The Intersection Between Faith and Horror: The Vampiric Angels of Netflix’s Midnight Mass

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Abstract
When it comes to on-screen depictions, oftentimes religion and horror are placed at opposing sides. Religion in film is the antithesis of horror, rarely does it venture into the concept of religion itself as the source. Netflix’s Midnight Mass (2021) by Mike Flanagan explores this topic in a deeper yet subtle manner. Since the series was released less than two years before this article was written, most of the articles found are focused on the cinematic aspect and the performance of actors. This article examines the use of overt religiousness to push forward the horror narrative, particularly the interchangeable nature of angels and vampires. By using textual analysis as a method, the writer concludes that horror can only be recontextualized into a holy perspective because religion is the origin of said horror.

Keywords: Netflix, Midnight Mass, horror, faith, religion, angels, vampires, Christianity

INTRODUCTION
Douglas Cowan (2016) in Sacred Terror: Religion and Horror on the Silver Screen, stated that “cinema horror is replete with religion and always has been.” Since the early breakthroughs of the silver screen—from the silent, black-and-white creature features to film as we know it today—horror has remained one of the most popular genres to be brought to life, and religious influences can frequently be found inside of it. Wheeler (2011) indicated that this popularity comes from the fear of the unknown, the vision of something beyond normal, or the pure horror that a horror film can instill in a human’s heart and mind. Horror as a genre is the least amenable to religious sensitivities. Horror features the profane, frequently in grotesque and unpleasant dimensions, and it offends, disgusts, and frightens. However, horror movies tend to incorporate religious themes, symbols, and rituals. From
the earliest Faustian plays to vampire legends and claims of demonic possessions to more contemporary apocalyptic nightmares (Stone, 2001). This is owed to the notion that religion is capable of being both the origin and antithesis of horror. The Bible and Quran are both filled with imageries of frightening beings, and both texts have emphasized the dread of terror that comes in the aftermath of sin and the following afterlife for such sinners. Prayers and good deeds in the name of God, aside from being preached as strategies to ward against such evils, are also typically the conclusion to many horror film atrocities.

The Malaysian horror duology, Munafik and Munafik 2 by Syamsul Yusof is centered around an ustadj who uses his extensive theological knowledge and unwavering faith to defeat manifestations of the devil. In James Wan’s The Conjuring franchise, the paranormal investigator pair Ed and Lorraine Warren are devoted Christians, and Christianity is the main tool to vanquish not just supernatural evils but also a guiding force for the characters’ moral worlds (Ross, 2021). These are only a few examples provided out of the number of other horror films and shows that focus on religion, specifically ones with a religious figurehead such as a priest or an ustadj as the main protagonist. Religion is all about offering people comfort, and horror is all about stripping it away (Romano, 2021), but what happens in a narrative where religion, too, becomes the source of all the horror?

Midnight Mass is a seven-part miniseries by Mike Flanagan that was released in 2021 on Netflix. It tells the story of a devout Christian town on a small island off the coast of Maine. A few years prior to the start of the show, there was an oil leak within the vicinity of the island, and since the fishermen could no longer make a living, most of the residents migrated to the mainland, gradually decreasing the number of inhabitants. The population, which used to be in the thousands, has been reduced to 127. The only town on the island is recently occupied by a new priest called Father Paul Hill, who is later revealed to be Monsignor Pruitt, the elderly priest that has been guiding the town for many decades, brought back into his younger body by a creature he perceived to be an angel while he was lost during a pilgrimage in Jerusalem. With his arrival, the town starts experiencing supernatural events that most residents believe to be miracles. The horror is not on the face and immediate, it is a slow burn journey filled with dread. Only a few characters from the ensemble cast are wary of the miracles’ that keep occurring in Crockett Island, and they are all part of the minority group that has completely renounced any religion or has a different faith entirely.

