CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

THE THEOLOGICAL MOMENT
IN ELEVEN SHORT STORIES OF FLANNERY O'CONNOR

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in

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by

Ruth Gwendolyn Fowler

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DEDICATION

I wish to thank my husband, R. Lee Fowler, for the innumerable sacrifices he has made in order that I might attain the Master of Arts degree. In addition, Dr. Benjamin Saltman, with great patience and kindness, aided me in the writing of this thesis. My children, Rhonda and Richard, have encouraged and helped me every step of the way. To these individuals and others, such as Dr. Elaine Plasberg and Dr. William Walsh, I extend my gratitude and appreciation.
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ABSTRACT

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The concept of grace permeates every short story and the two novels of Flannery O'Connor. This doctrinal truth belongs in the context of Roman Catholic teaching and can be specifically related to the writings of Jacques Maritain, a theologian and philosopher who influenced O'Connor's theological vision. The doctrinal matters which form the foundation of her personal life also form the foundation of her interpretation of fictional life. The writings of Maritain which interpret Thomistic order and the doctrine of grace added depth to O'Connor's viewpoint and gave it focus.
A close study of O'Connor's stories reveals that the idea of grace pervades them in some way, either as a major theme or as an underlying element. In all of them, however, there is present what may be termed "the moment of grace," that moment in which the protagonist is offered grace by whatever means employed in the story and then reacts to this gift by either acceptance or refusal. Whereas some of her later stories have been examined by critics on the concept of grace, the moment of grace has not been identified in her first short stories which comprise her Master of Fine Arts Thesis dated June 1947. In addition to identifying the moment of grace in her thesis stories, five other stories have also been selected for this identification. These stories include "The Partridge Festival," "A Temple of the Holy Ghost," "The River," "A Stroke of Good Fortune," and "The Enduring Chill." While they are not her most famous short stories, they are important pieces in the body of her work and are excellent examples of her use of the operation of grace. Four of the stories illustrate the transmission and affirmative reception of sanctifying grace through the agency of the sacraments.

Maritain's explorations into the deeper realms of
Catholic dogma provided her with the full development she required as a Catholic and as an artist. O'Connor, who saw herself as a servant of Christ, achieved fruition as an artist with her reliance upon grace working upon human nature as the central theme in her stories.
I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of grace* imbues every short story and the two novels of Flannery O'Connor. St. Paul, in Ephesians 2:8, writes: "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not from yourselves, for it is the gift of God." As St. Paul implies, grace is a sharing in the divine life gratuitously given by God. Since it is difficult to observe the physical manifestations of this participation, the Church has termed grace a mystery. Yet this mystery, it can be shown, is a major preoccupation of O'Connor. Grace as doctrinal truth belongs in the context of Roman Catholic teaching and can be specifically related to the writings of Jacques Maritain, a writer who influenced O'Connor's theological vision. The doctrinal matters which form the foundation of her personal life also form the foundation of her interpretation of fictional life. In response to an interviewer's question, "What are you main concerns as a writer?", O'Connor replied, "I will admit to certain preoccupations that I get, I

* See Attachment A.
suppose, because I'm a Catholic; preoccupations with belief and with death and grace and the devil.\textsuperscript{1}

Jacques Maritain presented a system of philosophy starting from the epistemological and metaphysical principles of Thomism which combined Aristotelian realism and Christian revelation.\textsuperscript{2} The values of contemporary Catholics are applied through his writing, in which the particular question of the importance of grace in salvation in thoroughly examined. An investigation of O'Connor's work reveals an indebtedness to Maritain's theological position as spokesman for Thomism in the Roman Catholic Church; thus a genuine insight into her theological attitude must include the work of Maritain.

A close study of her stories reveals that the idea of grace pervades them in some way, either as a major theme or as an underlying element. One thing that is implicit in the moment of grace for Flannery O'Connor is the protagonist's confrontation with reality. O'Connor explains that her concept of reality is a precondition of grace in her comment on violence in her work:

\ldots in my own stories I have found that violence is strangely capable of returning my characters to reality and preparing them to accept their moment of grace. Their heads are so hard that almost nothing else will do the work. This idea, that reality is something to which we must be returned
at considerable cost, is one which is seldom understood by the casual reader, but it is one which is implicit in the Christian view of the world.3

Supporting this view is Maritain's statement that

An integral realism is only possible for an art sensitive to the whole truth of the universe of good and evil, for an art pervaded by the consciousness of grace and sin and the importance of the moment. And all that is most real in the world escapes the notice of the darkened soul.4

O'Connor's protagonists undergo a search for salvation, a search for basic truths as do all men, either knowingly or unknowingly. In some of her fiction, such as The Violent Bear It Away, for example, the sacrament of Baptism, one means of obtaining sanctifying grace, acts as a major motif - "the central action"5 - as she herself designates it. In others, the action of grace is found in a much more subtle form. But in all of them, there is present what may be termed "the moment of grace," that moment in which the protagonist is given grace by whatever means employed in the story, and then reacts to this gift by either acceptance or refusal. The acceptance of grace wins him salvation; the refusal of grace condemns him. The acceptance or refusal is not always absolute in those cases in which the protagonist continues to live. If the protagonist does not die in the act of refusal, there still remains hope for salvation at a later time. If the
protagonist accepts grace, he is in "the state of grace" and thus eligible for further graces to help him continue in this state throughout his life. The refusal of grace lessens the probability of its being offered; it is offered fewer and fewer times with each refusal.

Whereas some of the later stories of O'Connor have been examined by critics such as Bob Dowell and Carter Martin on the concept of grace, the moment of grace has not been identified in her first short stories which comprise her Master of Fine Arts Thesis dated June 1947. But first a summary of the catechetical teaching of the Church is necessary before examining the nature of grace itself as explained by Maritain and used by O'Connor. Adam, the father of man, failed through disobedience to God the Father, and lost grace for himself. Through his sin his children (all mankind) come into the world without grace. Jesus Christ redeemed the world through his suffering and death. Men are thus restored to grace through Christ's sacrifice. As man searches for the ultimate end, supernatural life, he is constantly working to gain grace. Three key questions are involved: "What is grace?" "Grace is a supernatural gift of God bestowed on us through the merits of Jesus Christ for our salvation." There are two kinds of grace: sanctifying and
actual. "What is sanctifying grace?" "Sanctifying grace is that grace which confers on our souls a new life, that is a sharing or 'participation' in the life of God himself," that is, in the divine nature. It thus raises men to a supernatural level of existence. "What is actual grace?" "Actual grace is a supernatural help of God which enlightens our mind and strengthens our will to do good and to avoid evil." Flannery O'Connor uses both kinds, yet only actual grace is used in her thesis.

No doubt Miss O'Connor's religious training was based on the teaching of the Baltimore Catechism, the standard U. S. text and the fundamental source of Catholic doctrine, in which the concept of grace is all-diffusive. This concept is mentioned at least in passing in every unit besides being dealt with in a unit of its own. The catechism teaches that grace is gained from the sacraments, the use of sacramentals, prayer, and as special helps from God in particular times of stress. Throughout the catechism manual the importance of grace is emphasized repeatedly. The tone of the manual is direct, didactic, positive, and dogmatic. Little wonder then that Flannery O'Connor's work is so thoroughly imbued with the concept of grace.

Miss O'Connor's early religious education occurred
during a period when religion was a matter of absolutes. There existed no room for doubt or qualification. Hence, the teaching of the Church on grace was presented dogmatically as having a very real existence. The vision of Christ's example while he lived on earth was set before every Catholic. Religious training was simply the systematic learning of the proper responses to the questions considered by philosophers and theologians to be necessary to the living of a good life. These responses were then to be applied to the everyday right conduct of a person. The answers acted as guidelines, moral standards, for the individual efforts to gain salvation, the primary endeavor of a man's life. Rules for conduct, both interior and exterior, left little room for uncertainty and were, therefore, a comfortable, reassuring way of looking at life. A person could know with some assurance where he stood if he accepted the teachings of the Church on faith. Flannery O'Connor possessed such an attitude of self-assurance and certitude on matters of faith and morals. O'Connor's attitude is an example of what Maritain means when he says, "... the novelist who does not believe in moral values destroys in himself the very matter of his art." In Art and Scholasticism, he also says, "Catholicism orders our whole life to Truth itself
and subsisting Beauty. In us it places the theological virtues above the moral and intellectual virtues and, through them gives us peace."⁹

With the basic knowledge from the catechism obtained in her parochial school education, O'Connor went on to study the question of grace on a higher level after she left high school. One of the theologians whom she studied was Jacques Maritain. In a lecture at Hollins College, Virginia, published in an article entitled, "On Her Own Work," Miss O'Connor remarked on the action of grace in her work:

It is the way of drama that with one stroke the writer has both to mirror and to judge. When such a writer has a freak for his hero, he is not simply showing us what we are, but what we have been and what we could become. His prophet-freak is an image of himself.

In such a picture, grace, in the theological sense, is not lacking. There is a moment in every great story in which the presence of grace can be felt as it waits to be accepted or rejected, even though the reader may not recognize this moment.

Story-writers are always talking about what makes a story "work." From my own experience in trying to make stories "work," I have discovered that what is needed is an action that is totally unexpected, yet totally believable, and I have found that, for me, this is always an action which indicates that grace has been offered. And frequently it is an action in which the devil has been the unwilling instrument of grace. This is not a piece of knowledge that I consciously put into my stories; it is a discovery that I get out of them.
I have found, in short, from reading my own writing, that my subject in fiction is the action of grace in territory held largely by the devil.10

These words reflect Maritain's:

... it is not enough [for the novelist to look into the face of man's sin and evil]. Because the question is to discover the whole of man, and because in good and evil, in the use of grace and its refusal, there is in man much more than man.11
II. STORIES CONCERNING ACTUAL GRACE

As to the six short stories of O'Connor's Master's thesis, the impression of grace is clearly discernable as the major underlying theme. In the first, and probably the best, of these stories, "The Geranium," grace is rejected. The plot involves a doddering, almost senile man, Old Dudley, who is brought by his daughter to live out his years in a New York apartment. He spends his days reminiscing about how different things were back home and sitting in a rocker looking out the window watching a potted geranium grow on a window ledge across the alleyway. The two environments are judiciously juxtaposed in his reflections. The geranium operates as a transcendant symbol between the two. His new environment is vastly unlike Georgia. Back home in Coa County he lived in a boarding house and acted as handy man around the place, assisted by a Negro named Rabie. For his work, his "protection," and his weekly fish catch, the little old ladies who shared the boarding house flattered his ego. He was in familiar surroundings and felt secure
in his position as "wise old man." However, in New York his daughter, whose motive in bringing him North is duty, and her family, treat him with impatience and disrespect while making no attempt to understand him. The look-alike buildings, indistinguishable hallways, els, subways, and mobs of people frighten him though he refuses to admit it. No one communicates with him even on the simplest level.

Heightening the juxtaposition is the relationship between Old Dudley, a white man, and the two black men, Rabie the Negro helper in Georgia and the unnamed next-door Negro neighbor in New York. Their relationships are the crux of the story.

The qualities of the black men and Old Dudley are subtly contrasted. Both of the black men are shown to be competent, dignified, agile-bodied, respectful, humane individuals. Dudley is clumsy, overweight, unskillful, proud, and patronizing. They are nature-loving. "Rabie knew the river up and down for twenty miles. He loved the river, but it hadn't meant anything to Old Dudley. The fish were what he was after." The neighbor informs Dudley, "Never was much at killing anything. Seems kind of a shame to deplete the game reserve. I'd collect guns if I had the time and the money though" (12). These statements fully depict humanistic values. Adding to the
contrast, another detail functions artfully - the incongruous dialect. Old Dudley speaks with a Southern dialect which sounds Negroid while the neighbor speaks with a Northern dialect so that he sounds like a Caucasian. The dress, manners, speech, housing, occupation, and concerns of the neighbor are all those of a typical white man.

Rabie covers up Old Dudley's incompetence and insufficiencies while Dudley himself rationalizes them away. Rabie "could steal cleaner than a weasel but he knew where the fish were" (5). The next sentence adds immensely to the ironic revelation of Dudley's stance on the racial question. "Old Dudley always gave him the little ones" (5). Dudley means he always remembers to provide Rabie with some of his catch in return for finding the fish but the fact that he takes care to give him only the little ones exemplifies the master-slave Southern tradition.

