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**“AND WHO HAS NEVER REALLY BELIEVED IN
JESUS?”: CATHOLICISM IN JACK KEROUAC’S
LOWELL NOVELS**

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“*And who has never really believed in Jesus?*”: *Catholicism in Jack Kerouac’s Lowell novels*
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ABSTRACT

Until now, there has rarely been any in-depth theological reflection on religion in the writings of Jack Kerouac and other Beat Generation writers. The doctoral thesis *“And who has never really believed in Jesus?”: Jack Kerouac’s Catholicism in Lowell novels* aims to apprehend the scope and depth of traditional Roman Catholicism portrayed in Kerouac’s Lowell novels: “Visions of Gerard,” “Doctor Sax,” “Maggie Cassidy,” “The Town and the City,” and “Vanity of Duluo.” The main tasks of the thesis are to provide a systematic account of Kerouac’s portrayal of Catholicism and understanding of God in his Lowell novels, to contextualize these insights within a broader scale of post-war religious trends in America, and to analyze whether already available generalized assumptions of the nature of Catholicism in Kerouac’s writings are adequate for Lowell novels.

This thesis is the first attempt in Kerouac’s research to systematize Catholic theological categories in his literary works. The religious terms and text fragments for the analysis of the text were selected inductively using the qualitative content analysis method and divided according to nine systematic categories of Catholic theology: 1) Faith and revelation, 2) God, 3) Creation, 4) Jesus Christ, 5) Church, 6) Sin and grace, 7) Saints and Virgin Mary, 8) Sacraments, 9) Eschatology. Such an approach helps to obtain a comprehensive understanding of God and the portrayal of Catholicism in Lowell novels. It also illustrates Catholicism’s importance and presence in French-Canadian immigrant communities in America.

Kerouac shows his and his character’s in-depth knowledge and understanding of God as creator, the created world as God’s revelation, the importance of the suffering of Jesus in salvation, God’s perfections, and the Virgin Mary’s role for believers in their way to salvation and also about Catholic hagiography as a genre. Kerouac’s characters sometimes question the necessity of the church as an institution by searching for God outside it. However, as the author, Kerouac does not provide a theological solution for these situations nor gives a new interpretation for his readers.

Keywords: Jack Kerouac, Beat Generation, Catholicism, Lowell novels, 20th-century American religiosity, Catholic devotion, qualitative content analysis

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INTRODUCTION

Epilogue

I think a change has come in my life
and though that'll mean so very little
a few years, 10 years, 50 years, 100 years
from now, maybe the work that I'll do
because of it will mean a lot and
I hope it does – whether my children,
historians, or that ancient-history worm
read this, I say it anyway, I hope
it is true that a man can die and
yet not only live in others but give
them life, and not only life but
that great consciousness of life that
made cathedrals rise from the smoke
& rickets of the poor, mantles fall
from illuminated kings, gospels spread
from twisted tortured mouths or living
saints that sit in dust, crying, crying
crying, till all eyes see.¹

2022 is the year the world celebrates the centenary of the writer Jack Kerouac (1922 – 1969). Until now, there has rarely been any in-depth theological reflection on religion in the writings of Jack Kerouac and other Beat Generation writers. The doctoral thesis “*And who has never really believed in Jesus?*”: *Jack Kerouac's Catholicism in Lowell novels* is the first attempt in Kerouac's research to systematize Catholic theological categories in his literary works. The doctoral thesis aims to apprehend the scope and depth of traditional Roman Catholicism² portrayed in Kerouac's so-called Lowell novels.³ The tasks of the research:

- To provide a systematic account of Kerouac's portrayal of Catholicism in his Lowell novels: “Visions of Gerard,” “Doctor Sax,” “Maggie Cassidy,” “The Town and the City,” and “Vanity of Duluo.”
- To outline the understanding of God through the complete analysis of the portrayal of systematic categories in Lowell novels.

¹ A poem by Jack Kerouac; Todd Tietchen, ed., *The Unknown Kerouac: Rare, Unpublished & Newly Translated Writings*, trans. Jean-Christophe Cloutier (New York: The Library of America, 2016), 172.

² Catholicism in this research represents Roman Catholicism.

³ This term is used, for example, by Robert A. Hipkiss, describing all five Lowell novels as “not particularly remarkable”; Robert A. Hipkiss, *Jack Kerouac, Prophet of the New Romanticism: A Critical Study of the Published Works of Kerouac and a Comparison of Them to Those of J. D. Salinger, James Purdy, John Knowles, and Ken Kesey* (Lawrence: Regents Press of Kansas, 1976), 35. However, it seems that the Lowell novels are “not particularly remarkable” for Hipkiss. This research is not focusing on analyzing researchers' views about the artistic value of Kerouac's novels but on looking at the Christianity portrayal in the Lowell novels.

- To contextualize Kerouac's illustrated insights within a broader scale of post-war religious trends in America.
- To analyze whether the generalized assumptions of the nature of Catholicism in Kerouac's writings are adequate for Lowell novels.

The research questions are connected to the scope of Catholicism and its teachings in Kerouac's Lowell novels. Considering that there is a significant gap in Beat studies in the field of theology, the author of the dissertation created a comprehensive and holistic insight into the Catholicism portrayed in Kerouac's writings. The religious terms and the text fragments for the analysis were selected inductively using qualitative content analysis method. The author used nine systematic categories of Catholic theology to group the text fragments and terms portrayed in Kerouac's novels: 1) Faith and revelation, 2) God, 3) Creation, 4) Jesus Christ, 5) Church, 6) Sin and grace, 7) Saints and Virgin Mary, 8) Sacraments, 9) Eschatology. These categories were based on Francis Schüssler Fiorenza and John P. Galvin's edition of systematic Catholic theology.⁴ The text fragments were then analyzed in the context of the Beat Generation's religiosity and American and Franco-American Catholicism. During the research, it was possible to confirm that Kerouac portrays in his Lowell novels all nine selected systematic categories of Catholic theology, which gave the author the possibility further to conclude the importance of Catholicism in these novels. The categories chosen to analyze Kerouac's religious references in Lowell novels are those of Catholic systematic theology because "the full Christian theological understanding of God occurs only in and through an entire systematic theology encompassing all the great symbols of tradition."⁵ Systematic theology helps to obtain a full understanding of God through all of these categories. Using such an approach gives a holistic insight in the understanding of God and the portrayal of Catholic teachings in Lowell novels.

Additionally, the research question also entails the content of these categories. Does Kerouac's portrayal of these theological categories correspond with official Church teachings? Do Kerouac's characters understand these categories within the framework of Catholic theology at the time? If the understanding of Catholicism in novels differs from Catholic teachings, are those examples dominating, and what is their significance? It is possible to encounter generalized assertions by researchers about Kerouac's Catholicism as, for example, jansenistic or as one that Gnosticism has largely influenced. The author chose to analyze Lowell

⁴ Francis Schüssler Fiorenza and John P. Galvin, eds., *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011).

⁵ David Tracy, "Approaching the Christian Understanding of God," in *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*, eds. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza and John P. Galvin, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 110.

novels to see whether these traditions or trends dominate the texts to such an extent that it would be possible to use such generalizations. The research shows that such features are inconsistently visible and are not dominant. The Catholicism reflected in Lowell novels is primarily consistent with the ideas and practices of Catholicism prevalent during Kerouac's lifetime. The religious references to the categories of systematic Catholic theology primarily portray a traditional understanding of Catholicism at the time. These conclusions further confirm that the Kerouac's portrayed Catholicism in the Lowell novels cannot be characterized as jansenistic or gnostic because these ideas are rarely depicted in comparison to the traditional Catholic teachings. At the same time, Kerouac's characters sometimes question the necessity of the institutional religion, searching for God outside its boundaries, which illustrates turning away from the traditional understanding of Catholicism. Such an approach illuminates the scope and depth of Catholicism in Lowell novels, understanding of its teachings, and historical presence in American immigrant communities.

Jack Kerouac was born on March 12, 1922, and for some, he might be better known as "the king of the Beats."⁶ There are events commemorating Kerouac's influence in its diverse contexts this year. The Saint Jean Baptiste church is transformed into a space for concerts and readings in his hometown Lowell, Massachusetts. At least a few conferences have been planned to commemorate Kerouac's importance in literary history.⁷ The year began with a Dior men's autumn/winter 2022 fashion show inspired by Kerouac's most famous novel, "On the Road." The organizers even made the runway look like the original scroll of the book's manuscript.⁸ The clothing paid homage to the 1960s, keeping in mind the traveling nature of Jack Kerouac and his fellow writers. The creative director Mr. Kim Jones deeply respects books, especially the Beat Generation literary section.⁹ These events brought forward something that might have been forgotten and introduced to younger generations.

⁶ Allen Ginsberg originally described Kerouac as "King of the Beats," and the media started to use this term during the "Beatnik era when Kerouac was the most prominent personality within the new Beat Generation"; Paul Varner, *Historical Dictionary of the Beat Movement* (Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, 2012), 167.

⁷ For example, The Beat Studies Association Conference "The Jack Kerouac Centenary" on November 3-4, 2022, Palatine, Illinois; "2022 BSA Conference – The Beat Studies Association," *The Beat Studies Association*, <https://beatstudies.org/2022-bsa-conference/> (accessed 11.10.2022).

⁸ "On the Road," *Dior*, https://www.dior.com/en_lv/mens-fashion/shows/folder-fall-2022/on-the-road (accessed 11.04.2022).

⁹ Laura Hawkins, "Kim Jones celebrates Jack Kerouac for Dior A/W 2022 men's show in London," *Wallpaper*, December 14, 2021, <https://www.wallpaper.com/fashion/dior-aw2022-men-show-jack-kerouac> (accessed 11.04.2022).

Why should researchers analyze Jack Kerouac's Catholicism?

The author of this dissertation has been researching various aspects of the Beat Generation's writers' religious insights, terminology, and ideas, their interpretation of "religious transformation," their consistent being "on the road" as a spiritual quest, and their portrayal of mystical experiences in their diaries and literary works. However, this dissertation focuses on the Catholicism portrayed in Jack Kerouac's writings, particularly his Lowell novels. Why precisely this subject? There has been missing an in-depth and encompassing research on Catholicism's portrayal in the writings of Jack Kerouac and the other authors of the Beat Generation. Louis Albarran also emphasizes this aspect: "there are various roads of interpretation one could take toward understanding the writer Jack Kerouac, but for some reason, Catholicism remains one of the least accepted and traveled roads while it is one of the most important roads – as the author himself often attested."¹⁰ Previously also Loni Reynolds has affirmed: "although Beat texts are full of rich and varied religious and spiritual themes, the current critical understanding of this aspect of the movement is incomplete. Particularly, "the link between the Beats and traditional religious belief is largely unexplored."¹¹ Henceforth, there is still a large section of Kerouac's writings to study through the prism of Christian theology. The more known traditional Western religions in America of that time, such as Christianity and Judaism, have been largely neglected in the works of the Beats. Nevertheless, "readers of Kerouac's 30-plus published works will find a wealth of Catholic symbolism."¹² He was born, raised, and died as a Catholic. He did have an interest in diverse belief systems and religions. However, Kerouac combined them with, opposed them to, or even compared them to the theological ideas of Catholicism he encountered in his childhood and youth.

It is essential to mention some critical studies in this area focusing, for example, on Kerouac's portrayal of Catholic devotionism and sacramentality in Louis T. Albarran's dissertation "The Face of God at the End of the Road: The Sacramentality of Jack Kerouac in Lowell, America, and Mexico." In "Irrational Doorways: Religion and Spirituality in the Work of the Beat Generation," Loni Sophia Reynold explores the "links between the Beats and traditional religious forms."¹³ In his paper "Mad to Talk, Mad to Be Saved": Jack Kerouac,

¹⁰ Louis T. Albarran, *The Face of God at the End of the Road: The Sacramentality of Jack Kerouac in Lowell, America, and Mexico* (doctoral thesis, University of Dayton, 2013), 1.

¹¹ Loni Sophia Reynolds, *Irrational Doorways: Religion and Spirituality in the Work of the Beat Generation* (doctoral thesis, University of Roehampton, 2011), 3 – 4.

¹² Robert Reilly, "On the road to redemption with Catholic author Jack Kerouac," *U.S. Catholic*, April 11, 2004, <https://uscatholic.org/articles/200404/on-the-road-to-redemption-with-catholic-author-jack-kerouac/> (accessed 17.08.2022).

¹³ Loni S. Reynolds, *Irrational Doorways: Religion and Spirituality in the Work of the Beat Generation*, 3.

Soviet Psychology, and the Cold War Confessional Self,” Robert Genter tackles the subject of Kerouac’s usage of the confessional style of writing and the sources of Catholic ideas that have influenced Kerouac. One of the resources to gain more insight into the Franco-American integration within larger American culture, and the different attitudes in the community itself towards, for example, the importance of conserving the French language as part of the education process in parish schools, is Cynthia C. Lees’s dissertation “Border Spaces and La Survivance: The Evolution of the Franco-American Novel of New England (1875-2004).” Also, the analysis of the correlation between Jack Kerouac’s narrator and characters in Lowell novels in Joseph A. Spedalieri’s “Visions of Duluo: A Study of the Use of Personae as a Means of Self-comprehension in the four Lowell Novels of Jack Kerouac’s Duluo Legend” gives clearer understanding.

A systematically structured summary of the portrayal of different theological categories seems to have been missing in the research on Christianity in the writings of Kerouac and the Beat Generation. This dissertation aims to provide a holistic overview of all the nine major Catholic theological categories and their portrayal in Kerouac’s Lowell novels. Categories of systematic theology will provide comprehensive theological understanding of God and Catholicism, as portrayed in Kerouac’s Lowell novels. Indeed, Kerouac himself did not create “a coherent theology,” as Genter argues.¹⁴ However, it is possible to get an overview of these categories by concentrating on the novels where Kerouac describes a time when he attended the Catholic church and practiced its rituals daily. Throughout all the Lowell novels, Kerouac has mentioned, and his characters refer to all of the nine chosen theological categories. The scope of theological categories portrayed in the texts further affirms the underlying presence of Catholicism in his works. The doctoral thesis will serve other researchers as a good starting point for diving into more specific theological or religious reflection aspects of Kerouac’s works.

Methodological framework

Jack Kerouac’s writings are known to be semi-autobiographical,¹⁵ which can be both an asset and an obstacle while studying his texts. Because of the semi-autobiographical nature of the text, it is possible to use Kerouac’s extensive journal and letter content to pinpoint the

¹⁴ Robert Genter, “Mad to Talk, Mad to Be Saved”: Jack Kerouac, Soviet Psychology, and the Cold War Confessional Self,” *Studies in American Fiction* 40.1 (Spring 2013): 30.

¹⁵ Stefano Maffina, *The Role of Jack Kerouac’s Identity in the Development of his Poetics* (lulu.com, 2012), 21.

understanding of some of the references made in the literary text. However, researchers should not take his literary writings as an affirmation and validation of Kerouac's beliefs. Henceforth, the author analyzes the text using Kerouac's background as a helpful interpretative vantage point but not as proof of the contents of the text. The main research focus is Kerouac's writings and the references to the Catholic theological categories in his texts.

In this doctoral thesis, the author will analyze the portrayal of Christianity in Jack Kerouac's so-called "Lowell novels," which Beat researchers mostly attribute to the novels that look at Kerouac's childhood and youth in Lowell, Massachusetts. Louis T. Albarraan argues that Kerouac's Catholic devotional ethos is "especially expressed in Lowell, Massachusetts – was one of the most important characteristics of and contributors to Kerouac's vision as writer."¹⁶ Four out of five "Lowell novels" are the first ones in the "Duluoz Legend" – Kerouac's body of work dedicated to his life narrated by Jack Duluoz.¹⁷ Although it is possible to see the order of the narrative, it is essential to remember that Kerouac did not write them in chronological order. The complete list of "Lowell novels" used in this dissertation is the following: "The Town and the City" (1946-1949), "Doctor Sax" (1952), "Maggie Cassidy" (1953), "Visions of Gerard" (1956), "Vanity of Duluoz" (1967).¹⁸ The fifth Lowell novel is "The Town and the City" – Kerouac's first published novel. Although it does not speak specifically of Lowell and the narrator is not yet Jack Duluoz as in other Lowell novels, Lowell is a prototype for Galloway where "The Town and the City" take place. Kerouac also based the characters on his family, his friends, and mostly on himself. In an interview with "San Francisco Examiner" in June 1957, Kerouac says, "All my novels [...] belong to one story -- the story of my life. When I'm through you'll have the whole thing on one shelf. That's the grand scheme."¹⁹ As one can see, the publication and creation of the Lowell novels span over two decades. That will be a crucial aspect to consider as the portrayal of different ideas and theological categories in the texts might have changed during this period. It is worth noting that the books portray the life of Jack Duluoz in different ages, the chronological order being "Visions of Gerard," "Doctor Sax," "Maggie Cassidy," and "Vanity of Duluoz." Researchers argue that "Vanity of Duluoz" is a revised version of the years covered in "The Town and the

¹⁶ Louis T. Albarraan, *The Face of God at the End of the Road: The Sacramentality of Jack Kerouac in Lowell, America, and Mexico*, 2.

¹⁷ For more on this subject, see the subchapter "Lowell novels."

¹⁸ These are the dates of the composition, not the publication of these books.

¹⁹ Paul Maher Jr., *Empty Phantoms: Interviews and Encounters with Jack Kerouac* (Broken Bottle Press, 2018), 27. Kerouac himself lists the books included in the Duluoz Legend in a letter to Sterling Lord on May 5th, 1961; Jack Kerouac, *Selected Letters: 1957-1969*, ed. Ann Charters (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 326 – 327. Full list of Duluoz Legend and the Lowell novels is outlined in Barry Gifford and Lawrence Lee, *Jack's Book: An Oral Biography of Jack Kerouac* (New York: Penguin Books, 2012), 335 – 336.

City.”²⁰ The author has still chosen both books because the analyzed sections of these books do not overlap but rather complement each other and portray systematic Catholic theological categories.

Kerouac’s family was rooted in the Catholic tradition, so the categories were derived from systematic Roman Catholic theology. The theological categories portrayed in Lowell novels are those of systematic Catholic theology because “the full Christian theological understanding of God occurs only in and through an entire systematic theology encompassing all the great symbols of tradition.”²¹ Systematic theology helps obtain a comprehensive understanding of God through these categories. Using such an approach gives a holistic insight into the understanding of God and the portrayal of Catholic teachings in Lowell novels. Nine categories of systematic Catholic theology were chosen before reading Kerouac’s novels: 1) Faith and revelation, 2) God, 3) Creation, 4) Jesus Christ, 5) Church, 6) Sin and grace, 7) Saints and Virgin Mary, 8) Sacraments, 9) Eschatology. These categories were based on Francis Schüssler Fiorenza and John P. Galvin’s edition of systematic Catholic theology.²² It is worth remembering that Kerouac did not create an account of Catholic systematic theology in his novels. His writings and portrayal of Catholic ideas can be seen as “ordinary theology,” the portrayal of beliefs by those who are not theologically trained, churchgoers, and other Christians.²³

The specific religious terms, such as “God,” “Christ,” “Church,” “baptism,” “confession,” “rosary,” “prayer,” and others were derived from the texts inductively by using qualitative content analysis method.²⁴ The author chose to use inductive qualitative content analysis because this research aims to give a holistic insight into Christianity in Kerouac’s Lowell novels. The problem might arise if one chooses Christian terms before reading the texts, resulting in an incomplete insight. For example, it would be inefficient to research God in a Christian context without analyzing the portrayal of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, or the Trinity. Qualitative content analysis is “typically accomplished through one of two processes: a close

²⁰ Robert A. Hipkiss, *Jack Kerouac, Prophet of the New Romanticism: A Critical Study of the Published Works of Kerouac and a Comparison of Them to Those of J. D. Salinger, James Purdy, John Knowles, and Ken Kesey*, 135.

²¹ David Tracy, *Approaching the Christian Understanding of God*, 110.

²² Francis Schüssler Fiorenza and John P. Galvin, eds., *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*.

²³ Jeff Astley, *Ordinary Theology: Looking, Listening and Learning in Theology* (London: Routledge, 2017).

²⁴ The author primarily uses the works of Philipp Mayring, who first developed the qualitative content analysis approach and who distinguishes steps for doing inductive qualitative content analysis; see Philipp Mayring, “Qualitative Content Analysis: Demarcation, Varieties, Developments,” *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 20.3 (September 2019), art. 16. For the use of content analysis in theology and religious studies see Chad Nelson and Robert H. Woods, Jr, “Content Analysis,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion*, eds. Michael Stausberg and Steven Engler (London: Routledge, 2011), 109 – 120.

reading of relevant materials by the researcher and the use of coders.”²⁵ Henceforth, the categories of systematic theology were distinguished beforehand, and the content of those categories was selected inductively while carefully reading the Lowell novels. The close reading method helped to gain further insight into the selected texts. Initially, 3134 terms were collected. During the reading process author sorted through the selected religious terms and adjusted them accordingly. This process was necessary to eliminate terms and text sections that initially seemed adequate for the chosen systematic categories but lost their importance when more terms were compiled. Usually, the chosen term consisted of one or two words. The text section analyzed then is the sentence in which Kerouac uses the specific religious term. If it seemed necessary to understand the context better, the author wrote the sentence before and after the one selected. The author wrote the religious terms in a *Microsoft Excel* program, and each section contained a number, text fragment, novel, page, and religious term. The author used the filter tool to find the specific terms to work with (appendix 1). The systematic theology categories were also divided using color coding, which facilitated the recognition of text appropriation for a specific systematic category (appendix 2). Such division allows distinguishing trends based on the number of references in each novel. For example, “Vanity of Duluo,” compared to other Lowell novels, practically does not mention institutional religion because there are scarcely any references to the church or sacraments. The lack of references to the institutional aspects of Catholicism further corresponds with the fact that in “Vanity of Duluo,” there are visible references to understandings that differ from the traditional Catholic teachings. Although helpful to some extent, the results have their constrictions. For example, although there are few references to Christ in “Maggie Cassidy,” one of those references is crucial to understand Catholicism’s portrayal in Kerouac’s works – when Christ speaks to Duluo from the cross. For exactly this reason, the author chose to use qualitative content analysis. Another aspect to remember is that these novels have different lengths that affect the number of references. In light of this, it is surprising how few references are in “The Town and the City” and how dense “Visions of Gerard” is, which is approximately five times shorter.

The qualitative content analysis method helped to deduct terms and text sections to work with from the texts. To categorize them using Catholic systematic theology’s categories allows for a holistic understanding of God in Lowell novels. Such an approach illuminates the scope and depth of the Catholic images, understandings of its teachings, and historical presence in American immigrant communities portrayed in the Lowell novels. Through research, it was possible to confirm that Kerouac portrays in his Lowell novels all nine selected systematic

²⁵ Joshua D. Atkinson, *Journey into Social Activism: Qualitative Approaches* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), 85.

categories of Catholic theology, which gave the author the possibility further to conclude the importance of Catholicism in these books.

The study outlined here is the first attempt in Kerouac's research to systematize theological categories in his literary works. The author has chosen to focus on the Lowell novels because Kerouac has based these novels on childhood and youth. The described timeframe is the period when Kerouac himself, as well as his characters, mostly knew and practiced the Roman Catholic faith of their parents' parish. This approach allows analyzing texts that primarily focus on Catholicism rather than other religious traditions in which Kerouac was interested at different times in his life. For example, in "Visions of Gerard," it is apparent that Gerard Duluo²⁶ is a devout Catholic. However, his brother, the narrator Jack Duluo sometimes interprets Gerard's actions, attitudes, and worldviews for himself and the reader through the prism of Buddhism. Kerouac's works undoubtedly represent both religions and elements of other religious traditions too. However, the focus will remain on Catholicism to tackle the task of creating a systematic overview of theological categories in Kerouac's Lowell novels. The syncretic aspect of some of Kerouac's works and the incorporation of Buddhism and Catholicism in his ideas is undoubtedly an aspect worth exploring. Some researchers have already done that.²⁷ Nevertheless, it is not the goal of this study to portray the syncretic aspect of Kerouac's works or measure the influence and the importance of each tradition but focus on a systematic overview of the portrayal of Catholic theological categories in Kerouac's Lowell novels. However, it will also not elaborate in-depth on all the historical and theological developments and discussions of the mentioned systematic categories throughout the centuries because that would entail several dissertations. The author will look at the main interpretations of the categories in Catholic tradition and then analyze the aspects portrayed specifically in Kerouac's texts and their importance in a broader Catholic context.

Renowned theologians, in their systematic theology, usually outline their methodology of researching theology, such as Tillich's correlation method.²⁸ However, as Kerouac did not

²⁶ Character based on Kerouac's brother Gerard, who died when he was nine years old.

²⁷ For example, Ben Giamo, *Kerouac, the Word and the Way: Prose Artist as Spiritual Quester* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000). See Timothy D. Ray, "Syncretic Visions of Buddha: Melding and Convergence in the Work of Kerouac and Ginsberg," *College Literature* 37.2 (Spring 2010): 195.

²⁸ Tillich emphasizes that existentialism cannot give answers, "it can determine the form of the answer [...]. To give such answers is the function of the Church not only to itself, but also to those outside the Church"; Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), 49. Tillich's view, though, has also been criticized throughout the years. Roman Catholic theologian David Tracy, although indebted to Tillich's basic presuppositions, affirms that Tillich's method is inadequate: it does not correlate but rather "juxtaposes questions from the "situation" with answers from the "message"; David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 46. Theologian Kathryn Tanner, for example, considers that although correlationists may perceive a significant interpretation between culture and theology, they assume conceptual differentiation prior to such interpretation. What she criticizes is the fact that the correlation method first determines a distinctively Christian message: "those other cultural practices are there from the

set out to write systematic theology of his religious beliefs, systematic theology will be approached as giving systematized answers to understanding important theological categories. Systematic theology “occupies itself more generally with Christian claims about reality”²⁹ compared to more specific fields such as Christian doctrine or dogmatics. Nevertheless, as the word “systematic” suggests, it is “especially interested in the scope, unity and coherence of Christian teaching.”³⁰ The author then appropriates these aspects of systematic theology for Kerouac’s Lowell novels. What do these texts say about Christianity and such theological categories as God, creation, sin, and grace? How do the characters of Lowell novels perceive Jesus Christ’s suffering, and what do Redemption and Salvation entail for them? How do Kerouac’s characters understand sacraments? Is it possible to see an authentic portrayal of Catholicism of the French-Canadian community in Lowell in these texts?

It is worth noting that Kerouac had established his method of writing as “the spontaneous prose.”³¹ That is an essential premise to remember while reading most of Kerouac’s work. However, in “The Town and the City,” Kerouac has not yet developed his literary style. Kerouac “knew that spontaneity of the disciplined body enabled an artist to say “All is Well” without being either a bouncy charlatan or a relaxed antiquarian of comparative religions.”³² Some researchers do call this a “confessional style of writing,” arguing that Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac “turned to a more confessional style that sought to disclose the workings of their inner minds [..].”³³ Kerouac has even described this spontaneous writing style as coming from God: “I write the way it comes to me from God. I never revise. To revise is TO SIN.”³⁴ However, Kerouac was also a meticulous editor: “Considering the extent of Kerouac’s carefully detailed recordkeeping—including countless character charts, event logs, inventories, maps, and diary entries that directly address future readers—Kerouac was not simply seeking

beginning as the materials out of which the very Christian message or lens is constructed”; Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 116.

²⁹ John Webster, “Introduction: Systematic Theology,” in *The Oxford Handbook to Systematic Theology*, eds. John Webster, Kathryn Tanner, Iain Torrance (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 1.

³⁰ John Webster, *Introduction: Systematic Theology*, 1.

³¹ Jack Kerouac, “Essentials of Spontaneous Prose,” in *The Portable Beat Reader*, ed. Ann Charters (New York: Penguin Books, 1992), 57 – 59.

³² Jack Kerouac, *The Scripture of the Golden Eternity* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1994), 15. This spontaneity directs back to the jazz influence that is also visible in Kerouac’s writings that has been dedicated more visibly to Buddhism thought. Critic and poet Eric Mottram identify this indebtedness to music writing that in “The Scripture of the Golden Eternity,” Kerouac “sought a recognition in philosophy of his early sense that his body participated in the universal forms of energy with a quality of exuberance – that “serious exuberance” which he so accurately called jazz”; *ibid.*, 8.

³³ Erik Mortenson, *Ambiguous Borderlands: Shadow Imagery in Cold War American Culture* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2016), 93.

³⁴ Interview in the Lowell Sun on September 20, 1962; Paul Maher Jr., *Interviews and Encounters with Jack Kerouac*, 150. In a later interview in August 1968, he somewhat extravagantly claims that the Holy Ghost speaks through him; Paul Maher Jr., *Empty Phantoms: Interviews and Encounters with Jack Kerouac*, 258. Kerouac himself believed to be a “pure” writer who has dedicated his life to nothing but gathering experience and getting impressions of it unadulterated on paper”; *ibid.*, 27.

the reification of his life and work, but rather hoped that further decryption would one day lead to truer understanding, even for a life as examined as his own.”³⁵

Outline of the thesis

In the introduction, the author gives answer to the question, “Why should Kerouac’s Catholicism be researched?” Then the author describes the methodological framework of the thesis, followed by an overview and concise review of the Lowell novels.

The second chapter examines the background of Kerouac and the emergence of the Beat Generation. This chapter gives an insight into Jack Kerouac’s life and the importance of the “creation” of the Beat Generation. Analyzing the post-war religious situation is helpful to contextualize Kerouac’s Catholic ideas and diverse interests from a broader perspective of shifts in religious beliefs and praxis. The revival of traditional religions in America in the post-war years accompanied the turn to the East and interest in mystical traditions. Beat Generation writers were curious about diverse religious traditions and did not hesitate to try something new.

In the third chapter, the author explores Catholicism – its importance to Franco-Americans, Kerouac particularly, and more broadly, its place in America and the world. Catholicism gained a prominent place in post-war Christian America mainly because of Kennedy’s presidency and immigrants from countries that primarily practiced Catholicism. Franco-American Catholicism encountered different obstacles in the 20th century that also affected their attitudes toward others. An insight into the description of everyday Catholic lives in “Little Canada” of Lowell in the writings of Jack Kerouac is outlined. Here, the goal is to verify what Marco Abel calls “the descriptive truthfulness of the historical moment of immediate post-war American society,”³⁶ focusing on the portrayal of Franco-American Catholicism.

The fourth chapter gives an account of the systematized overview of Kerouac’s portrayal of theological categories in the Lowell novels in the last chapter. An in-depth analysis of theological categories such as faith, revelation, God, Christ, sin, grace, Church, sacraments,

³⁵ Jean-Christophe Cloutier, “Kerouac’s Love Affair with Libraries,” *Journal of Beat Studies* 7 (2019): 12.

³⁶ Marco Abel, “Speeding across the Rhizome: Deleuze Meets Kerouac On the Road,” *Modern Fiction Studies* 48.2 (2002): 245. Jean-Christophe Cloutier shows that this revision and writing down of everyday events “it should be stressed that in the wider historical context of Quebec diaspora, such “preoccupation with files, records, systems” was vital to the project of survivance which sought to preserve the French Canadian heritage, language, and culture in the midst of the hotbed of assimilation in which Kerouac grew up”; Jean-Christophe Cloutier, *Kerouac’s Love Affair with Libraries*, 14.

and eschatology is outlined. All of these categories in Kerouac's Lowell novels affirm Catholicism's scope and importance in Kerouac's writings.

In the final chapter, the most important conclusions are outlined, focusing on whether Kerouac's portrayal of Catholicism is compatible with the traditional understanding and teachings of Catholicism.

As the 21st century rages on with pandemics, wars, school shootings, gas, and economic crises, and global warming, the question arises, how long will Beat Generation be recognizable, especially by this term? For example, some researchers already use the term "beat generation" to describe a generation "capable of learning isochronous rhythms over a range of frequencies that are relevant to music and speech."³⁷ However, it is then the task of a researcher to remind others of the past to help to explain the present and hopefully change the future.

Lowell novels

Kerouac's novels are often divided into "Road novels," where the protagonist describes his encounters and adventures while traveling, and the so-called "Lowell novels," whose narratives take place in Lowell, the hometown of Kerouac. Kerouac gained fame primarily because of the "Road novels" and the adventures described there. However, the poet, artist, and book publisher Lawrence Ferlinghetti writes in his travel diaries on 1st April 1960 that "Jack has nothing to do with Beat or beatnik except in the minds of thousands who read *On the Road* thinking he's some sort of crazy wild rebel whereas really he's just a "home boy" from little ol' Lowell and certainly no rebel."³⁸ Ferlinghetti keeps telling him to stop wandering around and go back home to Lowell and stay there, "even though it would probably not work out, with him staggering around bars and not finding any "home"... and old friends all changed."³⁹ Though it would be possible to see that Kerouac did return to Lowell through his "Lowell novels," especially if he wrote them while traveling, as is the case of "Doctor Sax."⁴⁰

"Visions of Gerard," "Doctor Sax," "Maggie Cassidy," and "Vanity of Duluoaz" are part of a more extensive collection of Duluoaz Legend. Ginsberg writes, "it's amazing, year after year, book after book, all comprising what he called the Legend of Duluoaz. "I've worked harder

³⁷ Amitabha Bose, Áine Byrne, John Rinzel, "A neuromechanistic model for rhythmic beat generation," *PLOS Computational Biology* 15.5 (May 9, 2019): e1006450.

³⁸ Lawrence Ferlinghetti, "Travel Journals," *VQR* (Summer, 2015): 227.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Kerouac wrote "Doctor Sax" while visiting his friend William Burroughs in Mexico City.

at this legend business than they have,” he said.”⁴¹ As Kerouac wrote the books for a more extended period, his characters evolved, and it is essential to define the character-narrator relationship⁴² to understand the text better. Here Joseph A. Spedaliere is helpful. He argues that “the character-narrators that are found in the Lowell novels are three-fold because of who they are, who they represent, and how they aid in his search.”⁴³ This three-fold nature includes Kerouac, who writes as the narrator Jack Duluoz and the auto-biographical characters. Kerouac bases his characters on younger versions of himself: “*Ti Jean Duluoz*, a four year old in *Visions of Gerard*; Jackie Duluoz, ages eight to fourteen in *Doctor Sax*; Jacky Duluoz, ages sixteen and seventeen in *Maggie Cassidy*; and Jack Duluoz, ages seventeen to twenty-something in *Vanity of Duluoz*.”⁴⁴ Kerouac then can “tell his story as an adult, while interacting with other personae of the narratives at a variety of ages, from child to young adult.”⁴⁵ The narrators of Kerouac’s work are called “personae who parade themselves as the narrators of Kerouac’s work, his autobiographical character-narrators.”⁴⁶ Through this autobiographical character-narrators prism is where readers most clearly can see Kerouac’s manipulation of events to aid his search for a clearer understanding of himself. The writing of Lowell novels also performs as a meaning-making process for Kerouac himself, because he “is able to insert the knowledge he has gained throughout his life and give it to his character-narrators be they four, ten, fifteen or twenty years old. [...] The hindsight that Kerouac employs and grants to Duluoz enables the narrator to tell Kerouac’s story.”⁴⁷ This meaning-making process then includes the fact that Kerouac, through writing, “revisits past events in his life, to see how these events unfolded and occurred, using a fuller perspective to see the “how” and “why,” to obtain the meaning inherent in these events.”⁴⁸ Through his novels, “Kerouac is not attempting to discuss the world, but rather to discuss himself, and his interaction with those he has come in contact with, as a way to more clearly understand who he is.”⁴⁹ This notion is also helpful in interpreting sections where Kerouac discusses Christian theological categories – not attempting to interpret the theological categories as such but rather to discuss his interaction with those categories.

⁴¹ Allen Ginsberg, *The Best Minds of My Generation: A Literary History of the Beats*, ed. Bill Morgan (UK: Penguin Books, 2018), 104.

⁴² Jack Duluoz, the narrator, and protagonist of the Duluoz Legend, Kerouac’s autobiographical adventure, exists both as a narrator and a character in these narratives; Joseph A. Spedaliere, *Visions of Duluoz: A Study of the use of Personae as a Means of Self-Comprehension in the Four Lowell Novels of Jack Kerouac’s Duluoz Legend* (doctoral thesis, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, 2001), 149.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Joseph A. Spedaliere, *Visions of Duluoz: A Study of the use of Personae as a Means of Self-Comprehension in the Four Lowell Novels of Jack Kerouac’s Duluoz Legend*, 149 – 150.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 150.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 151.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 151.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 153.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 152.

“**Visions of Gerard**” is chronologically the first novel of the Duluoz Legend. Here narrator Jack Duluoz recalls the events of the death of Gerard Duluoz, his brother. Besides Gerard, the protagonist is little *Ti Jean*, who is only four years old. The story follows Gerard’s life right before his death at age nine. Kerouac portrays Gerard as saint-like and flawless, a role model for little *Ti Jean*. Kerouac then fills the book with Catholic imagery of Gerard’s faith and the sorrows of a grief-stricken family. Jim Christy calls “Visions of Gerard” the “Christian mystic masterpiece.”⁵⁰ It is undoubtedly one of Kerouac’s novels that are most saturated with Catholic themes, “and it contains rich descriptions of the devout French-Catholic community in which Kerouac grew up.”⁵¹ In this book, Kerouac portrays his little brother as a truly devoted Christian, celebrates the holiness of his life, and often compares his brother to Christ or a saint. Loni Reynolds even argues that “the vivid Catholic imagery in this work serves as evidence for the impact the religion of Kerouac’s youth had on him throughout his life, even as he explored other religious traditions.”⁵² It might be hard to measure this impact; however, Catholic tradition is quite dramatic – for some, it seems appealing and revolting to others. This novel “illustrates how the Catholic imagery to which Kerouac was exposed in his youth – such as the crucifix and the Virgin Mary – and the religious ideas behind this imagery made its way into the author’s adult work, even as he experimented with other religious traditions such as Buddhism.”⁵³ To clarify this, it is essential to note that Kerouac wrote this book during a period that researchers call his Buddhist period.⁵⁴ However, here and in other Lowell novels, it would be hard for Kerouac to try to explain the event’s environment without also portraying the Catholicism and devotion of his brother. This book focuses more on the importance of Catholicism for Gerard than it seems on the impact on the narrator Jack Duluoz, who in this book is more interested in Buddhistic notions and explanations. However, even if the narrator looks at, for example, Gerard’s kindness through the teachings of Buddhism, he never portrays Gerard as immersed in these ideas. Gerard Duluoz is a devoted Catholic from the start until the end. Kerouac portrays him as such.

The novel “**Doctor Sax**” is as Kerouac himself describes it in an interview for *Village Voice* on September 18, 1957: “A book called Dr. Sax, a kind of Gothic fairy tale, a myth of puberty, about some kids in New England playing around in this empty place when a shadow

⁵⁰ Jim Christy, *The Long Slow Death of Jack Kerouac* (Toronto: ECW Press, 1998), 87.

⁵¹ Loni S. Reynolds, *Irrational Doorways: Religion and Spirituality in the Work of the Beat Generation*, 126.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 127.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 128.

⁵⁴ “Visions of Gerard” is the only book from the Lowell novels that Kerouac wrote during his Buddhist period that peaked from 1954 until 1957; Benedict Giomo, “Enlightened Attachment: Kerouac’s Impermanent Buddhist Trek,” *Religion & Literature* 35.2/3 (Summer-Autumn, 2003): 173 – 206. See also Kyle Garton-Gundling, “Beat Buddhism and American Freedom,” *College Literature* 44.2 (Spring 2017): 200 – 230.

suddenly comes out at them, a real shadow. A real shadow,” he said, stressing the image, his black eyes flashing.”⁵⁵ Kerouac, at the time, also considers *Dr. Sax* his best book. Kerouac worked on “*Doctor Sax*” almost simultaneously with “*On the Road*,” which he documented in his journals.⁵⁶ Although Robert A. Hipkiss deems other Lowell novels “not particularly remarkable,” he lists “*Doctor Sax*” as an exception with “some wonderful descriptions of boyhood fancies that shape the course of a man’s desires.”⁵⁷ The main character is Jackie Duluo, who sometimes “terrorizes his playmates in the guise of the Black Thief, foreshadowing the title character.”⁵⁸ He has to “first ally himself with the powers of darkness and evil”⁵⁹ to be able to help Dr. Sax, who is a mystical figure who sneers from the shadows during the night. There is an undeniable reference to *the Shadow*, which was a popular pulp fiction and radio superhero of the 1930s.⁶⁰ Some researchers argue that Kerouac based *Sax* on another Beat Generation’s writer William Burroughs because he wrote this novel while staying with the Burroughs in Mexico City: “While framed in a fictional context, the “secret, malevolent leer” concealed under *Sax*’s slouch hat in particular points to an image of Burroughs truly beyond the human pale, beyond even Gid [..].”⁶¹ Dr. Sax “appears mysteriously caped to lead his young charge in an assault on the evil occupants of a local castle.”⁶² In the end, an epic fight takes place that resembles apocalyptic descriptions. James T. Jones describes the scene: “The shades of grey that return at the end of the novel represent the “ordinary” world of the balanced, mature mind.”⁶³ It is possible to see that when “the Universe had disposed of its own evil,” Dr. Sax and Jackie Duluo returned to the mundane world. However, it seems that for Jackie Duluo, it is not mundane anymore. If previously he was afraid of the grotto, he now puts roses in his hair, passes the grotto, and sees the cross and praying old French-Canadian

⁵⁵ Paul Maher Jr., *Empty Phantoms: Interviews and Encounters with Jack Kerouac*, 34.

⁵⁶ Jack Kerouac, *Windblown World: The Journals of Jack Kerouac 1947-1954*, ed. Douglas Brinkley (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 155 – 263.

⁵⁷ Robert A. Hipkiss, *Jack Kerouac, Prophet of the New Romanticism: A Critical Study of the Published Works of Kerouac and a Comparison of Them to Those of J. D. Salinger, James Purdy, John Knowles, and Ken Kesey*, 135.

⁵⁸ James T. Jones, “Sharing a Shadow: The Image of the Shrouded Stranger in the Works of Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg,” in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*, ed. Carol A. Schwartz (Gale: Gale Literature Resource Center, 2020), 384, link.gale.com/apps/doc/H1420127477/LitRC?u=csamer&sid=bookmark-LitRC&xid=e432e95d. (accessed 17.08.2022).

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* This goes well together with Rushkoff’s argument that already in 1960s “cultural references had more to do with what cartoons we admired than which sport we played or which church we belonged to”; Douglas Rushkoff, *Media Virus!: Hidden Agendas in Popular Culture* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1996), 29.

⁶¹ Véronique Lane, *The French Genealogy of the Beat Generation: Burroughs, Ginsberg and Kerouac’s Appropriations of Modern Literature, from Rimbaud to Michaux* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 102.

⁶² In the present context, *Doctor Sax*, the novel, may be seen as Kerouac’s attempt to neutralize the image of the Shrouded Stranger, to make it friendly without detracting its numinous quality; James T. Jones, *Sharing a Shadow: The Image of the Shrouded Stranger in the Works of Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg*, 384.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

ladies.⁶⁴ The novel is “a fantasy merging into reality,”⁶⁵ as Kerouac himself describes it. It is a coming-of-age story,⁶⁶ and it seems that Kerouac’s main character, after his journey to adulthood, is first greeted by the Cross of the Christ, Catholic devotionism, and the roses. The latter might be a reference to the Virgin Mary, who is the gateway to Christ and whose symbol is also the rose.⁶⁷ In “Doctor Sax,” Kerouac portrays the devotionism of everyday religiosity of Lowell Franco-Catholic community, in which Grotto is one of the central places. In addition, young Jackie Duluoaz and the Shadow try to fight the World Snake, but the Bird of Paradise saves them. The epic fight that can be defined as “almost Judgement day” has vivid apocalyptic imagery. Still looming in the air is the saintliness of Duluoaz’s older brother Gerard.

“**Maggie Cassidy**” is the story of “Kerouac’s high school romance with a 17-year-old, working class, Irish girl. Told through the tightly woven perspectives of three Jacks (16, 20, and 32 years old), the book chronicles his courtship of Maggie from 1939, his last year at Lowell High where he is a star athlete, to 1943, the year he ships out as a merchant marine.”⁶⁸ The story follows Jacky Duluoaz’s rising football career, his first relationships, and devotionism.⁶⁹ In “Maggie Cassady,” readers encounter Duluoaz’s own devotionism – his prayers to God and Virgin Mary and his encounter with the personal God. For God, Duluoaz prays, hoping for intervention while at the same time understanding that God does not interfere with minor events of everyday life.

“**The Town and the City**,” the first published book by Kerouac, follows the hardships and joys of the Martin family who live in Galloway. The narrator of the story is not yet Jack Duluoaz. However, the town is a prototype of Lowell. Therefore, this novel is also included in the “Lowell novels.” Allen Ginsberg describes “The Town and the City” as “extraordinary as a

⁶⁴ Jack Kerouac, *Doctor Sax: Faust Part Three* (London: Penguin Books, 2012), 219.

⁶⁵ “I imagine a hill called Snake Hill overlooking Centralville with an old New England castle on top of it,” Kerouac said in an interview in *Lowell Sun* on September 15, 1957; Paul Maher Jr., *Interviews and Encounters with Jack Kerouac*, 30.

⁶⁶ James T. Jones argues that by projecting the dream image of the Shrouded Stranger onto the character of Doctor Sax and retrojecting him into his early adolescence, Kerouac gains some control over personal and cultural tendencies to polarize moral issues; James T. Jones, *Sharing a Shadow: The Image of the Shrouded Stranger in the Works of Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg*, 384.

⁶⁷ During the Middle Ages, paintings often depicted Virgin Mary surrounded by roses. The white rose without thorns is a symbol of Mary, derived from the belief of Mary’s sinlessness while also being the color of chastity. The rose without thorns also symbolizes the roses that grew in the Garden of Eden; Alva William Steffler, *Symbols of Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 23.

⁶⁸ Nancy McCampbell Grace, “A White Man in Love: A Study of Race, Gender, Class, and Ethnicity in Jack Kerouac’s *Maggie Cassidy*, *The Subterraneans*, and *Tristessa*,” *College Literature* 27.1 (2000): 39, <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A59013204/AONE?u=googlescholar&sid=bookmark-AONE&xid=f77b4bb8> (accessed 17.08.2022).

⁶⁹ The book also shows the aspects of intimacy in teenage relationships at the time that was shaped by “pervasive courtship customs of the day and the doctrine of Irish and French-Canadian Catholicism, both of which conflate sex and love, allowing limited expression of love and demanding sexual abstinence by “good” girls and respect for this abstinence by “good” boys”; *ibid.*

first novel and it really is Kerouac prose, in and out, beginning to end.”⁷⁰ Many critics of the time and researchers nowadays emphasize that while writing this book Kerouac was influenced by Thomas Wolfe’s writings, which he admired. Ginsberg explains that from Wolfe Kerouac got “these long symphonic prose sentences, and also the personal quality, the glee or joy of person that he put into all of his novels.”⁷¹ Nevertheless, there are also already visible “touches of great violins of Kerouac sound,” that represents melancholy of the passing time. Ginsberg sees this sound, the “little personal cry that Kerouac got out of Wolfe, as well as the large-scale canvas, many characters, endless book, like river flowing over rocks, broadening out.”⁷² The Martin family is large; they have eight children. Nevertheless, it still portrays Kerouac’s descriptions of his life because when he was writing “The Town and the City,” Kerouac divided himself up into three people. Ginsberg explains that he wrote about his family, but in an imaginary way, The older brothers represented different aspects of himself and “he was very conscious of that. The three that count are actually Kerouac’s portrait of his own nature and his division of himself.”⁷³ Ginsberg connects Kerouac with Joe, Peter, and Francis Martin: “Kerouac was coming in and out of town, like Francis coming into town, hanging around with me and Burroughs. And Joe Martin, the all-American, was hanging around with Hal Chase, going down to the bar, getting drunk, and chasing girls.”⁷⁴ Peter Martin, however, was “the sensitive Kerouac,” “the Christian saint or Buddhist bodhisattva,” as Ginsberg puts it.⁷⁵ But without his sensitivity, Peter was the one “with celestial ambition, celestial football ambition, or celestial poetry ambition.”⁷⁶ The reader would likely identify Kerouac with Peter because his story is the most developed. The working logs of Kerouac’s journals show that he was devoted to Christianity when writing “The Town and the City.” When the novel finally found a publisher, “he fell to his knees in his kitchen and recited a prayer of thanksgiving.”⁷⁷ In his journals, he contemplated Jesus’s teachings, wrote his version of psalms dedicated to God, and confirmed that he read New Testament and prayed to God. It is noteworthy that Kerouac wrote “The Town and the City” before becoming acquainted with Buddhist teachings.

Kerouac’s “**Vanity of Duluo**z” chronologically in the “Duluo

z Legend” covers a similar period already described in the second part of “The Town and The City.” The time frame the

⁷⁰ Allen Ginsberg, *The Best Minds of My Generation: A Literary History of the Beats*, 91.

⁷¹ Allen Ginsberg, *The Best Minds of My Generation: A Literary History of the Beats*, 92.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 98.

⁷⁷ Robert Reilly, “On the road to redemption with Catholic author Jack Kerouac,” *U.S. Catholic* (April 11, 2004), <https://uscatholic.org/articles/200404/on-the-road-to-redemption-with-catholic-author-jack-kerouac/> (accessed 17.08.2022).

narrator looks back at, as indicated in the book's full title, is 1935 – 1946. The novel recalls the American football in Horace Mann High School days and the wartime in New York. Kerouac himself was a football player, and during the war, he was also working on ships. Ginsberg argues that Kerouac's "late work is a necessary addition to the early romances. If you're going to have Kerouac, you also have to get the disillusioned Kerouac, because he's a wise man too, though a bitter one."⁷⁸ The bitterness follows the readers even after the end of the book:

In *Vanity of Duluo* there is a visionary description by Kerouac of something that involves some sense of gap, that even at the moment of greatest pleasure or fulfillment, there's a certain empty center of which one becomes conscious and leads one to think that the world was too full of suffering for anybody to take time out enough to realize the basic difficulty and dissatisfaction of existence.⁷⁹

As mentioned before, suffering is one of the key themes in his work. Nevertheless, Ginsberg continues by praising Kerouac as a courageous writer: "Ginsberg commends "*Vanity of Duluo*" and Kerouac as courageous writer "Looking back on his youth and seeing his vanity, seeing his own karmic hollowness and his own faults, which very few writers have dared, much less dared near their deathbed."⁸⁰ Again it is possible to see that Ginsberg also interprets Kerouac's actions through his perception of the world, for example, "karmic hollowness." It is also hard to know whether Kerouac knew what he was doing because he probably did not know when he would die. Yet, Kerouac dedicated his last book to the theme of vanity, and wrote it "as if spoken to his wife, somewhat parallel to Herman Melville's poems to his wife in the character of an old sailor smoking his tobacco talking to his wife."⁸¹ Another difference, compared to other Lowell novels, in this book, the narrator seems to describe more of his opinions about the changing world. Kerouac wrote this book a decade after he became famous, and "*Vanity of Duluo* appropriates a celebrity Kerouac as a constitutive part of a Kerouac story, a zenith in Kerouac's reflexive reckonings with emerging postmodern phenomena which he anticipated in his earlier books and endured in his life. The novel is both implicit and explicit testament to the continuing depredations of celebrity."⁸² The inclusion of his celebrity in the narrative of "*Vanity of Duluo*" shows "the way these late novels comment on distortions of media scrutiny, as, with his signature reflexiveness, Kerouac critiqued the hyperreal effects of his iconic fame in his books."⁸³ As the final novel published in Kerouac's life and written just a couple of years before Kerouac's death – this novel deals the least of all novels with the

⁷⁸ Allen Ginsberg, *The Best Minds of My Generation: A Literary History of the Beats*, 60.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² Ronna C. Johnson, "'You're putting me on': Jack Kerouac and the Postmodern Emergence," *College Literature* 27.1 (Winter 2000): 22.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 23.

question of institutional church and sacraments. There are text fragments where Duloz tries to explain some of his interpretations of questions of life here and beyond through theological and philosophical prism.

Kerouac and his fellow Beats quite frequently have been compared to the sort of modern-day prophets. Willie James Jennings highlights: “I believe that the artistic and the prophetic call to each other through time, echoing back and forth the possibilities of newness, of life more abundant, life in freedom with God.”⁸⁴ It is possible to appropriate this to Kerouac’s writings, through them he tried to create meaning for his place in this world and his relationship with God.

⁸⁴ Willie James Jennings, “Embodying the Artistic Spirit and the Prophetic Arts,” *Literature & Theology*, 30.3 (September 2016): 257, doi:10.1093/litthe/frw022.

1. BEAT GENERATION AND THE RELIGIOUS TRENDS IN MID-20TH CENTURY AMERICA

For no Church told me
No Guru holds me
No advice
Just stone
of New York⁸⁵

It is essential to contextualize Kerouac's Christian ideas portrayed in his Lowell novels in a broader religious and historical context. In this chapter, the author will look at Jack Kerouac and the Beat Generation, the religious situation in post-war America, and the religiosity of the Beat Generation.

1.1. Jack Kerouac and the Beat Generation

Jean-Louis Lebris de Kerouac, better known as Jack Kerouac, was born on March 12, 1922, in Lowell, Massachusetts. His parents were French-Canadian immigrants – his father in the second generation, and his mother in the first generation.⁸⁶ Most French-Canadians emigrated to New England because of the rising industrial possibilities. Kerouac's mother came to America to work in a shoe factory, as she did later in her life, to support her son's literary career. However, his father had his own printing business, which he lost due to his gambling habits and a devastating flood⁸⁷ that Kerouac has also described in "Doctor Sax." Kerouac had an older brother Gerard and an older sister Caroline. His brother died very young from rheumatic fever, and he has been an influential person and character in Kerouac's life and literary works. During his teenage years, Kerouac was a rising football star. Due to this talent, he was able to get into college in New York. During his studies at Columbia University, he met William S. Burroughs and Allen Ginsberg. The three of them later constituted the core of the Beat Generation. As opposed to Francis Scott Fitzgerald's "lost generation"⁸⁸ that were

⁸⁵ Jack Kerouac, *Poems All Sizes* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1992), 23.

⁸⁶ Paul Maher Jr., *Kerouac: His Life and Work* (Lanham: Taylor Trade Publishing, 2004), 3 – 17.

⁸⁷ His father's printing shop was filled with water up to six feet, and it "drowned his prospects as an independent businessman"; Barry Gifford and Lawrence Lee, *Jack's Book: An Oral Biography of Jack Kerouac*, 11.

⁸⁸ For F. Scott Fitzgerald generation means "that reaction against the fathers which seems to occur about three times in a century. It is distinguished by a set of ideas, inherited in moderated form from the madmen and the outlaws of the generation before; if it is a real generation it has its own leaders and spokesmen, and it draws into its orbit those born just before it and just after, whose ideas are less clear-cut and defiant"; F. Scott Fitzgerald, *My Lost City: Personal Essays, 1920 – 1940*, ed. James L. West III (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 193.

occupied with the question of a lost faith, the Beat Generation were seeking for it.⁸⁹ Beat Generation was born when America had just dropped the atomic bomb on Japan, the threats of the Cold War were looming around every corner, and in addition to that, America relived a national “anti-communist hysteria”⁹⁰ during the forties and the fifties. It was a time of urbanization in America, the rise of the suburbs – the all-American dream of a simple life of prosperity and peace.⁹¹ Some lived happily in the suburbs, but others still faced ongoing negative racial relationships or discrimination against their sexual identities.⁹² However, the relationship “between Beat, modernism, and postmodernism are complex and heterogeneous.”⁹³

Beat Generation’s popularity peaked during the second half of the fifties and sixties, one of the defying moments being the “Sixth Gallery Reading” in San Francisco in 1955. The term “Beat Generation”⁹⁴ for the first time appeared in written form in John Clellon Holmes’s essay “This is the Beat Generation,” which was published in *New York Times* magazine in 1952.⁹⁵ However, the Beat writers used this term since 1948 when Kerouac “coined this phrase.” The term “beat” embodied two aspects. Primarily “beat” was understood as an exhausted or broke person, meaning taken from the 40s Afro-American jazz community.⁹⁶ However, for Holmes, Ginsberg, and especially Kerouac, “beat” meant something more – a

⁸⁹ John Clellon Holmes, “This Is the Beat Generation,” *The New York Times Magazine*, November 16, 1952, <https://www.nytimes.com/1952/11/16/archives/this-is-the-beat-generation-despite-its-excesses-a-contemporary.html> (accessed 30.08.2022).