Although never directly addressed as one, the show uses the particular figure of a vampire—often referred to only as ‘The Angel’— to represent the horror, which is accomplished by emphasizing the overlap between the biblical angel and the vampire of Western myths.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Contemporary adaptations frequently depict vampires in a more romanticized light—preferring to use them as protective love interests instead of monsters that hunt the protagonists, such as the vampires in the Twilight franchise (2008–2012) or CW’s The Vampire Diaries (2009–2017)—way before that, vampires already had a long history of being staple figures of horror in both western literature and film. John William Polidori’s 1819 short novella, The Vampyre, was one of the earliest tales of the vampire that was written in English. In the story, the vampire antagonist, Lord Ruthven, preyed on noblewomen while disguising himself as a rich gentleman. J. Sheridan Le Fanu’s Carmilla was published in 1872, preceding Bram Stoker's Dracula by 25 years. It recounts the tale of a human girl who developed feelings for an enigmatic woman who arrived in front of their house out of the blue. Later, it was discovered that the mysterious woman, Carmilla, was actually Mircalla, Countess Karnstein, a vampire who had been terrorizing women for centuries.

Dracula (1931), starring Bela Lugosi, was predominantly based on Bram Stoker's novel and is the most well-known depiction of the vampire in early cinema. Despite the adjustments made to the human cast members, the tale still largely revolves around the count's desire to relocate to England
in order to pursue fresh prey. The Hammer Horror vampire films, which ran from the late 1950s through the early 1970s, came next. Christopher Lee’s performance as Count Dracula in the Hammer films, in particular, inspired a number of contemporary horror vampires. Karg et al. (2009) mentioned that "with his bloodshot eyes and savage hypnotics, Lee made a striking Dracula whose athleticism, provocative sexual undertones, and unbridled animal impulses gave the character fresh life." Consequently, fear of the vampire is now accompanied by fear of their capacity to seduce and coerce their victims into doing their bidding.

In films where vampires are the adversaries, they are often united by their recurring weakness for symbols of faith. The most common is that vampires are shown to have intolerance—and in some cases, extreme aversion—toward the crucifix. In Dracula (1931), the character Renfield, who was on his way to visit Count Dracula’s castle in Transylvania, was persuaded by the villagers to wear a crucifix, begging him, "If you must go, wear this... for your mother's sake." And only a few minutes later, their fear for his life was proven correct. As Renfield nurses a cut finger during shaving, the count's hunger overcomes his demeanor, and he stalks in to feed only to be driven back by the sight of the crucifix (Phillips, 2005). Similarly, Cowan (2016) noted that "in many horror films—particularly, though not exclusively, Western vampire films—the cross represents a significant component in the technology of salvation and the successful narrative resolution of the conflict. Even when only passively deployed—worn as a pendant or created through the interplay of light and shadow—the cross protects, binds, banishes, and destroys the evil that comes against it."

Fall (2011), in “Vampires, Reflections in a Dark Mirror”, claimed that stories of vampires always reflect the cultures in which they are created, which can be boiled down to humanity’s constant struggles to overcome animalistic drives and resist the descent into monstrosity. So in cases where a vampire becomes impaired in the face of a symbol of faith, the cross becomes an extension for religion as a whole, which more often than not becomes a synonym for "good", "moral", and "ethical", an opposing force to the vampire’s malevolence as a personification of evil that seeks out to persuade innocent humans to a life of sin, alluding to the concept that religion in horror can only be a tool to eradicate all evil.

3. METHOD

This paper contributes to a previous study of Midnight Mass by Lammer-Heindell (2022), which discusses the show’s question of whether what has been given to the characters is actually a miracle or a demonic influence, the line between the holy and the unholy, and how blind faith ties it all together. This study examines religion as the origin of horror, primarily the show’s concept that angels and vampires are interchangeable, along with the blurred distinction between the two supernatural beings. The main characteristics of the film vampire will be taken from Karg, Spaite, and Sutherland’s 2009 vampire encyclopedia, The Everything Vampire Book: From Vlad the Impaler to the Vampire Lestat—a history of vampires in literature, film, and legend, supported by examples from various works of literature and film pertaining to vampires. The data is gathered through an in-depth observation of the show, specifically certain scenes taken from episodes three, four, five, and six. The images from the show are taken by the author of this paper, and the transcription provided in the excerpts are taken directly from the script of Mike Flanagan’s Midnight Mass.