In a Southern society Dudley's condescending attitude toward Blacks seems natural, but in Northern territory this attitude is inappropriate as the daughter tries to point out. The climax of the story is reached when Dudley is forced to realize this fact of life. The articulate, well-dressed Negro neighbor is a blow to
Dudley's feelings of pride and superiority. He experiences a role reversal of sorts because the Negro pats him on the back and calls him "old-timer" at the same time that he politely, but with an air of superiority, inquires about his background.

Dudley's moment of grace comes when he must accept and acknowledge aid from a Negro and face the reality that the Negro is a better man than he or at least just as worthy. On finding Dudley play-acting his old hunting days, the neighbor asks, "What are you hunting, old-timer?" (12). This question is loaded with irony by O'Connor to indicate perhaps man's search for truth. As the Negro helps Dudley up the stairs to his apartment, Dudley is plagued by the actual grace of recognition and awareness. He is enlightened. But he is unable to adjust, to cope, "to do good and avoid evil." He cannot admit his own mistaken false pride and bigotry because bigotry is too deeply ingrained in him. A simple "Thank you" would have sufficed as a sign of acceptance of equality but the old man chokes on the pain of saying anything. He remains silent. He refuses his gift of grace. His crying afterward may be seen as a kind of prayer. But it is too late. The falling of the geranium from the window ledge symbolically marks this refusal. Instead of being grateful and
appreciative, Dudley is chagrined and embarrassed that he is dependent on a Negro. The threat from the man across the alley is significant, too, since it might be taken as a rejoinder from a God-image, "I only tell people once" (14). In an essay "The Protestant South" O'Connor's comments summarize her message:

He has the mistaken notion that a concern with grace is a concern with exalted human behavior, that it is a pretentious concern. It is, however, simply a concern with the human reaction to that which, instant by instant, gives life to the soul. It is a concern with a realization that breeds charity and with the charity that breeds action. Often the nature of grace can be made plain only by describing its absence.13

Another important fact in the transmission of grace is the operation of man's free will. As Maritain says,

What causes a man to be purely and simply good is the goodness of his deeds as expressing his will; it is the action which achieves his being and emanates from him as a man, that is, as a person master of himself and capable of working out his own destiny, as a free agent.14

The conflict exists within man's will. O'Connor corroborates Maritain's view:

The Catholic novel can't be categorized by subject matter, but only by what it assumes about human and divine reality. It cannot see man as determined; it cannot see him as totally depraved. It will see him as incomplete in himself, as prone to evil, but as redeemable when his own efforts are assisted by grace. And it will see this grace as working through nature, but as entirely transcending it, so that a door is always open to
possibility and the unexpected in the human soul. Its center of meaning will be Christ; its center of destruction will be the devil.

The second story of O'Connor's thesis, "The Barber," also concerns racial prejudice although the issue is presented blatantly rather than subtly. In a small Southern town (Dilton, Georgia), Rayber, a sham liberal college professor, is asked by Joe the barber to defend his political stance on the upcoming election. In an attack on his candidate, Joe arouses Rayber's anger when he accuses him of being a "nigger lover" (15). Rayber's timid personality prevents him from giving an immediate response but instead he thinks of what he should retort. Consequently, he leaves the barbershop and immediately commences to write an argument convincing the barber and his customers that his convictions are the correct ones. Additionally, his arrogance impels him to worry about making the right impression so he is overly careful in choosing his words.

As a sub-plot, Rayber's relationship with his wife affects the main plot. In two brief vignettes he demonstrates that he is oblivious to her as a person since he does not even know for whom she plans to vote. "Whenever he mentioned the election, she made it a point to say, "Just because you teach doesn't mean you know
everything" (22). The fact that she does not care about him is revealed by his recollection that she serves canned Spam every Tuesday with the remark that, "if you don't like it you don't have to -" (18). While struggling with the writing of the argument, his wife asks, "What is the matter with you?" He replies, "not a thing . . . I just have to work" (21). But the next day he needs someone on whom to practice his paper so he telephones her. The conversation betrays their mutual dissatisfaction with their marriage. During his oral reading of the paper at home afterward, she abstractedly looks at a magazine. Her dissociated critique emerges as a mere cryptic comment, "That was very nice" (23). His failure to convince his wife who is supposed to love him and supposed to be concerned with his ego and his activities constitutes his awareness that he will be unable to win over the men in the barbershop since he means nothing to them. It should be his moment of recognition but he blithely ignores the obvious.

As an educated man, Rayber stands for reason, sanity, and a progressive, enlightened view. Excessive reason devoid of emotion and real caring is anathema to O'Connor and she uses this theme in several of her stories. Rayber is obsessed with the idea that his opinion is worth more
than that of uneducated men. His true feelings about Negroes are cleverly presented in a distracted, off-hand thought to himself. "Three colored boys in zoot suits" (20) stroll by the barber shop while he is in the chair and block his view of the town square. "'Why the hell can't they park somewhere else?' Rayber thought fiercely" (20). His social liberality is a facade, a pretense; his concern exists only on an intellectual plane. As Maritain says, "A man can be endowed with exceptional intelligence and possess every kind of knowledge, he can be a great scientist or a great philosopher, and be at the same time a bad man."16

When he returns to the barbershop to deliver his defense which he falsely declares is "no mission of conversion" (22), everyone has forgotten the incident. He could leave the matter alone but he declines his proffered grace and instigates the political argument anew. He forces the issue and is rebuffed. The hard-core, red-neck conservatives reject his systematic reasoning and ridicule him. He is humiliated because he has made a fool of himself. In violent, unreasonable reaction, he socks the barber and runs out of the shop with his face dripping with shave leather. His foaming face invokes a hydrophobic mad-dog image. The ultimate humiliation is
his reduction to the animal level which he has considered to be the level of his opponents. Shedding his reformist, do-gooder, stoic posture, together with a true admission of the right of others to a personal opinion, would have established Rayber's path to union with Christ.

In "Wildcat," the third and shortest of the stories, overweening pride or hubris is once again the characteristic flaw of the protagonist. The characters are all Negroes. Old Gabriel, like Nancy in William Faulkner's similar tale, "That Evening Sun," who possesses the keenest sense of smell for a hundred miles around, is mesmerized by terror because of a premonition that a wildcat in the neighborhood is out for his blood. A flashback to his youth discloses a corresponding incident when a helpless old man, Hezuh, feared such a fate and, in fact, was killed by a cat. Psychologically, Gabriel identifies himself with Hezuh.

The first night that the younger men hunt the predator, Old Gabriel stays home alone though he is asked to stay with Mattie who lives down the road. His fear of being branded a coward, "like he was a woman" (30) deprives him of accepting the invitation to safety. He foolishly thinks he can overcome or outwit the animal. But when he discovers that his calculation of the cat's
position by his smelling instinct is incorrect, he realizes, "He won't sharp like he used to be. They shouldn't leave old people by theyselves" (32). The realization of his limitations is the moment of enlightenment but while the story ends without actually portraying the scene, the indications are that he will persist in his refusal to accept protection and grace and remain home alone again on the second evening of hunting. Of such refusals O'Connor remarks,

He [the critic] forgets that the novelist does not write about general beliefs but about men with free will, and that there is nothing in our faith that implies a foregone optimism for man so free that with his last breath he can say No. All Catholic literature will be positive in the sense that we hold this freedom to exist, but the Church has never encouraged us to believe that hell is not a going concern. 17

"The Crop," which takes its name from the "story within a story" and is the fourth in the series, is a remarkable little piece because Miss Willerton, a spinster writer, is a comic alter-ego of Flannery O'Connor although the story was written too early in Miss O'Connor's life for her to view the character as such. A writer by pseudo-profession, Miss Willerton acts as a mouthpiece for O'Connor's own beliefs on the art of writing and, in some instances, mocks the "truisms" about writing conveyed in creative writing classes. For example,
Miss Willerton was a great believer in what she called "phonetic art." She maintained that the ear was as much a reader as the eye. She liked to express it that way. "The eye forms a picture," she had told a group at the United Daughters of the Colonies, "that can be painted in the abstract, and the success of a literary venture" (Miss Willerton liked the phrase, 'literary venture') "depends on the abstract created in the mind and the tonal quality" (Miss Willerton also liked 'tonal quality') "registered in the ear." There was something biting and sharp about "Lot Motun called his dog"; followed by "the dog pricked up its ears and slunk over to him," it gave the paragraph just the send-off it needed. (35)

However, the pouring forth of statements on writing is only a small sidelight to the main story. Miss Willerton apparently lives with her family, her only duty being to "crumb the table," that is, brush the crumbs off the table after meals. The remainder of her day is spent thinking and creating, unfortunately too much thinking and not enough creating.

One particular day she visualizes a story about a sharecropper and his wife but three-quarters of the way through the imaginary plot "Willie" interjects herself into the scene and takes over as the sharecropper's wife and becomes the heroine by saving her new husband. "She liked to plan passionate scenes best of all, but when she came to write them, she always began to feel peculiar and to wonder what the family would say when they read them" (36). Therefore, she relishes living in her unrealistic,
highly romantic imagination and finds it difficult to endure the ordinary things of life.

Later in the day she goes to the grocery and fails even to keep straight the two items for which she was sent. She observes various people at the store and judges all of them unfavorably. Previously, she had been most sympathetic to people in her imagination but is now repelled by them in fact. The startling event which next occurs forms her moment of grace. She encounters a couple on the street who exactly fit the descriptions of the sharecropper and his wife in her imaginary story. By strange and fantastic coincidence these people are the embodiment of the characters she had imagined. Her reaction is expressed in one word, "'Ugh,' she shuddered" (41). The actuality is too much for her. At home once more she resumes her writing but on rereading the few words she had written earlier, she begins another tale, repulsed by the first one. Liking fiction better than real life, she dwells in a world of her own, but on meeting the two worlds converged into one - which should shake her out of her fantasy - she prefers to remain the same. If she had chosen to involve herself with the couple, she might have found her salvation and become a warm, human, sympathetic person as she visualizes herself.
When she rejects others, she condemns herself to a life of fantasy.

Unlike the first four stories which portray the rejection of grace, "The Turkey," formerly entitled "The Capture," depicts the operation of grace in a positive way. Throughout the narrative, a gradual change overcomes the protagonist due to the working of the power of grace which culminates in an affirmative reception at the moment of grace.

The story concerns an eleven year-old boy, Ruller McFarney, who fortuitously comes across a wounded, limping turkey and hopes to capture it in order to carry it home triumphantly to impress his family. In the midst of a dizzying chase, Ruller stuns himself running into a tree and loses the turkey. "It was like somebody played a dirty trick on him" (45). Venting his fury, he cautiously begins to swear which builds into cursing and eventually blasphemy, "taking the name of the Lord in vain." Flashbacks of family scenes reveal his unhappy home life: his mother and father arguing; his older brother, Hane, who is going to the devil, smoking, playing pool, and sneaking in at twelve-thirty; his grandmother carping about conquering the ways of Satan. After sassing God and blaming him for the loss of the turkey, he
suddenly thinks, "you shouldn't think that way about God, though" (48). Looking around, he discovers the turkey, dead from a gunshot wound, a short distance away.

Thinking about himself, Ruller wonders if he is an unusual child:

He guessed he was one of the most unusual children ever. Maybe that was why the turkey was there. He rubbed his hand along the neck. Maybe it was to keep him from going bad. Maybe God wanted to keep him from that.

Maybe God had knocked it out right there where he'd see it when he got up.

Maybe God was in the bush now, waiting for him to make up his mind. (49)

Shortly thereafter he continues to think along these lines:

Maybe finding the turkey was a sign. Maybe God wanted him to be a preacher. He thought of Bing Crosby and Spencer Tracy. He might found a place for boys to stay who were going bad. (49)

Carrying the turkey slung over his shoulder he parades exultantly through the main street of Tilford where everyone may admire the bird. His mother's lady friends and others make remarks of surprise on his accomplishment. "A man with a hunting suit and gun" (50) looks at the boy and turkey and mutters knowingly, "The goddam imp" (51). Obviously the man is the one who wounded the fowl. Nevertheless, Ruller "felt warm all
over and nice as if something very fine were going to be or had been" (51). Some country boys steadily follow him. "God must be wonderful, he felt suddenly. He wanted to do something for God" (51). He prays for the Lord to send him a beggar, "'Please! one right now;' and the minute he said it --- the minute ---" (52) a beggar walks straight toward him. The prayer, a means of obtaining grace, is answered. He thrusts his dime into the hand of the woman who wears "an antique black cloak" and whose "face was the color of a dead chicken's skin" (52). Both phrases fuse her image with the turkey. Ruller's contribution of a dole, a gift in the name of God, to a repulsive beggar who tries to avoid accepting the dime, signals his moment of full acceptance, "he began to feel full of a new feeling - like being happy and embarrassed at the same time" (52).

