— But why do you fear a bit of bread?

— I imagine, Stephen said, that there is a malevolent reality behind those things I say I fear.

— Do you fear then, Cranly asked, that the God of the Roman catholics would strike you dead and damn you if you made a sacrilegious communion?

— The God of the Roman catholics could do that now, Stephen said. I fear more than that the chemical action which would be set up in my soul by a false homage to a symbol behind which are massed twenty centuries of authority and veneration. (Joyce 2000: 205)

3.3. Religion and artistry

3.3.1. Correlation between religious and literary ecstasy

There is a clearly perceived correlation between religious ecstasy and artistic epiphanies in the novel. Each of Stephen's religious ecstasies has in turn a corresponding reaction in artistic terms. Thus his religious repression leads Stephen to immoral sexual relationships at a quite early age. More relevant for his development as an artist, its almost masochistic piety after his repentance and confession "only serve to subtilize and extend the very senses they are designed to subdue" (Bloom 1986: 113). The religious repression he undergoes at different moments and with different intensity can only lead to his dedogmatisation and growth as an artist.

The ideas exposed in Cisoux's essay *The Style of the Troubled Conscience* are likewise clarifying regarding this issue. Cisoux indicates that Ernest's state of immoral debauchery is not as suitable in terms of imagery and ideas as a state of religious submission, repentance and atonement, which gives to the creative mind countless poetical material (hell, heaven, religious myths, etc.)

On the other hand, his growth as an artist goes hand in hand with his process of maturity. As he grows older, he begins to reject his former aesthetic ideals (quite significantly those tenets learnt from Walter Pater) and feels a desire to experiment new ones. This is only perceived in the journal at the end of the novel, in a process

that unveils Stephen as more human and open to self-criticism and less cold and unsensitive, as John Paul Riquelme indicates (Attridge 1990: 122).

3.3.2. Residual influence of religion in the artistic production

The dedogmatisation in this novel is remarkable not only for these swaying between extremes in Stephen's life, but also because it is accompanied by a growing aesthetic sentiment and activity as a poet and writer. This new activity separates him from the people and environment where he lives, which will have consequences that we will look later on in this chapter. He has always had the vein of an artist in him. This artistic vein we can see in his feelings at an early age at school when he is acting out a piece of theatre:

A few moments after he found himself on the stage amid the garish gas and the dim scenery, acting before the innumerable faces of the void. It surprised him to see that the play which he had known at rehearsals for a disjointed lifeless thing had suddenly assumed a life of its own. It seemed now to play itself, he and his fellow actors aiding it with their parts. (Joyce 2000: 71)

Although he has an artistic vein, he is still prone to suffer the influence of his religious education. The images and speech of religious ceremonies and homilies are likely to appear in a mind that is gradually unbonding chains. For example, this can be seen in an passage where we can see the creative process of the composition of a poem at the beginning of the fifth chapter. Before we observe how the artist begins his creative process, we are shown in beautiful words how he gets an inspired vein: "His mind was waking slowly to a tremulous morning knowledge, a morning inspiration. A

spirit filled him, pure as the purest water, sweet as dew, moving as music.” (Joyce 2000: 182).

We find several religious similes and rhetoric devices in an otherwise poem about love: “Are you not weary of ardent ways, / Lure of the fallen seraphim? / ... Above the flame the smoke of praise / ... Our broken cries and mournful lays / Rise in one eucharistic hymn. / ... While sacrificing hands upraise / The chalice flowing to the brim.” (Joyce 2000: 188). The religious imagery is clearly there, interspersed in the lines of a love poem. In this autobiographical novel and its embryo *Stephen Hero* Joyce wants to highlight how he himself passed through different stages where the influence of religion was important, even in his growing up as an artist.

As we have analysed in Butler’s novel their protagonists want to embrace only too eagerly the chance to have a sounder view of the world whenever they get a minimal chance to do it. The protagonist in *Portrait* also shows that if a child moves in strict religious circles without being able to imagine and deconstruct what he is instructed to sternly believe, he is likely to do so when he has the chance. In any case, in *Portrait* the change is not so dramatical and traumatic, but a process of dedogmatisation and the rise of the artist’s creative mind.

