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硕士学位论文

天主教与侦探小说——切斯特顿《布朗神父探案集》的宗教主题分析

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中文摘要

吉·基·切斯特顿(1874—1936)是英国 20 世纪初一位颇有影响的文学家。他涉猎的文学类型十分广泛,无论在诗歌、小说、戏剧、评论,还是在传记、杂文、特写方面,均有大量杰作,是个名副其实的多栖和多产作家。不过,他在文学创作上的最大成就,还是已被列入西方古典式侦探小说经典的《布朗神父探案集》。这部探案集自 1911 年陆续问世后,即以独特的魅力征服了无数读者,成为世界各国家喻户晓的经典作品。但是由于历史、文化等种种客观原因,这部深受读者喜爱的作品并未引起国内外评论界太大的关注。笔者从图书馆和网上进行了仔细的搜索,未能找到相关方面的研究专著,只发现一些零星的评论性文章。这些文章主要集中于与同类侦探小说的比较以及对作品中所蕴含的具体宗教教义的诠释。笔者认为,作为虔诚的天主教徒,切斯特顿始终对宗教保持着浓厚的兴趣。宗教一直是他生活中最关注的问题之一,并经常成为他作品的主题。因此探究这部作品集中的宗教主题显得十分有意义。

本文将在总结前人研究成果的基础上,立足于意大利著名神学家托马斯·阿奎那关于理性、人性及原罪的理论,分三章来系统地讨论这部文学作品的宗教主题。

第一章主要论述切斯特顿对天主教以及天主教以外其他信仰的态度。作为天主教信仰卫士,吉·基·切斯特顿总是不遗余力地捍卫自己的宗教信仰,为自己的神学思想辩护。他的文学作品中无不透露出对神学问题的探究和思考。在这部探案集中,通过对情节的安排、对话的设计和人物的塑造,切斯特顿明确表达了自己对天主教的肯定以及对其他宗教、哲学信仰的批判与否定。

第二章主要聚焦于切斯特顿的善恶观在《布朗神父探案集》中的体现。切斯特顿对善、恶的理解深受罗马天主教会“天使博士”托马斯·阿奎那的影响。在善恶问题上,他们既不赞同一元论也不支持二元论,而是走了一条温和的路线,即认为善是绝对的实体,而恶只是善的缺失。因此,虽然切斯特顿有明确的是非善恶观念,他的探案集中却没有绝对的善人、恶人之分。在认清了恶的本质之后,切斯特顿又进一步探讨了恶的本源问题。在他看来,恶源于内心,所以我们每个人即要时刻警惕自己心中的恶,也要勇于宽恕别人的恶。正是基

于这样的认识，切斯特顿笔下的布朗神父才能迅速破解谜案并在破案后成功挽救罪犯堕落的灵魂。

第三章则分析了切斯特顿对原罪和救赎的理解。在天主教的诸多教义中，对切斯特顿影响最大的一个便是原罪观。天主教的原罪观贯穿了《布朗神父探案集》的始终，是推动整个故事向前发展和人物命运发生转折的关键。然而切斯特顿并不仅仅想要通过这些故事告诉我们人人生而有罪，而是力图通过对人物犯罪动因的探究来找出人类堕落的原因，并为人类指明该如何去除自己的罪恶。在切斯特顿看来，上帝赋予人类自由意志，是人类滥用自由意志导致了自己最终的堕落，然而仁慈的上帝又给了人类第二次机会。因此，切斯特顿认为只要真诚地向上帝忏悔，人们就能除去自己的罪恶，重获新生。

在从这三方面进行系统分析之后，笔者最后得出一个结论：吉·基·切斯特顿的《布朗神父探案集》绝非那种简单的以破案解谜为主要目的的消遣性故事，而是有着深刻道德内涵和宗教寓意的启示性小说。透过这部启示性小说的种种推理和对堕落灵魂的暴露及拯救，读者看到的是吉·基·切斯特顿毕生矢志不渝地信奉的教义：世人都犯了罪，本都要受到神的审判，灭亡在永远的刑罚里。而耶稣替罪人死，使一切相信他的人的过犯得以涂抹，罪过得到赦免，不再灭亡反得永生。

关键词：布朗神父 缺失 原罪 自由意志

Abstract

G. K. Chesterton (1874—1936) is an influential English writer in the early decades of the 20th century. Writing around 80 books, several hundred poems, some 200 short stories, 4000 essays and several plays all his life, he is actually a prolific and gifted writer in every area of literature. Yet among all his works, the greatest achievements are still Father Brown stories. Since their first publication in 1911, this series of works have conquered countless readers with their unique charms and are still among the best-selling classical detective story books to the present. However, because of a certain objective factors, these works have not arrested much attention from the critics both at home and abroad. I have made detailed searches in libraries and on web, but only find a few critical essays on these stories at last. These essays mainly focus on the comparison with those congener stories and the exploration of the profound religious meanings in Father Brown stories. As a Catholic writer, G. K. Chesterton holds a strong interest in religion, which has always been a frequent theme of his literary works as well as a major concern in his personal life. Therefore, it is worth making an analysis of the religious meanings in his works.

In my thesis, basing on the achievements made by the former critics and with the help of St. Thomas Aquinas' theology, I will make a discussion of the religious theme in Chesterton's Father Brown stories from the following three aspects.

Chapter One mainly displays Chesterton's attitude to Catholicism and non-Catholicism. As a pious Catholic, Chesterton always spares no effort to defend his Catholic faith and vindicate his theology. All of his works reveal his reflection on and exploration of the theological problems. Here during all these stories, through the arrangement of plots, design of conversations and portrayal of characters he definitely expresses his affirmation of Catholicism and negation of other beliefs.

Chapter Two focuses on Chesterton's view on good and evil. On this problem, instead of accepting dualism and monism, Chesterton takes a mild way under the influence of St. Thomas Aquinas, Doctor Angelicus of the Roman Catholic Church.

That is to say, he regards good as an absolute entity and evil only as a privation of good. Therefore, though his Father Brown stories are full of vivid concepts of right or wrong and good or evil, there is neither perfect well-doer nor utter villain in them. After recognizing the nature of evil, Chesterton makes a further exploration of the origin of it. In his opinion, all evils come out of human heart; hence we should be on guard against the evil thoughts and desires all the time and try to forgive others' evil deeds as well. It is just basing on such recognition that Father Brown could quickly solve cases and successfully save criminals' depraved souls.

Chapter Three mainly analyzes Chesterton's reflection on original sin and salvation. Among all the Catholic doctrines, the one that influences Chesterton most is the original sin. In his Father Brown stories, the Catholic doctrine of original sin is omnipresent and endowed with his unique characteristics. During all these stories, the original sin is the key to the development of the whole story as well as the turn of characters' fates. Through all these stories, Chesterton not only intends to tell us that everyone was born with sin, but also attempts to make a further exploration of such problems: what is the cause of sin and how to get rid of it on earth. According to Chesterton, God endows human beings with free will, but human's abuse of free will results in their final degeneration. However, God gives them the second chance. In Chesterton's opinion, one could get rid of his sin and gain a new life as long as he frankly confesses his crime to God.

After making a detailed analysis from these three aspects, I finally get such a conclusion: Chesterton's Father Brown stories are revelatory stories full of profound religious morals rather than entertaining ones simply aiming at solving mysteries. In these stories, through the exposure and salvation of those degenerative souls, Chesterton expresses the teachings he firmly believes all his life: all have sinned and should be adjudged by God and perish in eternal punishment; but Christ dies for them; thus whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Key words: Father Brown privation original sin free will

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Introduction

0.1. G. K. Chesterton and His Father Brown Stories

G. K. Chesterton is an influential English writer in the early decades of the 20th century. Writing around 80 books, several hundred poems, some 200 short stories, 4000 essays and several plays all his life, he is actually a prolific and gifted writer in every area of literature. His works can not be summed up in one sentence or in one paragraph. Throughout all his life, he “wrote beautifully about beautiful things: faith, family, the extraordinary gift of creation itself. In everything he wrote he expressed a kind of joyful gratitude for God’s abundant generosity to us.”^①

G. K. Chesterton lived in an era in which English capitalism was turning from prosperity and stability to decline and turbulence. During this period, new cultural and philosophical thoughts emerged continuously and gifted writers came forth in great number, such as Herbert George Wells, John Galsworthy, William Somerset Maugham, and George Bernard Shaw. However, because of the limitation of certain objective conditions, these writers created in a narrow way compared with G. K. Chesterton. Chesterton almost dabbled in every literary genre. No matter in the aspect of poetry, novel and literary criticism, or that of play, biography and essay, Chesterton all had abundant excellent works. For example, his epic *Ballad of the White Horse* is regarded as a poetic masterpiece and was frequently quoted during the Second World War; his first novel *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* is proposed by many critics as the best novel ever written by any of English great fiction writers; his criticism on the works of those he did like are recognized as brilliant; and his biography *Saint Thomas Aquinas* (1933) is regarded by many, including Etienne Gilson, the twentieth century authority on St. Thomas, as the greatest single work on the Christian Church's greatest philosopher.

Yet among all these literary creations, the most famous achievements are still Father Brown stories which appeared in series from 1911 to the mid of 1930s. The

^① Zenit, *Institute Carries on G.K. Chesterton's Work – Father Ian Boyd on Continuing the Writer's Legacy*, South Orange, New Jersey, May 3, 2005

complete Father Brown stories included 51 stories and were collected into 5 volumes altogether: *The Innocence of Father Brown* (1911), *The Wisdom of Father Brown* (1914), *The Incredulity of Father Brown* (1926), *The Secret of Father Brown* (1927), and *The Scandal of Father Brown* (1935).

The protagonist of these stories is a priest detective with a face as round and dull as a Yorkshire dumpling and grey eyes as empty as the North Sea; he always carries a battered umbrella and wears rusty-black clerical clothes. Yet this inconspicuous appearance conceals a keen deductive mind, a deep religious faith and a rare insight into human nature. Actually the image of Father Brown is based on a real Irish Roman Catholic priest, Father O' Conner, who guides Chesterton through his own conversion to Roman Catholicism and to whom *The Secret of Father Brown* is dedicated. However, Father Brown is an imitation of O' Conner's spiritual world rather than a copy of his physical appearance. In fact he shares O' Conner's spiritual understanding and experience of the evil in the world.