⁹⁰ Ann Charters, ed., *The Portable Beat Reader* (New York: Penguin books, 1992), xvi – xvii.

⁹¹ Christopher Gair notes that it has been only part of the whole situation; Christopher Gair, *The American Counterculture* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 18. The construction of the first suburban community called Levittown began in 1947 on Long Island, New York. Suburbs mark a shift from living in the cities to suburbs. One of the reasons was the growing number of war veterans and their families. The architects planned suburbs so that the automobile would be the primary way of transportation, henceforth grew the demand for gas, which contributed to the air pollution; Robert E. Hag, “May 7, 1947. Construction of Levittown is Announced,” in *Great Events from History: The 20th Century, 1941 – 1970*, ed. Robert F. Gorman (Pasadena, CA: Salem Press, 2008), 650 – 653.

⁹² Both later became one of the biggest impulses for civil rights movements, which became quite popular and visible during the 1960s. Even doctors in the 20th century often considered same-gender relationships as a psychological illness and its normalization happened only in 1973; Susan J. Wurtzburg, “October 10, 1969. National Institute of Mental Health Report “Normalizes” Homosexuality,” in *Great Events from History: The 20th Century, 1941 – 1970*, ed. Robert F. Gorman (Pasadena, CA: Salem Press, 2008), 3313 – 3314. Also see Frank J. McVeigh and Loreen Therese Wolfer, *Brief History of Social Problems: A Critical Thinking* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2004), 158.

⁹³ Haidee Kruger, “Confessing out the soul to conform to the rhythm of thought”: a reading of Allen Ginsberg’s Beat poetry,” *Literator* 28.1 (April 2007): 43.

⁹⁴ But not all the Beats felt a close connection to the term itself; for example, Lawrence Ferlinghetti always preferred the term “San Francisco Renaissance” instead of “Beat generation”; Susan and Carl Landauer, “Open Eye, Open Palette: The Art of Lawrence Ferlinghetti,” *Confrontation* 117 (Spring, 2015): 95.

⁹⁵ Holmes, in this essay, is trying to define a whole generation, which is no easy task, so it is important to note that not everyone corresponds to his assertions; see John Clellon Holmes, “This Is the Beat Generation,” *The New York Times Magazine*, November 16, 1952, <https://www.nytimes.com/1952/11/16/archives/this-is-the-beat-generation-despite-its-excesses-a-contemporary.html> (accessed 30.08.2022).

⁹⁶ Jamie Russell, *The Beat Generation* (UK: Oldcastle Books, 2012), 10.

combination between exhaustion and empowerment.⁹⁷ For Kerouac, the Beats “meant characters of a special spirituality who didn’t gang up but were solitary Bartlebies staring out the dead wall window of our civilization.”⁹⁸ They refuse this depressing and dispiriting world, turning exhaustion into a challenge by reaching toward religious transformation.⁹⁹ Still, it is essential to note that Kerouac envisioned another layer of the term “beat” by connecting it with the word “beatitude.”¹⁰⁰ In the article “Beatific: The Origins of the Beat Generation” in 1959, Kerouac goes further, boldly affirming that the term “beat” actually “was Catholic.”¹⁰¹ Kerouac sees the Beat Generation through this religious prism: “There is a priest preaching on Sunday morning, all of sudden through a side door of the church comes a group of Beat Generation character in strapped raincoats like the I. R. A. coming in silently to “dig” the religion...”¹⁰² Kerouac blurs the lines between the society’s view of what should a Christian believer look like and the possibility to be a believer and still be yourself. To summarize, “all in all, Beat seems to stand for a popular, widely dispersed culture that embraces positive spiritual values such as honesty, spirituality, love and sensitivity.”¹⁰³

Kerouac did not finish his studies at Columbia University. However, his move to New York marked the beginning of his goal to become a writer. Later, he would travel, write, and work different short-term jobs all over the continent, and after publishing “On the Road” in 1958, he also added celebrity to this list. While Allen Ginsberg was “involved with supreme reality [...] Kerouac was involved with his raw youth fantasy about becoming the greatest writer since Shakespeare, or Thomas Wolfe, one or the other.”¹⁰⁴ However, he soon realized that fame is different from respect and glory. Here Beat poet Bob Kaufman’s expression in his “Jail poems” “Thank God for beatniks”¹⁰⁵ in Kerouac’s case might come with a particular aspect of polarity. He did find longtime friends with whom he could spend hours in conversations. Ginsberg describes this friendship vividly:

⁹⁷ Jamie Russell, *The Beat Generation*, 10 – 11.

⁹⁸ Ann Charters, ed., *The Portable Beat Reader*, xviii.

⁹⁹ Jamie Russel, *The Beat Generation*, 11.

¹⁰⁰ Priest Nicanor Pier Giorgio Austriaco writes that “the pope explained that the human being attains a happy life, what the classical authors called beatitude, only in the following of Christ along the path of perfection” and that this “happiness, or beatitude, is understood to signify the fulfillment of every human yearning, spiritual, moral, and emotional”; Nicanor Pier Giorgio Austriaco, *Biomedicine and Beatitude: An Introduction to Catholic Bioethics* (Washington: The Catholic University of American Press, 2011), 9. Beatitudes are also frequently used to indicate “a collection of eight” beatitudes as shown in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5:3–10). But these beatitudes or sayings were also found in Egyptian, Greek and Jewish literature; Raymond F. Collins, “Beatitudes,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1: 629.

¹⁰¹ Ann Charters, ed., *The Portable Jack Kerouac* (New York: Viking, 1996), 565 – 573.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 571.

¹⁰³ Haidee Kruger, “Confessing out the soul to conform to the rhythm of thought”: a reading of Allen Ginsberg’s Beat poetry, 34.

¹⁰⁴ Allen Ginsberg, *The Best Minds of My Generation: A Literary History of the Beats*, 101.

¹⁰⁵ Bob Kaufman, *Solititudes Crowded with Loneliness* (United States: New Directions Books, 1965), 58.

The Idiot and *The Brother Karamazov* were our favorite books then, because those books dealt with heroes who were constantly rushing up to each other and looking in each other's eyes and asking about each other's souls and getting into big conspiracies or crimes or emotional climaxes together. That served as a model for our own behavior toward each other.¹⁰⁶

Keeping in mind Kerouac's passion for different ideas and inconsistency in his affirmations is crucial. Carolyn Cassady, the wife of one of Kerouac's closest friends, Neal Cassady, in an interview, affirms this inconsistency also about his worldviews: "I think he responded to everything emotionally first, and that's why he will say with some very heavy opinion one minute and then two minutes later he's just as adamant about the opposite views, and we could never pin him down as to what is he really believed, because it changed every five minutes."¹⁰⁷ This indeed is an essential argument for the researchers not to absolutize Kerouac's ideas and expressions, it might be rather easy to find statements where he contradicts himself.

When Kerouac reached fame in the second half of the fifties, it was hard to grasp the new way of living.¹⁰⁸ This might have been one of the aspects that continued to fuel Kerouac's substance addiction. Another reason why Kerouac used substances might have been that they helped deal with the oppressive culture of conformity. Most vividly, Kerouac's Jack Duluoz describes deliriums of alcoholism in "Big Sur" and mentions drinking as a reason why he cannot follow the example of Jesus in "Vanity of Duluoz." Kerouac even ends the latter book, his last published book in his lifetime, with:

Forget it, wifey. Go to sleep. Tomorrow's another day.

Hic calix!

Look that up in Latin, it means "Here's the chalice," and be sure there's wine in it.¹⁰⁹

Allen Ginsberg adds, "That's the last line, and then he drank himself to death."¹¹⁰ Analyzing Kerouac's "Vanity of Duluoz" Ginsberg even comments that, in places, Kerouac's writing in this book has become influenced by alcohol: "The next chapter is just pure messing around, he must have got drunk then."¹¹¹ The last driving aspect of his addiction could be seen as suffering. Early in his life, Kerouac experienced his brother's death, and the question of suffering surfaces repeatedly throughout his work. Allen Ginsberg writes that Kerouac was "so obsessed [...] with the suffering he encountered that he could not let go. I think the alcohol amplified that suffering,

¹⁰⁶ Allen Ginsberg, *The Best Minds of My Generation: A Literary History of the Beats*, 101.

¹⁰⁷ Paul Maher Jr., *Empty Phantoms: Interviews and Encounters with Jack Kerouac*, 16.

¹⁰⁸ Throughout the sixties, Kerouac was "battling his addictions; what political sensibility he does exhibit tends toward the conservative"; Michelle Martin, "The Burden of Legend: Beat Studies in the Twenty-First Century," *Journal of Modern Literature* 36.4 (Summer 2013): 164. Neal Cassady was Kerouac's inspiration for protagonists in such novels as "On the Road" and "Visions of Cody."

¹⁰⁹ Jack Kerouac, *Vanity of Duluoz: An Adventurous Education, 1935-1946* (London: Penguin Books, 2012), 258. More on the reference in this quote to the Latin mass, see chapter "Church."

¹¹⁰ Allen Ginsberg, *The Best Minds of My Generation: A Literary History of the Beats*, 138.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 75.

left him prey to the phantasm of the monotheistic imposition which Blake had denounced as being “six thousand years of sleep” for Western civilization.”¹¹² What is important to note here is that Ginsberg looks at Kerouac through the prism of his religion, entailing that it might have been alcohol that made him practice Catholicism which is part of monotheistic Christianity. Looking at Kerouac’s works, letters, and journals, it is rather clear that Kerouac was tackling the question of theodicy all his life. His brother was pious and died tragically so young. It is easy to imagine that little Kerouac would think God would have saved such a devoted little child as Gerard. Also, it is challenging to explain to a child that other children die because of Original Sin. Henceforth, even nowadays, people are drawn to Buddhism’s clear explanation of the meaning of suffering, the same as Kerouac 70 years ago. However, Buddhism does not give a hopeful future of the afterlife as Christianity does. To deal with suffering, Kerouac might have used Buddhism ideas. However, when closing the end of life, the salvation promised by Christianity was something that his narrator-character Jack Duluoz hoped for: “For after all the sea must be like God, God isnt asking us to mope and suffer and sit by the sea in the cold at midnight for the sake of writing down useless sounds, he gave us the tools of self reliance after all to make it straight thru bad life mortality towards Paradise maybe I hope.”¹¹³ This is not to show the superiority of any of these religions. Kerouac was interested in both during specific periods of his life, and both had importance to him.

The image of the Beats as rebels against the conformity of America is one that is widely used by researchers. However, as Dan Napelee emphasizes, “even if the Beat Generation rebelled against mainstream conservative American values, they too abused the power of the majority – as White, predominantly heterosexual men – and belittled “fags,” “queers,” and women.”¹¹⁴ It is possible to say that the Beats had a complex and multilayered relationship with the American “values.” It is not surprising that most people considered Beats mad because “orality and madness are two major aspects of Beat literary tradition.”¹¹⁵ The Beats were performers. Amid conformity and the extensive pressure to lose one’s identity, this madness appealed to many youngsters in mid-20th century American society. Also, Kurt Hemmer notes that “the Beats were not revolutionaries calling for an end to the American way of life. They

¹¹² Allen Ginsberg, “Negative Capability: Kerouac’s Buddhist Ethic,” *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review* (Fall, 1992), <https://tricycle.org/magazine/negative-capability-kerouacs-buddhist-ethic> (accessed 24.08.2022). Other Beat Generation writers were aware of their addictions and wrote extensively about them, especially William Burroughs.

¹¹³ Jack Kerouac *Big Sur* (New York: Penguin Books, 1992), 41-42.

¹¹⁴ Dan Napelee, “On the Road: The Original Scroll; Or, We’re Not Queer, We’re Just Beats,” *The Explicator* 69.2 (2011): 75. Doi: 10.1080/00144940.2011.619591.

¹¹⁵ Randy Ridwansyah, “Orality as the Representation of Madness in the Poem Howl by Allen Ginsberg,” *Humaniora* 25. 3 (Oct 2013): 258.

demanded that America live up to its promises of freedom and democracy.¹¹⁶ The Beats did not want to destroy the system. They wanted the system to work, but they saw it was flawed. Nevertheless, the Beats' relationship with America, its society, and the way of living was tricky, varied, and visible in different layers. Through stepping over the boundaries, the Beat Generation found a platform where they could express their artistry and creativity. At one point, this platform became one with a rebellious stance toward American conformity.¹¹⁷ However, it is not possible to distinguish an unequivocally homogenous picture in this question, as Carolyn Cassady emphasizes: “[..] every man in the fifties and forties just assumed that you get married and have a family and home [..].”¹¹⁸ To this background also the Beats belonged.

1.2. Religion in post-war America

It is essential to look at the broader picture of postwar America and its religion to understand the religiosity of the Beat Generation and Jack Kerouac. America's society at this time experienced a religious revival. One of the reasons for this revival was the rise of the American population. The “Baby boom” (the 1940s – 1960s) that happened in America during and after the II World War was one of the influential aspects of the rising population. In addition, there was a broader supply of religious traditions available for more diverse needs.¹¹⁹ American Studies researcher Eric Mottram gives a vivid explanation of the environment that was the soil for later post-war ideas:

Since the Second World War for many men this has meant finding a viable alternative to the dragging decay of Christian capitalist democracy and the delusions of extreme leftist reform associated with the Depression and the Thirties. In the Forties and Fifties this alternative consisted in forms of ideological refusal to be held captive by the history of the West.¹²⁰

There are a couple of essential notions that Mottram explores here. One of those is the “dragging decay of Christian capitalist democracy.” Indeed, throughout this period, America might have been considered a Christian nation. That was a way to distinguish America from the Soviet

¹¹⁶ Kurt Hemmer, “Political Outlaws: Beat Cowboys,” *American Studies Journal* 50 (2007), <http://www.asjournal.org/50-2007/political-outlaws-beat-cowboys/> (accessed 13.09.2022).

¹¹⁷ Their rebellious survival tactic was relived in many ways, as Eric Mottram concludes that Kerouac “lived out strategies of survival for the changing self.” It was not only a “fight” with society. It was also a self-actualization process. By the beginning of the sixties, “ways of living through a traditional sense of oneness with all energy and form have become a common basis for survival in a disastrous time for the intelligent young in America”; Jack Kerouac, *The Scripture of the Golden Eternity*, 8, 15.

¹¹⁸ Paul Maher Jr., *Empty Phantoms: Interviews and Encounters with Jack Kerouac* (Broken Bottle Press, 2018), 14.

¹¹⁹ Benjamin E. Zeller, “American Postwar “Big Religion”: Reconceptualizing Twentieth-Century American Religion Using Big Science as a Model,” *Church History* 80.2 (June 2011): 349.

¹²⁰ Introduction by Eric Mottram in Jack Kerouac, *The Scripture of the Golden Eternity*, 7.

Union, the latter proclaiming atheism.¹²¹ During this time, America's consumerist and capitalist society came hand in hand with some notion of Christianity. These ideas resulted in Dwight Eisenhower's decision in 1954 to add the words "under God" to the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America: "I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."¹²² But as political scientist Denis Lacorne writes: "this God was neither the God of the Pilgrims nor the God of the Founding Fathers, but a God, cobbled together in the 1950s to point to the true nature of the quasi-eschatological battle between Christian America and the communist and atheistic Evil Empire."¹²³ The American civil religion finds its roots in the Puritan concepts of God's chosen people and America as "Promised land."¹²⁴

Christianity functioned as a politically helpful ally. Eisenhower chose to speak through Christianity and its terms in his political speeches. For example, in his remarks at the Washington College Commencement in Chestertown, Maryland (June 7, 1954), he emphasized, "My friends, America believes correctly. Has any one of you ever met a man that was willing to say, "I do not love America"? We believe in America. We believe in our system of government. [...] We believe in God."¹²⁵ The American society intertwined with Christianity also in the educational system as Jack Dulouz describes that every morning at prep school for college, the students "had to sit in the auditorium and be led in the singing of 'Onward Christian Soldiers' by English Professor Christopher Smart."¹²⁶ One's ethnical or religious background was not taken into account for the song as mentioned earlier was "followed by 'Lord Jeffrey Amherst' which was a song no more appropriate for me to sing (as descendant of French and Indian) than it was appropriate for the Jewish kids to sing 'Onward Christian Soldiers.'"¹²⁷ As

¹²¹ One of the most prevalent influences for this was Karl Marx's quote, first published in his "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right: "Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless situation. It is the *opium* of the people." See Karl Marx, "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right," in *On Religion*, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (Mineola, N. Y.: Dover Publications, 2012), 42.

¹²² Lately, more than one citizen has tried to object to the phrase "under God" by emphasizing that it violates the First Amendment. For more information about a lawsuit that shocked American society in the 2000s, see chapter eleven in Jeffrey Owen Jones, and Peter Mayer, *The Pledge: A History of the Pledge of Allegiance* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2010), 160 – 169. See also *The American Flag*, <https://www.usa.gov/flag> (accessed 10.09.2022).

¹²³ Denis Lacorne, *Religion In America: A Political History*, trans. George Holloch (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 142.

¹²⁴ Philip Gorski, *American Covenant: A History of Civil Religion from the Puritans to the Present* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017).

¹²⁵ Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, 1954* (USA: Best Books on, 1960), 543.

¹²⁶ Jack Kerouac, *Vanity of Dulouz*, 27.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

communication and media studies professor Michael V. Tueth describes: “America in the 1950s saw itself as God’s Country, and the new Garden of Eden was to be found in the suburbs.”¹²⁸

Another aspect of Mottram’s quote is “forms of ideological refusal to be held captive by the history of the West,” which might well explain the Beats’ interest in and the growing popularity of Eastern religious and philosophical traditions. For more on this subject, see the following subchapter.

Then to summarize, it is possible to distinguish various religious trends that gained popularity in post-war America. First, post-war era witnessed revival within the mainline churches, which experienced increased attendance at religious functions. The statistics pointed to the increase in church membership which grew from 86.8 million in 1950 to over 114 million in 1960.¹²⁹ J. Ronald Oakley emphasizes that each year saw record contributions to churches and other religious organizations. There was the construction of new religious buildings, record enrollments in college religion courses, overcrowding in religious seminaries, and growth in the prestige of clergy members.¹³⁰ Another important aspect – was the birth of the National Council of Churches.¹³¹ By adding “under God” to the national pledge, President Eisenhower meant three mainline traditions – Protestantism, Catholicism, and Judaism. According to Kerouac’s biographers, during the war, he worked as a seaman, and the ship drowned on the next trip after Kerouac had returned.¹³² In “Vanity of Duluoaz,” Kerouac accurately represents these mainstream religious traditions illustrating that there were four chaplains that died in this shipwreck: “[.] the Four Chaplains being two Protestants, a Catholic and a Jew. They just went down with the ship and with Glory in those icy waters, praying.”¹³³ However, “it is no longer possible to describe the United States as a Judeo-Christian nation, as many Americans once thought of their country.”¹³⁴ Nevertheless, the Beats did not support Eisenhower’s ideas, and he became a symbol for the Beat writers. Eisenhower for them was “a good and capable man, the invader of Europe,” who “presided over a smugly opportunistic, spiritually weak America which had lost its way and become mechanical and inhuman.”¹³⁵ One more important aspect

¹²⁸ Michael V. Tueth, *Laughter in the Living Room: Television Comedy and the American Home Audience* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005), 4.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ J. Ronald Oakley, *Gods Country: America in the Fifties* (New York: Dembner, 1986), 319 (cited in Benjamin E. Zeller, “American Postwar “Big Religion”: Reconceptualizing Twentieth-Century American Religion Using Big Science as a Model,” *Church History* 80.2 (June 2011), 331.

¹³¹ This does show America’s emphasis on Christian traditions; however, the council did start an ecumenical organization to unite diverse denominations. Founded in 1950 and now includes 37 member communions; National Council of Churches, <https://nationalcouncilofchurches.us/> (accessed 09.09.2022).

¹³² Michael J. Dittman, *Jack Kerouac: A Biography* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2004), 16 – 17.

¹³³ Jack Kerouac, *Vanity of Duluoaz*, 137.

¹³⁴ R. Marie Griffith, “Beyond Diversity and Multiculturalism: Pluralism and the Globalization of American Religion,” *OAH Magazine of History* (January 2008): 27.

¹³⁵ Park Honan, “Ginsberg and Kerouac,” *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism* 120 (Gale: Gale

that became more popular in the postwar years was media use in popularizing religion. It also happened within the traditional Christian denominations. For example, some even called the Roman Catholic Bishop Fulton J. Sheen the “first clergyman to become a television star,” having an even bigger audience than Billy Graham.¹³⁶ Kerouac in “The Town and the City” also mentions talking about well known “radio priest” Father Coughlin: “Then Nick, Uncle Nick, takes me by the arm and says: ‘When you have more time I tell you some more about Father Coughlin.’”¹³⁷ Jack Duluoz is so busy with school and training and the long distance he needs to travel every day to and from school that he barely has time to talk with his uncle: “[...] there was my huge steaming supper, eight thirty, almost time for bed already, barely time to talk to old Nick about Father Coughlin or Greek pastries and of course no time to do any homework in my room.”¹³⁸ At the time, reports of saints in *The Life* magazine is another one of the ways Catholics used media to portray their ideas.¹³⁹

Second, another significant trend was evangelical (or neo-evangelical, as some scholars call it) resurgence.¹⁴⁰ Religious figures such as Billy Graham made this religious strand appealing to the broader masses. Technocratic society and the rise of media gave the necessary foundation for the growth of evangelized Christianity, and Graham was one of the first ones who understood the power of media as a mediator between the audience and the message. He smartly used radio and television as a platform to reach even more and more audiences. Graham was able to fill arenas with people and convert sometimes even more than 1000 people in these conventions. On “Saturday Review” September 28, 1957, the interviewer recalls what Kerouac has said about Billy Graham: “Even Billy Graham,” he told me, “[...] is very hip. Hip and beat mean the same thing, you know. What’s Graham say, ‘I’m going to turn out spiritual babies.’? That’s beatness. But he doesn’t know it.”¹⁴¹ Initially, Kerouac liked the idea of “spiritual babies,” which goes well together with his ideas of spiritual revival. However, ten years later his fictional counterpart Jack Duluoz expresses his disagreement with Billy Graham’s idea on sin.¹⁴² However, evangelicalism is not only Billy Graham. Religiosity during the sixties also spoke louder about social justice. Here a good example is Martin Luther King Jr., who founded

Literature Resource Center), link.gale.com/apps/doc/H1420044492/LitRC?u=csamer&sid=bookmark-LitRC&xid=347437d6 (accessed 09.05.2022).

¹³⁶ Benjamin E. Zeller, “American Postwar “Big Religion”: Reconceptualizing Twentieth-Century American Religion Using Big Science as a Model,” *Church History* 80.2 (June 2011), 346.

¹³⁷ Jack Kerouac, *Vanity of Duluoz*, 24-25.

¹³⁸ *Ibid*, 33.

¹³⁹ “American Saint. Mother Cabrini is first citizen of U.S. to be canonized in Rome,” *LIFE* 21. 4 (July 22, 1946): 30 – 31.

¹⁴⁰ Benjamin E. Zeller, *American Postwar “Big Religion”: Reconceptualizing Twentieth-Century American Religion Using Big Science as a Model*, 321.

¹⁴¹ Paul Maher Jr., *Empty Phantoms: Interviews and Encounters with Jack Kerouac*, 37.

¹⁴² More on this see subchapter “Sin as an obstacle of faith.”

a civil rights movement with its goal of “justice and equality” for all peoples and creeds while being an ordained Baptist minister.¹⁴³

Third, the growing popularity of the new religious movements. There was a demand for more exotic, non-traditional religions. The mainstream religious traditions for the youth seemed too conformist and institutionalized. As something opposite and marginal, these religious traditions became appealing. To escape the linear history of the West that mainly has been molded by the Christian tradition, people chose quite the opposite. For example, eastern traditions see history as circular, not linear. Furthermore, many traditions do not praise history as much as Western culture. In a time of war, embracing historical values to some might seem useless.

In the American popular imagination, people recall the 60s as a time when the emergent youth culture rebelled against 50s social norms. This youth culture consisted of varied groups, many of whom had nothing to do with one another. Some groups tried to promote social justice, but not all of them.¹⁴⁴ The countercultural sensibility “was pluralistic, not oppositional; it embodied an anything goes mind-set, not an antiestablishment stance; it attracted people who sought, on the whole, to disengage from mainstream society, not to transform it.”¹⁴⁵ This pluralism helped counterculture not to associate with single culture thread, but adopt everything.¹⁴⁶ This was visible also in their religiosity as historian Richard King argues that the impulse of the counterculture was to “promiscuously create a new religion, out of nothing or out of everything,”¹⁴⁷ as Timothy Leary proclaimed¹⁴⁸ everyone should do, or they took a bit of every religious tradition that they were interested in or encountered. This explosion of ideas and mixture of creative practices resulted in a surge of such new religious movements as Terrence McKenna’s psychonauts, Urantia, Scientology, Wicca, and many more. The practices were diverse, but, for example, for the community living in the Haight-Ashbury district in San Francisco in the late 1960s, the main interest was in the “exploration of the Otherwordly.” It could happen through “exotic sounds of sitars to halogenic drugs,” but this “exploration of the Otherwordly” was “one of the counterculture’s main means to disassociate from Cold War politics and a system fueled by violence, war, and hatred. The more the mainstream grew to

¹⁴³ Nadya Zimmerman, *Counterculture Kaleidoscope: Musical and Cultural Perspectives on Late Sixties San Francisco* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2008), 8.

¹⁴⁴ Unlike the civil rights movement, for example, large portions of the “counterculture” were far from being an organized sociopolitical community: they were not oppositional in orientation, not bound by specific agendas, and not determined to bring about major changes in the system; *ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁴⁷ Richard King, *The Party of Eros: Radical Social Thought and the Realm of Freedom* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1972), 9.

¹⁴⁸ Timothy Leary, *Start Your Own Religion* (Berkeley, CA: Ronin Publishing, 2005).

fear Otherness, the more the counterculture embrace it.”¹⁴⁹ The diverse praxis of how to experience the “Otherworldly” tended towards immediate reaction or transformation. The psychedelic substances sometimes gave them the experience of immediate transformative or even religious acts. At the end of the 1960s, there were more and more strands of counterculture disintegrated within larger American culture.¹⁵⁰

This division between mainstream and counterculture lies in the notion that the former embraces rationality and the latter welcomes spirituality or even esoterism. While “technocratic society relied on rationality, scientific forms of knowledge, and technological innovation – [...] to generate an atomized society, the counterculture shrouded itself in adopted forms of spirituality from esoteric to religious traditions like Chinese astrology, Zen Buddhism and Sufism.”¹⁵¹ Counterculture wanted to disassociate from better-known forms of religiosity, so they explored non-Western religiosity, for example, within the hippie communities, the Chinese mystical book of wisdom, the *I Ching* was quite popular.¹⁵² The increasing popularity of Eastern traditions were also influenced by the growing number of immigrants in America.¹⁵³ Good example here is Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, the founder of the transcendental meditation who gained massive success in America in the celebrity circles with his ideas of the development of personal potential and tapping into the pure consciousness.¹⁵⁴

Fourth, fundamentalist backlash against all these developments. Social critic and historian Theodore Roszak defined counterculture as “a culture so radically disaffiliated from the mainstream assumptions of our society that it scarcely looks to many as a culture at all, but takes on the alarming appearance of a barbaric intrusion.”¹⁵⁵ To some people this alarming appearance resulted in a religious choice as a reaction against the counterculture. Nevertheless, it was nothing new because “fundamentalism as a backlash against a revolution in morals”

¹⁴⁹ Nadya Zimmerman, *Counterculture Kaleidoscope: Musical and Cultural Perspectives on Late Sixties San Francisco*, 11.

¹⁵⁰ Standardization which came in the 1950s threatened creativity. Combined with the idea of technology as the new god, both were potential blocks to enjoying life; William George Thiemann, *Haight-Ashbury: Birth of the counterculture of the 1960s* (1998), 114. Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

¹⁵¹ Nadya Zimmerman, *Counterculture Kaleidoscope: Musical and Cultural Perspectives on Late Sixties San Francisco*, 11.

¹⁵² William George Thiemann, *Haight-Ashbury: Birth of the counterculture of the 1960s*, 112.

¹⁵³ The surge of the new religious movements was even more visible after the lift of the immigration and nationality act in 1965; Roger Finke and Laurence R. Iannaccone, “Supply-Side Explanations for Religious Change,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 527 (May 1993): 36-39. However, the act also brought a lot of new church members to Catholicism. The immigrants from Latin America, Mexico, and other countries secured the importance of and diversified Catholicism in America.

¹⁵⁴ Kim Knott, „Transcendental Meditation,” in *Encyclopedia of New Religious Movements*, ed. Peter B. Clarke (London: Routledge, 2006), 634. He could not continue as a guru in India because he was not from the priest caste; Lola Williamson, *Transcendent in America: Hindu – Inspired Meditation, Movements as New Religion* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 81 – 87.

¹⁵⁵ Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition* (Garden City, NY: Doublday & Company, 1969), 42.

suggests a striking parallel to the 1920s.”¹⁵⁶ Most visibly, it “was during the 1970s that a backlash against the whole 1960s counterculture began to take organizational form,”¹⁵⁷ and the center of this process was the issue of abortion. Some joined fundamentalist traditions, to express their objections towards “whatever goes” countercultural sensibility. Others, through the countercultural movement, turned toward the “Native American” – “Indians” signal “spiritual and environmental purity.”¹⁵⁸ For a predominantly white counterculture, Native Americana could easily represent a distinctly nonmainstream, nonmodern ideal of original wisdom carried by other cultures.”¹⁵⁹

Fifth, the turn from the collective to personal experience of faith and religion. This also entails the interest in mystical traditions that concentrates more on the personal and inner experience of the Supreme Reality than the collective and more institutionalized forms of religiosity. Often adepts induced the mystical state by using various substances; that was also the case with the Beat Generation. However, Kerouac had visions particularly often, as Ginsberg remembers: “Kerouac was always talking about visions. He was having them every other day.”¹⁶⁰ The importance of mysticism and the personal experience of religious transformation in the Beat Generation will be further explored in the following subchapter.

Sixth, the rise of different theological strands, for example, African American, Latino, Asian, Liberal Protestant, Neo-orthodox, Congolese, feminist or womanist, Thomist, White U.S. American or European. However, the “God is dead” movement is what Kerouac also portrays in his Lowell novels. Duluoz argues that “‘God is Dead’ made everybody sick to their stomachs because they all know what I just said, and Pascal said, and Paschal means Resurrection.”¹⁶¹ Ginsberg comments on this section: “[..] paschal lamb, means resurrection. He makes a little Catholic statement there, just from an aesthetic point of view.”¹⁶² He then continues, “‘God is Dead’ made everybody sick to their stomachs” was his final comment on that as an intellectual thesis.”¹⁶³ Duluoz further compares the death of his father as a prism through which Jesus’ phrase “Father, Father, why has thou forsaken me?” gains a new meaning. For Jack Duluoz his “human father sits there in death before you almost satisfied. That’s what’s so sad and horrible about the ‘God is Dead’ movement in contemporary religion, it’s the most

¹⁵⁶ George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 240.

¹⁵⁷ Ronald M. Glassman, William H. Swatos, Jr., Barbara J. Denison, *Social Problems in Global Perspective* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2004), 108.

¹⁵⁸ Nadya Zimmerman, *Counterculture Kaleidoscope: Musical and Cultural Perspectives on Late Sixties San Francisco*, 9.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Allen Ginsberg, *The Best Minds of My Generation: A Literary History of the Beats*, 101.

¹⁶¹ Jack Kerouac, *Vanity of Duluoz*, 163.

¹⁶² Allen Ginsberg, *The Best Minds of My Generation: A Literary History of the Beats*, 83.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

tearful and forlorn philosophical idea of all time.”¹⁶⁴ The belief that God is dead has come from the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, who after the crisis of faith in the west, declared in the 19th century that God is dead and that humans have killed him. This declaration “expresses the general cultural atmosphere which finds no place for God.”¹⁶⁵ This is also the notion that was characteristic to the 1960s “Death of God” movement. Kerouac indeed did not consider that there would not be a place for God. Through diverse practices, he searched for him, and God would always have a place at the end of his road.

1.3. Beat Generation’s religiosity

Beat Generation’s “religious and spiritual attitudes” were linked to “their dissatisfaction with some trends prevalent in post-war American society.”¹⁶⁶ Opposite to Fitzgerald’s “lost generation,” which was occupied with the question of lost faith, the Beat Generation was seeking it.¹⁶⁷ Undoubtedly, the Beats participated in a “wider discussion about the role of religion in the modern world.”¹⁶⁸ Beat writers believed “that a worldview too reliant on technology, science, and reason leaves no room for religious and spiritual forms in post-war America.”¹⁶⁹ At one point, Kerouac even interpreted that Beat Generation was part of a religious movement, “the Second Religiousness that Oswald Spengler prophesied for the West.”¹⁷⁰ For some, that kind of conclusion might seem too eccentric. Book editor and writer Maurice Dolbier in *New York Herald Tribune* quite cynically commented that: “Kerouac hammers out the case with anonymous instances of strange manifestations, foreshadowings of the end of the world and the Second Coming, hipsters who have seen angels and devils, and reports quite casually that he too has heard the heavenly music while speeding along a California highway.”¹⁷¹ There have been various reactions to the Beat Generation’s religious interests and topics. If for some they seemed too farfetched, for others, Beats were an inspiration to widen their religious knowledge.

¹⁶⁴ Jack Kerouac, *Vanity of Duluoz*, 253.

¹⁶⁵ Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 5th ed. (Chichester, West Sussex, U.K.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 208.

¹⁶⁶ Loni Sophia Reynolds, *Irrational Doorways: Religion and Spirituality in the Work of the Beat Generation*, 21.

¹⁶⁷ Levi Asher, “*This Is The Beat Generation*” by John Clellon Holmes (July 24, 1994), <https://litkicks.com/thisisthebeatgeneration> (accessed 13.09.2022).

¹⁶⁸ Loni S. Reynolds, *Irrational Doorways: Religion and Spirituality in the Work of the Beat Generation*, 21.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Originally published in *New York Herald Tribune*, September 22, 1957; Paul Maher Jr., *Empty Phantoms: Interviews and Encounters with Jack Kerouac*, 36.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

Beat scholar Eric Mottram distinguishes the idea of unifying the paradoxes that the Beats inherited from their transcendentalist ancestors, such as William Blake, Walt Whitman, Henry David Thoreau, and Ralph Waldo Emerson.¹⁷² From them, Beat writers also took the interpretation that everyday life could be seen as “a holistic interconnectedness of all things [..].”¹⁷³ Beat writers refer to well-known religious concepts and offer their interpretations of these concepts. This holistic approach and unity of paradoxes illuminate Beats’ “turn towards religious and spiritual forms which celebrate the irrational.”¹⁷⁴ Transcendentalists and the Beats created “a body of literature that explores new ideas about religion, sexuality, scholarship, and even writing itself.”¹⁷⁵ The writing demands “reconsideration of conventional American values and practices.”¹⁷⁶ The results manifest “in the contemporaneous social critiques and – particularly with the Beat Generation – countercultural movements, which denounce the established social and political orders while calling for a more “authentic” approach to society and the self.”¹⁷⁷

The Beats created their own “ordinary theologies,” which they integrated into a broader spectrum of their insights about the meaning of their lives and creation. The Beats reflected on their experiences and religiously acknowledged the texts they read, similar to what theologians have done throughout the centuries. Nevertheless, the Beat writers took “part in several larger-scale post-war religious and spiritual trends.”¹⁷⁸ The author will explore four of them: pluralism, turn towards the East, the influence of the traditional religious forms, and mysticism.

First, the pluralism of the counterculture. To describe it more broadly and vividly, the Beat Generation’s writers changed their religious views almost as often as they changed their socks. They were influenced by and interested in different religious traditions and belief systems, taking from each of them the things they liked the most. A “hybridity characteristic”¹⁷⁹ will be essential for the postwar counterculture. Beat writers made eclectic religious combinations themselves. William Burroughs came from a wealthy Protestant family, yet he was interested in Mayan mythology, Scientology, and Islam. Gary Snyder, for example, turned

¹⁷² Introduction by Eric Mottram in Jack Kerouac, *The Scripture of the Golden Eternity*, 10.

¹⁷³ Ilze Stikāne, “Recreation of the Spiritual Experience Gained Through the Act of Listening to Music in the Beat Generation’s Poetry During the 1950s,” *Ceļš* 67 (2017): 203 – 204.

¹⁷⁴ Loni S. Reynolds, *Irrational Doorways: Religion and Spirituality in the Work of the Beat Generation*, 23.

¹⁷⁵ Caitlin Cater, “In Search of America: Nature, Spirituality, and the Self in American Transcendentalism and Beat Generation Literature,” *The Oswald Review: An International Journal of Undergraduate Research and Criticism in the Discipline of English* 10.1 (article 4): 19.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Loni Sophia Reynolds, *Irrational Doorways: Religion and Spirituality in the Work of the Beat Generation*, 23.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

to Buddhism, spending 12 years in a monastery in Japan translating haikus.¹⁸⁰ Philip Lamantia, a descendant of immigrants from Sicily, was taken with Islam ideas at the beginning of the 1950s.¹⁸¹ At the end of the 1950s, Lamantia converted again to Catholicism after surviving a scorpion's bite in Mexico.¹⁸² For some Beats creating legends about one's hybrid religious and ethnic past was a necessary part of constructing their identity. Poet Bob Kaufman's: "Legend (perpetuated by Kaufman himself) states that his mother was a black Catholic from Martinique who practiced Voodoo while his father was a German Orthodox Jew."¹⁸³

The writers of The Beat Generation studied different religious texts, as Ginsberg writes in "Howl." They "studied Plotinus Poe St. John of the Cross telepathy and bop kaballah because the cosmos instinctively vibrated at their feet in Kansas."¹⁸⁴ Ginsberg explains in an annotation to "Howl" that the "overt intention of this mystical name-dropping was to connect younger readers, Whitman's children already familiar with Poe and Bop, to older Gnostic tradition."¹⁸⁵ In this section, the author will explore most of the strands that Ginsberg lists.

Allen Ginsberg was born in a Jewish family, and he also used the practices and notions of this tradition in his writing, more visible in his earlier poems. The most vivid example of this is Ginsberg's poem *Kaddish*.¹⁸⁶ Although Ginsberg and other writers might have been seen as in opposition to traditional religion, which seemed institutionalized, Ginsberg feels that his mother should have received this final prayer. Often that kind of disappointment comes from unknowing and not having a real insight into the particular religious tradition and its praxis.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁰ When he returned, he immersed himself in the ecological prism, also touching some threads of eco-theology that became more popular in the second half of the 20th century.

¹⁸¹ Ginsberg's poem's "Howl" line "who bared their brains to Heaven under the El and saw Mohammedan angels staggering on tenement roofs illuminated" portrays a vision where after extensive reading of Quoran Lamantia reached another state of consciousness where he was traveling through the endless universe. There he saw a bearded face that told him that he could return to this place only when he finished his work; Allen Ginsberg, *Howl: Original Draft Facsimile, Transcript, and Variant Versions, Fully Annotated by Author, With Contemporaneous Correspondence, Account of First Public Reading, Legal Skirmishes, Precursor Texts, and Bibliography*, ed. Barry Miles (New York: HarperPerennial Modern Classics, 2006), 124.

¹⁸² Garret Caples, ed., *Tau by Philip Lamantia and Journey to the End by John Hoffman* (San Francisco: City Lights, 2008), 2.

¹⁸³ Brian Flota, *A Survey of Multicultural San Francisco Bay Literature, 1955 – 1979: Ishmael Reed, Maxine Hong Kingston, Frank Chin, and the Beat Generation* (Lewiston, N. Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 2009): 75.

¹⁸⁴ Allen Ginsberg, *Howl and Other Poems* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1956), 12.

¹⁸⁵ Allen Ginsberg, *Howl: Original Draft Facsimile*, 126.

¹⁸⁶ If the synagogue did not provide Ginsberg's mother with Kaddish, Ginsberg himself wrote one for her in the form of a poem. Unfortunately, ten men (*minyan*) at the funeral were necessary for the Jewish tradition so that the prayer for the dead, the Kaddish prayer, could be recited. Allen Ginsberg, *Selected Poems 1947 – 1995* (London: Penguin Books, 1996), 93 – 111.

¹⁸⁷ From the letters, it seems Ginsberg was somehow disappointed in the synagogue. Ginsberg had high expectations from a synagogue that neither he nor his parents visited. The only one who was religious in their family was his grandmother. He is hurt that the Kaddish was not ministered; however, in reality, it would not be the task for the synagogue, especially if they do not consider burial a ritual for not active members of the community. Kaddish and minyan are part of the tradition that they did not practice.

Not long after his mother's death, Ginsberg became increasingly interested in Buddhist religious tradition, to which he converted in 1972.¹⁸⁸

“Telepathy” most likely refers to the clairvoyant Edgar Cayce that Neal Cassady was interested in. Jack Kerouac also mentions Cayce in his Lowell novels: “After awhile Pa’s up and grumbling in the kitchen over his breakfast, with puffed disinterested eyes, not, as Edgar Cayce explicitly reminds us, ‘mindful of the present vision before our eyes.’”¹⁸⁹ At one point the grown-up narrator Jack Duluoz compares Gerard with Edgar Cayce whom he refers to as the “great American Saint”: “Like a Roman Soldier left to die on a deserted battlefield and howling for mercy for three days running, without food or water, and finally dying, which is a remembrance of the great American Saint Edgar Cayce (according to him in an earlier transmigration) Gerard a petalish thing of 9 [..].”¹⁹⁰ Kerouac might have been interested in Cayce because Neal and his wife were sure about his insights and future predictions. Referring to him as “American Saint” resembles Kerouac’s tendency to portray Neal Cassady as a “new kind of American Saint.”¹⁹¹ The interest in a clairvoyant indeed illustrates the hybrid sensibility of the counterculture.

Ginsberg, in his annotation, also mentions the idea of connecting their readers with an older Gnostic tradition. Although Gnosticism was not a new religious movement, it is one that also Kerouac explored. In an interview in *San Francisco Examiner* on October 5, 1958, Kerouac answers the question about the chief difference between the lost generation and the Beat Generation:

The Lost Generation, from what I can tell from the books, was based on an ironic romantic negation. “Beat” generation is sweating for affirmation, and yet there is an irony, almost a cynicism, involved, a kind of lip-service about the “greatness” of life. And, of course, Romanticism is dead: In its place, the search for Gnosticism, absolute belief in a Divinity of Rapture. I believe God is Ecstasy in His Natural Immanence.¹⁹²

Beat scholar Barry Miles gives better insight into the extent of this knowledge of Gnosticism and what that might entail for Kerouac: “[..] presumably Jack read the *Pistis Sophia*,”¹⁹³ because there were not as many Gnostic texts yet available at the time. *Pistis Sophia* was an essential Coptic manuscript that probably dates back to the second century. The text “presents

¹⁸⁸ Tony Trilgio, *Allen Ginsberg’s Buddhist Poetics* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2007), xii.

¹⁸⁹ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard* (UK: Penguin Books, 2020), 56.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 54.

¹⁹¹ Jack Kerouac, *On the Road* (New York: Penguin books, 1991), 38. To define more broadly, a saint serves as an example how to live and how to act for a certain community. Dean, for the Beat Generation community, becomes an example, a saint, whose lead to follow – his tremendous new energy being one of the attributes that makes his “sainthood” as an example for others alike.

¹⁹² Paul Maher Jr., *Empty Phantoms: Interviews and Encounters with Jack Kerouac*, 57.

¹⁹³ Barry Miles, *Jack Kerouac, King of the Beats: A Portrait* (UK: Virgin Books, 1998), 39.

complex gnostic teachings in ‘gospel’ format, as having been addressed by Jesus Christ to his disciples after the resurrection.”¹⁹⁴ Barry Miles continues that Kerouac “probably found some of the heretical practices interesting, too, such as the Phibionites’ idea that grinding down evil and sin required at least 365 successive sexual unions with 365 different women.”¹⁹⁵ Another reference might be visible from Marcion, who concluded that there must be two gods: one, a low God, the creator, whose book is the Old Testament and whose law is the Jewish law of retaliation, and a higher God, who is absolutely good, and who was unknown to us until he revealed himself to men in Christ.¹⁹⁶ Jack Duluoz argues that

It is, face it, a mean heartless creation emanated by a God of Wrath, Jehovah, Yaweh, No-Name, who will pat you kindly on the head and say ‘Now you’re being good’ when you pray, but when you’re begging for mercy anyway say like a soldier hung by one leg from a tree trunk in today’s Vietnam, when Yaweh’s really got you out in the back of the barn even in ordinary torture of fatal illness like my Pa’s then, he wont listen, he will whack away at your lil behind with the long stick of what they called ‘Original Sin’ in the Theological dogmatic sects but what I call ‘Original Sacrifice.’”¹⁹⁷

Although there are similarities visible with Marcion’s ideas, it is hard to tell how consciously Kerouac made this reference and how much he knew about Marcion as such. Nancy M. Grace argues that Kerouac was guided “spiritually by a form of Gnosticism.”¹⁹⁸ However as she states, it is not meant the historical Gnosticism of the first centuries but gnostic characteristics that is visible in Kerouac’s writings and ideas.¹⁹⁹

Second, the turn to the East. Kerouac and others were most significantly influenced by Eastern religious traditions, in Kerouac’s case Buddhism. Readers mainly consider Kerouac a Buddhist, and in the 50s and 60s, he indeed was one of the promoters of Buddhism in America: “The emergence of the Beat Generation coincided with a new interest in Zen Buddhism, partly brought about by some of the Beats themselves.”²⁰⁰ Carolyn Cassady argues that in her view, “he responded to everything emotionally [...]. That’s why he went into Buddhism, I am sure it was, that lovely imagery and so forth, whereas Neal and I are more of a logical and analytical mind, and you have got to show us, you know, and prove it [...].”²⁰¹ Increasingly more researchers analyze the syncretic aspect of Kerouac’s religiosity – that of Catholicism and

¹⁹⁴ G.R.S. Mead, *Pistis Sophia: A Gnostic Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), n.p.

¹⁹⁵ Barry Miles, *Jack Kerouac, King of the Beats: A Portrait* (UK: Virgin Books, 1998), 39.

¹⁹⁶ Kurt Aland, *Saints and Sinners: Men and Ideas in the Early Church*, trans. Wilhelm C. Linss (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), 58.

¹⁹⁷ Jack Kerouac, *Vanity of Duluoz*, 253.

¹⁹⁸ Timothy D. Ray, *Syncretic Visions of Buddha: Melding and Convergence in the Work of Kerouac and Ginsberg*, 190.

¹⁹⁹ Nancy M. Grace, *Jack Kerouac and the Literary Imagination* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 17 – 26.

²⁰⁰ Jaap van der Bent, “Beats on the Table: Beat Writing in the Chicago Review and Big Table,” *TS* ● > 31 (June 2012): 12.

²⁰¹ Paul Maher Jr., *Empty Phantoms: Interviews and Encounters with Jack Kerouac*, 16.

Buddhism: “The spiritual search in Kerouac’s writing was an attempt to resolve his dualistic theology of Catholicism, the religion he was raised in, and his countercultural leanings toward whatever else was out there, which increasingly focused on his intensive study of Buddhism.”²⁰² However, these religions are different and there is “a contrast here, ethically and philosophically, between non-theistic Buddhist space-awareness or awareness practice, and theistic Catholicism’s contemplation of or fixation on the Cross of suffering.”²⁰³ Nancy M. Grace is another researcher that have illustrated this hybrid aspect of Kerouac’s religious views portraying his philosophy a “Buddhist Christianity.”²⁰⁴ Timothy D. Ray argues that “such a term reinforces the notion that Kerouac was continually trying to meld competing ideas in his mind and through his writing, rather than offering an authentic vision of “the Eastern.””²⁰⁵ Veronique Lane, though, disputes that Kerouac’s

syncretism consists less in a mixture of two religions (Christianity and Buddhism) than of two diametrically opposed philosophical stances (Dostoevsky’s romantic spirituality and Céline’s postwar nihilism), a most curious combination that explains both the richness and the pitfalls of the plot and characters of *On the Road*.²⁰⁶

Kerouac was not only a Buddhist teacher for Ginsberg, but he also inspired many of his readers to study it, for example, David Bowie, who, in an interview with Burroughs, says: “I was studying Tibetan Buddhism when I was quite young, again influenced by Kerouac.”²⁰⁷

Third, Western religious traditions and their influences. The Beats could not leave the religious traditions they adhered to when they were younger or their parents’ traditions. Some of the notions they took consciously, and others worked quite unintentionally. It is possible to take Jack Kerouac out of Catholicism, but not Catholicism out of Kerouac. That is especially visible in their usage of religious terminology and notions in their texts, which “are packed with imagery and language that is clearly religious and spiritual.”²⁰⁸ Biblical literary genres and texts also influenced their usage of religious terminology. In their writings, the Beats freely used such terms as angels, God, Christ, Jesus, eternity, Bible, and others. On the one hand, the liberal use of religious vocabulary would suggest that these terms are only a part of the language that

²⁰² Timothy D. Ray, *Syncretic Visions of Buddha: Melding and Convergence in the Work of Kerouac and Ginsberg*, 190.

²⁰³ Allen Ginsberg, “Negative Capability: Kerouac’s Buddhist Ethic,” *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review* (Fall, 1992), <https://tricycle.org/magazine/negative-capability-kerouacs-buddhist-ethic> (accessed 24.08.2022).

²⁰⁴ Nancy M. Grace, *Jack Kerouac and the Literary Imagination*, 154 – 159.

²⁰⁵ Timothy D. Ray, *Syncretic Visions of Buddha: Melding and Convergence in the Work of Kerouac and Ginsberg*, 190.

²⁰⁶ Véronique Lane, *The French Genealogy of the Beat Generation: Burroughs, Ginsberg and Kerouac’s Appropriations of Modern Literature, from Rimbaud to Michaux*, 66.

²⁰⁷ Sylvère Lotringer, ed., *Burroughs Live: The Collected Interviews of William S. Burroughs 1960-1997* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2001), 236. On Kerouac’s Buddhist influence on Ginsberg, see Tony Trigilio, *Allen Ginsberg’s Buddhist Poetics*, xii.

²⁰⁸ Loni Sophia Reynolds, *Irrational Doorways: Religion and Spirituality in the Work of the Beat Generation*, 4.

is a construction. In this case, the Beats, through their usage of religious terms, show their rebellious stance against institutions' monopoly over them, portraying that as a language construction, they can be used to portray a variety of things not necessarily associated with religion. On the other hand, the usage of religious terms would also suggest that the Beats cannot escape the cultural environment they grew up in. America is mostly Christian America – “under one God.”²⁰⁹ Western Christian culture and language have molded the Beat Generation writers. Moreover, in this case, religious and specifically Christian terms seem to be extra important. They have been used to affirm the importance of the context, event, or person they are referring to. The Beats use Christian terms for this because they know them. For example, to call someone an angel instead of a friend seems to connote a deeper connection between the two people. Using Christian terms to attach extra importance to the things written would suggest that the Beats also affirmed the importance of institutionalized terms of Christian religion even though they sometimes rebelled against them.²¹⁰

Kerouac and Ginsberg also use the imagery of apocalypse in their literature – Allen Ginsberg's “Howl” and Kerouac's “Dr. Sax” are good examples here. Taking inspiration from its literary genres, for example, Allen Ginsberg wrote his version of the “book of psalms,” including such poems as “Magical psalm,” “Hymmmn,” “Psalm,” “Psalm II,” “Psalm III,” and “Psalm IV.”²¹¹ Ginsberg read the poem's “Howl” long verse as the verses of the Old Testament in one breath. Similarly, Kerouac delved into psalmic literature, creating his psalms published in his journals. When referring to Bible texts, one of the most extensive quotes is from Psalm 22. In “Vanity of Duluoz,” Kerouac quotes quite a section of Psalm 22, focusing on the well-known expression “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?” This passage is one of the rare times when Kerouac provides his readers with some conscious²¹² theological reflection,

²⁰⁹ For further reading, see also Kevin M. Kruse, *One Nation Under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America* (United Kingdom: Hachette UK, 2015).

²¹⁰ It is no surprise that the Beat Generation's scholars also use Christian terms while describing Beat writers and their ideas. Librarian Brian Flota writes that Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, and William S. Burroughs are Beat Generation's “holy trinity”; Brian Flota, *A Survey of Multicultural San Francisco Bay Literature, 1955 – 1979: Ishmael Reed, Maxine Hong Kingston, Frank Chin, and the Beat Generation*, 75. Michelle Martin offers to use the expression “Burroughs iconicity”; Michelle Martin, *The Burden of Legend: Beat Studies in the Twenty-First Century*, 170. For example, the Beat scholar Kurt Hemmer writes that Kerouac's *On the Road* is “the Bible of the Beat Generation”; Kurt Hemmer, “Political Outlaws: Beat Cowboys,” *American Studies Journal* 50 (2007), <http://www.asjournal.org/50-2007/political-outlaws-beat-cowboys/> (accessed 13.09.2022). Also termed as “the Beat Bible itself” in Karen E. H. Skinazi, “Expanding Jack Kerouac's “America”: Canadian Revisions of “On the Road,”” *American Studies* 51.3/4 (Fall/Winter 2010): 49.

²¹¹ Allen Ginsberg, *Selected Poems 1947 – 1995*, 109 – 114; Paul Portugés, “Allen Ginsberg's Visions and the Growth of His Poetics of Prophecy,” in *Poetic Prophecy in Western Literature*, ed. Jan Wojcik, and Raymond-Jean Frontain (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1984), 164 – 166; and Bill Morgan, *The Works of Allen Ginsberg, 1941 – 1994: A Descriptive Bibliography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995), 60.

²¹² However, throughout this time, Kerouac drank heavily. As John Clellon Holmes remembers, he drank a quart of brandy a day, roughly a liter of heavy liquor; Barry Gifford and Lawrence Lee, *Jack's Book: An Oral Biography of Jack Kerouac*, 263 – 264.

explaining what Jesus meant by saying this. The author of Revelation of John “records that all will gather around the throne of heaven where the four living creatures will recall the words of Isaiah 6:3 and say, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty” (4:8).”²¹³ John’s Apocalypse recalls this holiness, as does Ginsberg’s footnote to *Howl*. For Ginsberg, everything is holy: “Holy the groaning saxophone! Holy the bop apocalypse!”²¹⁴ The Beats, through usage of various imagery and also religious experience, took “part in a broader Western trend toward subjectivity within organized religious forms.”²¹⁵ The “individual expression, impulse, emotion, and subjectivity sets the context for the Beats’ own subjective turn.”²¹⁶ Reynolds underlines that “particularly through returning to and restructuring traditional religious belief, bringing out those aspects latent within them that celebrate the individual, subjectivity, bodily experience, chaos, and fragmentation – they take part in an established tradition American religious protest.”²¹⁷ This leads to the next aspect of the Beat Generation’s religiosity, mysticism.

Fourth, mysticism. The Beat Generation was against the 1950s conformity, and they regarded America as an oppressor, vividly portrayed as the ancient Near East deity Moloch in Allen Ginsberg’s poem “*Howl*.”²¹⁸ The “standardization, which came with 1950s America, threatened creativity,”²¹⁹ something that the Beat Generation writers speak of already in the 1950s. Starting from that decade, “technology put forward a new god.”²²⁰ Ginsberg did not consider that system should be destroyed. He tried to find a way to transcend the system: “Moloch who frightened me out of my natural ecstasy! Moloch whom I abandon! Wake up in Moloch!”²²¹ But transcendence is not something one can buy in a store. Here is possible to speak of Beat Generation’s interest in mysticism.

