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ドン・イッポーリト神父の苦境：A Foregone Conclusionにおけるハウエルズの宗教批判

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The Plight of a Venetian Priest: Howells's Religious Criticism in *A Foregone Conclusion*

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I

Howells's letters and newspaper and magazine articles contain many references to his planning and writing of *A Foregone Conclusion*, the "first full-blown novel" of Howells (Woodress 266) published in 1875. They show that even before his departure in November 1861 for his consular service at Venice, lasting through the whole Civil War period to July 1865, Howells was seriously considering the ideas and conflict of the sort he was to dramatize in this novel. As early as 1860, in his serialized *Cincinnati Gazette* column, "Glimpses of Summer Travel," Howells contemplated the life of the Gray Nuns in Montreal, showing his deep interest in the kind of materials he was to weave into the novel (Gibson 161). After his arrival in Venice, Howells started making conscious efforts to develop his embryonic ideas with specific applications to reality, because there he found the prototype of the hero he had had vaguely in mind in a young Venetian priest, Padre Libera, with whom he studied Dante. This young priest in certain ways suggested the character of Don Ippolito Rondinelli, the Venetian priest in *A Foregone Conclusion*, and Padre Libera's religious skepticism was what interested Howells most. That Padre Libera served as the model for Don Ippolito is also evidenced by the exact likeness of Howells's descriptions of their apartments in his book of travel sketches entitled *Venetian Life* (1866) and *A Foregone Conclusion*, respectively (Woodress

266-67 ; *Venetian Life* 431 ; *Foregone Conclusion* 32 ; ch. 3).

After his return from Venice in August, 1865, Howells wrote a *New York Times* editorial entitled "Marriage Among the Italian Priesthood,"[1] in which he suggested part of the theme of the novel. After surveying with a tone of whole-hearted support the current campaign for marriage among the priesthood conducted by the Italian priests themselves, Howells wrote :

> [A]ll travelers and sojourners in Italy will consent that it is an important step, which if once taken, will do more than any other to advance social purity and religious freedom and independence. It would be scarcely useful to rehearse here the evils which intelligent Italians believe to result from the celibacy of their priesthood, or to define the anomalous position which the priest, isolated from mankind by an ascetic superstition of the middle ages, holds in the ameliorated society of this day . . . . [A]s the celibacy of the priesthood is blamed for much of the corruption which afflicts Italian society, the present advocacy of clerical marriage by a respectable number of the priesthood seems the most natural and consequent growth from present conditions. (4)

It is plain, as William M. Gibson notes, that Howells was taking a "sanguine" editorial view of the possibility of reform. But in *A Foregone Conclusion*, Howells weaves these facts into the story "with much of James's skill for tragic artistic purposes" (Gibson 161), and suggests his strong opposition to the conditions of the Italian church which precipitate the fall of the priest Don Ippolito.

In June, 1866, Howells wrote to his sister Victoria that he was thinking of commencing a "romance" with setting in Venice (*Selected Letters* 1 : 260). In December of the following year, he wrote to a

friend: "I am at work on the novel [*A Foregone Conclusion*] when I can get a moment, but it's a slow business and may turn out a failure" (*Selected Letters* 1: 291). To Henry James, one of his life-long friends who now and then gave Howells warm encouragement, Howells wrote, on March 10, 1873:

> I am already thirty pages advanced on a new story, in which, blessed be heaven, there is no problem but the sweet old one of how they shall get married. In this case I'm sorry to say they don't solve it, for the hero is a Venetian priest in love with an American girl. There's richness! (*Selected Letters* 2: 17)

The statement that "there is no problem" in the first sentence of this letter is misleading; it does not suggest the seriousness and bitterness with which Howells treats the problems of Don Ippolito in the actual body of the story. But the last sentence shows that Howells was aware of the richness of the material he was dealing with. In his subsequent letter to James, dated December 5, 1837, Howells wrote that his story was drawing near the end with "a gathering intensity" (*Selected Letters* 2: 39). Moreover, as Edwin H. Cady says, Howells, for the first time, became aware that the fictional construction he was dealing with could not be solved by "stringing things out on a line of travel" (190) as he had earlier done in his so-called travel books, e. g., *Their Wedding Journey* (1872) and *A Chance Acquaintance* (1873). Clearly, Howells was getting more interested in dramatic characterization than in the charm of romantic settings.