Just like most of their contemporary detective works, Father Brown stories belong to the western classic detective fiction, whose design of plots, investigation of crimes and solution of cases all follow Allen Poe's classic mode without exception. But instead of purely imitating Allen Poe, Chesterton makes a wise decision of blending into the works his unique creativity. That is to say, by employing the method of investigating and solving cases, Chesterton effectively combines the form of classic detective story with the theme of serious fiction, thus making these stories a tool to illustrate his theological thoughts. He endeavors to reveal through those mysterious cases that the world is moral and everyone has the responsibility of maintaining its moral system. However, because of man's free will and the temptation of evil, everyone can be a potential criminal. So committing a crime is actually a process of exerting one's free will and crime itself is the result of his free choice. According to Chesterton, the most important thing is not seizing and punishing criminal, but finding out the causes of crime and avoiding its reoccurrence.

Despite the unique innovation and distinguished characteristics, Father Brown stories still have their own limitation. In these stories readers often find themselves

lacking in the informative details which normally provide clues to them for solving crimes along with the protagonist. During the process of investigation, only Father Brown can grasp all the clues and until his final explanation, readers can not find out how the crime is committed. This often frustrates readers and prevents them from reading further.

Anyhow, Father Brown stories are an excellent creation. Since the first publication in 1911, this series of works have conquered countless readers with their unique charms and are still among the best-selling classical detective story books to the present. Now, G. K. Chesterton, alike Conan Doyle and Agatha Christie, has become a brilliant classic detective novelist. And his protagonist Father Brown, together with Doyle's Holmes and Agatha Christie's Miss Marple, has become a classical detective who is widely spread among the world for generations.

0.2. The Critical Reviews both at Home and Abroad

Though his Father Brown stories are deeply loved by readers all over the world and have already been listed into classical detective stories, G. K. Chesterton, a well-known writer in the early decades of the 20th century, had been unfairly treated in the academic and critic circles for long and been forgotten by the western world for more than half a century. Why did he receive such unfair treatment? Dale Ahlquist, the president of American Chesterton Society, gives two reasons in his article *who is this guy and why haven't I heard of him?* One is that it seems Chesterton is hard to categorize. His creations cover various literary genres and in each genre he produces many excellent works; therefore it is hard to classify him into a certain category. However, in literary world, if a writer can not be quickly consigned to a category, or to one-word description, he risks falling through the cracks. The other reason is that modern thinkers and commentators and critics have found it much more convenient to ignore Chesterton rather than to engage him in an argument, because to argue with Chesterton is to lose. Even George Bernard Shaw (Chesterton's frequent sparring partner in public debates) has to admit Chesterton is "a man of colossal genius"^① in

^① Maisie Ward, *Gilbert Keith Chesterton*, New York: Sheed and Ward, 1943, p367

argument.

Fortunately, after years' of neglect, G. K. Chesterton appears in academic domain again, attracting people's attention and getting into their good graces. Critics use all kinds of wonderful languages to eulogize him and endue him with the title of "genius". The reason for Chesterton's regaining their attention is various, ranging from the strains of political consciousness and the drive of economic interest to the expansion of religionary forces and the impact of cultural thoughts. However, the most essential element is presumably the rediscovery and reconfirmation of the literary value of his works, especially his Father Brown stories.

Generally speaking, researches on Father Brown stories in western countries have begun to appear in the late 1960s and early 1970s. During this period, the one that contributed most was W. W. Robson, an eminent literary critic best known for his work on nineteenth-and-twentieth century literature. He published *G. K. Chesterton's "Father Brown" Stories* in *The Southern Review* (p611-629) in 1969. In this article Robson appeals for people's reappraisal of the literary value of Chesterton's Father Brown stories. He maintains that these stories should not be neglected just because they are detective stories, a literary category which is commonly regarded as a low form of art. According to him, Chesterton's detective stories deserve more serious critical attention than is customary for the genre. From then on western critics gradually turn their eyes to these stories. By now, the researches on Father Brown stories have made much progress; however, they have not formed a certain scale yet. To find some monographic books on these stories, I have made detailed searches in libraries and on web, but find nothing at last. In the last forty years, only some articles come out sporadically, bringing a few pleasantly surprising viewpoints for the researching work now and again.

Concretely speaking, judging from the documents I have collected by now, I find that current studies of Father Brown stories in western countries mainly focus on the following tendencies: first, they are tending to compare these stories with their congeners and second, they are tending to explore a certain biblical meanings in these stories.

The most famous representatives of the first trend are A. W. R. Sipe and B. C. Lamb, whose *Chesterton's Brown and Greeley's Blackie: Two Very Different Detectives* was published in *Commonweal* (Vol. 119, No. 14, August, 1992, pp. 18–25). At the beginning of this article, they point out that there exist more differences than similarities between Father Brown and Father Blackie, though both are priest detectives. Then they analyze amply from the following three aspects: the way Father Brown and Father Blackie engage a case, their methods of solving a crime and their ultimate goals and objectives. In this article that is not long enough, the authors concretely and systematically compare Chesterton's Father Brown to Greeley's Father Blackie with the help of abundant examples. However, this article lays so much stress on the outer mode and method that it neglects the comparison of their inner thoughts. On the comparison of the religious belief, this article is in lack of deep argumentation and enough arguments. But generally speaking, this is a thesis well worth learning in our attempt to compare Chesterton's Father Brown stories with their congeners.

Of course, besides this, there is another excellent article, *The Cross and the Compass: Patterns of Order in Chesterton and Borges* (published by Aden W. Hayes and Khachig Tololyan in *Hispanic Review*, Vol. 49, No. 4, Autumn, 1981, pp. 395–405). In this article, by comparing Chesterton's Father Brown stories with Borges' detective works, the authors examine how Borges uses the "Chestertonian" themes in his own detective stories.

The most representative critic of the second trend is Mark Knight. In chapter 2 of his book *Chesterton and Evil*, choosing Father Brown stories as the text, Knight concretely analyzes Chesterton's view of evil. In this chapter, after making an exploration of Chesterton's encounter with evil during the time at the Slade School of Art, Knight endeavors to reveal his insistence on the need for a clear distinction between good and evil. According to Knight, Chesterton's attempt to distinguish between good and evil is apparent throughout the Father Brown stories and with the aid of theology he seeks to reconstruct a clear demarcation between them in these stories. This chapter is not long enough, but the opinions contained in it are pretty

unique, worth studying and using for reference. Actually I greatly benefit from this chapter in designing my thesis. However in this chapter Knight is mainly engaged in the discussion of Chesterton's view on the nature of evil. As to some other problems about evil such as the source of it and Chesterton's attitude to it, Mark hardly touches upon in this part.

Besides Mark's works, there are some other articles dealing with this aspect such as *Chesterton's Father Brown*, in which Ronald Knox describes how Chesterton uses his writing as an outlet to demonstrate his personal philosophies and *G. K. Chesterton*, where Martin Priestman discusses how Chesterton uses the detective story format to explore theological issues. However, all these articles are focused on the nature of good and evil. They rarely touch upon some other theological issues. Even if some of them mention other issues, their analysis is plain and shallow.

Anyhow, these are the two main tendencies in the study of Father Brown stories in western countries. And judging from what I have collected, the current criticism on Father Brown stories mainly focuses on the second trend, especially on Chesterton's view on evil. Generally speaking, these essays are still in the primary stage; though every critic puts forward their original opinions, their analysis is still comparatively narrow and superficial.

But at any rate, in the study of Father Brown stories, western countries have preceded us out and away. Indeed, not until the end of the 20th century did the Chinese version of this book appear. With the publication and republication of its Chinese version, Chinese readers become gradually familiar with and fond of this priest detective. However, it has not yet arrested Chinese scholar's attention. According to my documents, it seems there has been no one dabbling in the study of Father Brown stories in our country to the present. Therefore, Father Brown stories are waiting for further exploration in our country, no matter in the aspect of depth or width.

Such studying status both domestic and abroad is one of the reasons that attract my research interest in these stories. Another important reason is that Chesterton has a strong belief in Catholicism. As a pious Catholic, Chesterton holds a serious interest

in religion, which has always been a frequent theme of his literary works as well as a major concern in his personal life. Therefore, it is worth making an analysis of the religious meanings in his works. However, the religious meanings contained in these stories are so profound that the current studies only show the tip of the iceberg for us. Hence, basing on the achievements made by the former critics, I determine to make a further exploration from a wider perspective, that is, from some other theological perspectives, for the purpose of digging up something underneath the iceberg.

Concretely speaking, in my thesis, I will make a discussion from the following three aspects. In chapter one I will reveal Chesterton's attitude towards Catholicism and non-Catholicism. As a defender of the Catholic faith, Chesterton always spares no effort to defend his Catholic faith and vindicate his theological ideas. All of his works (Father Brown stories without exception) reveal his reflection on and exploration of the theological problems. Here in these stories, through the arrangement of plots, design of conversations and portrayal of characters Chesterton definitely expresses his affirmation of Catholicism and negation of other beliefs.

In chapter two I will discuss Chesterton's view on good and evil. But instead of mainly focusing on the nature of evil, I will make a further exploration of the origin of it and Chesterton's attitude to it. According to Chesterton, all evils come from the inside; therefore we should be on guard against it all the time, prevent us from committing evil deeds and unconditionally forgive others' evil thoughts and misdeeds as well.

In chapter three, I will analyze Chesterton's reflection on original sin and salvation. Through his Father Brown stories, Chesterton not only intends to tell us everyone was born with sin, but also attempts to dig up the cause of sin and tries to find out the correct way to get rid of it. According to Chesterton, it is human's free will that results in their final degeneration. However, the benevolent God gives human beings the second chance; therefore, one can get rid of his sin and begin a new life as long as he confesses his sin to God.

