

What a divine slog into the dogma and dead end doctrine that accompanies citizens of America who are encouraged by our First Amendment to exercise Freedom of Religion and Speech. Evan Smith gives us a well-researched and passionate view of what we get when all religions are competing for converts in these modern United States. What would the founding fathers have thought!

Smith's main characters are two late middle-aged sisters Mary and Margaret (not to be confused with Mary and Martha from the old testament – or are they). They're quietly residing in the familial home they grew up in - under the southern backdrop of Savannah, Georgia – city with rich historical heritage as well as local tales of pirates, ghosts and black magic. While Smith puts Savannah in the title – one might expect to hear about “Squares” dedicated to the likes of John Wesley (Christian reformer) or philanthropist James Oglethorpe or even the first Baptist African American church organized by Andrew Bryan in 1788. There are so many religious 1sts in Savannah, but these threads are never woven. So, one wonders why the title is used and if it is meant to be a subtle connection.

The action begins when Melissa, a well-meaning young convert {who is really angling for a husband} comes calling door to door. She is selling salvation and giving away tracts in pursuit of a quest to be a missionary.

Mary answers the door and wants nothing to do with a religious zealot and sends her packing. She is the crusty, realist, no nonsense older sister whose been weathered by a failed marriage (her husband took off with a Baptist woman she reports) and so, she takes out her frustration on all around her. She has been victimized, but has chosen to cling to her Catholic religion. So, in turn she suspects that everyone she meets must be trying to con her. (She checks the store clerk's receipts and will return if it is “a penny off”).

Her kindly sister, Margaret is an “easy mark” and lets Melissa in when next she rings the doorbell. She is intrigued by the information she hears and is searching for the road to heaven. Is it Catholicism or is it found through this woman's faith? She is struck by Melissa's glib answers and uses them to find her own voice. She has misgivings about Mary's bitterness. She does have some urgency about all this, as the answering machine calls everyone to the real world. There are doctor's tests to be explained and with that, a health crisis? We're not told who but, Margaret is keenly aware that this will all affect her. And perhaps that is what fuels her interest in heaven. When she dies, will she be one who is resurrected to come back to her home? Will she be alone? Or, will she be the wrong religion and have to reside in hell? Of course, regardless, everyone expects Mary to be there.

So, the plot thickens - Mary gets caught up in the melee, and now, with Melissa questioning her religion, she sets up a confrontation with her mentor (Father Murphy). She is sure that he will fight the battle she cannot. He will set the record straight. He will destroy this “Christian Delinquent”.

But, Father Murphy, like everything else in her life, disappoints. He actually takes Melissa's side on religious dogma, points out where Melissa is correct in her Biblical understanding and Mary is chastised. This is a huge affront to her. Not to be outdone, she vows to be "excommunicated" and calls the bishop. She'll show Father Murphy!

Abandoned and cast out by Mary, Father Murphy sets off on his own quest for righteousness and seizes the opportunity to challenge Melissa and Margaret (who sports new found courage) to solve Biblical inconsistencies. He calls out scriptural verses and shows how discrepancies in the versions really cast a shadow on how each denomination interprets them. Melissa is steadfast. She *knows* the truth.

Smith doesn't let up. It really IS a disputation! When Margaret exasperatingly exclaims -Where is the REAL Bible (she just wants 1 clear answer), and of course, there isn't just one. The Bible is a bunch of stories told and retold through history and written and rewritten by Biblical scholars? Who, like for instance scientists of climate change today - have their own agenda to market.

As I watched this American drama unfold, I couldn't help but think back on a memory of my own childhood. The Sarners family, who were Catholic, with 5 children, moved in across the street from my family. We were 5 too, and children of Evangelicals. We children became friends and, as children do, we both wanted to share our religion - because it was an important part of our lives'. So, I would take my Bible over to Ann Sarners house on a regular basis and we would compare. (This will date me, but, at that time, unlike this drama, Catholics didn't have Bibles. They were left to the blind teachings of the priests.) For Ann and I, it was a conundrum with tempers flaring and lots huffing and finger pointing. Sound familiar?

Our modern Catholic Church is different. Father Murphy shows his metal as he extols Margaret to joust with Melissa read the *Modern New Testament* while Melissa uses the standard "King James Version". They compare stories of David and Goliath and others. It is indeed a slog into the depths of our thinking that these truths that we base so much of our life on, are - but stories- brought to us by being handed down from generation to generation. Not only do we have a version of "telephone". But, then we put a **holy** stamp on it all and call it *sacred* - beyond reproach. Is it any wonder that today, globally, we have a number of religious wars being fought?

Perhaps our founding fathers couldn't foresee the cultural diversity and incredible scientific innovation we have today when they demanded all the freedoms we still enjoy. Or maybe, just maybe these arguments are age old and universal. Those among us who live by their beliefs and fight for them have a special place in human history. They are immortalized. The rest of us, like Mary suffer with our human failings and merely survive to exist another day. Margaret is "easy". She ultimately gets it. Mary, always more complicated, decides not to sever ties with Father

Murphy and he will probably be back for dinner next Thursday. Will Melissa ever get her man? I guess it just "is what it is".