To supplement the materials he had gathered through his own observations in Venice, Howells sent a questionnaire to one of his Venetian friends, "covering priests from details of dress to daily habits

and duties and even legal status" (Cady 190). The evidence of the development of Howells's skill as a novelist was seen in his new method of handling his materials. For instance, Cady says:

> [I]nstead of using settings and Venetian esoterica for their own sakes, Howells now made them serve the emotional atmosphere in which the psychological action of his plot takes place. Everything converges to the tragic moment when the full folly of the illusion in which all the characters have been moving, each bemused by his own, is revealed. (190)

According to Delmar G. Cooke, Howells in this novel subordinates and finely integrates the descriptive element in such a way that it fulfills "only its noblest function of fixing and enriching the human scene" (173).

Howells then undertook his writing of *A Foregone Conclusion* quite seriously, spending at least eight years for actual writing or about 15 years in all including the embryonic stage, as is evident from his letters and articles cited above. He rightly called it "My first novel" (Cady 189). It is an intensely dramatic and tragic story of a Venetian priest, Don Ippolito, who succumbs to a worldly love for an American girl, Florida Vervain. More importantly for the purpose of the present study, the novel contains Howells's religious criticism that is skillfully and artistically interwoven in the actions of the characters. We know that the religious opinions and observations in this novel are the author's because they are substantiated by parallel opinions and observations in his *Venetian Life* as well as in his letters and articles.

The novel first appeared serially in the *Atlantic Monthly* from July through December of 1874, and was published in book form in 1875. Henry James probably gave a just appraisal of the novel and

its author when he said in one of his two reviews of the novel, "Howells's 'Foregone Conclusion'" published in the *Nation* of January 7, 1875: "[Howells] has now proved that he can embrace a dramatic situation with the true imaginative force—give us not only its mechanical structure, but its atmosphere, its meaning, its poetry" (12). Because this novel is artistically well written, as critics agree, Howells succeeds in presenting and criticizing serious religious problems without becoming too obtrusive.

II

Howells presents one aspect of religious problem in the form of the priest Don Ippolito's agnosticism and his unsuccessful attempt to forsake his office. Howells's presentation of Don Ippolito's predicament as well as his delineation of the priest's character are very effective. Howells lets 30-year-old Don Ippolito reveal his troubles to other main characters in the novel, who later discuss them with each other. Therefore, the reader gets a great deal of additional information about Don Ippolito from other characters, especially 26-year-old Henry Ferris, who is, as Howells himself was, the American consul in Venice and who acts as Howells's spokesman.

Don Ippolito's trouble is that he wants to but cannot forsake the priesthood to which he has had no sense of attachment. Although he has been a priest for a long time, he has never reached any religious conviction. When Florida Vervain, a 17-year-old American girl traveling in Venice with her half-invalid mother, asks him if he believes in God, all that Don Ippolito can do is to falter out a few whispered words, "I do not know" (94; ch. 10). He has long been trying desperately to forsake his priesthood so that he may have a rebirth, and reestablish himself as an inventor. But he has not been able to

carry it out mainly because of the strong pressure from his church, and partly because of his own indecision.

Under the present circumstance, Don Ippolito is much in danger of losing his self-identity and of eternally falling into oblivion, for now he leads a double life of a skeptical, insufficient priest and a rebellious would-be inventor. It appears now that forsaking of the priesthood is the only way left for him to re-discover his real self and to identify himself with his fellow men. But at this point, Howells is confronted with a harassing problem ; namely, Don Ippolito does not seem to be getting any love and sympathy from the people of the Venetian society. He is, then, in the words of Ferris, "as much cut off from the church as from the world" (59 ; ch. 7). This is Don Ippolito's trouble.