Mysticism has been marginal in diverse religious traditions throughout the centuries. It never was the mainstream thread of any religious tradition, and mystics sometimes even were victims of their authorities. Mystics sometimes were considered “heretics” because, for

²¹³ Lyndel Vaught, “Worship Models and Music in Spiritual Formation,” *Journal of Religion, Spirituality & Aging* 22 (2010): 116.

²¹⁴ Allen Ginsberg, *Howl and Other poems*, 27.

²¹⁵ Loni Sophia Reynolds, *Irrational Doorways: Religion and Spirituality in the Work of the Beat Generation*, 24. “In the Beats’ America, the subjective turn within organised religion is not only evident in the post-war era; it has a long history, reaching back to the country’s founding principles. Although it is true that the Beats protested against many major American wartime and post-war ideas and institutions, they can be seen to take part in other, longer-standing religious and spiritual traditions”; *ibid.*, 27.

²¹⁶ Loni Sophia Reynolds, *Irrational Doorways: Religion and Spirituality in the Work of the Beat Generation*, 30 – 31.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 31.

²¹⁸ Allen Ginsberg, *Howl and Other Poems*, 21-23.

²¹⁹ William George Thiemann, *Haight-Ashbury: Birth of the counterculture of the 1960s*, 114.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*

²²¹ Allen Ginsberg, *Howl and Other Poems*, 22.

example, their ideas became too holistic.²²² It is easier to see different patterns and blurred lines between such patterns as – one God, unification with God, being One with the whole universe, being one with every creature, being one with God himself or monism, monotheism, panentheism, or others.²²³ The fact that mysticism was not widespread phenomenon made it fascinating for the countercultural-minded. The mysticism also might seem like an aspect of religion most prone to combining pluralistic ideas.

One of the characteristics of mysticism is the concept of unification with the higher reality – that might be God, Universe, Supreme Being, “transcendent All,”²²⁴ or any other interpretation of this higher reality. This kind of unification entails the loss of “self.” Through mystical experiences that, for some, come in the form of visions, one unites with a higher reality, gains new knowledge and a deeper understanding of all there is, and then returns to everyday life. Often adherents describe this return as an almost traumatic experience. The state of unity has been incredible, but when one returns, they are devastated because the unity with the higher reality has been lost. One can use diverse praxis and techniques to reach a state of unity. For some traditions, it is extensive meditation and asceticism. For others, the state of unity might be induced by using enhancing substances.

The Beat Generation writers experienced mystical visions by experimenting with different halogenic drugs. For example, “Howl,” was partly written under the influence of *peyote cactus*. According to Beat legend, writer Dan Napelee emphasizes, “Jack Kerouac produced the first fermented draft of his semi-autobiographical *On the Road* (1957) during a three-week Benzedrine-induced period.”²²⁵ In the 50s, Aldous Huxley’s book *The Doors of Perception*²²⁶ gained popularity, where he describes his experience while under the influence

²²² For example, Meister Eckhart saw the importance of the mystical prayer that it helped one to get rid of “God” by returning to a “primordial state, the one it had before creation existed, when there was nothing in relation to which God could be called ‘God.’” Here, God was more emphasized than Trinity, and Eckhart accentuates eternity and the unity of creation. The idea that the soul had something uncreated because it can reach the primordial state was “considered one of his most dangerous beliefs”; Louise Nelstrop, Kevin Magill and Bradley B. Onishi, *Christian Mysticism: An Introduction to Contemporary Theoretical Approaches* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2009), 208.

²²³ Paul Oliver, *Mysticism: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Continuum, 2008), 7 – 18.

²²⁴ Nancy M. Grace, *Jack Kerouac and the Literary Imagination*, 62.

²²⁵ Dan Napelee, *On the Road: The Original Scroll; Or, We’re Not Queer, We’re Just Beats*, 72.

²²⁶ On 20th May 1959, Ginsberg writes to his father: “I went down to Stanford University the other day to be subjected to a research experiment with a new drug – LSD-25 (Lysergic Acid), which Huxley described in his books *Doors of Perception* and *Heaven and Hell*. “It was astounding – I lay back, listening to music, and went into a sort of trance state (somewhat similar to the high state of laughing has) and in a fantasy much like a Coleridge world of Kubla Khan saw a vision of that part of my consciousness which seemed to be permanent and transcendent and identical with the origin of the universe – a sort of identity common to everything – but a clear and coherent sight of it. Rather beautiful visual images also, of Hindu-type gods dancing on themselves. This drug seems to automatically produce a mystical experience”; Allen Ginsberg, *The Letters of Allen Ginsberg*, ed. Bill Morgan (Da Capo Press, 2008), 223. Here it is possible to see Ginsberg’s interpretation and reflection on his mystical experience. Furthermore, there is more than one mainly affirmed aspect of mystical experience, such as vision, state of trance, feeling identical, or unity with the universe’s origin. In this case, psychedelic drugs amplify the

of mescaline, which is the primary hallucinogenic substance of the peyote cactus.²²⁷ That sort of research would be unimaginable to be conducted nowadays. However, such contemplations as Huxley offers are excellent sources for researchers. Huxley mainly affirms a holistic experience of unity with the entire world. Also, during this process, he gained new knowledge about how the world came to be and how it functions.²²⁸ Similarly to mescaline, “giving up the “ego” seems to be one of central things to the LSD experience.”²²⁹ The sense of losing one’s ego could open a way to a person’s interest in the mystical tradition, taking into account that, most often, one of the characteristics of mysticism is unification with the higher being, which implies the loss of one’s ego. Also, this aspect of psychedelic drugs made attractive Eastern religious traditions that are not as individualistic in their outset as Western ones, for example, Buddhism. In some Buddhism traditions, “ego” or “No-self” is considered something to thrive for.²³⁰ However, it is a paradox that one searches within oneself to lose oneself.

As part of a more extensive and manifold counterculture movement, the Beats mostly did not trust institutions and religious authorities, and they were more comfortable with individual experience.²³¹ The mystical experiences are mostly inward personal experiences of the believers. This pull toward mysticism shows that they distanced themselves from collective forms of religion to the more personal experience of religion and the world around them. The Beats did identify themselves with mysticism: “The Beat Generation loves everything, man. We go around digging everything. Everything means something: Everything’s a symbol. We’re mystics. No question about it. Mystics.”²³² Religious researcher Stephen Prothero describes them as “wandering monks and mystical seers”²³³ who traveled from New York to San Francisco, Mexico and Tangier. Kerouac even affirms that mysticism is their religion: “The beat generation has no interest in politics, only mysticism, that’s their religion. It’s kids standing

spiritual experience, even to the point where Ginsberg sees visions of dancing Hindu gods. Not only the theoretical aspect of this experience evokes reflection of the mystical nature of the experience, but also the meaning-making part. Ginsberg has gained new knowledge about the origin of the universe. The text also shows even further the reflection of the Beats. Here, Ginsberg shows his interpretation of his mystical experience.

²²⁷ M. Foster Olive, *Peyote and Mescaline* (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2007), 19.

²²⁸ Aldous Huxley, *The Doors of Perception and Heaven and Hell* (London: Vintage books, 2004).

²²⁹ William George Thiemann, *Haight-Ashbury: Birth of the counterculture of the 1960s*, 95.

²³⁰ In the Mahayana tradition, the doctrine of “emptiness” explains the notion of “No-Self.” Many Mahayana practitioners see all things as “empty” of identity. They do not seek Nirvana simply as a goal at the end of a long process of discipline – they can experience it in the emptiness of the present moment; Malcolm David Eckel, *Buddhism* (New York: Rosen Publishing, 2010), 61.

²³¹ Raluca-Nicoleta Rogoveanu, “Allen Ginsberg and the Theology of Eclectic Mysticism,” *Annals of Ovidius University Constanta – Philology* 22.2 (2011): 99.

²³² Interview on *Saturday Review*, September 1957; Paul Maher Jr., *Empty Phantoms: Interviews and Encounters with Jack Kerouac*, 39.

²³³ Stephen Prothero, “On the Holy Road: The Beat Movement as Spiritual Protest,” *The Harvard Theological Review* 84.2 (April 1991): 220.

on the street and talking about the end of the world.”²³⁴ This is quite a logical result then because mysticism was the form of religion that encapsulated all of the abovementioned features – mysticism can be pluralistic. It can easily encompass Eastern religions, especially with their ideas of the annihilation of “ego,” and it can indeed be compatible with traditional Western religions and their imagery. Beats did write extensively about their visions and mentioned them in their writings. Not all of those can be considered authentic explorations of mystical visions. Kerouac would speak of visions more broadly, but Ginsberg would offer descriptive explanations of the visions seen using various substances. In an interview with Mike Wallace published on January 21, 1958, Kerouac says that Beat is hip to life and religion. When asked what kind of religion, Kerouac says, “it’s weird. Visions. Visions of God.”²³⁵ Wallace then asks whether Kerouac considers Beat people to be mystics. Kerouac affirms that it is true, “It’s a revival prophesized by Spengler. He said that in the late moments of Western civilization there would be a great revival of religious mysticism. It’s happening.”²³⁶ Kerouac does not explain here what is meant by these visions, but Ginsberg does remember that

Kerouac was always talking about visions. He was having them every other day. By vision he meant a perception [whereby for example he] suddenly sees his family moving around him, or he comes into the city and sees all of us cramped in our apartment conspiring, so he has a vision of us as a bunch of Dostoyevskian creeps conspiring.²³⁷

It is hardly a description of particular visions that Kerouac experienced by using substances. Ginsberg’s description even seems compatible with hallucinations characteristic of psychological diagnosis. However, Kerouac considered them part of his life and crucial to the Beat Generation’s mysticism. Kerouac’s Beat mystics “believe in love [..], they love everything.”²³⁸ Loni Reynolds argues that the turn to the subjective experience of religion can also happen within traditional religious forms.²³⁹ In her opinion, “they bring this subjective quality of their respective faiths to the surface, and see within such subjectivity a strong potential for redemption: not only for themselves, but for America as a whole.”²⁴⁰

²³⁴ Interview on *Saturday Review*, September 28, 1957; Paul Maher Jr., *Empty Phantoms: Interviews and Encounters with Jack Kerouac*, 37.

²³⁵ Paul Maher Jr., *Empty Phantoms: Interviews and Encounters with Jack Kerouac*, 49.

²³⁶ *Ibid.* Spengler’s revival of religious beliefs will flourish in a technological society. Rationalism then will be exchanged for mysticism; Lawrence J. Telizzese, *Hope in the Thought of Jacques Ellul* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2005), 115.

²³⁷ Allen Ginsberg, *The Best Minds of My Generation: A Literary History of the Beats*, 101.

²³⁸ Paul Maher Jr., *Empty Phantoms: Interviews and Encounters with Jack Kerouac*, 49. During a mystical experience, Ginsberg even unites with a reality whose substance is love. More on this Ilze Stikāne, “Mysticism of the Beat Generation: Allen Ginsberg’s “Howl,” *Ceļš* 65 (2015): 209 – 213.

²³⁹ Loni Sophia Reynolds, *Irrational Doorways: Religion and Spirituality in the Work of the Beat Generation*, 13-24.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 21.

Beat Generation was born when the United States experienced a religious revival, a notion that the Beats considered vital for themselves. One of the main differences between the Beats and the lost generation was that they were looking for faith. The religious revival in America happened not only in traditional and already known religious traditions but also saw the birth of many new traditions. New religious movements allowed choosing something out of the specter of American conformity. Sometimes it reached the level: the more opposed and different from Western religious traditions, the better. Eastern religious traditions became widespread in the postwar years, and the Beat Generation also influenced the scope of their popularity. Other religious traditions also offered personal ways to experience belief rather than the collective, which was also a synonym for Western institutionalized religious traditions. The Beat Generation then turned toward mysticism as a personal way to experience something out of the mundane world. The mysticism's marginal nature within diverse religious traditions and its emphasis on personal experience allowed the Beats to put all their religious interests under the roof of mysticism. It became pluralistic since the Beats were interested in Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Scientology, the Mayan religion, and others. Mysticism also allowed them to keep the aspects of their childhood religions that they liked and combine them with other concepts. The notions of these mystical traditions came from Beat Generation's "visions," some seen after taking substances that might induce hallucinations, some more broadly interpreted as vivid ideas that, for example, Kerouac saw before his eyes. Mysticism as a sponge also easily absorbed the ideas that the Beats read in different authors, for example, Oswald Spengler and his notion of religious revival. It is impossible to speak of a systematic mysticism of the Beat Generation. However, the characteristics mentioned above are a conjunctive aspect.

Beat writers portrayed their religious explorations and insights in their writings. Loni Sophia Reynolds emphasizes that "Beat literature and Beat religion are [...] inseparable: the Beat authors' beliefs are expressed through their literary forms and their view of writing itself."²⁴¹ However, when analyzing Kerouac's texts, it is essential to keep in mind the pluralistic and mystical aspects of his worldviews. It is hard to find Kerouac's writings that concentrate only on one religious' tradition. However, the chosen Lowell novels mainly portray Christian tradition, particularly Roman Catholicism. As Reynolds argues, "a narrow focus is the best way to investigate Beat religion and spirituality, as it allows for the necessary precision to explore such a complex phenomenon as religion and allows space for a close reading [...]"²⁴² To better

²⁴¹ Loni Sophia Reynolds, *Irrational Doorways: Religion and Spirituality in the Work of the Beat Generation*, 5.

²⁴² *Ibid.*

understand Kerouac's Catholic influences, the next chapter will focus on Catholicism in America and its characteristics in the Franco-American communities.

2. FRANCO-AMERICANS AND THE CATHOLICISM OF THE KEROUACS

Catholic church is a weird church; much mysticism is sown broadspread from its ritual mysteries till it extends into the very lives of its constituents and parishioners.²⁴³

This chapter will look closely at Catholicism in America and particularly in the Franco-American community in New England. The understanding of the Catholicism that Kerouac encounters will give better insight into his interpretation of Catholicism, which is integral to analyzing systematic theology's categories in Kerouac's Lowell novels.

2.1. Catholicism in America

In his book "The Survival of American Innocence," William Halsey describes that Catholicism in the 20th century continued the qualities of 19th Century American innocence which he lists as enthusiasm, cheerfulness, moralism, idealism, and optimism. These then persisted in the Catholic community up until the mid-1960s.²⁴⁴ Apologist J. M. Cameron emphasizes the thoroughly American nature of the Catholicism in the United States at the time of writing in 1963.²⁴⁵ The American Catholic Church, due to the distance from Rome, was somewhat more independent, and the utterances of Europe and even of the Pope were "curiously muffled" by the time they reach the United States.²⁴⁶ Of course, this might be true in 1963. However, when the Second Vatican Council (it took place from 1962 to 1965) ended amidst the Cold War era, American participants experienced "on both experiential and structural level the transition to a world Church."²⁴⁷ American Catholics in the Council spoke of the necessity to develop a better strategy for communication. Moreover, most American participants in the Second Vatican Council believed this true.²⁴⁸ Many participants from America in the Council America were unhappy about the communication thus far. American Catholic parishes felt the need to be more immersed within the European and global Catholic Church and more linked to Rome. Furthermore, during the process of the Second Vatican

²⁴³ Jack Kerouac's letter to Neal Cassady, January 3rd, 1951; Jack Kerouac, *Selected Letters: 1940 – 1956*, ed. Ann Charters (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 270.

²⁴⁴ John A. Coleman, "The Fall from Innocence: Contemporary American Catholicism," *Revue française d'études américaines* 12 (October 81): 187.

²⁴⁵ J. M. Cameron, "Catholicism in America," *Blackfriars* 44.511 (January 1963): 6.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁷ Joseph P. Chinnici, "The Cold War, the Council, and American Catholicism in a Global World," *US Catholic Historian* 30.2 (Spring 2012): 8.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*: 8 – 9.

Council Catholic Church of America acknowledged itself more and more in the broader context of the global church. The sessions, formal and informal meetings between the bishops, and the format of the discussions made all this possible.²⁴⁹

Noteworthy, when researchers speak of Kerouac's Catholicism, it must be remembered that it is primarily a pre-Second Vatican Council Catholic Church. It is essential to look at the Catholicism that Kerouac saw and practiced to understand his views on Catholic concepts and ideas in his literary works. Lurie argues that this was the majestic and fearsome Catholicism that "now exists purely in the realm of imagination for most modern practitioners: the Catholicism of the Latin mass, of all-powerful priests, of God as the unknowable, awe-inspiring other."²⁵⁰ Here are listed some of the most significant changes in the Church before and after the Second Vatican Council. First, the language of liturgy changed from Latin to the language of the parish. The Latin mass, as such, makes the adherent more set outside of the process of liturgy, emphasizing the humbleness of a parishioner. The Mass became more accessible and understandable for the parishioner after the council. However, the aspect lost was the universal unity of the Catholic Church that Latin Mass also ensured – the Mass was the same either in Lowell, Hong Kong, France, or Latvia. Even in Latin Mass, the sermon usually was delivered in the language of the parish, and the believers could confess their sins in their native language. It was indeed also in the interest of the Church for the believers to confess; henceforth, a viable language option was ensured.

After the Second Vatican Council, there was a shift in the liturgical position of the clergy. In the traditional mass, the priests celebrated the Mass with their backs turned towards the parishioners, quietly praying at the altar. After the council, this changed; the priests now faced the congregation while celebrating the mass. The clergy indeed had sort of a halo around them before the council. They were venerated and distant. In Lowell novels it is even portrayed that children envisioned that in Rectory where priests lived there were "candle parades in there at night and snow white lace at breakfast."²⁵¹ However, they sometimes were lively and human in private conversations. Kerouac's Jackie Dulouoz gives an example of a priest who tells jokes at parishioners' homes: "LaPoule at our wild parties loved to tell the joke (which was actually a true story) about the parish priest in Canada who wouldn't pardon some guy for a sin and in revenge the guy smeared shite on the rail of the pulpit so here it is Sunday morning the priest

²⁴⁹ Chinnici has made a detailed account in his paper about how American Catholicism became a part of the world Catholicism; Joseph P. Chinnici, "The Cold War, the Council, and American Catholicism in a Global World, 1 – 24.

²⁵⁰ Robert Dean Lurie, *The Conservative Kerouac: Beat novelists, Catholic, Republican – do you know Jack?*, September 7, 2012, <https://www.theamericanconservative.com/the-conservative-kerouac> (accessed 19.09.2022).

²⁵¹ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 20.

is about to begin.²⁵² One should not use absolute affirmations to portray that social communication with priests started only after the Second Vatican Council. However, the church's atmosphere and communication with clergy did become more informal.

In his portrayal of Catholicism that Kerouac encountered, Lurie also mentions an unknowable God, an awe-inspiring other, which illustrates the change in the understanding of Divine Revelation described in *Dei Verbum*. This document encouraged Catholics to read the Bible for their own spiritual profit.²⁵³ Council also emphasized ecumenism, allowing believers from other traditions to pray under certain circumstances. In *Gaudium et Spes*, the council fathers urged Catholics and others to take “an active part in efforts for peace and international cooperation.”²⁵⁴ The latter tract highlights the Church has a duty to scrutinize the signs of the times and interpret them in the light of the Gospel.²⁵⁵ A reference to this can be seen in Matthew 16:3, where Jesus criticizes religious leaders who “can interpret the skies for tomorrow's weather, but cannot grasp the work of God in what is going on around them.”²⁵⁶ This is the result of the Second Vatican Council; the Church tried to become more open to its community of believers and other traditions. The post-war religious situation in America might suggest that the Catholic Church needed to adapt to the age of religious plurality. Nevertheless, Catholic Church transcends the framework of nationality rather than simply leaving the nations behind.²⁵⁷

It is proper to assume that American Catholic Church consists primarily of immigrants and their descendants.²⁵⁸ It is quite understandable that for the ones who moved, their Catholic faith was something that accompanied them.²⁵⁹ However, this assumption was challenged when J. F. Kennedy was elected president because he was ideally American except for his religion.²⁶⁰

²⁵² The joke then continues by priest saying from the pulpit: “‘Today, ladies and gentlemen, I want to speak about religion, *la nature de la religion* – Religion,’ says he, beginning putting his hand on the rail, ‘religion ...’ he bring his hand up to his nose, puts it down again ... ‘religion is – ’ once again he brings his hand to his nose, frowning in perplexity, ‘*la religion – mais c’est d’la marde!*’”; Jack Kerouac, *Doctor Sax*, 61.

²⁵³ John W. O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), 291.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁵ *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Gaudium et Spes, Promulgated by His Holiness, Pope Paul VI, December 7, 1965*, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html (accessed 19.09.2022).

²⁵⁶ Kelton Cobb, *The Blackwell Guide to Theology and Popular Culture* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 8.

²⁵⁷ David Paul Deavel, “Preface: Influence, Wayfaring, and the Catholic Novelist,” *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 22.4 (Fall 2019): 9. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1353/log.2019.0036>.

²⁵⁸ John A. Coleman, *The Fall from Innocence: Contemporary American Catholicism*, 188.

²⁵⁹ J. E. Robert Choquette, “French Catholicism in the New World,” in *Encyclopedia of the American Religious Experience: Studies of Traditions and Movements*, eds. Charles H. Lippy and Peter W. Williams (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1988), 1: 234.

²⁶⁰ J. M. Cameron, “Catholicism in America,” *Blackfriars* 44.511 (January 1963): 8.

Kennedy was a turning point in a post-war religious revival where Catholicism was “no longer so firmly tied to a certain racial and social stereotype: lace-curtain Irish, Italian grocer, Polish miner, German farmer, immigrant worker from Mexico, French-Canadian lumberman, Navajo Indian.”²⁶¹ However, it is the French-Canadian²⁶² community in America, and especially Lowell, that is of importance when researching Kerouac.

Historically it is not apparent for one to be Catholic in America. The overwhelming majority of settlers in America were either Puritans or more radical Nonconformist groups like Quakers, and their influence has “shaped the moral, intellectual, and religious life of Americans.”²⁶³ French-Canadians were one of the groups comprising the broader specter of American Catholicism and one of the earliest waves of immigrants, together with German and Irish Catholics.²⁶⁴ After the post-war years, immigrants from Latin countries also contributed to the fast-growing number of Catholic church memberships. The surveys show that Catholic adherents were more prone to church attendance than Protestants or Jews.²⁶⁵ After the war, the percentage of Catholics regularly attending weekly Mass in 1957 was over 75%. However, it dropped to 50% in 1980.²⁶⁶

The post-war years also came with media use, and religious ideas seeped into different aspects of culture. Cameron describes that Catholicism in the 1960s America meant: “Cardinal Spellman, the Brooklyn *Tablet*, the Legion of Decency, the Knights of Columbus, Democratic party machines with fringe connexions with the underworld in half a dozen cities, Bing Crosby, Mrs Clare Booth Luce, Bingo, Bishop Fulton J. Sheen.”²⁶⁷ Still, it also implies Dorothy Day and the House of Friendship, “Commonweal,” “The Catholic Worker,” Fordham University and the University of Notre Dame, Trappist monasteries in Kentucky and Benedictine monasteries in the Middle West, Father John Courtney Murray and *avant garde* poets.²⁶⁸ Kerouac in “The Town and the City” even adds that “some of the Jesuit colleges are just bastions of reactionary Catholicism.”²⁶⁹ Although the situation was not always as good for the

²⁶¹ J. M. Cameron, “Catholicism in America,” *Blackfriars* 44.511 (January 1963): 8.

²⁶² Author uses in the text Franco-Americans in the text is used to signify Franco-Americans of Canadian origin. French-Canadians are used here by author to portray community that lived in Canada. However, the researchers quoted use different terms writing about Kerouac’s ethnic background. Kerouac himself used the term “French-Canadians.” Nevertheless, the newest scholarly studies suggest the use of “Franco-Americans” that is also used here.

²⁶³ Sydney E. Ahlstrom, “Introduction,” in *Theology in America: The Major Protestant Voices: From Puritanism to Neo-Orthodoxy*, ed. Sydney E. Ahlstrom (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1967), 31

²⁶⁴ John A. Coleman, *The Fall from Innocence: Contemporary American Catholicism*, 188..

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 194.

²⁶⁶ James Hennessey, S.J., *American Catholics: A History of the Roman Catholic Community in the United States*, foreword by John Tracy Ellis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 329.

²⁶⁷ J. M. Cameron, “Catholicism in America,” *Blackfriars* 44.511 (January 1963): 10.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁹ Jack Kerouac, *Town and the City* (UK: Penguin Books, 2018), 112.

Jesuit education, which was “seriously hampered” after the persecutions they encountered in the 19th century, the college began to flourish after that with 26 colleges in America in the year 1900.²⁷⁰ Kerouac also mentions Jesuit colleges in “Vanity of Duluoaz,” where Duluoaz explains that “he didnt like the idea of being told what to think by professors in big black robes and end up ... well, I dont know where I got the idea that Jesuits are not to be trusted [..]”²⁷¹ Beat Generation, however, soundly fits here into the “*avant gard* poets” framework, although it would be hard to tell whether Cameron thought of them specifically.

Researchers have also criticized the American Catholic Church. For example, Cameron argues that “except in matters of sexual morality and the educational system, it is all too immersed in the common prejudices of American Society.”²⁷² Cameron argues that Catholicism in America lacks depth. Although Catholics in America were numerous and wealthy, they lacked intellectual achievements because there were just “a few good and overworked theologians of whom Father Courtney Murray is the best known.”²⁷³ However, he does not speak of Catholic theologians outside America. Cameron describes American Catholic and lays out some general characteristics of American Catholicism at that time: “A sexual puritanism kept in a state of permanent inflammation by the sex-in-the-head propagated from every bookstand, thought the movies and television, and through the advertising media; an obsessive anti-communism.”²⁷⁴ Many Christian denominations have been preoccupied with the question of morality and ethics, which often also includes the aspect of sexual relationships.²⁷⁵ For conservative Christian America during the Cold War era, Communism was an enemy, and its devotional style illustrated the international struggle against it.²⁷⁶ America’s society in the post-war years was polarized. It is an aspect that Kerouac skillfully portrays in his writings: “The robust rosy-cheeked young priest from Fordham, with some of his jayvee basketballers on a night of ‘good clean fun,’ and the cadaverous morphine-addict stumbling by full of shuddering

²⁷⁰ Robert Schwickerath, S.J., *Jesuit Education: Its History and Principle Viewed In The Light Of Modern Educational Problems* (St. Louis, MO: B. Herder, 1904), 201 – 205.

²⁷¹ Jack Kerouac, *Vanity of Duluoaz*, 40. The negative myth dates back to the sixteenth century; John W. O’Malley, S.J., “The Historiography of the Society of Jesus: Where Does It Stand Today?” in *The Jesuits: Cultures, Sciences, and the Arts, 1540-1773*, eds. John W. O’Malley, Gauvin Alexander Bailey, Steven J. Harris and T. Frank Kennedy (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 3 – 37.

²⁷² J. M. Cameron, *Catholicism in America*, 14.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 15 – 16.

²⁷⁵ Kerouac was very timid about his body. Although he also had promiscuous sexual relationships, he did not have “an anything goes” mindset toward nudity, body, and sexuality. Carolyn Cassady comments on this attitude towards body: “Well the fact that they were influenced by their background and their modesty, that was partly the Church and partly the culture, and later on we both got over that. But Jack was always ... our bathrooms were always inconvenient in both houses, and so he had an awful time with that – embarrassment in the bathrooms”; Paul Maher Jr., *Empty Phantoms: Interviews and Encounters with Jack Kerouac*, 22.

²⁷⁶ Joseph P. Chinnici, O.F.M., “The Catholic Community at Prayer, 1926-1976,” in James M. O’Toole, ed. *Habits of Devotion, Catholic Religious Practice in Twentieth-Century America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 52 – 70.

misery in search of a fix.”²⁷⁷ However, as mentioned at the beginning of this subchapter, Catholic Church had diverse ethnic communities under its wing that lived in America. In the following subchapter, the author will look at French-Canadian Catholicism and its characteristics as a belief of a minority in America, specifically in Lowell.

2.2. Franco-American Catholic community in Lowell

Most of French-Canadians in America arrived from Quebec beginning in the early 1840, after a prolonged economic depression in Canada.²⁷⁸ French Canadians were looking for other employment opportunities due to this crisis. The largest communities settled in New England, where steady employment was available in brickyards and textile factories.²⁷⁹ New England region, especially at the end of the 19th century, was well known for its cotton mills. Interestingly, none of Kerouac’s closest relatives were in this line of work.²⁸⁰ Sometime in 1890 also, Kerouac’s grandfather from his father’s side moved from Canada to New Hampshire in Nashua.²⁸¹ Overall, from 1790 to 1940, such large numbers of French-Canadians would migrate to the United States, and to New England in particular, that it was “estimated there are now more Franco-Americans of Canadian origin in the United States than there are French-Canadians in Canada.”²⁸² In 1873, when more than a quarter of Quebec’s farmlands lay uncultivated, 400,000 French-Canadians resided in the United States. Another 1 million arrived before 1929, causing the emergence of “Little Canadas” throughout New England.²⁸³ There is another noteworthy aspect that many immigrants did change their profession when they came to America, which has been quite evident within the cotton industry, where many males started to work in the mills previously coming from mostly rural settings.²⁸⁴

The Canadian church at first viewed their Catholic “emigrant brothers” as “lost apostates condemned to be the hewers of wood and drawers of water for corrupt Americans.”²⁸⁵ Messianic school’s belief was that God has chosen these people “to serve as a beacon of truth

²⁷⁷ Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 359.

²⁷⁸ J. E. Robert Choquette, *French Catholicism in the New World*, 234.

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

²⁸⁰ Although the increasing competition of immigrants and the lowering wages of laborers did impact the French Canadian immigration numbers; Bruno Ramirez, “French Canadian Immigrants in the New England Cotton Industry: A Socioeconomic Profile,” *Labour / Le Travail* 11 (Spring, 1983): 140 – 142.

²⁸¹ Paul Maher Jr., *Kerouac: His Life and Work*, 7.

²⁸² J. E. Robert Choquette, *French Catholicism in the New World*, 233 – 234.

²⁸³ Ibid., 234.

²⁸⁴ Bruno Ramirez, *French Canadian Immigrants in the New England Cotton Industry: A Socioeconomic Profile*, 129.

²⁸⁵ J. E. Robert Choquette, *French Catholicism in the New World*, 234.

and light in a continent dominated by gross Anglo-American positivism and materialism.”²⁸⁶ However, that changed in 1869, when the massive move of French-Canadians began to be understood as resulting from God’s providence.²⁸⁷ During this “second phase of this messianic phantasm, Catholic church activity became prominent.”²⁸⁸ Statistics reveal that in 1910 there were 202 such [French-Canadian French-language] parishes and 101 missions served by 432 priests of French-Canadian origin. More than 2,000 teaching sisters and brothers directed the schooling of 55,000 pupils.²⁸⁹ However, Franco-American historian David Vermette affirms that he has not come across evidence that would have suggested organized attempts by Franco-Americans to convert U.S. Protestants to Catholicism through missionary activities.²⁹⁰ Nevertheless, the presence of these clerics and later bishops, “fueled the nationalistic agitation that troubled the period’s American church.”²⁹¹ By 1930 this resulted in a serious opposition from American nativist spokesmen, “dwindling migration from Quebec, and increasing pressures to assimilate into the American mainstream.”²⁹² Supported by the Vatican, Irish-American bishops contributed to the repression of French-Canadian Catholics, who were perceived as “un-American.”²⁹³ This might be one of the plausible reasons for Kerouac’s suspicion of any institutions. Here, within their tradition, Franco-American Catholics of Canadian descent were oppressed. Nevertheless, the Catholic Church served as government, educator, extended family, and cultural mediator to New England’s mostly impoverished French Canadians. Perhaps as a result of this spiritual immersion, both Kerouac’s mother and he himself saw signs of God and angels everywhere.²⁹⁴ However, not all were happy about this wave of immigrants; it was unpopular in the midst of Franco-Americans already settled in New England, some of whom were third-generation families and who viewed the newcomers as “a threat to their economic well-being.”²⁹⁵

The religious situation in Lowell was diverse. In an interview, Kerouac depicts Lowell that it is “vast collection of Christians.”²⁹⁶ The citizens of Lowell had different ethnical

²⁸⁶ J. E. Robert Choquette, *French Catholicism in the New World*, 234.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

²⁹⁰ David Vermette, *A Distinct Alien Race. The Untold Story of Franco-Americans: Industrialization, Immigration, Religious Strife* (Montréal: Baraka Books, 2018), 239.

²⁹¹ J. E. Robert Choquette, *French Catholicism in the New World*, 234.

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ Ibid.

²⁹⁴ Robert Dean Lurie, “The Conservative Kerouac: Beat novelists, Catholic, Republican – do you know Jack?” *The American Conservative*, September 7, 2012, <https://www.theamericanconservative.com/the-conservative-kerouac> (accessed 21.09.2022).

²⁹⁵ Cynthia C. Lees, *Borderspaces and La Survivance: The Evolution of the Franco-American Novel of New England (1875-2004)* (dissertation, University of Florida, 2006), 165.

²⁹⁶ Interview in October 1962; Paul Maher Jr., *Empty Phantoms: Interviews and Encounters with Jack Kerouac*, 172.

backgrounds and religious beliefs: “[..] they visited each other after church, the French Canadians going to Sainte Jeanne d’Arc on the Pawtucketville hill, and G.J. across the river with his dark-veiled mother and sisters to the Byzantine Greek Orthodox church near the canal, and were reassured.”²⁹⁷ Franco-Americans, Irish, and Polish communities were Catholics, and the Greeks were orthodox Christians. Kerouac illustrates this diversity also in his Lowell novels: “He took a Greek patriarch by the black robes at the bottom and shoved him out of his printing shop for arguing about the price of circulars.”²⁹⁸ Here, Kerouac emphasizes the Greek patriarch but misuses the term. Most likely, here it is to portray a Greek orthodox church deacon. It is possible to see from other text sections that one of Duluo’s acquaintances was of Greek descent: “The mother was half Russian, and the whole family was tumultuously religious in the Greek orthodox faith.”²⁹⁹

There were also different strands within the Franco-American community. Although, in most cases, Franco-Americans did see their Catholicism and piety as an integral part of their identity and ethnical background, not all stayed Catholics. Not so from New England, in St. Anne, Illinois, under the priest Charles Chiniquy (later a Presbyterian minister), a considerably large group of French-Canadian immigrants, following their leader, broke off the Roman Catholic Church and later became a part of the Presbyterian church. They came under the tutorage and protection of the protestants, who are the elite in Canada.³⁰⁰ The abandoning of Catholicism which was so fundamentally connected with their historical heritage and he notion of survivance, “their survival as a people in a basically Anglophilic and Protestant environment [..] makes the conversion that much more dramatic.”³⁰¹ The conversion shows a shift among immigrants towards their religion, especially if they were already first or second-generation immigrants for whom the survivance was not as current as for their parents. However, the Franco-American Catholic community did work with the bishops in America. That would be a standard praxis for a bishop in America to write to, for example, the bishop of Montreal to ask for priests with French language knowledge.³⁰² This is genuinely portrayed in “Doctor Sax”: “At night [..] with the family downstairs in the big kitchen (maybe my own mother or father there, others, a young priest just down from Canada who loves to woo de ladies – we are four levels up to the attic, we only hear faint roars of laughter below) [..].”³⁰³ The growth of Franco-

²⁹⁷ Jack Kerouac, *Maggie Cassidy* (London: Penguin Books, 2009), 12.

²⁹⁸ Jack Kerouac, *Vanity of Duluo*, 11.

²⁹⁹ Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 128.

³⁰⁰ Caroline B. Rettell, “From Catholics to Presbyterians: French-Canadian Immigrants in Central Illinois,” *American Presbyterians* 63.6 (Fall 1985): 295.

³⁰¹ Caroline B. Rettell, *From Catholics to Presbyterians: French-Canadian Immigrants in Central Illinois*, 296.

³⁰² *Ibid.*, 286 – 296.

³⁰³ Jack Kerouac, *Doctor Sax*, 58.

American community soon made them build new churches and established social clubs with exclusively French Canadian members.³⁰⁴ Also the sermon of the Mass at the time was held in French in Franco-American churches, and they also sang psalms and said prayers in French.³⁰⁵ Although it was not seen as self-evident. In the following chapter, the author will also illustrate the wish to assimilate Franco-Americans into American culture. One of the best accounts for Franco-Americans in Lowell is Kerouac's Lowell novels: "His heart under the little shirt as big as the sacred heart of thorns and blood depicted in all the humble homes of French-Canadian Lowell."³⁰⁶ The author will look at the three characteristics aspects of Franco-American Catholicism: survivance, community, and devotionism.

1) **The notion of survivance or the ideology of culture survival.** For Franco-Americans Catholicism was one of the characteristics of their identity as descendants of French Canadians.³⁰⁷ It was part of their ethnicity and cultural heritage. Their motto was "*Notre langue, notre foi, nos traditions*" and it forces, as Lees argues, "an ideology based on history rather than on initiative."³⁰⁸ Mark Fellows writes: "Because of their language (an Americanized version of Quebecois French called *joual*) and religion (Catholicism), Lowell's French-Canadians were ghettoed in tenements and employed in the textile mills."³⁰⁹ Parishioners also used *joual* to speak with the priest. Kerouac illustrates this aspect of the Lowell Franco-American community's parish when Jacky Duluoz remembers his confession to the priest when he asks, "And you played with your little *gidigne*?" To this 7-year-old, Duluoz answered: "Yes *mon père*."³¹⁰ The use of both languages most likely suggests that Kerouac wanted the reader to understand the context of the confession. In 1899 "La Société Historique Franco-Américaine" in Boston, Massachusetts even began to print French-language materials for use in parochial schools.³¹¹ However, Franco-Americans experienced attack in 1920s that was directed towards

³⁰⁴ Paul Maher Jr., *Kerouac: His Life and Work*, 11.

³⁰⁵ Caroline B. Rettell, *From Catholics to Presbyterians: French-Canadian Immigrants in Central Illinois*, 286 – 296.

³⁰⁶ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 8.

³⁰⁷ This of course is not only typical to French Canada. Even to this day there are small villages in the Eastern Latvia where if you ask the villagers what their ethnical identity is, they will answer that they are Catholics.

³⁰⁸ Cynthia C. Lees, *Borderspaces and La Survivance: The Evolution of the Franco-American Novel of New England (1875-2004)*, 167.

³⁰⁹ Mark Fellows, "The Apocalypse of Jack Kerouac: Meditations on the 30th Anniversary of his Death," *Culture Wars* 18.11 (November 1999): 34. It is important to note that Kerouac's first language was *joual*, and many of his writings have at first been written in French. Translator Jean-Christophe Cloutier argues that some meanings in the English translation have lost a part of its depth, for example, "On the Road" in French is to be "sur le chemin", which "means to be on the way, on the trail, or, more literally, "on the path." He continues that "the French title is protean with spiritual connotations, pointing toward the ritual of the Catholic pilgrimage that fascinated Kerouac, along with Eastern doctrines of Tao and Buddhism that Kerouac studied for years"; Translator's Jean-Christophe Cloutier notes in Todd Tietchen, ed., *The Unknown Kerouac: Rare, Unpublished & Newly Translated Writings*, xxix.

³¹⁰ Jack Kerouac, *Maggie Cassidy*, 43.

³¹¹ Cynthia C. Lees, *Borderspaces and La Survivance: The Evolution of the Franco-American Novel of New England (1875-2004)*, 164.

three principal tenets of this ideology of culture: “French traditions, French language, and Roman Catholicism.”³¹² This statement falls into a broader idea reigning in America after World War I that ethnic minorities should be assimilated. Franco-Americans were forced to assimilate from outside and there were also forces within the community that thought it would be best to assimilate. Franco-Americans were even persecuted by Ku Klux Klan.³¹³

In year when Kerouac was born a law was passed that banned teaching in public and private schools in any other language than English.³¹⁴ The Bishop of Providence William Hickey promoted policies that instruction in Catholic schools should be solely in English. These attempts of assimilation provoked resistance. The Kerouac’s childhood Lowell of 1920s saw the rise of the *Sentinellists*, “a self-appointed watchdog group” that was resisting the Bishop of Providence’s attack on the use of French in parochial schools.³¹⁵ The name of the group came from the newspaper *La Sentinelle* that was published during this time, and its creators were campaigning to “ensure the continuation of instruction in French in parochial schools.”³¹⁶ According to historians Kerouac most likely learned in a bilingual parochial school, before 1960 Franco-American parochial school had “half a day in French, with subjects like French grammar, catechism, Canadian history, art and music, and half a day in English, that is American history, arithmetic, geography, and so on.”³¹⁷ The Baltimore Catechism which Kerouac learned from itself probably was in English, but most likely the nuns described it in French-Canadian, so that the children would understand.³¹⁸ It might be understandable then that Duluoz remembers more vividly the engravings not the text, especially as he did not speak English before he was 6 years old.³¹⁹ This was a far cry from the initial goal of Franco-American parochial schools, which was the “profound conviction that abandoning the French language was tantamount to abandoning the Catholic faith.”³²⁰

³¹² Cynthia C. Lees, *Borderspaces and La Survivance: The Evolution of the Franco-American Novel of New England (1875-2004)*, 166.

³¹³ For them Franco-Americans were targets not only because they were Catholics but also because of the perceived dangers posed by the proximity of their Québec homeland; David Vermette, *A Distinct Alien Race. The Untold Story of Franco-Americans: Industrialization, Immigration, Religious Strife*, 278.

³¹⁴ Cynthia C. Lees, *Borderspaces and La Survivance: The Evolution of the Franco-American Novel of New England (1875-2004)*, 168.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 166.

³¹⁶ The opposition resulted in sixty-two *Sentinellistes* who were excommunicated; *ibid.*, 169.

³¹⁷ This daily routine was detailed in such manuals as *the Programme d'études et Directoire a l'usage des SS. de l'Assomption de la S.V. pour les Ecoles Bilingues* (Nicolet, 1912); Gerard J. Brault, “The Franco-Americans of Maine,” *Maine History* 12.1 (1974): 22, <https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/mainehistoryjournal/vol12/iss1/3> (accessed 11.10.2022).

³¹⁸ Dennis McNally, *Desolate Angel: Jack Kerouac, The Beat Generation, and America* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2003), 9.

³¹⁹ M. C. Rintoul, *Dictionary of Real People and Places in Fiction* (London: Routledge, 2014), 565.

³²⁰ Gerard J. Brault, “The Franco-Americans of Maine,” *Maine History* 12.1 (1974): 18. [3-28]. <https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/mainehistoryjournal/vol12/iss1/3>

The church then became as defender of the French-Canadian heritage,³²¹ which it has been since British colonization when Catholicism became an integral aspect of French-Canadian ethnic identity and the “church remained the soul of people.”³²² The Catholic Church “indoctrinated the faithful in the importance of family, parish, and parochial school, and in the dominance of spiritual over material.”³²³ In extreme cases, such protection transformed into a belief in a “providential mission, a divine union of nationalism and Catholicism.”³²⁴ The sense of providential mission and “a deep ambivalence toward elite Catholicism, an almost peasantlike suspicion of those in authority, and an eagerness to control one’s own responses to the unfolding cosmic drama”³²⁵ dates back to Catholicism in Canada already in the 17th and 18th century. Religion instead became a way of life, because the Franco-American church elite saw themselves and their followers as “the only pure Catholic nationality, who would expand the kingdom of God and expose the false material values of Protestantism.”³²⁶ Here, it is possible to see a relatively exclusive and somewhat snobbish community of believers, which is not surprising in the case of the elite’s religious beliefs. Also, Richard S. Sorrell speaks of this Catholicism as part of *la survivance* or national survival:

Franco-American elite made a valiant attempt to preserve these triads of *survivance* by stressing Catholicism, family, and the broader ethnic environment to be found in the Little Canadas of the mill towns where most Franco-Americans obtained employment.³²⁷

Moreover, Kerouac was “raised in such a *survivance* trinity: Catholicism, family (particularly his relationship with his mother), and Francophone Lowell.”³²⁸ *Survivance* was an important notion also in Quebec. Catholicism and fidelity to it, Quebecers believed, would “enable French Canadians to survive on a hostile continent and create their own collective identity.”³²⁹ During the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century Church in Canada “emphasized the importance of Catholic piety and orthodoxy”³³⁰ and by the middle of the 19th century, Canadian Catholicism had been more influential in every aspect of Canadian life than they had been in

³²¹ Richard S. Sorrell, “The Catholicism of Jack Kerouac,” *Studies in Religion* 11.2 (Spring, 1982): 191.

³²² Gregory Baum, “Catholicism and Secularization in Quebec,” *CrossCurrents* (Winter 1986-7): 437.

³²³ Richard S. Sorrell, *The Catholicism of Jack Kerouac*, 191.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*

³²⁵ George Rawlyk, “Religion in Canada: A Historical Overview,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 538 (Mar. 1995): 133.

³²⁶ Richard S. Sorrell, *The Catholicism of Jack Kerouac*, 191.

³²⁷ Richard S. Sorrell, *The Catholicism of Jack Kerouac*, 191.

³²⁸ *Ibid.*

³²⁹ Gregory Baum, *Catholicism and Secularization in Quebec*, 448. There was also a special devotion to Mary, common in the old Quebec; Gregory Baum, “Catholicism and Secularization in Quebec,” *ibid.*, 457.

³³⁰ However, soon, the church found itself increasingly on the defensive as it confronted modernity. Vatican II, ironically, by undermining traditional dogma and clerical influence, signaled the decline of Catholicism in Canada rather than its renewal; George Rawlyk, *Religion in Canada: A Historical Overview*, 138.

the United States.³³¹ This was the Catholicism that Kerouac's mother grew up in, a Catholicism also characteristic to New England, "traditional and devotionally oriented."³³²

Cynthia C. Lees argues that Jack Kerouac's prose, along with that of such authors as Grace de Repentigny Metalious and Charleen Touchette, challenges the primacy of the ideology of cultural survival.³³³ Kerouac reveals a deep ambivalence toward his ethnicity and an "intriguing fascination with the ideology of cultural survival."³³⁴ Kerouac's works, in their largely autobiographical nature, suggest that his "writing serves as an exploration of [...] ethnic personhood and how that identity conforms to or rebels against Franco-American culture."³³⁵ His voice speaks in English and refuses "the hegemonic identifications assigned to Franco-American culture by the powerful Francophone elite."³³⁶ Furthermore, he discovers that it is necessary to expose that which the institutional bases of Franco-American power would seek to disguise.³³⁷ However, Kerouac both identifies with and rejects his working-class Franco-American heritage, an ambivalence to be found throughout his work Cynthia C. Lees suggest.³³⁸ She further argues that Kerouac's roots in working-class neighborhoods "impel their creation of characters that hunger for a piece of the American dream, an opportunity historically denied to Franco-American mill workers."³³⁹ However, Grace notes that Kerouac's feelings

are not unlike those of many ethnic individuals, whose intense desire to retain the heritage of family and country is buttressed by the fear of the larger "foreign" world in which the vulnerable ethnic group exists as a subpart, a component that face diminution or obliteration through Americanization.³⁴⁰

This text illustrates the polarities that Kerouac most likely felt himself – he yearned to be part of America but did not want to denounce his cultural heritage. Nevertheless, he did not affirm all of the tenets of survivance, and Kerouac was one whose ideology of cultural survival encountered resistance from within Franco-America.³⁴¹

³³¹ George Rawlyk, *Religion in Canada: A Historical Overview*, 131.

³³² Peter W. Williams, *America's Religions: From Their Origins to the Twenty-first Century* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 162.

³³³ Cynthia C. Lees, *Borderspaces and La Survivance: The Evolution of the Franco-American Novel of New England (1875-2004)*, 166.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*, 170.

³³⁵ *Ibid.*

³³⁶ *Ibid.*

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, 171.

³³⁸ Cynthia C. Lees, *Borderspaces and La Survivance: The Evolution of the Franco-American Novel of New England (1875-2004)*, 171.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁰ Nancy McCampbell Grace, *A White Man in Love: A Study of Race, Gender, Class, and Ethnicity in Jack Kerouac's Maggie Cassidy, The Subterraneans, and Tristessa*, 39.

³⁴¹ Cynthia C. Lees, *Borderspaces and La Survivance: The Evolution of the Franco-American Novel of New England (1875-2004)*, 170.

2) **Community.** The workers, the middle classes and the intellectuals remained loyal to the Church's tradition.³⁴² As the Catholic Church was part of the ideology of cultural survival, it was an integral part of the Franco-American community in Lowell. They wed in Catholic Church, baptized their children there, and sent them to parochial schools, which was the case for Kerouac children.³⁴³ These rituals made one part of the Franco-American community. There have been accounts of the strict teaching methods of the nuns. Maher confirms that Saint Louis de France nuns "were severe and strict in appearance, determinedly living up to their intimidating reputation if only to garner the respect and obedience of their young Catholic charges."³⁴⁴ Kerouac portrays this also in his Lowell novels:

One afternoon as the whole school stood silent in the noon gravel, listening and fidgeting, Joe, who'd done some *pecher* (sin) during the recess, was being whanged with a big ruler with iron rims on the ass in the Sister Superior's office – shrieking and howling he was, when I asked him about it later he said 'It hurt' and didn't make any excuses for the howling he did.³⁴⁵

Jack Duluoiz recollects that the nuns also had "a habit of whacking the kids on the knuckles with the edge part of the ruler when they didnt remember 6 X 7, and there were tears and cries and calamities in every classroom every day."³⁴⁶ The nuns are portrayed as suspicious, watching through the window, "a hobo from Louisiana and the East Texas Oil fields who happens to be passing thru Lowell, lies in the straw grass below the Green School fence [...]"³⁴⁷ The nuns also used intimidation by declaring that because the kids of the Public School were not Catholics "they have tails concealed beneath their trousers."³⁴⁸ They wore black habits, black rosaries, they had "rheumy eyes" and they were "delicate as lacework their features, distant as chalices, rare as snow, untouchable as holy bread of the host, the mothers of thought."³⁴⁹

Kerouac later attended a school that Jesuits supervised. The "Jesuit" is a category that Kerouac uses quite often. First, there are descriptions of Jesuits in Kerouac's Lowell novels. They "dressed in black,"³⁵⁰ were "gloomy men,"³⁵¹ and they "rush, bookish like 'ill angels,'

³⁴² Gregory Baum, *Catholicism and Secularization in Quebec*, 447.

³⁴³ Kerouac's parents wed on October 25, 1915, at Saint Louis de Gonzaga Roman Catholic Church in Nashua. Gerard was baptized in Saint Jean de Baptiste Church, and Jack was baptized in Centralville's Saint Louis de France Church according to the rite of the Roman Catholic Church. Jack Kerouac was baptized by the Reverend D. W. Boisvert; Paul Maher Jr., *Kerouac: His Life and Work*, 9 – 13.

³⁴⁴ In the parochial school Kerouac was supervised by ten Sisters of Assumption; *ibid.*, 16.

³⁴⁵ Jack Kerouac, *Doctor Sax*, 63 – 64.

³⁴⁶ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 23 – 24. On the strict nature of the nuns in New England in the mid-century America, see also Kathy Wormhood, *Habits, Hosts and the Holy Ghost: Tales from a Catholic School Girl* (Bloomington, IN: Balboa Press, 2013).

³⁴⁷ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 21.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 19.

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 21.

³⁵⁰ Jack Kerouac, *Vanity of Duluoiz*, 56.

³⁵¹ Jack Kerouac, *Doctor Sax*, 118.

from darkness to darkness.”³⁵² Secondly, Kerouac identified himself as a Jesuit, that he apparently uses as a synonym for Catholic. More on this is described in the following subchapter.

Priests were part of the community, for example, consoling the relatives of the deceased, as Kerouac recalls father Labossiere did before Gerard died, saying to his mother: “[.] he was going to build her a little white cottage in Heaven.”³⁵³ The priests also function as advisors in a Catholic community. Kerouac’s parish priest Father Arman “Spike” Morissette, encouraged him to go to New York where his writing could be more appreciated.³⁵⁴ Yet, priests also attended social gatherings and chatted with locals while using their services. In “The Town and the City,” Kerouac describes such a situation, where Father Mulholland regularly comes to George Martin’s printing shops “printing of collection envelopes and letterheads and other matters pertaining his parish. He was a tall venerable old man who at one time had been connected with a parish in Lacoshua [..].”³⁵⁵ Nevertheless, Church in a community also functions as an institution that provides for cultural and social needs. Kerouacs themselves volunteered to help with the parish’s cultural and social needs, organizing parties, club meetings, and dances.³⁵⁶

For Kerouac, brown color characterized the community in Lowell. Kerouac “yearns for the brown,”³⁵⁷ and he associates it with Lowell. It is “the aura of his ethnicity and working class identity that he values and seeks to preserve.”³⁵⁸ It seems that brown is a color which Kerouac constantly envisions in Lowell, in his home, with his mother. It might be that he thought of this as a representation of the Mother Earth and also simply prescribing the colors of the French-Canadian tenements: “[.] noticing the corner tenement because the poor Canucks my people of my God-gave-me-life were burning dull electric lights in a brown doom gloom of the kitchen with Catholic calendar in the toilet door (Ah Me), a sight full of sorrow and labor -.”³⁵⁹ Kerouac here displays devotionism of Franco-Americans, illustrating that they had Catholic calendars

³⁵² Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 61.

³⁵³ Interview with Kerouac in October 1962; Peter Maher Jr., *Empty Phantoms: Interviews and Encounters with Jack Kerouac*, 168.

³⁵⁴ Robert Reilly, “On the road to redemption with Catholic author Jack Kerouac,” *U.S. Catholic* (April 11, 2004), <https://uscatholic.org/articles/200404/on-the-road-to-redemption-with-catholic-author-jack-kerouac/> (accessed 17.08.2022).

³⁵⁵ Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 40.

³⁵⁶ Paul Maher Jr., *Kerouac: His Life and Work*, 16 – 17.

³⁵⁷ Paul Michael Arendt, “Road Dust Heavengoing: Reading the Development of Jack Kerouac’s Spontaneous Prose in “On the Road”, “The Subterraneans”, and “Tristessa” (dissertation, Villanova University, 2010), 48, <https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/road-dust-heavengoing-reading-development-jack/docview/305229641/se-2>.

³⁵⁸ Nancy McCampbell Grace, *A White Man in Love: A Study of Race, Gender, Class, and Ethnicity in Jack Kerouac’s Maggie Cassidy, The Subterraneans, and Tristessa*, 39.

³⁵⁹ Jack Kerouac, *Doctor Sax*, 6.

on their toilet doors, that leads to the following characteristic of Franco-American Catholicism – devotionism.

3) **Devotionalism.** Surveys show that up until the mid-1960s American Catholics were the most orthodox and devout American religious group.³⁶⁰ Franco-Americans in Lowell were undoubtedly contributing to this result. In Kerouac's Lowell novels, there are numerous depictions of Catholic devotionism for which one of the primary sources was his own family. Kerouac's mother was a devout Catholic. It was a belief that she turned to even more vigorously during the illness of her eldest son. Kerouac's father wore a rosary around his neck, blessed by Trappist monks.³⁶¹ His aunt Caroline joined the Daughters of Charity in Montreal, which took her to missions from the American Midwest to the Northwest.³⁶² Also, the environment of "Little Canada" with the wooden cottages surrounded by wooden picket fences were "decorated with a bathtub-enshrined Virgin Mary stepping on the coiled snake representing Satan"³⁶³ served as reminders of devotionism.

In his study, Albarran defines devotionism as "an embodied understanding of God's presence in this world, or the presence of the sacred in this world."³⁶⁴ Above-mentioned embodiment becomes visible when people engage in diverse practices. They are very well documented in Kerouac's Lowell novels. One of the practices is lighting holy candles not only in church but also in such settings as their homes.³⁶⁵ Believers also use prayer cards of saints to ask for their help, and in "The Town and the City," it is possible to find one of the best samples of this. Ruth Martin made holy pictures that she sold during Easter and Christmas. Peter Martin accidentally told his father about the death of one of his brothers, but because they were twins, he named the wrong one. The mistake made Peter feel guilty. To minimize this sensation, he used Catholic holy pictures as a talisman to pray for the well-being of Francis Martin: "Peter took a pile of them and went back quietly to Francis's room and, while Francis slept, he laid them all around his head on the pillow, at his side, even at his feet, all over the bed till he was

³⁶⁰ John A. Coleman, *The Fall from Innocence: Contemporary American Catholicism*, 194.

