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Abstract
This study adopts a Christian hermeneutic to explore sacred themes in several of the 346 Don Camillo short stories that Giovannino Guareschi wrote between 1946 and 1966. Such a critical approach may seem non-traditional to use in analyzing a post-World War II, twentieth-century author. And yet, Guareschi defies convention in many ways beyond his profession as a journalist, humorist and popular author: he openly opposed the anti-clerical and Marxist literary establishment; defined himself as an anti-intellectual; and, as a layperson, he wrote unromantically about matters of faith. Especially as editor of the immensely popular weekly newspaper *Candido*, he had the perfect forum to reach millions of readers who shared his Christian values and were not part of the intellectual elite. To be sure, Don Camillo stories delight and earn frequent smiles and giggles, but the narrative action in best of them powerfully echoes Jesus of Nazareth's call to conversion and forgiveness through the way characters heed their consciences.

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Lagers, Communism, Prisons, Sons, Dowsers, Catholicism, Divinity, Tales, Morality

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This study adopts a Christian hermeneutic to explore sacred themes in several of the 346 Don Camillo short stories that Giovannino Guareschi wrote between 1946 and 1966. Such a critical approach may seem non-traditional to use in analyzing a post-World War II, twentieth-century author. And yet, Guareschi defies convention in many ways beyond his profession as a journalist, humorist and popular author: he openly opposed the anti-clerical and Marxist literary establishment; defined himself as an anti-intellectual; and, as a layperson, he wrote unromantically about matters of faith. Especially as editor of the immensely popular weekly newspaper *Candido*, he had the perfect forum to reach millions of readers who shared his Christian values and were not part of the intellectual elite. To be sure, Don Camillo stories delight and earn frequent smiles and giggles, but the narrative action in best of them powerfully echoes Jesus of Nazareth's call to conversion and forgiveness through the way characters heed their consciences.

Almost forty years after his death, Guareschi continues to influence the Italian collective conscience. More than twenty-three million copies of anthologized *Mondo piccolo* stories have been sold, and he is, according to several critics, the most translated Italian author of the *Novecento* (Bocca 34; Dossena 25). Political historians still reference his classic posters that helped ensure the defeat of the Popular Front in 1948 (Chiesa 160), and television broadcasts of Don Camillo movies occur on RAI and private channels at least monthly. The wily priest remains one of the most recognizable and endearing characters of Italian popular culture (Romano 439; "Hanno votato" 1).

Conversely, in intellectual circles, Guareschi has never received much critical validation. Since the 1950s, several critics have scorned his use of elementary language, predictable narrative plots, humor, and journalistic style of writing they considered as flat and unimaginative (Serra 111; Ferroni, "Ricostruzione" 803). He simply did not fit within traditional literary norms, and some critics still question if he wrote what could be considered as "literature." (Ferroni, "Bravo sceneggiatore" 114; Raboni 28).

Moreover, in the last fifty years many critics have shunned Guareschi for various political reasons. As previously stated, Guareschi was a devout Catholic and a staunch

opponent of Communism. He openly spurned the official *litterati*, viewing them as parochial Marxists. His distain for them earned a similar response in kind.[2] Furthermore, the Church never championed him because his literary themes at times appeared too conciliatory towards Communists. Finally, the political Right never quite embraced him because, as an independent maverick, he never shied away from taking a poke at their politicians, namely, the sainted Alcide De Gasperi.

All of these reasons, both critical and political, help explain why so many anthologies do not mention him at all (Fiorentino III). But, since the end of the Cold War, interest in Guareschi, revisionist in nature, has steadily grown. Considerations focus on his political insight, use of humor, experience in World War II as a prisoner of the Third Reich, and the libel case brought against him by De Gasperi. Most especially, however, scholars and critics have turned to his profound Christian spiritual motifs in *Mondo piccolo*. Several of the 346 tales do read at times like light-hearted, superficial comedy; but, at a deeper level many reveal serious aspects of faith, couched in eloquently simple language, that are perhaps unmatched in a popular literary context by any other contemporary Italian artist. In fact, the best critical key to approach Don Camillo tales focuses upon Guareschi's sacramental understanding of the individual conscience as the receptical of the ethical and the sacred.[3]

The best place to start our inquiry into Guareschi's dominant theme of conscience should begin with his two experiences of prison: the first at the hands of the Third Reich during World War II, and the second as a prisoner of the Italian government in 1954 for having libeled Alcide De Gasperi. Fortunately, in both cases Guareschi left ample documentation in the form of diaries, notes, and letters that reveal how the experience of captivity brought him to a deeper level of self-consciousness in understanding the inviolate nature of conscience in moral choice.

1. The Lesson of Captivity: Valuing the Freedom of Conscience

In September 1943, shortly after Italy signed an Armistice with the Allies and opted to get out of the war, the Germans seized and shipped Guareschi, who was a Lieutenant of Artillery, to an internment camp in Poland.[4] Guareschi had refused to swear allegiance to

Hitler or Mussolini, honoring his military oath made to Vittorio Emmanuel III. In order to face the hardships of prison life, Guareschi kept a diary that he shared in the form of public lectures meant to entertain and to raise morale among his fellow prisoners. A particular theme he highlighted was his discovery that he could remain free even behind concertina wire. In a lecture entitled "Finalmente libero," for example, Guareschi conveyed how the Germans may have entrapped his physical body but that his "other self," his conscience or soul, was ultimately free. In the end, the deprivations he faced really had no bearing on his existence:

> C'era qualcuno che era prigioniero di me stesso, e la mia spessa cotenna lo opprimeva: ma ora egli è evaso dal suo carcere.
>
> Un giorno camminavo su questa sabbia deserta, ed ero stanco e trascinavo faticosamente le mie ossa cariche di pesante nostalgia, quando a un tratto mi sentii miracolosamente leggero [...].
>
> Mi volsi e vidi che ero uscito di me stesso, mi ero sfilato dal mio involucro di carne. Ero libero.
>
> Vidi l'altro me stesso allontanarsi, e con lui si allontanavano tutti i miei affetti, e di essi mi rimaneva solo l'esistenza. Come se mi avessero tolto un fiore e di esso mi fosse rimasto soltanto il profumo nelle nari e il colore negli occhi.
>
> Ritroverò l'altro me stesso? Mi aspetta fuori del reticolato per riprendermi ancora? Ritornerò laggiù oppresso sempre dal mio involucro di carne e di abitudini?
>
> Buon Dio, se dev'essere così, prolunga all'infinito la mia prigionia. Non togliermi la mia libertà. (*Diario Clandestino* 164-65)

Prison brought Guareschi to realize that he could forgo his outer body by heeding his inner conscience. The Germans could never imprison his immaterial spirit if he followed the truest thoughts and desires of his soul.

