

One More Sunday Short Guide

One More Sunday by John D. MacDonald

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Social Concerns

Although the plot is based on an unsolved crime and the thrust of the novel is satiric, *One More Sunday* is by no means a McGee novel without McGee. Seen through the eyes of a number of characters, the story offers a full-scale examination of the curious mix of fundamentalist ideas, satellite broadcasting, computerized fund-raising and money management, and institutional ambition which characterizes the most rapidly growing aspect of American religious life. Specifically, the novel depicts what seems to be the beginning of the end for The Eternal Church of the Believer, now in the hands of its founder's son and daughter and besieged both from within — by greed and incompetence — and from without — by the IRS and by the threat of scandal resulting from the disappearance of a woman reporter investigating the Church's operations.

MacDonald's portrait is by no means simplistic; good and evil are less sharply distinguished than in the McGee novels, and hypocrisy — although central to the story — is shown more as an accidental outcome of conflicting pressures than as the product of deliberate callousness. Although MacDonald sometimes seems a little out of his element here (The Jerusalem Bible, a Catholic translation with liberal and scholarly annotations, would be anathema to a fundamentalist church), the diversity of the characters and the variety of their perspectives on the Church make the novel both interesting and challenging to the reader.

Techniques

One More Sunday, like most of MacDonald's novels outside the Travis McGee series, does not employ a firstperson narrator; instead, it moves from one point of view to another, so that the plot unfolds through a variety of perspectives. The reader, needing to link them into a coherent picture, is thus encouraged to note similarities and contrasts among the characters — a process essential to the recognition of thematic strains in the novel. Roy Owen's career as a mutual fund manager parallels Joe Deets's job managing the vast funds of the Church. Tom Brady's sincerity mocks the Meadows' empire-building, and his personal "parables" are the clearest rebuke of the Church's computer-synthesized use of Matthew's voice to pressure delinquent members into tithing. The examples could be multiplied indefinitely; all readers will find their own.



Themes/Characters

Spirituality and sexuality dominate *One More Sunday*. In both arenas, MacDonald explores a range of attitudes through a wide variety of characters. Sexuality undermines integrity as it appears embodied in the Revs. Joe Deets, John Tinker Meadows, and especially Walter Macy. At the same time, two staff members of the Church, Jenny Albritton and Jenny MacBeth share a lesbian relationship that is by comparison wholesome and constructive, and Roy Owen and Peggy Moon display an innocent sexuality in a romance that serves as an antidote to the cruelties of fortune.

Spirituality appears in a comparable range of embodiments, from the emptiness of John Tinker and his sister Mary Margaret to the untutored sincerity of Church member Annalee Purves to the unbalanced prophet called Moses or the thoroughly sane but equally prophetic figure of the Rev. Tom Damel Birdy, who, more than any other character, seems to speak for MacDonald: Working people. I baptize them, and I he'p them through sickness, and I comfort them in grief, and I bury them, knowing they are safe with the Lord forever. Man, that's what this fool business is all about. It ain't quantity, Johnny.

And it ain't money and power and airplanes and all ... I want my people to give what they can and they do. You want them to give more than they can . . . You don't know them. What good is that?

How can you send a soul up to Jesus when you don't know the face it's hiding behind?

As Tom Birdy's speech shows, MacDonald locates the failings of The Eternal Church of the Believer in a deepseated confusion of the spiritual and the material. The confusion clearly stems from Matthew Meadows, who formulated the idea that gifts to the Church were the equivalent of prayer.

Another element in this confusion involves the Church's use of technology. Not only are computers used for normal record-keeping, for instance; they also are employed to imitate human beings. Apparently "personal" letters are sent out in mass mailings as part of the constant fund-raising effort, and Matthew Meadows gains an imitation of immortality by means of video and audio tape recording and computerized voice-synthesis.

Another thematic element, also found in a number of the McGee novels, is a marked sense of poetic justice.

Although MacDonald's world is full of random misfortune, there is often a sense that particular fates may be appropriate to their victims. In this connection, forces of nature seem occasionally to take a fitting revenge on unnatural figures, as in the case of Walter Macy, or diseases may seem especially apt, as in Matthew Meadows' suffering from Alzheimer's disease — his anti-intellectualism punished by a degenerative illness of the brain.

Related Titles

MacDonald has published forty-seven novels outside the Travis McGee series. Many of them seem to take place in other corners of the same world McGee occupies; indeed, some overlap with McGee's world explicitly.

The Last One Left (1967), for example, involves the history of the Munequita, a small runabout found adrift in the Gulf Stream; in the next year's *Pale Gray for Guilt*, McGee has bought the same boat in an estate sale. In addition, *The Last One Left* is dedicated to Travis McGee!

Similarly, *The Lonely Silver Rain* (1985) includes a passing reference to TV preacher John Tinker Meadows, a central character of *One More Sunday*.



Copyright Information

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