Howells introduces Henry Ferris at the outset of the story. He had been a professional painter before he came to Venice to serve as the Consul of the United States in the first year of the Civil War. Ferris is "a sardonic humorist," as described by Henry James in his "Review of *A Foregone Conclusion*" (12), and he is also a bitter critic of the Italian church and priest. The use of Ferris is obviously one of Howells's literary devices in the novel to express his own religious opinions without impairing the novel's artistic quality. Howells parenthetically writes that Ferris is "one of my predecessors in office at Venice" (4 ; ch. 1). Thus, Ferris is Howells's alter ego, if not Howells himself, criticizing the conditions of the church and priesthood in Italy.

Howells begins with the first meeting of Ferris and Don Ippolito. Don Ippolito has been groping for a way to escape from the misery of his clerical life. He thinks the best way is to go to America, where, he imagines, he will be completely freed from any obligations. He

goes to the Consulate of the United States to obtain a "passport" for America. He takes with him one of his ingenious inventions, a neatly finished model of a breech-loading cannon, as an inducement for Ferris to issue a "passport." Cordially received by Ferris, Don Ippolito tells Ferris that he will contribute the cannon to the Union Army for its advantage in the Civil War in exchange for a "passport" for America. In his strong rebellion, Don Ippolito has cherished dreams of going to America, which he has been told is an inventor's paradise. Therefore, Don Ippolito's disappointment is all the greater when he learns that he, an Austrian subject now, has to go to the Austrian Lieutenancy of Venice to obtain a passport. Knowing that the Austrians do not allow any Italians to move out, Don Ippolito realizes that his hope of escaping from his miserable life is shattered. He remains helpless, not knowing what steps to take next.

Howells's description of the priest's physical appearance gives a good idea of what Don Ippolito looks like:

> [Don Ippolito's] face was a little thin, and the chin was delicate; the nose had a fine, Dantesque curve, but its final droop gave a melancholy cast to a countenance expressive of a gentle and kindly spirit; the eyes were large and dark and full of dreamy warmth. (4-5; ch. 1)

Ferris sees with a painter's eye the rare quality of Don Ippolito's appearance and determines to paint him. He describes the priest's appearance thus:

> [W]hat I'm going to paint *at* is the lingering pagan in the man, the renunciation first of the inherited nature, and then of a personality that would have enjoyed the world. I want to show that baffled aspiration, apathetic

> despair, and rebellious longing which you catch in his face when he's off his guard, and that suppressed look which is the characteristic expression of all Austrian Venice. (50 ; ch. 5)

Ferris also catches a flash of genius in the priest at their first meeting, and when he later sees the priest's other inventions, Ferris is much impressed and exclaims, "Don Ippolito, you are another Da Vinci, a universal genius" (33 ; ch. 3). However, he considers the priest's inventions as "aspirations toward the impossible" (34 ; ch. 3), because he recognizes with pity that the church authorities do not allow the priests to devote themselves entirely to scientific experimentation.

As he finds out more about Don Ippolito, Ferris reaches an understanding that the priest is not well regarded and treated by his superiors and associates in the church because of his absorption in the work of invention. With all the doubtful eyes of the churchmen fixed on him, Don Ippolito is not able to freely expand his scientific imagination. He has also serious financial problems, because his experiments have cost him a considerable sum of money. In order to save money for his work, Don Ippolito has denied himself everything except the necessary decorum of dress and lodging, and often fasted like a saint and slept like a hermit. And yet, he has always been short of funds for experiments, because, Howells satirically tells us, the

> meagre stipend which he received from the patrimony of his church, eked out with the money paid him for baptisms, funerals, and marriages, and for masses by people who had friends to be prayed out of purgatory, would at best have barely sufficed to support him. . . . (29 ; ch. 3)

Don Ippolito is under the increasing pressure of his church to reform.

The thought of security, freedom, and independence haunts him daily, until it becomes a mania in him. He is nobody as he is, and he must do something to become somebody. He struggles within, and forms a bitter disgust with himself and his office. His present state of mind is well expressed in his self-condemnation and his terrifying account of how he became a priest, and how he has been forced to live a miserable life.