He once again voiced this sense of personal freedom through a diatribe leveled against his captors and entitled *Signora Germania*. For Guareschi, the hardships his German guards imposed on him did not mean defeat. Rather, they helped him to undergo

a conversion of self and to discover the priceless gift of his own ability to think and reason for himself, a gift he saw as divine:

> Signora Germania, tu mi hai messo tra i reticolati, e fai la guardia perché io non esca.
>
> È inutile, signora Germania: io non esco, ma entra chi vuole. Entrano i miei affetti, entrano i miei ricordi.
>
> E questo è niente ancora, signora Germania: perché entra anche il buon Dio e mi insegna tutte le cose proibite dai tuoi regolamenti.
>
> Signora Germania, tu ti inquieti con me, ma è inutile. Perché il giorno in cui, presa dall'ira, farai baccano con qualcuna delle tue mille macchine e mi distenderai sulla terra, vedrai che dal mio corpo immobile si alzerà un altro me stesso, più bello del primo. E non potrai mettergli un piastrino al collo perché volerà via, oltre il reticolato, e chi s'è visto s'è visto.
>
> L'uomo è fatto così, signora Germania: di fuori è una faccenda molto facile da comandare, ma dentro ce n'è un altro e lo comanda soltanto il Padre Eterno.
>
> E questa è la fregatura per te, signora Germania. (*Diario Clandestino* 41)

Guareschi also came to realize that he had to survive by using humor:

> L'umorista, vittima oggi d'un grave incidente guarda ad esso serenamente evitando di reputarlo "cataclisma" come fa l'uomo privo di senso umoristico, e trova oggi stesso il lato divertente della vicenda [. . .]. Umorista è chi sa retrodatare le sue azioni, e le sue sensazioni. (64)

If he and his fellow prisoners could assign positive meaning to events in the present, they would not be subjected to interpretations shaped by others in the future.

Guareschi's reflections strikingly parallel what Austrian psychotherapist Viktor Frankl came to understand at Auschwitz — that the one inviolate freedom the Nazis could never take away from him was his own ability to decide what life's events meant

and how to choose his own reaction to them.[5] Infused with this same emotional charge for his supreme freedom, Guareschi implored his fellow inmates to refrain from blindly following the whims of the masses when they returned to Italy after the war:

> La verità non si insegna; bisogna scoprirla, conquistarla. Pensare, farsi una coscienza. Non cercare uno che pensi per voi, che vi insegni come dovete essere liberi. [...] Strapparsi dalla massa, dal pensiero collettivo [...] ritrovare in se stessi l'individuo, la coscienza personale. Impostare il problema morale.
>
> Domani, appena toccherete col piede la vostra terra, troverete uno che vi insegnerà la verità, poi un secondo che vorrà insegnarvela, poi un quarto, un quinto che vorranno tutti insegnarvi la verità in termini diversi, spesso contrastanti.
>
> Bisogna prepararsi qui, "liberarsi" qui in prigionia, per non rimanere prigionieri del primo che v'aspetta alla stazione, o del secondo o del terzo.
>
> Ma passare ogni parola loro al vaglio della propria coscienza e dalle individuate falsità d'ognuno, scoprire la verità. (*Diario Clandestino* 182-83)

German imprisonment, lived as a conversion experience, thus imparted to Guareschi a solid understanding that one's personal conscience should always have more weight than any other value, cultural movement, or injunction proposed by others or the masses.[6]

After the war, Guareschi witnessed backstabbing, political jockeying, underhanded plays for power and emotional debate: all aimed at capturing votes. Tumultuous civic events marked the Italian *dopoguerra*; and, as the editor of the weekly satirical newspaper *Candido*, Guareschi reported on the inflammatory accusations that flew back and forth between the political Right and Left. Time and time again, he lambasted political leaders who failed to understand how their words curtailed the possibility for lasting social peace and justice in Italy.[7] In addition, as old editions of *Candido* indicate, he bravely broke a form of journalistic *omertà* in reporting political murders in areas where the Communists had greater authority, especially in Guareschi's home region of the Emilia-Romagna.

In all of his writings, Guareschi continued to accentuate his central message — that

readers needed utmost to heed their individual conscience in order to protect themselves against mass political movements. He held that these collective demonstrations and group philosophies fostered hate and discord. For example, in *Italia provvisoria*, an album of his own political musings interspersed with newspaper clippings and photos, he wrote an essay entitled “Signore e signori,” that addressed how slogans and rabble-rousing rhetoric could enamor people who did not think for themselves:

> Cominciamo col distruggere la parte peggiore di noi stessi: quella che pascola nei prati della retorica e si ubriaca di frasi fatte, di aggettivi altisonanti, di fedi inconcusse, di dogmi politici, di imprescindibili destini.
>
> Liberiamoci di quella parte peggiore di noi stessi che è in agguato dentro ciascuno di noi e aspetta una squilla, un inno, uno sventolar di bandiera per levarsi la giacca, rimboccarsi le maniche e fare la nuova storia dell'Italia [. . .].
>
> Liberiamoci della parte peggiore di noi stessi: guardiamoci allo specchio e ridiamo della nostra tracotanza, del nostro barocco messicanismo, della nostra retorica.
>
> Guardiamoci allo specchio dell'umorismo. Così come posso fare io, cittadino niente che — quando mi specchio e vedo sul mio viso un truce cipiglio – scuoto il capo sorridendo e dico: "Giovannino, quanto sei fesso!" (*Italia provvisoria* 44-45)

As with several of his discourses in the Lager, here too Guareschi issues the call to follow one’s inner voice rather than political dogma.

As an editor, Guareschi never shied from condemning political corruption and incongruity, following his conscience with such zeal that he sometimes got into trouble. In 1954, Guareschi published two facsimiles of letters in *Candido*. They were dated March 1944, one written in long hand, the other typed, and supposedly former Prime Minister Alcide De Gasperi had composed and sent them to an English Lieutenant Colonel based in Salerno. Presenting a Vatican letterhead with De Gasperi’s signature, they requested that the Allies bomb Rome. Guareschi deplored De Gasperi’s maneuver, not because his letters invited destruction upon the Italian people, but because the

statesman had purportedly passed himself off as a Vatican representative, taking advantage of his status as a mere guest of the papal state while trying to avoid capture by the Germans. In Guareschi's opinion, De Gasperi was trying to shore up his visibility among the Allies in order to have a more important role in political affairs after the war ("Al resistente" 8).

De Gasperi sued Guareschi for defamation of character and won the case. A Milan tribunal sentenced Guareschi to serve a year in prison.[8] In a Socratic gesture, Guareschi refused to file an appeal because the Court never proved definitively that the letters were forgeries. His conscience was clear, and since he believed that he had done no wrong, he could not accept the verdict. In *Candido*, he heroically defended his position in spiritual terms:

> Nel tempo in cui tutti i responsabili cercano affannosamente di spersonalizzare le proprie azioni e di nascondere la faccia dentro il bandierone dei Partiti per scaricare sui Partiti le singole responsabilità, io continuerò a mostrare la faccia che Dio mi ha assegnato.
>
> Quel Dio che, al momento opportuno, non giudicherà i Partiti e le azioni del Partito, ma ciascun uomo e le azioni e i pensieri di ciascun uomo.
>
> Quel Dio che, assegnando a ogni uomo una coscienza e una personalità, è decisamente nemico di ogni forma di collettivismo che tenda a sostituire la coscienza personale con la coscienza collettiva.
>
> No, non termino dicendo: Dio è con me. Concludo esprimendo l'ardente speranza di essere io con Dio. ("La fine dell'anno" 7)

Had Guareschi sought an appeal, De Gasperi would probably have withdrawn his suit, not wanting the case to linger in the Court of Appeal. At that point, Guareschi could have retained his freedom as a private citizen and remained in control of *Candido*. Instead, he spent the next fourteen months in a Parma prison.[9] In opting for captivity, Guareschi wrote an editorial to his loyal readers and attempted to explain why he did not seek an appeal:

> No, niente Appello. La mia dignità di uomo, di cittadino e di giornalista libero è faccenda mia personale e, in questo caso, accetto soltanto il consiglio della mia coscienza.
>
> Riprenderò la mia vecchia e sbudellata sacca di prigioniero volontario e mi avvierò tranquillo e sereno in quest'altro Lager.
>
> Ritroverò il vecchio Giovannino fatto d'aria e di sogni e riprenderò, assieme a lui, il viaggio incominciato nel 1943 e interrotto nel 1945.
>
> Niente di teatrale, niente di drammatico. Tutto semplice e naturale.
>
> Per rimanere liberi bisogna, a un bel momento, prendere senza esitare la via della prigione. (“Il Ta-pum” 16)

Two aspects of this affirmation are important. First, Guareschi relies on his personal lore of the prisoner-of-war camp as a font of strength, a theme he echoed in his prison notebook: "Sento che sto per giungere a una svolta decisiva della mia vita: fra qualche mese ritroverò il clima favoloso del Lager. […] Ho bisogno di ritrovarmi completamente solo con me stesso. Devo troncare ogni legame col mondo esterno" (Quaderno n.p.).[10] Second, he again expresses the embodiment of his conscience as a doubling of himself. He wishes to come face-to-face with that part of himself which represents the essence of his inviolate and free conscience.