The ending of the story continues the idea of intervention. The country boys steal his turkey only a few blocks from his destination. Ruller runs home dejectedly "certain that Something Awful was tearing behind him with its arms rigid and its fingers ready to clutch" (53). These words repeat almost exactly his first attempt to capture the bird, "He began edging nearer with his arms rigid and his fingers ready to clutch" (43). The
"Something Awful" reminds one of evil, "the ways of the devil," but Ruller escapes its clutches by taking the Christian path. He does not try to fight the boys or snatch back the turkey.

Had Ruller successfully arrived home with the turkey, it would not have been the triumph he pictured. The turkey, as a potential source of pride, is also a source of the temptation to braggadocio and conceit and thus to commit the sin of Pride, one of the seven deadly sins. Also, a bird which dies after having been wounded much earlier, is inedible. The country boys save Ruller from being laughed at by his family for bringing home a worthless gift and prevent the family's sickness had they eaten of it.

The turkey is a symbol of perdition. The story appears to end sadly for the boy because he loses the turkey which he had hoped to carry home triumphantly. In effect he expects to buy love from his family with his capture of the turkey. The old beggar woman is a reinforcement of the idea of evil because she resembles a turkey. She is an emissary of the devil clothed in black. Ruller prays and his prayer is answered by the sudden appearance of the woman. He gives her a gift as a token of love for God just as members of the Church
offer their gifts at the Offertory of the Mass. In return he receives a gift of God's grace. The snatching of the turkey is actually the removal of a potential source of pride for him, mockery from his family, and sickness for his family. He has also gained a sense of humility and awe because he discovers that God truly does work in mysterious ways. Externally it appears that the boy is suffering a material loss but internally he is actually acquiring a spiritual gain even though he does not yet fully realize it himself.

The last and most unusual in the sequence is "The Train," in which O'Connor's major character, Hazel Wickers, a country lad of nineteen, undergoes a transition from living in the past, being haunted by it, to an insight into the future, as a revelation of his own frail mortality.

The plot is straightforward enough. The young man, originally from Eastrod, Tennessee, on furlough, takes a pullman to Taulkingham, state unknown, to visit his sister. During the trip he meets his seat companion, a garrulous woman named Mrs. Wallace Ben Hosen. As an incidental character, she works as a triggering device for the free association of his thoughts, although she is an interesting person in herself. The Negro porter from
Chicago strongly reminds him of an Eastrod Negro, Cash Simmons. Believing him to be Cash's runaway son, Haze keeps pressing the Negro to admit that he is from Eastrod also, "All them gulch niggers resembled" (55). When the Negro becomes angry and refuses to acknowledge his Eastrod origin except to say, "I'm from Chicago. My father was a railroad man" (60), Haze assumes the porter is denying his heritage whereas he is quite proud of his own, "My mother was a Jackson" (55).

The story takes on a sinister quality when Haze begins to replay the memory of his last furlough to Eastrod for a final look at the "ghost town." Finding Cash Simmons dead, "He got the cholera from a pig" (60), the store boarded up, and his former house empty with the exception of a "shifferrobe" upon which he places a note: "THIS SHIFFERROBE BELONGS TO HAZEL WICKERS. DO NOT STEAL IT OR YOU WILL BE HUNTED DOWN AND KILLED" (62), he spends the night on the kitchen floor. His free association leads to thoughts of what his mother is doing now that she is dead:

He wondered if she walked at night and came there ever - came with that look on her face, unrested and looking, going up the path and through the barn open all around and stopping in the shadow by the store boarded up, coming on unrested with that look on her face like he
had seen through the crack going down. He seen her face through the crack when they were shutting the top on her, seen the shadow that came down over her face and pulled her mouth down like she wasn't satisfied with resting, like she was going to spring up and shove the lid back and fly out like a spirit going to be satisfied: but they shut it down. (62)

Subsequently, these thoughts become a dream-like state from which he awakens to the terrifying feeling that he is in a coffin (the windowless upper berth) with the lid closing. He suddenly becomes aware of the porter at the other end of the car, "a white shape in the darkness, standing there, watching him and not moving" (62). The dream and the events of the train ride become the instruments for the exorcism of the past. The spirits of the dead - the town, his mother, Cash; and, the specter of the porter - force on Haze a realization of the importance of his own preparation for death and at the same time shock him into the present. This, too, is an example of the working of grace though not so much in the sense of acceptance or rejection but in the sense that it occurs involuntarily or spontaneously being bestowed without a formal request (prayer). The request could be considered an unconscious effort, however.

In these first works of Miss O'Connor, the germ of her fine talent is wholly apparent. The selections
withstand close scrutiny and analysis. There are no wasted words. The precise dialogue, accurate descriptions and vivid character studies readily bring home her message. O'Connor describes her writing in this way, "But it is from the kind of world the writer creates, from the kind of character and detail he invests it with, that a reader can find the intellectual meaning of a book."18 Her words are so clear-cut and on the mark that there is no mistaking her intent and meaning. Yet the simplicity of her everyday language may dupe the reader into seeing only the surface yarn while failing to understand her lesson. O'Connor expresses this intent when she says,

I think the answer to this [how control of writing comes about] is what Maritain calls "the habit of art." It is a fact that fiction writing is something in which the whole personality takes part - the conscious as well as the unconscious mind. Art is the habit of the artist; and habits have to be rooted deep in the whole personality. They have to be cultivated like any other habit, over a long period of time, by experience, and teaching any kind of writing is largely a matter of helping the student develop the habit of art. I think this is more than just a discipline, although it is that; I think it is a way of looking at the created world and of using the senses so as to make them find as much meaning as possible in things.19

O'Connor developed this habit of art in her own writing. Her personality permeates her work and becomes a part of her artistry. She successfully achieves what Maritain
describes as Art: "Art is a virtue of the mind, a virtue of the practical mind, and may be described as the peculiar virtue of the working reasons." And elsewhere he says, "With the habit or virtue of art exalting his spirit from within, the artist is a master making use of the rules to serve his ends."

In the years following the writing of her thesis, Miss O'Connor produced a number of more polished stories of the same genre - Southern Gothic humor - imprinted with her own personal stamp of sectarian convictions. These stories, without exception, utilize in one sense or another a religious atmosphere or theme. The Christian ethic seeps through the veneer of seemingly non-religious or irreligious attitudes. Though not ostensibly didactic, a sub-surface lesson appears in each. A religious purpose is sufficiently clear after a deeper look that it may be said that she intended that it be present, that it is there by design. Mrs. Sally Fitzgerald, O'Connor's friend and co-editor of Mystery and Manners, feels that the theology came out of its own accord, however, and not by design. In a conversation on October 11, 1974 she stated:

The fact of original sin or "human cussedness" as she called it was just as much an instrument of her art as the language she used. It colored the
way she understood things. It was the way she explained what she saw. Her stories came out to be about theological manners out of their own accord. They were not planned to illustrate a theological point in advance. She was so steeped in Catholicism that her stories reflected her beliefs and philosophy.22

Whether by design or by instinct, the more one sees the moment of grace in one story, the more apparent it becomes in another, only the mode of operation being different.

My consideration of the moment of grace includes a study of its interpretation found in St. Thomas Aquinas and explained by Maritain. In his book St. Thomas Aquinas and the Problem of Evil, Maritain discusses Aquinas' meaning of the willing of evil. Aquinas breaks down the moment of choice for good or evil into two steps or two conditions:

--- St. Thomas breaks up so to speak into two moments not chronological but ontological, the movement of the will in the evil act of choice. In the first moment there is an absence of consideration of the rule: . . . there is as yet no action . . . considered in itself that moment does not yet constitute the fault, for it is a mere absence of a good . . . And in the second moment there is action produced with that absence.23

In other words, first there is the consideration of an act but no action. The person may decide not to commit the act (the sin) of either omission or commission. And then, there is the action itself, either positive or negative, according to one's free choice. Further,
Maritain says,

God is the cause of all the being and goodness there is in things; He is not the cause of the evil in free will. Man does not render efficacious grace efficacious, but he can render sufficient grace sterile or undeveloped into efficacious grace. By himself alone he cannot merit, but by himself alone he can demerit.24

Efficacious and sufficient grace are two terms for the same thing because they mean the infusion of an amount of grace sufficient to produce the desired effect. The consideration here is that the efficacious grace is a pure gratuity on God's part; man cannot merit it. No one deserves it for "all have sinned and have need of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). The primary and ultimate factor in man's destiny is the activity of God's grace which does not exclude man's cooperation. Accordingly, O'Connor expresses her view,

My view of free will follows the traditional Catholic teaching . . . . So that while predictable, predetermined actions have a comic interest for me, it is the free act, the acceptance of grace particularly, that I always have my eye on as the thing which will make the story work.25

Additionally, Maritain explains good and evil in this way:

Evil is essentially easy. Because good is an integrity, whereas evil is a deficiency, and because evil does not act of itself but through good, whose parasite it is, it needs only a little good to be very successful in evil, whereas it requires a great deal of good to be slightly
successful in good. 26

O'Connor's attitude is parallel: "In my stories a reader will find that the devil accomplishes a good deal of groundwork that seems to be necessary before grace is effective." 27

In a number of her later stories, the moment of grace is accepted. "The Partridge Festival," like the thesis stories, concerns actual grace. The other four stories, "A Temple of the Holy Ghost," "A Stroke of Good Fortune," "The River," and "The Enduring Chill" depict the sacraments which are the only means of obtaining sanctifying grace.

"The Partridge Festival," reprinted for the first time in book form in The Complete Stories, is a comic grotesque story of the first order. Structurally this short story is the reverse of "A Good Man is Hard to Find." Whereas a grotesque shooting scene is the climax of "A Good Man is Hard to Find," a grotesque shooting scene which occurs at the beginning is the springboard incident of "The Partridge Festival." The action of grace is experienced in "The Partridge Festival" with regard to answering the call to one's true vocation. The story revolves around the premise that Calhoun, the central character, is denying his natural talent and forcing
himself into a way of life which for him is distorted. Mary Elizabeth, an ancillary character of similar personality and scholarliness, is like Calhoun one of O'Connor's typical snobbish pseudo-intellectual archetypes. Maritain's explanation of pseudo-intellectualism and how it distorts the personality applies to Calhoun and Mary Elizabeth:

It is a trait of pedantry to hold that all virtue is hypocrisy, all personality theatre mask. The form of reason is naturally postulated by what we are. The form of grace (without which reason forms us crookedly) is, while freely bestowed, - being supernatural and descending from the Principle - dearer to nature than nature herself.28

Calhoun's negative and superior attitude is revealed in the story's first sentence, "looking to the right and left as if he expected the profusion of azalea blossoms to have a lethal effect upon him" (421). Visiting his two maiden aunts under the pretext of viewing the annual Azalea Festival in the town of Partridge, he is actually attempting to write an expose of a murder from a sympathetic standpoint. Calhoun sees the killer as society's scapegoat and the real murderer society itself since society drove him mad. "He was here only because Singleton had captured his imagination" (421). O'Connor has captured the reader's imagination as well at this
point because the reader still does not know who Singleton is or why Calhoun has really come to Partridge. Snubbing the traditional provinciality of the festival activities which his own great-grandfather had initiated, Calhoun is immensely interested only in the events which preceded the festival, namely the cold-blooded act of retribution against five dignitaries and one innocent by-stander by a man named Singleton for having publicly humiliated him. As O'Connor relates the incident, grotesque and horrifying as it is, it emerges as one of her funniest ironic scenes through the devices of understatement and incongruity of figures. This passage is so crucial and so beautifully constructed that it deserves full quotation:

Ten days before the festival began, a man named Singleton had been tried by a mock court on the courthouse lawn for not buying an Azalea Festival Badge. During the trial he had been imprisoned in a pair of stocks and when convicted, he had been locked in the "jail" together with a goat that had been tried and convicted previously for the same offense. The "jail" was an outdoor privy borrowed for the occasion by the Jaycees. Ten days later, Singleton had appeared in a side door on the courthouse porch and with a silent automatic pistol, had shot five of the dignitaries seated there and by mistake one person in the crowd. The innocent man received the bullet intended for the mayor who at that moment had reached down to pull up the tongue of his shoe. (422)
In response to Calhoun's comment on the occurrence, "what about the little extra excitement you've had this time?" his aunt's realistic reply is the perfect undercutting stroke, "'An unfortunate incident,'" his Aunt Mattie said. "It mars the festive spirit'" (422).