III

Shortly after their first meeting, Ferris introduces Don Ippolito to Mrs. Vervain, the widow of an American army colonel from Providence, Rhode Island, who is staying in Venice at the end of her European sojourn, accompanied by her daughter Florida. This acquaintance leads to Don Ippolito's engagement by Mrs. Vervain as Italian teacher to Florida. Florida is a pretty blonde with blue eyes. Although a ritualist in religion, Florida is almost fierce in her scorn of hypocrisy and in her devotion to truth. She shows her basic goodness when she treats Don Ippolito in a friendly manner at their daily meetings for Italian lesson. Don Ippolito values her friendship enormously. One day, he tells Florida about his agnosticism and his wretched life. Florida, with innocent sympathy, tells him that she cannot endure to think of his doing the things he must as a priest while hating to be a priest. Don Ippolito then blurts out the whole story of his life. He condemns himself, declaring that he is in constant habit of a lie, and that virtues like the life-long habit of telling the truth belong only to those, like Florida, outside his church. Don Ippolito asks Florida :

> Do you know what it is to have the life-long habit of a lie? It is to be a priest. Do you know what it is to seem, to say, to do, the thing you are not, think not,

> will not? To leave what you believe unspoken, what you will undone, what you are unknown? It is to be a priest! (88; ch. 10)

Don Ippolito then tells Florida how he became a priest without wishing to be one. He recalls that as a boy he only considered the office of priests as a means of gratifying the passion that had always filled his soul for inventions and works of mechanical skill and ingenuity. "My inclination was purely secular," he says, "but I was inevitably becoming a priest as if I had been born to be one" (90; ch. 10). He tells how and why. "We are of the people, my family, and in each generation we have sought to honor our blood by devoting one of the race to the church" (90; ch. 10). Don Ippolito as a boy showed his natural bent for science, but his uncle, the principal priest of the church to which he is now attached, determined to make a priest out of him. Having done so, he has subjected Don Ippolito to the oppression of the church. Don Ippolito tells Florida: "He loves my soul, but not me, and we are scarcely friends" (93; ch. 10).

Howells implies that Don Ippolito is a misfit and should not be staying in the church. Ferris speaks for Howells about this agonized priest. Ferris has come to the conclusion that Don Ippolito is unfit for the priesthood, an "outlaw" of the church. He has insight enough to see Don Ippolito's problem. In his opinion, Don Ippolito is too secular-minded to be a priest, and yet, under the existing circumstance, he will become an apostate to everyone, if he forsakes his vocation. Don Ippolito is, Howells tells us, "of a purity so blameless" that he is "reputed crackbrained by the caffè-gossip" in Venice. Just as he is "alienated from his clerical fellows by all the objects of his life, and by a reciprocal dislike," so he is detached from society. Ferris perceives in Don Ippolito "an apparent single-heartedness" and ignorance of the

world, "such as no man can have but the rarest of Italians." In Ferris's opinion, Don Ippolito is the "albino of his species ; a gray crow, a white fly," and if he is not actually these, he surely must know "how to seem it with an art far beyond any common deceit" (54 ; ch. 6).

Howells is evidently accusing the Italian church for its failure to place Don Ippolito on common grounds with the ordinary people of society. Society, though, is reluctant to receive such an individual as Don Ippolito. As a matter of fact, people are much biased by common beliefs about the priests. Ferris, confessing that he too acted at first "in the teeth of a bitter Venetian prejudice against priests," tells Florida :

> All my friends here—they're mostly young men with the modern Italian ideas, or old liberals—hate and despise the priests. They believe that priests are full of guile and deceit, that they are spies for the Austrians, and altogether evil. (59 ; ch. 7)