In a Parma prison, just as it was in the German lagers, that part of himself kept intimate company with his other self. A year and a half later, for example, when he was released from prison, he published one such dialogue he had with his other self that embodies his conscience:

> Ogni tanto io mi ritrovo con l'altro me stesso e, stavolta, il Giovannino fatto d'aria è ad aspettarmi dentro lo stanzino del bagno. [...]
>
> Il Giovannino fatto d'aria mi guarda con occhio pieno di malinconia.
>
> "Questo è dunque il risultato di quattrocentonove giorni di carcere? A cosa ti sono servite queste lunghe ore di silenzio, di meditazione e di clausura se tu, partendo, eri d'accordo almeno con te stesso, e ora non sei più d'accordo neppure con te stesso?

> "Amico" rispondo "sono più che mai d'accordo con me stesso perché io mi sono sempre battuto contro la coscienza collettiva e per il trionfo della coscienza personale. E, dopo quattrocentonove giorni di lotta, la mia coscienza personale trionfa e ti parla senza alcun ritegno." ("La Signora Coscienza" 6-7)

The conversion experience as a German prisoner that split him in two and made him aware of his freedom, continued to hold sway ten years later.

Guareschi's self-reflections during his two imprisonments detail his awareness of the sacrality of conscience. By understanding this intimate aspect of his personality, we may now turn our attention to analyze the fundamental spirit that he infused in his *Mondo piccolo*.

2. The Conscience Issues a Call to Conversion: Don Camillo and Peppone Respond

Guareschi himself described the essential message he meant to impart in *Mondo piccolo* in a letter to his publisher Angelo Rizzoli:

> La tesi dei racconti di *Mondo piccolo* è di far risaltare la differenza sostanziale che esiste tra la "massa comunista" e l'"apparato comunista". Indurre cioè l'uomo della massa a ragionare col suo cervello e con la sua coscienza: fargli cioè capire che le direttive possono essere seguite soltanto fino a quando esse non vadano a ledere quelli che sono universalmente conosciuti come sani e onesti principi. [...]
>
> Trasformare cioè la obbedienza c*ieca*, *pronta* e *assoluta* in obbedienza *ragionata*. Si chiede che essi componenti della massa, prima di obbedire a un ordine del Partito, obbediscano agli imperativi della loro coscienza. ("Letter to Angelo Rizzoli" n.p.)

Essentially, he continued to say that "lo scopo di *Mondo piccolo* (e delle altre rubriche) è quello di cavar fuori dalla massa irragionevole e anonima l'individuo, che — se ha un fondamento buono, come ha in realtà la gente del nostro popolo — è sempre

ragionevole" ("Letter to Angelo Rizzoli" n.p.).

The centrality of conscience as a theme in *Mondo piccolo* meant so much to Guareschi, in fact, that he almost got into legal battles over the cinematic interpretations of his creation because the directors had so adulterated his message. Guareschi simply abhorred the five films because they made a sham of his focus on conscience. Anyone who knows Guareschi only through the popularity of his films has no way to comprehend what he thought of one's conscience.[11] In reading the stories, however, we can fully grasp Guareschi's notion of conscience and appreciate how his insight fell closely in line with the orthodoxy.

The Church from earliest times has always recognized the central role conscience has for helping humans attain grace.[12] Since humans, through the presence of the Holy Spirit, carry God's divine light within them, each person must follow the dictates of his or her heart in making moral decisions. At the same time, of course, the Church calls its faithful to have an informed conscience based on two-thousand years of its own wealth of wisdom expressed through saints, Doctors of the Church, papal bulls, encyclicals, edicts, theological study of the Bible, sermons, and traditions. In the end, however, personal conscience, in the words of John Henry Cardinal Newman, "is the messenger of him, who, both in nature and in grace, speaks to us behind a veil, and teaches and rules by his representatives. Conscience is the aboriginal Vicar of Christ" (129). An informed conscience opens one to receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit and to move closely to God (*Catechism* 438-42).

In this light, Guareschi knew that the individual had absolute primacy in a society subjected to the allure of political messages that could enthrall the masses. Having lived through the tragic experience of Italian Fascism, Guareschi particularly detested Communism because it too robbed individuals of their personal freedom to think conscientiously for themselves.[13] In his introduction to the first collection of *Mondo piccolo* stories, Guareschi explicitly states that Christ's voice represents his own conscience:

> Ebbene, qui occorre spiegarsi: se i preti si sentono offesi per via di don Camillo, padronissimi di rompermi un candelotto in testa; se i comunisti si sentono offesi

> per via di Peppone, padronissimi di rompermi una stanga sulla schiena. Ma se qualcun altro si sente offeso per via dei discorsi del Cristo, niente da fare; perché chi parla nelle mie storie non è il Cristo, ma *il mio Cristo*: cioè la voce della mia coscienza. (*Don Camillo* 33)

Together with Peppone and Don Camillo, the talking crucifix is present in one hundred fifty-four of the tales; through dialogue with Don Camillo, Jesus issues call to readers to think for themselves.

Once in "Il tesoro," for example, Don Camillo approaches the crucifix to help resolve a riddle, but Christ tells him: "Perché chiedere a Dio quale sia la verità quando la verità è dentro di te? Cercala, don Camillo" (*Tutto don Camillo* 34). Here we find an echo of the Gospel message that "the Kingdom of Heaven is among you" [Luke 17.21] — in other words, that the divine spark within, manifested in the human capacity to reason, judge, and love, will through conscience illuminate one's will in moral choice. By following conscience, the voice of the truest self, humans are then often brought to the next step of forgiveness and conversion. The process opens them to a moment of grace, love, and forgiveness.

Christ constantly challenges Don Camillo to be absolutely honest with himself, to shun public opinion, to put political differences aside, and to cater to his Communist rival. For example, in the tale "Peppone marca visita," Don Camillo, speaking to the crucifix, relates how he and the townspeople revel in Peppone's bankruptcy, convinced that his problems stem from his lack of respect for the Church. Christ rebukes him:

> "E cosa direbbe tutta la brava gente del paese, invece, se gli affari di Peppone fossero andati bene? Che ciò è accaduto perché ha rifiutato la benedizione della casa?"
>
> Don Camillo allargò le braccia:
>
> "Gesù: *relata refero* . . . La gente . . ."
>
> "La gente? Cosa significa 'la gente'? In Paradiso la gente non entrerà mai perché Dio giudica ciascuno secondo i suoi meriti e le sue colpe e non esistono meriti o colpe di massa. Non esistono i peccati di comitiva, ma solo quelli

> personali. Non esistono anime collettive. Ognuno nasce e muore per conto proprio e Dio considera gli uomini uno per uno e non gregge per gregge. Guai a chi rinuncia alla sua coscienza personale per partecipare a una coscienza e a una responsabilità collettiva."
>
> Don Camillo abbassò il capo:
>
> "Gesù, l'opinione pubblica ha un valore . . ."
>
> "Lo so: fu l'opinione pubblica a inchiodarmi sulla croce." (*Tutto don Camillo* 1020-21)

With Jesus's direction, Don Camillo is obliged to follow the better angel of his soul and interact in faith, hope, and love with both friend and foe.