Finding his likeable but dull aunts beneath his level of comprehension, Calhoun seeks out other town members to probe concerning the deeper significance and meaning of the murder. At the outset his intention is biased in that he intends to write an article vindicating the madman; consequently, whatever information he uncovers, he rationalizes by slanting and twisting it to meet his own viewpoint. As an auxiliary intention he expects his writing to "mitigate his own guilt, for his doubleness, his shadow, was cast before him more darkly than usual in the light of Singleton's purity" (424). He envisions himself as being like Singleton, partly physically, with the exception of the eyes, since they both have round faces, but mainly interiorly, i.e. that they would be "simpatico," having similar ideals, if they were to meet in person. Acting successfully in the occupation of salesman each summer in order to be able to pursue his intellectual interests as "rebel-artist-mystic" (424) during the remainder of the year, Calhoun suffers from
guilt stemming from the fact that he so thoroughly enjoys this low career. "In the face of a customer, he was carried outside himself; . . . he was in the grip of a drive as strong as the drive of some men for liquor or a woman; and he was horribly good at it" (425). And, in fact, he could have supported himself without his summer selling employment but he excuses himself by saying he can better afford to be his real self the rest of the year. The truth is he is his real self only in the summer when he is selling refrigerators and air-conditioners. Ashamed of enjoying something so materialistic and vainglorious, he feels a need to purge himself of his imperfection. These two subconscious impressions, his identification with Singleton and his self-hatred for liking selling, heavily color his outlook.

Upon interviewing a soda-jerk, a man on the street, a child, and the barber for their reactions, he learns that each feels the same way and delivers the same message - Singleton is guilty; he wrongfully committed a crime; he should be punished. Hoping to find even one person to agree with his view, Calhoun instead finds a different attitude, not half-heartedly but strongly opposite. A synthesis of this opposing view my be found "out of the mouths of babes" in the words of the
little girl in the park, "'He was a bad bad bad man,' she said" (429). This simple, concise judgment came as a rejoinder to Calhoun's "Socratic" (426) lecture to her on the issue.

"You people persecuted him and finally drove him mad," the boy said. "He wouldn't buy a badge. Was that a crime? He was the Outsider here and you couldn't stand that. One of the fundamental rights of man," he said, glaring through the child's transparent stare, "is the right not to behave like a fool. The right to be different," he said hoarsely, "My God. The right to be yourself." (429)

Unfortunately, Calhoun does not realize that the latter part of the statement should apply to him. From each of the encounters, Calhoun learns more information on Singleton, none of it complimentary. The innocent bystander was a drunkard and his death was good riddance to the town. Singleton himself was a miserly, vulgar, sloppy individual, possessing no such sensibilities as Calhoun has assigned him. The deaths of the town officials were regarded as service in the line of duty. But all that Calhoun can perceive is an image of Singleton as a scapegoat suffering for the sins of the community. He becomes furious, persisting in his blind belief in Singleton's innocence, excusing him at every turn. "No one had a thought for Singleton, who lay on a cot in a filthy ward at Quincy [the state mental
hospital" (432).

The secondary character, Mary Elizabeth, gradually assumes dimension but never achieves equal status to Calhoun. She appears in the second paragraph of the story as an unnamed girl next door who loudly expresses her opinions through such gestures as slamming shut the book she is reading. On into the middle of the story she is present physically, grimacing and gesturing, silently but obtrusively. The reader is aware from the first that she is contemptuous of, but like Calhoun. Later in the day after returning home, Calhoun finds that his aunts' have arranged a blind date for him with her to attend the beauty contest for the selection of Miss Partridge Azalea. During their self-conscious "date" he is startlingly apprised of her disdainful but corresponding attitude and is shocked to learn that when he least expects it he has found one person who shares his intellectual position. Her words reverberate his own, "'It's quite simple,' the girl said. 'He was the scapegoat. While Partridge flings itself about selecting Miss Partridge Azalea, Singleton suffers at Quincy. He expiates . . .\)" (435). Rather than rejoicing in his discovery, Calhoun is appalled because he can no longer be the superior individual and even becomes aware of
feelings of inferiority since she verbally puts him down and treats him as a mental incompetent. Their date becomes a comic-ironic situation because they each act on preconceived assumptions and make judgments about the other which are actually judgments on faults within themselves. "Calhoun felt that if he probed sufficiently he would expose her essential shallowness" (435). And later, "He watched her disappear into the building, thinking with grim satisfaction that she would soon turn into a full-grown ogre -- false intellect, false emotions, maximum efficiency, all operating to produce the dominant hair-splitting Ph.D." (440). During their discussion she angrily suggests that Calhoun go see for himself what Singleton is like. "The suggestion was appalling to him; for some reason he could not at the moment understand, it struck him as unthinkable" (436). But the decision is made and after much agonizing which includes a sleep filled with nightmares of the impending confrontation, and the reluctance to admit their fear or cowardice, the couple drive to Quincy, a short twenty miles away.

During the final scene, Calhoun and Mary Elizabeth unwillingly become more and more intimately related. Drawn together by their mutual objective, they slowly
realize their essential humanity and spiritual oneness. With the help of their new unity Mary Elizabeth destroys Calhoun's image of Singleton, "She had shattered the communion between them" (439). They recognize their relationship when they stare at the visitation slips filled in with the false names "Calhoun Singleton" and "Mary Elizabeth Singleton." "Both appeared to recognize that in their common kinship with him, a kinship with each other was unavoidable" (441). They shake hands at this awareness and from that moment accept the closeness to be achieved through their shared experience.

The face-to-face confrontation, the actual presence of Singleton himself, is again a humorous and at the same time pathetic scene. Two hospital attendants restrain Singleton while he leers at Mary Elizabeth and attempts to seduce her verbally. The climactic point occurs when he finally breaks free of the men and exposes himself for Mary Elizabeth's benefit. Dashing toward the door, Mary Elizabeth and Calhoun nearly collide in their race to the car. Not stopping until Calhoun has driven them five miles away, they look at each other: "There each saw at once the likeness of their kinsman and flinched" (443). At last the wrongness of their position is forced upon them. No matter how one
looks at the question, basically it is a sin to take the life of a fellow human being. Their intellectual empathy and compassion had all been wasted on the wrong party. Their emotions were false and insincere since neither wished to deal with Singleton on a person-to-person basis.

But this issue is subsidiary to the crux of the story, for O'Connor's real theological comment deals with the main issue which is Calhoun's denial of his true vocation. Calhoun sees his own image reflected in Mary Elizabeth's spectacle lenses:

In despair he leaned closer until he was stopped by a miniature visage which rose incorrigibly in her spectacles and fixed him where he was. Round, innocent, undistinguished as an iron link, it was the face whose gift of life had pushed straight forward to the future to raise festival after festival. Like a master salesman, it seemed to have been waiting there from all time to claim him. (444)

In Mary Elizabeth's glasses, he sees not only himself but his future. By pursuing a false vocation, Calhoun is rendered incapable of distinguishing right from wrong. Even his dream of the previous night consisted of visions of himself "driving to Quincy to sell Singleton a refrigerator" (437). Throughout the story Calhoun misuses his innate talent by employing salesman tactics in an intellectual world; for example, in his
approach to the interviews around town, he seeks to put words in people's mouths, to make them feel as he does, rather than to express their own views. That Calhoun merely pretends to be a writer is obvious when the barber asks him, "What you written?" (431) and Calhoun ignores the question entirely by changing the subject. Mary Elizabeth asks him, "How many novels have you written?" during their discussion of the art of writing. "'This will be my first,' he said coldly" (435). His heritage generating from his great-grandfather "the master merchant" (422) also beckons him to the sales profession. In Calhoun's denial of his natural aptitude for salesmanship, he is fighting his God-given ability. God gives man the grace to rightly pursue his proper role in life. Calhoun's moment of grace, his recognition of how he has thwarted his talent and evaded the inevitability of his career, strikes him when, in Mary Elizabeth's spectacles, he sees himself for what he is, an intellectual phony. The experience with Singleton crystallizes his intellectual vision. Mary Elizabeth's function as a mirror image, a source of "secondary causation" in theological terminology, is to clarify his phony posture and to restore his ability to recognize evil. O'Connor is saying, "It is better to be a good salesman than a
O'Connor's pointed use of physical description further substantiates the ideas of the mirror image and of the common bond of humanity. Shown a miniature portrait of his great-grandfather, Calhoun notes that the old man was round-faced, unremarkable-looking, and innocent in expression. In the newspaper he sees pictures of Singleton and his victims. The six faces of the victims were "of the same general stamp as his great-grandfather's" (423), whereas "Singleton's was the only distinctive face in the lot" (423). The aunts remark on Calhoun's resemblance to his great-grandfather which Calhoun resents because he believes the shape of his face is "broad" like Singleton's. In the barber's chair, Calhoun faces the mirror and "He was confronted with an image that was round-faced, unremarkable-looking and innocent" (429). At the dinner table, Calhoun notices Mary Elizabeth's "round face was still childish behind her glasses" (433). "Retarded," Calhoun thinks, disregarding the innocence there. In contrast, the aunts are characterized as being "box-jawed" or square-faced.

Calhoun expects his vision of Singleton to effect a change in him:

It would be a torturing experience, but it
might be his salvation. The sight of Singleton in his misery might cause him suffering sufficient to raise him once and for all from his commercial instincts. Selling was the only thing he had proved himself good at; yet it was impossible for him to believe that every man was not created equally an artist if he could but suffer and achieve it. (437)

Singleton's eyes are not only round (roundness denoting innocence) but "One eye was more nearly round than the other" (423). His "mismatched" eyes, which are mentioned repeatedly, correspond to his distorted personality, the impurity of his soul, his loss of innocence. "They were almost exactly the eyes that Calhoun had seen in the paper, except that the penetrating gleam in them had a slight reptilian quality" (442). The word reptilian here, refers to the snake in the garden of paradise or the devil.

Finally, in the last paragraph of the story, O'Connor reiterates these ideas and ties them together, "Round, innocent, undistinguished as an iron link" (444). The iron link image is like a chain of being. Calhoun "the master salesman" cannot escape his destiny within this chain nor can he escape his kinship with his fellowmen.

"The Partridge Festival" is the nearest thing to romance that the reader will find in O'Connor's work.
The aunts discuss Calhoun's need to hurry up and marry before he reaches thirty years of age; he is now twenty-three. The elements of the arranged date, the "romantic outing in the rain" as the aunts thought, which is actually the trip to the mental hospital, the tenderness Calhoun displays toward Mary Elizabeth once they begin to tolerate each other, the simultaneous acknowledgement of Singleton's sin of murder, all appear to produce a tendency toward a boy-meets-girl romance. Yet O'Connor does not include any definitive element or event which would allow it to be said that this is a love story. Mary Elizabeth remains the mirror image of Calhoun and does not assume the role of girlfriend. It is Calhoun who is the central character of the story. Mary Elizabeth as his mirror image is symbolic of Calhoun's inescapable destiny, his role as "master salesman."
II. STORIES CONCERNING SANCTIFYING GRACE

The significant matter of the next few short stories is the transmission and affirmative reception of sanctifying grace through the agency of the sacraments. There are seven sacraments: Confirmation, Holy Eucharist, Extreme Unction, Holy Orders and Matrimony which are called sacraments of the living because their chief purpose is to increase grace in souls already spiritually alive to sanctifying grace. Baptism and Penance are called sacraments of the dead because their chief purpose is to give the supernatural life of sanctifying grace to souls spiritually dead through sin. O'Connor's view of the use of the sacraments in her stories is evident in "The Church and the Fiction Writer" where she states, "The Catholic sacramental view of life is one that sustains and supports at every turn the vision that the storyteller must have is he is going to write fiction of any depth." 