³⁶¹ Paul Maher Jr., *Empty Phantoms: Interviews and Encounters with Jack Kerouac*, 95.

³⁶² Todd Tietchen, ed., *The Unknown Kerouac: Rare, Unpublished & Newly Translated Writings*, 441. More commonly known as Grey Nuns, which refer to six distinct Roman Catholic religious communities of women. Their origins can be traced to the Daughters of Charity of the Hôpital Général de Montréal, founded by Marie-Marguerite d'Youville in the mid-18th century; Anne-Marie Pedersen, and James Hanrahan, and Celine Cooper, "Grey Nuns," in *The Canadian Encyclopedia. Historical Canada* (published July 02, 2009; last edited July 25, 2019), <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/grey-nuns> (accessed 06.10.2021). Unfortunately, they also were involved in a school system that took indigenous children out of their families to teach them the "civilized" ways of Catholicism.

³⁶³ Paul Maher Jr., *Kerouac: His Life and Work*, 15.

³⁶⁴ Louis T. Albarran, *The Face of God at the End of the Road: The Sacramentality of Jack Kerouac in Lowell, America, and Mexico*, 16.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

surrounded with holy pictures.”³⁶⁶ Albarran also lists as a manifestation of devotionism “kneeling in prayer,” which mostly would happen in a church: “Some of the women are 80 years old, they’ve been coming to that basement church at dusk every day for the last quarter of a century [..].”³⁶⁷ The children and priests pray in the church:

We peek in at the church, at shuffling groups of little girls, at priests, people kneeling, doing the sign of the cross in aiseways, the prim flutter of front altar light where a pursymouth youngpriest wheels sensationally to kneel and hangs knelt like a perfect motionless statues of Christ in the Agony of the Garden, budging for just an instant as he barely loses balance and all little kids in church who watched have seen [..].³⁶⁸

The prayers then could be specific according to the liturgical year: “They happened to see two veiled old ladies trudging along the road, apparently towards the church in Norcott, two darkly-clad old women faithful to some endless novena.”³⁶⁹ Praying the rosary is another aspect of devotionism portrayed in Lowell novels: “Monastic ladies devoted to sewing and devout service in their gloomy redbrick hermitage there where we saw them in the windows with their cap flares and cameo profiles bent over rosaries or missals or embroideries [..].”³⁷⁰ In “Maggie Cassidy,” rosary can be seen as a synonym for devotionism and Catholicism: “Oh Jacky come home have Christmases with me – never mind all this charivary – fancy fanfares for nothing – I’ll have a rosary in my hand at least – to remind you.”³⁷¹ Believers pray the rosary also such events as funerals: “They all stood before the bier of the dead father, before the mother who was kneeling and whispering softly over her rosary beads.”³⁷² Kerouac also demonstrates the importance of rosaries and crucifixes at believers’ homes stored in an easily accessible place: “In the warehouse as they’re showing around I see one of Ma’s dresser drawers yaw open and inside I see her bloomers, crucifixes, rosaries, rubber bands, toys [..].”³⁷³ One could keep their rosaries in a pocketbook: “Together Gerard and I peer and probe into the mysterious pocketbook for the mysterious nickles and dimes that are always there intermingled with rosaries and gum and powder puffs.”³⁷⁴ In addition to that, most of Kerouac’s Franco-Americans in Lowell had a religious calendar in their homes: “Paul Boldieu’s home that we used to climb rickety outdoor steps to [..] where poor dim religious St Mary Calendars hung in brown door behind the stove.”³⁷⁵ Kerouac also describes what kind of women lived in those tenements: “It was the

³⁶⁶ Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 34.

³⁶⁷ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 47.

³⁶⁸ Jack Kerouac, *Doctor Sax*, 172.

³⁶⁹ Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 211.

³⁷⁰ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 21.

³⁷¹ Jack Kerouac, *Maggie Cassidy*, 184.

³⁷² Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 478.

³⁷³ Jack Kerouac, *Vanity of Duluoz*, 83.

³⁷⁴ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 32.

³⁷⁵ Jack Kerouac, *Doctor Sax*, 156.

women of interminable novenas, lovers of funerals, when somebody died they knew it right away and hurried to church, to the house of death and to the priest possibly [...].³⁷⁶ The seasons might also emphasize devotionism: “It’s the Christmas season and everyone feels devout.”³⁷⁷

Through prayer, one encounters the living God, which establishes a foundation for what Christians come to believe about God, Christ, the Church, and how they relate to the created world in which humans live.³⁷⁸ Through this prism, the prayers gain another layer of importance: “Young priests make polite calls and add their powerful prayers and depart swiftly to duties in the gloom.”³⁷⁹ Also, someone’s prayers at a funeral “are not to be thrown away.”³⁸⁰ Catholics believe that prayers to God are meant to be heard and answered: “I kneel at my bed at night to pray, instead my head falls on the blanket and I just goof with my eyes crushed down. I try to pray in the winter night, moveless.”³⁸¹ Parents also pray for their children: “Your old man’ll be praying for you tonight, Petey,” he said in a trembling voice finally, and he wandered into the house and closed the screen door behind him, and Peter was alone on the porch.”³⁸² And “your old mom prays for you every night and prays that you’ll be safe and sound no matter what.”³⁸³ If one feels guilty, one asks for forgiveness from God: “Then Peter got down on one knee and whispered to the holy pictures and tiptoed out of the room. He prayed again in his room to God that the holy pictures would work and make Francis better.”³⁸⁴ Believers also can show their devotion by praying in specific religious places. In his Lowell novels, Kerouac often mentions Grotto, which still exists in Lowell. This monument’s point of reference is the grotto church in France. It has, as Kerouac had also described, “Twelve Stations of the Cross, little individual twelve altars set it, you go in front, kneel, everything but incense in the air (the roar of the river, mysteries of nature, fireflies in the night flickering to the waxy stare of statues [...]).”³⁸⁵ Praying in these places can be performed for any occasion: “Before seeing Blanche in home to the horrible brown glooms of her dying father’s house – we go to this Grotto, like we often do, to get some praying in.”³⁸⁶ According to Baltimore Catechism, no special prayers were necessary for the stations of the cross, but one should think devoutly of the Passion and

³⁷⁶ Jack Kerouac, *Maggie Cassidy*, 45.

³⁷⁷ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 40.

³⁷⁸ The Monks of Saint Meinrad Archabbey, *The Tradition of Catholic Prayer*, eds. Christian Raab and Harry Hagan (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2007), xii. “Introduction” by archabbot Justin DuVall.

³⁷⁹ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 92.

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁸¹ Jack Kerouac, *Maggie Cassidy*, 96.

³⁸² Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 234.

³⁸³ *Ibid.*, 286.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 34.

³⁸⁵ Jack Kerouac, *Doctor Sax*, 114-115.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 115.

death of Christ while passing each of them.³⁸⁷ Praying in the Grotto portrays the everyday religiosity and devotion of Catholics in Lowell. The last part of the Grotto is the Cross that is at the top of the stairs. The believers can choose to kneel and work their way up to the Cross: “We made the stations to the ultimate foot of the Cross, where my mother kneeled, prayed, and worked a step up the cross-mount, to show me how some people did it all the way up – to the foot of the Cross itself [..].”³⁸⁸

In “Dr. Sax,” Reilly interprets that Kerouac “recounts his childhood fears and terrors when confronted by Catholic devotions such as the outdoor Stations of the Cross set in a sim collection of grottoes near Lowell’s Merrimack River. Kerouac, in Doctor Sax, recounts seeing a dark shape flitting among these stations and the culminating Crucifixion mound.”³⁸⁹ Here, though, it seems that not the Catholic devotions Kerouac is afraid of, but the Shadow that lurked everywhere. When describing the priest’s encounter with George Martin in a printing shop, one’s family’s devotion to the priest’s interpretation is connected to the aspect of whether a believer is yearning for God or not: “Here you are, a man yearning after God and after His light if I ever saw one! Yes, sir! And your children, the little ones, little Michael, Peter, Ruth and young Francis, all of them have the makings of splendid Catholics and certainly that of splendid Christians.”³⁹⁰ However, devotionism might also come with some side effects in post-war America. Carolyn Cassady comments about the unworthiness that many Catholics felt: “Well I think it was such a general thing and certainly ... with heavily Catholic families it was like second nature to be unworthy, but it’s not just Catholics, a lot of people feel that way.”³⁹¹

2.3. Jack Kerouac and Catholicism

Readers often do not notice the religious references in Kerouac’s texts. Loni Sophia Reynolds highlights that among diverse religious influences on each writer, there was a particular tradition that informed and shaped each major Beat author’s work.³⁹² For Kerouac, that is Catholicism, which views the created world not as scientific, rational, and objective, but

³⁸⁷ See section “The Stations of the Cross” in the *Baltimore Catechism*.

³⁸⁸ Jack Kerouac, *Doctor Sax*, 117.

³⁸⁹ Robert Reilly, “On the road to redemption with Catholic author Jack Kerouac,” *U.S. Catholic* (April 11, 2004), <https://uscatholic.org/articles/200404/on-the-road-to-redemption-with-catholic-author-jack-kerouac/> (accessed 17.08.2022).

³⁹⁰ Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 40. Paul Maher Jr. argues that there was also an instilled hatred of Jews and Protestants simmering within the Catholic church. This was seeded deeply into Leo and Gabrielle’s social sensibilities and passed on to their children; Paul Maher Jr., *Kerouac: His Life and Work*, 16. However, this hatred is not detectable in the Lowell novels.

³⁹¹ Paul Maher Jr., *Empty Phantoms: Interviews and Encounters with Jack Kerouac*, 15.

³⁹² Loni Sophia Reynolds, *Irrational Doorways: Religion and Spirituality in the Work of the Beat Generation*, 5.

as sacramental and infused with the divine.³⁹³ Kerouac saw everything in the world as Holy,³⁹⁴ a notion he illustrates in his literary works. Reilly emphasizes that those who are more familiar with Jack Kerouac's public life may be surprised to see him numbered among Catholic authors. Like James Joyce, Kerouac's Catholic upbringing remarkably informed his writings.³⁹⁵ Lurie argues that readers and critics are missing behind that brutal honesty of the deeper themes of loneliness and the yearning for God.³⁹⁶ He goes even further, stating that "one cannot grasp the soul of Kerouac unless one understands his fundamentally traditional core,"³⁹⁷ and he is "a political conservative and a Catholic."³⁹⁸

Jack Kerouac, in this study, is defined as a "communal Catholic." The term coined by Andrew Greeley describes that communal Catholics

Are loyal to the Catholic collectivity and at least sympathetic toward its heritage. At the same time they refuse to take seriously the teaching authority of the leadership of the institutional Church. Such communal Catholics are Catholics because they see nothing else in American society they want to be, out of loyalty to their past, and they are curious as to what the Catholic tradition might have that is special and unique in the contemporary world.³⁹⁹

Greeley "sees this mode of allegiance particularly among younger well-educated Catholics who are selective and self-conscious in their style of being Catholic."⁴⁰⁰ Communal Catholics "selectively dissent from Church dogma or moral injunctions. [...] When asked, they identify themselves as Catholic. Religious affiliation remains but with less totalistic identification."⁴⁰¹ The author of the thesis will divide this definition into numerous aspects and show how those can be attributed to Kerouac.

1) **"Loyal to the Catholic collectivity and at least sympathetic toward its heritage."** Richard S. Sorell, in his paper "The Catholicism of Jack Kerouac," argues that "the tragedy of his life and the genius of his literature find their origins in ambivalent tensions he

³⁹³ Loni Sophia Reynolds, *Irrational Doorways: Religion and Spirituality in the Work of the Beat Generation*, 24.

³⁹⁴ David A. King, "Discovering the Catholic in Jack Kerouac, author of the Beat Generation," *The Georgia Bulletin* (January 23, 2014), <https://georgiabulletin.org/commentary/2014/01/discovering-the-catholic-in-jack-kerouac-author-of-the-beat-generation> (accessed 20.09.2022). Similarly, Allen Ginsberg saw holiness in everybody and everything. Ginsberg also illustrates this motif in the Footnote to Howl; Allen Ginsberg, *Howl and Other Poems*, 27 – 28.

³⁹⁵ Robert Reilly, "On the road to redemption with Catholic author Jack Kerouac," *U.S. Catholic* (April 11, 2004), <https://uscatholic.org/articles/200404/on-the-road-to-redemption-with-catholic-author-jack-kerouac/> (accessed 17.08.2022).

³⁹⁶ Robert Dean Lurie, "The Conservative Kerouac: Beat novelists, Catholic, Republican – do you know Jack?" *The American Conservative* (September 7, 2012), <https://www.theamericanconservative.com/the-conservative-kerouac> (accessed 21.09.2022).

³⁹⁷ Ibid.

³⁹⁸ Lurie connects Kerouac's Catholicism to his family and their political stance – Republicans. Kerouac's father Leo loved his adopted country: "This belief in the land of opportunity remained with him even after his Catholicism lapsed in the wake of devastating business failures"; *ibid.*

³⁹⁹ Andrew Greeley, *The American Catholic: A Social Portrait* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 272.

⁴⁰⁰ John A. Coleman, *The Fall from Innocence: Contemporary American Catholicism*, 198.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

felt towards his traditional heritage, which had ancestral roots deep in the fertile ethnic soil of French Canada.⁴⁰² The traditional heritage was accompanied with an ethnoreligious background that was Franco-Catholic. Sorrell encompasses the sympathy towards one's religion by explaining that Kerouac's "life-long obsession with religion shows how important Catholicism was even to those Franco-Americans not ordinarily considered to be loyal sons of the church."⁴⁰³ Kerouac did often refer to his Franco-American background, to which Catholicism was part of their ethnical identity. As much as he may have used Buddhist terminology, "beneath the skin, and maybe not too far beneath, he was French Catholic."⁴⁰⁴

Kerouac's Lowell novels emphasize his Franco-American background and the church's presence in everyday life. He was well acquainted with the Catholic Church. He went to the parish school and served as an altar boy in the church. When Kerouac was 14, he stopped going to Mass and most likely never went consciously to the Mass again.⁴⁰⁵ There are accounts in Kerouac's letters that before he knew he was in the "middle of fullblown church service" that a young priest celebrated.⁴⁰⁶ Kerouac embraced Catholic Church more vigorously at the end of his life, "though in some ways he had never really left it."⁴⁰⁷ He went to Catholic churches to pray or kneel quietly. The Marian prayers were essential to him because they kept him from his destructive behaviors.⁴⁰⁸ When Kerouac died suddenly in 1969, the priest celebrated a funeral Mass in St. Jean Baptiste Cathedral in Lowell. Kerouac was "remembered as Catholic, at least in death, by the Church of his youth."⁴⁰⁹ Father "Armand "Spike" Morissette, who celebrated the Mass, linked the mystery of Kerouac's life to the words from Luke 24:32: "Wasn't it like a fire burning in us when he talked to us on the road?"⁴¹⁰

2) **"They refuse to take seriously the teaching authority of the leadership of the institutional Church."** Kerouac affirms that the mystical tradition is closer to him than the

⁴⁰² Richard S. Sorrell, *The Catholicism of Jack Kerouac*, 190.

⁴⁰³ *Ibid.*, 191.

⁴⁰⁴ David Robertson, "Real Matter, Spiritual Mountain: Gary Snyder and Jack Kerouac on Mt. Tamalpais," *Western American Literature* 27.3 (Fall 1992): 221 – 222.

⁴⁰⁵ David A. King, "Discovering the Catholic in Jack Kerouac, author of the Beat Generation," *The Georgia Bulletin* (January 23, 2014), <https://georgiabulletin.org/commentary/2014/01/discovering-the-catholic-in-jack-kerouac-author-of-the-beat-generation> (accessed 20.09.2022).

⁴⁰⁶ Jack Kerouac, *Jack Kerouac: Selected Letters 1940 – 1956*, 288.

⁴⁰⁷ David A. King, "Discovering the Catholic in Jack Kerouac, author of the Beat Generation," *The Georgia Bulletin* (January 23, 2014), <https://georgiabulletin.org/commentary/2014/01/discovering-the-catholic-in-jack-kerouac-author-of-the-beat-generation> (accessed 20.09.2022).

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁹ Brian Burch, and Emily Stimpson, *The American Catholic Almanac: A Daily Reader of Patriots, Saints, Rogues, and Ordinary People Who Changed the United States* (New York: Crown Publishing Group, 2014), np.

⁴¹⁰ David A. King, "Discovering the Catholic in Jack Kerouac, author of the Beat Generation," *The Georgia Bulletin* (January 23, 2014), <https://georgiabulletin.org/commentary/2014/01/discovering-the-catholic-in-jack-kerouac-author-of-the-beat-generation> (accessed 20.09.2022). The priest uses Good News Translation Bible version.

institutional one, a widespread trend in the post-war years as laid out in the previous chapter. Lurie emphasizes that casual readers might not be able to grasp religiosity in Kerouac's writing, "after all, his version of Christianity esteemed visions and personal experience over doctrine and dogma."⁴¹¹ Kerouac's Christianity in his life, of course, was not static. Such believers and mystics as St. Francis of Assisi, St. Therese of Lisieux, and Thomas Merton inspired Kerouac. William Blake's literary works for him was an example of visualized beauty that a combination of mysticism and poetics gives. All these influences chose to "some extent de-emphasized legalism in favor of a direct union with God,"⁴¹² which is one of the main emphasizes in mystical experience. Catholic phenomenologist and religious philosopher Louis Dupré defines mysticism as a state of consciousness that surpasses ordinary experience through the union with a transcendent reality.⁴¹³

Kerouac did not live in the nostalgic memory of his grandfather's America that he experienced as a youngster. He associated himself with the hipsters who "kept talking about the same things I liked, long outlines of personal experience and vision, nightlong confessions full of hope that had become illicit and repressed by War [...]."⁴¹⁴ Kerouac portrays war as the main problem. American novelist and literary critic Manuel Luis Martinez explains in his book that "for Kerouac too, an isolated, submissive individualism avoided civic agency in the form of the "eyeball kicks" of private vision, a quasi-imperialistic technique revolving around observation, sought after by the early Beats.⁴¹⁵ Kerouac illustrates the Beat Generation's interest in personal experience and visions, further affirming their interest in mystical tradition versus institutionalized and organized religion.

3) **"When asked, they identify themselves as Catholic. Religious affiliation remains but with less totalistic identification."** The idea of less totalistic identification is a great prism to view different times when Kerouac has identified himself with Catholicism. Theologian, priest, and editor James T. Keane writes in his paper "Beat Attitude. Jack Kerouac's unexpected life" that "despite the image of a modern spiritual seeker who eventually found a home in

⁴¹¹ Robert Dean Lurie, "The Conservative Kerouac: Beat novelists, Catholic, Republican – do you know Jack?" *The American Conservative* (September 7, 2012), <https://www.theamericanconservative.com/the-conservative-kerouac> (accessed 21.09.2022).

⁴¹² Ibid.

⁴¹³ Louis Dupré, "Mysticism [First Edition]," in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Lindsay Jones, 2nd ed., vol. 9 (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2005), 6341.

⁴¹⁴ Ann Charters, ed. *The Portable Jack Kerouac*, 569.

⁴¹⁵ Manuel Luis Martinez, *Countering the Counterculture: Rereading Postwar American Dissent from Jack Kerouac to Tomás Rivera* (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), 29. Some Catholic monastic groups opposed further institutionalization that later Razinger promoted; see Fr. Augustine Thompson, OP, "The Soul You Lose May Be Your Own: Historical Considerations on Theology and Culture," *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 22.3 (Summer 2019): 70, <https://doi.org/10.1353/log.2019.0021>.

Buddhism, Kerouac was born and died a self-identified Catholic [...].⁴¹⁶ In the “Author’s introduction” of “Lonesome Traveler,” Kerouac states: “Am actually not ‘beat’ but strange solitary Catholic mystic...”⁴¹⁷ His self-identification with Catholicism also came by identifying himself as a “Jesuit” that he apparently used as a synonym to Catholic. Kerouac’s interviews show the importance of being a “Jesuit.” He emphasizes that Neal Cassady is one: “He’s Jesuit by the way. He used to sing in the choir. He was a choir boy in the Catholic churches of Denver.”⁴¹⁸ The best example is when the interviewer asks Kerouac about Lowell and whether he sees any visions of God there: “Do you see God wherever you go – in a Pantheistic way?”⁴¹⁹ Kerouac firmly answers: “No – in a Deistic way, in a Gnostic way, in a Jesuitical way. I’m a Jesuit.”⁴²⁰ Kerouac’s character-narrator Jack Duluoz also self-identifies numerous times as a “Jesuit.” Jack Duluoz proclaims in “Vanity of Duluoz”: “I’m a Jesuit today, secret General of the Order [...]”⁴²¹ Duluoz also mentions that his works are derived from him being “one of the world’s worst secret Jesuits”: everything I do is based on some kind of proselytization, everything I’ve written, just take a close look.”⁴²²

Kerouac’s Christianity and devotion affirmations seeped into his essays published in popular magazines. In “*Beatific: Origins of the Beat Generation*,” published in 1959, he writes about the time poet Gregory Corso gave him a silver crucifix to wear around his neck after spending time in the mountains. Kerouac, for days, went around San Francisco with the crucifix and went to churches, read poetry, “walking talking God in the streets.”⁴²³ Afterwards, *Mademoiselle* magazine took pictures with Beat writers while Kerouac still had the crucifix around his neck. Most of the publications erased the crucifix from the picture, except for *The New York Times*: “God bless *The New York Times* for not erasing the crucifix from my picture as though it was something distasteful.”⁴²⁴ Kerouac addresses the ones who erased the crucifix by writing: “So you people don’t believe in God. So, you’re all big smart know-it-all Marxists and Freudians, hey? Why don’t you come back in million years and tell me all about it, angels?”⁴²⁵ Kerouac connects their actions with disbelief in God through the act of censorship. They did not censor Kerouac. They censored God himself.

⁴¹⁶ James T. Keane, “Beat Attitude. Jack Kerouac’s unexpected life,” *America* (January 21 – 29, 2013): 24.

⁴¹⁷ Jack Kerouac, *Lonesome Traveler* (London: Penguin Books, 2000), 9.

⁴¹⁸ Paul Maher Jr., *Empty Phantoms – Interviews and Encounters with Jack Kerouac*, 222.

⁴¹⁹ Interview in October 1962; *ibid.* 172.

⁴²⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴²¹ Jack Kerouac, *Vanity of Duluoz*, 40.

⁴²² *Ibid.*

⁴²³ Ann Charters, ed., *The Portable Jack Kerouac*, 565.

⁴²⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴²⁵ *Ibid.*

Kerouac received comments on the street while wearing the crucifix: “What right does he got to wear that?”⁴²⁶ The sentiment portrayed in this snappy comment is that of the American Christian society, privatizing God and having a concrete vision of how the believer should look. Kerouac, for them, could not represent the Lord. Kerouac affirms his belief, responding: “I am sure no priest would’ve condemned me for wearing the crucifix outside my shirt everywhere and *no matter where* I went.”⁴²⁷ Kerouac, as a Catholic, is proud to wear the crucifix: “I am not ashamed to wear the crucifix of my Lord. It is because I am Beat, that is, I believe in beatitude and that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son to it.”⁴²⁸ Kerouac here publicly confirms his beliefs in one of the most fundamental Christian tenets.

Catholicism in 20th century America was primarily considered the belief of immigrants, but Kennedy’s election challenged this assumption. Similarly to other traditions, also Catholicism experienced a religious revival in the post-war years. It slowly and steadily became one of the three traditions exemplifying Eisenhower’s Christian America. Catholics in Lowell followed the Franco-American motto: “*Notre langue, notre foi, nos traditions.*”⁴²⁹ Being the descendants of immigrants and feeling the threat of assimilation, they turned to their devotionism as means of survivance. The ideology of cultural survival became especially important when other Catholic communities in America tried to assimilate them into a larger American culture, a trend that was happening on a broader scale at the time. The primary demand was for the Franco-American community to use the English language in their parish activities. The *Sentinellists* fought for the opportunity to preserve the French language, especially in parochial schools. Most likely, Kerouac had his studies in a bilingual manner, which shows his ability later in life to use both languages fluently. Kerouac’s descriptions of the Franco-American community in Lowell novels, although semi-autobiographical, give an excellent example of the everyday life of the Catholic community in New England. In his texts, he illustrates that priests came to Lowell from Canada so that they would know French. Kerouac shows how devotionism accompanied Franco-Americans by praying daily, lighting devotional candles on appropriate occasions, getting punished by nuns in parochial schools, and being consoled by the priest in challenging moments.

The Catholicism that Kerouac knew was pre-Second Vatican Council tradition. Before 1965 Catholic Church was majestic in its aesthetics, distant in its liturgical language, and

⁴²⁶ Ann Charters, ed., *The Portable Jack Kerouac*, 565.

⁴²⁷ Jack Kerouac, *The Portable Jack Kerouac*, 566.

⁴²⁸ Ibid.

⁴²⁹ Franco-American motto, roughly translating to “Our language, our faith, our traditions,” which is more tended to historical aspect than to any initiative; see Cynthia C. Lees, *Borderspaces and La Survivance: The Evolution of the Franco-American Novel of New England (1875-2004)*, 167.

hierarchical. The Catholicism of the first half of the 20th century shaped Kerouac's imagination and identity in profound ways.⁴³⁰ Kerouac was a communal Catholic who was "selective and self-conscious in their style of being Catholic."⁴³¹ He did respect the Catholic collectivity and stayed loyal to his Franco-American heritage, which was Catholic in its roots. Through his Lowell novels, Kerouac pays homage to his heritage. Kerouac followed the religious trends of his time by shifting the traditional focus on the institution to that of the personal experience. Like other Beat writers, Kerouac preferred mystical traditions and the holistic interpretations of the world they gave. Kerouac could "find the admirable and holy in every soul he encountered on his travels, just as he had seen angels and the Holy Mother emerging from every corner in Lowell."⁴³² That shows also his

Researchers must remember that much of what Kerouac said and wrote must be considered carefully. For most of his life, "Kerouac was sadly out of his mind – drunk, addled, and fatigued by work and fame."⁴³³ Kerouac's longtime friend Ginsberg compassionately notes that "he was writing angel books in his illness."⁴³⁴ That does not necessarily mean that his Catholicism can be regarded as something created out of madness, fatigue, or boredom. The author agrees with David A. King, who thinks Kerouac's Catholic insights were deeply sincere.⁴³⁵ Kerouac's extensive reading, attendance at Catholic school and his highlighted aspects of Catholicism shows that Kerouac is a Catholic who "selectively dissents from Church dogma or moral injunctions"⁴³⁶ but stays to its core values.

In the final chapter of the study, the author will distinguish what Kerouac selects from Catholic dogma and portrays in his Lowell novels and what is left outside.

⁴³⁰ David A. King, "Discovering the Catholic in Jack Kerouac, author of the Beat Generation," *The Georgia Bulletin* (January 23, 2014), <https://georgiabulletin.org/commentary/2014/01/discovering-the-catholic-in-jack-kerouac-author-of-the-beat-generation> (accessed 20.09.2022).

⁴³¹ John A. Coleman, *The Fall from Innocence: Contemporary American Catholicism*, 198.

⁴³² Robert Dean Lurie, "The Conservative Kerouac: Beat novelists, Catholic, Republican – do you know Jack?" *The American Conservative* (September 7, 2012), <https://www.theamericanconservative.com/the-conservative-kerouac> (accessed 21.09.2022).

⁴³³ David A. King, "Discovering the Catholic in Jack Kerouac, author of the Beat Generation," *The Georgia Bulletin* (January 23, 2014), <https://georgiabulletin.org/commentary/2014/01/discovering-the-catholic-in-jack-kerouac-author-of-the-beat-generation> (accessed 20.09.2022).

⁴³⁴ Allen Ginsberg, *The Best Minds of My Generation: A Literary History of the Beats*, 138.

⁴³⁵ David A. King, "Discovering the Catholic in Jack Kerouac, author of the Beat Generation," *The Georgia Bulletin* (23rd January, 2014), <https://georgiabulletin.org/commentary/2014/01/discovering-the-catholic-in-jack-kerouac-author-of-the-beat-generation/> (accessed 18.09.2022).

⁴³⁶ John A. Coleman, *The Fall from Innocence: Contemporary American Catholicism*, 198.

3. CATHOLIC THEOLOGICAL CATEGORIES PORTRAYED IN JACK KEROUAC'S LOWELL NOVELS

My job is to describe Heaven just a little bit.⁴³⁷

Jack Kerouac embellished his literary language with many religious terms. Sometimes that is the reason the text itself seems to be religious. It is possible to distinguish how Kerouac uses religious terminology in his texts, particularly Lowell novels. 1) *Colloquial exclamatory expressions*: Kerouac numerous times uses in his texts “by God,” “damn it,” “to hell with it,” and others. There are many variations of these well-known expressions. For example, the name of God or Christ has been changed to “goddam,” “gosh,” “krissakes,” and “krise.” The most amusing of expressions surely would be “Christ-on-a-bicycle!”⁴³⁸ 2) *Kerouac's particular use of religious terminology to embellish his literary language*. For example, by describing something as dragging by as long as eternity, “blissfully sleeping,” “tremendous ascents to blasphemous heights,” or even “I confess before the judgment of the eternities I threw a marble.”⁴³⁹ 3) *Description of religious praxis and devotionism*, for example, how the Lowellians went to church every Sunday or how G.J.'s mother read the Greek Bible. Lastly, there are text passages where Kerouac uses religious terminology to speak of theological and belief concepts of a particular religion or worldview.

The last two are essential to understand better Kerouac's portrayal of Catholic theological categories in his Lowell novels. Even if not all the religious references substantially refer to Christianity, questions about “the existence of God, the Creator's purpose for all forms of life, the concept of mind, the nature of sin, the existence of evil, a hostile/indifferent/benign cosmos, self and other, the definition and function of time, care and compassion, and salvation,”⁴⁴⁰ always been important to Kerouac. The categories chosen to analyze Kerouac's religious references in Lowell novels are those of Catholic systematic theology because “the full Christian theological understanding of God occurs only in and through an entire systematic theology encompassing all the great symbols of tradition.”⁴⁴¹ In Catholicism, in front of dogma, “men of every degree of intelligence are placed on the same level”⁴⁴² and Kerouac is one of

⁴³⁷ Interview in October 1962, Paul Maher Jr., *Empty Phantoms: Interviews and Encounters with Jack Kerouac*, 166.

⁴³⁸ Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 178.

⁴³⁹ Jack Kerouac, *Doctor Sax*, 134, 117, 171.

⁴⁴⁰ Nancy M. Grace, *Jack Kerouac and the Literary Imagination*, 2.

⁴⁴¹ David Tracy, *Approaching the Christian Understanding of God*, 110.

⁴⁴² J. M. Cameron, *Catholicism in America*, 5.

them. The last chapter of this research will explore Kerouac's portrayal in Lowell novels of nine categories of Catholic systematic theology: faith and revelation, God, creation, Jesus Christ, Church, sin and grace, sacraments, and eschatology. The analysis will give a holistic overview of Kerouac's influence and usage of traditional Catholic teachings in his texts. It will also illuminate deviations characteristic of Kerouac's Lowell novels.

3.1. Faith and Revelation

One of the categories that constitutes an essential aspect of Christian and especially Catholic denomination is faith and revelation. Two crucial documents defining the nature of revelation in Catholic theology are dogmatic constitutions *Dei Filius* from First Vatican Council and *Dei Verbum* from the Second. The primary source for Kerouac's Catholicism was the church of the pre-Second Vatican Council. However, the theological questions discussed in the Second Vatican Council did not surface out of thin air. *Dei Filius* defines revelation as God's supernatural manifestation of himself.⁴⁴³ *Dei Verbum* described the revelation as "the action by which God freely makes known the hidden purpose (sacramentum) of the divine will and lovingly speaks to human beings as friends."⁴⁴⁴ This document, opposite to *Dei Filius*, is more personalistic, trinitarian, and Christocentric,⁴⁴⁵ characteristics noted by René Latourelle. The turn toward a personal and Christocentric God is also visible in Kerouac's Lowell novels.

God's revelation is the "divine promise of salvation" that "otherwise would not have been accessible to human understanding."⁴⁴⁶ In popular imagination, revelation often is accompanied by an awe-aspiring moment of realization. Kerouac illustrates it in "Visions of Gerard," where the father in the story says to his friend while kneeling and looking at the sunrise: "I'll tell ya Bull, there aint never been a mystery of this world I didnt stand in awe of, when standing in front of it, or kneelin on one knee as I am now."⁴⁴⁷ The text, however, encompasses an important aspect of the Catholic understanding of the created world. The divine promise of salvation is "immersed in the divine mystery it communicates."⁴⁴⁸ The divine mystery's interpretation can "never be brought to unambiguous closure as long as it respects

⁴⁴³ Pius Episcopus, *Dei Filius: Servus Servorum Dei Sacro Approbante Concilio*, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/i-vatican-council/documents/vat-i_const_18700424_dei-filius_la.html (accessed 24.09.2022).

⁴⁴⁴ Avery Dulles, "Faith and Revelation," in *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*, eds. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza and John P. Galvin, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 81.

⁴⁴⁵ René Latourelle, *Theology of Revelation* (Staten Island, NY: Alba House, 1966), 486 – 487.

⁴⁴⁶ John E. Thiel, *Senses of Tradition: Continuity and Development in Catholic Faith* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 4.

⁴⁴⁷ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 76.

⁴⁴⁸ John E. Thiel, *Senses of Tradition: Continuity and Development in Catholic Faith*, 4.

the mystery it seeks.”⁴⁴⁹ God cannot be fully understood by human perception, and God reveals these mysteries in diverse ways. The revealed mystery “pertains to the essence of our humanity and our experience, is ultimately God.”⁴⁵⁰ The unchanging aspect is that the revealed truths encompass the mystery of God and his created world that Gerard’s father experiences by kneeling. The mystery of God’s creation is further depicted in “The Town and the City”: “No one could see it, yet everyone was in it, and it was like the incomprehensible mystery of life in the world itself, grown fantastic and homeless in war, and strangely haunted now.”⁴⁵¹ The narrator of the story here affirms the incomprehensible nature of God’s mystery and his revealed truths as an integral aspect of Catholic Church teachings. Kerouac connects the mystery of revelation to nature: “Everything is soft and musical, and sweet, and full of longings, misty hints and unspeakable revelations that float in the gentlest blue air.”⁴⁵² God’s revelation is crucial Catholic teaching: “Without this mystery, God’s Revelation, our knowledge of Christ and the Church, the moral life and prayer of the baptized, and, indeed, the whole Creed itself is emptied of meaning.”⁴⁵³ Kerouac’s characters do illustrate this Christian tenet.

Kerouac and fellow Beats often saw and interpreted everything as holy: “I believed in the planks of the little corner; I knew that the earth, the streets, the floors and shadows of life were holy.”⁴⁵⁴ The goodness and holiness of God’s creation are affirmed in the New Testament: “Instead, be holy in all that you do, just as God who called you is holy. The scripture says, “Be holy because I am holy” (1 Peter 1:15-16). The divine mystery permeates Kerouac’s characters’ daily lives:

The very sheen of starlight on the glossy snows, the little red and blue and green lights in the windows of homes, the icicles hanging from eaves – all these things, in the silence of mystery and prophecy fulfilled, were the altar flickers and divine meanings that had to come every year at Christmas.⁴⁵⁵

Christmas time is depicted by Kerouac also as a time when people feel especially devout. Revelation is possible because of the grace of God: “[..] some fleecy mystery imparted, concerning the kinds of fearlessness, or the proof of faith, or the ethereality of pain, or the unreality of death (and life too), or the calm hand of God everywhere slowly benedicting.”⁴⁵⁶ Kerouac here unlocks another layer of understanding of God’s presence in this world. Looking

⁴⁴⁹ John E. Thiel, *Senses of Tradition: Continuity and Development in Catholic Faith*, 4.

⁴⁵⁰ Marie Theresa Coombs, *Mystery Hidden Yet Revealed: A Study of the Interrelationship of Transcendence, Self-actualization and Creative Expression, with Reference to the Lives and the Works of Thomas Merton and Georgia O’Keefe* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2003), 34.

⁴⁵¹ Jack Kerouac, *Town and the City*, 288.

⁴⁵² *Ibid.*, 15.

⁴⁵³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (London: Burns & Oates, 2006), 732.

⁴⁵⁴ Jack Kerouac, *Maggie Cassidy*, 104-105.

⁴⁵⁵ Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 167 – 168.

⁴⁵⁶ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 84 – 85.

for proof of faith seems to refer to looking for the revealed mysteries, in this case of God, because he is also the one who would “benedict” this earth. The definitions of God’s presence in this world differ. However, Kerouac’s interpretation appears to blur the lines between immanence and transcendence.⁴⁵⁷ God to Kerouac is brooding somewhere: “[..] silence except for echo pew-coughs and distant frabbles of wood benches dragging on stone, frrrowp, and God broods in the upper hum-air –.”⁴⁵⁸ The section would seem to suggest God’s presence in this world is more immanent; however, Michael Martin challenges this by wondering: “Was God really everywhere around and not just sitting in heaven not looking down? Everybody in church went about under God’s look like they were only lining up after recess, and yawning, and coughing, and fidgeting.”⁴⁵⁹ Mickey describes the atmosphere in the church, selectively explaining where God is and where he is not present:

The little noises of noon and the smell of lunches and orange peels and the crunching of shoes in the gravel in the schoolyard: that wasn’t God! And the priest talking about how the people did not give enough to the parish, and the way the people threw their money in the baskets, angrily almost, that wasn’t God! All this shuffling and coughing and *nose-blowing* in the church wasn’t God!⁴⁶⁰

Mickey’s contemplation of whether God is present in aspects of life that are not as gracious as others seem quite realistic for a child. Mainly Mickey focuses on the behaviors of the parishioners. Mickey starts to doubt his faith and wonders if everybody else believed in God as he did because his previous faith in Santa Claus turned out to be fake. Kerouac’s portrayal of this little child as more invested in the Church’s functions, more immensely than one would imagine a child would do, for readers might seem amusing. His comments show that God is not in the institutionalized aspects of the church – the Mass with its churchgoers and the everyday praxis of donations do not seem to Mickey to represent God. Mickey sees God’s presence in the music of the Mass: “Yet all the beautiful singing and the organ in the church, yes, it was God’s music for God.”⁴⁶¹ This shows Kerouac’s emphasis on more mystical tradition than the institutional church.

In “Maggie Cassidy,” Kerouac shows his shift towards “personalistic” and “Christocentric” aspects of revelation that have been emphasized in *Dei Verbum*, although

⁴⁵⁷ This notion is also affirmed by Margaret S. Archer, Andrew Collier, and Douglas V. Porpora, emphasizing that God is both immanent and exceeds this world, see “What do we mean by God,” in *Transcendence: Critical realism and God*, ed. Margaret S. Archer, Andrew Collier, and Douglas V. Porpora (London: Routledge, 2004), 29; see also David Paul Deavel, “Preface: America, the Church, and Orestes Brownson,” *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 23.4 (Fall 2020): 7.

⁴⁵⁸ Jack Kerouac, *Doctor Sax*, 184.

⁴⁵⁹ Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 175.

⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*

approved in a written form only in the Second Vatican Council after Kerouac had written this book. God speaks to Jacky Duluoaz from the crucifix:

My child, you find yourself in the world of mystery and pain not understandable – I know, angel – it is for your good, we shall save, because we find your souls as important as the soul of the others in the world – but you must suffer for that, in effect my child, you must die, you must die in pain, with cries, frights, despairs – the ambiguities! the terrors!⁴⁶²

The only way for believers to know something about this world will be if God has revealed it. However, human comprehension might not be sufficient to understand the divine mystery. The text section shows a very intimate and personal encounter with God that Jacky Duluoaz has in a church. God in this text approves the mystery that is the created world. Suffering is part of this world, and it is necessary for the believer to be saved. Noteworthy is the overall tone of Christ that speaks to Duluoaz from the Cross – he is, as a friend, consoling his companion of the suffering they encounter. He is the shoulder to lie on when everything else falls to pieces. As previously mentioned, the notion of God as a friendly companion was discussed in the Second Vatican Council. The encounter with God is a personal experience. However, it would not be accepted if the aspects God revealed in such an encounter were incompatible with Church's teachings. Not everyone can interpret the word of God freely outside the tradition. Kerouac emphasizes friendliness and does not show significant detours from the central Catholic tenets about revelation. Again, he is not interested in offering new theological interpretations. The text section shows Kerouac's turn toward the personal experience of faith and his approach to religion through the mystical aspects of traditions.

The mysteries of the created world are God's revealed truth. The faith in Catholic Church teaching is supernatural in its virtue and functions as the beginning of salvation because it is a way to reconcile with God.⁴⁶³ The faith, though, does not appear on its own. With the inspiration and help of God's grace, humans believe that "what He has revealed is true [...], because of the authority of God revealing it, who can neither deceive nor be deceived."⁴⁶⁴ Revelation is undoubtedly interconnected with faith and God's grace. God is the formal object of faith, and Jesus Christ is the Mediator of all revelation.⁴⁶⁵ *Fides divina* "not only confesses that there is a God, known through his revelation in Jesus Christ, in confessing and assenting to that revelation it confesses and assents to the revealer."⁴⁶⁶

⁴⁶² Jack Kerouac, *Maggie Cassidy*, 43.

⁴⁶³ A. R. Jonsen, "Faith," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, eds. Berard L. Marthaler, Gregory F. LaNave, Jonathan Y. Tan, Richard E. McCarron, Denis J. Obermeyer, David J. McGonagle, 2nd ed. (Detroit: Gale, 2003), 5: 594.

⁴⁶⁴ H. Dezinger, *Enchiridion symbolorum*, 3008, <http://catho.org/9.php?d=byi#dd0> (accessed 29.09.2022).

⁴⁶⁵ Avery Dulles, "Faith and Revelation," in *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*, eds. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza and John P. Galvin, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 85.

⁴⁶⁶ Eric O. Springsted, *The Act of Faith: Christian Faith and the Moral Self* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2015), 244.

Faith is the gift of God.⁴⁶⁷ Catholic Church goes further, stating that faith is “a gift of God, and a moral duty which may be required of us by the commandment of God.”⁴⁶⁸ Does Kerouac’s characters believe in God? Maggie does, confessing her belief to God: “Me I believe in *Le Bon Dieu*, Jacky,” – palm up – “He bless, make me, save me –.”⁴⁶⁹ There are two things that Maggie affirms from her faith – that she believes in the good God and the fact that he has created her and is going to save her, that will lead to salvation. The affirmation of faith to the essential tenets of the Catholic faith is illustrated in “The Town and the City”: “Both he and Mrs Martin believed that there was a God, and that there was a right and wrong, and that the virtuous life of love and humility was God’s own life. ‘And who has never really believed in Jesus?’ he would ask.”⁴⁷⁰ Surely Jack Duluoz has: “I believe in Jesus. Tell you why if you dont know already: Jacob wrestled with his angel because he defied his own Guardian Angel. Typical. Michael stand in my corner, 7 feet tall.”⁴⁷¹ The doctrine of guardian angels is not an official doctrine of the Catholic Church. The general understanding of angels is “the idea of a particular, personal guardian angels.”⁴⁷² Worth to remember that Church teaching and lived religion are not the same. In Catholic households, various saint cults arose, superstitious rituals and reliability on guardian angels.

Mr. and Mrs. Martin are the parents of the Martin family. The mother is Catholic but also quite superstitious in her everyday life, and her husband is not a churchgoer, but he does show his faith in God and Jesus throughout the book. They believe in Jesus Christ, the humility and love God has shown, and in right and wrong. The latter is explored further throughout the book. The belief in right or wrong for Martins was almost as important as the belief in God. They considered that the problem of the new generation is the fact that they have lost their belief in right and wrong: “Understand – this generation *knows* right and wrong, they sense it all right and that’s probably why they do so many crazy things, like those friends of yours. It makes them jumpy and neurotic. But they don’t *believe* in right and wrong.”⁴⁷³ Kerouac further depicts it as the reason for losing faith: “Kids just don’t have anything to lean on, any sort of faith, I guess. It gets the kids before it gets anyone else. Lord knows, the older generation is harassed enough.”⁴⁷⁴ Peter Martin answers his father in the name of this younger generation:

⁴⁶⁷ Juan Alfaro, “Faith,” in *Encyclopedia of Theology: A Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, ed. Karl Rahner (Mumbai: St Pauls, 2004), 504-506.

⁴⁶⁸ Henry Edward Manning, *The Vatican Council and Its Definitions: A Pastoral Letter to the Clergy* (New York: D. & J. Sadlier, 1871), 53.

⁴⁶⁹ Jack Kerouac, *Maggie Cassidy*, 130.

⁴⁷⁰ Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 23.

⁴⁷¹ Jack Kerouac, *Vanity of Duluoz*, 121.

⁴⁷² Frank K. Flinn, *Encyclopedia of Catholicism* (New York: Facts On File, 2007), 22.

⁴⁷³ Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 404 – 405.

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 404.

“So I drink, all right; I have my reasons! What’s the great thing we’re suppose to be living for now anyway? What’s the great faith, hope and charity of the age that’s been dumped on our heads –.”⁴⁷⁵ Peter affirms that he does not believe that there is some “great faith,” hope, or charity in the age that they live in. Another time, Kerouac describes the awe-aspiring event of a revelation: “He suddenly believed in God somehow, in goodness and loneliness.”⁴⁷⁶ That is different from the more subtle ways of immersing in divine revelation.⁴⁷⁷

Faith and revelation both function as the beginning of salvation because one can believe through God’s revelation and with the help of God’s grace. Jack Duluoaz in “Vanity of Duluoaz” ponders: “But we cant be redeemed ‘unless we believe’, it says, or follow His example. And who can do that?”⁴⁷⁸ First, Kerouac refers to the well-known Christian teaching that humans cannot be saved through their own efforts. The “living faith in Christ the Savior is a prerequisite for redemption [..].”⁴⁷⁹ Salvation cannot be reached by believers’ faith alone but also with the help of divine grace, which is necessary to this process. Second, through this passage, Duluoaz raises a very humane question about how to follow in Jesus’s footsteps. Here the aspect of redemption has not been explored further.⁴⁸⁰ The text suggests that Duluoaz does not consider faith as challenging but as the necessity to follow Jesus’s example. It is more difficult to follow in Jesus’ footsteps than to believe.⁴⁸¹ Third, this is one of the rare places where Kerouac portrays Duluoaz’s place in a blessed community. Kerouac wrote “Vanity of Duluoaz” in his last years of life when he attended church more often. If understood as the community of the Catholic Church, then Duluoaz, similarly to Kerouac himself, can be identified here as the “communal Catholic,” a concept outlined in the previous chapter. Overall, the passage shows Kerouac’s attempt to dialogue with the Catholic tradition and its teachings through his writings. Although the narrator questions the possibility of following some of the Catholic teachings, Kerouac does not try to find a new theological solution for it. The narrator seems to be waiting for someone else to affirm that his doubts are legitimate or to give him all the correct answers. It is

⁴⁷⁵ Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 305.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁷ Kerouac might have shown revelation as something sudden and dramatic because that would better serve his story concept. That could have been his understanding, or maybe some notions of Zen tradition could already be visible. For many Western readers, Zen was a Buddhist school emphasizing “sudden enlightenment”; Katsuki Sekida, *Zen Training: Methods and Philosophy*, ed. A. V. Grimstone (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2005), 12.

⁴⁷⁸ Jack Kerouac, *Vanity of Duluoaz*, 254.

⁴⁷⁹ Vassilis Vitsaxis, *Thought and Faith: Comparative Philosophical and Religious Concepts in Ancient Greece, India, and Christianity*, trans. Deborah Brown Kazazis and Vassilis Vitsaxis (Boston: Somerset Hall Press, 2009), 1: 238.

⁴⁸⁰ More on Kerouac’s portrayal of following Jesus footsteps, see chapter 3.4. about Jesus Christ.

⁴⁸¹ Jack Kerouac, *Vanity of Duluoaz*, 254.

impossible, as George Martin says to his son: “I’m not God, I can’t tell you what to do, all I can tell you is what I *think* you should do –.”⁴⁸²

Not every Kerouac character was a Catholic believer. In “The Town and the City,” Francis Martin functions as the symbol of disbelief: “Yet you ought to see, or perhaps you sense it now, that justice isn’t the concern of men in this world. Men are too unhappy for *that*. You can’t blame them, there’s no so-called faith, life’s too *short* for that [...]”⁴⁸³ Francis does not believe the faith itself, representing a rational thinker of 20th century America. Furthermore, Francis explains that God has vanished and is not accessible anymore: “[...] it’s just ... really ... that the original slap in the face has completely ... vanished. It cannot be known who did it. [...] Where is your original annoyed ... parent ... or unbelief ... or whatnot?”⁴⁸⁴ Francis functions as the rational voice on the shoulder, questioning faith and omnipotent God, under whose watch terrible suffering has happened.

To summarize, Kerouac portrays in his Lowell novels the mystery of God’s revelation that is visible in the created world. His characters have awe-aspiring moments of insight. In this aspect, Kerouac’s illustrated revelations can be understood in a more dramatic popular way than in the subtle aspects of Catholic revelation. Kerouac shows in his works a tendency toward a more personal encounter with God, corresponding with the post-war trend to move from the institutionalized experience to a personal one. Jacky Duluoaz has a personal encounter with God, who spoke to him from the cross in a church. This encounter with God portrays the character’s openness toward a mystical aspect of the Catholic religion. God in Kerouac’s novels is both immanent and transcendent in this world – he blesses everything and broods in the air. However, he is not present in the impatient parishioners. Kerouac’s selective interpretation of God’s presence shows his understanding of God as being connected to aesthetic and good things, as opposed to something as bodily as nose-blowing. The text portrays the perplexity of a devout kid that might go to some extremes in his explanations.

God’s revelation and grace are integral to one’s faith, which is the premise for salvation. Kerouac’s characters affirm their beliefs in God, Jesus, the right and wrong in the world, and personal guardian angels. A thought that is affirmed and questioned by Duluoaz. He affirms that believers can be redeemed if they believe. Another condition for this redemption is following Jesus’s example Duluoaz doubts what is possible in his case. Kerouac illustrates in his Lowell novels Catholic tenets of revelation and faith, understanding the world as a mystery of God’s

⁴⁸² Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 418.

⁴⁸³ *Ibid.*, 153 – 154.

⁴⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 490.

revelation and faith as a beginning of salvation. Furthermore, he emphasizes the awe-inspiring revelation of the created world or God and the mystical aspect of a personal account with God.

3.2. God

God in Christian theological understanding is intertwined with the revelation in Jesus Christ. The theological doctrine of God “discloses the divine reality that must inform every symbol and doctrine just as the doctrine of God is informed by every symbol and doctrine creation-redemption, Christ, eschatology, church, sacrament, revelation.”⁴⁸⁵ Christian theology must be theocentric, as David Tracy affirms, so that each symbol or doctrine in the whole system of doctrines can be adequately understood without explicitly relating it to the reality of God. He further emphasizes that “one way to remind ourselves of this systematic theological insight is to initiate the discussion of God first with the question of the identity of God as disclosed in Jesus Christ rather than with the traditional questions of the existence and nature of God.”⁴⁸⁶ The God of Christians is understood as a trinitarian. In light of this, it is interesting that Kerouac, in the Lowell novels, does not mention the term “Trinity.” He portrays the triune understanding of God only in a prayer formula: “In the name of the father, the son, and the Holy Ghost, amen.”⁴⁸⁷ Kerouac uses part of this formula another time to illustrate children in church that have made up a rhyme:

In the name of the Father
My Aunt Cafière
Pistolet of wood
Amen⁴⁸⁸

In Kerouac’s Lowell novels, God has been portrayed as the Father in Heaven. God directs Gerard’s funeral from heaven: “It’s a vast ethereal movie, I’m an extra and Gerard is the hero and God is directing it from Heaven –.”⁴⁸⁹ Jack Duluoz exclaims in “Vanity in Duluoz”: “O God in the Heavens, what a fumbling, hand-hanging, goof world it is, that people actually think they can gain anything from either this, or that, or thissa and thatta, and in so doing, corrupt their sacred graves in the name of sacred-grave corruption.”⁴⁹⁰ This insight of God in Heaven is also expressed by Gerard when he declares: “When I get to Heaven the first thing I’m gonna

⁴⁸⁵ David Tracy, *Approaching the Christian Understanding of God*, 133.

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 134.

⁴⁸⁷ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 15.

⁴⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁴⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 98.

⁴⁹⁰ Jack Kerouac, *Vanity Duluoz*, 81 – 82.

ask God is for the beautiful little white lamb to pull my wagon –.”⁴⁹¹ When George Martin, on his deathbed, is talking to God, he has turned his head toward the sky: “He raised his face mournfully to the poor cracked ceiling of midnight, he looked at heaven through the plaster-cracks of Brooklyn. ‘[...] See that they’re happy, God!’”⁴⁹² Peter’s friend Alexander looks at the sky reverently: “Alexander was pointing at the sky, saying: ‘Glory!’”⁴⁹³ The section reminds the reader of the gospel of Matthew. It describes that after the Judgement Day “the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky; and all the peoples of earth will weep as they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (Matthew 24:30).

Jack Duluoaz states in “Vanity of Duluoaz,” that “the Christ is the Son of God because nobody can prove otherwise [...]”⁴⁹⁴ Kerouac mentions the Son of God also in “Visions of Gerard”: “‘God said to his son, we’ve got to do this – they decided in Heaven – and they did it – it happened – INRI!’ – ‘INRI – that means, it happened!’”⁴⁹⁵ The text portrays Christ being with God before his incarnation, a notion known as “Christ’s pre-existence” that is also represented in the Pauline letters in New Testament.⁴⁹⁶ “Pre-existence” in a contemporary understanding “signifies the idea that the individual soul existed before its life on earth.”⁴⁹⁷ In Christian tradition, this is attributed to Jesus Christ. Kerouac also portrays this understanding in Lowell novels. Kerouac again affirms that Jesus is the Son of God by portraying this in “Vanity of Duluoaz,” where Duluoaz explains what Jesuits actually say: “That everybody’s got to be a Catholic because there’s no other way out of the impasse of medieval theology. But if like Pascal, Blaise Pascal, their ‘enemy’ in the seventeenth century, they simply should say the Christ is the Son of God because nobody can prove otherwise, I should have bought them.”⁴⁹⁸

Kerouac mentions Holy Ghost also only two times in the Lowell novels. Once in “Visions of Gerard,” where Holy Ghost has been portrayed as an entity that wills something to happen: “A bird zings across the reddening late sky and over the roof of St Louis de France, as though the Holy Ghost wanted it.”⁴⁹⁹ The texts illustrate an understanding of the Holy Ghost as actively present in this world. Christian tradition affirms that Holy Ghost was sent to this world after Jesus’s resurrection, as illustrated in New Testament (John 15:26). The active presence of

⁴⁹¹ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 21.

⁴⁹² Jack Kerouac, *Vanity of Duluoaz*, 465.

⁴⁹³ Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 211.

⁴⁹⁴ Jack Kerouac, *Vanity of Duluoaz*, 40.

⁴⁹⁵ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 27.

⁴⁹⁶ R. G. Hamerton-Kelly, *Pre-existence, Wisdom, and the Son of Man: A Study of the Idea of Pre-existence in the New Testament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 156.

⁴⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁴⁹⁸ Jack Kerouac, *Vanity of Duluoaz*, 40.

⁴⁹⁹ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 28.

the Holy Ghost “communicates the sacramental sanctification of grace.”⁵⁰⁰ In churches, the Holy Ghost is often portrayed as a bird, especially a dove, the symbol of the Holy Ghost. The section shows the symbolism of the Holy Ghost by connecting the bird’s flight to the will of the Holy Ghost. The second time Kerouac mentions the Holy Ghost is by depicting its importance in the Catholic tradition. The Holy Ghost had its own Station in the Twelve stations of Lowell’s Grotto: “[..] so engrossed have we been in our conversation, we’re in the Grotto! – deep, too, - half-way to the first Station of the Ghost.”⁵⁰¹ The most outrageous reference to the Holy Ghost comes from Kerouac’s interviews, where he states that the Holy Ghost is writing through him. He says to the interviewer: “This is the first time you’ve met the Holy Ghost in person. I do a certain mechanical thing. But I am the Holy Ghost speaking.”⁵⁰² The assumption that Kerouac suggests is not compatible with Catholic teaching. Only Church’s authority can approve Holy Ghost speaking through a believer. However, to compare oneself to being the Holy Ghost is quite preposterous. The identification with God and comparing oneself to it can be interpreted in the light of mystical tradition, where adherents unite with transcendent reality reaching unity and losing one’s ego or self. Nevertheless, the Church would not accept such an identification with the Holy Spirit. Kerouac, however, does not state this in his Lowell novels.