Ferris agrees that the only good thing for a skeptical priest to do will be to leave the church at once. But at the same time, he is pessimistic about Don Ippolito's future. For if an Italian priest leaves the church, even the liberals who distrust him now, would despise him still more. Ferris tells Florida : "Do you know that they have a pleasant fashion of calling the Protestant converts apostates ? The first thing for such a priest would be exile" (101 ; ch. 11). The social climate is not favorable for Don Ippolito. The real difficulty of Don Ippolito's problem is eloquently expressed in Ferris's answer to Florida's final question. As Florida asks him if Don Ippolito should remain a priest, Ferris significantly answers : "As a moralist, no ; as a humanitarian, yes, Miss Vervain. He'd be much happier as he was" (103 ; ch. 11). With his

skepticism and rebellious longing for a new life, Don Ippolito is an example of the unfit man in church organization. In presenting Don Ippolito's problem in this novel as he does, Howells implies that there are in the church many such inadequate men as Don Ippolito.

And at the same time, he criticizes the religious organization which permits such things to happen (Fox 208-9). While one phase of Howells's religious criticism in the novel is directed toward the unfit men in the church, as has been pointed out, another is directed toward the church itself. Howells, throughout the tragedy of Don Ippolito, condemns the absolute subordination of priests by the church. Howells does not condone the church that disregards the misery it has brought to its own members like Don Ippolito. Howells, first of all, points out that it has caused the alienation of priests from society and ordinary people. Speaking again for Howells, Ferris criticizes the fact that at the worst the priests are "merely professional people—poor fellows who have gone into the church for a living" (99 ; ch. 11), and he looks upon them as "voluntary prisoners" (107 ; ch. 12). A priest, to Ferris, is a "man under sentence of death to the natural ties between himself and the human race" (100 ; ch. 11), and he thinks little can be expected of such a man. Moreover, the church authorities have failed to keep abreast of the times in their obstinate belief that "all the wickedness of the modern world has come from the devices of science" (93 ; ch. 10), and this failure has contributed to the priests' becoming social misfits. That Don Ippolito cannot give full play to his scientific ability stems from this very failure of the Italian church, and that Don Ippolito belongs to this sort of church is his sheer misfortune.

Meantime, Florida wins Don Ippolito's trust with her latent goodness, and becomes his confidante. Don Ippolito tells Ferris that Florida and her mother are the first family in the world to receive him with

hospitality. To Don Ippolito, Florida is an "angel" who showed him the "blackness" of his life, and whose "immaculate truth has mirrored [his] falsehood in all its vileness and distortion" (120-21 ; ch. 14). When, during their Italian lesson, Don Ippolito tells Florida of his agnosticism and misery, she tells him with true girlish compassion if she were in his position, she would surely forsake the office at all hazard. She advises, verbally echoing Ferris's opinion, that Don Ippolito leave the church even at the expense of his friends, his country, and his fame. Then she promises him a refuge under her mother's roof in America, until he can make his inventions known. Don Ippolito decides to try to get out of Venice at all hazard, and join the Vervains in France to go to America together with them.

Misconstruing Florida's charitable ardor, Don Ippolito falls deeply in love with Florida. One night, he passionately proposes to her. Florida is shocked and does not know what to say and do. All she can say is "*You ? A priest !*" (137 ; ch. 15). This unexpected reaction from Florida is the fatal blow to Don Ippolito. He is plunged deeply into despair and collapses to the ground. In his almost unbearable agony, Don Ippolito cries out, "But you had no right to love my soul and not me—you, a woman. A woman must not love only the soul of a man" (138 ; ch. 15). Florida torments herself with a deep sense of guilt. Don Ippolito is not able to recover from his shock, and soon dies of a fever.

As was pointed out at the outset of this study, Howells supported the idea of marriage among the Italian priesthood. As James observes in his *Nation* review of the novel, it seems one's natural curiosity to know how Florida, "an American girl of the typical free-stepping, clear-thinking cast receives a declaration from a sallow Italian ecclesiastic," Don Ippolito Rondinelli (12). Howells makes Florida reject Don Ippolito's proposal. He is apparently with Ferris, who says that priests "seem

a kind of alien creature to us Protestants," and he lets Ferris agree with Florida that a "nun isn't unnatural, but a priest is" (99-100 ; ch. 11). This is another instance of Howells's criticism of the failure of the church. Howells knew when writing the novel that Don Ippolito's acceptance by Florida would be a step toward Don Ippolito's initiation into society, and that it would ultimately enable the priest to get completely out of what he termed in his *New York Times* editorial an "anomalous position." But the church, Howells points out in the editorial, has caused the priests to live in isolation, and neglected to do away with "an ascetic superstition of the middle ages," so that they have been denied the freedom of marriage (4).