0.3 The Theoretical Basis of My Thesis

In my thesis, in order to demonstrate my argument, I fall back on the theories of such theologians as St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Augustine. St. Augustine is one of the most important figures in the development of western Christianity. He develops the concepts of trinity, original sin, free will, etc, which profoundly influence the medieval worldview. St. Thomas Aquinas is one of the greatest philosophers of all time. His systematic combination of Aristotle's philosophy and Christianity forms much of the basis of the Catholic theology; therefore he is regarded as the Doctor Angelicus of the Roman Catholic Church. Here Aquinas' theories of "reason and faith" and "evil as privation" are very important for my study. On the problem of reason and faith, Aquinas firmly believes that reason and faith supplement each other. He thinks reason is a nature given by God to human beings while faith is an apocalypse coming from God. Both of them can be ascended to the same origin of truth; therefore, they can not be opposite to each other. In fact they are not only consistent with, but also supplementary and stimulative to each other. Of course, this didn't mean that they are in the equal position. On the contrary, faith is superior to reason and theology to philosophy and all the other science. According to Aquinas, "This science (religious faith) can in a sense depend upon the philosophical sciences (reason), not as though it stood in need of them, but only in order to make its teaching clearer. For it accepts its principles not from other sciences, but immediately from God, by revelation."^① Basing on such understanding, Aquinas educes that famous proposition---philosophy is the handmaiden of theology, which finally becomes the official stand of Roman Catholicism. If we apply such a theory to the Father Brown stories, we may find that every time Father Brown investigates cases, he begins from faith, that is to say, he begins with Catholic understanding of human nature. But he never forgets reason simultaneously. One of the provoking claims made repeatedly by Father Brown is that true religion is one the side of science and reason. During all those stories, he always works by both reason and faith, and the two are never at odds in him.

^① Aquinas. St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, translated by English Dominican Fathers, London: Burnes & Oates, 1947-8, Part 1, Question 1, Article 5

On the problem of good and evil, there always exist two different opinions---dualism and monism. The former considers evil an independent existence, which neither comes from nor depends on goodness while the latter negates the substantive origin of evil and claims that it is only an illusion. Both opinions have their own reasonable aspects that raise a series of difficulties and threaten to contradict orthodox creedal beliefs. In face of such a situation, Christian thinkers are forced to find some explanations by which Christianity can combine its belief in God as the Creator of everything that exists with a belief in the reality of evil. It is St Augustine who finally solves this problem. He formulates a definition of evil as privation (of good), an idea that is rooted in the teachings of Aristotle and later is taken up by St Thomas Aquinas. Actually there are some differences between the concept of privation advocated by Augustine and the one developed by Aquinas. But in my thesis I will locate Chesterton's use of privation in Aquinas' tradition, since Chesterton, as a pious Catholic writer as well as the author of *Saint. Thomas Aquinas*, is extremely familiarly with him and deeply influenced by him. In *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas notes:

“One opposite is known through the other, as darkness is known through light. Hence also what evil is must be known from the nature of good. Now, we have said above that good is everything appetible; and thus, since every nature desires its own being and its own perfection, it must be said also that the being and the perfection of any nature is good. Hence it cannot be that evil signifies being, or any form or nature. Therefore it must be that by the name of evil is signified the absence of good.”^①

For Aquinas, evil is not substance in and of itself but rather a corruption of that which is good. According to Aquinas, God creates all things; hence all creations are good in essence. But as the creation of God, things can not be as holy as God. There are more or less defects in them. This defect is evil; it is the privation of good. Aquinas' theory of “evil as privation” is helpful for us to understand Chesterton's

^① Aquinas. St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, Part 1, Question 49, Article 1

attitude to evil. Actually, in Father Brown stories, *The Dagger with Wings* provides us with the clearest attempt to articulate this understanding of evil.

Besides this, the Catholic doctrine of original sin is also useful to us in understanding Chesterton's theological thoughts in Father Brown stories. This doctrine holds that human nature has been morally and ethically corrupted due to the disobedience of human's first parents to the revealed will of God. Thus original sin is something inherent in us---the sinful tendencies, desire and dispositions in our hearts with which we were all born. So our sinful hearts cause us to make sinful choices, think sinful thoughts, feel sinful feelings and commit sinful deeds. Among all the Catholic doctrines, the one that influences Chesterton most is original sin. In his Father Brown stories, the theory of original sin is omnipresent and endowed with his unique characteristics. During all these stories, original sin is the key to the development of the whole story as well as the turn of characters' fate. The consciousness of original sin infiltrates into all the characters in Chesterton's detective stories, thus testifying the inveterateness of evil. Among all the Catholic doctrines, the one that is closely connected with original sin is the free will. According to Catholicism, God gives human beings free will and it is human who misuses this free will that allows sin and evil to enter into the world. Therefore, sin is out of free will, which is given by God but totally abused by human beings. Chesterton always spares no effort to apply the doctrine of free will to his own works. In his eyes, detective stories are actually a series of contests between individual free wills. In his Father Brown stories, Chesterton tries to set out how the individual commits a series of crimes out of their free will.

Chapter One Catholicism and Non-Catholicism

Whoever reads Chesterton's works will get such a conclusion: G. K. Chesterton has a special interest in Catholic theology. All of his works reveal his reflection on and exploration of the theological problems. And his Father Brown stories offer such a powerful tool for exploring religious ideas without exception. In this part, in order to make a clear understanding of the religious ideas revealed in these stories, I want to begin with a brief introduction of his untiring pursuit of faith first.

1.1. The Untiring Pursuit of Faith

Nothing in Chesterton's upbringing suggested that he would become a Catholic in the future. He was born to a conventionally liberal, middle-class family. His father was a liberal-universalist and his mother an agonistic. Of his religious upbringing, Chesterton once wrote: "As a fact my family, having become liberal, was no longer Protestant. I was brought up a sort of Universalist and Unitarian" when "the Universalist did not believe in hell" and "heaven was a happy state of mind."^①

His education at the Slade School of Art was even more resolutely anti-Christian. Actually, before finding his final religious faith, Chesterton did try many byways. At the turn of the 20th century, spiritualism and theosophy were in florescence, while the nihilistic philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche and the dialectical material of Karl Marx spread widely. Simultaneously, the psychological speculations of Sigmund Freud gradually came into being and made more and more important influences. Chesterton had dabbled in all of these ideas, but the one that affected him most are Spiritualism and Impressionism. It was at the Slade School of Art that Chesterton first met the artistic theories like Impressionism and the philosophy of Spiritualism. Spiritualism, the response to the collapse of mid-Victorian Progressivism, was pretty popular among the middle and upper classes in late-Victorian and Edwardian Britain. Chesterton admitted that it was a considerable religious movement, but judged it a demonic one, which separating the mystical from the material, was lied and unnatural. Thus he was hungering for a fresh principle, however, unfortunately for him the

^① G. K. Chesterton, *The thing*, London: Sheed and Ward, 1929, p74.

predominant philosophy in artistic circles at that time was Impressionism.

Chesterton had thought there was a spiritual significance in Impressionism, but he later found that it illustrated scepticism in the sense of subjectivism. "It naturally lends itself to the metaphysical suggestion that things only exist as we perceive them, or that things do not exist at all."^① In Chesterton's eyes, the Impressionist played too much the role of God while imagining himself to be creating the world entirely from his own perspective. He could not handle that kind of responsibility, which finally sent him into depression. Fortunately, with the help of those few of the fashionable writers who were not pessimists such as Robert Browning, Robert Louis Stevenson and Walt Whitman, Chesterton reclaimed a more hopeful outlook on Being in late 1893 or early 1894. After his recovery, Chesterton left the Slade School of Art in 1895 and began a career in publishing, which lasted until he became a full-time journalist in 1901. During these years, in the back of his mind, another quest had begun, that is, the search for someone to thank for the beauty of the world he had rediscovered.

Generally speaking, Chesterton's journey to Catholic faith was slow and involved many pushes. In 1896, Chesterton met Frances Blogg, an officer of one of Bedford Park's debating salons, and he soon paid court to her. One of Frances' chief attractions to Chesterton was her firm religious faith and her devout practice of it. Frances, serving as the agent of his first regular contact with orthodox Christians, began to introduce Chesterton to her Anglo-Catholic friends and spiritual adviser. Another one that influenced Chesterton most during this period was Conrad Noel, the curate who presided over his marriage to Frances. Chesterton regarded Noel as an uncompromising rebel against post-Christian intellectual trends such as Nietzscheanism. It was under their influence that Chesterton converted "from what he calls the Higher Unitarianism to the most...rational kind of Anglicanism---Tractarian more than Ritualistic."^②

However, Chesterton's spiritual quest did not cease with his acceptance of

^① G. K. Chesterton, *The Autobiography of G. K. Chesterton*. New York: Sheed and Ward, 1936, p94

^② John O'Conner, *Father Brown on Chesterton*, London: Frederick Muller Ltd, 1937, p28

Anglicanism. There were also several early personal Roman Catholic influences on him. He met Father John O'Connor in 1904, who showed him that a priest could derive intellectual vitality from his faith. Besides this, his close friend Maurice Baring became a Roman Catholic in 1909 and his brother Cecil followed four years later. These various contacts made Chesterton consider more deeply. Actually, with a more in-depth comprehension of Anglo-Catholicism, Chesterton became rather concerned that modernism seemed to be creeping into Anglican theology, undermining the supernatural claims that had drawn him to Christianity. He gradually found that many of the principal voices in the Church of England had become liberal, such as on the Bible, Christ, and evolution. So by comparison, the Roman Catholic Church seemed the more conservative of the churches. Thus, the liberalism in Anglicanism drove Chesterton into the fold of dogmatic Catholicism. Around 1911, he began to believe that only one church could withstand the onslaught of modernism, the Roman Catholic Church. But several factors held back his decision to become a Catholic. Frances and his family reacted coolly to Roman Catholicism. Many people in England at that time still saw Catholicism as the mysterious, foreign and despotic religion that had provoked so much pain during the Reformation. However, on July 30, 1922, Chesterton finally entered "the kingdom of heaven with the formalities of kingdom"^① according to his priest-friend John O'Conner.

In *Why I am Catholic*, Chesterton explains the attraction of Catholicism as this:

(1) It is the only thing that really prevents a sin from being a secret. (2) It is the only thing in which the superior cannot be superior; in the sense of supercilious. (3) It is the only thing that frees a man from the degrading slavery of being a child of his age. (4) It is the only thing that talks as if it were the truth; as if it were a real messenger refusing to tamper with a real message. (5) It is the only type of Christianity that really contains every type of man; even the respectable man. (6) It is the only large attempt to change the world from the inside; working through wills and not laws; and so on.^②

^① John O'Conner, *Father Brown on Chesterton*, p147

^② G.K. Chesterton, *The Collected Works of G.K. Chesterton*, V.3, Ignatius Press 1990, p393

1.2. The Determined Affirmation of Catholicism

As a pious Catholic, Chesterton holds a strong interest in religion, which has become a major concern in both his personal life and literary career. He once says “you cannot evade the issue of God, whether you talk about pigs or the binomial theory, you are still talking about Him”.^① According to him, the issue of God is related to everything; thus almost all of his works are full of his discussion on the sacred and theological issues. In his Father Brown stories, he also spares no pains to expound his religious ideas, which endows these stories with the depth unfound in their contemporary counterparts.