4. HUMOUR AND DEDOGMATISATION: LAMB

4.1. Family upbringing and dedogmatization

In the case of *Lamb* family upbringing is contextualised in a small town in Judea in the first century of our age. It is a particular case different from the other two novels as it narrates not only Biff's upbringing, but also Jesus' upbringing as well.

The children are brought up in a quite strict religious environment. Everybody observes the Jewish Law, especially those rules that establish what can make you unclean or not (and the various rituals to cleanse or purify one's body if the Law is disobeyed). Moore's humorous vein introduces really comical scenes that make light of religion and the Jewish Law, but he can also give us insights into how strictly Judean children could have been brought up in those times. In chapter 1 we read about how contact with unclean things should be avoided, when Biff first meets Jesus, a passage that also shows that, despite a strict religious context, people can be easygoing and tolerant:

The first time I saw the man who would save the world he was sitting near the central well in Nazareth with a lizard hanging out of his mouth...

"Unclean! Unclean!" I screamed, pointing at the boy, so my mother would see that I knew the Law, but she ignored me, as did all the other mothers who were filling their jars at the well. (Moore 2003: 8)

As the novel goes on, controversial codes of the Jewish Law are questioned. This could be seen as a result of having been in touch with other cultures and ways of life.

Despite the enclosed and hermetic character of the Jewish society at that time, it is to be expected that changes in habits and customs could also be possible. For example, Jesus eventually questions the rule that forbids to eat pork: ““Joshua, you’re the Son of God. You’re the Messiah. That implies—oh, I don’t know—that you’re a Jew! You can’t eat bacon.” “God doesn’t care if we eat bacon. I can just feel it.”” (Moore 2003: 169).

The religious or cultural bias impregnates the Judean society with prejudices and a tendency to gossip about your neighbour. This is of course a serious and probably damnable habit, but the author uses humour so as to make us not forget to take things easy. For example, apart from adhering strictly to the rules to remain pure and clean, Biff has a tendency to talk about people being possessed by evil spirits, even about his mother: “My father, Alphaeus, was a stonemason and my mother, Naomi, was plagued by demons, or at least that’s what I told everyone.” (Moore 2003: 9)

What is clear about Jesus is that he is not a common man. The novel describes that he is conscious of being God’s son, a concept that he has heard directly from his mother. Taking into account how malleable children are, Jesus quite soon propagates innocently and carelessly this very fact:

“I’ve heard stories about that boy’s mother,” she said to my father. “She claims to have spoken to an angel of the Lord. She told Esther that she had borne the Son of God.”

“And what did you say to Esther?”

“That she should be careful that the Pharisees not hear her ravings or we’d be picking stones for her punishment.”

“Then you should not speak of it again. I know her husband, he is a righteous man.”

“Cursed with an insane girl for a wife.”

“Poor thing,” my father said, tearing away a hunk of bread. (Moore 2003: 10-11)

What we could learn from these insights into Biff’s and Jesus’ early upbringing is that they were born and grew as Jews. Jesus learns from an early stage that he is a special man, a Messiah. Whether true or not, this fact will shape his future life in determining ways. A look at the words and deeds of Jesus that have been traditionally transmitted to us shows that Jesus was, no doubt, a Jew, and lived as a Jew. Analysis and commentaries on his very words, statements and teachings show that he was not altogether original, but borrowed many of his new doctrine from the words of the canon, as is shown in *The Cambridge Companion of Jesus*.

What is remarkable about the novel *Lamb* is how other cultures influence and shape Jesus’ way of thinking about humankind. Even if Jesus was not actually exposed to Eastern cultures, as the novel tries to insinuate, he had nevertheless contact with the Hellenistic culture transmitted by the conquering Romans, which could be seen as an early instance of globalisation in the ancient world (understood as the propagation and expansion of cultures across borders). Christianity is, in any case, a hellenized religion, an offspring of Judaism humanised through Hellenism. We will now have a deeper look at how globalised culture influences change and adoption of other ways of life.

4.2. International or globalised education and dedogmatisation

4.2.1. Global education in our time

In the case of Christopher Moore's *Lamb* we have to deal with a reflection on the current status of education in any corner of the world, and Spain, our country, is not an exception. This education is an open-ended one with a great stock of knowledge from every corner of the world. This has been enhanced and intensified with the coming of the Internet, but it could rather have its origin in globalisation, which is an older phenomenon (although it has intensified enormously in recent years). For example, every day more people circulate across countries and international travel is more and more frequent. This could have a professional motivation (mobility of skilled workers across nations) or a leisure one (for example, British or Germans coming in summer to Spain).