In this spirit, Christ's voice of conscience most often has a didactic function, recalling to Don Camillo that love for his fellow human is love for God.[14] For instance, in the story "Il commissario" a package of food arrives for the townsfolk from the bounty of the Marshall Plan. Don Camillo smugly doles out parcels of food, pleased at the political ramifications: American generosity trumps Communism. Some of Peppone's lackeys refuse to take a package from Don Camillo, hoping to show that they are above receiving any help, although in reality they are quite hungry. Don Camillo confides in the crucifix above the main altar:

> "Gesù," disse "vedete che roba?"
>
> "Vedo, don Camillo. E tutto ciò è molto commovente, perché è povera gente che ha bisogno come gli altri, ma obbedisce più ai suoi capi che alla sua fame. E così toglie a don Camillo la soddisfazione di umiliarla coi suoi sarcasmi."
>
> Don Camillo abbassò il capo.
>
> "Carità cristiana non significa dare il superfluo al bisognoso, ma dividere il necessario col bisognoso. San Martino divise il suo mantello col poverello che tremava per il freddo: questa è carità cristiana. E anche quando dividi il tuo unico pane con l'affamato, tu non devi gettarglielo come si getta un osso a un cane. Bisogna dare con umiltà: ringraziare l'affamato di averti concesso di dividere con lui la sua fame. Tu oggi hai fatto soltanto della beneficenza e neppure il superfluo

> tuo, ma il superfluo degli altri hai distribuito ai bisognosi, e non c'è stato nessun merito nella tua azione. Eppure non eri umilissimo come avresti dovuto essere, ma il tuo cuore era pieno di veleno." (254-55)

The harsh words awaken Don Camillo' s conscience. He shakes his head in dismay at his own attitude and replies: "Gesù [. . .] fate che quei disgraziati vengano. Io non dirò loro niente. E non avrei detto loro niente neppure se fossero venuti prima. Lo so che Voi mi avreste illuminato" (255).

In "Uomini e bestie," Christ calls Don Camillo to refrain from violence. Peppone has called an agricultural strike, and workers have abandoned a farm. Its animals start to go hungry and sick, and an unattended cow is about to give birth. Don Camillo cannot stand this mistreatment and does his best to keep from exploding. The following exchange demonstrates well Guareschi's capacity to illustrate the reasoning process of one person struggling to honor the true voice of conscience:

> "Gesù," disse al Cristo Crocifisso, "tenetemi o faccio la marcia su Roma!"
>
> "Calmati, Don Camillo," lo ammonì dolcemente il Cristo. "Con la violenza non si può ottenere niente. Bisogna calmare la gente col ragionamento, non esasperarla con atti di violenza."
>
> "Giusto," sospirò don Camillo. "Bisogna indurre la gente a ragionare. Peccato però che, mentre si induce la gente a ragionare, le vacche crepino di fame."
>
> Il Cristo sorrise.
>
> "Se, usando la violenza la quale chiama la violenza, riusciamo a salvare cento bestie, ma perdiamo un uomo: e se, usando la persuasione, perdiamo cento bestie ma evitiamo la perdita di quell'uomo, secondo te cosa è meglio? La violenza o la persuasione?"
>
> Don Camillo, che non riusciva a rinunciare all'idea di fare la marcia su Roma tanto era indignato, scosse il capo.
>
> "Voi, Gesù, mi spostate i termini: qui non è questione di cento bestie! Qui si tratta di patrimonio pubblico. E la morte di cento bestie non rappresenta

> semplicemente un danno per quella testa di ghisa del Pasotti [the owner of the farm who refused to bargain with Peppone], rappresenta un danno per tutti, buoni e cattivi. E può avere ripercussioni tali da inasprire ancor più dissidi esistenti e creare un conflitto nel quale invece di uno scappano fuori venti morti."
>
> Il Cristo non era d'accordo:
>
> "Se col ragionamento eviti il morto oggi, perché col ragionamento non potresti evitare i morti domani? Don Camillo, hai perso la tua fede?" (85)

Later, Don Camillo convinces Peppone to rescue the dying cows, and the strike soon comes to an end. In the end, therefore, Don Camillo has listened to that divine voice which calls him to reason, love, and fogive, and he helps put an end to the strike with peaceful means.

Peppone also serves as an ethical, proper example of heeding conscience, an important aspect of *Mondo piccolo* worth noting, for, although Don Camillo and Peppone are separate characters, they actually share one and the same voice. As Guareschi phrases it, they are essentially the front and back of the same medal.[15] Peppone may not hear Christ's voice, but he certainly comes around time and time again to abide by his conscience; and, when he cannot quite get to the heart of a matter, his adversary is there to help him. In Guareschi's words: "E alla fine quando Peppone non riesce ad arrivarci da solo perché occorre un ragionamento troppo sottile o perché è eccitato dalla polemica politica, don Camillo diventa, nei riguardi di Peppone, il portavoce di Cristo e quindi del ragionamento e della coscienza" ("Lettera a Angelo Rizzoli" 1950).

The resolution of conflict in *Mondo piccolo* often occurs precisely because Peppone refuses to follow the party line and chooses instead to heed his own common sense. For example, in "La maestra vecchia," the town's revered grammar school teacher, "la maestra Cristina," is on her deathbed, and she summons both Don Camillo and Peppone to her side. When Peppone arrives, she pardons him for being such an intractable student years before and recognizes that he has a good heart: "Io ti conosco e so che in fondo non sei cattivo: pregherò Dio che ti perdoni i tuoi delitti grossi." Then, after accusing Peppone and his fellow Communists of having sent the King into exile, she expresses her final wishes: "Voglio un funerale senza musica perché non è una cosa seria. [. . .] e sulla cassa

voglio la bandiera. [. . .] La mia bandiera, con lo stemma." After imparting a final blessing — "Dio ti benedica anche se sei bolscevico, ragazzo mio" (121) — she closes her eyes and dies.

Peppone takes Cristina's wish seriously and discusses the matter in a meeting with Don Camillo and all the different representatives of the local parties. After all, it had become illegal to use the royal flag with the Savoian coat of arms at public functions, and, as the Communist mayor of the town Peppone faces a tough decision. Once he has heard each political representative explain why he opposes the request, Peppone shares his own thoughts: as a public dignitary who upholds the law, and he recognizes that he must oppose the idea that she be buried with the tricolor and coat of arms. But, he knows that honoring her request is the best moral option:

> Peppone si raschiò un poco in gola e prese la parola.
>
> "In qualità di sindaco", disse "vi ringrazio per la vostra collaborazione, e come sindaco approvo il vostro parere di evitare la bandiera richiesta dalla defunta. Però, siccome in questo paese non comanda il sindaco ma comandano i comunisti, come capo dei comunisti vi dico che me ne infischio del vostro parere, e domani la signora Cristina andrà al cimitero con la bandiera che vuole lei perché io rispetto più lei morta che voi tutti vivi, e se qualcuno ha qualcosa da obiettare lo faccio volare giù dalla finestra! Il signor prete ha qualcosa da dire?"
>
> "Cedo alla violenza" rispose allargando le braccia don Camillo ed era rientrato nella grazia di Dio. (121)

The following day the funeral unfolds, just as la signora Cristina had wanted it: the flag draped over her coffin carried the royal coat of arms.