4. DISCUSSION

Characteristics of The Film Vampire

In the 2009 book, The Everything Vampire Book: From Vlad the Impaler to the Vampire Lestat—a history of vampires in literature, film, and legend, Barb Karg et. al, listed several key physical characteristics that make a vampire in films.

The first and most iconic characteristic is the fang, which are sharp, elongated canines that provide a means for them to rip through their victim’s skin to draw blood. While the early films, like Bela Lugosi’s Dracula, avoided showing any explicit acts of sucking blood, the Christopher Lee
films had no qualms about showing graphic neck-biting scenes. This is something that is subsequently carried over to modern-day vampire films, from a simple act of puncturing to access the carotid artery (Lestat biting Louis in *Interview with the Vampire* (1994)) to more gory exhibits of tearing apart the throat itself (the vampires in *30 Days of Night* (2007)). With the development of special effects, some of the contemporary vampires are also shown to have their jaw bones restructuring themselves or even becoming unhinged to accommodate the sudden growth of their fangs.

![Image](image_url)

**Figure 1. Imogen Poots as Amy in the remake of Fright Night (2011) (Alves, 2012)**

The second characteristic is their lack of sleep. It has been shown in numerous films that vampires do not define sleep the same way humans do. They are either capable of completely going without it, or they will rest while maintaining some degree of awareness. The former type is shown repeatedly in the Twilight franchise—one of the most memorable examples of this was in the fourth installment, *Breaking Dawn Part 2* (2012), when Edward Cullen and Bella Swan’s newborn child, Renesmee, was never put down inside a crib because of the number of vampires in the Cullen family. The child would constantly be passed from one vampire’s hold to another because none of them needed to sleep. The latter kind of ‘sleep’ can be seen in several other adaptations, such as *The Vampire Diaries*, where the vampires sleep during the day but will continue to be somewhat aware due to their enhanced supernatural senses.

Vampires being nocturnal creatures is also attributed to the fact that they are incapable of withstanding sunlight. In most films, they are shown to burn at the slightest exposure to the sun and would be pulverized when completely subjected to it. In *Fright Night* (2011), one of the victims who was abducted by the vampire died from incineration when she ran out of the house without realizing it was already morning. The final scene of *30 Days of Night* (2007) shows the main character, Eben, refusing to continue living as a vampire. He decides to die by watching the rising sun one last time, quickly disintegrating into ashes in the arms of his wife.

Although the third trait has become less prevalent in modern depictions, it nevertheless stands out as a distinctive trait. It is the fingernails. Karg et al. (2009) mentioned Count Orlok in *Nosferatu* (1922), mentioning that his "demonic digits are intentionally and abnormally long and gruesome, which adds dramatically to his rodent-like appearance." The nails of a vampire are typically longer and sharper than a human would be, not unlike the talons of a bird, or cut to a point like an arrowhead. The nails serve a similar function to their teeth, with the sharp edges of the nails being used to slice through or claw into flesh, most often their own, in order to share their blood with someone that they are planning to turn into another vampire.
In Netflix’s *Midnight Mass*, the third episode, “Proverbs”, is where Father Paul Hill’s true identity is revealed, and the show first gives a glimpse of the peculiar being that turned him into what he is. The scene takes place at the end of the episode, and the shot goes back and forth between Father Paul in the confession booth and the flashback of the senile Monsignor Pruitt getting lost during his pilgrimage in Jerusalem. In the confessional, Father Paul is alone, which provides the impression that he’s repenting directly to God. Meanwhile during the flashback, on the road to Damascus—while trying to navigate his way through a sandstorm—Monsignor Pruitt stumbles upon a cave that was recently unearthed by the storm. After lighting a candle, he decides to take shelter there overnight. Unbeknownst to him, the cave houses an inhuman creature. The creature proceeds to blow out his candle and attack him, draining him of all his blood. The moment right before he passes out, the creature leans in to give him its blood, dripping it into his open mouth and down his throat. In the morning, when he wakes, Monsignor Pruitt finds that he has been returned to his youth. From a man in his 70s back into a body that is decades younger.