4.2.2. Lamb as a reinvention of the figure of Jesus

Lamb is a humorous novel telling, or rather reinventing or creatively thinking, the 'lost years' of the life of Jesus, that is those years that are not told in the canonical Gospels. Simultaneously, we are presented a Jesus that is less divine or solemn, but more human, which is possible thanks to the mundane character of novel telling.

What is important in the novel is that Moore makes a further step into humanising the holy man of the Christian religion and at the same time positions him nearer to us because his story is one full of insights into his goodness and humanity.

4.2.3. Jesus in his infancy as a critical evaluator of the Jewish tradition

In this section I will deal with how this international (or globalised) education Jesus receives leads ultimately to a dedogmatization of religion. Prior to his contact with global culture, he is sort of isolated (though not completely) in his native land and feels rebellious and nonconformist with many aspects of his time. To summarise it, he is a Jew, but with rather critical, personal views on things such as the Jewish tradition and ceremonies.

For example, Jesus does not waver at stating his divine origin, even if that would put him in danger:

“ ... Is it not the word of Moses that you must honor me?”

Little Joshua spun on his heel. “My name is not Joshua bar Biff, and it is not Joshua bar Joseph either. It’s Joshua bar Jehovah!”

I looked around, hoping that no one had heard him. I didn’t want my only son (I planned to sell Judah and James into slavery) to be stoned to death for uttering the name of God in vain. (Moore 2003: 15)

The figure of Jesus is also humanised as he beats his friend when they are young boys (still, he does not do it much in the novel, and even fewer times as he grows older): “Don’t let anyone tell you that the Prince of Peace never struck anyone. In those early days, before he had become who he would be, Joshua smote me in the nose more than once. That was the first time.” (Moore 2003: 15). In any case, it is only a slight aggravation, at least if one compares it with the violent acts Jesus

commits in the Infancy Gospel of Thomas, a Gnostic and revealing document that really dedogmatizes the myth and is referred to in the Epilogue.

The other Gnostic Gospels were either too fragmentary, or frankly, just plain creepy (the Infancy Gospel of Thomas describes Jesus, at age six, using his supernatural powers to murder a group of children because they tease him. Sort of Carrie Goes to Nazareth. Even I had to pass.) (Moore 2003: 441)

These two passages question the peaceful and conciliatory character of the Jesus of the biblical Gospels leading us to the process of dedogmatization.

The tensions between Jesus, who displays a determined idiosyncrasy from an early age, and an environment pervaded with religious piety or questionable ancestral rites offers us chances to see the conflicts that later would lead him to problems with the priests of Jerusalem. For example, Jesus abhors the sight of blood and when his stepfather proposes him to go to work at the Temple, he proposes that James should go as he is his first son (insinuating thereby that he is not his son, but the Son of God). There are some tense, harsh words between them at the end:

“But Abba, if you should die, who will take care of Mother if I am at the Temple?”

“Someone will look after her,” I said. “I’m sure of it.”

“I will not die for a long time.” Joseph tugged at his gray beard. “My beard goes white, but there’s a lot of life in me yet.”

“Don’t be so sure, Abba,” Joshua said.

...

“You go with Joshua. He needs a friend to teach him to be human. Then I can teach him to be a man.” (Moore 2003: 16-17)

His rebellious character also attacks the class of priests from an early age. For example, he criticises a Sadducee when he is trying to appease the Roman soldiers to avoid a fight with the local throng outside the city:

“The Sadducee wants to assure the Roman of his influence over us. It wouldn’t do to have a massacre on the day of his mother’s funeral.”

“So he’s watching out for us.”

“He’s watching out for himself. Only for himself.”

“You shouldn’t say that about a priest of the Temple, Joshua.” It was the first time I ever heard Joshua speak against the Sadducees, and it frightened me.

“Today, I think this priest will learn who the Temple belongs to.”

(Moore 2003: 32)

Jesus also feels inclined from a very early age to interpret the law in order to appease a jealous Biff:

“Did you hear me? I’m jealous of you and Maggie.”

“I’m still learning, Biff. There are things I don’t understand yet. The Lord said, ‘I am a jealous God.’ So jealousy should be a good thing.”

