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CATHOLIC ENCOUNTERS IN JACK KEROUAC'S "LONESOME TRAVELER" AND LOWELL NOVELS

Throughout his life, Jack Kerouac was interested in different religious traditions and practices. In popular perception, Kerouac still appears as a Buddhist, while his Catholic heritage is often overlooked. To some extent, one could even find threads of evidence that Buddhism gave Kerouac answers to questions that Catholicism could not. However, even if Buddhism's appeal to Kerouac might be understood as a reaction and interpretation to the question of theodicy, Kerouac's novels and other writings also portray Catholicism and its praxis. In this paper, the author will primarily analyse Kerouac's Catholic encounters while visiting churches described in "Lonesome Traveler."¹ The encounters in these pieces of travel writings will be compared to similar situations in Lowell novels (*Visions of Gerard*, *Doctor Sax*, *Maggie Cassidy*, *The Town and the City*, and *Vanity of Duluo*).² Kerouac's descriptions while on the road will be compared to those

1 The research is carried out as part of the project "Strengthening of the capacity of doctoral studies at the University of Latvia within the framework of the new doctoral model," identification No. 8.2.2.0/20/1/006.

2 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*,

based in the author's hometown Lowell or its fictional counterpart Galloway. The paper will explore the Catholic encounters in these books and highlight the similarities and differences in the described church visits in the road descriptions and novels based in Kerouac's hometown Lowell.

Kerouac's book "Lonesome Traveler" is a compilation of travel stories that initially was called "Beat traveler." He changed the title of his book, mainly compiled magazine sketches he already had, and put in stories he had worked on with other authors.³ Initially, Kerouac hoped to write a new novel, "Beat Traveler," which would be a story "of a penniless author becoming successful overnight and the hilarious adventures thereof."⁴ Nevertheless, this was not the final result of this process. "Lonesome Traveler" is not about success, though, because it still gives the notion of pre-"On the Road" fame Kerouac, especially in pieces partly written in the years that these trips happen, for example, "Mexico Fellaheen", which was based on Kerouac's trip to Mexico in 1952. Kerouac explains that "Lonesome Traveler" is a collection of published and unpublished pieces that are bind together by a common theme: traveling. He describes that these stories are about "railroad work, sea work, mysticism, mountain work, lasciviousness, solipsism, self-indulgence, bullfights, drugs, churches, art museums, streets of cities, a mishmash of life as lived by an independent educated penniless rake going anywhere."⁵ Kerouac here already highlights two aspects of interest in this paper – mysticism and churches. In addition to that, Kerouac's Lowell novels portray the church with its masses and sacraments, confessions, and baptisms. Throughout the paper, the author will analyse the different attitudes of Kerouac's protagonists toward the visit to a Catholic church and encountering Catholic belief in these churches. What differences can be outlined, and what notions do both share?

James Purdy, John Knowles, and Ken Kesey (Lawrence: Regents Press of Kansas, 1976), 35. The novels are part of a body of his works that Kerouac called the "Duluoz Legend"; Jack Kerouac, *Selected Letters: 1957–1969*, ed. Ann Charters (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 326–327. A complete list of novels is published in Barry Gifford and Lawrence Lee, *Jack's Book: An Oral Biography of Jack Kerouac* (New York: Penguin Books, 2012), 335–336.

3 For example, in "The New York" scenes, originally published as "The Roaming Beatniks," Kerouac wrote in collaboration with other Beat writers Allen Ginsberg, Peter Orlovsky, and Gregory Corso, and "The Vanishing American Hobo" in collaboration with Gregory Corso (both spring 1959); Ann Charters, *Jack Kerouac: Selected Letters 1957–1969*, 224.