In Father Brown stories, Chesterton deals with many misunderstandings on Catholicism. By giving the real Catholic explanation on these problems, he definitely sets forth his Catholic theology and stoutly defends his religious faith. For example, there has always been disputation between believers and nonbelievers on the problem of faith and reason. To the nonbelievers who know nothing of Catholicism, faith and reason are completely opposite. They think, as a religious faith, Catholicism is irrational, which denies the necessity and rationality of reason. Thus in Father Brown stories, directing at such misunderstanding, Chesterton discusses the problem of faith and reason more than once. One of the provoking claims made repeatedly by Father Brown is that true religion is on the side of science and reason. For example, in *The Blue Cross*, Flambeau disguises as a priest to defraud Father Brown of his trust. But his words give himself away.

The taller priest (Flambeau) nodded his bowed head and said: “Ah, yes, these modern infidels appeal to their reason; but who can look at those millions of worlds and not feel that there may well be wonderful universes above us where reason is utterly unreasonable?”

“No,” said the other priest (Father Brown); “reason is always reasonable, even in the last limbo, in the lost borderland of things. I know that people charge the Church with lowering

^① G.K. Chesterton, *Daily News*, December 12, 1903

reason, but it is just the other way. Alone on earth, the Church makes reason really supreme. Alone on earth, the Church affirms that God himself is bound by reason.”^①

Here, Flambeau's words just represent the misunderstanding of those nonbelievers, while Father Brown's represent the views of Chesterton. Through Father Brown's words, Chesterton tries to tell readers that faith and reason are not completely opposite. In Catholicism, faith is an apocalypse coming from God and reason is a blessing of God, whose effect is leading people to the apocalypse of God. Both of them can be ascended to the same origin of truth; therefore, they can not be opposite to each other. In fact faith and reason are not only consistent with, but also supplementary and stimulative to each other. During all these stories, Father Brown always works by both reason and faith, and the two are never at odds in him. It is faith that gives him a clear understanding of human nature and it is reason that helps him to find out how evil exerts its influences on human beings. Thus with the help of both reason and faith, he can quickly dig up the criminous motivation and find out the real criminal at last. However this does not mean that faith and reason are in equal position. In fact faith is superior to reason and reason is a certain handmaiden of faith. In Chesterton's Father Brown stories, Father Brown always begins his investigation from faith, that is to say, he always begins with a Catholic understanding of human nature. And then with the help of reason, he applies the knowledge of human nature into practical criminal cases, thus solving those mysteries.

In *The Incredulity of Father Brown*, there is in each tale an apparently supernatural event, such as a murder by a ghost, an evil spirit or a family curse. However, during all these stories, Father Brown, the one who is expected to believe in supernatural explanations to the shocking and mysterious events, always turns out to be the one who doubts such explanations. For example, in *The Dagger with Wings*, in order to conceal his crime, John Strake makes up a story of superstition to deceive Father Brown. In the eyes of this pagan, as a Catholic, Father Brown has no business to be an unbeliever. He ought to stand for all the things those stupid people called

^① G.K. Chesterton, *The Innocence of Father Brown*, edited by Martin Gardner, Oxford: Oxford University, 1988, p18

Superstitions, including those old wives' tales about luck, charms, silver bullets and so on. However, Father Brown's answer to this is that he does believe some things, of course, and therefore, of course, he does not believe other things. Here, through Father Brown's words we may find that in Chesterton's eyes, a willingness to believe whatever anybody tells us is not real Catholic faith. Catholicism has embraced certain truths that should put the believer more firmly in touch with the real world, more so than his worldly neighbors ever will be. Therefore, in these stories, it is the priest who is skeptical about the alleged mysteries while the skeptics are only too ready to believe in them.

Such theme comes up again and again in the volume of *The Incredulity of Father Brown*. For example, in *The Oracle of The Dog*, people explain the dog's unusual behavior as a kind of supernatural knowledge of his master's murder. But Father Brown disapproves such explanation. He thinks the dog could almost have told them the story, if he could talk. However, it is just because he couldn't talk that people make up his story for him, and make him talk with the tongues of men and angel. According to Father Brown, "it is the first effect of not believing in God that you lose your common sense, and can't see things as they are."^①

Of course, in the eyes of those nonbelievers, it is natural for Father Brown, a Catholic priest, to believe in the supernatural. But the supernatural to Father Brown refers to both God and the Devil. Father Brown's belief in them is always unshaken and informs both his faith and his reason. He never accepts the false explanations for the way things happen. According to Chesterton, though some of the Catholic doctrines such as the triune of God and the union of the two natures of Christ are beyond human's comprehension, Catholic belief itself never violates reason and reality. In his eyes, "(Catholic) Christianity, which is a very mystical religion, has nevertheless been the religion of the most practical section of mankind."^② Thus, in *The Dagger with Wings*, when Dr Boyne says he is a practical man and never bothers much about religion and philosophy, Father Brown retorts that he will never be a

^① G. K. Chesterton, *The Incredulity of Father Brown*. Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1958, p50

^② G.K. Chesterton, *The Collected Works of G.K. Chesterton*, V.1, Ignatius Press 1990, p343

practical man till he does.

Chesterton's support of Catholicism is embodied not only in his defense of Catholic theology in Father Brown stories, but also in his creation of the image of this priest detective. Father Brown is quiet unassuming, with a face as round and dull as a Yorkshire dumpling and grey eyes as empty as the North Sea. However, the mild exterior conceals a keen brain and a rare insight into human nature. He could easily discern the nature of criminals and quickly solve difficult cases through deduction. In *The Blue Cross*, Flambeau calls Father Brown a "celibate simpleton". But it is this "celibate simpleton" who sees through his disguise. When Flambeau cries "how in blazes do you know all the horrors", Father Brown says "oh, by being a celibate simpleton, I suppose. Has it never struck you that a man who does next to nothing but hear men's real sins is not likely to be wholly unaware of human evil?"^① In another story, *The Flying Stars*, Sir Leopold regards Father Brown as the one whose creed requires him to be cloistered and ignorant of this world, but at last this cloistered priest helps him to get back the gems. Here, Chesterton wants to use these cases to prove that, unlike what people have expected priests are not completely out of evil and the real world. In fact, because of their special profession, they often come in contact with criminals, and therefore could be well aware of human evil. In the eyes of Chesterton, the reason why Father Brown could correctly discern human nature and quickly solve cases is that he is a pious Catholic. And just because of this Catholic comprehension of human nature, Father Brown could recognize that human heart is the origin of all evils; it is possible for everyone to commit crimes, and he himself is not an exception. Therefore, instead of disdaining and excluding the criminals, Father Brown feels great sympathy for them and tries his best to save their souls and give them chances to reform. For example, in *The Chief Mourner of Marne*, people condemn Father Brown's relentlessness in succession, accusing him of belonging to a profession of "vampires" who get hold on people and suck them dry, but at last only this relentless "vampire" could forgive that real criminal. Anyhow, in Father Brown stories, the priest detective Father Brown encounters a series of evils. Acting

^① G. K. Chesterton, *The Innocent of Father Brown*, p39

independently of the judicial system, this priest detective constantly reminds us that he is an agent of the church, and it is on this basis that he provides himself with a clearer understanding of evil which offers a better solution to it than do some of those around him.

1.3. The Total Negation of Non-Catholicism

In Father Brown stories, Chesterton deals with a lot of religious and philosophical schools. Here, we do not only meet a series of characters with different occupations, but also a lot of persons with various beliefs, such as atheists, legalists, secularists, skeptics, Darwinists, Protestants and Presbyterians. Towards all these non-Catholics, Chesterton holds a negative attitude. He has written a series of articles to defend the orthodoxy Catholic theology and criticize all the prevalent heretical thoughts, such as *Miracles and Modern Civilization*, *Skepticism and Spiritualism*, *Christianity and Rationalism*, etc. Here, his Father Brown stories also embody such criticism. In these detective stories, due to their personal religious or philosophical belief, the one who commit crimes are usually those who disbelieve Catholicism, especially those pagans. Thus, through the misdeeds of those nonbelievers, Chesterton definitely indicates his rejection of non-Catholicism.

For example, in *The Blue Cross*, we meet the great detective Valentine, a skeptic in the severe style of France. According to Chesterton, skepticism implies a dogma of hopelessness and definite belief in unbelief. Therefore, in his story, this skeptic, not believing in any religion, gradually tends to extremes and becomes extremely crazy and cool-blooded. Thus, in order to break what he calls the superstition of the Cross, the greatest of detectives commits his only crime---murdering the millionaire who is drifting to Catholic Church. In *The Eye of Apollo*, the prophet Kalon is as arrogant as Nietzsche. He adores the Sun, regarding himself as the priest of the living God, and thinking the Catholic Church is but a black police and all Catholic priests are only spies and detectives seeking to tear from man confessions of guilt. But at the end of the story, we find it is this prophet who cruelly murders his lover for the sake of half a million pound. In *The Hammer of God*, because of his eccentric foible, the Anglican

priest Wilfred Bohun becomes extremely cranky. He thinks it is given to him to judge the world and strike down the sinner; therefore, though he is a good man, he still commits a great crime---killing his evil brother.

In *The Sign of the Broken Sword*, General St. Clare is a national hero and a saint in the eyes of all Englishmen. But such a hero commits a series of despicable deeds. In order to conceal those ugly deeds, he kills Major Murray without mercy. Shortly afterwards, he launches a crazy attack to cover up Murray's body, which makes eight hundred soldiers lose their lives. In this story, it is from the perspective of religion that Father Brown begins his analysis of Clare's crime. Father Brown says St. Clare is an old Anglo-Indian Protestant soldier and that might mean a man physically formidable living under a tropic sun in an Oriental society, and soaking himself without sense or guidance in an Oriental Book. According to Father Brown, "Of course, he read the Old Testament rather than the New. Of course, he found in the Old Testament anything that he wanted--lust, tyranny, treason."^①

Actually even before Chesterton takes Catholicism, he has clearly stated the difference between Protestant Christianity and Catholic Christianity on their attitude to Bible. According to Chesterton, Protestant Christianity believes that there is a divine record in a book, Bible and that everyone ought to have free access to that book while Catholic Christianity believes that there is a divine army upon earth called the church, all people should be induced to join it and anyone who joins it can save his soul without ever opening any of the old books of the church at all. Chesterton thinks the Bible is only one of the institutions of Catholicism and is only efficient when taken as part of the Catholic Church. Therefore, in this story, the protestant General St. Clare, who believes that everyone ought to have free access to bible, inevitably reads his bible in his own way. Thus, according to his own understanding, he finds lust, tyranny and treason in his Bible. Chesterton thinks that is the matter with him. It is his faith that results in his committing crimes and in his vindicating these crimes. In Chesterton's opinion, if St. Clare was a Catholic, he could save his soul without ever opening one of the books of the church at all. In short, in Father

^① G. K. Chesterton, *The Innocence of Father Brown*, p151

Brown stories, such examples of non-Catholics committing crimes are too numerous to mention one by one.