The absence of the doctrine of Trinity in the Lowell novels is not surprising and does not imply Kerouac or his characters because of that are “lesser Catholics.” The doctrine of the Trinity is a notion exploited by theologians, but for regular faithful might be too challenging to be used daily. The doctrine of the Trinity means more for theologians than the parish of believers.

3.2.1. God’s perfections

God has trivially essential attributes, which in the doctrine of God usually are discussed as divine perfections. The Principle of Perfection then “leads us to place the perfections among God’s essential properties, since it is obviously greater to exemplify things like perfect knowledge, power and love in every world in which one exists than to exemplify them accidentally, that is, in only some worlds in which one exists.”⁵⁰³ Kerouac mentions the term “perfections” in “Vanity of Duluoaz”:

⁵⁰⁰ Gabriel Pivarnik, *Toward a Trinitarian Theology of Liturgical Participation* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012), 210.

⁵⁰¹ Jack Kerouac, *Doctor Sax*, 116 – 117.

⁵⁰² Paul Maher Jr., *Empty Phantoms: Interviews and Encounters with Jack Kerouac*, 258.

⁵⁰³ Jay W. Richards, *The Untamed God: A Philosophical Exploration of Divine Perfection, Simplicity and Immutability* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 96.

So just an apparition in molecular form for awhile, to haunt our souls with similarities to God's perfection, in Timmy's case the perfection was when he'd sit like a lion on the kitchen table, paws straight out, head erect and full-jowled, and God's imperfection when he was dying and his back was a skeletal run of ribs and spinal joints and his fur falling off [...].⁵⁰⁴

Jack Duluoze here explains that, in his opinion, God's perfection lies in the beauty of things, here in the cat's way of sitting. Theologian Karl Barth considered beauty a helpful category for understanding God's glory.⁵⁰⁵ Divine perfections for Kerouac are visible through God's creations. This idea is compatible with the mystery of God's revealed truth, comprehensible to a certain extent through the natural world and human beings. Duluoze in this section also implies that God has imperfections that would speak against the official Catholic teaching. The imperfection is the aspect in that live beings must die. Ginsberg comments on this section: "There's a little bit about his Catholicism here and his notions of God, which I thought were pretty good because he was summarizing thought, philosophical thoughts."⁵⁰⁶ However, he almost sneeringly concludes, that Kerouac is emptily and negligently making a few conclusions. Ginsberg's occasional dismissals of Kerouac's Catholicism have been one of the possible reasons for the ignorant attitude towards it on the part of researchers for so long.

God is infinitely perfect, and his divine perfections "include all those properties susceptible to perfection, such as knowledge, goodness, presence, freedom, power, love, mercy, justice and holiness."⁵⁰⁷ Divine perfections are described in the second lesson of the Baltimore Catechism: "God is a spirit infinitely perfect."⁵⁰⁸ The Baltimore Catechism states that some of these perfections are that God is eternal, all-good, all-knowing, all-present, and almighty.⁵⁰⁹

Kerouac's characters and narrators in Lowell novels depict God's perfections on numerous occasions. The listed are the ones mentioned. 1) *God is all-knowing and all-seeing*: "Because God sees and knows you love them and he'll reward you."⁵¹⁰ God will know if Gerard does not confess all his sins.⁵¹¹ It is "Godly" to be all-knowing, which also shows that God in Lowell novels is portrayed as such: "[...] but not now, oh, not now – the child, unknowing, yet best knowing, Godly all-knowing, the child crieth –."⁵¹² The idea of God the Father as all-knowing is mirrored in real life from children to their fathers: "The most beautiful idea on the

⁵⁰⁴ Jack Kerouac, *Vanity of Duluoze*, 163.

⁵⁰⁵ Jason A. Fout, *Fully Alive: The Glory of God and the Human Creation in Karl Barth, Hans Urs von Balthasar and Theological Exegesis of Scripture* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015), 56.

⁵⁰⁶ Allen Ginsberg, *The Best Minds of My Generation: A Literary History of the Beats*, 82.

⁵⁰⁷ Jay W. Richards, *The Untamed God: A Philosophical Exploration of Divine Perfection, Simplicity and Immutability*, 96.

⁵⁰⁸ *Baltimore Catechism*, 11.

⁵⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 14 – 20.

⁵¹⁰ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 17.

⁵¹¹ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁵¹² Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 187.

face of the earth,' he thought unaccountably, 'is the idea the child has that his father knows everything.' In the subway he brooded over the thought that that must be the idea men had always had of God."⁵¹³ Kerouac also portrays the common belief of the believers that God sees all that is going on: "[.] if indeed the Lord seeth all and saw all that is going on and all the beseechment in His name in dark earth-churches throughout the kingdom of consciousness, it would be with pain He'd attend and His thoughts to it."⁵¹⁴

2) *God is all-good*: In "The Town and the City," George Martin reflects on the beauty of life, seeing God's goodness in it: "Forget everything else, I say, because it's a sweet life and God is good to us in the end."⁵¹⁵ God's infinite goodness "entails a divine impetus to communicate its nature. Experience of it can be captured in diverse modes of apprehension of God such as prayer, meditation, silence and solitude."⁵¹⁶ Theologians and others have discussed the possible explanations for the existence of evil while having an all-good God. It is better known as the question of theodicy, a concept primarily used by theologians and philosophers to "illustrate the ways in which individuals try to find meaning in suffering."⁵¹⁷ For example, process theology even abandons belief in God's omnipotence to address the question of the world's evil and suffering.⁵¹⁸

3) *God is all-present*: God is comprehensible for humans only to a certain point, as explained in the chapter dedicated to faith and revelation. The Baltimore catechism states that God is everywhere, but "we do not see God because He is a pure spirit and cannot be seen with bodily eyes."⁵¹⁹ As a spirit, he does not have a body: "A spirit that will never die, and has understanding and free will."⁵²⁰ Kerouac characters affirm this in "Visions of Gerard" that "the Lord is no-body."⁵²¹ Finally, the idea of this comes primarily from the New Testament: "God is a spirit" (John 4:24). God is present with humans: "*Le Seigneur est avec vous* –,"⁵²² roughly translating: "The Lord is with you."

4) *God is almighty*: "Across the big world darkness I've come, in boat, in bus, in airplane, in train standing my shadow immense traversing the fields and the redness of engine

⁵¹³ Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 420.

⁵¹⁴ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 47.

⁵¹⁵ Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 199.

⁵¹⁶ Margaret S. Archer, Andrew Collier, and Douglas V. Porpora, "What do we mean by God," in *Transcendence: Critical realism and God*, ed. Margaret S. Archer, Andrew Collier, and Douglas V. Porpora (London: Routledge, 2004), 28.

⁵¹⁷ Taylor Paige Winfield, "Embodied Theodicy: From Conceptual to Bodily Engagements with Suffering," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 89.1 (March 2021): 205, doi:10.1093/jaarel/lfaa070.

⁵¹⁸ Margaret S. Archer, Andrew Collier, and Douglas V. Porpora, *What do we mean by God*, 32.

⁵¹⁹ *Baltimore Catechism*, 16.

⁵²⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁵²¹ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 24.

⁵²² *Ibid.*, 25.

boilers behind me making me omnipotent upon the earth of the night, like God – but I have never made love with a little finger that he has won me since.”⁵²³ Although this section does not speak primarily about God, it shows that God is considered omnipotent. God also has the power to fix everything: “God fixed all this a long time ago.”⁵²⁴ Kerouac also affirms God’s power in an interview in 1958, where he answers whether the devil is running the world: “No. The devil is defeated. [...] by God.”⁵²⁵

5) *God is merciful and kind*: “But God is merciful and God above all is kind, and kind is kind, and kindness is all [...]”⁵²⁶ Believers should pray to God so that “in his mercy, munifisessence, whatyoucallit Zagg, should only say ‘Gus, Gus, poor Gus, pray to the angels and to me and I shall see Gus that you poor old mother –.”⁵²⁷ It is through mercy above all that humans experience God, however his merciful love and generosity cannot be measured by human standards.⁵²⁸ Christians believe to experience forgiveness for their sins through God’s mercy.⁵²⁹ Pope Francis concisely describes that God’s mercy “is his loving concern for each of us.”⁵³⁰ God is merciful to all, because faith and salvation are available to all.⁵³¹

3.2.2. Anthropomorphisms of God

The divine mystery has been portrayed in the New and Old Testaments in anthropomorphic forms where God speaks, listens, sees, and even whistles.⁵³² The most important, though, is to remember that the human language portrays these anthropomorphic characteristics of God, which cannot be entirely understandable to human cognition. Kerouac is no exception. He continues this biblical tradition and uses anthropomorphisms to characterize God. In “Visions of Gerard,” Jack Duluoaz even mentions that using anthropomorphisms is something distinctly human: “It’s typical of us to compromise and anthropomorphize and He it, thus attributing to that bright perfection of Heaven our own low state of selfbeing and selfhood and selfconsciousness and selfness general.”⁵³³ The emphasis on self would suggest

⁵²³ Jack Kerouac, *Maggie Cassidy*, 38.

⁵²⁴ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 43.

⁵²⁵ Paul Maher Jr., *Empty Phantoms: Interviews and Encounters with Jack Kerouac*, 60.

⁵²⁶ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 30.

⁵²⁷ Jack Kerouac, *Maggie Cassidy*, 16.

⁵²⁸ Paul C. McGlasson, *Church Doctrine* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018), 5: 56.

⁵²⁹ F. J. F. Keenan, SJ, *The Works of Mercy: The Heart of Catholicism*, 3rd ed. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), 11 – 12.

⁵³⁰ Pope Francis, *The Name of God is Mercy: A conversation with Andrea Tornielli*, trans. Oonagh Stransky (New York: Random House, 2016), 119.

⁵³¹ Robert Wild, *A Catholic Reading Guide to Universalism* (Eugene, OR: RESOURCE Publications, 2015), 3.

⁵³² Jean-Hervé Nicolas, OP, *Catholic Dogmatic Theology: A Synthesis. Book I. On the Trinitarian Mystery of God*, trans. Matthew K. Miner (The Catholic University of America Press, 2022), 1: 64.

⁵³³ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 24.

that Kerouac might have had Buddhist notions of elimination of the ego in his mind. However, in his Lowell novels, he shows God as having human characteristics. God has an eye: “It’s the eye of God, there’s no bottom”⁵³⁴ and a mouth: “But in that room all converted into something dark, cold, incredible gloomy, my room on rainy days and all in it was a saturation of the gray Yoik of Bleak Heaven when the sides of the rainbow mouth of God hang difurdled in a bloomy rue – no color [..].”⁵³⁵ He can see: “To be God, and to’ve seen his eyes, looking up at my altar, with that beholding bliss, all because of some easy remission of mine, were hells of guilt I’d say”⁵³⁶ and God even cries: “Before the crucifix of Jesus in the house I stood attentively, sure of many things, I was going to see the tears of God and already I saw them in that countenance elongated white in plaster that gave life [..].”⁵³⁷ God has a lap: “It’s only later you learn to lean your head in the lap of God, and rest in love”⁵³⁸ and he can bend things: “God bent from his steel arc welded her a hammer of honey and balm?”⁵³⁹ God has a life: “Both he and Mrs Martin believed that there was a God, and that there was a right and wrong, and that the virtuous life of love and humility was God’s own life.”⁵⁴⁰ Kerouac also chooses to portray God as having human emotions. He hates: “By golly, I’ve made up my mind, bad streak or no bad streak, that’s what I’m going to do and God can hate me all he wants,”⁵⁴¹ and makes mistakes: “The Lord also makes mistakes: “The Lord *knows* he made a mistake.”⁵⁴² Truly, the latter is the one description through which Kerouac makes God humane because he too can make mistakes. The God portrayed here is not the all-powerful God mentioned before. However, there also might be a pang of underlying guilt here from the narrator himself, that people have disappointed God to the point that God regrets ever creating them. God also has wings, a motive that is popular in the Psalms. In “Maggie Cassidy,” Kerouac describes the girl Maggie while she skates: “[..] the pinkness of her cheek, her hair, the crown of her eyes corona’d by God’s own bent wing – .”⁵⁴³ In another account, Duluo describes her as having dropped from God’s wings: “Here’s the girl you love [..] you fell in love with her thighs, her dark eyes – the angel of tinsel God’d dropped you from them wings – Maggie [..].”⁵⁴⁴ God’s wing then serves as approval of her beauty. Gerard even answers what color God is: “White of gold red black and everything –.”⁵⁴⁵

⁵³⁴ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 22.

⁵³⁵ Jack Kerouac, *Doctor Sax*, 86.

⁵³⁶ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 30.

⁵³⁷ Jack Kerouac, *Maggie Cassidy*, 41.

⁵³⁸ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁵³⁹ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁵⁴⁰ Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 23.

⁵⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 195.

⁵⁴² Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 24.

⁵⁴³ Jack Kerouac, *Maggie Cassidy*, 33 – 34.

⁵⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 156.

⁵⁴⁵ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 5.

God has a will that seems to be known to Kerouac's characters: "[...] I cant explain them what they're dying to know – It's because God doesnt wanta."⁵⁴⁶ It seems as if this character's actions and capabilities depend on God's will. The section shows God as human in his decisions and wishes. Also, his involvement in tiny events is emphasized. God is portrayed as wanting parents' children until they get old: "That's what a father has to go through in his life? He must lose all his children one by one, because God wants them till they get old, then he's going to throw them away. But when he throws them away I won't be around to help them any more."⁵⁴⁷ George Martin's attitude expresses anger and sadness. At the same time, he is not blaming God for this; it seems as if George is expressing pity that things must be this way. Again, Kerouac does not offer a solution to this problem.

Kerouac successfully portrays the human wish that God would be more involved in everyday human life: "I listened in the silence of my mother's house to divine how God was going to arrange the success of my love with Maggie. [...] Something there was, that was not, nothing, just the consciousness that God awaits us."⁵⁴⁸ Jack Duluoz then reminds himself before hurrying to school that "mixing up in the affairs of the world isnt for God [...]"⁵⁴⁹ Even if God does not interfere in everyday situations, he is responsible for humans and their time in this world: "[...] walked to the left, passed the holy doorway where G.J. and Lousy and I hung sitting in the mystery which I now see hugens, huger, into something beyond my Grook, beyond my Art & Pale, into the secret of what God has done with my Time [...]"⁵⁵⁰ God is also responsible for whether people die or not: "I could get killed walking across the street, if Supreme Reality's arranged it, so why not go to sea?"⁵⁵¹ Later, this chapter ends with snoring sounds: "His sleepiness was a characteristic thing. It was just like cutting out of a scene which got too complicated."⁵⁵² In the Baltimore Catechism, God is called Supreme Being: "When we say that God is the Supreme Being we mean that He is above all creatures, the self-existing and infinitely perfect Spirit."⁵⁵³ Most likely, Kerouac understood Christian God with the Supreme Reality here. According to Grace, "Kerouac's gnostic move during this period [the late 1940s] was his rejection of a personal, anthropomorphized supreme other, which he replaced with his nascent understanding of transcendent All."⁵⁵⁴ The assumption proposed by Grace cannot be

⁵⁴⁶ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 46.

⁵⁴⁷ Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 265 – 266.

⁵⁴⁸ Jack Kerouac, *Maggie Cassidy*, 43.

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁰ Jack Kerouac, *Doctor Sax*, 5.

⁵⁵¹ Jack Kerouac, *Vanity of Duluoz*, 170.

⁵⁵² Allen Ginsberg, *The Best Minds of My Generation: A Literary History of the Beats*, 84.

⁵⁵³ The explanation is found in the following Baltimore Catechism's edition; Kerouac did learn from the 2nd edition; *The New Confraternity Edition Revised Baltimore Catechism No. 3 And Mass* (Elkhorn, WI: St. Jerome Homeschool Library Press, 2018), 11.

⁵⁵⁴ Nancy M. Grace, *Jack Kerouac and the Literary Imagination*, 69.

appropriated for Kerouac's Lowell novels because he still uses anthropomorphized descriptions of God. Kerouac wrote the Lowell novels in different periods; however, all books illustrate anthropomorphisms. The scope that these novels encompass is almost the whole of Kerouac's writing career, starting from "The Town and the City" in 1947 to "Vanity of Duluo" in 1967.

Kerouac does illustrate in Lowell novels Father, who is in heaven, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, although his characters and narrators do not speak of the Trinity as such. The triune understanding of God is essential for Christian theology. However, this silence in Kerouac's novels does not make his characters less Catholic. Through the centuries, the doctrine of the Trinity has been used more by theologians and less by daily churchgoers. Kerouac's characters illustrate precisely this. Kerouac dives deeper by illustrating God's perfections, showing his nature as all-knowing, all-seeing, merciful, kind, omnipotent, and all-present. The divine perfections portrayed in Lowell novels correspond to those of Catholic tradition. Continuing the biblical tradition, Kerouac also uses anthropomorphisms in his portrayal of God – he feels human emotions such as hate and has human features like eyes, lap, and mouth. God can cry and bend things and even has a color and wings.

3.3. Creation

The doctrine of creation expresses the belief that God is the origin, foundations of the world and everything in it. Creation for Christians is the self-revelation of God.⁵⁵⁵ The belief that God has created the earth is something that is also affirmed in "The Town and the City": "Living continues in Galloway like the seasons themselves, nearer to God's earth by these weathers, through which life pulses processionally in moods and leaps and bounds, while the moods of the universe flank across the skies endlessly."⁵⁵⁶ Here one even might see a parallel to the changes of the liturgical year. The sky is something "no fist could form in and hold any part of it."⁵⁵⁷ The idea of creation for believers gives a sense of dependence, that they are brought into existence by something beyond themselves.⁵⁵⁸ The narrator portrays Peter's thoughts in "The Town and the City," showing similarities to this dependence: "Something silent, beautiful, inscrutable had made all this for sure, and he was in the middle of it, among

⁵⁵⁵ Anne M. Clifford, "Creation," in *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*, eds. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza and John P. Galvin, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 202 – 204.

⁵⁵⁶ Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 21.

⁵⁵⁷ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 93.

⁵⁵⁸ John F. Owens, "Creation, *Paradise Lost*, and Modernity," *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 20.4 (2017): 39, Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1353/log.2017.0027>.

the children of the earth. And he was glad.”⁵⁵⁹ For Peter, as for other predominantly Catholic believers, the doctrine of creation gives hope.

In the Catholic faith, the created world is “a major locus for experience of the divine.”⁵⁶⁰ Creation embodies God’s revelation through nature,⁵⁶¹ a notion that Kerouac depicts in Lowell novels. Jack Duluoze sees nature as the image of God that can be derived from the assertion that creation embodies God’s revelation through nature: “To Peter it was the earth again, the land which was their home, the actual sweet sad place of life again.”⁵⁶² Duluoze also refers to Blaise Pascal’s idea of nature as the image of God. Pascal writes: “Nature has perfections to show that she is the image of God; and imperfections to show that it is only the image.”⁵⁶³ Duluoze states: “I believe that.”⁵⁶⁴ The debate on nature’s importance is not unique to Pascal; however, through this, he “sought to revive some of the earlier doctrines concerning the order of nature.”⁵⁶⁵ Kerouac’s turn toward nature and its importance can be seen in a broader context of an ecological shift in different fields. For example, the Beat poet Gary Snyder promoted humans’ relationship with nature; some even see him as an author encompassing eco-theological notions. The sensibility of the hippie movement entailed blurring the line between the individual and nature.⁵⁶⁶ Kerouac has shown in his Lowell novels his respect towards nature that might have been fueled even more by his Buddhist studies: “What with air pollution and all, and the ulcers of the executive, and the ads in *Time Magazine* [..].”⁵⁶⁷ However, Blaise Pascal would not be compatible with Buddhist ideas. Pascal was a 17th-century thinker who “became an adherent of austere Jansenist group of Catholics who were rivals of the more worldly Jesuits.”⁵⁶⁸ The fact that researchers have connected Pascal to Jansenism might be why studies of the Beat Generation emphasize Jansenism’s influence on Kerouac.⁵⁶⁹ He has read Pascal, but, for example, in his letters, he barely mentions him. That does not seem sufficient to call one an

⁵⁵⁹ Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 356 – 357.

⁵⁶⁰ Loni Sophia Reynolds, *Irrational Doorways: Religion and Spirituality in the Work of the Beat Generation*, 20.

⁵⁶¹ Avery Dulles, *Faith and Revelation*, 106.

⁵⁶² Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 307.

⁵⁶³ Blaise Pascal, *Blaise Pascal Thoughts: Selected and Translated*, trans. Moritz Kaufmann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 198.

⁵⁶⁴ Jack Kerouac, *Vanity of Duluoze*, 163.

⁵⁶⁵ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Religion & The Order of Nature: The 1994 Cadbury Lectures at the University of Birmingham* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 103.

⁵⁶⁶ See Morgan Shipley, “Hippies and the Mystic Way: Dropping Out, Unitive Experiences, and Communal Utopianism,” *Utopian Studies* 24.2 (2013): 232 – 263.

⁵⁶⁷ Jack Kerouac, *Vanity of Duluoze*, 10.

⁵⁶⁸ J. J. C. Smart and J. J. Haldane, *Atheism and Theism*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 47.

⁵⁶⁹ See Robert Genter, “Mad to Talk, Mad to Be Saved”: Jack Kerouac, Soviet Psychology, and the Cold War Confessional Self,” *Studies in American Fiction* 40.1 (Spring 2013): 30 – 31; Albert Gelpi, *American Poetry after Modernism: The Power of the Word* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015). Kerouac’s aunt has been seen as promoting the avoidance of this world, that is interpreted as Jansenistic; David Creighton, *Ecstasy of the Beats: On the Road to Understanding* (Toronto: The Dundurn Group, 2007), 214. See also Ben Giamo, *Kerouac, the Word and the Way: Prose Artist as Spiritual Quester*.

adherent of Jansenism. Further on, it is hard to tell how much Kerouac liked Pascal's ideas. He refers to the perfections of nature as being the image of God and its imperfections in the Lowell novels. However, Kerouac does not speak of Pascal's strict division between Catholicism and other traditions. For Pascal, there were only two options: "Catholicism on the one hand and atheism on the other hand."⁵⁷⁰ Kerouac's studies in Buddhism would not be compatible with this idea. Robert Genter argues that what Kerouac took from Jansenist teaching was that "man's salvation came only through God's gift of grace that cleansed man of his innate sinfulness."⁵⁷¹ Jansenist ideas preached strict morality despite their emphasis on the power of God's grace.⁵⁷² Pascal also supported strict and rigorous Catholicism, one of the reasons why he might have been prone to Jansenist ideas. A strict religious life for Pascal can ensure bliss and not "infinite torment in hell."⁵⁷³ Even if Kerouac saw Pascal's ideas as suggestive, he could not follow in his daily life a rigorous religious praxis. Other possible references to Jansenism will also be analyzed further on. This dissertation argues that Catholicism portrayed in Lowell novels cannot be generally described as jansenistic.

In Christian tradition, God created human beings, who are children of God, a notion that Kerouac's characters believe: "Morning is when the slackened sleep faces of the children of God must be righted, rubbed and waked up."⁵⁷⁴ He created everyone, not only saints and devout believers: "God made misers, and misers made God, and I'm suited."⁵⁷⁵ Jacky Dulouoz in "Visions of Gerard" also affirms that "God made us for His glory, not our own."⁵⁷⁶ This is a notion in the Christian tradition which is found in the Old Testament Book of Isaiah:

Let my people return from distant lands, from every part of the world.
They are my own people, and I created them to bring me glory (Isaiah 43:6-7).

The doctrine of creation comes with a moral problem, as John F. Owens observes, "something seems to have been imposed on us, for without our consent someone decreed that we are to be in a certain way and that we are not to stray from the identity with which we were first provided."⁵⁷⁷ Devout believers would not consider this problematic, but some might feel "tied forever to the intentions of the one who brought us into existence, appearing as if we are denied

⁵⁷⁰ J. J. C. Smart and J. J. Haldane, *Atheism and Theism*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 47.

⁵⁷¹ Robert Genter, "Mad to Talk, Mad to Be Saved": *Jack Kerouac, Soviet Psychology, and the Cold War Confessional Self*, 30 – 31.

⁵⁷² Gerald O'Collins, S.J., and Mario Farrugia, S.J., *Catholicism: The Story of Catholic Christianity*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 224.

⁵⁷³ J. J. C. Smart and J. J. Haldane, *Atheism and Theism*, 47.

⁵⁷⁴ Jack Kerouac, *Maggie Cassidy*, 116.

⁵⁷⁵ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 79.

⁵⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁵⁷⁷ John F. Owens, "Creation, *Paradise Lost*, and Modernity," *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 20.4 (2017): 41, Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1353/log.2017.0027>.

any fundamental creativity.”⁵⁷⁸ After the creation, humans are left to fend for themselves, as declared by Emil Duluoz: “Ah dammit son it’s a terrible thing not being able to help you but you do understand dont you God’s left us all alone in our own skins to fare better or worse – hah?”⁵⁷⁹ Kerouac’s characters also question the intentions of creation, stating that humans owe God a death: “Would I were divinest punner and tell how the cold winds blow with one stroke of my quick head in this harsh unhospitable hospital called the earth, where ‘thou owest God a death.’”⁵⁸⁰ It does not seem that God has created the world for people because there is much suffering in this world: “‘God doesnt look like he made the world for people’ [...] – No help in sight, the utter helplessness up, down, around.”⁵⁸¹ The world “‘ if made for anything, made for something dead to sympathy.’”⁵⁸² The notion that the world is not created for humans shows the characters’ experience of suffering, loss, and despair. The texts do not assume that God has not created the world. It questions God’s intentions in creating it, vividly illustrated when George Martin asks this for God on his deathbed:

And he talked to God, sometimes with heated familiarity and argumentative fury, he asked why things had been made so hard for men, why, and if there was no why, then what it was that was so strange, beautiful, sad, brief, raggedly real, so hurt and inconsolable. He asked God why he had been made by Him, for what purpose, for what reason the flower of his own face and the fading of it from the earth forever; why life was so short, so hard, so furious with men, so impossibly mortal, so cruel, restless, sweet, so deadly.⁵⁸³

George does not receive an answer from God before his death. Life is beautiful but brute because everything alive dies eventually:

I [...] saw that life is a brute creation, beautiful and cruel, that when you see a springtime bud covered with rain dew, how can you believe it’s beautiful when you know the moisture is just there to encourage the bud to flower out just so’s it can fall off sere dead dry in the fall?⁵⁸⁴

Duluoz connects this understanding with contemporary cultural trends: “All the contemporary LSD acid heads (of 1967) see the cruel beauty of the brute creation just by closing their eyes: I’ve seen it too since: a maniacal Mandala circle all mosaic and dense with millions of cruel things and beautiful scenes goin on [...]”⁵⁸⁵ Allen Ginsberg comments on this section: “So you see the [period] of invention and discovery that he was going through. And the eagerness to

⁵⁷⁸ John F. Owens, *Creation, Paradise Lost, and Modernity*, 41.

⁵⁷⁹ Jack Kerouac, *Maggie Cassidy*, 157.

⁵⁸⁰ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 31.

⁵⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁵⁸² *Ibid.*

⁵⁸³ Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 464.

⁵⁸⁴ Jack Kerouac, *Vanity of Duluoz*, 252.

⁵⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

communicate to America the unspeakable visions of the individual.”⁵⁸⁶ However, this brute nature also has a merciful side:

Because we do know that the brutish, the mean-hearted, the Mad Dog creation has a side of compassionate mercy in it, as witness the mother cat (Mother Nature) how she washes and soothes her little kittens in the basket [...] and gives of her own milk of kindness without stint [...].⁵⁸⁷

The “brutal creation” has sent Jesus Christ: “[...] the Son of Man who, to prove that we should follow His example of mercy, brotherly love, charity, patience, gave Himself up without a murmur to be sacrificed. Otherwise we would have taken His example lightly.”⁵⁸⁸ Mentioning the Son of Man gives readers an apparent reference to God as the creator.

The created world is God’s revelation, a mystery, as Peter Martin comments: “My philosophy is that you can’t explain the world. It’s too big and it’s too crazy and sometimes it’s funny and most of the time it’s ... strange.”⁵⁸⁹ Catholic Studies expert David Paul Deavel suggests that to know that the world is crazy, “that we will find no abiding or perfect city here on earth, and that we are meant for much more than this life, is already to suggest to us the outlines of behavior and attitudes that make for a good but imperfect society.”⁵⁹⁰ The direction expressed here corresponds better with the interpretations of the more skeptical brother Francis, who does not believe in mysteries: “As for the world being funny, I don’t know. If nightmares are funny...”⁵⁹¹ For Peter, however, the wish was to live a “super-spiritual existence” that exists outside world events: “Mighty world events meant virtually nothing to him, they were not real enough, and he was certain that his wonderful joyous visions of super-spiritual existence and great poetry were ‘realer than all.’”⁵⁹²

In “The Town and the City,” Peter’s friend Kenny tells a parable of creation. The story is called “parable” by Kenny, who mainly uses Christian imagery to explain the purpose of God’s creation. Like the creation described in the Bible (Gen 1:1), there was God at the beginning of everything else. Kenny says as if he would recall what God has said then, that he must make the perfect world. This seems for Kenny to include the creation of the natural world that happens before the creation of humans. However, he does not specify this. Afterward, God “makes men and women and looks at them with that judicious air of a carpenter getting his boards and nails together.”⁵⁹³ Similarly to other characters in Lowell novels, also for Kenny,

⁵⁸⁶ Allen Ginsberg, *The Best Minds of My Generation: A Literary History of the Beats*, 136.

⁵⁸⁷ Jack Kerouac, *Vanity of Duluoz*, 253 – 254.

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁹ Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 151.

⁵⁹⁰ David Paul Deavel, “Preface: Influence, Wayfaring, and the Catholic Novelist,” *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 22.4 (Fall 2019): 15, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1353/log.2019.0036>.

⁵⁹¹ Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 151.

⁵⁹² Ibid., 271.

⁵⁹³ Ibid., 386.

God is anthropomorphic. He talks, walks, has hands, is deep in thought, he watches humans. After God has created the humans, he watches everybody, and the problems start to arise, “all the things they cry about in books and newspapers, wars, crime, violence, adultery, deceit, and whatnot parlous.”⁵⁹⁴ God realizes that he has not made the perfect world, so he is adamant about perfecting it by erasing the mistakes that he made. God is compared to a chef, who “smacks his lips, tasting it like a French chef.” He is “making a stew, out of that stew he’s going to make a broth, out of that broth he’s going to make one drop of perfect essence, and that’s what he’s going to start his real heart’s-desire world with, that drop from the broth of the stew in the pot.”⁵⁹⁵ When God has put everyone in the pot, it is the end of the world and God rests. God’s secret recipe is something that will help him defeat the devil. Kenny exclaims that the devil “was there all the time, he’s God’s arch competitor in fancy carpentry and cuisine.”⁵⁹⁶ The difference, though, between God and the devil in this story, as it is also in the creation story in the Bible that God can create humans (Gen 1:26-27), but the devil cannot. That is why the devil “watches and sneers, and he works his dirty fingers into all the human beings, he tries to make them perfectly wrong, but they’re too disorganized even for that. God makes notes just the same, he learns something from every little life [..]!”⁵⁹⁷ When the “elixir” is ready, God “got his drop of splendid juice and he goes over to the ocean and lifts the mish-mash pot and dumps the whole mess in the ocean [..] to feed his sharks.”⁵⁹⁸ However, unlike the traditional Christian linear worldview, Kenny concludes that this creation/destruction as a circular event: “And then he’s going to start all over again a billion years from now.”⁵⁹⁹ Kerouac portrays another aspect – the relativity of time for God. It seems that Kerouac chose here to use “billion years” to emphasize more vividly the vast and eternal nature of this God.

To summarize, Kerouac’s characters affirm that God has created this world and that humans are children of God; both are well-known Christian notions. Kerouac also vividly portrays the despair of the human situation – that of suffering and death. Characters do not deny God’s existence but question God’s intentions for creating humans. In Lowell novels nature is portrayed as God’s revelation and a mystery, which also corresponds to Catholic teaching. The turn toward more specific ideas of nature as the image of God corresponds well with popular ecological notions of the time. Even if God has made human beings for his glory, Jack Duluoaz considers cats to be made for humans: “God made kitties I guess for us –.”⁶⁰⁰

⁵⁹⁴ Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 386.

⁵⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 386 – 387.

⁵⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 387.

⁵⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 387.

⁵⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 387 – 388.

⁵⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰⁰ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 81.

3.4. Jesus Christ

In a 1968 interview, Ted Berringen asks Kerouac: “How come you’ve never written about Jesus? You’ve written about Buddha. Wasn’t Jesus a great guy too?” Kerouac is surprised by such a question: “I’ve never written about Jesus? [...] all I write about is Jesus. I am Everhard Mercurian, General of the Jesuit Army.”⁶⁰¹ Jesus Christ is the central figure in Christianity. It cannot be imaginable without Christ – God made Man, who died for humanity’s sins so that humans could be redeemed and saved. Jesus Christ is the Mediator and fulness of all revelation.⁶⁰² Between the First and Second Vatican Council, Christology was understood as encompassing such central issues as the divinity of Christ, the interpretation of the crucifixion, and the resurrection.⁶⁰³ Theologians considered these questions settled at the time, so Christology’s task was to tackle “comparatively peripheral matters” such as the nature and scope of Christ’s human knowledge and others. The central issues previously considered settled were reexamined after the Second Vatican Council. John Galvin stresses that the inter-council period’s Christology was fragmented because it divided questions into two spheres of inquiry – fundamental and dogmatic theology. Many topics, as a result, were taken out from their appropriate contexts.⁶⁰⁴ Modern Catholic theology tries to overcome these divisions; however, Kerouac’s understanding of Christ most likely tended to join the Neo-Scholastic approach.⁶⁰⁵ Gospels were considered reliable historical sources, and the authority of the Bible was emphasized. Christology mainly consisted of the theology of the incarnation. The other approach to Christ was soteriology which explored Christ’s salvific work.⁶⁰⁶

In Lowell novels, the author will look at the possible portrayal of the more personalistic and Christologically centered God of Kerouac’s characters as the trend that was visible in

⁶⁰¹ Paul Maher Jr., *Empty Phantoms: Interviews and Encounters with Jack Kerouac*, 229. Everard Mercurian (1514 – 1580) was the general of the Society of Jesus from 1573 to 1581; Thomas M. McCoog, SJ., ed., *The Mercurian Project: Forming Jesuit Culture (1573-1580)* (Rome: Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu; St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2004).

⁶⁰² Chapter 2 in *Dogmatic Constitution On Divine Revelation Dei Verbum Solemnly Promulgated By His Holiness Pope Paul VI* (November 18, 1965), https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html (accessed 04.10.2022).

⁶⁰³ Catholic theology was dominated by Neo-Scholasticism, which sought to revive in modified form, the speculative synthesis of the Middle Ages, especially the work of Thomas Aquinas; John P. Galvin, “Jesus Christ,” in *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*, eds. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza and John P. Galvin, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 256.

⁶⁰⁴ John P. Galvin, *Jesus Christ*, 256 – 257.

⁶⁰⁵ Researchers have used this approach to analyze other Beat Generation writers that were influenced or grew up with Catholicism; see Kirby Olson, *Gregory Corso: Doubting Thomist* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2002).

⁶⁰⁶ John P. Galvin, *Jesus Christ*, 257.

Catholicism in post-war America. As Christ's incarnation, death, and resurrection are complementary parts of redemption,⁶⁰⁷ the author will look at all three in this chapter.

3.4.1. Incarnation

Incarnation is one of the central doctrines in Christianity. It is a teaching that God became a man in the form of Jesus Christ. Through God's work, creation and redemption meet in the Incarnation, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.⁶⁰⁸ Kerouac portrays children's perplexity of Jesus' conception while praying "Hail Mary": "*Et Jésus le fruit de vos entrailles*" – 'entrailles' the powerful French word for Womb, entrails, none of us had any idea what it meant, some strange interior secret of Mary and Womanhood, little dreaming whole universe was one great Womb."⁶⁰⁹ The birth of Jesus is symbolically remembered each year at Christmas. Despite focusing on the birth of Jesus, it also functions to remember all his life, suffering, and death. Christmas time is miraculous for little Michael Martin in "The Town and the City": "[...] a simple verity, the truth of Christmas which was the doing of little Child Jesus, and of God, to which he, Michael Martin, was trembling and joyously prepared and given over."⁶¹⁰ Christmas time is a joyous time for the Martin family, for the devoted ones at this time went to Church to celebrate the birth of Jesus, followed by secular activities with other family members like unwrapping presents and eating greasy meals. During Christmas, often in churches are displayed the nativity scene that Kerouac also describes in his novel:

Mickey gazed with fearful awe at the beautiful crib on one side of the gleaming white altar, representing the Christ child in the manger, the mother Mary bending over him silent and immobile, Joseph standing mournfully by, all of it bathed in the soft blue light that came from the enormous star. The three Wise Kings stood apart, with concentrated devotion, frozen in sorrowful intensity, as though they knew that the whole world was looking at them and the moment must never be disturbed, nor the little Child Jesus who lay in the crib in a halo of silent miraculous light.⁶¹¹

When Mickey got bored at the Mass, he imagined that he laid in the crib and "he himself was the Christ Child and that the Virgin Mary was his own mother."⁶¹² The identification helps

⁶⁰⁷ Nathaniel Peters, "The Trinitarian Shape of the Mystical Body of Christ in the Theology of Isaac of Stella," in *The Center is Jesus Christ Himself: Essays on Revelation, Salvation, and Evangelization*, ed. Andrew Meszaros (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2021), 154.

⁶⁰⁸ Bruce J. Nicholls, *Contextualization: A Theology of Gospel and Culture* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2003), 58.

⁶⁰⁹ Here, Kerouac portrays how children viewed the teaching of the Virgin Mary in Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 25 – 26.

⁶¹⁰ Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 167.

⁶¹¹ *Ibid.*, 172 – 173.

⁶¹² *Ibid.*, 174.

Mickey better understand the situation and the meaning of the nativity scene and “he fancied that he had seen a blush of pleasure growing on Mary’s cheeks.” Visualization and identification with Jesus Christ give him overwhelming emotions: “And at that precise moment, a low mournful note from the organ filled the church, and with unaccountable swiftness Mickey’s eyes burned with imminent tears.”⁶¹³ The notion of imitating Christ is already illustrated and mentioned in the New Testament numerous times. Imitating Christ can be displayed in three ways:

1. Disciples acquire a new identity, and they learn to be children of God.
2. They share Jesus’ faith.
3. By imitating Christ, disciples share in his power.

Christians usually choose one way to practice discipleship, however, intertwined with other theological concepts.⁶¹⁴ Through Mickey’s identification with Child Jesus, he understands how to be a child of God. However, he does not imitate Christ’s works, though readers should remember that he is a child.

Traditionally the primary sources to learn about Jesus’ life is the New Testament. Kerouac’s characters also read the Bible and referred to the events described there: “Unaccountably he remembered something he had read a few days before, in the New Testament, something about Jesus and his fisherman casting their nets in the sea.”⁶¹⁵ The episode is elaborated further in “Doctor Sax”:

He walked in the waves with silver rainment feet, Peter was a Fisherman but he never fished that deep – the Lord spoke to dark assemblies about gloomy fish – the bread was broken ... a miracle swept around the encampment like a flowing cape and everybody ate fish [...].⁶¹⁶

There is also a reference to Christ in the Temple: “I was amazed and scared in the corner, as one might have felt seeing Christ in the temple bashing the moneychanger tables every which away and scourging them with his seldom whip.”⁶¹⁷ This account has been described in the New Testament in all of the gospels (Matthew 21:12, Mark 11:15, Luke 19:45, and John 2:14). The believers also learn about Jesus’ life from the pictures in the church:

[...] we went seesawing thru Palm Sunday and we’d stare at those pictures of Jesus meek on the little *azno* entering the city and the palm multitudes, ‘The Lord has found that nice little animal there and he got up on his back and they rode into the city’ – ‘Look, the people are all glad’.⁶¹⁸

⁶¹³ Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 174.

⁶¹⁴ Daniel Patte, “Discipleship,” in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christianity*, ed. Daniel Patte (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010): 327.

⁶¹⁵ Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 487.

⁶¹⁶ Jack Kerouac, *Doctor Sax*, 83.

⁶¹⁷ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 10.

⁶¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 36.

The children learn about Christ in the church: “Gerard and all the boys did special novenas at certain season and went to confession on Friday afternoon to prepare for Sunday morning when the church hoped to infuse them with some of the perfection embodied and implied in the concept of Christ the Lord.”⁶¹⁹ This is the only quote where there one might see an indirect reference to the incarnate nature of Christ in his perfection that is embodied in his dual nature. The events of Christ’s life, especially the passion of Christ, are also portrayed in the stations of the Grotto:

The first of the stations faced the side of a funeral home, so you kneeled there, at night, looking at faint representations of the Virgin, hood over head, her sad eyes, the action, the tortured wood and thorns of the Passion, and your reflections on the subject mirrored from the funeral home where a dull light fixed in the ceiling of an overpass rain garage for hearses shines dully in the gravely gloom [...].⁶²⁰

The episodes of Christ’s life have been understood within the framework of Catholic teaching. It is different concerning the meaning of incarnation. It has not been mentioned in the Lowell novels with the meaning of the incarnation of Jesus Christ. The term “incarnation” is used twice by Duluoiz in “Maggie Cassidy” and “Visions of Gerard.”⁶²¹ In both texts, incarnation has been mentioned in the context of possible multiple lives – either from someone else’s previous life or his own. Kerouac’s characters do not explore the importance of Christ’s incarnation, him being a true God and true human at the same time.⁶²² However, there are more vivid references to the suffering of Jesus.

3.4.2. Passion of Christ

It is usually considered that the resurrection is the central theme in New Testament’s narratives concerning Jesus, but it has the crucifixion as its presupposition.⁶²³ Kerouac’s

⁶¹⁹ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 25.

⁶²⁰ Jack Kerouac, *Doctor Sax*, 116 – 117.

⁶²¹ Duluoiz hopes he would be an incarnation of some lucky man from earlier times. It seems that the protagonist hopes that something within him would “activate” to make him as successful as he wants to be: “I lay in bed thinking I was going to be a big hero of New York with rosy features and white teeth – an idiomaniac post-Iddyboy incarnation of the American Super Dream Winner, Go Getter [...]”; Jack Kerouac, *Maggie Cassidy*, 166. The term “incarnation” in the Western world is also used to name the incarnation of Boddhisattva in the Buddhist tradition. It seems that here the author has thought of a different tradition than Christianity: “I’m presumably with Ma and probably one year old in my baby carriage (if it happened at all) and the Vision is of the great Gloom of the earth and the great Clutter of human life and the great Drizzly Dream of the dreary eternities, and as we leave the shop, or, as is left the shop, by self or phantom, suddenly is seen a little old man, or ordinary man, in a strangely slanted gray hat, in coat, presumably, walking off up the dreary and endless boulevard of the drizzle dump, the tearful beatness of the scene and weird as if maybe this is just a memory of mine from some previous incarnation in St Petersburg Russia or maybe the gluey ghees of dark fitful kitchen in Thibet ancient and long ago [...]”; Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 97.

⁶²² *Baltimore Catechism*, 60 – 77.

⁶²³ Jens Glebe-Möller, *Jesus and Theology: Critique of a Tradition*, trans. Thor Hall (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 135.

characters refer more to Christ's cross and suffering than his salvific work or life. It is much harder for human beings to identify with incarnation and resurrection than with suffering that is common in this world. Christ died for human sins. He sacrificed himself for this reason: "[...] we have seen the brutal creation send us the Son of Man who, to prove that we should follow His example of mercy, brotherly love, charity, patience, gave Himself up without a murmur to be sacrificed. Otherwise we would have taken His example lightly."⁶²⁴ Jack Duluoaz here affirms something that has been debated theologically throughout the centuries – without the death of Christ, redemption would not be possible as Apostle Paul saw it.⁶²⁵ The sacrifice of Jesus was humble and sincere: "Seeing that He really meant it right down to the cross, we are impressed. Impressed so much that it comes to the point of being by way of a kind of redemption, a plucking from the sea, a saving hooray."⁶²⁶ It is this sacrifice that gives way for humans to have the chance to be saved. Gerard emphatically views the story of crucifixion when he visits the church:

Gerard doffs his cap, trails fingertip in the font, does the sign of the cross absently, walk half-tiptoe around to the side aisle and down under the crucified tablets that always wrenched at his heart when he saw them (*Pauvre Jésus*, Poor Jesus') as tho Jesus had been his close friend and brother done wrong indeed.⁶²⁷

The text illustrates the portrayal of a personal God, a friend with whom believers empathize. Gerard is portrayed as having a unique understanding and empathy towards Jesus' suffering: "He turns eyes up and around to the cross, where, with arms extended and hands nailed, Jesus sags to his foot-rest and bemoans the scene forever, and always strikes in Gerard's naturally pitiful heart the thought 'But *why* did they do that?'"⁶²⁸ Gerard feels saddened about the violent and unfair death of Jesus Christ, who died at the cross. Jack Duluoaz remembers Christ's death and explains what Jesus meant by crying out to his "Father why hast thou forsaken me": "He was only quoting a Psalm of David like a poet remembering by heart [...]"⁶²⁹ Furthermore, Duluoaz explains that Jesus

Did not repudiate His own kingdom, it's a crock to believe so, throw the Shield of David in the garbage can with the Cross of Jesus if that's what you think, let me prove it to you: Jesus was only quoting the first line of David's Psalm 22 with which he was familiar as a child even (not to mention that the sight of Roman soldiers casting ballots for his garment reminded him of the line in the same Psalm

⁶²⁴ Jack Kerouac, *Vanity of Duluoaz*, 253 – 254.

⁶²⁵ Brian O. McDermott, S.J., *Word Become Flesh: Dimensions of Christology* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 94.

⁶²⁶ Jack Kerouac, *Vanity of Duluoaz*, 253 – 254.

⁶²⁷ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 25.

⁶²⁸ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁶²⁹ Jack Kerouac, *Vanity of Duluoaz*, 121.

‘They cast lots upon my vesture,’ and add this too ‘They pierced my hands and my feet’).⁶³⁰

This section is paramount because it is one of the rare places where Dulouoz tries to give a theological explanation. He emphasizes that Jesus did not lose faith or did not wish that his sacrifice could be somehow dismissed.

Mickey goes even further in this understanding of following Jesus’s example; not only does he imagine himself as being the Jesus Child to understand the importance of the nativity better, but he also realizes that following his example means suffering:

Then the boy looked up again at the altar manger and saw that he too must suffer and be crucified like the Child Jesus there, who was crucified for his sake, who pointed out his guiltiness that way, but who also pointed out what was going to happen to him, for he too, Michael Martin, was a child with a holy mother, therefore he too would be drawn to Calvary and the wind would begin to screech and everything would get dark.⁶³¹

For those who tried to follow Jesus’ example, martyrs became models in their ultimate suffering and imitation of Christ.⁶³² Mickey here tackles the notion that if he were to imitate Jesus, he must suffer as Jesus did on Mount Calvary, where he died. David Robertson argues that “Kerouac’s notion of redemption is also thoroughly Christian: in order to turn humankind’s suffering into joy, the chosen ones must suffer vicariously.”⁶³³ Another time, Dulouoz exclaims in the face of the possible death of their German enemies during wartime: “Ah High Germanic Nordic Aryans you brutes of my heart! ... Kill me! ... Crucify me!”⁶³⁴ The text fragment attains a new dimension if one looks at it through a prism of a wish to follow Jesus’ example. Kerouac chooses here besides “Kill me” to emphasize the crucifixion, a death that is primarily understood in a Christian prism as the death of Jesus. Catholics learn about the evil of sin and hatred that God has towards it from the suffering and death of Jesus.⁶³⁵ For one to try to imitate

⁶³⁰ After this text, Dulouoz quotes from Psalm 22: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Loudly I call, but my prayer cannot reach thee. Thou dost not answer, my God, when I cry out... I am a byword to all, the laughing-stock of the rabble. All those who catch sight of me fall to mocking; mouthing out insults, while they toss their heads in scorn “He committed himself to the Lord, why does not the Lord come to his rescue, and set his favorite free?” ... I am spent as spilt water, all my bones out of joint ... parched is my throat, like clay in the baking, and my tongue sticks fast in my mouth ... They have torn holes in my hands and feet ... and they stand there watching me ... They divide my spoils among them, cast lots for my garments ...”; Jack Kerouac, *Vanity of Dulouoz*, 121.

⁶³¹ Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 174.

⁶³² Matthew D. Lundberg, *Christian Martyrdom and Christian Violence: On Suffering and Wielding the Sword* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 20.

⁶³³ But in contrast to Gary Snyder’s “atheistic spiritual materialism and his vision of bhikkus redeeming the world by an accumulation of little acts of kindness, Kerouac remained true to his Christian upbringing”; David Robertson, “Real Matter, Spiritual Mountain: Gary Snyder and Jack Kerouac on Mt. Tamalpais,” *Western American Literature* 27.3 (Fall 1992): 221 – 222.

⁶³⁴ Jack Kerouac, *Vanity of Dulouoz*, 121.

⁶³⁵ *Baltimore Catechism*, 84.

Jesus in suffering, as Kerouac has illustrated, shows a devotional interpretation that is quite strict and rigorous.

Understandably, it is not always easy to follow Jesus' example; Kerouac's Jack Duluoz even says: "But we can't be redeemed 'unless we believe', it says, or follow His example. And who can do that?"⁶³⁶ The text suggests that Duluoz does not consider faith as challenge but as the necessity to follow Jesus's example. Narrator gives the answer shortly after where he explains his inability to follow Jesus's example:

If I, myself, for instance, were to try to follow Jesus' example I'd have first to give up my kind of drinking, which prevents me from thinking too much (like I'm doing now in awful pain this morning), and so I'd go insane and go on public debt and be a pain to everybody in the blessed 'community' or 'society.'⁶³⁷

The ones with anxiety or depression are more prone to have problems with alcohol.⁶³⁸ The alcohol numbs the intrusive and abundant thoughts. Kerouac is let down by his illness in this section, probably unknowingly, when Duluoz starts making excuses for his drinking. The trivial reason for the first drink, here the restlessness of the mind, is often the excuse to have a "bender."⁶³⁹ Alcoholism's legitimization goes even thus far as being for the good of society. Ginsberg poetically describes that Kerouac was "undergoing crucifixion in the mortification of his body as he drank."⁶⁴⁰ He seems to view Kerouac's drinking as suffering through which he can reach salvation. Third, this is one of the rare instances where Kerouac portrays Duluoz's place in a blessed community. Kerouac wrote "Vanity of Duluoz" in his last years of life when he attended church more often. If understood as the community of the Catholic Church, then Duluoz, similarly to Kerouac himself, can be identified here as the "communal Catholic," a concept outlined in the previous chapter. Overall, the passage shows Kerouac's attempt to dialogue with the Catholic tradition and its teachings through his writings. Although the narrator questions the possibility of following some of the Catholic teachings, Kerouac does not try to find a new theological solution for it. The narrator seems to be waiting for someone else to affirm that his doubts are legitimate or to give him all the correct answers. It is impossible, as George Martin says to his son: "I'm not God, I can't tell you what to do, all I can tell you is what I *think* you should do –."⁶⁴¹

⁶³⁶ Jack Kerouac, *Vanity of Duluoz*, 254.

⁶³⁷ Ibid.

⁶³⁸ Manuel I. Ibáñez, María A. Ruipérez, Helena Villa, Jorge Moya, and Generós Ortet, "Personality and Alcohol Use," in *The SAGE Handbook of Personality Theory and Assessment*, eds. Gregory J. Boyle, Gerald Matthews, Donalds H. Saklofske (London: SAGE Publications, 2008), 1: 680.

⁶³⁹ Paul Antze, "Symbolic action in Alcoholics Anonymous," in *Constructive Drinking: Perspectives on Drink from Anthropology*, ed. Mary Douglas (London: Routledge, 2003), 10: 157.

⁶⁴⁰ Allen Ginsberg, "Negative Capability: Kerouac's Buddhist Ethic," *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review* (Fall, 1992), <https://tricycle.org/magazine/negative-capability-kerouacs-buddhist-ethic> (accessed 24.08.2022).

⁶⁴¹ Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 418.

Jack Dulouoz does not share Gerard's sentiment before his confession: "My Jesus wouldnt have liked that watching from his cross."⁶⁴² Gerard's devotion and lifestyle make him the best follower of Jesus' example of all of Kerouac's characters. Gerard's father Emil even speaks of him as the sacrificial Lamb that was Jesus Christ: "[...] goldpots strew the blue beginnings with incense of aurora and dawn creaks up to crack and boom over the black sad earth now irrevocably Gerard was, enfleshed, sacrificed and given over to, O moanin shame."⁶⁴³ Before his death, Gerard asks Jesus to help him through his suffering: "Nobody could know how much it hurts – O my Jesus you've left me alone and you're hurting me – And you too, you were hurted – Aw Jesus – nothing to help me – nothing."⁶⁴⁴ Even Jack Dulouoz prays for suffering to follow Jesus's example: "I stopped at the phosphorescent crucifix of Jesus and inwardly prayed to sorrow and suffer as He and so be saved."⁶⁴⁵ Gerard's devotion and his unfair death is still the ultimate example of how to follow Christ and be saved.

The cross is central in the representation of the death of Jesus. It serves as a reminder of Jesus' sacrifice, humility, redemption, and salvation. The reminder of the cross follows Jack Dulouoz in different accounts. James T. Keane describes that "one senses that Kerouac felt not only gratitude for the sacrifice of the crucifixion, but also a certain kinship with a suffering Jesus—a vanity, perhaps, but not an unknown one in the history of Christian mysticism."⁶⁴⁶ Primarily in churches, Jesus is portrayed nailed to the cross. Kerouac's characters also vividly imagine the crucified Christ: "INRI, the funny ribbon on the cross of the lover they killed – and, they put a nail through it."⁶⁴⁷ It is on Good Friday when Christians remember Christ's death at the cross. Mickey and Peter Martin are no exception: "[...] he had seen Jesus suffering and heroic, dark, dark Jesus and his cross, dear great sacrificial Jesus the hero and the lamb, and he had wept at the spectacle of that heroic sorrow [...]."⁶⁴⁸ In "Maggie Cassidy," Jack Dulouoz illustrates another portrayal:

Before the crucifix of Jesus in the house I stood attentively, sure of many things, I was going to see the tears of God and already I saw them in that countenance elongated white in plaster that gave life – gave life bitten, finished, droop-eyed, the hands nailed, the poor feet also nailed, folded, like winter cold feet of the poor Mexican worker you see in the street waiting for the guys to come with the barrels to empty the rags the crap and keeps one foot on the other to keep warm – Ah – The head bent, like the moon [...].⁶⁴⁹

⁶⁴² Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 27.

⁶⁴³ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁶⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁶⁴⁵ Jack Kerouac, *Maggie Cassidy*, 62.

⁶⁴⁶ James T. Keane, *Beat Attitude*, 26.

⁶⁴⁷ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 27.

⁶⁴⁸ Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 117.

⁶⁴⁹ Jack Kerouac, *Maggie Cassidy*, 41.