4 Jack Kerouac's letter to Donald Allen, December 1959, Northport; *ibid.*, 274.

5 Jack Kerouac, *Lonesome Traveler* (London: Penguin Books, 2000), 9–10.

The first encounter in Kerouac's book "Lonesome Traveler" with Catholicism, the Catholic church, and visiting a Catholic church is found in the piece called "Mexico Fellaheen":

*The sun was very hot and we were sweating – we came to a large beautiful church in the old Spanish Mission style and Enrique said: 'We go in here now' – it amazed me to remember that we were all Catholics. – We went inside and Gerardo kneeled, then Enrique and I kneed the pews and did the sign of the cross and he whispered in my ear 'See? is cool in the chorch. Is good to get away from the sun a minuto!'*⁶

This trip that Kerouac describes here is not his first trip to Mexico. Nevertheless, it is quite vivid that Mexico would be the place and the piece in which readers first encounter a church visit in this book. Mexico has played quite an essential role for Kerouac, of course, not only for the cheap drugs and literary kicks but also for the fact that he got to go and visit a country that is, in its essence, Catholic. Louis T. Albarran emphasizes that Kerouac, after entering Mexico, was "struck by the Catholic aesthetics of the land. The presence of ikons, crucifixes, and churches everywhere was so pervasive that he was compelled to write about it all."⁷ The text fragment in "Mexico Fellaheen" about Kerouac kneeling in the church, with an opium hangover, shows that Kerouac is immersed even further in Mexican Catholicism with every trip. This also vividly portrays Kerouac as a "communal Catholic,"⁸ one of whose characteristics is loyalty to the heritage of their tradition and its community. Kerouac here visits a church with no particular meaning. However, once he realizes that his acquaintances are also Catholics, Kerouac remembers that he is also a part of this community and, together with them, makes the sign of the cross that further affirms their affiliation and togetherness in the Catholic faith. Enrique's whisper at the end could also be seen in the light that it is not only cooler in the church temperature-wise, but it is hip to be in the church.

6 Jack Kerouac, *Lonesome Traveler* (London: Penguin Books, 2000), 33–34.

7 On subsequent trips, he became further immersed in Mexico and Mexican Catholic practices; 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, Dayton, Ohio, 2013), 121. This interest and the chance to observe Mexican Catholicism resulted in Kerouac's novel "Tristessa", whose main character is an addicted woman devoted to Catholicism and the cult of the dead.

8 A notion outlined by Andrew Greeley that defines Catholics who are loyal to their Catholic heritage, if asked identify themselves with Catholics, but take from dogmas and church ethics only things that they agree with; Andrew Greeley, *The American Catholic: A Social Portrait* (New York: Basic Books, 1974). See also John A. Coleman, "The Fall from Innocence: Contemporary American Catholicism," *Revue française d'études américaines* 12 (October 81): 198.

Mexico was the first country Kerouac went to, where the main religion was Catholicism. Catholicism has had its ups and downs in America⁹ – but it was never so vividly present there as it was in Mexico, because “American Catholicism was primarily a Church of immigrants and their descendants,”¹⁰ Kerouac’s family included. Kerouac did not actively practice Catholicism. His connection to this faith was mainly through his mother and her devotion to French-Canadian Catholicism. When Kerouac goes on a trip to Mexico, Catholicism is right there – everywhere he goes. This reality makes him, perhaps even consciously, finally face his questions about his childhood faith. It was right there in front of him, and he needed to tackle this question.

Nevertheless, Mexico’s Catholicism might have been what Kerouac needed to look at Catholicism from a newfound perspective, where he could again somewhat fall in love with this tradition. However, with the knowledge of a grown man, not of a child, when his parents were responsible for shaping his religious choices and beliefs. Although Kerouac did not attend the Mass in Mexico, he saw the tradition and the aesthetics of a Mexican church. He liked the simplicity and the realness. This church was closer to Kerouac’s idea of a wandering Catholic mystic and hobo, as Kerouac defines himself at the beginning of the book, who stops by many churches during his travels and, in more than one, has left a handful of his tears.