Besides dealing with those non-Catholic criminals, Chesterton also mentions the non-Catholicism through the conversation of the characters. For example, in *The Hammer of God*, Chesterton expresses his disapproval of Presbyterianism through the mouth of Father Brown, though here the Presbyterian doesn't commit crime at all. Father Brown says Presbyterianism is made up by men who pray on hills and learn to look down on the world more than to look up at heaven. According to him, one sees great things from the valley and only small things from the peak. Therefore though Barnes (a Presbyterian) is a good man, he is hard, imperious and unforgiving compared with a real Catholic Christian.

In *The Song of The Flying Fish*, Chesterton touches upon Darwinism. In this story, Count Yoon de Lara, a brilliant scholar and oriental traveler who believes Eastern magic firmly, tells a story about how an ancient Hindu hermit passed through the three armies that encircled the Mogul, took the great ruby out of the tyrant's turban, and went back unscathed like a shadow. But Dr Burdock, an orthodox evolutionist to whom all nature is one, thinks in stead of Eastern magic, it is a sleight-of-hand done with hypnotism and telepathy. Thus, the Count blames Dr Burdock for his self-willed explanation, claiming that it would bring great changes to things. Here though Chesterton does not believe and support the eastern magic, he expresses his opinion on Darwinism through this oriental traveler's mouth.

“What difference does it make to a thing that you now call it telepathy, as you once called it tomfoolery? If a man climbs into the sky on a mango-tree, how is it altered by saying it is only levitation, instead of saying it is only lies. If a medieval witch waved a wand and turned me into a blue baboon, you would say it was only atavism.”^①

Through these words we may find that Chesterton thinks Darwinism would bring many baneful influences to truth and reality. In his eyes, the Darwinian Theory “was a

^① G. K. Chesterton. *The Secret of Father Brown*, Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1974, p42

hypothesis, and it is still only a hypothesis”^①. However, Chesterton opposes Darwinism, not as bad science, but as bad humanism. According to him, when once one begins to think of man as a shifting and alterable thing, it is always easy for the strong and crafty to twist him into new shapes for all kinds of unnatural purposes, thus bring the unforeseen aftermath for humankind.

Generally speaking, religion has always been a major concern both in Chesterton's personal life and in his literary career. Even before his converting to Catholicism, through his book *Orthodoxy*, Chesterton has shown a serious interest in contemporary religious thoughts. Hence religion becomes a frequent theme of his works. Here in Father Brown stories, through the design of conversation, Chesterton spares no pains to put right people's misunderstanding and definitely sets forth the real Catholic theology. Besides this, one of the distinct characteristics on the arrangement of plots is that it is usually those nonbelievers who commit crimes. Thus through their erring, Chesterton clearly expresses his own opinion: lacking the guidance of reasonable belief, people can not get a correct understanding of themselves and human nature. Therefore, it is inevitable for them to commit various errors.

^① G. K. Chesterton, *As I Was Saying*, New York: Podd, Mead and Company, 1936, p142

Chapter Two Good and Evil

The problem of good and evil has always oscillated between the two poles of dualism and monism. Monists negate the substance origin of evil and claim that evil is not in existence at all. By contrast, dualists consider evil an independent existence. In their eyes, evil neither comes from nor depends on goodness; good and evil are two completely opposite things. Most writers oscillate between the two poles while the great mass of Christian writers advocate or at least flirt with dualism in some form. But the Catholic writer G. K. Chesterton takes another way.

2.1. The Coexistence of Good and Evil: Privation

Chesterton's view on evil was deeply influenced by St. Thomas Aquinas. During the 1890s Aquinas underwent a revival in the Catholic Church and later became the subject of a biography by G. K. Chesterton---*Saint Thomas Aquinas*. Aquinas's influence on Chesterton finds a clear expression in *The Secret Garden*, in which Father Brown makes an explicit reference to his familiarity with Aquinas as this: "I could paraphrase any page in Aquinas once"^①. On the problem of evil, Aquinas rejects the claims of dualism and Chesterton takes the same position with him. In *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, Chesterton blames dualism for making evil an equal partner with good. Here, in Father Brown stories, his opinion on dualism is concretely embodied in Father Brown's method of solving cases. In these stories, the reason why Father Brown could successfully find out evil criminals is not that he is absolutely good, but that he himself could become a criminal. In *The Secret of Father Brown*, when asked by Mr. Chace to explain his secret of cracking a criminal case, Father Brown answers the secret is that it is he who kills all those people. So, of course, he knows how it is done. "I had planned out each of the crimes very carefully, I had thought out exactly how a thing like that could be done, and in what style or state of mind a man could really do it. And when I was quite sure that I felt exactly like the murderer myself, of course I knew who he was."^② From these words, we may find that Chesterton tries to

^① G. K. Chesterton, *The Innocence of Father Brown*, p57

^② G. K. Chesterton, *The Secret of Father Brown*, p11

blur the distinction between the hero and the criminal. In Chesterton's opinion, the hero himself could become a criminal. He could think evil thoughts, scheme evil plans and commit evil crimes under the same situation. Thus there is no absolute opposition between good and evil. Actually they are interlinked in some sense. Chesterton thinks, as the creation of God, everybody is good in nature, but there also exists this or that kind of defect in his character. Therefore he refuses to simply divide people into good or evil. Thus in his Father Brown stories, there is neither absolute well-doer nor utter villain. In *The Man with Two Bears*, Father Brown explains Chesterton's such opinion as this: "Any man can be a murderer like poor John; any man, even the same man, can be a saint like Poor Michael."^① Hence, under Father Brown's persuading, Flambeau returns the goods he stole, gives up his career of stealing and becomes Father Brown's right hand, while Valentin, a great detective, switches from good to evil by beheading the millionaire to break the superstition of Cross. All these examples reflect Chesterton's desire to ensure that while a categorical distinction between good and evil is maintained throughout, the characters in these stories can not be classified in such black and white terms precisely because they are fallen human beings.

Chesterton's rejection of dualism is equal to his refusal of monism. However, it is always easy for readers to misunderstand Chesterton's such intention because in some of his detective stories, there is no crime at all. For example, in *The Three Tools of Death*, Sir Aaron is found dead in a morning and later people find three weapons on the spot---the noose, the bloody knife and the exploding pistol. But at last these three weapons turn out to be instruments of a curious mercy used to save Sir Aaron rather than the weapons used to kill him. Actually, Sir Aaron is a suicidal maniac. Reading this kind of stories, some readers may easily get such a conclusion: G. K. Chesterton rejects the authenticity of evil. In fact, they misunderstand Chesterton's intention. If we take the whole Father Brown stories into consideration, we can not come to the conclusion that Chesterton treats evil as an illusion. We may find that such kind of stories (e.g. *The Three Tools of Death*) only have small parts in Chesterton's Father

^① G. K. Chesterton, *The Secret of Father Brown*, p38

Brown stories. In fact most of his detective stories deal with real crimes and it is more usual for them to reveal that the appearance of one crime masks another. For example, in *The Paradise of Thieves*, robbery covers up fraud; in *The Vanishing of Vaudrey*, murder covers up vengeance and in *The Chief Mourner of Marne*, the aboveboard duel covers up a despicable assassinating plot. Furthermore, many of the crimes that are uncovered usually prove to be worse than those that mask them. For instance, in *The Vanishing of Vaudrey*, when Father Brown uncovers Vaudrey's vengeance masked by Damon's murder, he says he does not mean the murder when he says a horrible tale of vengeance. In fact he is "thinking of a much more horrible tale than that; though, of course, that was horrible enough, in its way. But that was much more comprehensible; almost anybody might have done it."^① From these words we may find that in Father Brown's eyes, almost anybody can commit murder in the same position with Damon; therefore the wildest murders are never the worst. There are some other crimes that are worse than them, such as Vaudrey's vengeance. In this story, a girl refuses to marry Vaudrey because he had once been a sort of criminal. Greatly insulted by the girl's refusal, Vaudrey devises an appropriate and artistic revenging plot by making her marry a real murderer. To Father Brown and Chesterton, compared with Damon's murder and some other crimes, Vaudrey's vengeance seems to be the worst of all. Thus, by revealing something far darker and more troubling beneath the surface, Chesterton illustrates his own opinion: evil is not an illusion at all; in fact it is a certain reality.

Since Chesterton rejects both of dualism and monism, then what is his view on evil in heaven? In fact, on this point, Chesterton still follows the steps of Thomas Aquinas. In order to find a reasonable explanation by which Christianity can combine its belief in God as the Creator of everything that exists with a belief in the reality of evil, St. Thomas Aquinas takes a route between the extremes of either treating evil as an illusion (monism) or granting it ontological autonomy (dualism). That is to say, he formulates a definition of evil as privation, an idea he takes up from St Augustine. In *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas defines evil as "the absence of the good, which is natural

^① G. K. Chesterton, *The Secret of Father Brown*, p80

and due to thing”^①. In his opinion, as the creator of all things, God is holy and therefore, goodness is unconditional. Evil does not exist in God. God creates all things; hence creation is essentially good. But as the creation of God, things can not be as holy as God. There are more or less defects in them. This defect is evil. Thus evil is the privation of good. In *The Dagger with Wings*, Father Brown's words confirm such an opinion. He says, “All things are from God and above all, reason and imagination and the great gift of the mind. They are good in themselves; and we must not altogether forget their origin even in their perversion.”^② Here from these words we may find that in Father Brown's eyes all things come from the same origin, God, and they are all good in themselves. For Father Brown and Chesterton, evil is not a substance coming from God, but only a perversion of the things that are good. Chesterton's view of evil as privation is especially prominent in *The Wrong Shape*, in which he uses the lack of purpose and natural order to symbolize the privation of good. In this story, when Father Brown picks up an oriental knife and finds that it lacks right shape and plain purpose, he becomes aware of evil. Shortly afterwards, Father Brown extends such reasoning to the paper with wrong shape, that it, with a corner snipped off. Thus, by following Aquinas' thoughts, Father Brown sees this lack of shape and order as evidence of evil.