**Episode III - “Proverbs”** [Timestamp 56:23 - 56:43]

**Scriptwriter(s):** Mike Flanagan, James Flanagan

**FR. PAUL (V.O.):** Pain, yes, and those eyes—eyes and skin and hands, yes—but also WINGS—the sense of great wings, enfolding him, and his [MONSIGNOR PRUITT] mind finally found the word...

**FR. PAUL continues his confession [to God].**

**FR. PAUL:** ... the word was unearthed by his [MONSIGNOR PRUITT] fear like the tomb was unearthed by the storm and the word was... ANGEL.
The word "vampire" was never explicitly stated in the show, but the ‘Angel’ of Midnight Mass shares all of the characteristics of the vampires in film, along with the blood-drinking, and there’s no denying that the creature bears no resemblance to the traditional portrayal of angels in media—be it the childlike cherubic entities or the youthful figure in flowing robes with feathered wings. As shown in the third episode and subsequent episodes, The Angel is tall, with bat-like wings. Its skin has a cold, sickly pallor that is akin to a corpse that has grown cold, and there are no discerning features that can be used to distinguish its gender. In place of normal fingernails, it possesses sharp, pointed talons that it continuously uses to slice its wrist whenever it needs to give out blood.

The Angel’s visage is more reminiscent of an ‘unconventional’ vampire from a classic film that preceded Bela Lugosi and Christopher Lee’s Count Dracula—which is Count Orlock from Nosferatu (1922). In addition, for a more recent portrayal, there is The Master or Sariel, from the television series The Strain (2014–2017), adapted from a novel trilogy with the same name, written by Chuck Hogan and Guillermo del Toro. When the wings are taken into account, The Angel also resembles the archangel Ozryel from The Strain novels. In their world, the strigoi—the in-universe term for vampires—are descended from Ozryel, who is directly inspired by Azrael, the angel of death in Islam and Judaism (Lollins, 2023). Their existence originated when God sent down three archangels to punish Sodom and Gomorrah for their transgressions, Ozryel being one of them. In the process, Ozryel developed a fascination for human blood and ended up attacking a human woman to drink from her. Yearning for more, Ozryel turned to his own kind. After witnessing the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Ozryel lured the archangel Michael onto a cliff and assaulted him, tearing into his throat to taste the silver blood of angels. Ozryel was eventually punished by God for his crimes. He was killed, and his corpse was separated into seven parts, with each appendage placed in various locations around the world. The Seven Primordial Strigoi, the progenitor of all the vampires in the world, were created as a result of his limbs sinking into the soil.
The incident with Ozryel could very well have been the case with The Angel of *Midnight Mass*. The origin of The Angel was never mentioned throughout the show; the only indicator was the cave Monsignor Pruitt found the creature in. The cave’s proximity to Jerusalem suggests that the creature might have had a hand in shaping the evolution of Abrahamic religions, serving as inspiration for the concept of angels. Lollins (2023) mentioned that occasionally vampires were demons, such as in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997–2003). For Christianity in particular, which is the religion of focus in *Midnight Mass*, it was expressed in Revelations (12:7–9) that demons hailed from fallen angels:

> And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, *but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer.* ⁸“So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the devil, or Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him,
>
> which brings to light a possibility for The Angel from *Midnight Mass*: it is a fallen angel, and through saving Monsignor Pruitt while he was on the brink of death, it has instead convinced him that it is an angel of God.
>
> As for Monsignor Pruitt, upon his rebirth as a young man, picked the name Paul with purpose. In the New Testament, on the road to Damascus, Apostle Paul—at the time named Saul—experienced an incident that altered his conviction. Before, he persecuted Jesus and all of His followers, until a beam of light shone down on him from heaven and Jesus appeared to him, inquiring why Saul persecuted Him, then He directed Paul to the city of Damascus where he will be told what to do next.
>
> Monsignor Pruitt/Father Paul likened his own encounter with The Angel with Apostle Paul’s encounter with Jesus, a life-changing event that converted—in Monsignor Pruitt’s case, reinforced—his beliefs. Convinced that it is not a coincidence, he brings The Angel back with him to Crockett Island, determined to share the ‘miracle’ he received with the other townsfolk, unaware that it was merely an imitation of God’s own miracles and unknowingly bringing himself—along with the churchgoers—down a more sinister path.

