

Abstract

This thesis employs the theological concept of God's grace and explores through it the stories of the American Southern author, Flannery O'Connor. Roman Catholicism and O'Connor's Southern heritage greatly influenced her own interpretation of this concept. The original focus on love shifted to violence and pain instead, giving rise to O'Connor's own concept of the moment of grace. In Christianity, God's grace is divided into *habitual grace* and *actual grace*. St. Augustine, the author of the original concept, focuses in his work primarily on habitual grace. O'Connor completes St. Augustine's doctrine by expanding on actual grace in her fiction. She links the former, which is expressed by pain, and explores its transformation into the latter, which is expressed by love. In the first part of the analysis, this thesis dissects twelve selected short stories and identifies the moment of grace in each. The second part is concerned with the classification of those moments of grace. Based on the characters' receptiveness of pain, both physical and emotional, and the subsequent psychological processes, the stories can be sorted into three categories. The characters 1) do not feel any pain, which means they cannot ever recognize grace and thus are exempt from salvation; 2) the result is unclear, but a stable pattern can be observed—the characters do feel physical or emotional pain, which means they are able to recognize grace, but for some reason, the transformation of actual grace into habitual is not completed. Lastly, the characters 3) do feel the pain of grace and let it transform them, which might ultimately lead to their salvation; these characters exhibit appropriate psychological changes that indicate that actual grace has been transformed into the habitual. This thesis shows that pain and violence in O'Connor's work is not a mere educational tool but the core of the author's own interpretation of the Christian concept.

Key Words: actual grace, habitual grace, St. Augustine, Roman Catholicism, salvation