To sum up, on the problem of the nature of evil, Chesterton takes a mild way. In stead of accepting dualism or monism, he chooses to follow St Thomas Aquinas's opinion of regarding evil as privation of good. While admitting the existence of evil, this opinion rejects its independence and substantiality, which solves the contradiction between the belief in God and the reality of evil. Under the influence of such an opinion, Chesterton thinks that human beings can not be simply divided into good and evil. But he also rejects to blur the moral boundaries between good and evil. Therefore in his Father Brown stories, though there is neither perfect welldoer nor utter villain, they are full of vivid concepts of right or wrong and good or evil. Chesterton has a clear conception of what is good and what is evil. And his attempt to

^① Aquinas St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, Part 1, Question 49, Article 1

^② G. K. Chesterton, *The Incredulity of Father Brown*, p142

distinguish between good behavior and evil deeds is apparent throughout the whole Father Brown stories.

2.2. The Source of Evil: Heart

After recognizing the nature of evil, Chesterton makes a further exploration of the origin of it. In Chesterton's opinion, good is an absolute and substantial existence which comes from God and evil, as the privation of good, is an unsubstantial one which is dependent and parasitic on good. However, though it is parasitic, it still has its own origin. Therefore, in the Father Brown stories, another problem Chesterton endeavors to discuss is the origin of evil. What on earth does evil come from? God's words give this problem a clear answer.

“Because from inside, from the heart of men, come evil thoughts and unclean pleasures, The taking of goods and of life, broken faith between husband and wife, the desire of wealth, wrongdoing, deceit, sins of the flesh, an evil eye, angry words, pride, foolish acts: All these evil things come from inside, and make the man unclean.”^①

From these words, we may find that evil not only exists in but also comes out of human heart. All kinds of evil come from the inside and make the man unclean.

As a pious Catholic, Chesterton firmly believes evil comes from the inner life and in his Father Brown stories, he definitely expresses such an opinion in *The Hammer of God*. During this story, when Father Brown finds out Wilfred Bohun's crime, Wilfred stags back against the wall, staring at Father Brown with frightful eyes and crying “How do you know all this? Are you a devil?” Father Brown answers gravely “I'm a man and therefore have all devils in my heart.”^② Here, Chesterton just uses one sentence to point out the origin of evil, that is, human heart. In his opinion, we are neither angels nor supernatural spirits. Instead, we are merely fallen human beings. Therefore we have all evil things in heart. We may often be driven by all kinds of evil thoughts and unclean pleasures coming out of our hearts and then commit various evil

^① Mark, 7:20—23

^② G. K. Chesterton, *The Innocence of Father Brown*, p195

deeds in action. In Father Brown stories, crimes are usually committed out of greed, jealousy, pride, hatred or fear in criminal's heart. For example, in *The Invisible Man*, out of the love for his lady, Welkin disguises as a postman and murders his rival in cold blood; in *The Dagger with Wings*, out of his crazy vengeance, John Strake kills the sons of his foster father cruelly; in *The Chief Mourner of Marne*, out of strong jealousy, Maurice thinks out a contemptible trick and kills his cousin in a duel and in *The Sign of the Broken Sword*, out of extreme greed for both money and honor, St. Clare commits a series of despicable deeds and in order to conceal those ugly deeds, he launches a crazy attack which sends eight hundred soldiers to death. To sum up, in the whole Father Brown stories, such examples of committing crimes out of the drive of inner thoughts are too numerous to mention one by one. In these stories, Chesterton deals with all kinds of inner passion and desires which tempt people to commit various crimes. Thus through Father Brown's analysis of these criminal cases, Chesterton makes a profound explanation of human nature and evil.

Since we recognize that evil comes out of heart, then how should we correctly treat the evil in our heart? Chesterton gives a clear answer to this problem in *The Secret of Flambeau*. In this story, Father Brown first points out people's opinion on evil at that time. He says there are two ways of renouncing the devil, and the difference is perhaps the deepest chasm in modern religion. One is to have a horror of him because he is so far off; and the other to have it because he is so near. According to Father Brown, the moderns are tending to renounce evil no matter in their eyes, evil is far away from or near to them. And closely following these words, Father Brown gives his own understanding on this problem. He declares,

“You may think a crime horrible because you could never commit it. I think it horrible because I could commit it. You think of it as something like an eruption of Vesuvius; but that would not really be so terrible as this house catching fire.”^①

Here through these words, Chesterton tries to warn readers that evil comes out of

^① Chesterton, *The Secret of Father Brown*, p130

the inner heart and it is possible for all of us to commit crime and therefore everyone should correctly understand evil and form a clear attitude to it. According to Chesterton, we should neither be afraid of it because it is so far off, nor neglect its existence because it is omnipresent. To Chesterton, the horror of evil does not lie in its impossibility but in its possibility. Therefore, we should bravely envisage evil, warn against evil thoughts and immoral desire all the time and try to prevent us from committing evil deeds in action. On his analysis of evil in Father Brown stories, Mark Knight states, "Because of their belief that evil is to be imagined and understood rather than kept at a distance, the Father Brown stories are particularly revealing when it comes to examining Chesterton's theology of evil".^①

2.3. The Attitude to Evil: Forgiveness

As I have mentioned, evil comes out of human heart, therefore rather than be afraid of it and keep it at a distance we should bravely envisage it, be on our guard against the evil thoughts and desires in our hearts and try our best to avoid committing evil deeds in action. But as the creation of God, people can not be as holy as God; there are more or less defects in them. Therefore it is inevitable for people to commit various evil crimes. Thus how should we treat these evil deeds and those who commit them on earth? On this problem, Chesterton is acutely aware that what makes the universe interesting is not the evil in human heart, with its various results of evil doings, but the possibility and condition of forgiving all the evils. Evil out of heart means that we are all capable of great evils and therefore should be responsible for it while forgiveness means that even if we committed crimes, those whose interests we damage could still forgive us. The power of forgiveness could overcome the force of evil and remove hatred and annoyance from the world. Here Chesterton's understanding of forgiveness is based on the Catholic teachings of love, beneficence and charity. Catholicism is a religion full of the teachings of love, beneficence and charity. In *Bible*, sermons about them can be found everywhere. As a Catholic writer, G. K. Chesterton is greatly influenced by such sermons, which produce a profound

^① Mark Knight, *Chesterton and Evil*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2004, p40

and long-range effect on him. Both his personal life and his literary career are never in lack of the belief in love, beneficence and charity.

In his Father Brown stories, beneficence, charity and forgiveness are one of the themes Chesterton endeavors to manifest. As the protagonist of these stories, Father Brown himself embodies such Catholic teachings. During all these stories, Father Brown never gives up his salvation of any criminal. Basing on his understanding of human nature and evil, Father Brown holds that there are gleams in every criminal and his business is to find out the potential gleams in them, tries to moralize them and point out the correct direction for them. For example, in *The Hammer of God*, when Father Brown finds out Wilfred Bohun is the murderer of his evil brother Norman Bohun, instead of handing Wilfred to the inspectors, Father Brown leaves all things for Wilfred himself to deal with. As to this decision, Father Brown's explanation is that Wilfred has not yet gone very far wrong and that is one of the gleams in him. In *The Flying Stars*, Flambeau steals the gems of Sir Leopold; Father Brown sees through his trick and stops his escaping in time. But instead of sending Flambeau to the sanction of law, Father Brown patiently persuades him to return the gems and give up the career of stealing. Similarly in *The Wrong Shape*, when Father Brown finds out that it is Dr Harris who kills Leonard Quinton, he just asks the doctor to write out the whole that he has not thought fit to mention and promises to treat anything the doctor writes in strict confidence; and in *The Invisible Man*, at last Father Brown walks those snow covered hills under the stars for many hours with a murderer, and what they say to each other will never be known. Anyhow, in the Father Brown stories, based on his Catholic understanding of the nature of evil, Father Brown thinks as the creation of God, everyone is essentially good while there is always this or that kind of defect in them. Therefore it is inevitable for them to commit various errors. He himself is not an exception. Hence instead of disdaining those criminals and sending them to the sanction of law, Father Brown chooses to forgive their errors and endeavors to humanize them and save their souls. He is the concrete embodiment of the Catholic teaching of charity and forgiveness.

Furthermore, on the problem of forgiveness, Chesterton puts a special stress on the

discussion of what is Christian (here refers to Catholic Christian) charity and what is real forgiveness in *The Chief Mourner of Marne*. Many years ago, the Marquis of Marne killed his cousin in a duel. Later, out of compunction, he leads a reclusive life in the melancholy castle of Marne. His friends attempt to rescue him from this living death, but Father Brown implores them to leave him alone. Dissatisfied with Father Brown's "cruelty", these friends, pretending to stand for the true Christianity which knows all and pardons all, condemn Father Brown's relentlessness in succession, accusing him of belonging to a profession of "vampires" who get hold on people and suck them dry. Thus despite Father Brown's persuasion, these friends resolve on rescuing the Marquis of Marne but only find out the ugly fact concealed by his reclusion. Hence, they immediately forget what they said just now, blame the Marquis for his ruthlessness one after another, and claim to put him to death. At this time, Chesterton timely expounds what is the real beneficence and forgiveness through the mouth of Father Brown.

"That is the real difference between human charity and Christian charity...For it seems to me that you only pardon the sins that you don't really think sinful...You forgive because there isn't anything to be forgiven...Go on your own primrose path pardoning all your favorite vices and being generous to your fashionable crimes; and leave us in the darkness, vampires of the night, to console those who really need consolation; who do things really indefensible, things that neither the world nor they themselves can defend; and none but a priest will pardon."^①

From these words we may find that human charity can only forgive those actually sinless criminals while Christian charity can forgive all criminals no matter how serious your interests are damaged by them. Actually the core of the Christian belief is about Christ's redemption. The real meaning of this redemption is that God forgives all those who are willing to confess because of the sacrifice Christ made for the fallen human beings. Therefore, forgiveness is a vital problem in Christianity; and as a result

^① G. K. Chesterton, *The Secret of Father Brown*, p126

Bible is full of the teachings of forgiveness. In the New Testament the problems of forgiveness between human beings are mentioned more than once and returning good for evil is a persistent instruction of it. In Matthew 5: 44, Christ says, "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" and in Romans the apostle Paul says, "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them (12:14). Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good (12:21)." Therefore, as a pious Catholic, Chesterton is greatly influenced by such teachings of forgiveness. In his eyes, real forgiveness is not expecting the one who harms you to make up for their misdeeds through apologizing and suffering sanction, but putting your suffering away, not caring for the others' misdeeds, completely forgetting their past with the aid of God and forgiving the others without condition.

