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Analytical Comparison of "I, the Worst of All" and "One Man's Hero"

The 1999 American film *One Man's Hero*, directed by Lance Hool, and the 1990 Argentinian film *I, the Worst of All*, directed by Maria Luis Bemberg, bare an immediate similarity to the extent that they both investigate the relationship of Catholicism to Latin American identity. Whereas in *One Man's Hero*, the perspective on Catholicism is largely determined from an Irish viewpoint, since the main characters of the film are Irish deserters who have gone to the Mexican side in the U.S.-Mexican war, and *I, the Worst of All*, takes an endemic Latin American perspective, as the central character is a local nun, both films show how Catholicism became a foundation for the Latin American world-view.

In the case of *One Man's Hero*, the historical setting of the film plays a crucial role in the story's unfolding. The main characters are Irish, fighting on the American side in the U.S.-Mexican war of the nineteenth century; yet these Irishmen then switch to the Mexican side, a decision that is arguably highly motivated by their shared Catholicism. Such Catholicism can explain why the Irish are eventually accepted into the Mexican army: Catholicism provides a common ground between the Irish and Mexican cultures, giving them a shared identity and belonging. The film in a sense demonstrates how Catholicism can transcend national borders: the power of a religious world-view, in this regard, is greater than that of the world-views of

nations and states. The secular world loses power when considered to the sacral or transcendent viewpoint that religion gives, namely, the universal message of the Christian faith which goes beyond any human defined borders.

The message of *I, the Worst of All* in regard to Catholicism is arguably the exact opposite of *One Man's Hero*. The narrative revolves around a nun in late seventeenth century Mexico, Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz, who is also a talented poet. Her viewpoint on life, however, is viewed by various Church figures as not ascetic enough: she is viewed as too European and bourgeois, not a true representative of what a Catholic nun should be. She is forced to confess and undergoes various tribulations because of her world-view, one deeply rooted and reflected in her poetry and her creations, which church authorities consider to be a transgression of the Catholic and Christian faith. In this sense, *I, the Worst of All* does not present Catholic faith as something liberating or unifying, but instead divisive and judgmental. The bigoted and limited horizons of the Church authorities inform their decision to destroy Juana Ines.

The vastly different interpretations of Catholicism on Latin American identity therefore, in the case of *One Man's Hero*, show how Catholicism can transcend national boundaries, allowing Latin Americans to co-exist with Europeans despite historical differences, whereas, in the case of *I, the Worst of All*, the discriminatory side of Catholicism is emphasized. Taken together, the films therefore demonstrate the complexity of any social phenomena such as religion: on the basis of the viewpoint we take to religion, our perspectives may change. Furthermore, historically, there are times when a phenomenon such as belongingness to a singular religion may be unifying, such as in times of war and conflict. Yet without any external opponent, religion may turn against its own believers, such as in times of peace.

What both films show in the context of the question of Latin American identity, however, is the clear sense in which the Catholic faith defined identity in terms of who “belongs” and who is the Other.