“But it makes me feel so bad.”

“You see the puzzle, then? Jealousy makes you feel bad, but God is jealous, so it must be good, yet when a dog licks its balls it seems to enjoy it, but it must be bad under the Law.”

4.2.4. Insights into a globalised world in the Roman Empire

In any case, we are indicated from an early stage that there are foreign influences in this enclosed and bigoted Jewish society. For example, in the conversation between Jesus' friend Biff, who is passing through hard moments, and Bartholomew the village idiot:

“What do you know?” I snapped. “You live in the dirt. You are unclean! You do nothing. I have to begin working next week, and work for a lifetime until I die with a broken back. The girl I want is in love with my best friend, and he’s the Messiah. I’m nothing, and you, you—you’re an idiot.”

“No, I’m not, I’m a Greek. A Cynic.”

I turned and really looked at him. His eyes, normally as dull as mud, shone like black jewels in the dusty desert of his face. “What’s a Cynic?”

“A philosopher. I am a student of Diogenes. You know Diogenes?”

(Moore 2003: 39-40)

In other occasions it is only his remembrances of what they were taught in their travels to the Far East. For example, there is a passage that makes a reference to reincarnation, which is something they learnt in their voyage to India: “The slaves... In another life they might have commanded an army or lived in a palace, but now they sweated in the morning chill, moving stones heavy enough to break a donkey.’ (Moore 2003: 48)

The effect of globalisation must be put in perspective. It is not globalisation as we experience it today, but a consequence of the exchange of ideas, goods and people across the Roman Empire (and beyond, as a piece of news about two mummified

corpses of Asian people found in a Roman camp in Britain evinced). One should hold as immovable truth that the movement of people across territories has existed from an early stage in the history of humans, first in search of new lands to colonize, later to expand trade (which would have as an important consequence an exchange of ideas, techniques and technology). In *Lamb* we perceive that this globalisation can have even a minor effect, such as the adoption of sarcasm and irony from the Hellenic culture by Biff as a child. In a passage Biff speaks to Jesus that he is ready to do some stonemason work after hearing his father tell them the hard penuries and suffering of his daily life and work:

“I for one, am excited,” I said. “I’m ready to cut some stone. Stand back, Josh, my chisel is on fire. Life is stretched out before us like a great bazaar, and I can’t wait to taste the sweets to be found there.”

Josh tilted his head like a bewildered dog. “I didn’t get that from your father’s answer.”

“It’s sarcasm, Josh.”

“Sarcasm?”

“It’s from the Greek, sarkasmos. To bite the lips. It means that you aren’t really saying what you mean, but people will get your point. I invented it, Bartholomew named it.” (Moore 2003: 50)

Diogenes and cynism, sarcasm... All evince foreign influence and can work to expand the narrow views of ancient Jewish thought and lead to dedogmatisation. That is what Jesus will do during a long period of international travelling.

4.2.5. Jesus as an international traveller

A major turning point in the novel is the one that marks the passing from infancy to a period of youth and early adult years that Biff and Jesus will spend travelling across Asia in order to learn how to become the Messiah. This is triggered by another passage where we are told that God commands Jesus that he needs to prepare to be the Messiah. An angel comes and announces him that God has ordered that he must go on a journey to fulfill his destiny: "I am here to tell the Savior that it is time for him to go." - "But you don't know where?" - "No." (Moore 2003: 83)

The ambiguity of the message puzzles them as the angel does not mention whereto they must travel. It is only by speaking to a great Rabbi Hillel at the Temple that they get a clue and go to the East in search of the three magi:

Hillel seemed to sense Joshua's distress. "Look, kid, your mother says that some very wise men came to Bethlehem to see you when you were born. They obviously knew something that no one else knew. Why don't you go see them? Ask them about being the Messiah." (Moore 2003: 97)

This is a turning point in this imaginary life of Jesus Christ as he will take contact with cultures of the Far East that will shape his teachings on the Holy Ghost, love instead of hatred, etc.

4.2.6. Balthasar and Chinese philosophers and thinkers

The first Asian culture and set of ideas he gets in touch with is transmitted to him by Balthasar in current day Afghanistan. He teaches him the qi (in Chinese energy, spirit,

impetus), as well as the teachings of Lao-tzu and Confucius. Biff and Jesus are also taught to read Chinese.