**Convincing Crockett Island**

Angels and vampires in horror films have always represented the absolute Good and Evil (Lollins, 2023), however, in the case of *Midnight Mass*, The Angel shares a number of characteristics with a vampire, which brings into question how horror is presented when the lines between good and evil are blurred. Throughout the show, the creature being an angel is an undeniable truth for the characters, and some are even willing to go certain lengths to rationalize
The Angel’s traits and actions, even encouraging and providing a platform for it to act—defying the idea that a creature who represents Absolute Good should not have their actions justified in the first place, which further proves the idea that it is not an angel of God, but is more likely a vampire, who in this case is a demon that hailed from a fallen angel. Prime examples of justifications are from Father Paul and Bev Keane, which will be discussed further below.

**Episode IV - “Lamentations”** [Timestamp 01:03:24-01:04:35]

**Scriptwriter(s):** Mike Flanagan, Dani Parker

He [*FR. PAUL*] paces inside, looking at — THE LARGE GLASS DECANTER. EMPTY, BUT WE CAN SEE THE STAIN OF THE RED LIQUID IT HELD. HE KNEELS DOWN, hands clasped.

![Figure 8. An empty, blood-stained glass decanter. Father Paul pacing frantically behind](image)

*FR. PAUL*: Please come. Please. Please. Angel of God my guardian dear to whom god’s love commits me here ever this day be at my side to light and guard to rule and guide— angel of God my guardian dear to whom god’s love commits me here—

AND THEN WE SEE IT. IN THE DOORWAY.

Someone STANDING in the dim light, looking in at him. Father Paul turns. SENSES IT. And there, in the doorway

— IS THE “ANGEL.”

We still can’t see it too clearly, because IT IS WEARING A LONG COAT, and a FEDORA. MONSIGNOR PRUITT’S TELLTALE CLOTHES.

THIS IS WHY RILEY THOUGHT HE SAW MONSIGNOR PRUITT ON THE BEACH — THIS IS WHAT ERIN SAW OUT HER WINDOW.

*FR. PAUL (CONT’D)*: Oh, thank God. Where have you—

It RAISES A HAND. SHARP TALON-LIKE FINGERS, A SUBTLE GESTURE — but unmistakable. And Father Paul QUIETS.

*FR. PAUL (CONT’D)*: Of course. I’m sorry. I’m just—I’ve been lost. I don’t know what’s—and I am out. I am out of the Sacrament.
The Intersection Between...

Figure 9. The Angel fills the glass decanter with its blood

In order to mislead the residents of Crockett Island, the (Fallen) Angel counterfeits God’s miracles. The sacrament that Father Paul mentioned refers to the sacramental wine that is given during communion. With the angel’s arrival, decked out in Father Paul Hill/Monsignor Pruitt’s clothes, it is finally revealed that the wine that Father Paul has been giving the townsfolk has been added with the angel’s blood. Just as Monsignor Pruitt has been transformed back into his younger self by the angel’s blood, the inhabitants of Crockett Island are starting to undergo changes that previously seemed impossible. Leeza Scarborough, a teenage girl who had a hunting accident that left her paralyzed from the waist down, has been able to walk once again since consuming the holy wine. Mildred Gunning, who was originally the same age as the old Monsignor Pruitt, gradually regained her youth. Prior to the final episode, she was frail and bedridden, but by the end, she was even younger than her own daughter. Erin Greene, who was heavily pregnant, had her body turned back to the way it was before she carried the baby, which made it seem that she never got pregnant at all. Most of the residents called the incidents “real-life miracles.”