Another story communicates an ironically humorous aspect of both Don Camillo and Peppone, who follow their conscience when voting. In "Fantasma con cappello verde" Peppone runs for re-election and pulls off an upset at the last moment, much to the apparent chagrin of Don Camillo. In thanksgiving, Peppone stops by the church to light a candle. Don Camillo, who has secretly observed Peppone, erupts at the gesture, believing his opponent's action to be blasphemous:

> "Gesù", disse don Camillo. "Voi l'avete visto e udito: egli ha bestemmiato qui, al Vostro cospetto."
>
> Il Cristo sorrise.
>
> "Don Camillo", disse con dolcezza. "Don Camillo, l'importante è aver fede in Dio, credere in Dio. Credere in un Essere Superiore che tutto ha creato e tutto amministra e che alla fine punirà i cattivi e premierà i buoni. Non essere troppo severo verso Peppone: peggio chi ha votato contro i 'rossi' e non crede in Dio che chi ha votato per i 'rossi' ma crede in Dio. La massima offesa che si può fare a Dio è non credere in Dio. La fede illumina e un giorno ogni ombra, anche la più fitta, scomparirà dall'animo di chi oggi ha la mente confusa. Don Camillo: non vede perché è senza occhi colui che non ha la fede. Non vede neppure chi ha gli occhi bendati, ma può vedere, e un giorno la benda cadrà dai suoi occhi e i suoi occhi conosceranno la luce. Non sente chi non ha orecchi né può sentire: e non sente neppure chi ha le orecchie chiuse dalla cera, ma può sentire, e quando la cera si scioglierà, egli udrà la voce di Dio."
>
> "Gesù", implorò, "egli ha bestemmiato venendoVi a ringraziare per avere aiutato la causa dei Vostri nemici! Di coloro che Vi negano."
>
> "Don Camillo, egli è venuto a ringraziare Dio, non ha ringraziato il capo del suo partito. E non ha pregato il capo del suo partito di farlo vincere: ha pregato Dio. Egli non nega Dio: egli, anzi, riconosce la potenza di Dio. Un giorno comprenderà tutto quello che oggi non comprende perché non conosce la verità. Non per tutti è facile il cammino che conduce alla verità." (575)

Jesus then proceeds to tell Don Camillo that Peppone actually did not vote for his own Communist party, but marked his ballot for the Christian Democrats. At that point Don Camillo admits that he himself voted for Peppone: "[. . .] io . . . io ho votato per lui. Io ho commesso questo sacrilegio. . . . Ma io non so come questa orribile cosa sia successo'" (576). And Jesus, knowing very well that Don Camillo voted according to his conscience, and that his priest in reality knows it too, playfully scolds him: "Io sì don Camillo [. . .]. L'amore per il tuo prossimo ha fatto tacere il tuo ragionamento. Che Dio ti

perdoni, don Camillo" (576).

The reliance on listening to conscience blurs the lines of separation and dissent. Political differences may exist, but what counts is Christian unity. Don Camillo and Peppone are heated rivals, but whenever either is truly in need, and especially when one is sick, the other comes to his aid as a Good Samaritan. In essence, each truly cares for the other.

In "Ful pitturato di rosso," Don Camillo is sick, and his condition grows even worse when someone plays a practical joke on him by painting red the posteriore of his dog. Ful. Peppone, the author of the trick, repents; he explains what he has done to the bishop and then serves as an altar boy at the Mass celebrated for Don Camillo's health. After the service, he arrives at the emergency room and discovers that Don Camillo has recovered.

In "Il compagno Gramigna," Peppone has had trouble breathing and goes for an x-ray. The results show that he has lung damage and must go to a sanitarium. According to the doctor, he has only two months to live. Soon afterwards, Peppone stops by the rectory to visit with Don Camillo before leaving to undertake his cure. They share light banter: Peppone does not want Don Camillo to see him genuflect or to hear his confession. When Peppone leaves for his treatment, Don Camillo realizes just how close he feels to his friend: "Allora don Camillo incominciò a trovare una crescente difficoltà a respirare e gli parve che, assieme a Peppone, se ne fosse andato un pezzo del suo cuore" (1187). Fortunately, when he arrives at the sanatorium, Peppone learns that he has been the victim of a providential misunderstanding. The x-ray the doctor had evaluated actually belonged to another man. Peppone is given a clean bill of health, and Don Camillo's prayers for Peppone have been answered.

These tales reveal that the sickness of one protagonist helps to awaken the conscience of the other so as to consider the value of their friendship. Both Peppone and Don Camillo realize how vitally important one is to the other: politically they are disparate, and at times animated opponents, but spiritually they are linked by their human, ultimately sacred, goodness. Similarly, any number of other material and immaterial instruments abound in these tales that also awaken the individual conscience, humankind's most sacred recepticle, to which we now turn our analysis.

3. The Sacramental Principle and Conscience

In *Mondo piccolo*, objects and experiences as signs of God's grace, quite often function to call Peppone, Don Camillo, and, other characters to examine their souls and seek redemption. For example, church bells, trees, bicycles, religious memorabilia, or animals can all elicit a desire to repent and move closer to God. This particular feature reveals how Guareschi instilled *Mondo piccolo* with a sacramental focus, an experience central to much Christian writing.

Since God created and loves all things, everything in this world intrinsically has the power to lead one to contemplate God's presence on earth. A sacramental principle under girds everything and speaks to much more than just the seven sacraments which sanctify specific moments of life. Thus, not only through the seven sacraments do Christians know that God is present; equally importantly everything — events, objects, experiences — is empowered to connect the believers with God. As Mary R. Reichardt puts it in *Exploring Catholic Literature*: "This vital Catholic sense of Jesus dwelling with us on earth, animating and transforming everything that exists, and the consequent sacramentality of all creation, permeates Catholic literature" (6). [16]

In this light, Don Camillo and Peppone live in a profoundly sacramental world. Of course, as we have seen, the most obvious sacramental object in *Mondo piccolo* is the crucifix above the main altar that converses with Don Camillo. When taken down and used by Don Camillo in a procession to bless the waters of the Po river, even Peppone's men bow their head in prayer; they know that only God's grace can keep the river from overflowing. They pin their hopes on the powerful symbol of Jesus on the Cross.

Similarly, other objects and experiences lead characters to forgiveness and conversion. For example, in the tale "Notturno con campane," Biondo, a former partisan, comes to Don Camillo, and at gunpoint he demands that he be absolved for having robbed and assassinated a political enemy shortly after the war. Even with the amnesty in place, Biondo's conscience still torments him for his action. But, as Don Camillo correctly surmises, Biondo has not truly repented for his homicide:

> "Pentirmi? Pentirmi di aver fatto fuori quello là? Mi dispiace di averne

> fatto fuori uno solo!"
>
> "È un ramo nel quale sono completamente incompetente. D'altra parte, se la tua coscienza ti dice che hai fatto bene, tu sei a posto" disse don Camillo aprendo un libro e mettendolo davanti al Biondo. "Vedi, noi abbiamo dei regolamenti molto precisi senza esclusione per il movente politico. Quinto non ammazzare. Settimo non rubare." (*Tutto don Camillo* 83)

Their discourse grows more frenzied, and Biondo eventually loses his patience. He chambers a round in his pistol and pulls the trigger, aiming directly at Don Camillo.