Kerouac’s visit to Mexico in 1952 at first seemed quite uplifting – he was doing good, the drugs helped him write a lot, and he wrote in his letters to Carolyn Cassady about his progress on the novel “Dr. Sax”.¹¹ There are some similarities visible in the text fragment of Kerouac visiting church in “Mexico Fellaheen” and the final pages of “Doctor Sax”. Under an opium-induced hangover, Kerouac in the church realizes that he is a Catholic, and he kneels. After his experiments with different substances, he returns to his childhood religion; it is still welcoming whatever might have happened. Another emphasis is the community – all three of them kneel together. Being part of a community gives one a sense of belonging. Kerouac had rarely experienced this in his everyday life since his childhood. Similarly, at the end of “Doctor Sax”, Jackie Duluo returns to his mundane

9 Slowly, Catholicism gained its ground in America, and during Eisenhower’s era it was considered as one of the three main traditions of the Christian America (Protestantism, Catholicism and Judaism). Catholicism’s popularity was even further affirmed when Kennedy became a president. Also the postwar years was the time of religious revival and the time of the rise of media as an outlet for religious traditions. For example, Father Coughlin had a famous radio show that gathered up to 2 million listeners.

10 John A. Coleman, *The Fall from Innocence: Contemporary American Catholicism*, 188. Lot of the immigrants came from Latin American countries, and many of those were Catholic. That is why a large part of the Catholic population spoke in Spanish.

11 Ann Charters, ed., *Jack Kerouac: Selected Letters 1940–1956* (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 361–366.

life after the epic fight between good and evil forces and is greeted by the cross of Christ in the Lowell Grotto and the devotionism of Franco-American ladies. Jackie also puts roses in his hair – a symbol of the Virgin Mary. Both texts show Kerouac's or Jackie's, based on Kerouac as a young teen returning to Catholicism. The Catholic encounter reminds them of their core beliefs.

However, when Kerouac started to run out of money in Mexico while writing "Doctor Sax" and experienced to some extent the events of "Mexico Fellaheen," his journey's uplifting aspects were overshadowed by depressive notions. Ann Charters affirms that "Kerouac felt his life closing in on him in Mexico City. He finished Doctor Sax just as he began to run out of money. [...] By June Kerouac wrote Holmes self-pityingly that he was surrounded by "doom..."¹² Overwhelmed by feelings of failure, he goes to a church:

*The last day I'm in Mexico I'm in the little church near Redondas in Mexico City, 4 o'clock in the gray afternoon, I've walked all over town delivering packages at the Post Offices and I've munched on fudge candy for breakfast and now, with two beers under me, I'm resting in the church contemplating the void.*¹³

Quite often, people turn to religion and devotion when times get tough. This is probably the case also with Kerouac. Although, it could also be that Kerouac knows he is leaving, and the church was where he wanted to return, to soak it in before he leaves. However, more interesting is what happens to him in this church. The following text fragments are amongst the most elaborate Kerouac's writings, where he reflects a personal experience of God in a Catholic church. Kerouac writes: "Right above me is a great tormented statue of Christ on the Cross, when I first saw it I instantly sat under it, after brief standing hand-clasped look at it [...]"¹⁴ Kerouac says, "My Jesus," looks up, and there he is: "they've put on Him a handsome face like young Robert Mitchum and have closed His eyes in death tho one of them is slightly open."¹⁵ Kerouac carefully describes the statue and its features of it. Similarly, in Lowell novels, Kerouac's characters vividly imagine the crucified Christ: "INRI, the funny ribbon on the cross of the lover they killed – and, they put a nail through it."¹⁶ In the Lowell novels, the passion of Christ is portrayed more often than his incarnation or resurrection. The readers might sense Dulouoz's empathy towards Christ. He sees the sacrifice of Jesus as humble

12 Ann Charters, ed., *Jack Kerouac: Selected Letters 1940–1956* (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 374–375.

13 Jack Kerouac, *Lonesome Traveler*, 36.

14 *Ibid.*, 36–37.

15 *Ibid.*

16 Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard* (UK: Penguin Books, 2020), 27.

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.”¹⁷ Gerard in “Visions of 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.*¹⁸

The text fragment illustrates 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?’”¹⁹ Gerard feels saddened about the violent and unfair death of Jesus Christ, who died on the cross.

