

CHAPTER IV

THE DISCREPANCY BETWEEN FAITH AND FACT

One of Thornton Wilder's significance is his capability to bring the number of important paradoxes that is brilliantly reconciled in his writing. The main paradox that dominates *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* is the question about discrepancy between faith and fact. Both of them are not in symmetrical position for faith (religion) sometimes leads to people's acceptance of a dogma, while fact as its characteristic can be seen empirically is under the world of thought (reason). The way in which people think about them is considered in the world of philosophy.

The writer is interested in this problem for it has been for along time she is also questioning about such facts in her life. Stands on the same point where Brother Juniper starts his observation, the writer also tries to look into the facts in his life. It doesn't mean that the writer has to understand Brother Juniper's religion since in the novel the author just presents universal belief that God is exist and All-good.

IV.1 FAITH AND FACT

Religion is not just a belief that some mysterious beings exist. It is in the contrary, a complex network of belief concerning morality, the purpose of life, the nature of the individual, and the ultimate explanation of things. Our rational, scientific

experience of the world is fragmented and incomplete, and religion attempts to bring these fragments together to form a coherent, meaningful image of the whole.

Philosophy like other studies, aims at knowledge. It is directed to the fundamental and pervasive concerns of existence. Philosophy is an attempt to provide a vision of the world that is systematic and clear, in which the connections between significant facts are made manifest. It is the search for first things and last things for first principles and their ultimate implications. The task of philosophy is to examine life, to tear down the comfortable barriers of dogma which prevent human being from growth.

People who believe in God believe that universe is a rational system, not merely an arrangement of blind accident. Ultimately this means that important features of the world must be explained in terms of the plan and the goals of the Creator. It is closely allied with his belief that the life of individual is significant in the divine scheme of such things. People believe that without God, life becomes a meaningless charade. If God exists, even our most bitter disappointments serve some ultimate purpose.

Human's problem about religion with God as the central focus usually begins when people realize that the world does not behave as people think it must. There is discrepancy between faith and fact.

Religious picture of the world must deal with several crucial questions. Foremost is the question of knowledge. Can the existence of God be established by the usual patterns of reasoning and observation, or is a special source of knowledge is required? If religious claims must ultimately rest on faith or mystical insight, what is the best way of understanding these states? Does religion actually provide a sense of purpose and significance to life which cannot be gained without God? Does it help, for example, to know that our suffering is planned and carried out in order to serve some higher ideal? Finally the religious view of life must face what appears to be an agonizing paradox. If God is all-good and all-knowing, why does He create a world full of suffering and disease and injustice and other natural disasters? Can any purpose, no matter how noble, justifies this enormous tragedy? (Minton, 1976:2)

In the other hand, it has been for along time to religion and science to have a quarrel one to another. One is based on faith and the other on reason. Many people are disappointed about the fact that though they become the good people as religion suggested, but their lifes are still suffered. They come to the decision that God is unfair and even He may do not exist at all. It is difficult to human to except the idea about God.

Brother Juniper, the main character of the novel, one who lies down his life into the purify of church, tries to make a new thought in which faith and reason can get along together. Brother Juniper believes that the world is the creation of an all-

powerful, all knowing, benevolent being. From the first time he has known about the answer, but he wants to prove it historically, mathematically the way of God to man. His effort once to satisfy his obsession to provide rational justification for believing in God. It probably will make other people are easier to understand about God existence and comes to agree that their pains are inserted to their lives for their own good.

VI.1 BROTHER JUNIPER AND THE FACT IN HIS SURROUNDING

Living as a priest in the society with native Indian, who is strongly believe in God and take religious teaching as a dogma, it is impossible to Brother Juniper has a problem about God's existence. He is a believer who never has even a little skepticism about God and religious matter. But life and world give him something different and a new consciousness about his Master. His question about God's wisdom begins when he meets his friend, who is suffered for his wife's leaving. This experience makes his friend feels that God is unfair for giving him a terrible life.

Brother Juniper would never have arrived at his method had it not been for his friendship with a certain master of University of San Martin. This student 's wife had stolen away one morning on a boat for Spain, following a soldier, and had left him care of two daughters in the cradle. He was possessed of all the bitterness that brother Juniper lacked and derived a sort of joy from the conviction that all was wrong in the world.

¹ Ibid p.211-212

His friend's experience of life gives him something new about the way of God to man. Why this life seems unfair to his friend? Why the innocence has to get suffer? Does God have anything behind? As a man with religious background, he doesn't have a negative thinking about the Almighty. He is sure that God is all-knowing. He is sure that God has some particular purposes to human beings and merely, either empirically it is good or bad experience, it is intended for their own goodness.

His friend also tells him about the story of Queen of Naples as quoted below as being considered to him also becomes an example of God's injustice.