Miraculously, the gun misfires. In protecting himself, Don Camillo then lets Biondo have it, hitting him squarely on the jaw, and when Biondo runs away, Don Camillo bolts up the bell tower as fast as possible. Guareschi's description and explanation of the outcome read fast:

> Poi si buttò sul campanile e, alle undici di notte, scampanò a festa per venti minuti. E tutti dissero che don Camillo era diventato matto: tutti meno il Cristo dell'altare che scosse il capo sorridendo, e il Biondo che, correndo attraverso i campi come pazzo, era arrivato in riva al fiume e stava per buttarsi nell'acqua nera; ma il suon delle campane lo raggiunse e lo fermò.
>
> E il Biondo tornò indietro perché aveva udito come una voce nuova per lui. E questo fu il vero miracolo perché una pistola che fa cilecca è un fatto di questo mondo, ma la faccenda di un prete che si mette a scampanare a festa alle undici di notte è roba davvero dell'altro mondo. (84)

With these words, our attention may focus on Don Camillo, who rejoices that his life has been spared. But, what really occurs is an absolution that leads to Biondo's moment of grace and redemption. Don Camillo intuits correctly that Biondo has hit rock bottom in attempting to destroy another life, his own, and has not yet realized that he has been spared this second, most mortal wound of the soul. Don Camillo rings the bells not for himself as a sign of thanksgiving but for Biondo as a call to seek forgiveness. In essence, by ringing the bells, he forgives Biondo, and their peal, embodying God's grace, reaches

Biondo in the nick of time. Don Camillo's action is truly divine — "roba davvero dell'altro mondo" — as is the outcome, for through grace Biondo comes to his senses. As readers, we have every right to conclude that Biondo has also truly repented for his first mortal sin. The bells serve as the conduit of God's saving grace. They reveal His presence among humankind.

Another story also illustrates the sacramental principle as it relates to conscience. In "Il sangue non è acqua" we again have a central moment of repentance. A narrative gem, it is perhaps one of Guareschi's most compelling tales.

For years *il Bacchi*, a landowner, has sought to find a vein of water on his property but to no avail: "[. . .] per quanto avesse seppellito soldi e tubi di ferro nella terra delle Ghiaie, d'acque non se n'era vista un goccio" (925). One day he hears of a famous dowser (*rabdomante*) who had always been able to find water where no one else could. *Il Bacchi* travels to Rome and, after much imploring, convinces the dowser to come to Emilia. He arrives a week later, cuts the correct length of willow branch for his divining rod, and sets immediately to work.

After hours and hours of searching, on the very limits of *il Bacchi's* property he finds something near a lone elm tree: "Il rametto di salice, di cui teneva strette fra le mani le estremità, pareva diventato vivo e s'era messo a girare" (927). The dowser marks his spot and repeats his steps from different directions only to come back to the exact spot: "'Qui l'acqua c'è', disse il professore, 'C'è e non molto profonda'" (927). Peppone, who is there to assist *il Bacchi*, is incredulous. Other dowsers have passed over the area and found nothing. But, as the dowser explains, the water does not come from a vein but from some other source. Peppone throws his arms up in disbelief: "Allora significa che l'acqua non proviene dalla terra ma dallo Spirito Santo. Perché, se venisse dalla terra, da qualche vena dovrebbe pure arrivare" (928). His words prove intriguing, for as events soon unfold, Peppone's reference to the Holy Spirit could not be more appropriate.

The laborers *il Bacchi* has hired begin to dig, but soon a commanding voice booms out: "'Nessuno si muova e nessuno tocchi niente finché non è arrivato il maresciallo' ordinò con voce tonante Peppone" (929). When the marshal and the doctor arrive, they jump into the hole to examine a body:

> "Un mucchietto d'ossa con un po' di stracci grigioverdi" spiegò il maresciallo a Peppone e a don Camillo, ritornando su dalla buca.
>
> "Foro alla nuca" aggiunse il medico sopraggiungendo. "Roba del 1945, probabilmente."
>
> "Politica!" commentò don Camillo.
>
> "Guerra!" replicò a denti stretti Peppone. (929)

The sheriff indicates that besides the bones, he finds an identification tag at the end of a gold chain that reveals a name: "Cesare Deppi" spiegò. "Chi sa mai di dov'è!" (929).

At this point, the famed dowser from Rome, who has stood silently observing all these events, speaks up:

> "Borgodeste" disse la voce del professore [the *rabdomante*]. E tutti volsero gli occhi verso di lui.
>
> "Scusi, come fa a saperlo?" balbettò il maresciallo.
>
> Il professore allargò le braccia e scosse malinconicamente il capo.
>
> "Non ho dimenticato le generalità di mio figlio" rispose. "Tanto più che era figlio unico. Io stavo in guerra e al principio del 1945 il ragazzo scappò di casa per arruolarsi. Non se n'è più saputo niente. L'avevano mandato al Nord e non è più tornato. Sua madre lo aspetta ancora."

The news stuns everyone.

Two days later, before the father returns to Rome, he explains that even though he had felt the presence of his lost son so strongly a few meters below him, water was still located at that very spot, about two hundred meters in depth: "Chi ha fede la trova" (930).

Il Bacchi has faith, and renews his search:

> [...] tutti dissero che era un pazzo scatenato quando incominciò a far conficcare tubi nella terra, vicino all'olmo.
>
> Aveva fede e poi capiva che era necessario trovare l'acqua: non per l'irrigazione, ma per qualcosa d'altro che egli non riusciva a spiegarsi ma che era

> molto importante.
>
> L'acqua fu trovata a centonovanta metri e, quando il Bacchi vide uscire quel torrente tumultuoso dal tubo da venti centimetri di diametro, gli venne la febbre e dovette mettersi a letto. (930)

Ten days later, *il Bacchi* inaugurates his long-desired well, and both the dowser and his wife come up from Rome for the ceremony. *Il Bacchi* tells the small gathering: "Ecco l'acqua che purifica tutto e lava la terra dalle macchie di sangue e, assieme alle macchie di sangue della terra, va via l'odio dagli anni. Amen" (931). After Don Camillo blesses the water, everyone dips their hands in it to sign themselves.

Some time later, Don Camillo returns to the well to reflect on all that has happened. He finds that one of Peppone's men, who remains nameless, is seated nearby, staring at the water, immobile and mesmerized. Setting up the scene, Guareschi directly addresses his readers: "Voi non conoscete i pomeriggi d'agosto della Bassa. Là, in mezzo ai campi deserti, pieni di sole, ogni cosa sa di favola e, se il Demonio apparisse scarlatto e ghignante in mezzo a una piana di stoppia bruciata, sembrerebbe la cosa più naturale del mondo" (931).