Kerouac, in “Mexico Fellaheen,” describes further that he knelt and prayed before Christ:

*His knees are all scratched so hard sore, they’re scathed wore out though, an inch deep the hole where His kneecap’s been wailed away by flailing falls on them with big Flail Cross a hundred miles long on His back, and as He leans there with the Cross on rocks they goad Him on to slide on His knees and He’s worn them out by the time He’s nailed to the cross – I was there.*²⁰

Kerouac continues contemplating the statue, gaining particular meaning from every feature. It guides him closer to re-living and re-enacting the death of Jesus Christ, the ultimate Christian story. It is interesting that Kerouac affirms that he was there while speaking about the crucifixion of Jesus. However, when he talks of the moment when Jesus is pierced in his ribs, he emphasizes that he was not there: “Shows a big rip in His ribs where the sword-tips of lancers were stuck up at Him. – I was not there, had I been there I would have yelled ‘Stop it’ and got crucified too.”²¹ There are a couple of things to be pointed out. First, Kerouac envisions himself as part of the crucifixion but not as

17 Jack Kerouac, *Vanity of Duluo: An Adventurous Education, 1935–1946* (London: Penguin Books, 2012), 253–254.

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

19 *Ibid.*, 27.

20 Jack Kerouac, *Lonesome Traveler*, 37.

21 *Ibid.*

part of the moment when a sword pierces Jesus. It would be possible to interpret this as affirmation from Kerouac that he was at the nailing at the cross because Jesus died for all our sins; henceforth, everyone was there in this sense. Another way this could be seen is that Kerouac has a mystical experience here. He has reached a different state of consciousness, in which he is united with a higher reality. It is characteristic that during a mystical experience, the ego is annihilated, and the mystic becomes one with the higher reality and, through this experience, gains new knowledge.²² If one looks at this text section through the prism of mysticism, it would be possible to argue that Kerouac was at the crucifixion in his consciousness but not physically. Hence, he was there to see Christ being crucified, he saw this through union with God, but he was not there physically to stop the process as in “had I been there I would have yelled ‘Stop it’ and got crucified too.” Kerouac’s affirmation that he would have yelled ‘Stop it’ portrays his indebtedness to Catholicism and the Christian faith. The text fragment could be one of the most vivid confessions of belief in one of the most central Christian teachings that can be seen from Kerouac. He describes behaviour that would have been characteristic of Jesus, to stand against injustice. In Lowell novels, imitating Christ is vital to his characters. Micky Martin in the “Town and the City” identifies with Jesus Child but then realizes that he, too, would be dragged to Mount Calvary:

*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.*²³

For those who tried to follow Jesus’ example, martyrs became models in their ultimate suffering and imitation of Christ.²⁴ Mickey tackles the notion that if he imitates 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

22 Many authors have written about mysticism, mystical experience, and different sensations that one goes through. One of the foundations in describing mystical experiences and their meaning is William James’s “The Varieties of Religious Experience.” In “The Essentials of Mysticism and Other Essays,” Evelyn Underhill offered a more narrow definition.” Also helpful is Paul Oliver’s “Mysticism: A Guide For the Perplexed.” Lastly, R. C. Zahner’s “Mysticism Sacred and Profane” has been influential in this field.

23 Jack Kerouac, *Town and the City* (UK: Penguin Books, 2018), 174.

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

to turn humankind's suffering into joy, the chosen ones must suffer vicariously."²⁵ In "Maggie Cassidy," Jack Dulouz illustrates another example:

*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 [...].*²⁶

For one to try to imitate 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 Dulouz even says: "But we cant be redeemed 'unless we believe', it says, or follow His example. And who can do that?"²⁷

While contemplating Jesus' death in a church in Mexico, Kerouac envisions some conversation that has taken place at the crucifixion. Moreover, "involved in this conversation are people responsible for Jesus' death, Jesus himself and Kerouac."²⁸ Kerouac hears Jesus say:

*I am the Son of Man, I am of Man, I am Man and this you would do to Me, Who am Man and God – I am God, and you would pierce my feet bound together with long nails with big stayfast point on the end slightly blunted by the hammerer's might – this you did to Me, and I preached Love?*²⁹

The text section is significant because Kerouac affirms the two natures of Christ, a notion that is not directly addressed in the Lowell novels. Kerouac answers, "He preached love, and you would have him bound to a tree and hammered into it with nails, you fools, you should be forgiven."³⁰ Although surely mistaken in their judgment, Kerouac continues to follow Jesus' righteous example by declaring that the fools who nailed Jesus to the cross should be forgiven. Albarran does not interpret this as a possible mystical experience but instead draws focus to Kerouac's devotionalism, which was "intense