The sacraments and the sanctifying grace they bestow are a major theme in Flannery O'Connor's work. The one
sacrament which is missing in her short stories is the sacrament of Holy Orders. (The whole of O'Connor's novel, The Violent Bear It Away, the story of Francis Tarwater and his call to be a prophet, deals with this sacrament explicitly. A vocation to the priesthood is the theme of both of her novels in fact.) 32

In the first of these stories, involving an adolescent search for a suitable vocation, the sacraments of the Holy Eucharist and Confirmation are symbolically represented in "A Temple of the Holy Ghost." A young girl simply referred to as "the child" receives grace in such a way that she is symbolically confirmed in her faith. The Holy Eucharist is the partial instrument of her confirmation.

This humorous, seemingly simple, little story carries a weighty theme - sainthood as a vocation. The symbolism of the sacraments is clearly presented. "The child," the subject of the vocational search, is twelve years old, within the usual age range for receiving the sacrament of Confirmation and well past the age of receiving her first Holy Communion. 33 She and her mother are visited over the weekend by two fourteen year-old cousins, Joanne and Susan, who attend Mount St. Scholastica convent. In the child's view the cousins are
fatuous, giggly, ugly, unintelligent, "practically morons," and boy-crazy. The child is described as having fat cheeks, braces and superior intelligence. Her knowledge is both typical and precocious for a twelve year-old, sagacious in the perceptive assessment of her cousins, yet naive in her childish fantasies.

A dinnertable discussion of how to entertain the visitors turns into a burlesque situation when the child suggests names of men and boys who are ridiculous possibilities as dates and then falls on the floor laughing at her own jokes. The cousins are unaware of the humor until the child suggests someone with whom they are familiar, a two hundred and fifty pound, sweaty, smelly, taxi-driver, Alonzo Myers, who drove them from the convent to their aunt's home. Changing the subject, the mother asks the girls why they call each other Temple One and Temple Two. Through their laughter the girls explain that Sister Perpetua said that if a young man should "behave in an ungentlemanly manner with them in the back of an automobile," they were to say, "Stop, sir! I am a Temple of the Holy Ghost!" (238). At this revelation the child ceases her own laughter. "I am a Temple of the Holy Ghost, she said to herself, and was pleased with the phrase. It made her feel as if someone had given her a
present" (238). The present suggests the gift of grace, a gift attributed to the Holy Ghost, which stimulates spiritual inclinations in her imagination.

The mother arranges a date to a local fair with Wendell and Cory Wilkins who are visiting their grandmother. The child continues to tease her cousins by describing the boys as handsome and desirable but the fact is that they are precisely the opposite of her description. Sitting on the front porch prior to the trip to the fair, one of the boys entertains the girls with "a hillbilly song that sounded half like a love song and half like a hymn" (240). The song is "I've found a friend in Jesus" followed by "The Old Rugged Cross" which are appropriate since "Somebody said they were both going to be Church of God preachers because you don't have to know nothing to be one" (239). By way of retort, the cousins sing "Tantum Ergo," a solemn hymn, almost a chant. "'That must be Jew singing,' Wendell said" (241). The child is indignant at Wendell's stupidity.

After supper the girls and their dates go to the fair, leaving the child alone in her room to imagine it and reminisce about the one she attended the previous year. O'Connor uses a phrase at this point which epitomizes the child's personality, "an expression,
fierce and dreamy both, on her face" (242). Hearing the sound of the calliope she recalls last year's fair which inspires thoughts of what she wants to be when she grows up. Last year it was a doctor, then it changed to an engineer, and now she feels,

She would have to be a saint because that was the occupation that included everything you could know; and yet she knew she would never be a saint. She did not steal or murder but she was a born liar and slothful and she sassed her mother and was deliberately ugly to almost everybody. She was eaten up also with the sin of Pride, the worst one . . . . She could never be a saint, but she thought she could be a martyr if they killed her quick. (243)

Daydreaming about different means of martyrdom leads to thoughts about how and why she says her prayers, ending with a prayer of thanks that she is not a member of the Church of God like the Wilkinses.

Returning from the fair, the cousins are noticeably subdued by what they have witnessed. To induce a revelation of the secret of the "grown-up" sideshow, the child trades information. She will tell how rabbits are born if they will tell what they have seen. Reluctantly the girls describe the scene. After giving a talk concerning the nature of God's will in his fate, a freak wearing a blue dress unveils himself to be a hermaphrodite; to preserve his dignity and to make the occasion
more important, he had addressed his audience in words which act as a recurrent motif throughout the story: "God made me thisaway and if you laugh He may strike you the same way. This is the way He wanted me to be and I ain't disputing His way" (245). The child's innocence is shown when they prompt her to reveal her secret - how a rabbit has babies. "It spit them out of its mouth" (246). Lying in bed, the child pictures the scene at the fair and intermingles it with sounds of the audience's answering "Amen. Amen" (246) to every sentence spoken by the freak as though answering an evangelistic preacher revealing the word of God at a church revival meeting.

At the close of the weekend, and the story, the child and her mother return the girls to the convent where the nun at the door quickly ushers all of them in to participate in the ceremony of the Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. Through the gift of actual grace received when the child first learned the expression, "A Temple of the Holy Ghost," she now is provoked to further graces by the spectacle of the priest raising the monstrance with the Sacred Host encased in the luna.

... they were well into the "Tantum Ergo" before her ugly thoughts stopped and she began to realize that she was in the presence of God. Hep me not
to be so mean, she began mechanically. Hep me not to give her so much sass. Hep me not to talk like I do. Her mind began to get quiet and then empty but when the priest raised the monstrance with the Host shining ivory-colored in the center of it, she was thinking of the tent at the fair that had the freak in it. The freak was saying, 'I don't dispute hit. This is the way He wanted me to be.' (247-48)

Her prayer is for help to overcome the weaknesses, the faults, she earlier had considered obstacles to her pursuit of being a saint. The freak's words recur in her mind as the answer to her question of what vocation to follow. She has chosen the highest of all vocations.

A symbolic indication of the difficulty of pursuing such a course occurs when the nun who met them at the door hugs her, "mashing the side of her face into the crucifix" (248). Her path clearly will be an uncomfortable one. Reinforcing this answer is the spectacle she sees as she looks out of the taxi window going homeward. "The sun was a huge red ball like an elevated Host drenched in blood and when it sank out of sight, it left a line in the sky like a red clay road hanging over the trees" (248). The symbolism of the Holy Eucharist is unmistakable. The red clay road is the road of life, red with the sufferings she must undergo.

While the young girl neither receives Holy Communion nor Confirmation in a physical sense in this story, she
does receive them symbolically. Confirmation is the sacrament through which the Holy Spirit comes to the person being confirmed and enables him to profess his faith as a strong and perfect Christian and soldier of Jesus Christ. In the child's fantasizing about being a martyr and defender of the faith, she shows a desire for Confirmation. The action of the Holy Spirit, as O'Connor indicates, will assist the child in her path to sainthood and salvation.

O'Connor dramatically depicts Christ in a sun image. On the way to the convent the child observes "the ivory sun" (247) which causes her to squint when she pulls away from the sight. At Benediction the Host shines "ivory-colored" in the center of the monstrance. God's splendor is evident in this sun image and is further verified in the ceremony itself, culminating in the hymn of adoration, the "Tantum Ergo." A translation of the first stanza of the "Tantum Ergo" is significant,

Down in adoration falling,
Lo! The Sacred Host we hail;
Lo! O'er ancient forms departing
Newer rites of grace prevail;
Faith for all defects supplying
Where the feeble senses fail,

for it underscores the granting of graces in the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist. Receiving the Holy Eucharist
is considered to be the greatest aid to a holy life.

Utilizing the liturgical colors and their connotations, O'Connor emphasizes her sacramental message. In the Roman liturgy purple is the symbol of penance and expiation. In the early part of the story when the child is in the midst of her negative attitude, "The sun was going down and the sky was turning a bruised violet color" (240). Later, "The boys' faces were dark red in the gray-purple light" (241). The reader may follow the changes in attitude in the story by noticing the changes in the color of the sky. The ivory color of the sun and Host indicates innocence, purity and triumph. Red, the color of blood, symbolizes Christ's Passion and death as it is reenacted daily in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and in the story, "The sun was a huge red ball like an elevated Host drenched in blood" (248). Red also is used in the priest's vestments and in the altar cloths on Pentecost and in masses of the Holy Spirit in memory of the tongues of fire of the first Pentecost, the occasion of the institution of the sacrament of Confirmation. "The red clay road" in the last sentence of the story indicates a reaffirmation of the child's confirmation. Green is the color of budding and living vegetation and the symbol of hope and in the story, the chapel is
"light green" as well as "gold" (247). The child on the way home "looked out over a stretch of pasture land that rose and fell with a gathering greenness" (248), which symbolizes the hope for her future. Gold is the color of kingship and majesty which decorates the chapel. O'Connor's color imagery underlines the meaning of the story and intensifies its impact.

Continuing the vocational motif in "A Stroke of Good Fortune," Flannery O'Connor composes one of her happier stories depicting the action of grace in the married state. Special graces are bestowed on a couple through the sacrament of Matrimony in order to assist them in coping with the ordinary duties and responsibilities of marriage. Additionally, these graces provide help in what the Church considers the primary purpose of marriage - the procreation and raising of children. Likewise, they aid two people in getting along with each other on a daily basis. In this story, the necessity for these graces and the mechanism by which they operate is amusingly demonstrated.

Eliminating grotesque situations, O'Connor has created a tender, gentle love story of a Southern Negro couple who are trying to better themselves in the world. The entire story, originally entitled "A Woman on the
Stairs," takes place during a four-flight trek up the stairwell to the apartment of Ruby Hill, the irritable thirty-four year-old wife of Bill B. Hill, a Miracle Products salesman. On returning from the grocery store to purchase some collard greens for a special dish requested by her brother, Rufus, as a celebration for his homecoming from Europe where he was a soldier in World War II, Ruby finds herself feeling ill, even nauseated. Having great difficulty climbing the stairs, Ruby experiences three encounters with others as she makes her uphill journey: on the second floor, a seventy-eight year-old retired history teacher; on the third floor, her good friend, Laverne Watts; on the fourth floor, a six year-old boy, Hartley Gilfeet. She and her husband live on the sixth.

The journey up the stairs is one of discovery. Because she is ill, Ruby who fears doctors, had visited Madam Zoleeda, a palmist on Highway 87, who told her she would have a long illness which would bring her a stroke of good fortune. Ruby misinterprets every sign of her illness, the cause of which is paradoxically apparent both to Laverne Watts and to the reader before it is to Ruby herself. She rationalizes her symptoms as being caused by heart trouble, gas, fatness, or cancer. Thoughts
of her baby brother strike up a flow of remembrances of her family life, especially of her mother's death when Rufus was born. These memories, linked with thoughts of the early deaths of four of her seven brothers and sisters, block her recognition of the fact that she is pregnant. Having babies prematurely aged and then killed her mother. The fear of the same thing prevents Ruby from arriving at the correct diagnosis after adding up the symptoms. The story ends on the fourth level where an amalgam of Rufus and Hartley Gilfeet in her subconscious gradually becomes the voice of the fetus within her calling out to be accepted, waiting to be born, and forming her moment of grace as well.

The story celebrates children and family life seen through the sacramental union of Bill and Ruby. The factors which develop this theme include the relationship between Ruby and Bill, the significance of the three encounters on the stairwell, the significance of Rufus as a source of the impressions from Ruby's past life which have an effect on her present life, and the future life of the family as predictable by Ruby's thoughts about Hartley Gilfeet. Through each of these elements, O'Connor covers the central aspects of the sacrament of Matrimony in the Catholic scheme of the marital state.
Concerning the relationship of Bill and Ruby, hints of their feelings for each other are sprinkled throughout the story. Since Ruby feels sick, she leaves her bag of groceries at the bottom of the stairs with a note written on it: "Bill you bring this upstairs" (96). Only a devoted husband would respond to such an order given with impatient but trusting foreknowledge of his dependable helpfulness. Ruby and Bill agree on little things such as not eating collard greens during the five years of their marriage because they considered it an uncivilized dish and a reminder of the country ways they are attempting to leave behind. They moved to the city for the same reason. Ruby feels she has bettered herself, unlike her sisters who "married from around" (98), by marrying Bill who was born in Miami, Florida. Bill, supposedly, has more knowledge and experience than someone from the rural area of Pitman, Tennessee, Ruby's home. Ruby's respect and admiration for Bill is fully apparent from her expression of disdain for her brother who "had about as much get as a floor mop" (95).