The man Don Camillo has been monitoring begins to speak, insisting that what he observes is not water but blood. Don Camillo remains firm. It is water:

> "Sangue!" ripetè il giovanotto sempre a occhi bassi. "Sangue. Lo so ben io perché è il *suo* sangue . . ."
>
> "Acqua" sussurrò mite don Camillo.
>
> "Sangue!" ansimò il giovanotto guardando con orrore il canale gonfio d'acqua. "Il suo sangue. Lo so ben io che l'ho toccato quando quel sangue era ancora caldo . . . Ho eseguito un ordine . . . Credevamo che fosse una spia . . . Io sono a posto perché ho eseguito un ordine . . . Io ho sentito quello che ha detto suo padre . . . Ho visto quel che ha fatto sua madre qui . . . Sangue. Questa non è acqua, è sangue." (932)

Don Camillo remains by the young man's side to comfort him, inviting him to dip his

entire hand into the water and explaining: “Il Bacchi aveva ragione: l’acqua purifica, lava le macchie di sangue, cancella l’odio” (932).

The executioner cedes. He submerges his hand in the water, and then he breaks down and cries: “A un tratto gli occhi gli si riempirono di pianto e due lagrime gli scivolarono sulle guance e andarono a cadere nell’acqua” (932). He looks fearfully at Don Camillo, who reassures him: “Stai tranquillo [...] Dio soltanto sa quel che è successo. Se pure è successo qualcosa. [...] Acqua [...] Non sangue. Acqua benedetta” (932). Then, the man gets up and departs, leaving Don Camillo alone once again with his thoughts.

Several sacramental signs are at work in this tale, obviously for the believers. First, the willow branch used in divining performs a sacred function since it allows the dowser to discover his dead son’s body. Second, the identification tag is also blessed because it reveals the identity of the son to his father. Third, the pipes and equipment used in constructing the well are sacred because they allow the water, God’s gift, to flow. Mainly, however, and most especially, water, a rich and traditional symbol of redemption, resides at the center of this tale. And *il Bacchi* is the first to sense that more than watering his land, the water will serve primarily to purify many people’s souls and redeem hatred.

Don Camillo also understands the sacrality of the water and sees how it calls the murderer to repent; in fact when the murderer begins to cry, he absolves him of his sin, having witnessed how he washed himself anew with the newly discovered water. Tears of sadness intimately unite with the saving waters of grace.

On one level, it may seem that the most amazing miracle in this tale is how *il Bacchi* just happens to invite the very father of the dead son to his property, and that the father actually discovers both his son and the water. But the real miracle in this tale exists at a much deeper level. More than these discoveries, the truest miracle is marked by how the water cleanses and frees the spirit of the man who shed the blood. By twisting the words of the tale’s title, Guareschi shows that water is not a dead man’s blood, and that it awakens the killer’s conscience to feel deep remorse for his sin, liberating him from hatred and leading him to a state of grace.

As “Notturno con campane” and “Il sangue non è acqua” so well illustrate, the sacramental principle is central to narrative action in *Mondo piccolo*. Time and again, the

stories' characters unsuspectingly find experiences and objects that serve as instruments of redemption that awaken the conscience: Don Camillo's cloak calls Peppone to see God's hand in saving his son's life; a dog's eerie and lonely howl beckons the townsfolk to contemplate the horror of political assassinations; a child's insistent glance jolts Peppone into forging a cast iron cross to put on top of the grave where the child's murdered father rests. Thus, material culture and simple actions in *Mondo piccolo* make God present in the characters' lives, summoning their conscience to overcome the spite they feel for themselves and others.

4. Conclusion

The theme of divine conscience animates the core of narrative action in *Mondo piccolo*. We can certainly appreciate how the tales exhibit other aspects of Christian spirituality: prayer, popular devotions, and the communion of saints.[17] More than these themes, the sacrality of conscience powerfully organizes the focus of narrative action in Guareschi's mythical world. Guareschi scholars have no better opportunity to comprehend the moral and spiritual formation of the author than through the study of Christ's voice, in and of itself a unique literary invention that seldom finds parallel in contemporary Italian popular literature. Scholars can defend the claim that Guareschi is one of Italy's most religious storytellers of the *Novecento*. Expressions of the sacramental principle, as it powerfully alludes to the message of conscience in the tales, can support this affirmation.

Guareschi came to understand the spiritual relevance of conscience through imprisonment, first in a German *Lager* and then later in Parma, where he inscribed and hung this motto on the wall of his prison cell: "Libertà è dovunque vive un uomo che si sente libero." Upon his return home in 1955 after having served his sentence, he changed those words slightly to stress further the importance of conscience: "Libertà è *soltanto* là dove vive un uomo che si sente libero" ("Lettere dal carcere" 6). As he explained to his readers in *Candido*, his sense of being physically restrained meant little since he honored the innately sacred and divine core of his own conscience.

The sacrality of human conscience comes through most clearly in "Giallo e Rosa". For weeks a stalker has been trying to kill Peppone, and one evening Peppone fires his

machine gun at him. Feeling remorse and regret, Peppone approaches Don Camillo and confesses his action. Instead of denouncing him, Don Camillo listens patiently, knowing that his friend is imprisoned with fear:

> Peppone sospirò ancora.
>
> "Mi sento come in galera" disse cupo.
>
> "C'è sempre una porta per scappare da ogni galera di questa terra" rispose don Camillo. "Le galere sono soltanto per il corpo. E il corpo conta poco." (*Tutto don Camillo* 225)

As Guareschi explains through Don Camillo, any prison may entrap the body, but a clean conscience that renounces hatred can set the spirit free. Guareschi's own familiarity with imprisonment is clearly evident in this exchange.

Guareschi knew that he would always be free, unburdened emotionally and unchained physically, if he followed God's voice within him: that sacred, divine presence embedded in every human that St. Augustine spoke of in virtually every page of his *Confessions*.[18] Guareschi understood that his conscience was the very core of his soul, a moral compass that indicated how he could move toward God in integrity with the self. The understanding of Guareschi's appreciation for the sacrality of conscience provides each reader with a most effective critical key to unlock the spiritual richness of *Mondo piccolo*.

Although he was not a theologian, Guareschi managed to capture a popular understanding of the sacred that is central to Christianity and still resides at the base of Italian culture in the twenty-first century. Through Don Camillo, Peppone and other characters, Guareschi spoke for a God who calls all deft humans to goodness through their inviolate consciences. We do well to appreciate Guareschi's contribution to *Novecento* Italian literature in this light.

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[1] A few paragraphs of this study have appeared in two of my previous studies: "Freedom of Imprisonment: Giovannino Guareschi and the Primacy of Conscience" *Italian Culture*, vol. 20, 1-2 (2001-2002): 67-78, and "Giovannino's Secret Weapon: The German Lager and Guareschi's Use of Reason as Humor," *Italian Quarterly*, nos. 153-154, Summer-Fall (2002): 39-53. A substantial portion of this essay will appear in *The Don Camillo Stories of Giovannino Guareschi: A Humorist Portrays the Sacred*, a book forthcoming with the University of Toronto Press.

[2] We have an example of Leftist disdain when, upon Guareschi's death in 1968, *L'Unità* reported that "è morto uno scrittore che non era mai nato" ("Guareschi è morto" 1).

[3] St. Augustine says in the first chapter of his *Confessions*, "'Vast are you Lord, and vast should be your praise' [. . .]. You prompt us yourself to find satisfaction in appraising you, since you made us tilted toward you, and our heart is unstable until stabilized in you" (3). In the spirit of St. Augustine's appraisal of how humans are inclined to seek a higher power, Guareschi held that one's conscience was sacred, the central core of a divine spark implanted in humans that drew them toward God. One's conscience was the portal through which a reality infinitely greater than human life revealed its presence.