In The Essence of Christianity, Feuerbach (2011) stated, "The specific object of faith, therefore, is miracle; faith is the belief in miracle; faith and miracle are absolutely inseparable." The sudden arrival of Father Paul and the miracles that he brought have reinforced the faith of the people of Crockett Island. They grow more reverent of him; they question his motives and behavior less and less, believing that he is the change that the town needs. In the horror genre, the priest is a person of knowledge, a figure of salvation, and a reliable source who lends assistance in Western culture (Shimabukuro, 2021). As the elderly Monsignor Pruitt, Paul was the religious figurehead that guided the town and island for decades. When he comes back as Father Paul, he becomes a symbol of new hope for the people. He serves as their priest in both cases, acting as the dependable guide who will lead them to salvation. So, when he tells them he will only hold Mass at midnight, they attend diligently. When he instructs them to drink, they obey. The people are encouraged by the knowledge that, so far, his directions have only led to positive—even miraculous—results. Every word that comes out of him is the word of God, or at least that’s what the people of Crockett Island are willing to believe. Except for people who are no longer part of the church, such as the convict Riley Flynn.

**Episode V - “Gospel”**

[Timestamp 41:22 - 43:12]

Scriptwriter(s): Mike Flanagan, James Flanagan

RILEY: (incredulous) God’s will.

BEV: Yes. Oh, yes, and don’t mock, Riley, do not mock. God’s will, and we know it from his own word, don’t we Sturge.

STURGE: “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life.”

BEV: And.

STURGE: And... I, will--

BEV: “I will raise them up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them.” Gospel
of John, and it’s pretty specific, isn’t it? Not really mincing words, is he.

Riley holds up his arms, still showing some BURNS.

**Figure 10. Riley holding up his scorched arm**

**RILEY:** And this? Is this in the gospels?

**BEV:** Why no dear, that’s in Revelation. “The fourth angel poured his bowl on the sun, and it was allowed to scorch men with fire.” Chapter 16, verse 8. That’s the thing about Jesus coming back to us - they told us from the start, it wouldn’t be pretty. Monsignor Pruitt was shaken, at first. Even him. But it’s all right there in the book, Riley. The seven bowls of God’s wrath, poured out at the second coming. The end of days. The fourth bowl, upon the sun. The fifth, since you asked, the fifth bowl of god’s wrath plunges the world into darkness... which won’t be an issue for you, or Monsignor, will it. Why it’s almost as if God is preparing you. For that. And you’re standing there, blessed among men, smirking when I say “God’s will...”

Riley Flynn awakens after being brutally attacked by The Angel at the end of the previous episode. Intending to ask Father Paul a question, Riley walks into the recreation center to find him, only to discover Father Paul prostrating on the floor as the looming, unfamiliar figure of The Angel pours its blood into the glass decanter. Realizing his presence, The Angel jumps at Riley, pinning him to the ground. The episode ends with Father Paul closing the door as The Angel bleeds Riley dry and then feeds him its blood. In the beginning of the fifth episode, Gospel, Riley Flynn is resurrected and comes face to face with Father Paul, who comes clean about his identity and explains to him that what happened was a direct blessing from God, revealing that the same thing happened to him on his trip to Jerusalem, calling the creature an angel.

**Figure 11. Sturge and Bev look at Riley with concern. Sturge’s arm is filled with bandages, Bev is holding a golden chalice**

To further convince Riley Flynn, Bev Keane and Sturge—important members of the church—use the word of God against him, expecting that he will be deceived as the congregation has been. Bev offers Sturge’s blood to Riley, causing Riley to realize that they are also involved in Father Paul’s schemes, covering for him in front of the townsfolk. When Riley refuses to drink the
blood and scoffs at them, Bev starts to recite the Gospel of John (6:54–56): "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them." reaffirming Father Paul’s claim that whatever happened to them was an act of God.

Riley continues to argue, pointing at his burned lower arm—caused by his attempt to escape from the building, where he ended up being scorched by the sun—and questioning if his suffering is also part of God's plans. Bev Keane once again rebukes him by citing the Book of Revelations. She declared that the occurrences were all already mentioned in the very same book. From the angel's arrival to its aversion to sunlight. She added that it (the transformation) was not meant to be pretty, and only by having faith can one be able to stand it, using Monsignor Pruitt as an example. Bev Keane, along with Father Paul uses their position of leadership as a tool instead to control and deceive the churchgoers, who unknowingly have already shifted their faith into Father Paul and the miracles they experienced, instead of the true word of God.