Balthasar searched for Jesus on his birth for a particular reason, to seek immortality in this world. Evidently Jesus' thoughts and teachings have not been completely shaped yet, so Balthasar has got a wrong notion of what type of immortality the Messiah would grant humanity.

Ultimately Jesus gets to know what Confucius' teachings were about, which will shape determiningly his own teachings:

“Look at this, do you see, Biff? When asked, the master Confucius says, ‘Recompense injury with justice, and kindness with kindness.’ Yet Lao-tzu says, ‘Recompense injury with kindness.’ Don’t you see?” (Moore 2003: 167)

After a long stay of many years in Balthasar's abode Jesus and Biff depart to find Gaspar, who lives in a Buddhist monastery in a mountainous region of China. In their travel they reach the Great Wall and Jesus has a revelation about what Balthasar had been trying to teach him, a defect in the Tao. Tao, so Jesus tells Biff, advocates for inaction, but it is the contrary which is important and Jesus learns at that very moment that he must become a man of action, a man actively involved in his quest:

“The magus wasn't teaching us about action as in work, it was action as in change. That's why we learned Confucius first—everything having to do with the order of our fathers, the law, manners. Confucius is like the Torah, rules to follow. And Lao-tzu is even more conservative, saying that if you do nothing you won't break any rules. You have to let tradition fall sometime, you have to

take action, you have to eat bacon. That's what Balthasar was trying to teach me...

"Change," Joshua said. "A Messiah has to bring change. Change comes through action. Balthasar once said to me, 'There's no such thing as a conservative hero.' He was wise, that old man." (Moore 2003: 202)

On the other hand, he begins to feel different about the holy teachings of the Jews, for example the righteousness of the God of the Ancient Testament (a mindset that can be seen as revolutionary for that time in history):

"But I didn't save them, and I blinded that Bowman. That wasn't right."

"You were angry."

"That's no excuse."

"What do you mean, that's no excuse? You're God's Son. God wiped out everyone on earth with a flood because he was angry."

"I'm not sure that's right."

"Scuse me?" (Moore 2003: 151)

4.2.7. Gaspar and Buddhist teachings

The chapters devoted to Gaspar and Buddhist teachings are impregnated with Buddhism maxims. Also with parallelisms between Buddhism and Judaism, for example the description of their strict set of moral codes. But what interests us most is how Buddhism could have shaped Jesus' thoughts and influence his later teachings in Judea. The Buddhist maxims resemble Jesus' parables for their obscurantism and hidden truths. The first maxims are told to them as they reach the temple: "— Go away and come back in the morning, the monk said. / — But we've

traveled all day, Joshua said. We're cold and hungry. / — Life is suffering, the monk said. He slammed the little door, leaving us in almost total darkness." (Moore 2003: 204). This paramount and famous Buddhist maxim is later used for comical purposes, thus bridging the gap between solemnity and mundane, practical reasoning:

I was relieved when Gaspar led five of us to a cabinet and issued yak-wool leggings and boots to each of us. "Life is suffering," said Gaspar as he handed Joshua his leggings, "but it is more expedient to go through it with one's legs intact." (Moore 2003: 233)

And again Biff recalls this annoying maxim when he is in a tight spot:

I was able to construct an envelope of comfort that kept the chill at bay. Ideally, I could have used a couple of more monks to stretch over the top of my hut to block the wind, but as the Buddha said, life is suffering and all, so I suffered. (Moore 2003: 239-240)

The use of Buddhist teachings used for comical purposes pervades these chapters and insinuates us the need to take serious things not too seriously (religion included): " —... When the snow falls we'll freeze to death without a blanket. I hate the cold. / — You have to be the cold, said Joshua. / — I liked you better before you got enlightened, I said." (Moore 2003: 232) This parody of Buddhist teachings and parables continues in the same page, this time even Jesus cannot help laughing at the jest:

... he stood behind us with his bamboo rod and periodically struck us on the back of the head for no reason I could discern.

“Why’s he keep doing that? I didn’t do anything,” I complained to Joshua over tea.

“He’s not hitting you to punish you, he’s hitting you to keep you in the moment.”

“Well, I’m in the moment now, and at the moment I’d like to beat the crap out of him.”

“You don’t mean that.”