All in all, good and evil has always been the problem Chesterton pays much attention to and makes a special discussion of in his Father Brown stories. During all these stories, through the exposure and salvation of those degenerative souls, what readers find is the vivid viewpoint of evil Chesterton holds all his life: good is the essence of all creation; evil is only the privation of good. It comes from the evil thoughts and immoral desires in human heart; therefore we should be on guard against it all the time, try to restrain our immoral desires and passions, prevent us from committing evil deeds and simultaneously forgive others' evil thoughts and misdeeds unconditionally.

Chapter Three Original Sin and Self-salvation

Besides the problem of good and evil, another issue Chesterton exerts himself to discuss in his Father Brown stories is original sin and salvation. In his Father Brown stories, the Catholic doctrine of original sin is omnipresent and endowed with his personal characteristics. However, through all these stories, Chesterton not only intends to tell us that everyone was born with sin, but also attempts to make a further exploration of such problems: what is the cause of sin and how to get rid of it on earth.

3.1. The Degeneration of Humankind: Original Sin

Original sin is one of the foundational doctrines in Catholicism. According to the recordation of Genesis (2—3), God created man in his own image and established our first parents---Adam and Eve---in his friendship. He then put Adam and Eve into the Garden of Eden and commended that, of every tree of the garden they may eat freely, except that of the knowledge of good and evil. But Adam and Eve were beguiled by the Serpent and ate the fruits of that tree furtively. As a result, they were driven out of the Garden of Eden and lost the friendship for them and for all the human beings. This losing was the beginning of original sin.

There are wide-range disagreements among Christian groups as to the exact understanding of the doctrine of original sin, with some so-called Christian group even denying it altogether. However, as a Roman Catholic, Chesterton always holds an affirmative attitude to the doctrine of original sin. Towards the phenomena of some new theologians disputing the authenticity of original sin, Chesterton once noted that original sin “is the only part of Christian theology which can really be proved (empirically because you) can see it in the street.”^① Later in his Father Brown stories, he uses various instances to testify the existence of it. For example, in *The Eye of Apollo*, Father Brown asks a question concerning some new religion “Can it (this new religion) cure the one spiritual disease?” His friend Flambeau inquires what that

^① G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, London: Bodley Head, 1927, p11

disease may be. Father Brown answers, "Oh, thinking one is quite well."^① Here in Father Brown's eyes, thinking one is quite well, that is regarding one as sinless, is a spiritual disease. In this story, Kalon is the representative of such new religion which denies the existence of original sin. While accusing Father Brown of convincing men of crime and sin, Kalon declares that every one is innocent and was born with virtue. But at last, it is such an "innocent and virtuous" man who commits one of the most brutal murders in human history. Through such a vivid example, Chesterton completely shatters the argument of the inexistence of original sin. Thus he clearly expresses his own opinion, that is, whether you admit it or not, original sin is a great reality on earth.

Among all the Catholic doctrines, the one that influences Chesterton most is the original sin. His long-time friend Maisie Ward once said that, "sin was almost the greatest reality to him."^② In his book *Orthodoxy*, Chesterton definitely notes that original sin is the most obvious of all Catholic doctrines and the only part of Catholic theology which could really be proved. According to him, original sin is something inherent in us, that is to say, we were all born with sin, morally and ethically corrupted due to the disobedience of mankind's first parents to the revealed will of God. In his Father Brown stories, such viewpoint of original sin is omnipresent and endowed with his unique characteristics. During all these stories, original sin is the key to the development of the whole story as well as the turn of characters' fates. The consciousness of original sin infiltrates into all the characters to such an extent that almost everyone is driven out of his mind by it. That is to say, the so-called original sin is actually the sinful tendencies, desires and dispositions in human's hearts with which men were all born. Their sinful hearts (original sin) cause them to think sinful thoughts, make sinful choice and commit sinful deeds.

As I have mentioned before, the criminals under Chesterton's pen are not completely evil; goodness and evil always coexist in them. For example, in *The Wrong Shape*, Dr. Harris is a good-tempered little man with brilliant medical skill and

^① G. K. Chesterton, *The Innocent of Father Brown*, p194

^② Maisie Ward, *Gilbert Keith Chesterton*, p129

strong responsibility. He believes in Nature since boyhood and long before he becomes a doctor, he believes that to be a good animal is the best things in the world. But his love for Quinton's wife and hatred for Quinton evoke the potential evil desires in his heart. Thus human beings' consciousness of original sin is awakened. Finally, such consciousness completely controls his spirit, induces him to betray his correct judgment and conscience and commit a crime which later makes him feel as if he had done something wrong. In creating such a character, Chesterton makes the consciousness of original sin infiltrate into every corner of Harris' mind, thus testifying the inveterateness of evil for us. During all these detective stories, there is a certain supernatural temptation in all characters, that is, the temptation of original sin. Once such temptation is awakened by the exoteric forces, one will commit evil deeds without question.

Chesterton always has a strong belief in the doctrine of original sin. But the one he believes is the Catholic doctrine of original sin rather than the Calvinist doctrine of total depravity. The so-called total depravity is actually a biblical doctrine closely linked with the doctrine of original sin. Formalized by St. Augustine, it is advocated in many Protestant confessions of faith, especially in Calvinism. This doctrine understands the Bible to teach that, as a consequence of the fall of human beings, every one born into the world is morally corrupt, enslaved to sin and utterly unable to choose to follow God. It emphasizes the total inability of human beings. But Chesterton disapproves such a doctrine. According to him, men are not powerless in salvation. They are able to love God from heart and commit some good deeds which qualify them for salvation. In his Father Brown stories, the criminals all have the ability to choose to follow God. And at the end of the stories, after finding out the criminals, Father Brown usually does nothing but leaving all things to them. For example, in *The Hammer of God*, after finding out the criminal Wilfred Bohun, Father Brown says he will take no more steps and the next step is for Wilfred himself. At last it is Wilfred who chooses to confess to God and thus saves his soul and life. In most of the stories, with the help of Father Brown, agent of the Catholic Church and the Lord God, these criminals choose to turn to God on their own initiative.

3.2. The Causation of Degeneration: Free Will

Although the myth of our first parents' falling had already contained the metaphor of the abuse of free will, it was not until the period of St. Augustine that there established a definite causality between human beings' free will and their falling. According to Augustine, free will is not equal to committing crimes, though he ascribes human beings' falling to it. He argues that God gives human beings free will and it is human who misuses this free will that allows sin and evil to enter into the world. Thus by emphasizing the role of human beings in choosing to sin, Augustine avoids the claim that God is directly responsible for crime. Such defenses of free will have been articulated in different ways by a large number of theologians such as St. Thomas Aquinas as well as by a wide range of literary writers including G. K. Chesterton. Aquinas explains in *On Evil* that "sin is caused by the free will according as it turns away from God. Hence it does not follow that God is the cause of sin, although he is the cause of free will."^①

G. K. Chesterton follows Augustine and Aquinas in his understanding of free will. In the eyes of Chesterton, everyone has his own free will and could freely choose to be good or evil. The doctrine of free will is absolutely pivotal to all Chesterton's philosophy. Thomas Peters, a young lay Catholic with a Master's degree in theology, has recognized "Chesterton's every conception of God and his philosophy of humanity took the free will of the human being as a foundational article of faith"^②. G. K. Chesterton always spares no pains to apply the doctrine of free will to his own works, such as the Father Brown stories. He regards detective stories as a series of contests between individual free wills. In his Father Brown stories, Chesterton tries to set out how the individual, under the temptation of all kinds of evil things, commits a series of crimes out of their free will. Under Chesterton's pen, the victims are not insane; they are not compelled by their subconsciousness to kill the victims. Their actions are not a result of a relentless heredity. Instead, they are deliberate, planned

^① Aquinas St. Thomas, *On Evil*, translated by Jean Oesterle, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995, p106

^② Thomas Peter, *Battling for the Modern Mind*, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1994, p151

and free, done by their own free will. Among all his detective stories, there is one which best illustrates Chesterton's doctrine of free will, that is *The Doom of the Darnaways*. In this story, the Darnaway home is described as a weedy old den of superstitions with an old family curse persecuting it all day. According to that curse, the Darnaways are doomed to kill themselves and they are unable to save their own lives or souls. Later the final death of the new heir seems to validate that curse. By that time, even the doctor finds that there is no excuse to deny the existence of the family curse. The doctor insists there is such a curse because the laws of heredity and the truth of science can not be denied. However, Father Brown thinks it is murder, "but murder is of the will, God made free". Later, Payne makes a further explanation of Father Brown's opinion. He says "I don't know, but Father Brown knows. And as Father Brown says, murder is at least done by the will, free as that wind from the sea."^① Here, Father Brown and Harry Payne's words clearly indicate Chesterton's opinion, that is, sin is out of free will, which is given by God but totally abused by human beings. Actually in this story the new heir does not die from an old family curse, but from a deliberately designed plan. He is murdered by Martin Wood out of Wood's free will.

Besides this, in this story, Chesterton also discusses the problem of free will and fatalism. Actually much of Chesterton's writing is an attack on fatalism, which is a kind of superstitious fear based on the sense of the inevitable fate, such as the gods worshipped by the Danes in *The Ballad of the White Horse*. According to fatalism, we can not choose to do anything; everything we do is predestined and our feeling of being free is only an illusion. It denies human beings' subjective initiative and their endeavor to transform nature. In short, fatalism denies all the freedom, including human's free will. Therefore, it has been criticized by theologians for long. Here Chesterton's *The Doom of the Darnaways* also expresses such critique on fatalism. In this story, when the young heir is almost driven crazy after staying several days in this den with an old family curse, he begins to accept the doom of the Darnaway family subconsciously. But Father Brown tells him there is no Doom of the Darnaways at all.