IV

Howells continues his criticism of the Italian church and the Christian church in general. During a Corpus Christi procession, Ferris, a keen observer, severely charges the church with a distortion of the true doctrine and departure from the true function. As the procession of priests approaches, Ferris is disgusted with the astonishing pomposity of the priests. He speaks up with bitterness and anger :

> Look at the silken and gilded pomp of the servants of the carpenter's son ! Look at those miserable monks, voluntary prisoners, beggars, aliens to their kind ! Look at those penitents who think they can get forgiveness for their sins by carrying a candle round the Square ! And it is nearly two thousand years since the world turned Christian ! It *is* pretty slow. (107 ; ch. 12)

Florida feels "dreadfully sad" at this "spectacle," and says that "every bit of this power and display of the church—*our* church as well as the rest—might be only a cruel blunder, a dreadful mistake," and that

perhaps "there isn't even any God ! " (107 ; ch. 12). The essence of Howells's criticism in these passages can be put in Ferris's own words—"How far it is from Christ !" (107 ; ch. 12). Howells shares the opinion of Thomas Hardy, who lamented in his poem "A Christmas Ghost-Story" (1899) that mankind, disobeying His teachings, still does not understand the "Cause for which He died" (825).

A Foregone Conclusion contains Howells's bitter criticism of unfit men in the church on one hand, and of religious leaders and organizations that fail to solve such problems. In presenting the twofold problem—the existence of inadequate priests in the church and the departure of the church from its true function—Howells registers his disapproval of certain conditions and activities of organized religion, as he does in his later novels, such as *The Minister's Charge* (1887) and *Annie Kilburn* (1889). And in his anger and negative criticism, Howells illuminates his own views of religion as well as his agnosticism.

Notes

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[1] This editorial, unsigned, is attributed to Howells by William M. Gibson and George Arms because of the "definitely Howellsian subject and manner" (*Bibliography* 90).

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論文要約

ドン・イッポーリト神父の苦境：*A Foregone Conclusion* におけるハウエルズの宗教批判

赤嶺健治

A Foregone Conclusion (1875) は Howells の第三作目の小説であるが、執筆に8年をかけ初めて本格的に取り組んだ作品で、作者はこれを "My first novel" と呼んでいる。出版当時の書評で Henry James は、この小説は「真の想像力で劇的な状況」を描く Howells の力量を証明しており、芸術性が高いと述べている。作者は、カトリック教会の神父という地位にありながら、その教義と伝統への懐疑に悩む Don Ippolito の不運な境遇を通して、種々の宗教問題を提示し、それらに対する批判を織り込みながら物語を展開している。視点人物として据えた自らの分身であるベニス駐在アメリカ領事 Henry Ferris の口を借りて作者が提示する問題の中でも最も深刻なのは、30歳になる Don Ippolito 神父自身の不可知論と聖職離脱へのあがきである。同神父は聖職を放棄して発明の才能が生かせるアメリカへ渡ることを望んでいるが、教会の圧力と自らの優柔不断のため決行の時機を逸し続け、懐疑的な神父と反抗的な発明家志望者の偽善的二重生活を送っており、このままではアイデンティティ喪失のみならず背教者として教会や世間から疎外されるのは明白である。Howells は一人の神父の窮状を17歳のアメリカ娘 Florida への思慕の念をからめて描きながら、カトリック教会の人、組織、教義、伝統等の諸問題とりわけ聖職者の本分逸脱を指摘し、それらを厳しく批判する中で、自らの宗教観を明らかにするという効果をあげている。