“Oh, what? I’m supposed to want to be the crap I beat out of him?”

“Yes, Biff,” Joshua said somberly. “You must be the crap.” But he couldn’t keep a straight face and he started to snicker as he sipped his tea, finally spraying the hot liquid out his nostrils and collapsing into a fit of laughter. All of the other monks, who evidently had been listening in, started giggling as well. A couple of them rolled around on the floor holding their sides. (Moore 2003: 232)

This environment of maxims and parables is the perfect environment for Jesus, according to Biff, and it will influence his sermons in Judea later on:

“How can I give you tea if your cup is already full?”

“Huh?” I said eloquently. Parables were never my strong suit. If you want to say something, say it. So, of course, Joshua and Buddhists were the perfect people to hang out with, straight talkers that they were. (Moore 2003: 219)

Jesus is a really gifted pupil of Gaspar’s teachings, so he achieves enlightenment at an early stage, which allows him, among other things, to become invisible. And finally, he manages to clearly see how his people should be liberated:

“It’s not the same. That’s what I came to tell you, that I can’t free our people from the rule of Romans.”

“Why not?”

“Because that’s not true freedom. Any freedom that can be given can be taken away. Moses didn’t need to ask Pharaoh to release our people, our people didn’t need to be released from the Babylonians, and they don’t need to be released from the Romans. I can’t give them freedom. Freedom is in their hearts, they merely have to find it.”

“So you’re saying you’re not the Messiah?”

“How can I be? How can a humble being presume to grant something that is not his to give?” (Moore 2003: 228)

The Buddhist teachings are of paramount importance to shape Jesus’ mind, and it does not stop there. In a talk with his master, Jesus realizes he must love his neighbour as he loves himself, which is one of the pillars of Christendom:

“when one reaches enlightenment, but makes a decision that he will not evolve to nirvana until all sentient beings have preceded him there, then he is a bodhisattva. A savior”

...

“If I were to say to you, love your neighbor as you love yourself, would I be telling you to be selfish?”

...

“Love thy neighbor as thou lovest thyself”—and here there was a long pause when I could imagine Joshua looking to the sky for an answer, as he so often did, then: “for he is thee, and thou art he, and everything that is ever worth loving is everything.” (Moore 2003: 230)

The encounter with a yeti and this environment of deep meditation makes Biff think about this strange human-shaped being and develop an early stance of the theory of evolution. There is a confrontation with Jesus, who thinks evolution is a really dumb idea as God would not create a creature only to let it die out. This illustrates the eternal clash between religious and scientific teachings. It is an example of how dedogmatisation could work and shape religious and sceptic people and it could also lead us to reflect on how dedogmatisation works at diverse stages or with different intensity in history due to the influence or evolution of rational thinking and science. In other words, science imposes some temporary truths that are not dogmas, while religious authorities are always reluctant to change their dogmas for fear we discover that much of what they propagate has not the least foundations. That is why religion has not evolved that much, as it is based on permanence of ideas, while science is continually evolving, with new knowledge added to it every day.

There is more things Jesus learns through meditation and the repetition of prayers till they become a habit and he does not have to think much about them, such as the need to be in a state of feeling without the need to think about it. For example, to love people or feel compassionate versus thinking about these things:

“You drill us every day in the same movements, we practice the same brush strokes over and over, we chant the same mantras, why? So that these actions will become natural, spontaneous, without being diluted by thought, right?”

“Yes,” said Gaspar.

“Compassion is the same way,” said Joshua. “That’s what the yeti knew. He loved constantly, instantly, spontaneously, without thought or words. That’s what he taught me. Love is not something you think about, it is a state in which you dwell. That was his gift.” (Moore 2003: 253)

4.2.8. Melchor and meditation

Before reaching Melchor’s place, there are some events and encounters with Indian Hinduism, a religion at that stage with rituals of human sacrifices, which make Jesus deeply reflect on the injustices and evils of every religion, be it Hinduism or Judaism and advocate for change and his major role in it as the Messiah:

“Gautama the Buddha gave the way to people of all births to find the hand of God. With no blood sacrifice. Our doors have been marked with blood for too long, Biff.”

“So that’s what you think you’re going to do? Bring God to everyone?”