[4] Germans captured Guareschi in Alessandria on 9 September 1943 after he had been recalled to active duty several months earlier. He refused to swear allegiance to the Third Reich and later to the Republic of Salò and spent the next twenty-one months interned in Germany and Poland, an experience that he shared with more than five thousand former Italian soldiers. After the war, Guareschi published many of his reflections of the experience in his *Diario clandestino* (1949). Forty years later his children published more of his writings in *Ritorno alla base* (1989), that also documents a return trip to Germany he undertook with his son Alberto in 1957, having also completed his sentence in Parma.

[5] Frankl's words in *Man's Search for Meaning* (1962) have become classic: "We who lived in the concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last human freedom — to choose one's attitude in any given circumstances, to choose one's own way" (86). Primo Levi also voiced an eloquent testimony to human dignity in being able to assign meaning to an event when in *Se questo è un uomo* (1958) he spoke of the necessity to refrain from letting the Nazis break his spirit: "Che siamo schiavi, privi di ogni diritto, esposti a ogni offesa, votati a morte quasi certa, ma che una facoltà ci è rimasta, e dobbiamo difenderla con ogni vigore perché è l'ultima: la facoltà di negare il nostro consenso. Dobbiamo quindi certamente lavarci la faccia senza sapone, nell'acqua sporca, e asciugarci nella giacca. Dobbiamo dare il nero alle scarpe, non perché così prescrive il regolamento, ma per dignità e per proprietà. Dobbiamo

camminare diritti, senza strascinare gli zoccoli, non già in omaggio alla disciplina prussiana, ma per restare vivi, per non cominciare a morire" (36).

[6] Guareschi describes the fundamental impact the *Lager* had upon him as a journalist in these terms: "La mia scuola di *giornalismo politico* io l'ho fatta in un *Lager*: e migliaia di degni galantuomini che hanno vissuto quei dolorosi giorni assieme a me possono testimoniare come il tenente Guareschi signor Giovannino abbia onorevolmente svolto la sua attività di *giornalista libero*, *onesto e sereno* dal primo all'ultimo giorno della sua permanenza nel *Lager*. Ho imparato, in quella dura scuola, come sia bello, come sia virile, come sia civile dire pubblicamente ciò che si pensa, specialmente quando ciò comporti un grave rischio. [...] Io ho fatto una severa scuola di *giornalismo politico* e sono ben convinto che un giornalista veramente libero come io sono deve sempre sostenere la causa che egli, in *piena coscienza*, ritenga giusta, *costi quel che costi*" (*Se ciascun* 20).

[7] Two excellent histories that focus on the political and social upheaval of the second *dopoguerra* include Ginsborg's *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics, 1943 – 1988* (1990) and Mammarella's *L'Italia contemporanea: 1943-1992* (1993).

[8] Gnocchi in *Giovannino Guareschi. Una storia italiana* provides an excellent study of the case, accusations, proceedings, and sentencing. Tritto's *Il destino di Giovannino Guareschi* offers another well-documented source.

[9] To the best of my knowledge, Guareschi is the only Italian journalist in the twentieth century to have served actual jail time for libel.

[10] Writing from prison for *Candido*, Guareschi also recalled his first imprisonment: "Ho ritrovato nella mia vicenda carceraria una stupefacente analogia con l'altra del Lager: mi sento infatti cittadino di un altro mondo, come allora. Anche allora come oggi l'Italia viveva giorni di insano furore. [...] allora come oggi le vittime erano le stesse: il buon senso e l'onestà. La 'civiltà' insomma" ("Dalle prigioni" 10).

[11] Two of Guareschi's personal letters bear out this point. In one, Guareschi vented his frustration to his editor Angelo Rizzoli and film producer Giorgio Amato over misguided interpretations of *Don Camillo*: "La figura di Don Camillo risulta completamente snaturata. […] I racconti scelti sono completamenti snaturati. […] Duvivier ha snaturato la mia prima serie di racconti e ora tende a snaturare la mia seconda serie. […] il soggetto del Ritorno è un soggetto da farsa. […] Non posso rendermi complice di una impresa cinematografica che risulterebbe dannosa alla Chiesa, alla borghesia, alla causa della civiltà e alla causa del buon gusto" ("Letter to Rizzoli e Amato" n.p.). In a letter to Paul Flemmand, almost a year later, Guareschi writes in the third person and explains: "E bisognerà precisare — dato che mi hanno costretto a difendermi — che Guareschi giudica libera e arbitraria la versione cinematografica che Duvivier ha dato di essi racconti: sia perché non rispecchia bensì falsa lo spirito dell'opera 'Mondo piccolo di Don Camillo', sia per interpolazioni e per modifiche di singoli episodi e per totale completa e assoluta mancanza di rispetto all'ambiente nel quale l'autore fa svolgere la vicenda" ("Letter to Paul Flemmand" n.p.).

[12] One of the more interesting biblical reflections on an intimate aspect of conscience occurs in Matthew 16.13-18 and Mark 8. 27-30, when Jesus, having come to Caesarea Philippi, asks his followers to explain who he is. They respond by telling Jesus that some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, and still others one of the prophets. Then Jesus

addresses them directly: “But who do YOU say that I am?” (my emph.).Simon Peter then responds: “You are the Christ, Son of the Living God,” and Jesus praises him, announcing to him and all present disciples that He will build his Church upon him. For the faithful, each person responds to that same question only by searching the reasons of the heart through one’s own inviolate, sacred, and divine conscience. All biblical citations are taken from *The Jerusalem Bible*.

[13] Thus, he created the caricature of the party dupe who has three nostrils, one extra in order to expel the smoke of inhaled rhetoric (“La terza narice” 4-5). Anyone who blindly follows any political or social doctrine, in effect, any “-ism,” be it Communism, Capitalism, or even Catholicism, grows a third nostril.

[14] In Matthew 22.36-39, one of the Pharisees asks Jesus, “Master, which is the greatest commandment of the Law?,” and Jesus responds: “‘You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second resembles it: ‘You must love your neighbor as yourself.’”

[15] As Guareschi explained to Angelo Rizzoli: “Don Camillo è identico a Peppone. Fisicamente e spiritualmente. Paragonando l’estremismo a una medaglia, Peppone è il diritto e don Camillo è il rovescio della medaglia. Sono due facce della stessa identica realtà” (“Letter to Angelo Rizzoli” n.p.)

[16] Reichardt further explains: “All things, events, and experiences ‘tell’ of God and can lead us to God if we have the eyes to see and the ears to hear. By grounding their work in the concrete, material world, literary artists in the Catholic tradition can reveal the supernatural and convey spiritual truths. Thus literature, too, can serve as a sacramental, a vehicle of grace for those disposed to receive it” (6).

[17] Two texts, *Qua la mano don Camillo: La teologia secondo Peppone* and *Don Camillo: Il Vangelo dei semplici*, extensively reference how Guareschi manifested these themes of Christian spirituality. My forthcoming book, *The Don Camillo Stories of Giovannino Guareschi: A Humorist Interprets the Sacred*, also does the same.

[18] In 2004, Guareschi’s son Alberto took me on a personal tour of his father’s private study located on the fourth floor of his Roncole Verdi home. On the shelves above Guareschi’s desk, there still sits a copy of the *Bible*, a weekday Missal, the *Little Flowers of Saint Francis*, Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, Collodi’s *Pinocchio*, De Amicis’s *Cuore*, a copy of the Italian Constitution, and the Geneva Convention Accords. In another room, Guareschi kept a copy of St. Augustine’s *Confessions*. All of these texts undoubtedly influenced his writing.