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

26 Jack Kerouac, *Maggie Cassidy* (London: Penguin Books, 2009), 41.

27 Jack Kerouac, *Vanity of Dulouz*, 254.

28 Louis T. Albarran, *The Sacramentality of Jack Kerouac in Lowell, America, and Mexico*, 109.

29 Jack Kerouac, *Lonesome Traveler*, 37.

30 *Ibid.*

enough to inspire Kerouac to think that he actually heard dialogue that happened at the crucifixion.”³¹ It would be possible to assume that intense devotionism might lead to some sensory experience involving moving or talking religious images. However, such intense devotionism would also manifest in other ways, not only in hearing dialogues but also with, for example, regular participation in church rituals. What Kerouac says next might refer to some mystical experience. Kerouac prayed on his knees for a long time,

looking up sideways at my Christ, I suddenly wake up in a trance in the church with my knees aching and a sudden realization that I've been listening to a profound buzz in my ears that permeates throughout the church and throughout my ears and throughout the universe, the intrinsic silence of Purity (which is Divine).³²

The text shows more than one characteristic of a mystical experience. First, trance refers to a changed state of consciousness common to mystical experience. Kerouac's sudden realization can be seen as returning from the changed state of consciousness and gaining new knowledge through the mystical experience. The aching knees add a realistic description of returning to reality. The newly gained knowledge helps one to understand the world better. Kerouac describes a buzz that permeated the church, his ears, and the whole universe. This silence is pure and divine. Through Catholic teaching, this could be understood as the presence of the Holy Spirit, primarily in the church and the whole world. Looking at the whole section of Kerouac's encounter with Catholicism in "Mexico Fellaheen," it might be possible to say that Kerouac reached a different state of consciousness where he had a dialogue with Christ. However, returning to a mundane world after a mystical unification with a higher reality can also result in great disappointment. The incredible moment of unity is gone. Kerouac is left with aching knees and silence that is roaring.³³ He no longer hears God.

Kerouac did not have a direct conversation with Christ in "Mexico Fellaheen," but in Christ speaks to Jack Kerouac in "Maggie Cassidy":

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!³⁴

31 Louis T. Albarran, *The Sacramentality of Jack Kerouac in Lowell, America, and Mexico*, 109.

32 Jack Kerouac, *Lonesome Traveler*, 38.

33 Ibid.

34 Jack Kerouac, *Maggie Cassidy*, 43.

The text shows Kerouac's shift towards "personalistic" and "Christocentric" aspects of revelation that the Vatican II Council has also emphasized.³⁵ Post-war America and its religious traditions saw a turn towards more personal religious practice in opposition to an institutional one, a popular notion in the counterculture movement.³⁶ In Catholic tradition, 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 of the mystery of 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. 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. The text fragment in "Maggie Cassidy" and "Mexico Fellaheen" shows Kerouac's turn toward the personal experience of faith and his approach to religion through the mystical aspects of traditions.

Another piece where Kerouac writes about his Catholic encounters while visiting churches is called "The Big trip to Europe." The first stop is the Cathedral of St. Sauveur in Aix-en-Provence, where he is overwhelmed by a feeling of beauty and cries when he hear the choir boys singing a "gorgeous old thing, while angels seemed to be hovering around – I couldnt help myself – I hid behind the pillar from the occasional inquiring eyes of French families on my huge rucksack (eighty pounds) and wiped my eyes [...]"³⁷ The church choir is usually heard during the Mass. The emotional reaction seems to entail Kerouac's nostalgia and reverence toward the sublime beauty of the singing. Little *Ti Jean*, a character that is based on Kerouac's childhood, during his brother's funeral Mass, drifts away from its meanings and sees a vision: "I see nothing but the swarm of angels in the church in the form of sudden myriad illuminated snowflakes

35 Vatican II Council document *Dei Verbum* described the revelation also "the action by which God freely makes known the hidden purpose (sacramentum) of the divine will and lovingly speaks to human beings as friends"; 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. Likewise, René Latourelle affirms that *Dei Verbum* opposite to *Dei Filius* is more personalistic, trinitarian and Christocentric; René Latourelle, *Theology of Revelation* (Staten Island, NY: Alba House, 1966), 486–487.