^① G. K. Chesterton, *The Incredulity of Father Brown*, p119, 120

He says, "A man isn't fated to fall into the smallest venial sin, let alone into crimes like suicide and murder. You can't be made to do wicked things against your will because your name is Darnaway, any more than I can because my name is Brown."^① Here Chesterton makes Father Brown his mouthpiece once again. In Chesterton's opinion, what happened is not predestined and man should not accept the so-called arrangement of fate passively. He thinks man is free to choose and is ultimately held responsible for his own actions. Just as what he once said, he does not believe in a fate that falls on men however they act; but he does believe in a fate that falls on them unless they act.

In his Father Brown stories, Chesterton not only explains how free will helps to account for the origin of evil in this world, but also illustrates how it contributes to the process of putting right evil. Chesterton once stated in his essay *The Outline of Liberty*, "Will made the world; Will wounded the world; the same divine Will gave to the world for the second time its chance, the same human Will can for the last time make its choice."^② Judging from these words, we may find that Chesterton not only emphasizes the divine will that made the world and initiated the process of redemption but also put a special stress on the human free will that wounded the world and then participated in the process of redemption. Chesterton firmly believes that free will could participate in the process of redemption and this idea becomes a frequent theme of the Father Brown stories. For example, in *The Hammer of God*, after finding out the murderer, Father Brown invited Wilfred Bohun (the criminal) to confess. He says he will take no more steps and the next step is for Wilfred himself. Here the reason why Father Brown does as this is that he believes that free will can participate in the process of redemption. Therefore, he leaves things to the murderer. According to Chesterton free will can drive people to commit something wrong as well as help them to put right wrong.

All in all, in Father Brown stories, Chesterton tries to reveal that everyone is a potential sinner because of the existence of free will and the temptation of evil. The

^① G. K. Chesterton, *The Incredulity of Father Brown*, p114

^② G. K. Chesterton, *The Common Man*, London: Sheed & Ward, 1950, p236

so-called committing a crime is actually a process people exerting their free will. It is the result of their free choice. So what is important is to find out the causation of crime and avoid its reoccurrence, rather than grasp the criminals and punish them cruelly.

3.3 The Self-salvation of Sin: Confession

One of the many theological concepts that Chesterton incorporates with his understanding of sin and free will is confession. Confession is actually the act of a penitent disclosing his sinfulness before a priest in the sacrament of penance in the hope of absolution. In his *Autobiography* Chesterton explains his main reason for joining the Catholic Church as this: "For there is no other religious system that does really profess to get rid of people's sin...The (Catholic) church deduces that sin confessed and adequately repented is actually abolished; and that the sinner does really begin again as if he had never sinned."^① From these words we may find that Chesterton holds a positive attitude towards confession. According to him, confession could get rid of one's sin and make him regenerate. Therefore, he calls for people to confess bravely. In *The Eye of Apollo* Father Brown's words definitely affirms such a viewpoint. During this story, Father Brown tries to persuade Kalon to confess. "The foulest crime the fiends ever prompted feels lighter after confession; and I implore you to confess."^② From these words we may find that in Father Brown's eyes the worst crime can become a negligible error as long as you confess.

However, Chesterton's view of confession is often criticized by modern thinkers. According to them, confession is a key means through which the church perpetuates its power on the mass by policing, disciplining and manipulating their behavior. But Chesterton has already foreseen such a situation and his works show themselves to be alert to the charges raised by these modern thinkers. In *The Eye of Apollo*, such charges are advocated by the self-appointed prophet Kalon. In this story, Kalon complains that all the Catholic Church is but a black police and all the Catholic priests are only spies and detectives seeking to tear from men confessions of guilt, whether

^① G. K. Chesterton, *The Autobiography of G. K. Chesterton*, p340

^② G. K. Chesterton, *The Innocence of Father Brown*, p165

by treachery or torture. However, instead of exerting himself to argue with Kalon, Father Brown uses facts to prove the mistake of Kalon's charges. At the end of the story, Father Brown shows us that it is this humanitarian libertarian who commits the cruel crime. And after uncovering Kalon's crime, in stead of tearing from him confession of guilt whether by treachery or torture, Father Brown chooses to let him go, which is a powerful counterattack on Kalon's condemnation. Here Chesterton attempts to use such an example to show that confession is not part of a process through which people are displaced, manipulated and policed by the church.

Actually in his Father Brown stories, Chesterton tries to indicate that confession is necessary for, rather than antithetical to human freedom. For example, in *The Hammer of God*, after murdering his evil brother, Wilfred Bohun loses his freedom. He finds that he is driven from pillar to post and this impoverished state ultimately leads to his desperate attempt to commit suicide. However, it is confession that gives him another chance. When he confesses his crime to Father Brown, absolution automatically follows. Wilfred gets rid of his sin and restores his freedom. Thus at the end of the story, he can come down into the village and go his own way as free as the wind. Similar with this, in *The Flying Star*, after his confession (though in heart) Flambeau returns the three flashing diamonds, escapes from the green cage of trees and melts into the free woods behind him like a monkey. Here Flambeau's escaping from the green cage of trees implies his escaping from the consequences of this crime and the final regaining of his freedom with the help of confession. Thus through these examples, Chesterton suggests that instead of being a human construct that inhibits one's innate freedom, confession is actually the means by which freedom is restored.

Furthermore, in his Father Brown stories, Chesterton also tries to indicate that confession is helpful in restoring an individual's ability to relate to the world. As its definition implies, the act of confession involves a necessary transaction between the one who confesses and the one who hears that confession. According to Chesterton, such transaction is very important in one's relationship with the other people and the whole society. Some of his Father Brown stories definitely embody such importance of this transaction. For example, in *The Wrong Shape*, Dr James Harris writes his

confession to Father Brown and in this letter he amply describes how his spirit struggles to come to terms with guilt. He says after committing the crime, he feels just as if he had done something wrong and thinks his brain is breaking up; he feels some sort of desperate pleasure in thinking he has told the thing to somebody and thinks he shall not have to be alone with it if he married and had children. From his letter we may find that one of the consequences of Harris' crime is that it isolates him from the local community. He has to seclude himself and keep the secret alone, which almost drives him crazy. But his confession to Father Brown saves him. Father Brown shares his secret, treats his confession in strict confidence and helps to restore his relationship to the society. Therefore at the end of the story, Harris could walk out of the house briskly. In *The Chief Mourner of Marne*, Maurice Mair kills his cousin by a trick in a duel. In the aftermath of the murder he committed, Maurice finds himself have fewer options to choose---he could do nothing but escaping. He goes abroad at first and cuts down all the relationship with the outside world and even with tradition. Ten years later he comes back and leads a hermit life in a melancholy castle. His friends attempt to rescue him from that living death, but actually no one can help him except Father Brown, the agent of God, and himself. It is only after his confession to Father Brown that his dawn comes. That is to say, Maurice is no longer alone. He restores the relationship with the church and with the help of Father Brown he is forgiven by others and begins a new life in his local community. Just as Chesterton claims in his *Autobiography*,

“When a Catholic comes from Confession, he does truly, by definition, step out again into the dawn of his own beginning, and look with new eyes across the world... He believes that in that dim corner, and in that brief ritual, God has already remade him in His own image. He is now a new experiment of the Creator. Thus the Sacrament of Penance gives a new life, and reconciles a man to all living, but it does not do it as the optimists and the hedonists and the heathen preachers of happiness do. The gift is given at a price, and is conditioned by a

confession.”^①

Generally speaking, Chesterton's viewpoint of original sin is apparent throughout his Father Brown stories. However, it seems that the author does not merely attempt to tell us that everyone was born with sin. In fact, through the exploration of all characters' humanity, Chesterton tries to find out the causation of human's degeneration and point out the correct way to get rid of their sin. According to Chesterton, God endows human beings with free will, but human's abuse of free will results in their final degeneration. However, God gives human beings for the second time its chance. In Chesterton's opinion, one could get rid of his sin and gain a new life as long as he frankly confesses his sin to the church and its priests, the agent of God.

^① G.K. Chesterton, *The Autobiography of G. K. Chesterton*, p341

Conclusion

After making an analysis from the former three aspects, I find that G. K. Chesterton's Father Brown stories are not entertaining stories simply aiming at solving mysteries. In fact, they are revelatory ones full of profound religious meanings. According to Chesterton, detective stories offer a powerful tool for exploring religious ideas and have the great advantages of confronting and rooting out evil; therefore he effectively combines the form of classic detective stories with the theme of serious fiction, thus successfully producing his Father Brown stories. In these stories, investigating and solving criminal cases are only the means to reflect his religious viewpoints. By making these stories dealing with evil and sin, Chesterton introduces the great name of God into detective stories and enlarges the boundaries of the detective story. His Father Brown stories provide a serious analysis of the theological problems to such an extent that they endow these stories with the depth unfound in their contemporary counterparts.

As a Catholic writer, Chesterton always shows a serious interest in contemporary religious thoughts. In his Father Brown stories, he spares no effort to defend his Catholic theology and criticize other theological and philosophical beliefs. In these stories, through the conversations between Father Brown and those nonbelievers, Chesterton puts right people's misunderstanding and definitely sets forth the real Catholic theology. What's more, by making those nonbelievers commit crimes, he clearly indicates that it is inevitable for them to commit various errors since they are in lack of the guidance of reasonable belief.

The crimes these stories tell of are evil deeds, deeds prompted by the evil desires coming out of human heart. According to Chesterton, good is the essence of all creation; evil is only the privation of good. It comes from the evil thoughts and immoral desires in human heart; therefore we should be on guard against it all the time, try to restrain our immoral desires and passions, prevent us from committing evil deeds and simultaneously forgive others' evil thoughts and misdeeds unconditionally.

Father Brown stories also provide a serious analysis of the problem of original sin and salvation. Through all these stories, Chesterton not only intends to tell us that everyone was born with sin, but also attempts to make a further exploration of such problems: what is the cause of sin and how to get rid of it on earth. According to Chesterton, God gives human beings free will and it is human's abuse of this will that allows sin to enter into the world and results in man's final degeneration. However, the benevolent God gives human beings the second chance. In Chesterton's opinion, one could get rid of his sin as long as he frankly confesses to God. Therefore, in all these stories, through the exposure and salvation of those degenerative souls, what readers find in Father Brown stories is the teaching Chesterton firmly believes all his life: all have sinned and should be adjudged by God and perish in eternal punishment; but Christ dies for them; thus whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

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