"There was a queen of Naples and Sicily," the student would say, "who discovered that she was carrying an angry tumor in her side, In great dismay she commanded her subject to fall to their prayers and ordered that all garments in Sicily and Naples be sewn with votive crosses. She was well loved by her people and all their prayers and embroideries were sincere, but ineffectual. Now she lies in the splendor of Monreale, and a few inches above her heart may be read the words: *I shall fear no evil.*"¹

In his friend opinion, life may be easier for believer who never disobey God existence and religious teaching. But the story of Queen of Naples above proves that even a good people as good as her has been suffered in her beautiful life, wherein he always believes that God is her best and only protector. It is a tragic story if her suffer and pain become a reward for her merit to her people. If Brother Juniper works on his

¹ Ibid p.212-213

experiments later, it is not because he is in skepticism about God. But merely he does it for his faith. He believes that God will never be like that. But how does one prove it to other people? Is it enough that he tells his friend that all his bad experience is just to his own good? But, what does the fact seem like? It does not indicate that God is All-good. It must be unreasonable to make people in skepticism, like his friend, to accept his opinion. All seems terrible for his life. The phrase "all suffer and pain that is happens on your life is for your own goodness" doesn't work effectively and may not mean anything to make people in skepticism, like his friend, accept his words. That phrase may be accepted as a truth if can be proved scientifically. It is the time for theology to reach its place among the science.

Thinking about his friend's judgment about God, Brother Juniper believes that the prove will be given by the time. The time that is mentioned as a device to prove, comes when the pestilence visits his dear village Puerto and carries off a large number of peasant, he secretly draws up a diagram of characteristic of fifteen victims and fifteen survivors. Each soul is rated upon a basis ten as regards its goodness, its diligence in religious observance, and its importance to its family group. Here is a fragment of this ambitious chart:

	Goodness	Piety	Usefulness
Alfonso G.	4	4	10
Nina	2	5	10
Manuel B.	10	10	0
Alvonso V.	-8	-10	10
Vera N.	0	10	10 ¹

Note: Alfonso G. is given negative points for the two first rows, since he is a propagandist for badness and not merely avoids church but leads others to avoid it. While Vera N., merely bad: but she is a model worshipper and the mainstay of a full hut

Those particular data above are considered as a fail one, because from those data Brother Juniper can not make such particular pattern. In that list there is many exceptions, for example in the first row, not all person has positive point. It happens with the second rows where there is a person with minus point.

After adding up the total points, he compares the result between victims and survivors. As his conclusion, Brother Juniper states that the dead were five times more worth saving. It looked as if the pestilence has been directed against the really valuable people in the village of Puerto. It makes the problem becomes worse.

That result just gives such affirmation to the previous opinion that God is unfair to the good people in the world. Being desperate about his work, Brother

¹ Ibid p.213

Juniper tears up his finding and casts them into the waves. Finally he realizes that God is being more-than-human-power.

....he gazed for an hour upon the great clouds of pearl that hang forever upon the horizon of that sea, and extracted from their beauty a resignation that he did not permit his reason to examine. The discrepancy between faith and facts is greater than is generally assumed. ¹

Another story that makes him to continue his observation is about the master of San Martin. This story is considered as a climax of the problem. It is the greatest Injustice of God to man for as if this very kind lady may never comparable to any human being. It gives inspiration for his method after the Bridge of San Luis Rey.

This master was one day walking through the Chaterdal of Lima and stopped to read the epitaph of a lady. He read with an increasingly prominent lower lip that she had been for twenty years the center and joy of her home, that she had been the delight of her friends, that all who met her went away in astonishment at her goodness and beauty, and that there she lay awaiting the Return of the Lord. One on the day that he read these words, the master of San Martin had had much to fret him, and raising his eyes from the tablet he spoke aloud in his rage: "The shame of it, the persecution of it! Everyone knows that in the world we do nothing but feed our wills. why perpetuate this legend of selflessness? Why keep this thing alive, this rumor of disinterestedness?" ²

¹ Ibid p.215

² Ibid p.215-216

This woman has been waiting for "only" twelve years. The master of San Martin finds that this woman is well loved by her closest people. Her dear traits have survived her and wherever she is mentioned there arises a suffering smile and the protest that words can not describe the gracious ways of her. Everyone has lost her. Even the eager youth of her grandchildren, who has never seen her before, is made more difficult by her great name. It is impossible for them to be as good as her. She is the object of the Lord's selfishness. People deserve to feed their wills. The most important to think whether in feeding our wills we have considered other people's happiness.

Knowing this story, Brother Juniper's question rises on top. He is wondering about "why" and "how." Often he examines a complete record of the prayers of rain and their results.

Often he had stood on the steps of one of his little churches, his flock kneeling before him on the baked street. Often he had stretched his arm to the skies and declaimed splendid ritual. Not often, but several times, he had felt the virtue enter him and seen the little cloud forming to on the horizon. But there were many times went week went by... but why think of them? It was not himself he was trying to convince that rain and drought were wisely oppoitioned.