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

37 Jack Kerouac, *Lonesome Traveler*, 137.

of ecstasy – I scoff to think that anybody should cry.”³⁸ The event of death is celebrated by this vision. Both texts hold similarities in the emotional reaction to the church and the vision that it is a place where angels are present. Kerouac continues his description of the visit to the Cathedral of St. Sauveur with a more touristic description by “[...] crying even at the sight of the 6th Century Baptistry – all old Romanesque stones with the hole in the ground still, where so many other infants had been baptized all with eyes of lucid liquid diamond understanding.”³⁹ He is overwhelmed by the atmosphere and aesthetics of this particular church and the events taking place in it. However, at the same time, he mentions a 6th-century baptistry, which makes Kerouac a visitor, a tourist, learning something new in a place he has never been before. During his trips, Kerouac yet again sees that church is a place where to find faith, encounter God and show one’s devotion: “But the next day I was suddenly unaccountably happy as I sat in the park in front of Trinité Church near Gare St-Lazare among children and then went inside and saw a mother praying with a devotion that startled her son.”⁴⁰ Here, Kerouac could have identified with the situation, imagining his and his mother’s devotion to faith. A similar situation is described in “Visions of Gerard,” where 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.”⁴¹ 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.⁴²

The last Catholic encounter in “Lonesome Traveler” is when Kerouac goes to a concert in a church in London on Good Friday afternoon where he hears “a heavenly performance of the St Matthew Passion by the St Paul’s choir, with full orchestra and a special service choir.” Kerouac is emotional to hear this and cries most of the time. Kerouac writes that he “saw a vision of an angel in my mother’s kitchen and longed to go home to sweet America again.”⁴³ This particular Bach composition was very important to Jack Kerouac; he refers to it more than once throughout the years. He listened to it on Christmas Eve 1959, and he remembers when he was waiting for Allen in his cottage and listening to Allen’s record of this in 1955. However, music especially heard in church, has another layer, according to Mickey Martin in “The Town and the City.” While perplexed about God’s presence in particular aspects and people in this world, Mickey is sure

38 Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 98–99.

39 Jack Kerouac, *Lonesome Traveler*, 137.

40 *Ibid.*, 138.

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

42 The Monks of Saint Meinrad Archabbey, *The Tradition of Catholic Prayer*, eds. Christian Raab and Harry Hagan (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2007), xii.

43 Jack Kerouac, *Lonesome Traveler*, 146.

that “all the beautiful singing and the organ in the church, yes, it was God’s music for God.”⁴⁴ This also helps to understand Kerouac’s emotional reaction better while visiting the church if the choir singing can be seen as something God created for himself. The angel that Kerouac refers to here might be a reference to “Doctor Sax”, where Jackie Dulouz sees his mother’s, a character based on Kerouac’s biological mother, guardian angel. The angel is walking beside her, “very solemn, slightly hurt, with lowered mouth, but with great shining wings, that drop rich showers of cool flame rolling and merling in the Gershom cobbles.”⁴⁵ The hurt wing might refer to age, number of sins, or suffering. 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.”⁴⁶ It is worth noting that Church teaching and lived religion are not the same. In Catholic households, various saint cults arose, superstitious rituals and reliability on guardian angels. Allen Ginsberg remembers that Kerouac was always talking about visions, and he had them almost daily. However, by this vision, Kerouac “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.”⁴⁷ It is hardly a description of a vision that Kerouac experiences in the church in Mexico or by using substances. Ginsberg’s description even seems compatible with hallucinations characteristic of psychological diagnosis.