“Yes. After a nap.” (Moore 2003: 281)

This passage is part of a longer one that contains a discussion between Jesus and Biff. The critical thinking about Hinduism and Judaism is a first step to dedogmatise, the first step to create a more humanised version of religion. Dedogmatisation must begin with these steps, a personal, inner reflection on the inconsistencies of one’s creed, a discussion with a friend, the writing of these novels we analyse here, etc. In its lighter version, it would produce a transformation of how we view the religion we have been brought up with. In more radical thinkers, it would lead to a rejection of any religious belief and atheism.

Seeing religion as another manifestation of power (hand in hand in collaboration with the political power and sometimes being part of law enforcement, as in the times of the

Inquisition), its major adopted role throughout history has been to force its train of thought to every single human being they can reach to. This is exemplified in the novel with a conversation about how submissive the Untouchables (the lowest caste in Hinduism) are:

“Still. Why did they help us if they didn’t want their children back?”

“Because we told them what to do. That’s what they do. What they are told. That’s how the Brahmans keep them in line. If they do what they are told, then perhaps they will not be Untouchables next life.”

“That’s depressing.”

Joshua nodded. (Moore 2003: 281)

If this enforcement of religion is part of every major religion around the world, then there are motives to rethink religion if the individual wants to keep his individuality, freedom and personal set of beliefs. Otherwise, religious dogmas and creeds would encroach our personal mindset and prevent us from being free, happy or fulfilling our ambitions.

After meeting Melchor, Jesus begins to learn yoga and meditation, which will later on help him to learn how to multiply food. He also learns some things he will later pray about, such as the need to achieve enlightenment. What is really important is the teachings about the Divine Spark, which Melchor says is achieved through meditation. On the day of their departure, Melchior says how he should act from now on, which connects with the conclusions Jesus reached at after leaving Balthasar’s abode:

... Others may perceive the Divine Spark in themselves only by realizing through enlightenment that the spark resides in all things, and in that they find kinship. But because the Divine Spark resides in all, does not mean that all will discover it. Your dharma is not to learn, Joshua, but to teach.”

...

“You must only find the right word. The Divine Spark is infinite, the path to find it is not. The beginning of the path is the word.” (Moore 2003: 300)

In this novel we have learnt about a globalised world and an internationally travelled Jesus who learns from many schools of thought and religions how to shape a previous religious lore, that of Judaism, and shape it into a humanised religion, Christianity. It is a process of dedogmatisation of a strict and stern mindset that creates a religion of love and hope. In its origins it was quite permissive and noble (a Hellenized religion), but it would be the clerical class of subsequent centuries which transformed it into a religion that oppressed and condemned people. The mistakes of the Church, as those of most religions, are countless. It is in the 20th and 21st centuries when a major process of dedogmatisation by the common masses, expressed superbly in the three novels we have looked at, has led us to a milder version of religion (at least in our inner thoughts) and a more practical view of life.

5. CONCLUSION: TOWARDS A RETHINKING OF RELIGION VIA DEDOGMATIZATION

What is actually dedogmatisation and its processes? How can they be useful for us? Is it relevant or convenient to work on new ways of understanding religion (which some people feel now obsolete, while for stern believers it is a central pillar of their lives)?

There have been many stances regarding religion throughout history. Agnostics will not believe in things whose existence is not proved, therefore will not believe or disbelieve in God. Atheists do not believe in God, in fact they deny its very existence. And what would a dedogmatiser think about religion?

Their position is quite a pragmatic one: they neither believe nor disbelieve in God, they just simply adopt a happy-go-lucky mentality. They will avoid fanaticism in religious ideas as they can only lead to a confused mind state where they lose focus on reality, a reality that must be regarded in practical terms. Likewise they will likely avoid religious congregations as they are a source of fanaticism and stern proselytism. This is the rebellious stance as shown by Butler's novel as the protagonist detaches himself finally from too enthusiastic or fervorous expressions of faith.

Religious people who have not undergone dedogmatisation can have a tendency to regard free expression of the will and the mind as dangerous. A dedogmatiser will perhaps be a creative person that searches constantly for new ways of thinking,

creating or expressing himself or herself. That is, he will have an inquiring or curious mind, and that corresponds with the view of Joyce's novel and its motto on the first page, "Et ignotas animum dimittit in artes" (So then to unimagined arts he set his mind", taken in a broader sense as a process of creative and intellectual thinking). In other words, a dedogmatiser is a creative person and will be of great value for society as he can think, create and discover new ways for society.