She didn't like to admit it about her own kin, least about her own brother, but there he was - good for absolutely nothing. "I seen it after five minutes of him," she had told Bill Hill, and Bill Hill, with no expression whatsoever, had said, "It taken me three." It was mortifying to let that kind of a husband see you
had that kind of a brother. (96)

This comparison richly brings out Ruby's esteem for Bill.

Ruby's notions of Bill's reaction to her new fullness of body reveal his loving feeling toward her and her feeling of being well-loved: "She was warm and fat and beautiful and not too fat because Bill Hill liked her that way. She had gained some weight but he hadn't noticed except that he was maybe more happy lately and didn't know why" (99). Ruby's complete faith and trust in Bill is reflected in her retort to Laverne's accusation that she will become a "MOTHER!" (104), "Oh no not me! Bill Hill takes care of that" (104). It is unthinkable to Ruby that Bill would be negligent. But early in the story, in remembering her visit to Madam Zoleeda, it occurs to Ruby "For two months she had had a distinct feeling that they were going to move. Bill Hill couldn't hold off much longer" (96). The latter sentence has a double meaning; Bill wants to move to the suburbs to a better life, too, but also, he wants to begin having children. From Ruby and Laverne's remarks, Bill Hill may have deliberately "slipped up" (104). Twice during her trip Ruby thinks about the happy look on Bill's face grinning for no explicit reason. From these clues, the impression is given of a happy, cooperative, loving
couple who have joint goals and so together would foster a good environment for a child.

Each of Ruby's encounters produces another facet of the sacrament of Matrimony. Ruby first meets Mr. Jerger, describing him as looking like a goat and later called "goat teacher" by Hartley Gilfeet. Mr. Jerger attempts to converse with each person he hears walking in the hall. He initiates a conversation by asking a historical question and on this particular occasion he asks Ruby, "Do you know what great birthday this is?" (100) which leads to a discussion on Florida since it is Florida's birthday. The conversation then leads to the subject of Ponce de Leon and his search for the fountain of youth. Two symbols are evident at this juncture. Mr. Jerger symbolizes the sexual nature of the union of two people in Matrimony since he is depicting as looking "like a goat" or a satyr, the classical emblem of sexuality. The talk of birthdays and the fountain of youth suggests the regeneration or renewal of the species and the desire of a man to have an heir to immortalize or perpetuate himself. Consequently, Mr. Jerger signifies the sexual side of marriage, the purpose of which, according to the Church, is both the enjoyment of sex for its own sake and the engagement in sex for the sake of reproduction.
Ruby's second encounter is with her good-natured friend, Laverne Watts, who removes all doubt as to the cause of Ruby's pain. Marion Montgomery, in an article entitled, "Flannery O'Connor's 'Leaden Tract Against Complacency and Contraception,'" sees this encounter as an analogue to the Annunciation as found in St. Luke, and Ruby and Laverne as characters in a comic parody of Mary and Elizabeth - a parody to be taken seriously.38 The encounter between Ruby and Laverne is a reversal of that between Mary and Elizabeth in that Ruby denies her pregnancy whereas Mary asserted hers. The point in terms of this thesis is that the issue revolves about the sacrament of Matrimony. After sizing up Ruby's swollen ankles, fat stomach, and pale appearance, Laverne performs a little song and dance routine which conveys the results of her analysis, "Put them all together, they spell MOTHER! MOTHER!" (104). Laverne further teases Ruby by intimating that she is interested in Rufus who is twenty; Laverne is thirty. Tremendously upset by this preposterous idea, Ruby wails, "Rufus is an enfant" (105). Laverne matter-of-factly replies, "That will make two" (105). Ruby's retort shows that Laverne's advice is symbolic of the role of the priest in the sacrament: "'I don't know how you think you know so
much,' Ruby said, 'single as you are. If I was so single I wouldn't go around telling married people what their business is!' (105). When two people bind themselves to each other in the sacrament of Matrimony, the priest acts as an official witness before God. His role is also to act in the capacity of neutral advisor in times of marital stress. Ruby's objection to Laverne's "interference" is the common rejoinder of those who object to the role of the priest on the grounds that he cannot give advice on something in which he has not participated himself.

Hartley Gilfett, whose name is suggestive of a fetus, is Ruby's third encounter. Early in the story Ruby sits down and finds Hartley's gun under her which evokes exclamations about how she would train and discipline him if he were hers. Hartley's mother has nicknamed him "Little Mister Good Fortune" (98) which associates him with the "stroke of good fortune" (98) which Madam Zoleeda had predicted. These associations are brought together in the last episode when Ruby says, "Good Fortune, Baby" (107) after Hartley runs into her. Charging up the stairs, Hartley crashes "into her and rocketed through her, smaller and smaller into a whirl of dark" (107) so that he is immersed in her like a
fetus in a womb. Thus, Hartley prefigures Ruby's unborn child. Ruby sees a possibility that a baby might be good fortune which marks the moment of recognition and a possible future acceptance of her approaching motherhood. In this scene the words "hollow" and "leer" in which the realization of the pregnancy is described show that she has not yet fully accepted the idea of motherhood joyfully though she may as her pregnancy progresses.

The presence of Rufus in the story is significant in that he represents Ruby's childhood vision of children and motherhood which has carried over to her adult life. Being fourteen years older than Rufus, she vividly remembers his birth and her mother's prolonged labor which resulted in death. The recurrent thought of Rufus which Ruby experiences is that "She saw him waiting out of nowhere before he was born, just waiting" (97). She fears having children will age her before her time, bring her grief and, finally, kill her as it did her mother. The association merges with thoughts of Hartley Gilfeet and grows until the story ends on the words of Ruby's recurring thought, "It was as if it were out nowhere in nothing, out nowhere, resting and waiting, with plenty of time" (107).

"A Stroke of Good Fortune" is unusual in that
O'Connor treats the subject of marriage in a kind and gentle fashion rather than in one of violence or grotesqueness. It is a joyful celebration of family life, children and renewal. The future is happily anticipated. For those critics who criticize O'Connor for lack of compassion, this story is a positive answer.

The positive aspects of grace are not always readily noticeable in O'Connor's work and sometimes, as in "The River," its workings, at first impact, appear negative due to the violent medium through which grace is shown. The sacrament of Baptism occurs twice in "The River," once in the physical sense and once in the abstract, constituting two of the three types of Baptism, Baptism of water and Baptism of desire. Baptism, shown through violence, is also a theme in O'Connor's novel, The Violent Bear It Away. The basic catechism definition of Baptism is that "Baptism is the sacrament that gives our souls the new life of sanctifying grace by which we become children of God and heirs of heaven." The River" is the story of a boy's search to become a child of God. Maritain explains such a search in the following terms: "But the Church also carries within her, as members not yet incorporated, nevertheless invisibly united to her soul, all the unbaptized in the state of grace,
The hero of "The River" is Harry Ashfield, a boy of four or five, the unwanted, neglected son of middle-class parents. While the parents wear off a hangover, a babysitter, Mrs. Connin, takes the boy for the day to her farm and to a "healing" by Reverend Bevel Summers before she returns him to his own home late in the evening. Harry tells the babysitter his name is "Bevel," just like the Reverend's name. He learns the story of Jesus from Mrs. Connin and is baptized at the "healing." The parents, who are having a party at the time of his return, quickly shunt him off to bed without assistance. Arising the next morning, Harry dresses and feeds himself because his parents are sleeping off the effects of their party. He boards the trolley to make the hour-long trip back to Mrs. Connin's but by-passes her house to return to the river site of the preaching and healing. He is seeking the Kingdom of God which he had heard of for the first time in his life the previous day. In the literal sense that children often take new information, Harry, "Bevel," thinks God's kingdom is beneath the river's water. Mr. Paradise, a neighborhood gas station owner, who scoffed at the reverend's teachings, attempts to pull "Bevel" from the river when he wades into it. "Bevel," mistaking
Mr. Paradise for a pig which had chased him at the farm the day before, overcomes his fear, dives under the water and drowns. Mr. Paradise's unsuccessful rescue attempt does not result in his own death.

A violent shock is rendered to the reader who takes the boy's death as a sad comment on parents whose neglect causes the foreshortening of their son's life. Not only do they treat him casually and off-handedly, but also in their pseudo-sophistication, they give him responsibilities beyond his years. In the opening scene, the father pulls on the boy's coat, unmindful of the boy's arm caught in the sleeve, and impatiently sends him off without a handkerchief even though he has a runny nose. The father's parting words are indicative of the adult manner with which they treat the child, "Good-by, old man. Have a good time" (158). The babysitter has to ask for car-fare. On his return home, he puts himself to bed without undressing, just casting off his shoes. The next morning, as Bevel studies the contents of the refrigerator, the items themselves tell a tale, "some shriveled vegetables that she had forgot were there and a lot of brown oranges that she bought and didn't squeeze; there were three or four kinds of cheese and something fishy in a paper bag; the rest was a pork bone" (171). He has a breakfast of
raisin bread heels, peanut butter and chocolate milk. He wants a bottle of ginger ale but the parents had put the bottle opener out of his reach. In her selfish indifference, the mother has plenty of party items available but nothing of substance for the child's diet. However, the parents' real neglect is not of the boy's body but of his soul.

Beneath the plain surface of factual material, the story as story, a good deal is going on in a theological sense. "The River" can be seen as a religious allegory depicting what can happen if parents fail to provide a religious education and a proper atmosphere for the moral development of their children. Such failure can result in a thwarted, distorted child.

Symbolically, Harry's parents represent those parents who commit a mortal sin either through putting off for an extended period or entirely neglecting the Baptism of their children. Mrs. Connin represents the godparent whose duty it is to see that the child is brought up with a religious background if his baptism and education are not taken care of by the parents. At Baptism, the name of a saint is given in order that the person baptized may imitate the saint's virtues and have him for a protector. Harry chooses the name Bevel. Reverend...
Summers represents Christ. Mr. Paradise symbolizes the devil and his attempts to prevent one's salvation. Pigs serve as a symbol for evil. They also represent the instinctive hedonistic forces within a person.

In examining the role of the parents, it is clear that Harry's parents fail to live up to their duties and thereby incur a mortal sin. As Bevel is learning about Jesus at Mrs. Connin's, by contrast he thinks repeatedly that everything at his house is a joke, "If he had thought about it before, he would have thought Jesus Christ was a word like 'oh' or 'damn' or 'God,' or maybe somebody who had cheated them out of something sometime" (163). Anything linked to religion is mocked by his parents. When he sneaks home the book which Mrs. Connin read him, "The Life of Jesus Christ for Readers Under Twelve," his parents' friend remarks, "That's valuable, ... That's a collector's item" (170) because it is dated 1832, not because of the knowledge it contains.

Harry's mother displays interest in the fact that he told the people at the healing his mother had a hangover when Mrs. Connin, thinking Mrs. Ashfield genuinely ill, asked the people to pray for her to be healed. There is irony again in that Mrs. Ashfield's true sickness is in her soul not her body. Instead of being
concerned about Harry's welfare, she queries, "What did that dolt of a preacher say about me?" (170). As Harry is trying to go to sleep, she badgers him about what happened in regard to her since it might affect her reputation, but she is totally uninterested in what happened to Harry or in putting him to bed properly. When informed by Mrs. Connin of Harry's Baptism, Mrs. Ashfield's only response is, "Well the nerve!" (169). Thus, religion is disregarded and ridiculed in the Ashfield household, especially by the mother who is usually more involved in a child's religious upbringing.

Mrs. Connin, representative of a godmother, is portrayed as a simple woman, loving and kind, who possesses a strong faith in Christ. O'Connor depicts her as a Bible-belt fundamentalist, who despite her deficiencies, manages to give Harry truths which influence him. She is appalled that Harry does not recognize the picture of Christ hanging over her bed. Besides wiping Harry's nose, providing him with a handkerchief and feeding him, she attends to his religious education by reading him a child's version of the life of Christ. She provides Harry with a commentary of what is going on at the riverside. Finally, she offers him to be baptized in place of the parents who failed to do so: "I suspect
he ain't ever been baptized" (167). She thus assumes the moral and physical duties of the parents which are required of a godparent if the parents fail to carry them out.