For young children, the portrayal of the crucified Jesus might have been something traumatizing:

[..] the cross in my mother's room, a salesman had sold it to her in Centralville, it was a phosphorescent Christ on a black-lacquered Cross – it glowed the Jesus in the Dark, I gulped for fear every time I passed it the moment the sun went down, it took that own luminosity like a bier [..].⁶⁵⁰

The picture of Jesus on the cross could even be horrific: “[..] in a horrible oldprint darkness shining through the celluloid – (if you got close up you could see the lines of bloody black tears coursing down his tragic cheek, O the horrors of the darkness and clouds, no people [..].”⁶⁵¹ For young Jackie Duluoz, the image of Christ's death keeps him up at night: “Earlier, too, horrors of the Jesus Christ of passion plays in his shrouds and vestments of saddest doom mankind in the Cross Weep for Thieves and Poverty – he was at the foot of my bed pushing it one dark Saturday night [..].”⁶⁵² The vivid images of the Passion of Christ, the thorned crown, and the blood dripping down Christ's face could evoke fear in a child's imagination. In the Lowell Grotto, the cross was the central focus point. Although it is mentioned in more than one book and is based on an existing Grotto that still exists in Lowell, most visibly, it is described in “Doctor Sax.” At the top of Grotto “was the gigantic pyramid of steps upon which the Cross itself poked phallically up with its Poor Burden the Son of Man all skewered across it in his Agony and Fright – undoubtedly this statue moved in the night [..].”⁶⁵³

Through his characters, Kerouac questions some of the well-known Christian tenets and viewpoints. While explaining the flaws of Jesus, which in Duluoz's understanding is the necessity to give away their belongings. He considers that “there's a hole even in Jesus' bag: and that hole is, where He says to the rich young man ‘Sell everything you have and give it to the poor, and follow me,’ okay, where do we go now, wander and beg our food off poor hard-working householders?”⁶⁵⁴ After questioning Jesus' call for everyone to give everything to the poor, Duluoz wonders about “poor and harried” Martha who “had not ‘chosen the better part’ when she cooked and slaved and cleaned house all day while her younger sister Mary sat in the doorway like a modern beatnik ‘square’ parents talking to Jesus about ‘religion’ and ‘redemption’ and ‘salvation’ and all that guck.”⁶⁵⁵ Kerouac here appears to side with Martha perplexed why does she is not highlighted as the Christian example in this text. Jack Duluoz

⁶⁵⁰ Jack Kerouac, *Doctor Sax*, 45.

⁶⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁶⁵² *Ibid.*, 4.

⁶⁵³ *Ibid.*, 114 – 115.

⁶⁵⁴ Jack Kerouac, *Vanity of Duluoz*, 254.

⁶⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

goes even further inquiring not only Mary's actions but that of Jesus himself – why did he not help with the dinner:

Were Jesus young Mary McGee waiting for supper to be ready? While talking about redemption? How can you be redeemed when you have to pass food in and out of your body's bag day in day out, how can you be 'saved' in a situation so sottish and flesh-hagged as that?⁶⁵⁶

In this situation, Duluoz sees it unfair that Mary has been elevated as doing a righteous thing while “doing nothing.” Duluoz here connects Mary's refusal as one being a “sort of a bum.” Again, Kerouac's characters raise their doubts about the specific teachings of the Catholic tradition. However, they do not offer any, for example, theological solutions for this problem. Commentaries suggest that the text in the Gospel of John focuses on Mary, who anoints Jesus' feet, an aspect not mentioned in Luke. However, the distraction of Martha while serving is emphasized in Luke, where Jesus affirms the choice of Mary to stay with him. Martha is upset that no one is helping her and some commentaries argue that the usage of “me” from Martha oversteps the boundaries of a good host. However, Jesus reminds Martha of gentleness in a better way. What Mary has chosen to do will not be taken away from her.⁶⁵⁷

Even if Kerouac's characters question and criticize Christianity and Christ, he is constantly reminded of his cross: “Yet I saw the cross just then when I closed my eyes after writing all this. I cant escape its mysterious penetration into all this brutality. I just simply SEE it all the time, even the Greek cross sometimes. I hope it will all turn out true.”⁶⁵⁸ Allen Ginsberg explains that at the end of his life, Kerouac was especially fixated on the image of the cross. Kerouac was lacking the means to calm his mind and let go of the suffering and he tended to grasp at the Cross. It is essential to note this because his look in “Vanity of Duluoz” corresponds with the time when Kerouac “made many paintings of the Cross, of cardinals, popes, of Christ crucified, of Mary; seeing himself on the Cross, and finally conceiving of himself as being crucified.”⁶⁵⁹

There is also a glimpse of hope that the resurrection and salvation are true. Significantly, the novel “Doctor Sax” finishes with imagery of the cross. It is as if the cross is the starting and the end point to which everything leads: “I passed the Grotto again and saw the cross on top of that hump of rocks, saw some old French Canadian ladies praying step by step on their knees. [...] By God.”⁶⁶⁰ After the epic fight between the Snake of the World and the Bird of Paradise,

⁶⁵⁶ Jack Kerouac, *Vanity of Duluoz*, 254.

⁶⁵⁷ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to LUKE* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015), 324 – 229.

⁶⁵⁸ Jack Kerouac, *Vanity of Duluoz*, 255.

⁶⁵⁹ Allen Ginsberg, “Negative Capability: Kerouac's Buddhist Ethic,” *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review* (Fall, 1992), <https://tricycle.org/magazine/negative-capability-kerouacs-buddhist-ethic> (accessed 24.08.2022).

⁶⁶⁰ Jack Kerouac, *Doctor Sax*, 219.

when Jackie returns to his “mundane” everyday life, it is visible that it is not plain at all. Jackie is returning home, and while on the way, he sees the cross, the devotionism of French-Canadian ladies, and puts roses in his hair, which might be a reference to French Catholic Discalced Carmelite nun Saint Thérèse of Lisieux.

3.4.3. Resurrection

The cross of Christ is the expression of the glory of God in salvation through judgment.⁶⁶¹ The resurrection of Jesus shows the victory of God over evil, sin, and death. The knowledge of resurrection conditions all suffering, all trials, and all finite historical existence. It reveals the anticipated end and promises the triumph of God’s power to the human race.⁶⁶² Duluoz ponders that seeing Jesus who “really meant it right down to the cross, we are impressed. Impressed so much that it comes to the point of being by way of a kind of redemption, a plucking from the sea, a saving hooray.”⁶⁶³ The teaching of the resurrection of Jesus Christ is crucial in Christianity. Christians consider that to believe in the risen Incarnate Jesus is to be united to him.⁶⁶⁴ As it is further away from the everyday insights of humans, it is not as vividly portrayed and as often in Kerouac’s novels as the passion of Christ. Resurrection, first and foremost, is a revival of something or someone dead: “What’s more, you’ve resurrected my faith in America. Yes!”⁶⁶⁵ However, as far as the resurrection of Christ, Kerouac’s characters do not elaborate on it as fully. The resurrection is connected to the Easter morning when it is believed to have happened. In Catholic tradition, every year in Easter, the resurrection of Christ is remembered and revered: “And raised up into the bedazzling blue hole of heaven in the clouds [...] the bell was clanging with a ding dong, the Lord rose on Easter morning, daisies rejoiced in field beyond the churches, almighty peaces settled in the clover [...]”⁶⁶⁶ During Easter Christians go to the church to remember the suffering of Christ, his sacrifice and the resurrection. Peter and Mickey also went to church “on the bell-golden Easter mornings of sun and flowers and seen Jesus arisen triumphant, immortal, radiant and true [...]”⁶⁶⁷ Jesus is

⁶⁶¹ James M. Hamilton, Jr., *God’s Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 57.

⁶⁶² Thomas Joseph White, OP, *The Light of Christ: An Introduction to Catholicism* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2017), 175 – 176.

⁶⁶³ Jack Kerouac, *Vanity of Duluoz*, 253 – 254.

⁶⁶⁴ Thomas Weinandy, OFM, CAP, “The Creed of the Council of Chalcedon and the New Evangelization,” in *The Center is Jesus Christ Himself: Essays on Revelation, Salvations, and Evangelization*, ed. Andrew Meszaros (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2021), 305.

⁶⁶⁵ Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 110.

⁶⁶⁶ Jack Kerouac, *Doctor Sax*, 218 – 219.

⁶⁶⁷ Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 117.

described according to the Baltimore Catechism as risen from the dead on Easter Sunday glorious and immortal.⁶⁶⁸ The resurrected Jesus is a figure that both Peter and Mickey want to follow: “They had to be heroes or nothing.”⁶⁶⁹ They did not want to be like “all the occasional yawning mortals sitting beside him in the pews, the ones who coughed and fidgeted irritably [...] turning away from immortality and heroism, abysmal, empty, and unamazed.”⁶⁷⁰

In Catholicism, faith is the beginning of salvation. Peter and Mickey both believe in the triumphant Christ and the Christian promise of eternity. However, to reach immortality, one must suffer. Jack Duluoiz interprets that shame is the “key to immortality in the Lord’s grave ... that key to courage ... that key heart. “Lord, Lord, *Mon Doux, Mon Doux*” [...] I’m saying to myself.”⁶⁷¹ Resurrection for Duluoiz proves the living God and his mercy in opposition to the popular “God is dead” movement at the time. Kerouac yet again takes Pascal as an example to describe his beliefs: “‘God is Dead’ made everybody sick to their stomachs because they all know what I just said, and Pascal said, and Paschal means Resurrection.”⁶⁷² In Church tradition, Paschal mystery embodies the Passion of Christ, his death, resurrection, and the glorification of Jesus. Paschal mystery signifies a constant call for faith and repentance that is nurtured in believers through devotional practices in the Church.⁶⁷³ Senior editor of Jesuit magazine “America” James T. Keane emphasizes that Kerouac and Gerard had similar mystical visions of the crucifixion. However, Keane notes: “While both brothers were convinced of universal salvation (a sticking point for those who would call Kerouac a Jansenist), glowing crucifixes and visions of Christ suffering loomed large.”⁶⁷⁴ Keane adds another layer here to the discussion of Jansenist influences on Kerouac.

To summarize the portrayal of Jesus Christ in the Lowell novels, it is possible to say that surely in the aspect of Passion of Christ, Kerouac’s characters stay within the traditional understanding of Jesus as the Son of God who died for human sins at the cross. However, his characters take quite seriously the aspect of imitating Jesus in their own lives, even as far as wishing and praying for the suffering of Jesus. The topic of incarnation is not as widely portrayed as passion, and even here, the term has also been used in the context of rebirth, not the incarnation of Christ. The resurrection of Christ is mostly connected to the Easter morning when it happened and resurrected Christ is seen as triumphant, immortal, and true, which

⁶⁶⁸ *Baltimore Catechism*, 89.

⁶⁶⁹ Jack Kerouac, *Doctor Sax*, 218 – 219.

⁶⁷⁰ Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 117.

⁶⁷¹ Jack Kerouac, *Maggie Cassidy*, 108.

⁶⁷² Jack Kerouac, *Vanity of Duluoiz*, 163.

⁶⁷³ Joseph Stanley, *The Paschal Mystery: Devotions for Lent & Easter* (Bloomington, IN: WestBow Press, 2011), 1 – 2.

⁶⁷⁴ James T. Keane, *Beat Attitude*, 26.

corresponds with Catholic church teachings. Kerouac's approach to Christ could be characterized more as a "functional Christology," where his significance for humans is underlined.⁶⁷⁵ Primarily, Kerouac's characters speak of Christ or to Christ in connection to themselves not highlighting Christ's ontological Christology.

3.5. Church

Christians believe that the Holy Spirit is sent to earth on the 50th day after Jesus Christ's resurrection, which is seen as the beginning of the apostolic Church. It happened on Pentecost, that is also the apostolic church's beginning.⁶⁷⁶ In Catholicism, the truth revealed by Jesus Christ has been passed down to 12 disciples, and after that comes the priestly succession. In Lord's Prayer, the church is defined as one apostolic Catholic Church – which is symbolically also the body of Christ, or the parish is the bride of Christ. Kerouac's narrator shows the church as an all-embracing entity: "[...] the poor complaining nuns doing what they think is best, within the Church, all within Her Folding Wing – Dove's the church –."⁶⁷⁷ Dove in Christianity has been seen as the symbol of the Holy Ghost. Nevertheless, it is hard to tell whether Kerouac meant to identify the church as the Holy Ghost. In Catholic tradition, the Holy Ghost is not the same as the church. However, he is active in the church. Henceforth, it could be interpreted allegorically as viewing the church as the extension and the work of the Holy Ghost. In Church Holy Ghost is active, there he continues the work of Christ. Another aspect of this text section is the wing motive. It is a motive commonly known to be prescribed to God, for example, in the Psalms but is less commonly used in speaking of the church.⁶⁷⁸ Here, God's wings, the Holy Ghost as a dove, and Christ as the groom of the continuing Church come together as the Trinity. The church is the extension of God because as God is light, then also the church: "[...] it was all for the bosom of the Grave Church, which we all know was Pure Gold, Pure Light."⁶⁷⁹ The church can be seen as a life-giving community that finds fulfillment in the joyful sharing of God's saving work and service.⁶⁸⁰

⁶⁷⁵ John P. Galvin, *Jesus Christ*, 273.

⁶⁷⁶ *Baltimore Catechism*, 97 – 101.

⁶⁷⁷ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 23.

⁶⁷⁸ There are churches where the altar pieces have wings, for example, in Katharinenkirche in Lübeck, Germany; Susie Nash, *Northern Renaissance Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 241 – 242.

⁶⁷⁹ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 24.

⁶⁸⁰ Stephen Bevans, SVD, "Beyond the New Evangelization: Toward a Missionary Ecclesiology for the Twenty-First Century," in *A Church with Open Doors: Catholic Ecclesiology for the Third Millennium*, eds. Richard R. Gaillardetz and Edward P. Hahnenberg (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2015), 16.

Through baptism, Christians identify with Christ; the church is a way of how Christ continues to be present in the world.⁶⁸¹ The church also functions as the place to find a Savior and hear God's words: "The Church carried me from one Saviour to another; who's done that for me since? – why the tears? – God spoke to me from the crucifix [..]."⁶⁸² The primary source through which humans can gain knowledge of God is a religious experience.⁶⁸³ Duloz also describes talking to God in the tower of the Gothic high steeple of Riverside Church, meeting Jesus on the Brooklyn Bridge [..]."⁶⁸⁴ Not only can one hope to experience God talking to them, but the church experience is accompanied by music, singing, and even dancing.⁶⁸⁵ Church has also been interpreted as the witness and home of faith. However, the Church's functions encompass much more than the building itself. It has been described as a believer, a teacher, and a symbolic realization of revelation in the world.⁶⁸⁶ Church is the sign and the witness to God's reign, and many ecclesialogists argue that the church will cease to exist once the reign of God is finally established.⁶⁸⁷

During the 1930s Roman Catholic Church lost some of its members in the American cities due to secularization. However, it did not lose the buildings that it had.⁶⁸⁸ Church unmistakably is also a part of the town's landscape, and Kerouac's hometown is illustrated as the most suitable option: "Perfect for the silhouetting presentations of church steeples and of rooftops and of the whole Lowell general, and always yon poor smoke putting from the human chimneys like prayer."⁶⁸⁹ It is a space that is part of the believers' everyday life on good days: "Amazing how the kids always scream with glee around the church at that sad hour of dusk,"⁶⁹⁰ and also bad ones: "She began to cry, at last, in the privacy of the car with her children, as they passed the old church."⁶⁹¹ The latter happened when the mother of the Martin family drives to the funeral feast of her late husband, George Martin. Prayer as a format for visiting the church has been a part of church tradition for a long time. It is a prayer that gives believers hope: "He

⁶⁸¹ Ibid., 17.

⁶⁸² Jack Kerouac, *Maggie Cassidy*, 42 – 43.

⁶⁸³ Margaret S. Archer, Andrew Collier, and Douglas V. Porpora, *What do we mean by God*, 25.

⁶⁸⁴ Jack Kerouac, *Vanity of Duloz*, 80 – 81. The Riverside Church here does not refer to Catholicism because it was a Baptist church. However, for Kerouac, the building might seem appealing, and the text intertwines the sight of the church with the reflections of God and Jesus. The archive of Riverside Radio, which was founded in 1961, is now available. The radio owner was the Riverside Church; *The WRVR-FM (Riverside Radio) Collection*, https://americanarchive.org/special_collections/wrvr-riverside (accessed 05.10.2022).

⁶⁸⁵ Willie James Jennings, "Embodying the Artistic Spirit and the Prophetic Arts," *Literature & Theology*, 30.3 (September 2016): 257, doi:10.1093/litthe/frw022.

⁶⁸⁶ Avery Dulles, *Faith and Revelation*, 106.

⁶⁸⁷ Stephen Bevans, SVD, *Beyond the New Evangelization: Toward a Missionary Ecclesiology for the Twenty-First Century*, 16.

⁶⁸⁸ Samuel Clarence Kincheloe, *The American City and Its Church* (New York: Friendship Press, 1938), 95.

⁶⁸⁹ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 45.

⁶⁹⁰ Ibid., 48.

⁶⁹¹ Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 492.

prays and bathes in prayers of gratitude at the white rail near the blood red carpet that runs to the stainless altar of white-and-gold, he clasps little hands over leaned elbows with hallelujahs in his eyes.”⁶⁹² Besides hope, it also gives comfort when crises arise: “More people than usual, they’re afraid of the Flood. Dimly you can hear it roaring behind the candle silence walls.”⁶⁹³ Gerard’s aunt goes to pray in the church as she passes it: “Aunt Marie take her leave and drops in the church for a quick prayer.”⁶⁹⁴ It is a part of daily routine that one could drop by in church to pray a bit: “[..] he did a couple *Notre pères* and looked at backs of the sudden devout kneelers preening in their dark shave [..].”⁶⁹⁵ For most of Kerouac’s characters, the church is a safe haven. For teenage boys, however, the church does not have such sacredness attached to it. It is where one prays for success in love life: “No, love is *great* Mouse – something to think about – go to church and pray *Zagg You Babe! Marry her! Screw her!*”⁶⁹⁶ Jack Duluoze even envisions sexual intercourse in the church with a girl that sits nearby: “[..] I dream of forcing her to some kind of anteroom to wrestle and moan with her, back of the altar, she has nothing underneath, I force myself on her and finally surprise her by really getting her and completing the job –.”⁶⁹⁷ This shows the vivid imagination of a teenage boy. In contrast, Duluoze’s devoted brother Gerard still looks at church as something beautiful: “Ah, a scene going on in the little church of dusk!”⁶⁹⁸ Kerouac wrote “Visions of Gerard” in 1958. In the same year, in an interview, he affirms the importance of the church for him, and it resembles Gerard’s awe: “Comes a day when you suddenly raise your eyes to heaven in despair and you feel a wave of beatitude flowing through you, especially in church. This feeling is as old as time.”⁶⁹⁹ Although it is beautiful at dusk, it might be scarier in the dark. It was easy for a child to imagine others who loom in the church: “Doctor Sax traversed the darkneses between pillars in the church at vespertime.”⁷⁰⁰ Vespers are a prayer usually held “at night, Petey, we all went to church at Willamette’s Corners for vespers. Your father here wanted to please me, so he came tagging along to church with us, but I knew he didn’t go to church any other time.”⁷⁰¹ However, after the church visit at dusk, Gerard hurries home: “Enveloped in peaceful joy, my little brother hurries out the empty church and goes running and skampering home to supper thru raw marched streets.”⁷⁰²

⁶⁹² Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 30.

⁶⁹³ Jack Kerouac, *Doctor Sax*, 159.

⁶⁹⁴ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 40.

⁶⁹⁵ Jack Kerouac, *Doctor Sax*, 184.

⁶⁹⁶ Jack Kerouac, *Maggie Cassidy*, 51.

⁶⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 175 – 176.

⁶⁹⁸ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 29.

⁶⁹⁹ Paul Maher Jr., *Empty Phantoms: Interviews and Encounters with Jack Kerouac*, 54.

⁷⁰⁰ Jack Kerouac, *Doctor Sax*, 65.

⁷⁰¹ Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 409.

⁷⁰² Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 31.

Lowell novels give accounts of different manifestations of the Roman rite – the weekly Mass, Midnight Mass, and Requiem or funeral Mass. The second part of this subchapter will focus on the critique of the church.

3.5.1. Liturgy

Through liturgy, which is set forth by the Gospel, parishioners share the mystery of Christ.⁷⁰³ Liturgy itself “utter the truth of Corpus Christi,” the *σῶμα Χριστοῦ*.⁷⁰⁴ Catholics are expected to attend Mass every Sunday and on various holy days.⁷⁰⁵ The Mass is typically an hour long, with five distinct phases: the preparatory part, the offertory, the consecration, the communion and the concluding rite.⁷⁰⁶ Liturgy could vary depending on the time of the liturgical year. Parishioners are involved during the Mass by kneeling, making the sign of the cross, and even bowing. Something that also Kerouac illustrates: “[...] ladies in black garments, scores of them, are scattered throughout St Louis de France church, kneeling or sitting or some standing at the various special shrines, their lips muttering prayers for similar requests for similar troubles in their own poor lives [...].”⁷⁰⁷ Kneeling is a common praxis in Catholic Church. When entering the church, one is expected to make a sign of the cross, accompanied by kneeling if the red light or candle is lit by the altar. That means that there are consecrated hosts in the tabernacle or the monstrance. For Duloz, the monstrance is “the solution to the problem be held up to shine and make true belief to shine, there’s no explaining your way out of the evil of existence.”⁷⁰⁸ Kerouac again questions why there is suffering in this world. The pews in Church, with time, have been so worn out: “He [...] puts little knees to plank, the plank is worn and dusted with a million kneeings morning noon and night.”⁷⁰⁹ The difference between the Catholic Mass as it is known now and when Kerouac wrote his books was that the traditional Mass was in Latin. The priest was mostly celebrating the Mass with his back turned against the congregation and towards the altar, as it is described in “Maggie Cassidy”: “Iddyboy who in church on Sundays stood straight as a post in front pews of Sainte Jeanne d’Arc turning bulging red faces when loud noises disturbed the silent priest in his silent altar.”⁷¹⁰ In 2021, Pope Francis

⁷⁰³ Michael Ramsey, *The Gospel and the Catholic Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2009), 96.

⁷⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 149.

⁷⁰⁵ *Baltimore Catechism*, 355.

⁷⁰⁶ For further description of each part, see George J. Moorman, *The Latin Mass Explained* (Charlotte, NC: TAN Books, 2007).

⁷⁰⁷ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 47.

⁷⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁷⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁷¹⁰ Jack Kerouac, *Maggie Cassidy*, 130.

limited the celebration of traditional Latin Mass, especially forbidding the celebration of some sacraments according to this rite.⁷¹¹

It is possible to distinguish three types of Mass that Kerouac's characters attend and mention in the Lowell novels: 1) *The weekly Mass*, most commonly the Sunday Mass, and any other that would happen during the week. Kerouac's characters describe how the church attendance would increase on Sundays: "We drove [...] past the church St Jean Baptiste, which on Sunday afternoon seems to swell in size [...]"⁷¹² The beginning of the Mass was signaled with the sound of church bells.⁷¹³ The Mass has always had a social aspect that Kerouac illustrates when town's in their best suits people smoke after the Mass and complain about the length of the sermon: "Holy Batchism, he made a long sermon this time [...]"⁷¹⁴ However, not all people enjoyed going to church on Sundays, especially teenage boys. For Tommy Campbell, "Sunday morning was a suffocating kind of time, when you [...] waited around while your mother and your sister took hours to get ready, and finally took you off to church."⁷¹⁵ The aroma of the church did not seem attractive to younger boys: "The smell of incense in the church, and the smell of three hundred other perfumed mothers and sisters, and the smell of the pews, and the smell of burning tallow – that was enough to smother the life out of you. Everything smelled like Sunday."⁷¹⁶ If children had gone to church since early childhood, there was a good chance they would serve as altar boys. They needed to go to the confession before the Mass to receive the eucharist on Sunday, as Kerouac describes: "Gerard and all the boys did special novenas at certain season and went to confession on Friday afternoon to prepare for Sunday morning [...]"⁷¹⁷ Another aspect mentioned here is novenas, which are special prayer cycles for saints and church celebrations, for example, during the Lent. Interesting how Kerouac integrates into "Doctor Sax" the argumentation of the child: "I'm at church, have to finish my Novena with which I can pray for anything I want later, besides they all told me to do my Novena, so I'm in church at dusk –."⁷¹⁸ It seems that if he finishes the novena that was asked of him, he can later pray for anything he wants. It might be seen as prioritization, or somehow his interpretation has

⁷¹¹ Nicole Winfield, "Pope Francis urges faithful to end ideological divide over old Latin Mass," *Chicago Sun Times*, 30 Jun 2022, <https://chicago.suntimes.com/2022/6/30/23188971/pope-francis-latin-mass-tridentine-rite-catholics-catholicism> (accessed 15.08.2022). However, there are still some places where the Latin rite is available, for example, in the *Santissima Trinità dei Pellegrini* church in Rome. Henceforth, that is one of the places where one can learn more about the Mass that Kerouac attended before the Second Vatican Council.

⁷¹² Jack Kerouac, *Doctor Sax*, 98.

⁷¹³ *Ibid.*, 210.

⁷¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁷¹⁵ Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 26.

⁷¹⁶ "You went to church choking at the collar and suffocating and dying, and your mother's perfume on her church clothes was enough to put an end to you for good - it went in your nose and down your throat and you choked on it"; *ibid.*

⁷¹⁷ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 25.

⁷¹⁸ Jack Kerouac, *Doctor Sax*, 159.

been fueled by explanations that one cannot pray for what they want until they have not done their church chores.

It was common to use rosary beads to guide the prayers accompanying the Mass: “Mickey was now growing a little tired of the Mass. [...] But he began to do another rosary on his beads for fear he had not prayed enough.”⁷¹⁹ Rosaries are meaningful in the Catholic faith because they connect the faithful with Jesus and the Virgin Mary.⁷²⁰ In “Maggie Cassidy,” Jack Duluo looks at his rosary beads during a church service that was a gift from his Aunt on his First Communion.⁷²¹ Duluo in “Maggie Cassidy” has been portrayed in his teenage years, which means that the rosary he is describing from his first communion is ten years old. The events of “Maggie Cassidy” are based on Kerouac’s high school years in 1939 – 1940, as he dates it in his 1960 notebook.⁷²² Henceforth, he is 17 – 18 years old. The first communion in the Catholic church happens when children are 8 – 10 years old. The crucifix is portrayed as being worn out, which entails that it has been frequently used: “The golden crucifix now darkened but terribly beautiful the little tortured image, the fists, the little muscles – Inri inscribed always like that mark of the mute – the feet nailed on little blocks of yellow metal in my hand –.”⁷²³

2) *Mass that is dedicated to essential church celebrations.* A few times, there are references to Easter mass, but the more vivid and broader description is about the Midnight Mass on Christmas. When describing the Martin family in “The Town and the City,” Kerouac writes:

There was no official religion in the family, but the mother had always taught the legend of the Catholic religion to those of her children who seemed most interested. As a result, on church holidays such as Easter or Christmas, some of the kids went to church with her, or else did not, all according to whimsical family trends.⁷²⁴

Easter has always been one of the most important celebrations in the church because it symbolizes the death of Jesus and, with his resurrection, the salvation of the whole of humankind. Peter with his brother Mickey “had gone to church in the rain dark Good Friday afternoons, [...] all silent and solemn, [...] and then he had gone to church, [...] on the bell-golden Easter mornings of sun and flowers [...]”⁷²⁵ Similarly to Martins in the descriptions, it is also

⁷¹⁹ Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 174.

⁷²⁰ Laura E. Masur, “Symbol or Presence? Archaeology and the Materiality of Catholic Devotions,” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 38.2 (Spring 2020): 20, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1353/cht.2020.0009>

⁷²¹ Jack Kerouac, *Maggie Cassidy*, 175.

⁷²² Rick Dale, “Jack Kerouac: The Duluo Legend (UPDATED 1-8-21),” *The Daily Beat*, <https://thedailybeatblog.blogspot.com/2018/02/jack-kerouac-duluo-legend.html> (accessed 15.08.2022).

⁷²³ Jack Kerouac, *Maggie Cassidy*, 175.

⁷²⁴ Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 22 – 23.

⁷²⁵ *Ibid.*, 117.

quite common nowadays for one to visit the church on Christmas or Easter. However, for Catholics, it is even more significant to do so because one of the church commandments is to receive Holy Communion during Easter time.⁷²⁶ Hence it follows that it is on Good Friday: “when the church is crowded and it’s usually raining (and according to superstition) [..].”⁷²⁷ There has been quite a visible drop in church attendance since the second half of the 20th century.⁷²⁸

Indeed Christmas is a time to remember that Jesus was born into this world. It is like that also for the devoted Mickey Martin, who is “deep in his own amazing thoughts about Christmas and everything, and once in a while – when no one was near – singing ‘Silent Night, Holy Night’ in a small, high voice like the choir boys at midnight Mass.”⁷²⁹ Although Mickey did contemplate the meaning and importance of the birth of Jesus, as a child he liked Scrooge, Christmas presents and he was expecting the opening of presents. At first Mickey had too much fun at home, and he did not want to go to the church after, but he is sublimely happy when he is walking toward the church that is welcoming with its lights and sounds: “From the open door of the church warm golden light swarmed out on the snow. The sound of the organ and singing could be heard.”⁷³⁰ Unlike Tommy Campbell, for Mickey, even smell is inviting: “Inside the church there was the delightful smell of overcoats fresh from the cold night mingled with the incense and flowers.”⁷³¹ Kerouac seems to connect one’s devoutness to Catholicism with their tolerance or fondness toward the fragrance of the church. Henceforth, the feeling about the church is easily influenced by one’s attitude toward its importance. Before the Mass starts, parishioners are setting down, clasping their hats devoutly, blowing their noses, looking around, nodding, adjusting their hats and prayer-beads with “sharp prim movements.” The choir boys who had been quietly assembling on each side of the altar and began to sing in high voices. Finally, the priest came out and everybody rose for the beginning of Mass.⁷³² Psalm 2 was sung at the introit of Midnight Mass followed by Psalm 7 as the antiphon.⁷³³ During the Mass, Catholics kneel to show their devotion: “He lowered himself with slow and painful dignity to the knee-rest and hooked his elbows over the pew, taking firm hold with his hands, in a

⁷²⁶ *Baltimore Catechism*, 389.

⁷²⁷ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 98.

⁷²⁸ For more elaborate insight on this question, see Stephen Bullivant, *Mass Exodus: Catholic Disaffiliation in Britain and America since Vatican II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

⁷²⁹ Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 168.

⁷³⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷³¹ *Ibid.*

⁷³² *Ibid.*, 172 – 173.

⁷³³ Joseph Andreas Jungmann, *The Mass of the Roman Rite: Its Origins and Development (Missarium Sollemnia)* (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1986), 329.

movement that was furtive and at the same time singularly devout.”⁷³⁴ Sometimes, the Mass could be too long, especially for a child, whose attention might drift to other parishioners:

Mickey could not take his eyes off the man’s great powerful brown hands as he draped them over the pew and clutched at the wood, [...] and at the large black rosary beads that were wound delicately about the hands and hung rattling gently against the back of the pew.⁷³⁵

Mickey was surprised that someone like that would attend this Mass. One of the focal points of any Mass is the Eucharist, also known as the Holy Communion when the priest offers parishioners Christ’s body and blood in its’ transubstantiated state.⁷³⁶ When the communion time comes, the parishioners stand up and walk towards the altar to receive the Eucharist: “They all marched slowly down to the altar where the little man ordered the procession of his family along the altar rail by a series of imperceptible signs. Mickey watched broodingly as the man and his family kneeled at the altar.”⁷³⁷ After this, the priest raises the ciborium – a bowl for the consecrated hosts accompanied by bells. The server ring the bell after the veil is being removed from chalice at the altar, which is a signal for the congregation to unite with the priest in offering God the gifts of bread and wine.⁷³⁸ The parishioners at this moment lower their heads, “but Mickey raised his head slightly and thrilled at the sight of the vast plane of bowed heads everywhere, until he caught the eye of another little boy who was looking around, they both dipped back quickly.”⁷³⁹ As it is one of the three Christmas Masses, there is also the nativity scene in the church with Jesus Child in the crib and Mary and Joseph standing next to him. While Mickey attends the Mass, he contemplates the nativity scene and imagines himself as the Jesus Child. When the altar boys start singing more enthusiastically, the Mass is coming to an end.⁷⁴⁰

3) *Requiem Mass for the funeral*. If the funeral for the parishioner was held in the church, it had a specific liturgy. The funeral Mass differed from other Masses in several aspects. First, the joyful elements were omitted, and there was more kneeling because of the penitential character of the Mass. A vivid description of the funeral Mass for Gerard, now called the funeral Mass, is offered in “Visions of Gerard.” The Mass starts when the coffin is brought into the church. The relatives follow, accompanied by the sounds of the organ, which symbolizes the beginning of Mass.⁷⁴¹ Mainly in the traditional Mass, the music was sung by the choir; however,

⁷³⁴ Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 173.

⁷³⁵ Ibid.

⁷³⁶ *Baltimore Catechism*, 236 – 250.

⁷³⁷ Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 174.

⁷³⁸ George J. Moorman, *The Latin Mass Explained* (Charlotte, NC: TAN Books, 2007), 99. Digital edition.

⁷³⁹ Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 174.

⁷⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁷⁴¹ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 96.

if the church had organs and an enthusiastic musician, they could adjust the instrumental music.⁷⁴² The funeral Mass would have started with Introit because it was mourning; it consists only of Antiphon Requiem and Psalm verses.⁷⁴³ When the time of oblation of the host comes, the priest prays in a low voice in Latin:

*Suscipe, sancte Pater, omnipotens aeterne Deus, hanc immaculatam hostiam, quam ego indignus famulus tuus offero tibi, Deo meo vivo et vero, pro innumerabilibus peccatis, et offensionibus, et negligentis meis, et pro omnibus circumstantibus, sed et pro omnibus fidelibus christianis vivis atque defunctis: ut mihi et illis proficiat ad salutem in vitam aeternam. Amen.*⁷⁴⁴

Kerouac has chosen to quote text that the Celebrant says in the offertory part of the Mass. The Celebrant, through this prayer, offers the host to God. The part Kerouac uses most likely was not heard because the priest prayed quietly at the altar with his back turned to the parishioners.⁷⁴⁵ The question then arises of why Kerouac quoted this part of the Mass. One of the explanations could be that Kerouac chose the text based on a linguistic and phonetic expression. However, Kerouac most likely knew this text when he was an altar boy and went to the parochial school. Kerouac could have distinguished the chosen text in order to emphasize the sacrificial nature of Gerard's death. The narrator, Duluoz, explains further that the organ music and the Latin in which the priest is speaking, the coffin that is placed next to the altar rail made him feel that Gerard "was delivered to that Pure Land where I could never go or at least not for a long time -."⁷⁴⁶ But the little *Ti Jean* still did not understand the funeral service; when the priest sings "*Et pro omnibus*," it seemed that "et pro om-ni-boos" is the "description of that land and that attainment, the glory of Gerard – (that was prophesied) -."⁷⁴⁷

The church is seen as an antechamber for Heaven – the smell of incense, the beautiful singing, the church's decorations: "incense everywhere, and turns with that untouchable delicacy of lace over holy black, with all his paraphernalias [...]"⁷⁴⁸ In the Requiem Mass, the frontal of the altar was decorated in black; the tabernacle veil is violet only if the Blessed

⁷⁴² Catholic members of the University of Cambridge, *Saint John Fisher Missale*, <https://media.musicasacra.com/sjfm/Requiem/Requiem-Ordinary-only.pdf> (accessed 01.10.2022). The Mass Requiem has been an important sung and instrumentation composition for many well-known composers; Cheniston K. Roland, "Songs and Singing," in *Encyclopedia of Death and Dying*, eds. Glennys Howarth, Oliver Leaman (London: Routledge, 2013), 424.

⁷⁴³ Catholic members of the University of Cambridge, *Saint John Fisher Missale*, <https://media.musicasacra.com/sjfm/Requiem/Requiem-Ordinary-only.pdf> (accessed 01.10.2022).

⁷⁴⁴ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 97.

⁷⁴⁵ *Rožu Kronis: Katoļu lūgšanu un dziesmu grāmata* (Cēsis: A. Piebalgs, 1943), 56.

⁷⁴⁶ "So that it seemed to me as the organ music played and the priest intoned in Latin at the altar far up the pews in the end of time, that Gerard, now motionless in the central presented bier at the foot of the main aisle and by the altar rail, with his long face composed, honorably mounted and all beflowered and anointed, was delivered to that Pure Land where I could never go or at least not for a long time -"; Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 97 – 98.

⁷⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 98.

⁷⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

Sacrament is there.⁷⁴⁹ The incense is used in the traditional Requiem Mass starting from offertory, which is later than in other Masses.⁷⁵⁰ While drifting away from the meanings of the funeral mass, *Ti Jean* sees a vision: “I see nothing but the swarm of angels in the church in the form of sudden myriad illuminated snowflakes of ecstasy – I scoff to think that anybody should cry.”⁷⁵¹ The event of death is celebrated by this vision. Since the choir boys are becoming restless, it is possible to tell that service is almost over. The priest then walks around with something that Kerouac calls “incense pot,” but in the Catholic tradition, it is known as thurible:

[...] the coffin at the forefront, and the priest flicking the ciborium incense pot and at each flick, in three direction, by some magic bell rope signal, the outside roofbell flicks like smoke itself and kicks off a soft ‘ker plang’ for the edification of the people of Centreville, Gerard has died – Drizzly news.⁷⁵²

The sound of the thurible is something that marks the passing of Gerard. The church bells symbolize the death of George Martin in “The Town and the City”: “Somewhere a churchbell was ringing, and everywhere Lacoshuans knew that George Martin had died.”⁷⁵³ However, Kerouac here imprecisely uses the term “ciborium” as part of the term for the “incense pot.” Ciborium in Catholic liturgy is the cup where consecrated hosts are kept and transported to the altar. The priest would not take the ciborium and the incense pot simultaneously. Here it would seem that Kerouac chose terms from Christianity in a spontaneous matter. However, in “The Town and the City,” he uses the term accordingly: “The little altar bell jingled as the priest raised the ciborium.”⁷⁵⁴ This might have been a mistake either by Kerouac or the editors. Alternatively, a “mystical name-dropping,” as Ginsberg called it.

3.5.2. Critique of the church

The Baltimore Catechism states that Catholic Church cannot err when it teaches a doctrine of faith or morals.⁷⁵⁵ That does not, however, exclude arising critiques of the church. The most detailed description of questioning the church tradition is when George Martin debates the church teachings with the priest in the printing shop. Martin affirms that God is his only witness whether he does a good job in his printing business and that he does not “see how

⁷⁴⁹ Adrian Fortescue, J.B. O’Connell, and Alcuin Reid, *The Ceremonies of the Roman Rite Described* (London: Burns & Oates, 2009), 460.

⁷⁵⁰ Catholic members of the University of Cambridge, *Saint John Fisher Missale*, <https://media.musicasacra.com/sjfm/Requiem/Requiem-Ordinary-only.pdf> (accessed 01.10.2022).

⁷⁵¹ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 98 – 99.

⁷⁵² *Ibid.*, 99.

⁷⁵³ Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 491.

⁷⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 174.

⁷⁵⁵ *Baltimore Catechism*, 124.

the church can come between a man and his God without somewhere breaking the direct contact.”⁷⁵⁶ Apparently, George does not see the necessity of church as a medium in his communication with God, and he considers this direct relationship with God sufficient for his belief. Further critique involves the question of funding for the church and the caution of being exploited by church members. However, Martin notes that he acknowledges that the church is not self-supporting and that it needs contributions. Although he understands the necessity of funding, George has seen parishioners who have been exploited in this way. Martin even seeks an affirmation from the priest that this has happened. The priest indeed confirms that it has, though he is elusive in answering further inquiries: “Are there not priests who are the representatives of God, and are there not priests without whose business acumen, without whose tireless efforts, there would be no church?”⁷⁵⁷ The representatives of God seem to portray the just priests who would not exploit money for personal gain and people in business who keep their churches going for the exact opposite reason. George also points out the political nature of the church hierarchy and that “the higher the priest, the more he is a politician.”⁷⁵⁸ The political aspect of the church is illustrated another time in “Maggie Cassidy”: “[.] it’s an afternoon service, a great big high school church service, gray dark Sainte Jeanne d’Arc basement, former Mayor Archambault is attending and the priest will mention him.”⁷⁵⁹ Here also, the socio-political role of the church is visible, as the priest will mention the city’s former mayor.

Another aspect that George Martin brings up in his critique of the church is the absurdness of holy communion. How can those who have been drinking and had fun the previous evening be so “saintly-like” the next day? George sees this as being hypocritical. Priest affirms that they are “not dead to God, evidently, because they all seem to turn up in church in the morning.” For George, the explanation is that they feel guilty and want to ease their conscience. The priest does not try to solve this theological problem for George; he only adds, “you’re arguing with yourself, not with me. Now I’m going to leave you to *your* conscience and go away.”⁷⁶⁰

The latter aspect of the possibility of combining an oblivious lifestyle and church mark a wider subtheme of George Martin and his objections to the church. Martin was a believer; he “believed that there was a God, and that there was a right and wrong, and that the virtuous life of love and humility was God’s own life. ‘And who has never really believed in Jesus?’ he

⁷⁵⁶ Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 41.

⁷⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁹ Jack Kerouac, *Maggie Cassidy*, 175.

⁷⁶⁰ Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 42.

would ask.”⁷⁶¹ However, he did not attend church unless he wanted to make his wife happy. Previously in the debate with the priest, he shows that he does not believe in repenting one’s sins and being free of them so easily. He wants to have direct communication with God. Although he did speak with God at the end of his life, believing and asking God about George’s purpose in life, he does not call for a priest before his death unlike Gerard. Also, he questions the necessity of baptism, asking the priest: “You say that I’m a man yearning after God – and isn’t that more than you can say of a lot of yearners we both know? Do I need an official writ to prove that I’m a Christian?”⁷⁶² However, from the Christian tradition’s point of view, this is quite presumptuous to think that one believer could measure his own and others’ devotion: “Why, then, do you look at the speck in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the log in your own eye?” (Matthew 7:3; Luke 6:41). Clearly, George Martin in “The Town and the City” is the best prototype of the one who believes in God and the hopeful message of Jesus but does not see the necessity of the church institution. Something that Kerouac himself might have very well identified with, and henceforth he might even channel his own feelings in this section: “I gave up the church to ease my horrors – too much candlelight, too much wax –.”⁷⁶³

To summarize, Kerouac primarily portrays the church’s liturgy, rather than the importance or symbol of the Church in the world. The citation in Latin makes it clear that he refers to the pre-Second Vatican Council church he was familiar with. He portrays weekly Mass, but more elaborately specific Midnight Mass and funeral Mass in Lowell novels. Kerouac envisions the church as being an undeniable part of the town landscape. It is a place where to gain religious experience and where one finds faith. Some of the church’s fundamental traditions as the holy communion, have been questioned by George Martin. The question remains do Kerouac’s texts demonstrate a thorough knowledge of the Church as he critiques it? George Martin seems to have his own convictions but wishes the priest would give him precise answers. The priest here is portrayed as elusive, yet maybe consciously avoiding unnecessary arguments. However, as an author, Kerouac does not try to elaborate on or solve this theologically. He leaves the question hanging in the air and lets the reader possibly feel the same frustration he did. The frustration shows emotional critique.

⁷⁶¹ Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 23.

⁷⁶² *Ibid.*, 40 – 41.

⁷⁶³ Jack Kerouac, *Doctor Sax*, 65.

3.6. Sin and grace

There is “much to admire in Kerouac – his joy of living accompanied by a recognition and sorrow for sin,” as “U.S. Catholic” author Robert T. Reilly affirms.⁷⁶⁴ God’s continuous gratuitous communion with his creation despite the sinful human condition is theologically mutually intertwined because sin and grace are simultaneously revealed. The doctrines of sin and grace are essential to the Christian understanding of themselves as both deals with the mystery of human existence in relation to the God revealed in Jesus Christ.⁷⁶⁵

3.6.1. Sin as an obstacle of faith

Sin is a category in Catholicism that can be viewed as an obstacle to one’s faith. Primarily “sin” refers to what has traditionally been called “original sin” that entails two aspects: “the originating sin at the dawn of human existence, often called the fall, and the damaging effects of that sin, resulting in a sinful condition of the whole race.”⁷⁶⁶ The fall narrative has been widely portrayed and originates from the book of Genesis, where the story of Adam and Eve unfolds. The story itself has been mentioned once in “Doctor Sax” in the apocalyptic final fight with the Snake: “The horrid stench of the ancient Snake that has been growing in the world-ball like a worm in the apple since Adam and Eve broke down and cried.”⁷⁶⁷ The story might be interpreted through the prism of sinful humanity because the world has been corrupted almost since its beginning. A notion that Catholic teaching highlights: “Our nature was corrupted by the sin of our first parents.”⁷⁶⁸ The Snake, the enemy of Doctor Sax and Jackie Dulouoz, seems to hold the evilness of the whole world. What happened then in Eden? The doctrine of sin cannot be distinguished from the question of human freedom. The story of Adam and Eve also symbolizes how this freedom emerged in history.⁷⁶⁹

One of the most well-known theologians in connection to the development of the notion of original sin is Augustine, to whom Dulouoz refers questioning the necessity of such a concept in the light of his brother’s death:

⁷⁶⁴ Robert Reilly, “On the road to redemption with Catholic author Jack Kerouac,” *U.S. Catholic* (April 11, 2004), <https://uscatholic.org/articles/200404/on-the-road-to-redemption-with-catholic-author-jack-kerouac/> (accessed 17.08.2022).

⁷⁶⁵ Roger Haight, “Sin and Grace,” in *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 377 – 386.

⁷⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 386.

⁷⁶⁷ Jack Kerouac, *Doctor Sax*, 206.

⁷⁶⁸ *Baltimore Catechism*, 46.

⁷⁶⁹ Roger Haight, *Sin and Grace*, 395.

If his mortality be the witness of Gerard's sin, as Augustine Page One immediately announced, then his sin must have been a great deal greater than the sin of mortals who enjoy, millionaires in yachts a-sailing in the South Seas with blondes and secretaries [...].⁷⁷⁰

Jack Duluoaz here refers to Augustine's explanation that human mortality is the witness of his sin.⁷⁷¹ He questions the probable graveness of his brother's sin that he has deserved to die so young. However, Augustine describes human mortality resulting from the original sin. Here both of the previously mentioned factors are visible – from the original sin come the damaging effects resulting in human mortality. Nonetheless, Kerouac refers to a significant problem in Christianity – the suffering of the innocent. "Visions of Gerard" vividly portrays this: "Why should such hearts be made to wince and cringe and groan out life's breath? – *why does God kill us?*"⁷⁷² In the face of such despair, the concept of original sin can easily be challenged, and the faith weakened. Theodicy was designed to deal with the question of evil, focusing on the conflict between an all-good and mighty God and the experience of pain and suffering. One of the approaches to unravel this riddle is the interpretation of God's intentions as a mystery and that he is free to act without any explanation.⁷⁷³ Gerard cries, perplexed: "Why is everyone so mean? Didn't God see to it that we – of all people – *people* – would be kind – to each other, to animals."⁷⁷⁴ God could have seen to it; however, God respects the creative autonomy that God established, including human freedom. Moral evil in this world comes from human freedom, not God or nature.⁷⁷⁵ God is not responsible for the viciousness of human beings. However, his actions remain a mystery that is not fully comprehensible to humans. Kerouac effortlessly portrays a child's naive rendition of faith and hope for God's involvement in a more visibly active way. Sometimes though, it seems that this might have always remained the belief for Kerouac too. Regardless, the justice of God will prevail because he will punish sinners in eternal fire.⁷⁷⁶

Duluoaz questions Graham's rigorous interpretation of the original sin: "What SIN is there, but the sin of birth? Why doesn't Billy Graham admit it? How can a sacrificial Lamb of birth itself be considered a sinner?"⁷⁷⁷ Graham did emphasize particular sin over original sin, which Andrew S. Finstuen links to the fact that he was more of an evangelist than a theologian. He preached that believers should repent their sins, but he did not deal with theological

⁷⁷⁰ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 35.

⁷⁷¹ Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 3.

⁷⁷² Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 53.

⁷⁷³ Maurice Hamington, *Hail Mary? The Struggle for Ultimate Womanhood in Catholicism* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 145.

⁷⁷⁴ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 16.

⁷⁷⁵ Roger Haight, *Sin and Grace*, 386.

⁷⁷⁶ Thomas Joseph White, OP, *The Light of Christ: An Introduction to Catholicism*, 268.

⁷⁷⁷ Jack Kerouac, *Vanity of Duluoaz*, 255.

interpretations.⁷⁷⁸ In Christian tradition, Jesus' sacrifice has been portrayed as "sacrificial Lamb," a motif that has its roots in Exodus and the sacrificial system of Israel.⁷⁷⁹ In the New Testament most vividly it is portrayed by Saint Paul, where he describes that the paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed (1 Corinthians 5:7). Possibly Kerouac, with the "sacrificial Lamb of birth itself," refers to Jesus Christ. In that case, it should be clarified that Jesus takes upon himself human punishments, in the sense that he endures consequences of original sin that are collective punishments for human sins, and confronts the horror of our moral iniquity with unique insight. He mourns for human guilt with intense suffering of contrition of heart. However, it is not of his guilt but his infinite innocence in the face of our sinfulness. The passion of Christ is not a mystery of divine wrath but divine justice, mercy, and reparation.⁷⁸⁰ Through this rendition, it is feasible to say that Kerouac theologically understands the meaning of Christ's sacrificial death adequately in connection to the sinful human condition.

Kerouac considers the crucial sin as being born, deeming Graham's particular sins unnecessary. An example from Jesus' life, who was born to die, Kerouac explores this theme in his novels. For Duluoz, "birth is the direct cause of all pain and death [...]"⁷⁸¹ If one were not born, they would not know the price of death because "on this earth is "thou owest God a death."⁷⁸² All humans experience this because "we're all born to die, it's the same story for everybody, see?"⁷⁸³ Duluoz argues that different specialists, even philosophers, tackle many unneeded questions rather than "pinning it down once and for all on what it comes from: birth."⁷⁸⁴ Nothing lasts forever also in nature, where blossoms and fruits are "living-but-to-die."⁷⁸⁵ Certainly, it is hard to accept one's mortality: "The mortality in my heart is heavy, they're going to throw me in a hole already eaten by the dogs of dolor [...]"⁷⁸⁶ Death is inevitable, "to feel yourself alive and dying in your chest every minute of the livelong day – ."⁷⁸⁷ That is a notion that at times appears unbearable: "[...] big sadness, impossible this life where we find ourselves doomed for death,"⁷⁸⁸ and all moments are farewells, all life is saying

⁷⁷⁸ Andre S. Finstuen, *Original Sin and Everyday Protestants: The Theology of Reinhold Niebuhr, Billy Graham, and Paul Tillich in an Age of Anxiety* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 60 – 61.

⁷⁷⁹ Thomas B. Slater, *Christ and Community: A Socio-Historical Study of the Christology of Revelation* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 166 – 167.

⁷⁸⁰ Thomas Joseph White, OP, *The Light of Christ: An Introduction to Catholicism*, 170.

⁷⁸¹ Jack Kerouac, *Vanity of Duluoz*, 255.

⁷⁸² Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 31.

⁷⁸³ *Ibid.*, 11. Kerouac continues this theme also in his novel "Tristessa," where the narrator proclaims that "All of us trembling in our mortality boots, born to die, BORN TO DIE I could write it on the wall and on Walls all over America"; Jack Kerouac, *Tristessa* (UK: Penguin Books, 2019), 22. However, Kerouac's characters seem to be doomed and depressed about it, but they do not try to find or offer any solution for this problem.

⁷⁸⁴ Jack Kerouac, *Vanity of Duluoz*, 255.

⁷⁸⁵ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 37.

⁷⁸⁶ Jack Kerouac, *Maggie Cassidy*, 40.

⁷⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁷⁸⁸ Jack Kerouac, *Doctor Sax*, 111-112.

goodbye.⁷⁸⁹ Sensibly, children dread the death of one or both of their parents, “this mere thought was all I needed to know of death.”⁷⁹⁰ If the parents die, that does not necessarily change the children’s sense of their own mortality. After the death of their father, the Martin children displayed a surreal account of death by thinking that somehow they “would be fathers and mothers who would never end, who would never die, who would never bend and pray over the sad sweet consummation among flowers that they saw there.”⁷⁹¹ Idea that humans are sinful until they die is even more woeful: “[...] sinner always right unto death, no help no hope, born –.”⁷⁹² At one point, it might seem that life is not worth living because of “the pitiful inescapability of death and the pain of death, and it will happen to the best and all and most beloved of us, O.”⁷⁹³ Kerouac has articulated this condition “the sin of life.”⁷⁹⁴ Additional to the critique of original sin, in “The Town and the City,” Francis interprets that sins or crime is something that keeps humans in line and that the only crime of humans is their consciousness and innocence: “Our only responsibility is there, and it is *not* a responsibility.”⁷⁹⁵ Peter Martin – the protagonist that was most of all based on Kerouac himself, replies to this, “How can you believe all that?”

It appears that Jack Duluoaz finds a solution to this issue of the concept of original sin in “Vanity of Duluoaz” by associating it with the wrathful, vengeful God of the Old Testament. Duluoaz does not characterize him as a loving God in comparison to the God of the New Testament. Kerouac describes that the God of Wrath, Jehovah, Yahweh, No-Name, does not listen to the faithful when they pray and has punished them with mortality.⁷⁹⁶ Here, Kerouac’s main character seems even to believe the Gnostic notion of Marcion of Sinope that the Old Testament God and the God of the New Testament are two different entities.⁷⁹⁷ Christian theology regards both being the one and only God. Beat generation scholar Michael Skau ties this passage to the “gruesome demise” of Kerouac’s father that has inspired this section that Skau sees as one of his “most savage tirades against both mortality and conventional religion.” The only explanation from Skau is that this captures Kerouac’s feeling of “helpless human vulnerability to illness, misfortune, and death and of merciless negligence by the Master or

⁷⁸⁹ Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 230.

⁷⁹⁰ Jack Kerouac, *Doctor Sax*, 132 – 133.

⁷⁹¹ Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 478.

⁷⁹² Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 26.

⁷⁹³ *Ibid.*, 52 – 53.

⁷⁹⁴ “[...] everybody’s already dead, what a horror to know – the sin of life, of death, he pissed in his pants his last act”; Jack Kerouac, *Doctor Sax*, 111.

⁷⁹⁵ Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 153.

⁷⁹⁶ Jack Kerouac, *Vanity of Duluoaz*, 235.

⁷⁹⁷ Kurt Aland, *Saints and Sinners: Men and Ideas in the Early Church*, 57 – 58.

Yaweh.”⁷⁹⁸ However, it should be considered in a broader context. Firstly, this is not the only place where Kerouac questions the traditional teachings of Christianity. Secondly, the question of theodicy is presented here, a common theme throughout Kerouac’s writings: “What are we supposed to do in a suffering world ... suffer? That’s not enough to satisfy the big feeling we might have of wanting everything and wanting to like everything. How can we be fair in an unfair situation like that?”⁷⁹⁹ Thirdly, it is understandable to be struggling with the notion of original sin after experiencing the death of a loved one. Coping with that kind of grief is unpredictable and known to those who have been through that. However, it seems that Kerouac never did find answers to his inquiries about Catholic teachings, although he did spend years studying different strands of ideas, notions, and systems. It seems that at some point, Kerouac gave up and felt defeated because “even Gerard was a sinner,”⁸⁰⁰ for God has a particular purpose for the ones who suffer: “O the poor Dulouzes are all dying! – chained by God to pain – maybe to hell!”⁸⁰¹ The reader does not feel the deliberating and hopeful faith that despite human sinfulness, the grace of God is available to the believers.

The price of the human freedom God gave them is a condition where actual sinning remains an ongoing fact.⁸⁰² The seriousness of the sin then is estimated by its gravity. Roman Catholic theology distinguish two types of actual sin – mortal and venial. Duluoze portrays both of them in “Vanity of Duluoze”:

[..] that lying is a sin, unless it’s an innocent lie based on lack of memory, certainly the giving false evidence and being a false witness is a mortal sin, but what I mean is, insofar as lying has become so prevalent in the world today [...] that, when a man tells the truth, everybody, looking in the mirror and seeing a liar, assumes that the truth-teller is lying too.⁸⁰³

This text section shows Kerouac’s knowledge of the notion of sin and its aspects in Catholic theology. Venial sin is the “innocent lie,” a sin that is committed when one does not recall something, with less self-awareness. Its effects are the “lessening of the love of God” in one’s heart, making them less resistant to mortal sin.⁸⁰⁴ In Kerouac’s text, mortal sin is portrayed as a conscious lie. Kerouac’s characters seem to consider God to be both just and loving in the different layers of his judgment. George Martin links his inability to work because of his health and God punishing him for giving up his printing shop.⁸⁰⁵ Later in the story, there is an

⁷⁹⁸ Michael Skau, “Jack Kerouac’s Rubáiyát: The Influence of Omar Khayyám,” *The Journal of Popular Culture* 48.3 (2015): 497 – 498.