¹ Ibid p.21-22

He does not know why he is thinking of that. He tries to convince that what happens in the world is planned and created at its best, till he witnesses the collapse of the bridge.¹

He has spent for six years to do his observation. He knocks at all the doors in Lima, asks thousands of questions, fills scores of notebooks, in his effort at establishing the fact that each of the five lost lives are a perfect whole.

In compiling the book of the life of the victims, Brother Juniper is seemed to be pursued by the fear that omitting the slightest detail, he may lose some guiding hint. Here the writer will try to make a diagram about those victims (c.q. Marquesa de Montemayor, Esteban and Uncle Pio) in short.

Marquesa de Montemayor

1. Has unhappy childhood since she is ugly and stuttered. Her mother persecutes her.
2. Was lonely after her beloved daughter leaves her to Spain.
3. Get disappointed because her love is rejected.
4. Death comes to her when she just realizes what she did for herself and decides to begin her life again.

¹ The complete explanation about the accident can be seen in Chapter III about Plot.

Esteban

1. Found in the foundling basket before the convent, his childhood has been spent only with his twin brothers, Manuel.
2. Was lonely since his only one brother who was once his only friend died.
3. Get disappointed for realizing that he loves his brother much better than his brother does to him.
4. He wants to begin a new life without his twin brother and leaves lima, the place where his twin brother is buried.

Uncle Pio

1. Terrible childhood
2. Does not have anybody else except Camilla who is his closest people.
3. Get disappointed since his effort to bring Camila back to the theater failed.
4. He wants to begin a new life with Don Jaime (Camila's son) and educates him to be an actor like his mother before the bridge befell them.

The result proves that more or less those victims have several similarities. Brother Juniper feels that this observation is a perfect proof for his observation. From this observation Brother Juniper finds a pattern that the victims of the collapse bridge are together killed on that day. Brother Juniper writes his finding in such books that

deals with the life of the victims of that accident, cataloging thousands of little facts and anecdotes and testimonies, and concluding with dignified passage describing why God has settled upon that day for his demonstration of wisdom. Here one can could surprise His intention in a pure state.

The book being done fell under the eyes of some judges and is suddenly being pronounced heretical. It is ordered to be burned in the Square with its author.

Brother Juniper is trying to seek in his own life the pattern that had escaped him in five victims. He is willing to lay down his life for purity of church, but he is longing for one voice somewhere to testify for him that his intention at least has been for faith.

IV.3 THE ESSENCE OF THE DISCREPANCY BETWEEN FAITH AND FACT

All religious language is symbolic. God is in another dimension off our living land. To understand about Him, human only knows about His characteristic through his surrounding. Whatever happen in His world has been created and He is the Creator. All fact or event that happen in our circumstances is meant something about His intention though not all of them can be traced by human reason and logic.

Brother Juniper's observation about the accident of the collapse bridge is one of human effort to know his Master. Church board judges his work as a work of

heresy and puts it (once the author) up to torch, but merely Brother Juniper does his work for his faith's sake. Brother Juniper realizes that not all of human woe has been quite fit for scientific examination. He also accepts that in several area of life, human deserve to determine his fate.

Oh, there had never been any lack of specimens; any number of his charges had met calamity, --spiders had stung them; their lungs had been touched; their houses had burned down and things had happened to their children from with one averts the mind. But these occasions of human woe had never been quite fit for scientific examination.

Brother Juniper focuses his examination towards human woe in which human himself can do anything to prevent it to be happens on him. For many believers the collapse of the bridge and other facts or events may be assumed as Act of God and as a part of Divine Plan. It does not need to think further about. While for atheist, it may be assumed as only a natural phenomenon that is the part of natural process without something behind. It just wastes the time to think about it.

Brother Juniper's observation may not be applied successfully for every accident happen in human life. It proves in his observation about the peasant in Puerto. It is because human reason is limited. People can not observe the thing like the eye of God. As people only get a little part of the things, it will give human also a little aspect about the things itself. It doesn't mean that people's observation about the

¹ Ibid p.19-20

Almighty is useless because whatever that can not be explained does not mean that it does not to be. But in the case of Brother Juniper's observation towards the victims of the collapse bridge, perhaps, it proves that God has such intention to them.

What the essence of life we can learn from the phenomena is that all of them enable human beings to know better about his God as long as it is based on the belief that God is exist. God's power is reflected in every occasion of human life.

The knowledge of God lies between science and dogma. Some are explainable and some are not. What human being can do for this matter is just to try, like Brother Juniper has done it. Finally, Brother Juniper convinces that,

.....he did not permit his reason to examine,¹ The discrepancy between faith and facts is greater than is generally assumed.

It means that man cannot presume to judge God. God is not fully knowable and can not be reasoned. It is certainly foolish if people think that they shall be reasoning all about God all.

¹ Ibid p.215