**Prompt**: Allegory is a type of extended metaphor or symbolism that is often religious and can be interpreted to reveal a hidden meaning which is usually moral. In a well-written essay explain how Clint Eastwood’s Spaghetti Western film *High Plains Drifter* (1973) can be seen as a religious allegory of the avenging angel from western religious mythology. Analyze a single scene in your essay and explain the significance of the scene within the film’s overall allegorical design and what this scene contributes to the film’s narrative development and/or central theme.

Clint Eastwood’s directorial debut in the 1973 Spaghetti Western *High Plains Drifter* is an allegorical story of the avenging angel, who comes to the town of Lago (‘lake’) in order to mete out brutal retribution on the men who killed him and on the town who stood by and watched. In religious mythology the avenging angel is an angel of death sent by God in order to exact punishment through slaughtering with the purpose of restoring order and honor. This slaughter traditionally takes the form of burning, beheading or throttling (choking). In the final, climactic, scene of the film all three symbolic deaths are executed against the three hired murderers of the town Marshall Duncan by an unnamed stranger amid a burning town that is intended to represent Hell itself. The first of Marshall Duncan’s murderers is yanked through the air and out of the saloon by a bull whip that seems to come from the darkness at a high angle, as if some supernatural force was pulling him into the blackness from above. This gang member is then whipped to death in the street by a shadowy figure while the two remaining gang members, and the rest of the town, stand frozen by fear inside the saloon only to have the instrument of vengeance, the whip, tauntingly tossed in at them on the floor as a warning of what is to come. The manner in which the gang member is whipped to death by the stranger and the way in which even his friends standby out of fear and do nothing to stop the whipping mirrors the earlier scene in which Marshall Duncan whipped to death. After finally exiting the saloon, the second gang member is grappled around the neck with another bull whip and hung from a building as the third, and final, gang member – the leader – by the name of Stacey looks on unable to see where the whip is coming from. Again it appears as if a supernatural force has come out of the darkness from above to exact justice. The hanging metaphor is also relevant because the leaders of the town had conspired to have Stacey and his cousins kill Marshall Duncan while the rest of the town watched the crime and kept quiet after the fact while burying the Marshall in an unmarked grave. The head of the mining company Dave Drake summed it up when he said “Hell, why do you think Stacey Bridges and the Carlin brothers kept their mouths shut this entire time? Same reason everybody else did in this town. If one of us hangs we *all* hang.” In this way the gang member’s hanging becomes symbolic of the punishments of the entire town. The allegorical connection to the avenging angel is further illustrated when Stacey then hears someone calling for help from the darkness in a manner that is eerily familiar to the way the Marshall called to the townspeople for help as he was being brutally whipped to death. As Stacey cautiously investigates the noise, the viewer sees through a long-shot the shadowy figure walk into the street behind Casey and take position in front of the burning church. The town here, painted red and engulfed in flames, truly takes on the representation of burning Hell. As Casey screams at the shadowy figure, half in anger and half in despair, “Who are you?!” the figure unloads his gun into the last gang member. The final trigger in the film is pulled by the midget Mordecai as he puts a bullet into the hotel owner and saves the stranger from death from behind. At this point in the film the Marshall Duncan has been avenged. All of the characters who were involved in the death of the Marshall have been killed and the members of the town who stood by and did nothing to save him have seen their livelihoods go up in flames. As the stranger rides off the next day Mordecai is labeling an unmarked gravestone and looks up and says “I still don’t know your name.” The stranger replies “Yes you do,” before he rides off into the sunset and disappears behind the gravestone which now bears the inscription “Here lies Marshall Jim Duncan”. With all of these clues that range from subtle to blatant the theory that the stranger is an allegory for the dead Marshall’s avenging ghost is a foregone conclusion.