⁷⁹⁹ Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 489.

⁸⁰⁰ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 25.

⁸⁰¹ Jack Kerouac, *Doctor Sax*, 113.

⁸⁰² Roger Haight, *Sin and Grace*, 388.

⁸⁰³ Jack Kerouac, *Vanity of Duluoze*, 7.

⁸⁰⁴ *Baltimore Catechism*, 51 – 59.

⁸⁰⁵ Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 252.

assurance that there will not be a punishment because: “God won’t punish us for taking a little fun along the way.”⁸⁰⁶ It correlates with the idea of sin as natural as going to the toilet: “No man exempt from sin any more than he can avoid a trip to the toilet.”⁸⁰⁷ All are equal in front of God through sin: “The sins of the junkman on Ennell Street, they were vast almost as mine and brother’s –.”⁸⁰⁸ because it did not matter what rank, class or situation the person is from. Even altar boys sin:

The altar boys were sinners and hypocrites, he knew some of them, especially Mulrooney there in the back, so innocent-looking, who killed snakes along the river by frying them in tin cans, and blew up frogs with straws, and the blond boy Bailey [...] hit Raymond one day in the schoolyard and made his nose bleed.⁸⁰⁹

Because they go to regular confessions, Mickey concludes: “they too were being saved.” This physical body is sinful due to original sin: “you bumbling fool you’re a mass of sin, a veritable barrel of it, you swish and swash in it like molasses.”⁸¹⁰ The carnal and sexual themes and the connection of it to sin are portrayed in “Maggie Cassidy.”⁸¹¹

Any sin weakens believers’ connection with God and decreases God’s sanctifying grace. Devotees should understand the gravity of their actions before repenting: “Now Gerard ponders his sins, the candles flicker and testify to it.”⁸¹² Church also functions as a space for contemplating one’s sin: “So I’m in church worrying about sins, syphilis, girl of my heart and dreams [...]”⁸¹³ If someone does not acknowledge their sin, Kerouac shows that the parochial school system of his novels found ways to “teach” them what their wrongdoing was about.⁸¹⁴ Regardless, “sin is sin and there’s no erasing it.”⁸¹⁵ The Catholic tradition gives believers chances to repent their sins. However, devotees should ask forgiveness from God and the ones they hurt: “It’s in the words of the Lord’s Prayer – forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. Did you forgive me for hitting you?”⁸¹⁶ If a person sins and understands their wrongdoings, that also entails personal guilt, a notion that somewhat has been identified almost solely with the Catholic church. Guilt has been a reoccurring theme throughout Kerouac’s literary works, but in “Visions of Gerard,” it has been shown concerning the guilt of sin: “His heart sank, and it’s *me* that done it – it’s a clear sin.”⁸¹⁷ Without the confession, the guilt might

⁸⁰⁶ Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 403.

⁸⁰⁷ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 25.

⁸⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁸⁰⁹ Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 175.

⁸¹⁰ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 24.

⁸¹¹ Jack Kerouac, *Maggie Cassidy*, 73, 176.

⁸¹² Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 26.

⁸¹³ Jack Kerouac, *Maggie Cassidy*, 176.

⁸¹⁴ Jack Kerouac, *Doctor Sax*, 63-64.

⁸¹⁵ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 25.

⁸¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 82.

⁸¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 26.

linger: “Ah inconceivably lost the corridors of that long school, those long courses, the hours and semesters I missed, I played hooky two times a week on the average – Guilt.”⁸¹⁸ Levinsky explains how guilt is influencing Peter in “The Town and the City” to him: “[...] you feel guilty of something, you feel unclean, almost diseased, you have nightmares, you have occasional visions of horror, feelings of spiritual geekishness.”⁸¹⁹ In “Vanity of Duluoaz,” Jack recalls going back and forth from the home of his parents and that of his wife: “but both equally dark and inhospitable places of guilt, sin, sorrow, lamentation, despair. It wasn’t so much the darkness of the night that bothered me but the horrible lights men had invented to illuminate their darkness with ...”⁸²⁰ Still, the ultimate judge of the repentant’s intentions is God, who will decide if one should be saved. Kerouac’s researchers and biographers emphasize that guilt has had an integral part in Kerouac’s own life. Reilly argues that “this guilt was one reason he tried Buddhism, attracted by its First Noble Principle that existence was suffering.”⁸²¹ He also comments that “guilt followed him everywhere” by referring to a section in “The Town and the City,” where Mickie Martin using Reilly’s words “chastises himself”: “Oh Christ, what I am doing to everybody?”⁸²² Reilly mistakenly applies this to Mickie because it was Peter who “felt guilty for the sacrifices his parents has made so he could attend college.”⁸²³ Though the regret first and foremost came to him because he irresponsibly had spent most of his money on drinks and women. Because of the original sin, for some Catholics, it is difficult to love themselves genuinely, and it could be compensated by egoism and vanity. The ongoing personal sins make it even harder. Thomas Joseph White suggests that this problem can be solved through prayer.⁸²⁴ It is through prayer that Christians can also experience the presence of God, which is possible through his forgiving grace. The year before his death, Kerouac mentioned in an interview that he prayed to Jesus to preserve his sanity and energy.⁸²⁵ It is difficult to tell whether Kerouac found solace and the presence of God through prayer, yet throughout his novel sin continuously accompanies different characters.

⁸¹⁸ Jack Kerouac, *Maggie Cassidy*, 57.

⁸¹⁹ Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 366.

⁸²⁰ Jack Kerouac, *Vanity of Duluoaz*, 249 – 250.

⁸²¹ Robert Reilly, “On the road to redemption with Catholic author Jack Kerouac,” *U.S. Catholic* (April 11, 2004), <https://uscatholic.org/articles/200404/on-the-road-to-redemption-with-catholic-author-jack-kerouac/> (accessed 17.08.2022).

⁸²² Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 256.

⁸²³ Robert Reilly, “On the road to redemption with Catholic author Jack Kerouac,” *U.S. Catholic* (April 11, 2004), <https://uscatholic.org/articles/200404/on-the-road-to-redemption-with-catholic-author-jack-kerouac/> (accessed 17.08.2022).

⁸²⁴ Thomas Joseph White, OP, *The Light of Christ: An Introduction to Catholicism*, 295.

⁸²⁵ Paul Maher Jr., *Empty Phantoms: Interviews and Encounters with Jack Kerouac*, 232.

3.6.2. Grace of God

The gratuity of grace is one of the fundamental aspects of Catholic theology. If the doctrine of sin entailed human freedom, then God's grace is the one that inspires believers to use this freedom well in search of God.⁸²⁶ Through the work of the Holy Spirit, grace is in action in humans.⁸²⁷ Faithful can obtain God's grace through sacraments and prayer.⁸²⁸ His grace refers to his goodness, graciousness, and benevolence toward human beings because grace is God's love for human existence. However, it should always be seen in the context of human sinfulness in whose light God's grace appears as mercy and forgiveness. Moreover, even considering humans' sinfulness, God continues to communicate with them gratuitously. Although this grace is gratuitous, it describes God's nature and universal attitude to all human beings.⁸²⁹ Through the work of the Holy Spirit, grace is in action in humans.⁸³⁰

Opposite to sin, Kerouac's characters seldom mention grace or the grace of God. It is likely to be used in an expression: "The buses were running grace to God so most folks go home that way, Maggie who live three miles away across all city and out, has to take a cab."⁸³¹ Kerouac situates grace in a more secular setting, the "last day of grace" being the last day of mercy.⁸³² Charlie Martin needed to get 9 dollars to pay back to the officer about a window that he broke. He chose to collect metal junk to raise money. The story unfolds as his brother and sister help him raise money more quickly. However, grace is also connected to the church tradition. Kerouac notes that "grace" was a term that was difficult to pronounce for young children: "'Hail Mary –' in French prayer: '*Je vous salue Marie pleine de grâce*' – Grace and grease interlardedly mixed, since the kids didnt say 'grace,' they said 'growse' and no power on earth could stop them."⁸³³ Grace by Jacky Duluoiz is also comprehended as something gratuitous, almost as fortune: "I'd sometimes in my grace like the grace that got me Maggie get the thick ice cream almost an inch wide, by some mistake in the ice cream factory with rich unbelievable thick chocolate layer that also by mistake was larded and curled right on [...]"⁸³⁴ The grace that gave Duluoiz Maggie was something that he acquired through prayer: "I prayed in Sainte Jeanne d'Arc church for the grace of her love; I'd almost forgotten ..."⁸³⁵ The fact

⁸²⁶ Thomas Joseph White, OP, *The Light of Christ: An Introduction to Catholicism*, 197.

⁸²⁷ Willie James Jennings, *Embodying the Artistic Spirit and the Prophetic Arts*, 257.

⁸²⁸ *Baltimore Catechism*, 303.

⁸²⁹ Roger Haight, *Sin and Grace*, 402 – 408.

⁸³⁰ Willie James Jennings, *Embodying the Artistic Spirit and the Prophetic Arts*, 257.

⁸³¹ Jack Kerouac, *Maggie Cassidy*, 144.

⁸³² Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 158.

⁸³³ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 25.

⁸³⁴ Jack Kerouac, *Maggie Cassidy*, 48.

⁸³⁵ *Ibid.*, 38.

that Duluoaz prayed for the grace here indicates his understanding of grace as God's communion with human beings, and through prayer, the believer has access to this grace. God gratuitously communicates with his believers despite their sinfulness because grace is in his nature. Christ and Holy Spirit is God's grace to human existence.⁸³⁶ Duluoaz also asserts the origin of grace: "Never dreaming, was I, poor Jack Dolouaz, that [...] from Heaven grace descends [...]"⁸³⁷ This is the only place where Duluoaz demonstrates that grace comes from Heaven. In other places, it is said that God is in Heaven, as Gerard states. Faith is the gift of God's grace, and through grace, Christians come "to know and love God in a way analogous to the way God knows and loves himself."⁸³⁸

Once Kerouac's characters speak of grace in possible connection to predestination. Kenneth Wood says to Peter Martin in a bar: "Martin, do you know that some people are condemned, and some are not? Some gets *hanted* and some gets grace, so what are you doing here? You're the one that got grace."⁸³⁹ The division here could be interpreted as the notion that God has given people grace, but the ones who are condemned have chosen to sin against God's grace, thus forfeiting their salvation.⁸⁴⁰ However, the text does seem to refer to the idea of chosen people. The cited text section is one of the rare places in Kerouac's books where a potential influence of Jansenist ideas might be apparent. Jansenists believed that one cannot resist divine grace and that they are predestined to be saved or damned.⁸⁴¹ They emphasize that the grace of Christ will save the chosen ones. Otherwise, Jansenism sees sufficient grace as a rarity.⁸⁴² Jansenism based its concepts on Augustine and was similar to Calvinism. Kerouac, in "Vanity of Duluoaz," quotes Pascal, who favored some of the Jansenist ideas that he

says not to look to ourselves for the cure to misfortunes, but to God whose Providence is a foreordained thing in Eternity; that the foreordainment was that our lives be but sacrifices leading to purity in the after-existence in Heaven as souls disinvested of that rapish, rotten, carnal body –.⁸⁴³

The Pascal text might have led some researchers to further look into a possible gnostic influence on Kerouac because of the highlighted "rotten, carnal body." For others, this further affirmed Jansenism's influence on Kerouac. Most likely, Kerouac did like Pascal. Envisioning the

⁸³⁶ Roger Haight, S.J., *The Experience and Language of Grace* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 7.

⁸³⁷ Before the text about Heaven, Kerouac notes that he never dreamed that his soul was dead. This could be interpreted as Kerouac realizing that humans are alive because of God and his grace; Jack Kerouac, *Maggie Cassidy*, 26.

⁸³⁸ Thomas Joseph White, OP, *The Light of Christ: An Introduction to Catholicism*, 197.

⁸³⁹ Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 410.

⁸⁴⁰ Thomas Joseph White, OP, *The Light of Christ: An Introduction to Catholicism*, 268.

⁸⁴¹ Leszek Kolakowski, *God Owes us Nothing: A Brief Remark on Pascal's Religion and on the Spirit of Jansenism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 5 – 30.

⁸⁴² E. M. Burke, F. Colborn, S. Kenel, "Grace (Theology of)," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, ed. Berard L. Marthaler, 2nd ed. (Detroit: Gale, 2003), 6: 392.

⁸⁴³ Jack Kerouac, *Vanity of Duluoaz*, 125.

circumstances where Kerouac writes this at the end of his life, being a heavy drinker, it might be liberating for him to believe that the body and how people treat it would not be regarded in Heaven. People cannot change their destiny whatever they do because it has already been predestined. However, as previously mentioned, Pascal and Jansenists were prone to rigid praxis. Pascal's quote differs from the Catholic Catechism, where Divine Providence is described as "God's loving care for us."⁸⁴⁴ Kerouac refers to things that God has prescribed for humans another time in "Doctor Sax," where Sax, during the final epic battle with the Snake, broods:

Funny thing is, I never knew that I would meet Judgement Day in my regular clothes without having to go around in the middle of the night with that silly cape, with that silly goddam shroud hat, with that black face the Lord prescribed for me.⁸⁴⁵

Eventually, God's providence is something that humans should not complain about because "it was the work of some power higher than us [...]."⁸⁴⁶

Kenneth saying that some are condemned, and some get grace seems to suggest the Jansenist or Calvinist ideas about the salvation of the chosen ones. However, the assertion that Peter is one of those who have grace makes Kenneth drift away from these ideas because one cannot know whether they are saved or not, even if it is already predestined. These interpretations, indeed, are problematic for Catholic theology. First, humans have the free will to choose God's grace. It is the freedom of humans to situate themselves before God that even allows society to thrive. God sustains humans and gives them the grace to attain communion with God.⁸⁴⁷ Second, Christ died for all, not only those who are chosen. Here it is Kenneth, a personage based on Kerouac's friend Lucien Karr, not Peter, who says this, that might suggest that the ideas of "chosen ones" and predestined nature of human beings might have been exciting and originated from other Beat members. Third, Catholics are cut off from God's sanctifying grace when they sin until they repent. The condemned condition could be seen as a state where the believer cannot access God's grace. However, suppose the believer does not repent before his death. In that case, condemnation becomes even more realistic because it is believed that the believer will automatically go to hell, which is often seen as the ultimate state of condemnation.

Another way to look at this is the prism of guilt that Peter, the prototype of Kerouac himself, felt. He has the grace and all the possibilities in this world. Why, then, is he, a recent

⁸⁴⁴ *The New Confraternity Edition Revised Baltimore Catechism No. 3 And Mass*, 14.

⁸⁴⁵ Jack Kerouac, *Doctor Sax*, 215.

⁸⁴⁶ Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 241.

⁸⁴⁷ David Paul Deavel, "Preface: America, the Church, and Orestes Brownson," *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 23.4 (Fall 2020): 13.

college dropout, in the bar after helping his friend hide a murder weapon? This notion intertwines with the guilt that one feels for sinning. Peter has access to God's grace; he is baptized but has sinned, and his friend reminds him that he should "renew" the "outpour" of the sanctifying grace. Believers encounter God's grace in the historical world. God is present to human beings by creative power that includes his gracious love, but this love has to be answered by a personal response.⁸⁴⁸ Although not in the lifetime of Kerouac, grace in Catholic thought has been seen as an all-pervasive reality of God's love that can be found in every aspect of life in this world, not only through particularly sacred channels.⁸⁴⁹ Considering Kerouac's mindset towards the institutionalization of religion, this characteristic of Catholic theology might have appeared appealing to him.

To summarize, Kerouac in Lowell novels focuses more on sin than the salvific character of grace. The despair lingers because "what are we going to do, where are we going to go, when do we all die like this?"⁸⁵⁰ Kerouac focuses on the diverse ways how sin shows up in this world and ponders why there is suffering, vividly encompassed in Gerard's unfair death. The brother's death is a starting point for Kerouac's recurring theme of theodicy. Another theme encompassed in Kerouac's writings is that humans are "born to die." Kerouac's characters show an unequivocal attitude towards death. The uncertainty of one's mortality hums in the air. According to Catholic teaching, Kerouac even portrays diverse types of actual sin, showing his understanding of the tradition. However, the saving grace in Kerouac's case is much quieter than the aspects of one's sin. The reader then is left feeling more doomed than hopeful about the future. Probably similarly to Kerouac. It is easier to see sin in everyday life than grace which might be one reason for the abundance of references to sinfulness. Another aspect might be that Kerouac had encountered in church and parochial school that sin was emphasized more than grace.

3.7. Saints and Virgin Mary

Roman Catholics undoubtedly believe in saints. Believers pray to saints, honor them, name their children after them, and even cherish their relics. Although saint-like figures are not unique to Catholicism but can be seen in different religious traditions, only Catholics have a specific process through which one becomes a saint. However, the church does not create one,

⁸⁴⁸ Roger Haight, *Sin and Grace*, 409.

⁸⁴⁹ E. M. Burke, F. Colborn, S. Kenel, *Grace*, 393.

⁸⁵⁰ Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 488.

for God alone provides grace to saints.⁸⁵¹ By honoring the saints, who are the chosen ones of God, faithful honor God Himself.⁸⁵² The church identifies the ones to be canonized, a process that affirms that the saint, indeed, is with God. Only then can one be sure to pray to the saint to intercede with God on their behalf.⁸⁵³

Devotion to saints is integral to Catholic believers' daily praxis, which Kerouac reflects in his novels – the belief that saints provide protection and help. It is a subtle reference that adequately shows Catholic devotion in action. As an example can be mentioned the scene when the mother of Gerard in the evening “takes out her missal” and prays to Saint Martha for help: “I ask thee, St Martha [...] to overcome all difficulties as thou didst overcome the dragon which thou hadst at your feet.”⁸⁵⁴ Saint Martha is first mentioned in the New Testament, where she hosts Jesus in her house together with her sister Mary (Luke 10:38-42), and she was the brother of Lazarus, who was risen from death (John 11). A legend started circulating in the French-speaking communities during the Middle Ages about Saint Martha and her victory over a dragon which is also integrated into the prayer known in Catholicism in the 20th and 21st Centuries. In the legend, Saint Martha is the sister of Lazarus, the man Christ rose from death, and Mary of Bethany, which in church tradition is believed to be Mary Magdalene.⁸⁵⁵ The legend states that after Lord's ascension, Martha went to Marseilles, where she and her companion preached and converted the local populace to the faith. A dragon that lived in the forest along the Rhone between Arles and Avignon was “half animal and half fish, larger than an ox, longer than a horse, with teeth as sharp as horns and a pair of bucklers on either side of his body.”⁸⁵⁶ The believers asked Martha for help, and she then went after the dragon. She found the beast in the forest while devouring a man. Martha sprinkled him with blessed water and held a cross in front of him. The dragon was subdued at once and stood still while Martha tied him up. During the last year of her life, Martha knew she was about to die. On the last night, she was visited by evil spirits but did not lose her faith. She sees Christ, who invites her and

⁸⁵¹ Kenneth L. Woodward, *Making Saints: How the Catholic Church Determines Who Becomes a Saint, Who Doesn't, and Why* (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 15 – 17.

⁸⁵² *Baltimore Catechism*, 331 – 344.

⁸⁵³ Kenneth L. Woodward, *How the Catholic Church Determines Who Becomes a Saint, Who Doesn't, and Why*, 17.

⁸⁵⁴ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 47.

⁸⁵⁵ This belief has been studied and challenged because the New Testament text does not affirm this fact. Early Christianity sources also do not portray Mary of Bethany as Magdalene. Both have similar traits. Mary Ann Beavis suggests that Mary figures that are mentioned near Martha and not specified as “Magdalene” should be understood as Mary of Bethany; Mary Ann Beavis, “Mary of Bethany and the Hermeneutics of Remembrance,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 75 (October 2013): 755. For more on the discussion of Marys in the Christian tradition, see Mary Ann Beavis and Allu Kateusz, eds., *Rediscovering the Marys: Maria, Mariamne, Miriam* (London: T&T Clark, 2020).

⁸⁵⁶ Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Reading on the Saints*, trans. William Granger Ryan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 409.

welcomes her into his heaven. The next day Martha dies, miracles happen to those who visit her grave.⁸⁵⁷ In “Visions of Gerard,” Kerouac also shows the regularity of the prayers: they will burn a candle each Tuesday to demonstrate their devotion. The devotees ask for the saint’s protection in return. Gerard’s mother asks Martha to interfere with God for Gerard’s health: “[...] bless my poor little Gerard and make him well again so that he can live his little life in peace – and without pain [...] – My Lord, have pity on this little courageous child, amen.”⁸⁵⁸

Kerouac’s mother was devoted to Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, a late nineteenth-century nun canonized in 1925. Kerouac allegedly inherited this devotion.⁸⁵⁹ With the rising popularity of sainthood and Saint Thérèse in the post-war years, “The Little Way of the Little Flower” was at its zenith. Saint Thérèse preached the Little Way of confidence and sainthood of the ordinary, small deeds in daily life.⁸⁶⁰ Her little way soon gained popularity in Catholic parish churches, enhanced by the devotion of well-known figures such as Thomas Merton, Édith Piaf, and none other than Kerouac.⁸⁶¹ In his writings, Kerouac has evoked Thérèse’s vision and “who promised to come back and shower the earth with roses after death, shower ye with roses the secret nun who understands, make her pallet a better one than canopied of Kings.”⁸⁶² She inspired an enthusiastic cult among French-speaking communities and was canonized much more rapidly than the Church customarily permitted.⁸⁶³ Alexander’s reverence towards a little flower in “The Town and the City” on an early morning walk with his friends could be seen as a reference to Saint Thérèse:

What’s left of life, a little flower. Immortal little flower that venerates us, that venerates us and all that this morning means. [...] He knelt there, while the boys watched grinning, he knelt there and seemed to be wrapped in a secret, prescient ecstasy of what life was to him.⁸⁶⁴

All the other references to Saint Thérèse are found in “Doctor Sax” and recall one specific event. The protagonist recalls that in his childhood parochial school, he saw a movie where the head of the statue of Saint Therese was turning: “At the age of seven I went to St Louis Parochial School, a particularly Doctor Saxish school. It was in the auditorium of this kingdom that I saw the Ste Thérèse movie that made stone turn its head.” It was a 1920s Catholic movie:

⁸⁵⁷ Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Reading on the Saints*, 410 – 411.

⁸⁵⁸ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 47.

⁸⁵⁹ James Baaden, “Post-War Saints: 1945 – 1960,” *History of European Ideas* 40.6 (2014): 878 – 882.

⁸⁶⁰ Thomas R. Nevin, *The Last Years of Saint Thérèse: Doubt and Darkness, 1895 – 1897* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), ix – x.

⁸⁶¹ James Baaden, *Post-War Saints: 1945 – 1960*, 880.

⁸⁶² Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 85. The image of Saint Therese of the Roses was popular in the second half of the 1960s due to the success of the famous song “St Therese of the Roses”; James Baaden, “Post-War Saints: 1945 – 1960,” 878.

⁸⁶³ Dennis McNally, *Desolate Angel: Jack Kerouac, The Beat Generation, and America*, 10.

⁸⁶⁴ Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 211.

The statue of Ste Thérèse turning her head in an antique Catholic twenties film with Ste Thérèse dashing across town in a car with W.C. Fieldsian close shaves by the young religious hero while the doll (not Ste Thérèse herself but the lady hero symbolic thereof) heads for her saintliness with wide eyes of disbelief.⁸⁶⁵

But this visualization of the turning statue haunts the protagonist later in various situations. He also saw the statue of Saint Thérèse in their home turn its head.⁸⁶⁶ When recalling seeing a man die, Duluoz is sad. He remembers the statue, amongst other things that might be considered scary: “We told pop about the dying man ... gloom music played in my soul ... I remembered the turning Thérèse statue head, the fish heads cut off in the cellar, door yawning open in the closet of night, black spiders crawling in the dark [..].”⁸⁶⁷

Saints are a part of the everyday life of Catholics; for example, they have medals of the saints for the protection of the saints: “I have a medal, as you know, over my backyard door. It’s the medal of St Benedict.”⁸⁶⁸ Daily religiosity might have come with a specific aspect of superstition; an Irish girl once told Duluoz: “Whenever you move into a new house two things you must do according to your blood as an ancient Gael: you buy a new broom, and you pins a St Benedict medal over the kitchen door.”⁸⁶⁹ Saint also embodies in Kerouac’s works someone wise and experienced: “[..] there stands Boaz the old caretaker [..] – a Saint, the old man was a red-eyed saint, he’d seen too much [..].”⁸⁷⁰ e also sees the older Doctor Sax as an “angel saint.”⁸⁷¹ Saints are also tired and somewhat wild: “This poor demented man actually did look like a saint, he really wore the hairshirt of the wilderness. There he stood, a mournful ramshackle wreck of being, bearded, rheumy-eyed, blue with cold [..].”⁸⁷² Saint is someone who asks to fight injustice and evil: “‘You there!’ cried the saint, pointing at a youngster who carried books and listened in silence. ‘Pick up your pen, son, and write against the evil in this world.’”⁸⁷³ And even the protagonist Jack Duluoz himself could be recognized as some specific category of a saint: “[..] our forefathers gradually unfolded and he began to realize I was really

⁸⁶⁵ Jack Kerouac, *Doctor Sax*, 3 – 4.

⁸⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁸⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 132.

⁸⁶⁸ Jack Kerouac, *Vanity of Duluoz*, 62. For example, in the road novel “Big Sur,” the medal of Saint Christopher is mentioned more than once as the patron of travelers. Duluoz’s mother had sown the medal inside his bag. Lex Pascal gifts the Saint Christopher medal as a going away gift for Duluoz that is connected in the story with both of their French-Canadian backgrounds; Jack Kerouac *Big Sur*, 7, 71. Saint Christopher has been a patron for bus drivers, travelers, also truck drivers in America and protected against accidents, sudden death, and plague; Rosemary Ellen Guiley, *The Encyclopedia of Saints* (New York: Facts On File, 2001), 75 – 76. The medallion is a token of affection from both characters towards Duluoz, showing their wish for his safe travels.

⁸⁶⁹ Jack Kerouac, *Vanity of Duluoz*, 62.

⁸⁷⁰ Jack Kerouac, *Doctor Sax*, 131.

⁸⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 202.

⁸⁷² Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 346.

⁸⁷³ *Ibid.*, 347.

one, one, of Briton blood, and especially, after all, one kind of a funny imbecilic saint.”⁸⁷⁴ Also, little Mickey Martin was like a saint: “Reared in Catholic myths and understanding, he walked in the frosty night and was a saint.”⁸⁷⁵ Peter Martin can, however, experience martyrdom to specific ideas and visions: “I see you’ve become a martyr in the great American cause for bigger and better concrete stadiums!”⁸⁷⁶

Believers can use pictures of saints to pray to them. These pictures remind them of saints and also can work as a talisman, similarly as it is with medallions. In “The Town and the City,” Ruth Martin made holy pictures that she sold during Easter and Christmas. Peter Martin accidentally told his father about the death of one of his brothers, but because they were twins, he named the wrong one. The mispronunciation made Peter feel guilty. To minimize this blame, he used Catholic holy pictures as a talisman to pray for the well-being of Francis Martin:

Peter took a pile of them and went back quietly to Francis’s room and, while Francis slept, he laid them all around his head on the pillow, at his side, even at his feet, all over the bed till he was surrounded with holy pictures. Then Peter got down on one knee and whispered to the holy pictures and tiptoed out of the room. He prayed again in his room to God that the holy pictures would work and make Francis better.⁸⁷⁷

However, Kerouac’s respect for saints culminates in “Visions of Gerard,” his take on the hagiographic genre.

3.7.1. Kerouac’s legend of “Saint” Gerard

Kerouac has continually portrayed his brother Gerard as a saint in his literary works, especially in his book “Visions of Gerard,” where he “celebrates the holiness of Gerard’s short life, often comparing his brother to Christ or a saint.”⁸⁷⁸ Saints are first known by their stories and eventually even become these stories, as Kenneth W. Woodward asserts, and Kerouac wrote one about his brother.⁸⁷⁹ In this subchapter, the author will highlight various aspects in which Kerouac created the legend of “Saint” Gerard. 1) *Dramatic and necessary conversion to the faith*. Baptism is an integral part of the story as it is often seen in the saints’ hagiographies. Usually it is described as a dramatic conversion as in the legend of Saint Thecla or the event of

⁸⁷⁴ Jack Kerouac, *Vanity of Dulouoz*, 196. Only one other time Dulouoz as a character is called “St Jack Dulouoz” in “Vanity of Dulouoz”: “Why, St John Dulouoz and the boys, naturally, and this may sound funny, but this was the second time that on a high school team I had participated in the defeat of St John’s Prep”; *ibid.*, 38. Most likely, it was used to show Jack’s capabilities as a sportsman on a football team.

⁸⁷⁵ Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 167 – 168.

⁸⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 138.

⁸⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁸⁷⁸ Lori Reynolds, *Irrational Doorways: Religion and Spirituality in the Work of the Beat Generation*, 126.

⁸⁷⁹ Kenneth L. Woodward, *Making Saints: How the Catholic Church Determines Who Becomes a Saint, Who Doesn’t, and Why*, 18.

receiving faith as something miraculous as in the case of Saint Paul. Kerouac also refers to the beginnings of Gerard's devotion by receiving baptism:

I prefer rivers in my death, or seas, and other continents, but no satin death in Satin Massachusetts Lowell – with the bishop of St Jean de Baptiste Stone, who baptized Gerard, with a wreath in the rain, beads on his iron nose, ‘Mama did he baptize me?’ ‘No he baptized Gerard,’ I wishes – I was just a little too young to have been baptized by a Saint of the Hero Church, Gerard had, and so baptized, saint did thus die –.⁸⁸⁰

Baptism symbolizes the first brick of the legend of Kerouac's “Saint” Gerard. A bishop baptized him – this fact for Catholics is essential. The text portrays the priest as a saint, whose sainthood has also been transmitted further to Gerard. In Christian tradition, the role of godparents is essential in baptism because they will help guide the baptized on the right path in their faith. Kerouac does not mention Gerard's godparents; thus, the importance has been put solemnly on the priest. Here the narrator, Duluoz, distinguishes why he is not a saint because this particular priest did not baptize him. However, Gerard was, which is why he died as a saint. Nevertheless, the attribution of sainthood for the bishop and Gerard comes to portray more of a folk everyday religion that shows that the believers assigned particular importance to this aspect. For the story's sake, Kerouac might also have “sanctified” the bishop to affirm Gerard's saintliness.

2) *The saint, during his life, acts as an example for others by imitating saints and Christ.*

Gerard is portrayed as an example, a devoted Catholic who liked the church and went there often.⁸⁸¹ He is more devout than other parish boys, he has a more reverential attitude towards penance prayers, he prays before and after the confession:

The innocence and yet intrinsic purity-understanding with which the Hail Mary was done, as Gerard, now knelt in his secure pew, prepares to visit the priest in his ambuscade and palace hut with the drapes that keep swishing aside as repentant in-and-out sinners come-and-go burdened and disburdened as the case may be and is, amen.⁸⁸²

The scene is compared to his predecessor in the confessional, who “prays fast and furious his repentant penalty rosaries at the rear seat half on his way to run out and slap cap on [..].”⁸⁸³ Through this comparison highlighted devotion of Gerard. He also taught his little brother not to get mad at anyone and to be kind to little animals: “The little flies too, you dont have to kill them – they rub their little legs, they dont know how to do anything else.”⁸⁸⁴ Gerard, in the days before his death slapped his little brother and instantly regretted it: “We made up soon enough

⁸⁸⁰ Jack Kerouac, *Doctor Sax*, 65.

⁸⁸¹ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 21.

⁸⁸² *Ibid.*, 26.

⁸⁸³ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁸⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 82.

head to head at the sad and final mortal window, holy Gerard and I, which gave credence now to his speech about kindness [..].”⁸⁸⁵ In this section, the narrator affirms that Gerard lived what he preached. The overly kind attitude of Gerard towards everyone, but especially towards animals has been emphasized throughout the book. That gives quite an apparent reference to Saint Francis and his “sermon to the birds”: “Gerard had birds that neighbor and relative could swear did know him personally.”⁸⁸⁶ The most visible imagery of this reference is when Gerard sleeps in his bed in the last year of his life and waits to feed the birds: “[..] the picture of him hand outstretched and helpless in bed calling at the open window for the celestial visitors [..].”⁸⁸⁷ One of the typical images of Saint Francis and how he is illustrated in the Catholic tradition is feeding the birds because he is the patron of animals.⁸⁸⁸ Gerard, similar to Saint Francis, is compassionate toward all beings, especially animals. He would rescue mice and bring them back to health “in little cardboard box hospitals that were also cathedrals of holy reverence to which his little face with the soft fall of melancholy hair, over melancholy eyes, turned, impossibly hoping – he made everybody cry when he died, terribly from within.”⁸⁸⁹ Denis McNally also emphasizes Gerard’s likeness to Saint Francis of Assisi, “gifted with an almost supernaturally tender love for all living creatures.”⁸⁹⁰ Gerard taught that kindness towards animals will be the merit after which God will measure humans to their worthiness for his heaven: “God put these little things on earth to see if we want to hurt them – those who dont do it who can, are for his Heaven – those who see they can hurt, and do hurt, they’re no for his Heaven.”⁸⁹¹

Kerouac even ascribes Gerard with Christ-like abilities: “Then the birds would come flocking and singin in rollicking nations around our holy roof again and he’d call for bread, and multiply it in crumbs, and sow it to the sisters who pecked and picked.”⁸⁹² The reference is undeniable to the New Testament’s story about Jesus multiplying bread for thousands of people (Matthew 14:13-21; Mark 6:31-44; Luke 9:12-17; John 6:1-14). The imitation of Christ is an essential aspect of Catholic sainthood, and Kerouac does not leave out this aspect in creating

⁸⁸⁵ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 81 – 82.

⁸⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁸⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁸⁸⁸ Rosemary Ellen Guiley, *The Encyclopedia of Saints*, 116. See the account of the “sermon to the birds” and Saint Francis’ attitude towards nature in Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi: A New Biography* (Ithaka: Cornell University Press, 2012), 54-58.

⁸⁸⁹ Jack Kerouac, *Maggie Cassidy*, 92.

⁸⁹⁰ Dennis McNally, *Desolate Angel: Jack Kerouac, The Beat Generation, and America*, 5.

⁸⁹¹ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 81.

⁸⁹² *Ibid.*, 18.

the legend of “Saint” Gerard. At the end of his life, Gerard even cries out to God similarly to Jesus: “O, when will it stop -? O my Lord, help me –.”⁸⁹³

3) *Saint is a medium between God and believers for transmitting the meaning of the Christian faith.*⁸⁹⁴ Saints could see things that others did not, events that will happen, perceive demons, and have visions of Christ, the Virgin Mary, and other wonders of faith.⁸⁹⁵ Gerard, in his visions, sees Virgin Mary:

‘My sister, I saw the Virgin Mary.’
The nun is stunned: ‘Where?’
‘There – in a dream, when I slept.’
She does the sign of the cross.⁸⁹⁶

Nun’s reaction in this passage shows genuine shock that this little kid has seen Virgin Mary in his dreams. Because they heard the revelations of Gerard either in catechism class or at his death bed, little *Ti Jean* felt that the nuns and some of the boys knew something of Gerard that he never knew.⁸⁹⁷ *Ti Jean* wished he had also heard the revelations of the “Saint” Gerard. He also had some special knowledge about the dead: “the whole yard is rattling, and the dead underneath it, and the fence full of sitters, everything rattling like mad like those varnished skeletal furnitures and the unfeeling cruel uncaring rattle of dry bones and especially the rattle of the window when Gerard said the ghosts had come [..].”⁸⁹⁸

4) *Saints are essential to their local communities.* Saints and their cults are often cultivated and preserved alive by their communities. The saint is an example of how to live and act for a specific community. Gerard is represented as an example of the Franco-American Catholic community in Lowell. To further affirm the legitimacy of Gerard’s saintliness, Kerouac also shows that the community of Lowell Franco-American Catholics believes that Gerard is a little saint. The narrative enhances it with the events leading up to his death, especially the text about the nuns who visited him right before death to write down Gerard’s views of heaven:

[..] the nuns of St Louis de France Parochial School were at his bedside to take down his dying words because they’d heard his astonishing revelations of heaven delivered in catechism class on no more encouragement than that it was his turn to speak.⁸⁹⁹

⁸⁹³ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 53.

⁸⁹⁴ Kenneth L. Woodward, *Making Saints: How the Catholic Church Determines Who Becomes a Saint, Who Doesn’t, and Why*, 18.

⁸⁹⁵ Robert Bartlett, *Why Can the Dead Do Such Great Things? Saints and Worshippers from the Martyrs to the Reformation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 368.

⁸⁹⁶ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 42.

⁸⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁸⁹⁸ Jack Kerouac, *Doctor Sax*, 37.

⁸⁹⁹ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 3.

Mainly, these descriptions were used within the smaller community and must go through quite a severe examination to be confirmed by church administration as legitimate saints.⁹⁰⁰ If any miracles would arise after the death of the devoted one, then these notes would gain greater importance and serve as additional sources for the life of this saint. Duluoz in “Visions of Gerard” and even Kerouac in interviews refer that these writings would never be seen again. However, whether Kerouac or his mother ever tried to retrieve them from a particular convent is a good question. It appears that he did not do that because of the lingering feeling of possible injustice that Kerouac expected the nuns to bring to him. In the context of the “Visions of Gerard,” this affirmation that the notes have been lost somewhere with the nuns continues the mysterious legend of the saint – no one can precisely know what Gerard revealed in the last moments of his life.

5) *Saints in church tradition are “made” after their death.*⁹⁰¹ “Visions of Gerard” would not have the effect of a hagiographical legend without Gerard’s death, which is central to the story. Everything leads to it. First and foremost, it is the tragic and painful death of a young child that vividly refers to a broader tradition of martyrdom: “[..] he’s suffered enough for twenty four old sick men and he hasn’t said a word,” his mother prays to God.⁹⁰² The martyrs give an example of the expectations of discipleship for the Christian faithful.⁹⁰³ Gerard delivers nothing less with his long and painful death, imitation of Saint Francis and Christ, utter kindness, and visions. Some Beat researchers connect this to an impossible ideal that Kerouac was compared to and ceaselessly tried to reach.⁹⁰⁴ After the death of Gerard, the parish priest Père Lalumière the *Curé* consoles the mother: “Ah well, be not anxious, Mrs Duluoz, he was a little saint! He’s certainly in Heaven!”⁹⁰⁵ The portrayal of nuns and priest plays a crucial role in the legend of “Saint” Gerard – the community expresses their belief that he was one. If taken

⁹⁰⁰ More on the process of canonization, see Kenneth L. Woodward, *Making Saints: How the Catholic Church Determines Who Becomes a Saint, Who Doesn’t, and Why*, 50 – 86.

⁹⁰¹ Kenneth L. Woodward, *Making Saints: How the Catholic Church Determines Who Becomes a Saint, Who Doesn’t, and Why*, 18.

⁹⁰² Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 47.

⁹⁰³ Matthew D. Lundberg, *Christian Martyrdom and Christian Violence: On Suffering and Wielding the Sword* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 20.

⁹⁰⁴ Dennis McNally interprets that Gerard set an impossible standard of behavior for his normal and rambunctious younger brother Kerouac. His death, however, was tragic; the months passed, “the whimpers became shrieks, the sobs scream of agony”; Dennis McNally, *Desolate Angel: Jack Kerouac, The Beat Generation, and America*, 5 – 6. Reilly notes that Jack idolized his older brother and attributed everything good to him, contrasting what he saw as his own weak, sinful nature. In his later years, Kerouac proclaimed that his saintly brother was guiding his hand as he wrote. This conviction that his writing was somehow inspired made Kerouac reluctant to revise and hypersensitive to criticism; Robert Reilly, “On the road to redemption with Catholic author Jack Kerouac,” *U.S. Catholic* (April 11, 2004), <https://uscatholic.org/articles/200404/on-the-road-to-redemption-with-catholic-author-jack-kerouac/> (accessed 17.08.2022). According to tradition, it would not be far off to consider that Gerard is there to help him together with God if Kerouac considered Gerard a saint that truly is in Heaven with other saints and God. However, Catholicism would not consider Gerard a saint.

⁹⁰⁵ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 90.

through the prism of Catholic teaching, the priest's text is understood that Gerard is already in Heaven with other saints and God. On the day of the funeral, Gerard lies in a coffin with a rosary in his hands, "beyond punishment [...] qualified for eternity and perfectness -."⁹⁰⁶

6) *The portrayal of the cult after the saint's death.* According to the Baltimore Catechism, saints can be honored in three ways. First, by imitating them, something that Jackie tried to do: "They see me in the parlor imitating Gerard with imaginary talks back and forth concerning lambs, kitties, clouds."⁹⁰⁷ Second, by praying to them, and third, by showing respect to their images and relics.⁹⁰⁸ After hitting another boy, Duluoze felt that he was hurting an angel, and at Gerard's picture, he "said my prayers and prayed for Ernie's love. Gerard made no move in the photo."⁹⁰⁹ When Catholics pray to the saints, they are there to offer their prayers to God. If Kerouac portrays Gerard as a saint in Heaven with God, as a priest affirmed to his mother, then it is no surprise that Jackie prays to his brother's picture as that of a saint. According to Baltimore Catechism, showing respect to the pictures and images of Christ and saints is acceptable because they are their representations and memorials.⁹¹⁰ However, Catechism is regarded as an example of Kerouac's insights in representing Gerard according to Catholic hagiographical tradition. Kerouac created the legend of "Saint" Gerard, and he could not be considered a saint in the traditional sense.

Gerard's saintliness is venerated, but that can also be something that children are frightened by, like the statue of Saint Theresa that was turning its head. Jackie Duluoze sees his brother Gerard's ghost in the night's shadows:

In darkness in mid-sleep night I saw him standing over my crib with wild hair, my heart stoned, I turned horrified, my mother and sister were sleeping in big bed, I was in crib, implacable stood Gerard-O my brother ... it might have been the arrangement of the shadows.⁹¹¹

The ghost of Gerard dwelled in the desk of his room: "On the back of that desk still were chalkmarks Gerard had made when he was alive in the green desk – this desk rattled in my dreams because of Gerard's ghost in it [...]"⁹¹² The emphasis here is on the chalk marks made by Gerard, somehow turning this desk into a sacred object of the saint.

7) *The background in which "Visions of Gerard" emerges.* In the post-war years, there was a widespread cultural interest in saints and sainthood, which reached its crescendo between

⁹⁰⁶ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 92.

⁹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁹⁰⁸ *Baltimore Catechism*, 340.

⁹⁰⁹ Jack Kerouac, *Doctor Sax*, 71 – 72.

⁹¹⁰ *Baltimore Catechism*, 342.

⁹¹¹ Jack Kerouac, *Doctor Sax*, 36.

⁹¹² *Ibid.*, 89.

1945 and 1960. The emerging ideas draw their inspiration from images and ideas of sainthood from the 1920s and 1930s that were highly accessible and memorable. The post-war period created a “cultural moment” in which the noble qualities of the saints were admired amid mass bereavement and ethical disorientation.⁹¹³ Another influential source for Kerouac was Jean Genet, who reworked traditional Catholic themes of sainthood in his novel “Nôtre Dame des Fleurs” written during the 1940s.⁹¹⁴ These trends also influenced Kerouac in creating his interpretation of hagiography. James J. Donahue successfully argues that “Visions of Gerard” is a contemporary example of hagiography. He looks at the spiritual biography as living discourse, one that Kerouac participated in, and tries to find how the novel may also help readers better understand the developing nature of hagiographic discourse.⁹¹⁵ The author of the study distinguishes documentary witnesses for sanctification, the saint’s life as an example for others, and the syncretic nature of hagiography.⁹¹⁶ It is worth remembering that the star of hagiography usually is the saint himself/herself. In traditional forms of hagiographical writing, rarely would the author be from another denomination, less alone from another tradition. However, the saint Gerard does not waver from his Catholic faith. Kerouac has portrayed him as a Catholic saint with characteristics inherent to Catholic hagiographical tradition. Regardless, it does appear that the hagiographer in “Visions of Gerard” is in a dialogue between Catholicism, which Gerard conveys, and Buddhism, represented by the narrator Dulouz and the character *Ti Jean*. In the passages where the narrator refers to Buddhism, the reader learns more about the hagiographer than the saint. The narrator, Dulouoz, might look at Gerard at some point through the Buddhist lens, but the character of Gerard stays faithful to his Catholicism until the day he dies.

Nowadays, generations have been molded by popular culture. Biblical stories, church traditions, symbols, or rituals are not the primary sources of influence, but television, Instagram, Tik Tok, comic books, Twitter, and much more. These trends shape today’s myths, parables, gods and devils, iconographies, and even hagiographies.⁹¹⁷ When Kerouac wrote “Visions of Gerard,” it was a time when there was a widespread interest in saints. When this “explicitly hagiographical text” was published in the sixties, the readers were puzzled because the widespread interest in saints and sainthood had waned.⁹¹⁸

⁹¹³ James Baaden, *Post-War Saints: 1945-1960*, 881 – 882.

⁹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 879.

⁹¹⁵ James J. Donahue, “Visions of Gerard and Jack Kerouac’s Complicated Hagiography,” *The Midwest Quarterly* 51.1 (Autumn 2009): 27.

⁹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 28 – 31.

⁹¹⁷ Kelton Cobb, *The Blackwell Companion to Theology and Popular Culture*, 7.

⁹¹⁸ James Baaden, *Post-War Saints: 1945 – 1960*, 878.

3.7.2. Virgin Mary

Virgin Mary is an important figure in Christianity, but more so in Catholicism, where “the figure of Mary continues to exercise its fascination.”⁹¹⁹ The idea of Mary’s virginal chastity and maternal loveliness has been confirmed with numerous dogmas that have enriched this ideal – Mary’s divine motherhood, Immaculate Conception, virgin maternity, sinlessness, virginity, and freedom from bodily corruption of the grave.⁹²⁰ However, not all of these came without discussion and critique. Jesuits did preach the doctrine of Immaculate Conception, defined in the First Vatican Council, that the Virgin Mary is born sinless, but the Dominicans disapproved of this teaching.⁹²¹ Kerouac has shown in “Visions of Gerard” the mystery of the Virgin Mary as a mother for young boys in the church, as previously highlighted. The incomprehension of the boys is no wonder because often, in everyday religion, one knows better the praxis, not the theory, especially kids. Students’ lack of understanding of such dogmatic teachings as Immaculate Conception was also affirmed by a survey from the end of 1910s showing that 35.1 percent answered quite incorrectly. However, the students had an explicit vision of the purity and chastity of Mary. For them she also serves as an inspiring and dynamic ideal.⁹²² This devotion and aspect of purity will be further analyzed in Kerouac’s texts.

Virgin Mary, first and foremost, is celebrated as a Virgin mother of Christ. It is a role and a feeling that most people can relate – either being themselves mothers or children of their mothers or being parents as such. The story of Mary and Joseph has always been important in Christian tradition because it is part of the story of Jesus Christ. Most often, if Joseph and Mary are portrayed together, then also is the child Jesus, especially during Christmas nativity scenes: “Mickey gazed with fearful awe at the beautiful crib on one side of the gleaming white altar, representing the Christ child in the manger, the mother Mary bending over him silent and immobile, Joseph standing mournfully by [...]”⁹²³ Mickey, after a while, even identifies with the child of Christ and envisions Virgin Mary as his mother. This visualization for Mickey comes with wonder, the scene comes to life, and he is overcome by imminent tears, “for he too, Michael Martin, was a child with a holy mother [...]”⁹²⁴ As a figure of mother Virgin Mary provides comfort to those who struggle: “I brought him on earth, in my womb, the Virgin Mary

⁹¹⁹ Aidan Nichols, OP, *There Is No Rose: The Mariology of the Catholic Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), x.

⁹²⁰ Patrick W. Carey, ed., *American Religious Thought: The Shaping of a Theological & Social Tradition* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2004), 264.

⁹²¹ J. S. Cummins, *A Question of Rite: Friar Domingo Navarrete and the Jesuits in China* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1993), 41 – 45.

⁹²² Patrick W. Carey, ed., *American Religious Thought: The Shaping of a Theological & Social Tradition*, 264.

⁹²³ Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 172 – 173.

⁹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 174.

help me! – in my womb, with pain – I gave him his milk! – I took care of him – I stood at his bedside – I bought him presents on Christmas, I made him little costumes Haloween.”⁹²⁵ Gerard’s mother here prays to Virgin Mary after her son’s death.

Virgin Mary is a saint, which is why the figure of Mary is so often portrayed in Catholic churches, she has her altars, and even churches are named after her as shrines to worship her. In Lowell novels, the St Louis de France church also had separate altar for Mary and Joseph.⁹²⁶ That is not unique to Catholic churches. Most of them were built in the name of a particular saint or devoted to it. If it was a larger church, there were altars for distinguished figures in the Catholic tradition, like Mary and Joseph. Mary has a particular station in the Lowell Grotto: “The first of the stations faced the side of a funeral home, so you kneeled there, at night, looking at faint representations of the Virgin, hood over head, her sad eyes [..].”⁹²⁷ The devotions of believers do keep the cult alive, which is the case of the Virgin Mary. Believers have altars at their homes dedicated to Saint Mary: “I take a freight train to Lowell and settle on that little hill where I rode my bicycle down [..] near the house where batty woman had the Catholic altar, where – where – (I remember the statue of the Virgin Mary in her livingroom candlelight).”⁹²⁸ Archaeological records from Virginia, Maryland, and Pennsylvania show that sacramental objects, including statues of the Virgin Mary, were crucial to their devotion because, in times of distress, devotees would bury them for safekeeping. Moreover, the materials the objects were made of gave them power.⁹²⁹

Catholics believe that saints listen to devotees’ prayers and offer them to God. Mary is also celebrated as the prayerful voice of intercession. Catholic catechism contains the “Hail Mary” – one of the most famous prayers in the Catholic tradition.⁹³⁰ zAdditional personal prayers to Virgin Mary are common in Catholicism. Catholics pray to Virgin Mary for her blessing over the ones who are the closest to us: “My mother walks right along, any old guardian angel’ll do and she will bless them when her time comes Holy Mother, Blest on High.”⁹³¹ The passage refers to another belief in Catholicism – that of guardian angels. The Church fathers generally assert that every Christian has a guardian angel.⁹³² The functions, though, vary. Jackie Dulouoz sees his mother’s guardian angel walking beside her, it is “very solemn, slightly hurt,

⁹²⁵ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 88.

⁹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁹²⁷ Jack Kerouac, *Doctor Sax*, 116 – 117.

⁹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 169 – 170.

⁹²⁹ Laura E. Masur, “Symbol or Presence? Archaeology and the Materiality of Catholic Devotions,” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 38.2 (Spring 2020): 20 – 21, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1353/cht.2020.0009>

⁹³⁰ For further insight into the meaning and historical aspects of Hail Mary, see Part II of Leonard Boff, *Praying with Jesus and Mary: Our Father, Hail Mary* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005).

⁹³¹ Jack Kerouac, *Doctor Sax*, 189.

⁹³² Serge-Thomas Bonino, OP, *Angels and Demons: A Catholic Introduction*, trans. Michael J. Miller (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2016), 265.

with lowered mouth, but with great shining wings, that drop rich showers of cool flame rolling and merling in the Gershom cobbles.”⁹³³ The hurt wing might refer to age, number of sins, or suffering. Jacky Duluoz prays to Virgin Mary also for the success of all things. However, he feels Virgin Mary would not come to him but could only come to women and older men, “not raw me’s.”⁹³⁴ The lingering sense of guilt and unworthiness here prevails; regardless, Duluoz does pray to Mary. The older men could be here connected to lost fishermen in the sea whom the Virgin Mary guides: “Maybe it’s not surprising the Portuguese and Mediterranean fishermen pray to Mary and by night call her the Star of the Sea, or Stella Maris.”⁹³⁵ Virgin Mary often is portrayed wearing blue color. Kerouac calls it the pure blue of the real deeps deep blue with white foam, the colors of the Virgin Mary.

Virgin Mary is the symbol of chastity and purity celebrated as sinless Eve. Kerouac also refers to Mary, not calling her “Virgin Mary” but indicating her when the protagonist compares her to his girlfriend Maggie: “I grieved inside that I had to give up her for Maggie. But I couldn’t have Mary and Magdalene both so I had to decide my mind.”⁹³⁶ Here, another important aspect is visible from Kerouac’s literary themes – that of sexuality. The protagonist must choose between the more promiscuous girl and his girlfriend, Maggie, who would be his potential future wife. Some researchers have interpreted that throughout his works, it is possible to see that Kerouac tries to combine two types of women – the chaste Mary and promiscuous Magdalene, that he always tried to have both but, of course, failed.⁹³⁷

Lastly, Virgin Mary in the Catholic tradition is a gateway to Christ, which entails that she is also the gateway to Heaven. This idea of Mary as the one to be guiding believers to Heaven is seen in Gerard’s vision while he sleeps in the classroom. At first, Gerard dreams of sitting in a yard with his little brother. He is about to stroke Ti Jean’s head

[..] when suddenly he gets up and goes to another part of the yard, nearby, trees and bushes and something strange and gray and suddenly the ground ends and there's just air and supported there at the earth's gray edge of immateriality, is a great White Virgin Mary with a flowing robe ballooning partly in the wind and partly tucked in at the edges and held aloft by swarms, countless swarms of grave bluebirds and white downy bellies and necks [...]. The Virgin Mary reads it in his perplexed eyes. ‘Look,’ pointing to the red sun, ‘it’s still early, I won’t be mad at you, you were only gone less than a morning – Come on -’
 ‘Where?’
 ‘Well, don’t you remember? We were going – come on –’

⁹³³ Jack Kerouac, *Doctor Sax*, 189.

⁹³⁴ Jack Kerouac, *Maggie Cassidy*, 176.

⁹³⁵ Jack Kerouac, *Vanity of Duluoz*, 165. As mentioned in “Vanity of Duluoz,” when New Bedford fisherman is strangled in ice-cold waters, they pray to God and Stella Maris; *ibid.*, 256.

⁹³⁶ Jack Kerouac, *Maggie Cassidy*, 100.

⁹³⁷ Dennis McNally connects this to the lessons that Kerouac as a child, learned in the parochial school about sin and purgatory. Women were either good as his mother or evil like the nuns; Dennis McNally, *Desolate Angel: Jack Kerouac, The Beat Generation, and America*, 8.

‘How’m I gonna follow you?’⁹³⁸

Gerard’s vision corresponds in the story with the last day he goes to school. Right after he wakes up, he informs the class nun that he has seen Virgin Mary. The described vision was one of the primary aspects of why Gerard was revered in his religious community. Virgin Mary here is portrayed as a gate to Heaven. The imagery is also popular in Catholic theology because through Mary, believers can reach Jesus, who awaits them in Heaven. There is another time when Kerouac writes of this in his novels, where in “Big Sur,” the protagonist sees a vision: “For a moment I see blue Heaven and the Virgin’s white veil, but suddenly a great evil blur like an ink spot spreads over it, “The devil! [..]” – But angels are laughing and having a big barn dance in the rocks of the sea [..] – Suddenly as clear as anything I ever saw in my life, I see the Cross.”⁹³⁹ Although found outside the Lowell novels, this reference gives better insight into the description in “Visions of Gerard.” Both of these texts portray Virgin Mary as a gateway to Heaven. Virgin Mary is the one that both Gerard and Duloz see in their visions; Virgin Mary waits for them on their way to an anticipated death. The text passage in “Big Sur,” however, gives the ultimate resolution of the vision – the cross of Christ. Because Virgin Mary is the gateway through which believers can reach Christ and salvation, she has been seen in Catholicism also as a symbol of eschatology.⁹⁴⁰ Another aspect portrayed in the texts is Mary’s veil. The mentioned veil most likely refers to the white veil over her head or the protecting veil, often depicted in iconography. Mary is often also depicted as wearing a white veil over her head. Aidan Nichols connects this imagery with Mary’s role as the “Source of Life” and as the mediatrix of grace.⁹⁴¹

To sum up, Kerouac in Lowell novels authentically portrays the devotion of the Catholic community – the usage of medallions for saints, holy pictures, devotional candles, prayers, and even altars. Against the increasing trend of saints and sainthood in post-war America, Kerouac creates his hagiographic legend of his brother, “Saint” Gerard. Kerouac illustrates his in-depth knowledge of this genre by using aspects characteristic of the descriptions in Catholic hagiographies. He emphasizes the baptism of Gerard, his devotionism in comparison to others, his unlimited kindness, his teachings of life, visions of Heaven, and martyr-like death. The importance of the Virgin Mary is most vividly portrayed in Gerard’s vision of Mary as a gateway to Heaven, Christ, and salvation. The white veil of Mary, as described in the visions, is most likely taken from iconographical accounts of the Mother of God. Virgin Mary has been

⁹³⁸ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 40 – 41.