But perhaps the most prominent characteristic of the person who undergoes dedogmatisation is his sense of humour and a tendency to take things easy. This is so because dogmas tend to require a silent avowing and respect towards what they establish as immovable truths and a dedogmatiser wants to think of things in a happy-go-lucky way. What Moore's novel *Lamb* shows us is that we can look at religion with humanity and a light spirit (by looking at an unusually humanised figure of Jesus).

Is this approach to dogmas with a rebellious, creative/artistic and humorous mind dangerous for religion or could it create more often than not more atheists? I think that is not so. Rebellion under religious or political oppression are a common factor in history, the creative mind always wants to free from bonds (both in mind and spirit) and the humorous pathos in life is a common evidence of the relaxed character of the modern and contemporary man. On the other hand if people look unavoidably for answers to existential questions, one could only avow that religions have lost most of their prestige because they cannot satisfy the contemporary mind, they have only

one set of ideas to defend and avoid talking about other ideas that could redeem a worried mind.

The conciliation between different stances regarding religion is what we should look eagerly forward to. Can a conciliatory dialogue between dedogmatisers (inquiring minds that question everything) and the clerical class (who will impose their dogmas without possibility of questioning them) be possible? That is one of the key issues that could determine the success and propagation of dedogmatisation and religion in a new stage in our era of information and computing technologies, where the key issue is how to propagate successfully an idea to great masses of population.

The rethinking of religion can cause conflicts within the individual when he thinks of the more questionable parts of his faith. A Christian would not question the good disposition of Jesus towards helping others, but would perhaps waver at the idea of him resurrecting. Jesus' miraculous deeds are frequently questioned with this thinking process: "Is it possible that he performed miracles? I have not seen one in my whole life, so maybe they are not true". The expansion of knowledge can lead people to accept (even unconsciously and without having made a conscious encounter with new ideas) other ways of thinking about spirituality and after-life. In Mircea's *Tratado de Historia de las Religiones*, we find plausible instances of after-life spirituality, such as the Australian aborigines' belief in returning to the infinite cosmos of stars and light after death. Other believers prefer that God be only explained in scientific terms, leaving the verification of their theoretical aims to the future of science. That is the case of O. Wilson in his book *Consilience*:

On religion I lean toward deism but consider its proof largely a problem in astrophysics. The existence of a cosmological God who created the universe (as envisioned by deism) is possible, and may eventually be settled, perhaps by forms of material evidence. (Wilson 1998: 268)

One reason why the contemporary citizen may turn to other sets of beliefs could have been caused by the indagation into the sociological mechanisms of religions. Current anthropological research into the origin and development of religions. As Wilson describes:

The rising agricultural societies, egalitarian at first, became hierarchical. As chiefdoms and then states thrived on agricultural surpluses, hereditary rulers and priestly castes took power. The old ethical codes were transformed into coercive regulations, always to the advantage of the ruling classes. About this time the idea of law-giving gods originated. Their commands lent the ethical codes overpowering authority, once again—no surprise—to the favor of the rulers. (Wilson 1998: 282-283)

To conclude, dedogmatisation would aim at such a secularization of religion and myth. It does not want to reject its tenets or dogmas, rather to put them in their proper light so that they are viewed as what they actually are. In an age were people are willing to do the most outrageous acts following their fanatic ideas, it is mandatory a rationalisation of religion and declaring sternly a firm belief in the original humanity of religions and their tenets.

The clash between monotheistic religions should be followed naturally by a mitigation of their conflicts and confrontations, and this could indicate that progresses have

been made. It will take place when the religious tenets are supported by evidence, so that we reject the idea of a unique and exclusive God (we have a God, yours is merely a meaningless idol) as there can only be (if any) one unique God for the whole humanity.

Although there have been many critical voices of the value of literature, with its stories it has fulfilled by far one of the most important functions in the culture of societies. It has shown the way people think and act, as well as the key issues of every historical stage and community. It has shown the mistakes and successes of mankind.

Reading these three novels would produce a personal development in one's personal views regarding religion and dogmas. They exemplify three instances of opposition to imposed beliefs: rebellion against dogmas, revolution and imagination through art, and humour as a way to pathos.

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