It is ironic that Mrs. Connin's four children, particularly the boys, are portrayed lacking her virtues and religious instincts. The oldest boy is named J. C. The brothers seem to envy Harry's coat since they stare at it for a prolonged period. They conspire to play what may be termed a "devilish" prank on Harry by enticing him to take a first-hand look into the pig pen knowing the pigs will attack the boy. Their voices seem to be the persuasive voices of the devil's advocates which say, "Indulge yourself." For example, the littlest boy says, "Pull harder . . . It's nice and rotten. Just lift out that nail" (162). They represent individuals who enjoy the suffering of those of whom they are jealous: "Their stern faces didn't brighten any but they seemed to become less taut, as if some great need had been partly satisfied" (162). Their desire to cast Harry into the pig pen because their mother appears to favor him is reminiscent of the special treatment of the biblical Joseph, who is cast into a cistern by his brothers because they are jealous of the special coat of many
colors woven by their father, Jacob (Genesis, 37).

O'Connor is also saying that a religious education is not enough to save a person. The person must use the actual grace presented to him in the form of education as a help in living a worthy life. Nor does Baptism alone, though a source of sanctifying grace, save a person from temptation or damnation. Mrs. Connin's sons may be assumed to be baptized and to be aware of the life of Christ since the details given of Mrs. Connin's home show it is a religious environment.

In the tradition of giving a person a saint's name, the name is generally chosen by the parents since Baptism ordinarily takes place soon after birth. Mrs. Connin fulfills her religious duty as "godparent" by taking Bevel to be baptized. By naming himself, Harry is demonstrating his freedom of choice, essentially the choice of good or evil. In choosing the name "Bevel," he shows a desire to have the Reverend for emulation, protection and guidance. "Bevel" may be defined as "incline" or "slant." The name possibly represents one's natural inclination toward what is good and, in this case, toward God, the ultimate good. "Bevel" takes readily to every idea of Christ that is presented to him and shows that he is inclined toward God. By picking
his own name, "Bevel" is also following tradition in which persons old enough to do so at Baptism give themselves a saint's name.

The Reverend Bevel Summers is the Christ-figure in the story and a suitable choice as a namesake for Harry. Mrs. Connin tells Mr. Ashfield that "He's healed a lot of folks. The Reverend Bevel Summers" (158). Shortly after, she informs Harry who has just named himself "Bevel," "He's no ordinary preacher. He's a healer. He couldn't do nothing for Mr. Connin though. Mr. Connin didn't have the faith" (159). Later in the day at the river, Reverend Summers tells the people gathered there, "'If you ain't come for Jesus, you ain't come for me. If you just come to see can you leave your pain in the river, you ain't come for Jesus. You can't leave your pain in the river,' he said. 'I never told nobody that'" (165). As he continues to preach he says, "This old red river is good to Baptize in, but it ain't this muddy water here that saves you" (166). The preacher's message is Christ's message according to Catholicism but opposed to Luther's notion of justification by faith alone. The message in essence is that "a person must have faith to be saved, but faith alone is not enough." The sky (heaven) is reflected in the Reverend's eyes. The
Reverend functions as a metaphor for Christ in the pattern of the story.

Diametrically opposed to the Christ image of Reverend Summers is the devil image of Mr. Paradise. The name Paradise invokes an ironic twist since his function is to lead the boy astray - away from the love in Paradise and toward the isolation of hell. The Reverend's name, Bevel, could also be an ironic reversal since Bevel rhymes with devil. It emphasizes the contrast in what each man offers "Bevel." The Reverend preaches the kingdom of God; Mr. Paradise preaches the religion of skepticism. Mr. Paradise mocks the healing when a blind woman puts her face in the river, "She's been that way for thirteen years, ... Pass the hat and give this kid his money. That's what he's here for" (166). He comes to the healing each year to demonstrate his disbelief by showing that the cancer over his ear is not cured. His lack of faith prevents his being healed. In the last scene of the story, Mr. Paradise, on seeing Bevel heading for the woods, picks out "a peppermint stick, a foot long and two inches thick" (173) to entice Bevel. The candy cane with its red color which is usually associated with the devil stands for worldly pleasures used by the devil to seduce people into sin.
This symbol functions to contrast earthly pleasure with unearthly pleasure which Bevel chooses. O'Connor's closing simile for Mr. Paradise, "the old man rose like some ancient water monster" (174) strongly suggests an age-old demon from the depths. He "stood empty-handed" (174) devoid of the soul he sought to claim.

Coupled with the image of Mr. Paradise as the devil, is his close association with the pigs, symbolic of evil. Mrs. Connin points out a resemblance between the pig who chases Bevel and Mr. Paradise, "That one yonder favors Mr. Paradise . . . He's got the cancer over his ear" (162). The pig is described as long-legged and hump-backed with part of one of his ears bitten off. Mr. Paradise is "a huge old man who sat like a humped stone on the bumper of a long ancient gray automobile. He had on a gray hat that was turned down over one ear and up over the other to expose a purple bulge on his left temple" (166). In Bevel's mind the pig is connected with something he wants to avoid. Mrs. Connin saves him when the pig chases him. When Bevel enters the river he feels something is pushing him back but on seeing Mr. Paradise "like a giant pig bounding after him, shaking a red and white club and shouting" (174) he overcomes his doubts and deliberately goes after the kingdom of Christ. In
a paper entitled "O'Connor's Redeemed man: Christus et/vel Porcus?" Dr. James Goss says, "The hog is the symbol which helps to link these various events into a coherent whole and provides the reader with a hermeneutical tool to aid in the interpretation of the story." Dr. Goss also points out the association that Bevel makes between a picture of the pigs in "The Life of Christ" and the pigs in his picture books at home. From his confrontation with a live pig, Bevel recognizes that the picture in the book of Jesus is of real pigs while those in his books at home are fake. The book must contain truth if it is truthful in its depiction of pigs. The pigs provide Bevel with a symbol with which to discern reality from superficiality, the believable from the non-believable.

Bevel's moment of grace comes when he returns home from the river. He experiences contrasts all during the day between his home and the world of Mrs. Connin. Bevel thinks "You found out more when you left where you lived" (163). At Bevel's Baptism the Reverend tells him, "You count now" (168). The affection and care given him by Mrs. Connin become more desirable than the indifference and lack of care he finds in his parents. At his return his parents continue to deny him genuine love. He then determines to return to that which he
recognizes to be good, to have more of the kingdom of Christ of which he has had a small taste. The story which appears to end sadly because Bevel drowns, ends happily because Bevel achieves eternal life through Baptism of desire and water. In the struggle for Bevel's eternal soul the devil loses; Christ triumphs.

One of the sacraments symbolized in "The Enduring Chill," the next story under discussion, is known by several names. The sacrament was known formally as Extreme Unction when O'Connor first published the story in 1958 and informally as "The Last Rites." The designation Extreme Unction has been changed to the Sacrament of the Sick, a name which is appropriate to this story because it deals with a young man who is supposedly dying of an unknown disease. The sacrament of Penance is also symbolized for it is an integral part of the ritual of "The Last Rites." Penance also heals the sickness of the soul.

Asbury Fox, a twenty-five year-old New York "writer," becomes destitute and is forced to return home to Timber­boro because he has an illness from which he suffers periodic chills, fever and a general weakened condition. He romantically assumes that death is imminent and pre­tends to enjoy anticipating its coming. It is easier
for him to face death than to admit a lack of writing
talent. He is another of O'Connor's intellectual artistic
archetypes and particularly similar to Calhoun in "The
Partridge Festival" for he also tries to press himself
into a life mold which does not fit him. Asbury's mother,
a practical, energetic woman, takes him to her dairy
farm to recuperate. After her husband died, Mrs. Fox
managed the farm and put her children through college but
paradoxically "she had observed that the more education
they got, the less they could do" (361). Asbury and his
older sister immediately resume the sibling rivalry and
animosity of their childhood days. The sister, Mary
George, an unmarried woman of thirty-three, a pseudo-
intellectual like Asbury, and the principal of an elemen-
tary school, taunts Asbury at every opportunity about his
inability to write and his failure to publish. She
herself lacks the ability to admit her deficiencies and
inadequacies. Asbury defends himself against her charges
but secretly he knows that she is correct in her asser-
tions. He blames his mother for his failure and hopes by
coming home to die that it will serve as punishment to her
by watching him suffer and waste away. In actuality, she
tries to discuss subjects of interest to him, defends him
against verbal attacks from his sister, and cooperates
with him in his artistic desires: "You can have a little studio in your room and in the mornings you can write plays and in the afternoons you can help in the dairy!" (365). He has written a last letter to his mother filling two notebooks which he keeps locked in a bedside table in his room. After his death the letter will be the means by which she will recognize what she has done to him. The title of the story comes from the persistent chills of his illness and from the continuing chill he wishes to leave his mother, "the letter would leave her with an enduring chill and perhaps in time lead her to see herself as she was" (365), something he is unable to do himself.

Mrs. Fox calls in Dr. Block, a local physician, to treat Asbury. Asbury objects to the visit because "What's wrong with me is way beyond Block" (359). This objection is more truthful than Asbury realizes for the sickness is predominantly of his soul. Block refuses to prescribe until he has diagnosed the illness by testing daily blood samples. Mrs. Fox thinks Asbury is on the brink of a nervous breakdown whereas Mary George is convinced that his illness is psychosomatic. Dr. Block is determined to diagnose and treat the case as a specific physical disease.
During his days in bed Asbury remembers meeting a liberal Jesuit priest at a lecture on Vedanta. He also remembers his last visit home during which he attempted to make friends with the Negro helpers in the dairy, Morgan and Randall. He hoped to gain interracial experiences so that he could write a play on how they felt about their condition. He tried to establish rapport by smoking with them in the dairy and by drinking the fresh milk from a mutual cup. His mother had strictly forbidden smoking and she had also prohibited drinking the unpasteurized milk. After the smoking incident, two cans of milk were returned from the creamery because they had absorbed the tobacco odor which indicates that Mrs. Fox had a good reason for the restrictions. Afterwards, Morgan and Randall refused to drink the milk Asbury offered them, "That's the thing she don't 'low" (369) and so Asbury's efforts at interracial involvement failed. In spite of her restriction and their refusal, Asbury drank the milk to show them his disregard for his mother's orders even though he despised milk.

His mother offers to have Dr. Bush, a retired Methodist minister, talk to him as a fellow intellectual. Asbury scoffingly refuses but remembering the priest in New York, he asks for a Jesuit as his dying wish. The
coming of a Jesuit would satisfy him in two ways: he could talk to a man of culture and find solace from someone whom he considers of equal intelligence and it would irritate his mother immeasurably. The priest's visit does not turn out as he expects because the country priest, unlike the New York Jesuit, is ignorant of such intellectual matters as James Joyce. His knowledge is of the conventional, dogmatic type. Father Finn goes right into a discussion of basic religious duties. He questions Asbury about his prayers and his purity and then quizzes him on the fundamental questions in the catechism. Asbury's cynical agnostic attitude is beaten down by the positive assurance of the priest and his blunt analysis: "The Holy Ghost will not come until you see yourself as you are - a lazy, ignorant, conceited youth" (377). The priest chides Mrs. Fox for neglecting her duty as a mother by failing to give Asbury religious training and then leaves, giving the boy his blessing. The boy is stunned by the penetrating identification of his problems coming from a pragmatic old priest who is somewhat deaf and partially bling. Father Finn, in spite of being a spouter-forth of rote religion with deficiencies himself, sees clearly as fools can sometimes do.

The next morning Asbury wants to have one last smoke
with the Negroes but he again fails to achieve communion with them. That evening Dr. Block arrives and elatedly presents his diagnosis, undulant fever, which is contacted by drinking unpasteurized milk. Asbury's illness will recur from time to time but will not kill him. The diagnoses from the priest as spiritual healer and from the doctor as physical healer provide Asbury with a true understanding of his condition. He may now decide whether to persist in his ignorance or to open himself to the light of self-knowledge. Asbury quickly removes the key to the drawer with the notebooks so that his mother will not see how malicious and ignorant he really is. This action indicates his acceptance of his moment of grace.

