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Christian element in *Waiting for Godot*

Beckett speaks so little in *Waiting for Godot*, yet it invites so many critical discourses, including the religious one. Neither the text nor its author makes a claim to any definite meaning, still a new meaning is born each time one partakes the play. "The human predicament described in Beckett's first play", William Mueller had commented, "is that of man living on the Saturday after the Friday of the crucifixion, and not really knowing if all hope is dead or if the next day will bring the life which has been promised." In the five decades since *Waiting for Godot* was staged, several attempts to view the play from a Christian perspective relied more or less on the Mueller motif.

Waiting for Godot abounds in biblical allusions. Religion is introduced quite early in the play as Vladimir asks if Estragon have read the Bible. The nondescript tree can be universally symbolic, but from a religious stance it conjures an image of the Cross. And, despite Beckett's assertion that Godot is not God, the absent character still appears to be a messiah for the two tramps. We are further tempted to a religious interpretation with the correlation of Lucky's idea of God "with white beard" and the identical description of Godot by the Boy. The endless waiting for Godot reflects the belief that Christ will return when the time will come. What actually sustains Vladimir and Estragon is this faith, or 'bad faith' for existentialists like Sartre, that Godot will surely come, tomorrow if not today, and harmonize all the disorders.

Estragon once compares himself to Christ, and ironically his life mirrors Christ's final days. He talks of spending the night in a ditch, an analogy to the cave that housed Christ after his death. And, learning that Estragon has been beaten, Vladimir tenderly reaches out to embrace him just like loving Veronica. The final expression of the image comes when Estragon rises from sleep and Pozzo examines the cut on his leg, thus recalling the Apostle's examination of Christ's wounds after his rising.

But the most prominent biblical reference is the crucifixion myth. Vladimir ambiguously reminds Estragon that one of the two thieves was saved; and later when the Boy says that Godot spares him but beats his brother we immediately recall the crucifixion discourse. Only, there is a reversal of the biblical allegory of the sheep being rewarded and the goats damned. Crucifixion is also conveyed through the tree, the tramps' attempt to hang themselves from it, the "skull" in Lucky's speech and so forth. The tree pose in Act Two is yet another symbol of crucifixion. Vladimir's feeding Estragon on carrot is reminiscent of Jesus feeding a crowd of five thousand on meagre foods. The tree for Estragon seems "more like a bush", thus invoking Exodus's picture of Moses on Mount Sinai. These references are apparently disconnected, but the overall tone they create tempts the recipient more and more into a religious interpretation.

Nevertheless, Beckett problematizes whatever religious element can be found in his play. We never find an answer to Vladimir's shocking question that why the other thief was not saved and why only one of the four saints narrated the incident. Our faith is at once destabilized; we calculate like Vladimir the percentage of redemption in a divine gambling. Just as religious bias has often slowed down human civilisation, and bigotry hindered human liberation, here the tramps' faith on Godot stops the linear timeline and prevents them from going away. It is religious faith once again that led the entire mankind to inaction:

Estragon: Don't let's do anything. It's safer.
Vladimir: Let's wait and see what he says."

Faith is once again undermined as Estragon and Vladimir talk over the certainty of Godot's offerings:

Estragon: A kind of prayer.
Vladimir: Precisely.
Estragon: A vague supplication.
Vladimir: Exactly.
Estragon: And what did he reply?
Vladimir: That he'd see."

There are also oblique hints to the Christian practice of confession. Estragon is least interested in Vladimir's discourse on crucifixion; and when Estragon wants to share a nightmare and thus get relief, Vladimir adamantly refuses to hear him.

In his first appearance Pozzo enters with all the embellishments of a false prophet, and initially Vladimir and Estragon mistake him as Godot. Can he be seen as Godot's alter ego, the religious oppressiveness? Pozzo whips Lucky, burdens him with sandbags, leads him by a rope and tells him

when to act. At the extreme, Lucky can speak only when Pozzo gives him his hat and allows him to. Was Beckett suggesting through this the controlling nature of the Church?

The importance of messengers does not end with Pozzo and Lucky. Godot's errand-boy resembles Christ as God's messenger, and both meet similar mistreatment at their recipients. The Boy reinforces this allusion by telling that his master spares him but beats his brother, a relationship recalling Cain, Abel and their Lord. Ironically, the names Cain and Abel are later explicitly mentioned in the text.

Waiting for Godot thus abounds in biblical allegories, advocating more and more for a religious interpretation. Still, considering it only as a dramatised Christian allegory will be an oversimplification. Like Beckett, his play as well as his characters are not committed to any specific theory or interpretation. Viewing *Waiting for Godot* as a Christian play may be a way to approach it, but surely not the only one.