The concert Kerouac attends is on Good Friday, when Christians remember Christ’s death at the cross. Peter Martin in “The Town and the City” is 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 [...]”⁴⁸ In “Lonesome Traveler” and Lowell novels, Kerouac keeps returning to Christ and his cross. He even goes further to quote the Bible after describing the music of Bach:

And I realized that it didnt matter that we sin, that my father died only of impatience, that all my own petty gripes didnt matter either. – Holy Bach spoke to me and in front of me was a magnificent marble basrelief showing Christ and three Roman soldiers listening: ‘And he spake unto them do violence to no man, no accuse any falsely, and be content with thy wages.’⁴⁹

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

45 Jack Kerouac, *Doctor Sax: Faust Part Three* (London: Penguin Books, 2012), 189.

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

47 Allen Ginsberg, *The Best Minds of My Generation: A Literary History of the Beats*, ed. Bill Morgan (UK: Penguin Books, 2018), 101.

48 Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, 117.

49 Jack Kerouac, *Lonesome Traveler*, 146.

It is not often that Kerouac directly quotes Bible, and here he quotes Luke 3:14. He does write about the fact that he reads it in his journals, and sometimes in his books. There are references to the Gospel of Luke also in Lowell novels, referring to Christ in the Temple,⁵⁰ Jesus' visit of the house of Lazarus, where he meets his sisters Mary and Martha,⁵¹ and the multiplying of bread.⁵² As in the case of "Mexico Fellaheen," Kerouac seems to be thinking about Christ's last days throughout his trips.

The question remains whether these church visits can or should be seen in the sense of a Catholic pilgrimage. Although the description entails intense experiences in the church, it seems that in "Lonesome Traveler", Kerouac's visits are rather spontaneous than conscious, the latter being the case of a pilgrimage. For some, it might not matter what the motivation for the pilgrimage was. People could call themselves "pilgrims" to denote one's trip "as being special and set apart from the profane world."⁵³ This opinion does blur the lines between, for example, pilgrim as defined in the scope of Catholic tradition and the secular realm. However, in Kerouac's case, the description of motivation is lacking. One might see Kerouac as a religious tourist, visiting churches as part of his itinerary.⁵⁴ Kerouac does indeed describe a specific treasure of the Cathedral of St. Sauveur from the 6th century. Nevertheless, the spontaneous nature of the visits of churches themselves in "Lonesome Traveler" seems to stray away from a conscious travel decision. Of course, Roman Catholic Church does "accept religious tourism due to its huge economic magnitude"⁵⁵; however, it would not use the term "religious tourism" because of the understanding that "religious and the profane cannot both be the content

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

51 Jack Kerouac, *Vanity of Duluo*, 254.

52 Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 18.

53 Justine Dignance, "Religious and Secular Pilgrimage," in *Tourism, Religion and Spiritual Journeys*, eds. Dallen Timothy, Daniel Olsen (London: Routledge, 2006), 44–45.

54 Boris Vukonic divides three most popular forms in which most often appears religious tourism in Roman Catholic Church: 1) pilgrimage with continuous groups and individuals visiting religious shrines; 2) large-scale gatherings on the occasion of significant religious dates and anniversaries; 3) and tours of and visitation to important religious places and buildings within the framework of a tour itinerary; Boris Vukonic, "Sacred places and tourism in the Roman Catholic tradition," in *Tourism, Religion and Spiritual Journeys*, eds. Dallen Timothy, Daniel Olsen (London: Routledge, 2006), 237.

55 A. Nicolaides, "Marian Tourism: Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic pilgrimage," in *African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure* 5.4 (2016): 3.

of the same moment of time, because their motivation is completely different.”⁵⁶ However, as mentioned previously, it does not seem to be the reason for Kerouac’s visits. Here, Roger Bill’s argument is valid – that Kerouac’s travels can be seen both as a precursor for the coming mass tourism in America and as a search for the real as opposed to the tourist experiences.⁵⁷ Both are combined when Kerouac visits a church in France: “I hid behind the pillar from the occasional inquiring eyes of French families on my huge rucksack (eighty pounds) and wiped my eyes.”⁵⁸ The rucksack shows him as a tourist whom natives look upon with suspicion, but his tears affirm an authentic experience rather than a tourist one. Kerouac through “occasional church visits,” was reminded and returned to some of the most fundamental Christian tenets, such as Christ’s death and sacrifice.