The trust and faith that the residents placed in their figure of salvation, Father Paul/Monsignor Pruitt—or in a sense, their form of idolatry—will eventually lead to disastrous results. At the end of the sixth episode, “Acts of the Apostles”, during midnight mass for the Easter vigil, Father Paul gathered the entire town into the church, proceeding to confess that he was actually Monsignor Pruitt. He preached to them regarding his journey to Damascus and his encounter with The Angel. He then demonstrated the process of the vampire transformation—which he called the Resurrection—with the help of a devout member of the church, Sturge, by asking him to drink poison and for the churchgoers to wait for him to reawaken after his death. He explains to them that they all have the blood of The Angel inside their bodies from drinking the sacramental wine and encourages them to drink the poison he had prepared so they would all be resurrected together, exclaiming, "Resurrection of the body, that’s what Easter is about!".

Seeing the congregation’s fearful reception of his actions, Father Paul invites The Angel into the church, dressed in his robes. To assuage the crowd, he quotes from the Bible, Luke (2:9), "Lo and behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and they were afraid." reminding them that whenever angels appear in front of humans, fear is expected, and to remember that the arrival of an angel is synonymous with good news. The continuation of his quote, Luke (2:10), is "Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people." which was not said by Father Paul but greatly implied, for he expected them to rejoice at its appearance.

Free of their doubts, along with his assurances that their fears are within boundaries and him being the living proof of the Resurrection, the majority of the townsfolk no longer questions him, believing that this is just another leap of faith, this time to achieve everlasting life. They have their guide, and they have evidence of miracles to strengthen their faith and help them get through the trial. At this point of the story, it finally settles that the true horror was the people themselves, and the lengths they would go to in order to carry out what they deem as their religious duty, and The Angel was only a tool for them to achieve it.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Midnight Mass (2021) is an interesting presentation of how religion and horror can go hand in hand, with an approach where the real horror is disguised under the belief of salvation that’s brought by religion. With Midnight Mass, Mike Flanagan introduces the audience to a fictional town that is so easily identifiable as Christian and places them in a situation where their devotion and their faith would be put to the test, questioning how far they are willing to justify the acts done in the name of religion.

The actions of Father Paul in Midnight Mass were visibly inspired by real-life incidents of ritual mass suicides and the implication of the horrifying power religion has over people, which
was mentioned by Cowan (2016): "real life horror from the jungles of Guyana (Jonestown) to the upscale suburbs of San Diego (Heaven’s Gate) confronts us with the power of religion to motivate participants in ways that those of us not privy to their secrets are often at a loss to understand." The concept comes back to the horror genre idea that religion stands for ultimate Good—thus everything done in its name must serve a larger goal—but with a much more sinister tone. The progression of the story throughout the seven episodes is what happens when religion is used as a reference for horrifying occurrences, instead of being the saving force that goes against it. The horror itself comes from the rules that have been ingrained deep within the teachings of religion and the blind faith that provides the means for them to work.

By using the character of an angel as a medium, it delivers horror in a way that evokes more and more dread as the story goes on. The Angel’s nature that is reminiscent of a vampire brings up the possibility that perhaps the two creatures are one in the same, but despite it, the people were already too deep in their belief and are willing to overlook the dubious nature of the being—choosing to have faith in their guide, their priest—even at the cost of their demise.

Several recommendations for future research based on this study would be to improve on the aspect of blind faith toward religion, which became the driving force of the residents willingness to do anything that was asked of them, as Lammer-Heindel (2022) discussed in his paper; the horrifying real-life instances done by religious cults, which influenced the latter parts of the show; or the character of Sherif Hassan and his son, who were the only muslims on the island, and the portrayal of Islam to provide an outsider perspective toward the events in *Midnight Mass.*

### 6. REFERENCES

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