A vision of the implacable fierce bird with icicles in its beak etched in the watermarks of his bedroom ceiling "which through the years of his childhood and the days of his illness had been poised over his head, waiting mysteriously, appeared all at once to be in motion. Asbury blanched and the last film of illusion was torn as if by a whirlwind from his eyes" (382). The story ends with Asbury's recognition that he must forfeit his romantic attitude of resignation to death and prepare himself to live a new life as the New York Jesuit had predicted, "'There is," the priest said, 'a real probability of the
New Man, assisted, of course,' he added brittlely, 'by the Third Person of the Trinity'" (360).

Extreme Unction is the sacrament which, through the anointing with blessed oil by the priest, and through his prayer, gives health and strength to the soul and sometimes to the body when a person is in danger of death. The effects of the sacrament are fourfold: (1) an increase in sanctifying grace; (2) comfort in sickness and strength against temptation; (3) preparation for entrance into heaven; (4) health of body when it is good for the soul. O'Connor uses the healthgiving (physical and spiritual) functions of this sacrament as the foundation for "The Enduring Chill." The action of the Holy Spirit as the benefactor of sanctifying grace is easily ascertained throughout the story.

The features of the priest's visit visibly represent the sacrament of Extreme Unction. The priest gives Asbury the spiritual equipment he needs to ward off temptation by instructing him, "'Do you have trouble with purity?' he demanded, and as Asbury paled, he went on without waiting for an answer. 'We all do but you must pray to the Holy Ghost for it. Mind, heart and body'" (375). The litany of the priest's questions and Asbury's answers form a penitential rite. Contrition,
a necessary component of Penance, may be assumed at least imperfectly, on the part of the sinner, when Extreme Unction is given. The priest grants Asbury his blessing which symbolizes the anointing with oils and the absolving of his sins. When sin is absolved one is prepared to die or to live because he is once more in the state of grace. Without grace one is considered to be "dead" to the life in Christ. Just before the doctor arrives, "He waited, preparing himself for the encounter as a religious man might prepare himself for the last sacrament" (379). The effects of the health-giving aspects of the sacrament are emphatically symbolized when Block gives a positive prognosis for Asbury's illness. Renewed physical health will enable him to carry out his spiritual mission to pursue a rightful vocation which will aid him in obtaining personal salvation. Pursuing his false god "Art" interfered with his salvation because it gave him a pompous notion of himself and made him insensitive to others. "He had failed his god, Art, but he had been a faithful servant and Art was sending him Death" (373). Asbury's satiric comment reveals O'Connor's agreement with Maritain's contention that when art becomes a god, it becomes a tyrannical master. But ironically, Flannery O'Connor's God sent Asbury life not death. The priest's
visit, the confession, the blessing, and the restored
health fully symbolize the elements of the last sacrament.

Confession, as a part of the ritual of Extreme
Unction, is an inherent factor in the sacrament of Penance. When Father Finn, the voice of Church orthodoxy, discovers that Asbury does not say his prayers he admonishes him, "Well you will never learn to be good unless you pray regularly. You cannot love Jesus unless you speak to Him" (375). The admonition on prayer, the reprimands on behavior, the instructions on the catechism, and the bestowal of a blessing roughly constitute a symbolic outline of the ritual of confession in the sacrament of Penance. Prior to confession a person should examine his conscience. Quite often the priest will assist a penitent in the examination of conscience in the confessional itself. Asbury, with his blind self-righteousness that blocks self-awareness, cannot rightly examine his conscience. Father Finn helps him to examine his spiritual behavior by questions on whether he says his prayers, whether he exercises the virtue of purity, whether he knows his catechism. The next step in confession is to determine the gravity of an individual's sin. Father Finn makes this determination through Asbury's answers. For a sin to have been committed, the sinner
must be able to recognize sin. Asbury does commit his sins of pride deliberately and knowingly. In his charges the old priest said in a "battering" voice, "If you don't apply yourself to the catechism how do you expect to know how to save your immortal soul?" (376). The word "battering" calls to mind a similar idea expressed in a poem by John Donne, "Batter My Heart, Three-personed God," in which Donne metaphorically belongs to evil but desires to belong to good just as Asbury does. Father Finn, as additional spiritual instruction, explains the consequences of Asbury's sinful actions, "Do you want your soul to suffer eternal damnation? Do you want to be deprived of God for all eternity?" (377). Absolution and penance, particular steps in confession, are given to the boy by the priest when he departs, "I'll give you my blessing and after this you must your daily prayers without fail" (377). The catechism states that, "The priest has the power to forgive sins from Jesus Christ, who said to the apostles and to their successors in the priesthood: 'Receive the Holy Spirit; whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained.'" 

46 The words of a blessing and the words of absolution both call on the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The sacrament of Penance with its power
to restore grace opens the way for Asbury to maintain and increase sanctifying grace in his soul. His conversion to a spiritual outlook on life is not yet complete but it has begun by the time the priest leaves. Perfect contrition does not occur for Asbury until the doctor renders his diagnosis. Hence, the action of grace stirred in him by the reception of the two sacraments, makes way for his true moment of grace: "There was something he was searching for, something that he felt he must have, some last significant culminating experience that he must make for himself before he died" (378). The vision of the Holy Spirit is the ultimate experience for which he is searching, and "He saw that for the rest of his days, frail, racked, but enduring, he would live in the face of a purifying terror" (382).

Miss O'Connor's religious convictions are intrinsically ingrained in the meaning of her stories. The contents of her personal library, which included works by Maritain, St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Augustine, are a reflection of those influences which helped color her thinking. Basically, she retained an orthodox viewpoint and the imprint of these theologians is certainly identifiable in her work. Their explorations into the deeper realms of Catholic dogma provided her with the
full development she required as a Catholic and as an artist. Her stories are a kind of defense against the currents of change which were beginning to sweep through the Church. She could foresee the trends taking shape which would attempt to disallow the validity of the Catechism teachings. Consequently, she held true to the fundamental doctrines of the Church in her stories and pointed up their effectiveness in the life of ordinary man. Modern man is constantly buffeted by temptation in a world changing so rapidly that it is difficult to hold to the old truths and yet find meaning and applicability in the new discoveries. Grace is the means by which the resolution of this conflict occurs. The writings of Maritain which interpret Thomistic order and the doctrine of grace added depth to O'Connor's viewpoint and gave it focus. She believed in total commitment and total acceptance achieved through the power of grace. Her religious philosophy gave her writing power and authenticity. In a talk she prepared for delivery at Notre Dame on April 16, 1957, Miss O'Connor declared:

... the serious fiction writer will think that any story that can be entirely explained by the adequate motivation of its characters, or by a believable imitation of a way of life, or by a proper theology, will not be a large-enough story for him to occupy himself with. This is not to say that he doesn't have to be concerned
with adequate motivation or accurate references or a right theology; he does; but he has to be concerned with these only because the meaning of his story does not begin except at a depth where these things have been exhausted. The fiction writer presents mystery through manners, grace through nature, but when he finishes there always has to be left over that sense of Mystery which cannot be accounted for by any human formula.47

Besides the theological (anagogical) level, O'Connor's fiction contains grotesquely humorous, satiric, psychological, naturalistic, and regionalistic levels. Grace, which can be recognized as an integral and unifying element in her thesis stories as well as in the ones she later produced, is only one of the concepts implicit in her writing. Yet Maritain would agree with O'Connor on the centrality of grace and the mystery of grace in the world of her fiction.

... we know that it is a fearful thing to bear the name of Christ before men, and what a paradox a Christian art must realize; what dangers attend the meeting between religion and the restless world of art and the lying world of literature - and the eagerness with which grace and despair quarrel to possess a generation of youth; but the majority of men usually fail in whatever is difficult and that therefore the ultimate spoiling of every enterprise of even a little elevation conforms to the custom of nature. Well! we shall rely upon grace.48

O'Connor, who saw herself as a servant of Christ, achieved fruition as an artist with her reliance upon grace working upon human nature as the central theme
in her stories, for "The work so bears the stamp of the artist; it is the offspring of his soul and mind."\textsuperscript{49}
ATTACHMENT A


THE HOLY GHOST AND GRACE

The Holy Ghost is God and the third person of the Blessed Trinity. He is equal to the Father and the Son because He is God. The Holy Ghost sanctifies souls through the gift of grace. He dwells in the Church as the source of its life.

Grace is a supernatural gift of God bestowed on us through the merits of Jesus Christ for our salvation. There are two kinds of grace: sanctifying grace and actual grace.

Sanctifying grace is that grace which confers on our souls a new life that is, a sharing in the life of God Himself. The chief effects of sanctifying grace are: (1) It makes us holy and pleasing to God; (2) It makes us adopted children of God; (3) It makes us temples of the Holy Ghost; (4) It gives us the right to heaven. Sanctifying grace is necessary for salvation. It is the supernatural life which alone enables us to attain the supernatural happiness of heaven.

Actual grace is a supernatural help of God which enlightens our minds and strengthens our will to do good and to avoid evil. Unfortunately, we can resist the grace of God. Our will is free, and God does not force us to accept His grace. Actual grace is necessary for all who have attained the use of reason. Without it we cannot long resist the power of temptation nor perform other actions which merit a reward in heaven.

The principal ways of obtaining grace are prayer and the sacraments, especially the Holy Eucharist. We can make our most ordinary actions merit a heavenly reward by doing them for the love of God and by keeping ourselves in the state of grace.
FOOTNOTES


5 O'Connor, "Novelist and Believer," Mystery and Manners, 162.


A fuller definition of grace with its external and internal distinctions is herewith presented: "Grace. A supernatural gift, freely bestowed by God, that lifts the soul to the supernatural sphere, making it pleasing to God and rendering every action performed under the influence of grace worthy of God's acceptance. This grace may be external, such as good example or some miraculous occurrence that inspires us to good. Or it may be internal, either as a permanent quality abiding in the soul, when it is called habitual (sanctifying) grace, or by stirring up the mind and will, when it is called actual grace."


13 O'Connor, "In the Protestant South," *Mystery and Manners*, 204.


15 O'Connor, "In the Protestant South," 196-197.


22 Notes from a telephone conversation with Mrs. Sally Fitzgerald on October 11, 1974.

Maritain, St. Thomas, 38.

O'Connor, "On Her Own Work," Mystery and Manners, 115.


O'Connor, "On Her Own Work" Mystery and Manners, 117.


A sacrament is an outward sign instituted by Christ to give grace. The sacraments receive their power to give grace from God, through the merits of Jesus Christ. All the sacraments give sanctifying grace. Each of the sacraments also gives a special grace called sacramental grace. Sacramental grace helps one to carry out the particular purpose of the sacrament. The sacraments always give grace if they are received with the right disposition.

Horan, 120.

O'Connor, "The Church and the Fiction Writer," Mystery and Manners, 152.


This article is one of several which explore the issue of Tarwater's vocation in The Violent Bear It Away. "You Can't Be Any Poorer Than Dead" is the short story which is the precursor to The Violent Bear It Away and in it there are hints of what is to come in the novel but Holy Orders is not a concern in the short story itself.

There is no canon law regulating the age of Confirmation; the only requirement is that it occur after Baptism. Regulations are set by the individual church dioceses. The average age set by most dioceses is twelve or thirteen. The age of receiving one's first Holy
Communion is usually seven or when it is determined that one has reached the age of reason.

34 St. Joseph's Missal, 1317. "Benediction is a short exposition of the Blessed Sacrament for adoration by the faithful. During the ceremony, any number of hymns may be sung, together with prayers in conformity with the custom of the particular church. At the end of the exposition the "Tantum Ergo" is sung and the Priest makes the Sign of the Cross over the people with the Blessed Sacrament."


36 St. Joseph's Missal, 1317.

37 The story never stipulates that the couple is Negro but from the names of the characters, from the mention of collard greens, from the dialect which the characters speak, they are most probably Negroes. Anyone from the South could have similar characteristics but the names are distinctly typical Negro names.

38 Marion Montgomery, "Flannery O'Connor's 'Leaden Tract Against Complacency and Contraception,'" Arizona Quarterly. XXIV (Summer 1968), 133-146.

39 Baptism of Blood, which is the sacrificing of one's life for the faith of Christ even though physically unbaptized by water through no fault of one's own, is the third type.

40 Horan, "Baptism," Lesson 24, 123.


43 Dr. James Goss, "O'Connor's Redeemed Man: Christus et/vel Porcus?" The Drew Gateway. 44:2,3 (Winter-Spring 1974), 106-119.

44 Horan, "Extreme Unction and Holy Orders," Lesson 34, 166.

46 Horan, "Penance," Lesson 30, 144.


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