Kerouac’s church visits in “Lonesome Traveler” are spontaneous, opposite to Lowell novels, where it is more of a conscious decision. The spontaneity can be understood as a natural aspect of traveling and subtleness as a characteristic of staying in one’s hometown. Traveling, especially in time without the internet, is more spontaneous than going to a Midnight Mass in one’s hometown every Christmas. However, the common aspect in both “Lonesome Traveler” and Lowell novels is that encounters with Catholicism through spontaneous and conscious church visits remind Kerouac and his characters about essential tenets of the Christian faith. Either through mystical experiences or church music Kerouac and his characters, again and again, return to Jesus Christ and the cross. In church, one can encounter God, and in “Lonesome Traveler” and Lowell novels, there are vivid examples of this. The believers in the church find faith and can even be moved to tears. The spontaneous church visits during Kerouac’s trips described in “Lonesome Traveler” remind him of Christ and direct him home. Kerouac writes at the end of the piece called “The Vanishing American Hobo” (1959):

*I’m too tired now of everything else, I’ve had enough, I give up, I quit, I want to go home, take me home O brother in the night – take me home, lock me in safe, take me to where all is peace and amity, to the family of life, my mother, my father, my sister, my wife and you my brother and you my friend – but no hope, no hope, no hope, I wake up and I’d give a million dollars to be in my own bed – O Lord save me.*⁵⁹

56 The author also affirms that in recent decades Roman Catholic Church has become more involved in secular matters and even tried to explain the relationship between tourism and religion; Boris Vukonic, *Sacred places and tourism in the Roman Catholic tradition*, 237–242.

57 Roger Bill, “Traveller or tourist? Jack Kerouac and the commodification of culture,” *Dialect Anthropol.* 34 (2010): 395–417.

58 Jack Kerouac, *Lonesome Traveler*, 137.

59 *Ibid.*, 157.

The spontaneous nature of the church visits in “Lonesome Traveler” sometimes resulted in overwhelming emotions, occasionally even in mystical experiences. However, the Catholic encounters through spontaneous church visits while traveling serves as a reminder of faith in Jesus Christ. This reminder then ignites a longing for a continuous relationship with God that can be sustained in his hometown and is further elaborated in Kerouac’s Lowell novels. In Kerouac’s life, one does not exist without the other – the spontaneity reminds him of his faith, and he returns to his hometown, his mother, and the Catholicism of their family. However, when the longing for faith fades out of habit, Kerouac is on the road again to regain it.

KOPSAVILKUMS

Sastapšanās ar katolicismu Džeka Keruaka *Lonesome Traveler* un Louelas romānos

Amerikāņu rakstnieks Džeks Keruaks dzīves laikā interesējās par dažādām reliģiskajām tradīcijām, vislielāko uzmanību līdzās budīsmam pievēršot kristietībai. Rakstā analizēti Keruaka ceļojumu rakstu krājumā *Lonesome Traveler* atrodami baznīcu apmeklējumu apraksti un salīdzināti ar Louelas romāniem, kuru notikumi balstīti pilsētā, kurā Keruaks uzauga. Šie teksti liecina par gadījumiem, kad Keruaks vai viņa varoņi, apmeklējot baznīcas, gūst emocionālus pārdzīvojumus vai pat mistiskas pieredzes. Caur šīm pieredzēm Keruaks un viņa varoņi atkal un atkal atgriežas pie Jēzus Kristus un viņa piemēra. Keruaks savos ceļojumos nebūtu uzlūkojams kā svētceļnieks vai tūrists – viņa aprakstos pietrūkst iepriekšēja nodoma, kas to apstiprinātu. Drīzāk viņa īstenotajiem baznīcu apmeklējumiem piemīt spontāna daba, kas raksturo arī to laikā gūtās autentiskās pieredzes. Šādās situācijās, kas apcerētas grāmatā *Lonesome Traveler*, sastapšanās ar katolicismu Keruakam atgādina par viņa ģimenes praktizēto reliģiju un par Jēzus nozīmi. Šis atgādinājums tālāk izraisa ilgas pēc mājām, kur būtu iespējamās nepārtrauktas personiskas attiecības ar Dievu, kādas tās ir attēlotas Louelas romānos.