⁹³⁹ Jack Kerouac, *Big Sur*, 204.

⁹⁴⁰ A Joint Commission of Catholic Bishops’ Conferences and Secretariat of Divine Worship, *Collection of Masses of the Blessed Virgin Mary* (Collegeville, MI: Liturgical Press, 2011), 1: 262.

⁹⁴¹ Aidan Nichols, OP, *There Is No Rose: The Mariology of the Catholic Church*, 111 – 130.

portrayed according to the understanding of her role in the Catholic tradition – she is the Mother of God, a virgin, a saint, chaste and pure. Believers honor her by having altars and churches dedicated to her. Virgin Mary consoles the believers by listening to their prayers.

3.8. Sacraments

In the Baltimore catechism, the following seven sacraments have been listed – Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Penance, Extreme Unction, Holy Orders, and Matrimony. The sacraments embraced whole life – from baptism until death, and they are an integral part of Catholic Church tradition.⁹⁴² A sacrament effectuates the grace it signifies, as Thomas Joseph White defines it.⁹⁴³ Through sacraments in liturgical worship, the church becomes “most tangibly a symbolic presence of Christ in the world, actualizing its essential being [..].”⁹⁴⁴

Kerouac does not mention at all in Lowell novels the sacrament of holy orders and matrimony. There is an indication of it when the mother of the Martin family cries in the car after her husband’s funeral, and she sees the church where they were married, entailing that they were wed in a Catholic church. The sacrament of holy orders is mentioned implicitly only a few times in “The Town and the City,” where priests have been called “representatives of God” who are doing the “official service of God.”⁹⁴⁵ However, in Catholic communities, it is an honor if someone in your family decides to be a priest. Gerard’s mother conveys this attitude in “Visions of Gerard.”⁹⁴⁶ These references, however, are not sufficient to merit further exploration. The only time Kerouac mentions the sacrament of confirmation in Lowell novels is in “Maggie Cassidy”: “His tall strange kid brother prayed and made novenas at the church with all the other kids his age doing their Confirmation.”⁹⁴⁷ Part of growing up in a Catholic community is first communion and confirmation. That would also be true of Kerouac’s childhood, that he and his classmates would have their first communion simultaneously. They would have probably been singled out if someone had not done that. When the faithful are anointed with the oil of confirmation, one receives fortification of the Holy Spirit to bear witness of Christ.⁹⁴⁸

⁹⁴² *Baltimore Catechism*, 137.

⁹⁴³ Thomas Joseph White, OP, *The Light of Christ: An Introduction to Catholicism*, 194.

⁹⁴⁴ Avery Dulles, *Faith and Revelation*, 107.

⁹⁴⁵ Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 40 – 41.

⁹⁴⁶ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 14.

⁹⁴⁷ Jack Kerouac, *Maggie Cassidy*, 19.

⁹⁴⁸ Thomas Joseph White, OP, *The Light of Christ: An Introduction to Catholicism*, 194. Kerouac had his first communion at age seven; Dennis McNally, *Desolate Angel: Jack Kerouac, The Beat Generation, and America*, 9.

The Eucharist is a vital sacrament through which the believer reaches communion with Christ. Considering the centrality of the Eucharist in the Catholic tradition, it is then quite surprising how little Kerouac has integrated this aspect in his Lowell novels. Altar boys did special novenas and went to the confession on Friday to receive Eucharist on Sunday Mass, where “the church hoped to infuse them with some of the perfection embodied and implied in the concept of Christ the Lord.”⁹⁴⁹ Priest prays at the altar before the Eucharist but, due to a heavy hangover, almost falls over when trying to kneel.⁹⁵⁰ Then a bell signals the beginning of the Eucharist during the Mass, and when the time comes, the believers march down to the altar rail where they kneel.⁹⁵¹ These references tell more about the nature of liturgy than the meaning of this sacrament. Dulouoz in “Maggie Cassidy” mentions transubstantiation once, but it has no connection to Eucharist.⁹⁵² The most detailed description of Holy Communion comes from a critique expressed by George Martin. He has seen the ones who receive Eucharist on Sunday what they do on Saturday nights when there is nothing holy about them. However, on Sunday morning, they go to church, “receiving Holy Communion, walking back to their seats with a mighty holy look. [...] it’s that look in church that beats me!”⁹⁵³ Martin then awaits from the priest that he would affirm Martin’s doubts of hypocrisy, but the priest does not satisfy his expectations: “George, I believe you fancy yourself a philosopher. I’m not going to answer your question. Indeed, I’m going to let you think about that question yourself.”⁹⁵⁴ More vivid interpretations and portrayals of the Eucharist can be found in another Beat Generation poet Gregory Corso’s literary works.⁹⁵⁵

The three sacraments that will be explored further and that Kerouac more significantly portrays in his Lowell novels are baptism, penance, and extreme unction.

3.8.1. Baptism

Baptism is a gateway to all other sacraments because the adherent is incorporated into the mystical body of the Church. After baptism, Christians become part of a community of those who believe and confess the salvation of God in Christ.⁹⁵⁶ Through baptism, Christians

⁹⁴⁹ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 25.

⁹⁵⁰ Jack Kerouac, *Doctor Sax*, 60 – 61.

⁹⁵¹ Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 174.

⁹⁵² Jack Kerouac, *Maggie Cassidy*, 81.

⁹⁵³ Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 42.

⁹⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵⁵ For deeper insight, see Loni Reynolds, “A Humane Yet Dark Tribute to Life”: The Eucharist in the Work of Gregory Corso,” *Religion & Literature* 47.1 (Spring 2015): 143 – 168.

⁹⁵⁶ Karl Rahner, S.J., *Nature and Grace: Dilemmas in the Modern Church* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1964), 88.

no longer belong to themselves alone but to Christ and his cause.⁹⁵⁷ Karl Rahner explains that baptism is the first sacrament “of forgiveness of sin, of the communication of divine grace, of sharing in the divine nature, and of interior, lasting capacity for faith, hope, and love towards God and men.”⁹⁵⁸ Catholic Church teaches, according to the Scriptures, that one receives Holy Spirit through baptism, whose presence entails that one has received grace, is redeemed from original sin, and is no longer estranged from God.⁹⁵⁹ Baptism is crucial in Catholicism because it is necessary for salvation.⁹⁶⁰

Kerouac describes the baptism of *Ti Jean* and his brother Gerard. As distinguished in the previous chapter, the baptism also played an essential part in Gerard’s hagiography: “I’ll never malign that church that gave Gerard a blessed baptism, nor the hand that waved over his grave and officially dedicated it.”⁹⁶¹ The priest that baptized Gerard was a bishop, which bestows extra importance to the even in the eyes of Catholic Community. When Duluo mentions St. Jean de Baptiste church for other reasons, he does not forget to underline that it is where Gerard was baptized. For Duluo, it is crucial to highlight that that was the church where his brother was baptized. Not only is the church of importance, but also who was the one who baptized Gerard. The higher the priest in the church hierarchy, the more influential the baptism.⁹⁶²

In “Visions of Gerard,” Duluo says, “We are baptized in water for no unsanitary reason, that is to say, a well-needed *bath* is implied.”⁹⁶³ It is an interesting passage because it might be understood in two separate ways. First – quite literally, young children do not look after their hygiene much, and they like to play, which might involve some dirty knees and hands. Henceforth, there might have been thought of condescending looks if the kids were not in their best clothes. The other aspect might be a theological one – baptismal ceremony as a clean sleight, implying that the children have already sinned due to the original sin. It must be washed away because it is implied that it is necessary. The narrator also recalls the baptism of his father: “I can picture the scene of his baptism at some wind whipped country crossing Catholic church [...] and the paisans all dressed up [...]”⁹⁶⁴ The mention of his father being baptized gives a sense of continuing belief that parents baptize their children according to their

⁹⁵⁷ Patrick W. Carey, ed., *American Religious Thought: The Shaping of a Theological & Social Tradition*, 430.

⁹⁵⁸ Karl Rahner, S.J., *Nature and Grace: Dilemmas in the Modern Church*, 88.

⁹⁵⁹ Thomas Joseph White, OP, *The Light of Christ: An Introduction to Catholicism*, 190 – 191.

⁹⁶⁰ *Baltimore Catechism*, 154.

⁹⁶¹ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 23.

⁹⁶² *Ibid.*, 65.

⁹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁹⁶⁴ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 61. Kerouac portrays that Emil is anointed through baptism for his death, which corresponds with Kerouac’s ongoing theme that humans are “born to die.” For more on this, see the chapter on sin and grace.

religious views. If his father was baptized, that means that Catholicism was also the belief of his grandparents. Duloz envisions clearly how his father was baptized with “holy water of life”: “I can see the baptism of my father in St Hubert, the horses and carriages, an angry tug at the reins [...]”⁹⁶⁵ Kerouac, in his texts, mentions holy water one more time: “And vast solemn marble basins in which the old holy water lies, dipped by a thousand hands.”⁹⁶⁶ The text speaks of the holy water basins found in Catholic churches, mainly closer to the entrance so that the ones who enter or leave might dip their fingers in the holy water and make the sign of the cross. George Martin criticizes baptism when he asks a priest whether he needs written proof that he is a Christian emphasizing the personal relationship between the believer and God. The Church makes it easier for many individuals to achieve salvation, and in this aspect, it is significant but not unconditionally necessary, as Rahner contemplates. However, he continues that the grace of God in Christ is present as “an event, an abiding and historically tangible event, in an incarnational body in the world” because of the Church. Salvation “is ordered toward the Church by God’s command and the necessity of a desire for the sacrament.”⁹⁶⁷ The sacraments are integral to God’s grace and, ultimately, salvation. The old priest chuckles at George’s resistance to his salvation and affirms that George is indeed a “stubborn fellow.”⁹⁶⁸

3.8.2. Penance

The sacrament of penance helps the penitent to restore his soul to a state of grace after moral downfalls. It has a unique capacity to restore one soul’s peace with God.⁹⁶⁹ According to Church commandments, the faithful must receive the sacrament of the Eucharist at least once a year.⁹⁷⁰ As previously elaborated, Kerouac often wrote about sin and what it entails. Consequently, the sacrament of confessing sins is broadly described in Lowell novels. The churches have specific furniture where the repentant can confess his sins. The church in Lowell was no exception, with “antique mahogany confessionals with winey drapes and ornate peep doors.”⁹⁷¹

Devoted Gerard knows the gravity of his sins. Before the confession, he thinks of the two sins he has to confess: looking at a friend’s genitals at the urinals and lying to a nun that he

⁹⁶⁵ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 62.

⁹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁹⁶⁷ Karl Rahner, S.J., *Nature and Grace: Dilemmas in the Modern Church*, 89 – 90.

⁹⁶⁸ Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 40 – 41. For more insight, see the subchapter on the critique of the church.

⁹⁶⁹ Thomas Joseph White, OP, *The Light of Christ: An Introduction to Catholicism*, 192.

⁹⁷⁰ *Baltimore Catechism*, 389.

⁹⁷¹ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 20.

had studied the catechism at home.⁹⁷² But Gerard is ashamed to speak of these sins. “Bless” is the only word Gerard hears “as the priest quickly mutters the introductory invocation, and then his ear is ready.”⁹⁷³ Gerard shows his maturity as a believer, that he must confess all of his sins although he feels ashamed. It would be another sin over the ones he already has to confess.

Another characteristic of Kerouac’s younger characters when they mention sin is the overdramatization of the consequences. For Mickie Martin, it felt like it was “virtually a sin” that he continued to walk to his old home after they had moved out of an old habit, felt like it was “virtually a sin.”⁹⁷⁴ Gerard thinks of hiding something from a priest in the confessional but soon realizes that he must know otherwise how his sins can be redeemed. It would be an even bigger sin not to tell the priest: ““Poor Father Priest, what’ll he know if I dont tell him? he wont know anything and he’ll comfort me and send me off with my prayer, well it’ll be a big sin to hide him a sin – like if I’d spit in his eyes when he’s dead [..].”⁹⁷⁵ To withhold information from the priest would be mocking him. The sacrament of Penance also remits sins and restores friendship with God through the priest's absolution.⁹⁷⁶ Undoubtedly, Gerard considers his sins a severe violation of his Catholic faith. He must be truthful with the priest. Otherwise, he cannot restore his friendship with God. The reaction in the priest’s thoughts further highlights Gerard’s emotional overreaction: “Ah, that’s no sin.”⁹⁷⁷ For Kerouac, it might have seemed better to over-dramatize this than to be ignorant because feeling indifferent to good and evil, beauty and anything else, is “the root of all human troubles.”⁹⁷⁸

Even if confessing one’s sins might not be easy, it is liberating afterward: “I can see him entering the church at 4 PM, [..] most of the other boys are thru and leaving the church with that lightfooted way indicative of the weight taken off their minds and left in the confessional.”⁹⁷⁹ The repentance of the sins, if there were any, in the church tradition most often comes with what Kerouac calls “penalty prayers” that the priest orders the repentant to recite after confession: “Very well, that’s all? Well then, say your rosary and fifteen Hail Mary’s.”⁹⁸⁰ Kerouac also writes about a similar confession in “Maggie Cassidy.” In “Visions of Gerard” it is Gerard who has looked at the genitals of his friend, and for it he needs to say 15 Hail Marys, but in “Maggie Cassidy” it is the Duluoz, who remembers that for touching his genitals he needed to “say a whole rosary and after that do ten *Notre Pères* and ten *Salut Marie’s* in front

⁹⁷² Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 27 – 30.

⁹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁹⁷⁴ Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 236.

⁹⁷⁵ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 27 – 28.

⁹⁷⁶ *Baltimore Catechism*, 188 – 191.

⁹⁷⁷ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 28.

⁹⁷⁸ Jack Kerouac, *Windblown World: The Journals of Jack Kerouac 1947 – 1954*, 24.

⁹⁷⁹ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 25.

⁹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 30.

of the altar and after that you can go.”⁹⁸¹ Here the count of prayers is priest’s decision. Nevertheless, Gerard has been portrayed as the one who “sins less” because if Duluoz played with his genitals, then Gerard did not, he only looked. Through such comparisons Gerard is depicted as “holier” further affirming his status of “Saint” Gerard. However, Duluoz then is the character that cannot reach these kinds of standards and only try to imitate Gerard. “The redemption gained at the altar rail” after Gerard has done his “penalty prayers” will be distributed “according to their light and darknesses.”⁹⁸² The narrator situates the sacrament of penance already in the wider context of one’s salvation, and the penitent “gives up self and admits he was a fool and can only be a fool and may his bones dissolve in the light of forever.”⁹⁸³ The prayers of penance in the Catholic tradition should be done right after the confession – one kneels near the altar and say their penance at once. Gerard’s prayers of penance and those of other boys correspond to Baltimore Catechism because they pray right after the confession.⁹⁸⁴ Confession is undoubtedly a liberating aspect for a Catholic believer. It assures forgiveness and redemption: “Just like when I made my First Confession, I was a little angel of pure future.”⁹⁸⁵ Restoring “the flow of grace” through this sacrament is crucial in Catholicism.

Through confessing sins in Gerard’s case again, the question of theodicy arises: “Lance, lance, lance, why is this happening to me, what’d I do? I confessed to the priest, I havent hidden anything.”⁹⁸⁶ Gerard does not understand why his sickness is getting worse when he has done everything according to what he has learned in his parochial school. Truly, Kerouac leaves his readers pondering with his characters: “When all is said and done, why do we sit here and have to admit the sinningness of man.”⁹⁸⁷

3.8.3. Extreme Unction

In the Catholic church, the sacrament of Extreme Unction today is known as the sacrament of anointing the sick. It is intended to strengthen the recipient in his physical suffering and to bear suffering patiently with grace in atoning one’s sins and strengthening the union with Christ in case of death.⁹⁸⁸ Kerouac most likely understood this sacrament in terms of Baltimore catechism. However, the differences are not essentially significant, though the

⁹⁸¹ Jack Kerouac, *Maggie Cassidy*, 45.

⁹⁸² Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 25.

⁹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁹⁸⁴ See section “The right manner of confessing” in *Baltimore Catechism*.

⁹⁸⁵ Jack Kerouac, *Maggie Cassidy*, 169.

⁹⁸⁶ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 52.

⁹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁹⁸⁸ Thomas Joseph White, OP, *The Light of Christ: An Introduction to Catholicism*, 192.

priest used to focus more on giving health and strength to the soul than to the body when one was in danger of death from sickness.⁹⁸⁹ Kerouac mentions this sacrament when Gerard is dying in “Visions of Gerard,” and the priest is called for the last benediction. In the story, the doctor says to the mother that it is time to call the priest: “‘He cant have the strength to go any further’ (‘if he does,’ adding to think, ‘it’ll be murder’).”⁹⁹⁰ Surely, the characters know what it entails – that Gerard is about to die soon. Kerouac does not explicitly portray the sacrament as such, but it is clear it has been administered. The nuns are beside Gerard’s bed, and when Gerard is awake, they ask him whether he is afraid. Gerard affirms that he is not because the priest blessed him.⁹⁹¹ This further shows Gerard’s devout belief. In “The Town and the City,” it appears that the priest came to the house after the death of Julian, but it is not elaborated further.⁹⁹² In “Visions of Gerard,” Gerard would have known what a priest’s blessing means in this situation. He had learned about the catechism in his parochial school. Nevertheless, at least in front of the nuns, he is portrayed as one who is not afraid of his death. There has been a twofold attitude towards the calling of the priest to anoint the sick and give the last benediction in the Catholic tradition historically. Sometimes the believers feared that the sick person would die faster if the priest came. However, at the same time, if the priest is not called in time, the sick person will not have the opportunity to redeem his or her sins before death.

Researchers have described Kerouac’s writings through the prism of confession. Ann Charters defines *Kerouac’s canon* as “confessional picaresque memoirs.”⁹⁹³ Kerouac himself has said that “notoriety and public confession in literary form is a frazzler of the heart you were born with, believe me.”⁹⁹⁴ This honesty in his writings was his way of capturing the truth that came to him spontaneously. Lurie emphasizes that Kerouac saw his writing as the sacrament of reconciliation, which is why “revision was tantamount to lying in the confessional.”⁹⁹⁵ Opposite to that, James T. Keane writes that Kerouac approached the “sacraments with nothing short of terror,”⁹⁹⁶ which would not be compatible with the idea that Kerouac’s whole purpose of writing was his confessional style. Kerouac’s confessional style of understanding might be understood in the light of his confessing sins to his readers, searching for redemption and renewal of grace.

⁹⁸⁹ *Baltimore Catechism*, 271 – 277.

⁹⁹⁰ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 84.

⁹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹² Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 26.

⁹⁹³ Jack Kerouac, *The Portable Jack Kerouac Reader*, xix.

⁹⁹⁴ Salman Rushdie, *The Paris Review Interviews IV* (New York: Picador, 2009), 119.

⁹⁹⁵ Robert Dean Lurie, *The Conservative Kerouac: Beat novelists, Catholic, Republican – do you know Jack?* (September 7, 2012), <https://www.theamericanconservative.com/the-conservative-kerouac> (accessed 19.09.2022).

⁹⁹⁶ James T. Keane, *Beat Attitude. Jack Kerouac’s unexpected life*, 25.

To conclude, most of the references to sacraments are concentrated in “Visions of Gerard.” Kerouac practically does not speak of the sacrament of matrimony and that of holy orders. Eucharist (also in the form of the First Communion) is mentioned scarcely. Baptism is explained in the context of continuity – either as the religion of parents and grandparents or as inherited saintliness from the priest who conducts it. The extreme unction is portrayed in the context of Gerard’s death. His willingness to see the priest and the acceptance of his approaching death further inspire the legend of “Saint” Gerard. Kerouac more broadly referred to sin than grace, further illustrated by the sacrament of penance he dedicates his attention the most. Confessing sins is frightful because of the shame of what one has done, but at the same time, it is liberating when redemption is gained after the penance prayers. The younger children seem to overreact to the graveness of their sins, entailing that the church teaching gave it foundation or that as children, their sins to adults seemed minor but, for themselves, enormous.

3.9. Eschatology

Eschatology is a theological category concerned with interpreting the direction of humankind and the world and the ultimate goal toward which it leads. It does not deal solely with life beyond death but also with assessing the here and now by taking Jesus Christ as an example. Eschatology, in this sense, is a “hope-filled expression of the whole of the faith.”⁹⁹⁷ The narrator-Duluo, during Gerard’s funeral, explains that *Ti Jean* has a realization that “Heaven, Our Salvation is *Here and Now*.”⁹⁹⁸ Jeannine Hill Fletcher further stresses that Christian eschatology invites Christians to a life with continuity here and beyond. It also insists that this life is not the end, and the critical moment of death brings humans to a definitive relationship with God. History is also essential in eschatology because life is not disassociated from death.⁹⁹⁹ In “your death you’ll know the *death* part of your life.”¹⁰⁰⁰ Against this human mortality, “God’s love appears as a power unto ultimate salvation in eternal life.”¹⁰⁰¹ Jesus’ sacrifice for human sins makes God’s forgiveness possible for creation.¹⁰⁰²

The field of eschatology deals mainly with categories that are beyond human life. Kerouac, in his novels, does not mention purgatory. However, he does mention the end of the

⁹⁹⁷ Jeannine Hill Fletcher, “Eschatology,” in *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*, eds. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza and John P. Galvin, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 622.

⁹⁹⁸ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 85.

⁹⁹⁹ Jeannine Hill Fletcher, *Eschatology*, 631 – 638.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Jack Kerouac, *Doctor Sax*, 188.

¹⁰⁰¹ Roger Haight, *Sin and Grace*, 402.

¹⁰⁰² Marcus J. Borg, *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time: The Historical Jesus & The Heart of Contemporary Faith* (New York: HarperCollins, 1995), 129.

world. Levinsky, Peter's friend in "The Town and the City," presents his idea of how the end of the world will happen. The beginning of the end of the "Geneseean world" will be marked with the sudden collapse of the molecule, leaving just atoms, the wealthy will suddenly start falling apart, and the preachers at the pulpit will suddenly explode. After that, "there'll be a non-Geneseean world without all that truck about sin [..]"¹⁰⁰³ The created world as described in the book of Genesis here is equated to a world inseparable from sin. If there is no created Genesis world, there is no sin. Another solution is projected here – not that of redemption, but eviscerating sin as such.

Kerouac also portrays his version of what initially seemed to be Judgement Day but turned out to be an epic fight between good and evil forces. In "Doctor Sax," readers will find an extensive apocalyptic description of the fight between the Snake of the World and the Bird of Paradise, and little Jackie and Dr. Sax are witnesses to this. Kerouac does write this narrative from a Christian perspective, using abundant Christian terminology and symbols, such as Judgement Day,¹⁰⁰⁴ end of the world, sea monster, Saviour,¹⁰⁰⁵ Satan,¹⁰⁰⁶ Hell,¹⁰⁰⁷ demons, and angels.¹⁰⁰⁸ However, Kerouac also integrates his own characters and ideas in this story, for example, the Snake and the Bird, the dovists – idealistic left of the Satanist movement, or the vampires and wizards.¹⁰⁰⁹

Dr. Sax has previous knowledge about the events that are soon about to take place: "The end of the world [..] is Coming."¹⁰¹⁰ Then suddenly, "an incident worth noting – that abyss cracking open."¹⁰¹¹ There are great thuds; everything is shaking. The followers of the Snake started to wield spears "and hung people upside down on crosses in fires,"¹⁰¹² and over the hill "came this mass of screaming demons with their teeth and bamboos – with their drought –."¹⁰¹³ Kerouac uses the imagery of hell to describe the end of the world, as Jackie ponders: "It seemed to me a drought would come, parch the earth, reduce Lowell and the world to nothingness-

¹⁰⁰³ Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 367.

¹⁰⁰⁴ "My son, this is judgement day"; Jack Kerouac, *Doctor Sax*, 213.

¹⁰⁰⁵ "Saviour in the Heaven! Come and lift me up"; Jack Kerouac, *Doctor Sax*, 210 – 211.

¹⁰⁰⁶ "The face of Satan stares you back, a huge and mookish thing, fool!"; *ibid.*, 204.

¹⁰⁰⁷ "This was an afternoon of such bliss that the earth moved – actually moved, I knew why soon enough – Satan was beneath the rock and loam hungry to devour me, hungry to sleek me up through his portal teeth to Hell"; *ibid.*, 176 – 178.

¹⁰⁰⁸ "The Angels of the Judgement Day were making great tremendous clang across the way"; *ibid.*, 204.

¹⁰⁰⁹ "Dovism was the idealistic left of the Satanic movement, it claimed that Satan was enamored of doves, and therefore his Snake would not destroy the world but merely be a great skin of doves on coming-out day, falling apart, millions of come-colored doves spurting from it as it shoots from the ground a hundred miles long"; *ibid.*, 207 – 208.

¹⁰¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹⁰¹¹ *Ibid.*, 131.

¹⁰¹² *Ibid.*, 136.

¹⁰¹³ *Ibid.*

parturience with everybody starving and thirsting to death and weeping for rain [...].”¹⁰¹⁴ When all hope seems lost, and Dr. Sax’s potion does not work to defeat the Snake, miraculously, the Bird of Paradise appears. It is portrayed as a Saviour, awe-inspiring, the bringer of hope, at the same time being such a powerful and frightening being that even Devil was horrified.¹⁰¹⁵ Bird of Paradise came to save humankind, and Jackie felt more fear than when he first saw the Snake: “This could not be Judgement Day! There was still hope!”¹⁰¹⁶ With ease, the Bird cracked the Snake and raised it in the sky. In the background, the bell is ringing, and the narrator reminds readers that “the Lord rose on Easter morning, daisies rejoiced in field beyond the churches, almighty peaces settled in the clover – up rose the huge monstrosities that have left our Spring!”¹⁰¹⁷ What is more important is the symbolism that Jackie Duluoaz sees when the apocalyptic fight is over: while walking home, Jackie puts roses in his hair; a symbol often used to represent the Virgin Mary. Then he sees the cross in the Grotto. Catholic theology teaches that through Mary, believers can access Christ. It is then accompanied by the scene of French-Canadian ladies devoutly praying. After the near of the end of the world experience, Jackie returns. In the light of the risen Lord on Easter morning, he is sure that through Mary and the grace of faith, he can access Christ and henceforth access salvation.

In Catholicism, faith is the beginning of salvation. Through the sacrament of baptism, God gives grace for the believer’s salvation insofar as he or she becomes a member of the Church.¹⁰¹⁸ Karl Rahner highlights that “when we speak of the Church, we shall always mean the Church as an organized hierarchical body, the Church who, through laws, commands, general directives etc., guides and supports men in working out their salvation.”¹⁰¹⁹ However, he continues that Catholics do not want to accept that besides their trusting faith in God’s forgiveness, “other definite attitudes and actions can be of decisive importance to our salvation and justification in God’s sight.”¹⁰²⁰ ahner’s argument corresponds well with that of the cook named Glory, who “The Town and the City” exclaims to sailors: “[...] now you all want to go to heaven and git paid, but you doan want to work [...].”¹⁰²¹ All faithful are called to live in a union with God like Jesus; it is essential to try to follow his example and “work out thy salvation with diligence [...].”¹⁰²² Human life “bears a christiformity in the perfected form of its

¹⁰¹⁴ Jack Kerouac, *Doctor Sax*, 136.

¹⁰¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 217 – 218.

¹⁰¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 218 – 219.

¹⁰¹⁸ Karl Rahner, S.J., *Nature and Grace: Dilemmas in the Modern Church*, 88.

¹⁰¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁰²⁰ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹⁰²¹ Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 298.

¹⁰²² Jack Kerouac, *Vanity of Duluoaz*, 255.

actualization.”¹⁰²³ However, it is humane to make mistakes. Christians understand salvation as being accessible for those who have sinned, so “pray for the deliverance of all our soul, in your heart of hearts, in the deep of your soul, pray! It is given you to pray in this world!”¹⁰²⁴ If one has sinned but looks up to God in faith, repenting his sins, and accepts God’s gift of salvation, “there is more joy in heaven over this one sinner than over ninety-nine just men who think they need no repentance,” as Rahner puts it.¹⁰²⁵ Gerard echoes the same sentiment stressing that “We’ll never go to heaven if we go on eating each other and destroying each other like that all the time! – without thinking, without knowing!”¹⁰²⁶ Although said to a cat who ate a mouse, still, if one sins, it is crucial to “realize what you’ve done! – Be ashamed!”¹⁰²⁷ However, this can go to the other extreme by considering sin as a necessary aspect of the Christian life, without which he could not gain grace and be redeemed. Sin does not make one Christian, and the doctrine of universal salvation affirms that all are saved.¹⁰²⁸ Mickey, during the Mass, contemplates the sinfulness of some of the altar boys, but in a Christian manner, knowing that they go to regular confessions, concludes that “they too were being saved.”¹⁰²⁹

Peter and Mickey believe in the triumphant Christ and the Christian promise of eternity. Jack Duluoiz interprets shame as the “key to immortality in the Lord’s grave ... that key to courage ... that key heart. “Lord, Lord, *Mon Doux, Mon Doux.*””¹⁰³⁰ Kerouac goes even further, often referring to the idea that for humans to reach salvation, it is to suffer. It comes from the understanding that following Jesus’ example, one can find union with God in his kingdom. Even God himself speaks from the cross to Duluoiz to affirm the necessity of suffering: “I know, angel – it is for your good, we shall save, because we find your souls as important as the soul of the others in the world.”¹⁰³¹ Because one must follow Jesus’ example to be saved. However, following Jesus’ example and reaching salvation also means suffering, which Kerouac emphasizes. It derives from an idea, as Peter explains, that God does have a purpose for the pain of humans and that even if he could meddle with the system, he could not “alleviate the suffering without breaking up God’s purpose in the whole thing.”¹⁰³² Nevertheless, according to the systematic outlook, God’s primary focus is not suffering but the promise of his kingdom. The kingdom remains visibly unfulfilled in this life, and death holds a

¹⁰²³ Jeannine Hill Fletcher, *Eschatology*, 639.

¹⁰²⁴ Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 347.

¹⁰²⁵ Karl Rahner, S.J., *Nature and Grace: Dilemmas in the Modern Church*, 59.

¹⁰²⁶ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 10.

¹⁰²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰²⁸ Karl Rahner, S.J., *Nature and Grace: Dilemmas in the Modern Church*, 48.

¹⁰²⁹ Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 175.

¹⁰³⁰ Jack Kerouac, *Maggie Cassidy*, 108.

¹⁰³¹ *Ibid.*, 42 – 43.

¹⁰³² Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 489.

critical point in understanding the promise of salvation.¹⁰³³ But to die for Kerouac's characters also means to suffer: "you must die, you must die in pain, with cries, frights, despairs – the ambiguities! the terrors!"¹⁰³⁴ It is no wonder that heaven also becomes an interpretation of the afterlife. When children die, it is better because "they're pure for heaven" and those who die are taken or have gone to heaven.¹⁰³⁵ The closest to the deceased then wait to join the ones who passed in heaven.¹⁰³⁶

Christians believe that life continues through resurrection after death, and they identify "Jesus as the Righteous one vindicated by God for the salvation of all."¹⁰³⁷ Throughout history, the question arose of what this resurrection would entail, especially in opposition to philosophies that stated that after death, the soul is finally liberated from the constriction of the material body. The belief of the resurrection of the faithful in their very body has been affirmed in the Eleventh Council of Toledo in 675, the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, and up until the Second Vatican Council.¹⁰³⁸ Duloz chooses to refer to one of those philosophies, emphasizing that Blaise Pascal, who, as Duloz retells, "says not to look to ourselves for the cure to misfortunes, but to God whose Providence is a foreordained thing in Eternity; that the foreordination was that our lives be but sacrifices leading to purity in the after-existence in Heaven as souls disinvested of that rapish, rotten, carnal body."¹⁰³⁹ Duloz continues explaining that his body is so thick and carnal that he cannot penetrate the souls of others that like him are entrapped in "trembling weak flesh." He interprets Pascal's notions almost as if one is not responsible for his sins and anticipates getting rid of the body.¹⁰⁴⁰ The interpretation offered here goes against the Christian belief in *bodily resurrection*. Rahner explains that Logos became flesh not to save humans from flesh because it is corrupted by sin but to save the flesh itself.¹⁰⁴¹ Resurrection of the body ultimately affirms the goodness of creation and the material existence of humans in its complexity.¹⁰⁴² For Duloz, if he cannot penetrate other souls, how can he gain an understanding of how he can turn to God with effect? The situation is hopeless because even

¹⁰³³ Jeannine Hill Fletcher, *Eschatology*, 631.

¹⁰³⁴ Jack Kerouac, *Maggie Cassidy*, 42 – 43.

¹⁰³⁵ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 89 – 91.

¹⁰³⁶ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁰³⁷ Jeannine Hill Fletcher, *Eschatology*, 631.

¹⁰³⁸ For further insight, see J. Neuner, S.J. and J. Dupuis, S.J., *The Christian Faith in The Doctrinal Documents of The Catholic Church* (New York: Alba House, 1981).

¹⁰³⁹ Jack Kerouac, *Vanity of Duloz*, 125.

¹⁰⁴⁰ Pascal distinguishes people into Three Orders, the lowest being "carnal," which concerns people who take advantage of worldly wealth. The second order is of mind, comprised of scientists and those who are curious. The highest order then is "will," where Christ is portrayed as the supreme example of this order of charity. One should aspire to reach a higher sphere of self-knowledge. The third order is the state of perfection, unblemished by the Fall; Nicholas Hammond, "Pascal's Pens'ees and the art of persuasion," in *The Cambridge Companion to Pascal*, ed. Nicholas Hammond (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 248 – 250.

¹⁰⁴¹ Karl Rahner, S.J., *Nature and Grace: Dilemmas in the Modern Church*, 62.

¹⁰⁴² Jeannine Hill Fletcher, *Eschatology*, 631.

clasped hands cannot last because they will be useless in eternity.¹⁰⁴³ At first look, it appears that Duluoz contemplates the mystery of God. However, he does not mention the incomprehensible mystery of God but rather the inability to know to turn to God in a way that would be effective. Catholicism lists multiple ways how to turn to God. In personal piety, prayer is the most obvious way. However, the power of prayer appears to be decreased by stating that hands clasped supposedly in prayer are useless. Here, Catholic theologians might even interpret this as Duluoz's heresy that endangers his salvation, which manifests in him as "a lack of truth and reality in the understanding." Rahner further explains that "the man who is in error is missing the truth which means salvation to him, his error is dangerous whether he holds it in good will or in bad."¹⁰⁴⁴ Yet, according to Catholic teaching, if one realizes his misunderstandings, yearns for God, and repents his sins, they can have access to salvation. To the broken ones, even if by their sins, salvation is much nearer than to the self-righteous.¹⁰⁴⁵

Kerouac writes in his journal that there is a purpose to knowledge: salvation.¹⁰⁴⁶ The knowledge Kerouac mentions can be interpreted in many ways. However, in Lowell novels, readers find the assertion that French Canadians have a specific stern gravity "that knows what's coming to everybody in Heaven later on inside Time – it's ever been so in the bottom of my soul [...]"¹⁰⁴⁷ "Later on inside Time" continues the notion illustrated at the beginning of this chapter that Christian life has a continuity here and beyond. The example of a faithful, devoted Catholic and his knowledge of Heaven in Lowell is "Saint" Gerard. His visions are the primary source in Lowell novels for the descriptions of heaven. It is a place where God and angels reside.¹⁰⁴⁸ Gerard, while hearing others complaining to and even somehow blaming his mother for his sickness, realizes that all sorrows will fade "when heaven reveals her white."¹⁰⁴⁹ The connection of white color to heaven might be explained by first envisioning seeing Virgin Mary in a white veil in heaven. That is how she appeared in a vision while Gerard was sleeping. There is across the yard "a great White Virgin Mary with a flowing robe ballooning partly in the wind and partly tucked in at the edges and held aloft by swarms [...]"¹⁰⁵⁰ In another vision, Gerard sees a little white wagon with two little lambs to pull it, and he is ascending to heaven.¹⁰⁵¹ Gerard visualizes that through his vision, he has gone to heaven and then returned. Like ones who experience mystical visions, Gerard returns to ordinary life with new knowledge: "we're all in

¹⁰⁴³ Jack Kerouac, *Vanity of Duluoz*, 125.

¹⁰⁴⁴ Karl Rahner, S.J., *Nature and Grace: Dilemmas in the Modern Church*, 72.

¹⁰⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 59.

¹⁰⁴⁶ Jack Kerouac, *Windblown World: The Journals of Jack Kerouac 1947 – 1954*, 87.

¹⁰⁴⁷ Jack Kerouac, *Doctor Sax*, 91.

¹⁰⁴⁸ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 51.

¹⁰⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹⁰⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 40 – 41.

¹⁰⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 41 – 42.

Heaven – but we dont know it!”¹⁰⁵² The new knowledge then is shared with the particular community, in Gerard’s case, the nuns of his parochial school. Kerouac describes this transmission of knowledge about salvation in his journals: “What good are my visions or your visions, beautifully and laboriously worked out in art, if the purpose of it is not to save something in our souls and make it all beautiful. You’ve got to feel that you’re on your way *there* ...”¹⁰⁵³ However, new knowledge comes with leaving behind “the perfect ecstasy” of the vision of heaven and Gerard: “Why did God leave us sick and cold? Why did not he leave us in heaven.” Gerard is sure that everyone used to be in heaven because the world cannot be arranged this way: “I dont like it. I wanta go to heaven. I wish we were all in heaven.”¹⁰⁵⁴ Opposite to Duluo’s ideas taken from Pascal, Gerard does envision bodily existence in heaven by stating that when he gets to heaven, “the first thing I’m gonna ask God is for the beautiful little white lamb to pull my wagon.”¹⁰⁵⁵ This description corresponds with the catechism, where heaven is explained as the everlasting life in which one sees God face to face.¹⁰⁵⁶ According to the catechism, Gerard believes that he will meet God in heaven. In addition, Gerard states that in heaven, he will have all the birds that he wants, angels there will be like lambs, and all children will be together with their parents forever.¹⁰⁵⁷

In conclusion, Kerouac’s characters do not share a united understanding of matters that deal with life here and beyond. That is no surprise, considering that what happens beyond death is a matter of faith. It is susceptible to uncountable interpretations and belief systems. Kerouac uses vivid Christian imagery to describe an epic “almost Judgement Day” fight between evil and good forces. Jackie and Dr. Sax survive this, and as a reminder, Duluo returns to the world where he is awaited by roses, the symbol of the Virgin Mary, the Cross of Christ, and the devotion of Franco Catholics. Gerard’s visions of heaven further affirm this hope for salvation that the Cross symbolizes. Virgin Mary awaits one as a gateway to Christ and salvation. Heaven is a place of happiness. Gerard sees himself speaking to God there with his parents and co-existing with angels. In opposition to this, Duluo, through Pascal’s idea of predestination, seems to remove human responsibility for sins. Referring to Blaise Pascal, Duluo in “Vanity of Duluo” portrays that the soul in heaven will finally be free from the material, carnal and sinful body. That strays away from Catholic teaching of bodily resurrection because the Word became flesh not to save humans from sinful flesh but save flesh itself. Though sinful, humans

¹⁰⁵² Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 42 – 43.

¹⁰⁵³ Jack Kerouac, *Windblown World: The Journals of Jack Kerouac 1947 – 1954*, 87.

¹⁰⁵⁴ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 34 – 35.

¹⁰⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹⁰⁵⁶ *Baltimore Catechism*, 420.

¹⁰⁵⁷ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 4 – 17.

who repent their sins have access to salvation. The best way to summarize this is by using Gerard's words: "[.] in heaven – and maybe on earth, have courage, patience."¹⁰⁵⁸

¹⁰⁵⁸ Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 17.

CONCLUSION

“Little paradises take their time. Little parties end.”¹⁰⁵⁹

There are many references to both authentic Roman Catholic practice and belief in Jack Kerouac’s Lowell novels. The understanding of the theological categories and religious insights in Kerouac’s Lowell novels examined in this study overall corresponds with the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. Kerouac does not simply mention prayer, church, cross, God, or Jesus in a passing manner. Lowell novels provide a more detailed account of the essential theological categories of systematic Catholic theology. For Kerouac’s characters, God’s revelation is visible through the created world that embodies God’s mystery. Duluoz emphasizes that one must believe to be redeemed. The immanent and transcendent nature of God allows Duluoz, Peter, Gerard, and others to experience a personal encounter with God. Not residing on the perplexing doctrine of the Trinity, Kerouac focused on the depictions of God’s perfections and influenced by the Biblical tradition, used anthropomorphisms of God in his novels. God creates the world and everyone in it; however, that entails death and suffering. This despair continues in vivid portrayals of Christ’s passion and emphasis on following Jesus’ example for the promise of salvation. The resurrected Christ is triumphant, immortal, and true.

The church is a place where to gain religious experience and find faith. However, the sinful human condition permeates Lowell novels. If one confesses sins, they have restored their connection to God’s grace and eventually to salvation. Faithful use medallions and holy pictures of saints, light devotional candles, pray to them and have dedicated altars. Virgin Mary with a white veil is portrayed as a gateway to Heaven. Lowellians are baptized and receive Eucharist. In the case of sickness that endangers one’s life, the priest administers extreme unction, now known as the sacrament of anointing the sick. The ultimate goal is to be in Heaven with God and angels, as Gerard envisions.

The outlined research provides a systematic account of Kerouac’s portrayal of Catholicism and comprehensive understanding of God in Lowell novels. Illustrated insights were contextualized in a broader scale of post-war religious trends in America. Kerouac highlights in his writings aspects of religious experience that were widespread at the time – turn toward individual and personal experience of religion instead of institutionalized and interest in other religious traditions compatible with his Catholicism under the roof of mysticism. The

¹⁰⁵⁹ Jack Kerouac, *Maggie Cassidy*, 147.

Catholicism reflected in Lowell novels is primarily consistent with the ideas and practices of Catholicism prevalent during Kerouac's lifetime. These conclusions further confirm that the Kerouac's portrayed Catholicism in the Lowell novels cannot be characterized as jansenistic or gnostic because these ideas are rarely depicted in comparison to the traditional Catholic teachings. However, there are some characteristics to be distinguished of the scope and depth of understanding of Catholicism and its teaching portrayed in Lowell novels:

- Being the descendants of immigrants and feeling the threat of assimilation, Franco-Americans turned to their devotionism, and Catholic community as means of cultural survival.
- Kerouac's descriptions of the Franco-American community in Lowell novels, although semi-autobiographical, give an authentic portrayal of the devotionism of the Lowell Catholic community in the first half of the 20th century. His novels can serve as additional material for theological, historical, religious, and other research, keeping in mind the semi-fictional nature of the texts.
- Lowell novels recall the childhood and youth events of the protagonists based on Kerouac, his family, or friends. The portrayal of understanding of Catholic teachings sometimes contains child-like naivety, for example, conviction that one will not suffer anymore just because they confessed their sins. The portrayal of everyday religiosity further shows that the lived religion of Catholics is not identical with the ones described in dogmatics.
- Kerouac's characters reflect a post-war religious trend towards a personal and mystical experience of transcendental reality; for example, God speaks to Duluoz from the cross. However, this shift was also visible to some extent in the Catholic Church, thus accentuating the personal experience in the Second Vatican Council.
- If institutional Catholicism is described, it is that of the pre-Second Vatican Council most vividly described through the liturgy of Latin Mass.
- Characters of the Lowell novels sometimes question the necessity of the institutional religion, for example, the necessity of the church as a medium between individuals and God. Some characters solve this by searching for God outside the institutional boundaries, which illustrates turning away from the traditional understanding of Catholicism. However, if characters outline critique towards the church, Kerouac does not try to find solutions to these theological questions or give new interpretations within the scope of tradition.

- By creating a hagiography of his brother “Saint” Gerard, Kerouac follows an emerging post-war appeal to saints and sainthood. His portrayal shows Kerouac’s in-depth understanding of the catholic hagiography as genre.
- The ongoing theme in Kerouac’s novels is the interpretation that humans are “born to die.” It intertwines with the constant struggle with the question of theodicy and the despair of suffering in this world.
- Kerouac’s Lowell novels highlight the centrality of God and emphasize a personal relationship with the deity. Through the belief in God, one gain grace to experience God in the Church, which is the beginning of the promise of salvation.
- The most conspicuous deviations from Catholic traditions’ teachings come from Kerouac’s last novel “Vanity of Duluo.” Duluo refers to an idea of the soul’s immortality that would be resurrected without the carnal body. This interpretation goes against the Christian and Catholic belief in bodily resurrection. The deviation from Catholic teachings is further illuminated because there are scarcely any references in “Vanity of Duluo” made to the church or its sacraments, both of which also portray Catholicism’s institutional aspect. Kerouac undoubtedly read Pascal and adapted some of his ideas. Especially predestination that outlines that only the chosen ones will be saved. Because it is already predestined, people cannot change their life after death. Several Beat researchers have connected Kerouac’s interest in Pascal to Jansenism as one of the main influences and descriptions of Kerouac’s Catholicism. However, “Vanity of Duluo” refers to Pascal only three times. Kerouac’s selected letters do not affirm such an overt interest in Pascal either, not to mention in Jansenism. Jansenistic ideas that Kerouac got acquainted with through Pascal’s works did seem attractive to him at the end of his life. However, these ideas are not portrayed in any other Lowell novels. Interest in Pascal’s ideas does not yet make Kerouac a Jansenist. In Lowell novels, Roman Catholic traditional teachings are repeatedly portrayed, which has not been emphasized enough in Kerouac’s research.
- Although Kerouac portrays all the author’s chosen Catholic systematic theology’s categories, he did not consciously create a Catholic identity in his novels.
- Kerouac promoted being curious about religion; however, his ideas were not unequivocal and could have drastically changed. Even his closest friends were not sure what exactly he believed.

- Kerouac can be seen as a “communal Catholic” who respects his Catholic heritage, identifies himself as Catholic but selectively chooses which church dogmatics or moral teachings to follow and which not.

This research can be a starting point further to explore Kerouac’s Catholicism and its theological implications. A comparison between the portrayal of Catholicism in Lowell and road novels might shed some insight into the religion practiced locally and “on the go,” highlighting the differences between institutional and personal experience. One could look at a novel’s theological category and cross-reference that with Kerouac’s religious ideas in the particular timeframe. That kind of comparison could provide further insight into whether the portrayal of Catholicism corresponds with Kerouac’s assertions at the time. The continuity and development of any theological categories could be researched, taking as canvas the canon of Kerouac’s fictional writings. Kerouac’s works are convenient for comparative research. It would be possible to compare Kerouac’s portrayal of Catholic theological categories with other “Catholic” authors, for example, Flannery O’Connor. The interaction of Buddhism and Catholicism is also worth further exploration. Indeed, there are vast opportunities for this field to grow just in time when a new centennial of Kerouac begins.

There is still a considerable gap in theological reflection of religion in the writings of Jack Kerouac and other authors of Beat Generation writers. The doctoral thesis provides a holistic and systematic account of the portrayal of Catholicism in Kerouac’s Lowell novels. Kerouac’s illustrated insights are contextualized within a broader scale of post-war religious trends in America. The author analyzes whether the generalized assumptions of Catholicism and Christianity in Kerouac’s writings as different from traditional teachings as previously outlined by several Beat researchers are adequate in the case of Lowell novels. Dominating references in Kerouac’s Lowell are to Roman Catholicism. The understanding of the Catholic tradition in Kerouac’s Lowell novels examined in this study overall corresponds with the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. There are a few deviations from Catholic guidelines. However, these ideas are rarely portrayed for one to conclude that Kerouac can be characterized as, for example, an adherent of Jansenism or Gnosticism. In his Lowell novels, Kerouac shows his and his character’s in-depth knowledge and understanding of God as creator, the created world as God’s revelation, the importance of the suffering of Jesus in salvation, God’s perfections, and the Virgin Mary’s role for believers in their way to salvation and also about Catholic hagiography as a genre. Kerouac’s characters sometimes question the necessity of the church as an institution by searching for God outside it. However, as the author, Kerouac does not provide a theological solution for these situations nor gives a new interpretation for his readers. The doctoral thesis *“And who has never really believed in Jesus?”: Jack Kerouac’s Catholicism in Lowell novels* illuminates the scope and depth of the Catholic

images, understandings of its teachings, and historical presence in American French-Canadian immigrant communities portrayed in the Lowell novels.

God bless Kerouac, “amen.”¹⁰⁶⁰

¹⁰⁶⁰ The last word of Jack Kerouac’s “Visions of Gerard.”

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The filter tool used in Microsoft Excel.

Nr	Quote	Novel	Page	Category
106	We smooth the ruffled paper, stroke the paper lady's eyes, brood over our sin, rectify hells, fruition good Karmas for ourselves, repent, go to confession	Visions of Gerard	19	
198	Gerard and all the boys did special novenas at certain season and went to confession on Friday afternoon to prepare for Sunday morning when the church hoped to infuse them with some of the perfection embodied and implied in the concept of Christ the Lord	Visions of Gerard	25	
284	Quickly Gerard whispers him the news about the urinal, Saturday Afternoon Confessions in St All's had never heard a lurider admission it would seem from the stealth of his ps-ps'es.	Visions of Gerard	29	
313	Did you go to your confession, Lil Gerard?	Visions of Gerard	31	
2706	But I had goofed throughout entire wartime and this is my confession.	Vanity of Duluo	251	
2923	Three little girls, wearing the uniform of the church's sodality, came out and stood in front of the communion rail and raised trumpets to their lips [...]	The Town and the City	173	
2932	When communion time came, the man turned to the big woman next to him, and nodded to her, and instantly a file of children started from the pew followed by the big woman and the little man, who walked and hobbled like the bow-legged French-Canadian farmer that he was. They all marched slowly down to the altar where the little man ordered the procession of his family along the altar rail by a series of imperceptible signs. Mickey watched broodingly as the man and his family kneeled at the altar.	The Town and the City	174	

Filter tool interface showing options for sorting and filtering data. The 'Category' column is selected for filtering. The filter list includes:

- cloistral
- coffin
- communion
- communion rail
- Compassion
- condemned
- confession
- confessional
- Confirmation

Buttons: OK, Cancel

Assigned colors to categories and examples of the terms inductively selected from texts for the category of Christ.

<p>Gerard and all the boys did special novenas at certain season and went to confession on Friday afternoon to prepare for Sunday morning when the church hoped to infuse them with some of the perfection embodied and implied in the concept of Christ the Lord</p>	Visions of Gerard	25	Christ the Lord
<p>Gerard doffs his cap, trails fingertip in the font, does the sign of the cross absently, walk half-tiptoe around to the side aisle and down under the crucified tablets that always wrenched at his heart when he saw them (<i>Pauvre Jésus</i>, Poor Jesus') as tho Jesus had been his close friend and brother done wrong indeed</p>	Visions of Gerard	25	crucified
<p>242 My Jesus wouldnt have liked that watching from his cross' The massive silence enveloping the graceful gentle form of hip and loincloth, limbs and knees and the tortured thin breast - And the unforgettable downcast face - 'God said to his son, we've got to do this - they decided in Heaven - and they did it - it happened - INRI!' - 'INRI - that means, it happened! - or else, INRI, the funny ribbon on the cross of the lover they killed - and, they put a nail through it'</p>	Visions of Gerard	27	cross
<p>247 through it' Ah my angel - my new angel, black, follows me now - I exchanged the angel of life for the other. Before the crucifix of Jesus in the house I stood attentively, sure of many things, I was going to see the tears of God and already I saw them in that countenance elongated white in plaster that gave life - gave life bitten, finished, droop-eyed, the hands nailed, the poor feet also nailed, folded, like winter cold feet of the poor Mexican worker you see in the street waiting for the guys to come with the barrels to empty the rags the crap and keeps one foot on the other to keep warm - Ah - The head bent, like the moon, like my picture of Maggie, mine and God's; the dolors of a Dante, at sixteen, when we dont know conscience or what we're doing.</p>	Visions of Gerard	27	cross
<p>1385 Voila, at sixteen, Maggie - the crucifix - there, God knew I had love troubles that were big and real now with his plastic statued head just neckbroke leaned over as sad as ever, more sad than ever. "You found yourself your little darkneses?" said God to me, silently, with his statue head, before it my hands clasped waiting. "Grew up with your little gidigne?" (dingdong). At the age of seven a priest had asked me in the confessional "And you played with your little <i>gidigne</i>?" "Yes <i>mon père</i> ." "Well therefore, if you played with your little <i>gidigne</i> say a whole rosary and after that do ten <i>Notre Pères</i> and ten <i>Salut Marie</i>'s in front of the altar and after that you can go." The Church carried me from one Saviour to another; who's done that for me since? - why the tears? - God spoke to me from the crucifix: - "Now it is morning and the good people are talking next door and the light comes in through the shade - my child, you find yourself in the world of mystery and *pain not understandable - I know, angel - it is for your good, we shall save, because we find your souls as important as the soul of the others in the world - but you must suffer for that, in effect my child, you must die, you must die in pain, with cries, frights, despairs - the ambiguities! the terrors! - the light, heavy, breakable, the fatigues, ah - "</p>	Maggie Cassidy	41	crucifix of Jesus
<p>1394 The vultures were feeding on all our chimneys, tempus. I stopped at the phosphorescent crucifix of Jesus and inwardly prayed to sorrow and suffer as He and so be saved. Then I walked downtown again to track, nothing gained.</p>	Maggie Cassidy	42-43	crucifix
<p>1423 Old Joe Hatter coming into my dormitory in rain, bleary-eyed, saying, 'Jesus Christ is pissing on the earth tonight.'</p>	Maggie Cassidy	62	crucifix of Jesus
<p>2519 Because we do know that the brutish, the mean-hearted, the Mad Dog creation has a side of compassionate mercy in it, as witness the mother cat (Mother Nature) how she washes and soothes her little kittens in the basket (almost said 'casket') and gives of her own milk of kindness without stint: we have seen the brutal creation send us the Son of Man who, to prove that we should follow His example of mercy, brotherly love, charity, patience, gave Himself up without a murmur to be sacrificed. Otherwise we would have taken His example lightly. Seeing that He really meant it right down to the cross, we are impressed. Impressed so much that it comes to the point of being by way of a kind of redemption, a plucking from the sea, a saving hooray.</p>	Vanity of Duluo	72	Jesus Christ
<p>2725 Yet I saw the cross just then when I closed my eyes after writing all this. I cant escape its mysterious penetration into all this brutality. I just simply SEE it all the time, even the Greek cross sometimes. I hope it will all turn out true.</p>	Vanity of Duluo	253-254	cross
<p>2742 He had gone to church in the raindark Good Friday afternoons, and so had Mickey, all silent and solemn, and he had seen Jesus suffering and heroic, dark, dark Jesus and his cross, dear great sacrificial Jesus the hero and the lamb, and he had wept at the spectacle of that heroic sorrow - and then he had gone to church, and Mickey too, on the bell-golden Easter mornings of sun and flowers and seen Jesus arisen triumphant, immortal, radiant and true - and all the occasional yawning mortals sitting beside him in the pews, the ones who coughed and fidgeted irritably was marching all around them, these were the 'soreheads' of the earth indifferently turning away from immortality and heroism, abysmal, empty, and unamazed. That was not for Peter, not for Mickey.</p>	Vanity of Duluo	255	cross
<p>2860 They had to be heroes or nothing. Then the boy looked up again at the altar manger and saw that he too must suffer and be crucified like the Child Jesus there, who was crucified for his sake, who pointed out his guiltiness that way, but who also pointed out what was going to happen to him, for he too, Michael Martin, was a child with a holy mother, therefore he too would be drawn to Calvary and the wind would begin to screech and everything would get dark.</p>	The Town and the City	117	Jesus suffering
<p>2944</p>	The Town and the City	174	crucified

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