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FLANNERY O'CONNOR, FYODOR DOSTOEVSKY AND THE ANTIMODERNIST TRADITION

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ABSTRACT

This paper is concerned with the ways in which the work of writers Flannery O'Connor and Fyodor Dostoevsky serves as a critique of the modern world. No evidence exists to suggest a direct and conscious influence, yet an examination of O'Connor's work reveals a remarkable similarity, both thematically and stylistically, to that of Dostoevsky. To illustrate their traditional, orthodox perspective, both writers rely on the use of the following techniques: ironic humor, which is intended to underline the ridiculousness of human existence without God; the creation of "doubles," characters who mirror the worst tendencies of the protagonists; and the use of "epiphanic" scenes in which God is revealed as an active, positive force in the lives of characters. These techniques are meant to illustrate a single idea: a world without God is a world of chaos, strife and absurdity.

O'Connor and Dostoevsky, unlike most of the antimodernist critics who were the subject of Jackson Lears's No Place of Grace, have formulated a religiously based critique of historical modernity that is both unrelenting and uncompromising. Recognizing the alienation that often results from lack of faith, both writers share much in common with existentialist philosophers. Yet, because they focus so strongly on the need for faith above all else, O'Connor and Dostoevsky may be more accurately described as "Christian existentialist" writers. Their common vision suggests that antimodernist thought has not been confined primarily to a single century, nor to one region or continent; rather, it is a viable intellectual tradition that has contributed a great deal toward arriving at an understanding of the shortcomings and imperfections of life in the modern world.

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In *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture*, Jackson Lears explores the roots of the American antimodernist tradition. Rather than being a product of twentieth-century disillusionment, Lears argues, antimodernist protest is rooted in the Victorian era, an age which historians have traditionally characterized as possessing a blind faith in "Progress," science and technology. In Lears's opinion, a substantial number of nineteenth-century cultural leaders in Europe and America viewed the West's increasing fascination with material progress as being both misdirected and potentially dangerous. Antimodernist sentiment assumed various forms, from the anti-mass production rhetoric of the Arts and Crafts movement, to the therapeutic remedies offered by leaders of "The Cult of the Strenuous Life." What united these disparate groups was the common assumption that so-called Progress created as many problems as it was supposed to solve. The solution to overcoming the sense of alienation that modernization tended to promote lay in developing some alternative mode of existence. But instead of providing alternatives to the more alienating aspects of modernization, these movements, according to Lears, only managed to ease the transition, providing various means for promoting the widespread acceptance of the "modern way of life" and its inherent value system. The end result is that the antimodernist tradition has largely been reduced to the level of cliche, with little of value to contribute toward a critical understanding of the modern condition and the profound cultural changes that have occurred during the last century.

Lears has purposely limited the scope of his study, primarily focusing on nineteenth-century northeastern culture in America. He concerns himself only briefly with twentieth-century antimodernism, or with various movements that have developed outside America and Western Europe. This exclusion is significant, for as Lears acknowledges, antimodernist movements in America and Europe were often spearheaded by political and cultural elites who stood to profit from the very forms of material progress they were criticizing. It may be argued, then, that antimodernist movements originating in regions that have yet to experience the benefits of modernization may be less influential, but perhaps more radical and more insightful, than those movements that have stemmed from within the urban and cultural centers of America and Western Europe. Viewed in this light, the work of writers Flannery O'Connor and her literary and philosophical forebear, Fyodor Dostoevsky, plays an important role in the history of antimodernist thought. Neither writer is concerned with promoting any particular antimodernist "remedies" similar to those advocated by leaders of the Arts and Crafts or
"Back to Nature" movements. What O'Connor and Dostoevsky offer instead is a critique far more profound than those outlined by Lears, one which steadfastly demands of modern humanity an unwavering commitment to resisting "Progress" and the attendant forces of materialism, science and technology. Both writers share a unique perspective on the modern condition that was fueled by their common status as outsiders: O'Connor was a Southerner at a time when the region was under attack for its civil rights policies and its generally "backward" way of life, a Catholic in a region that was predominately Protestant, and a woman in a profession that has been traditionally dominated by men; Dostoevsky was an adamant Slavophile during a time in Russian history that was characterized by a widespread fascination with European culture and an increasing suspicion of the Orthodox Church, as well as by increasing discontent with Russia's seeming inability to promote industrialization and modernization. Less enamored of "the modern way of life" than many of their contemporaries, O'Connor and Dostoevsky developed a far more critical approach to the problems of the modern world. To them the solution to overcoming alienation is more complex than merely finding "self-fulfillment" in taking up a hobby or in returning to the "simple way of life."

Both writers view the necessity of resisting the alienating forces of modernity as a matter as urgent as life and death, for they share the viewpoint promoted by various existenentialist thinkers that the crisis of modern culture holds profound spiritual implications. Like many existentialists, O'Connor and Dostoevsky believe the seemingly chaotic, absurd, and often ridiculous aspects of modern existence stem largely from the sense of emptiness, or as Nietzsche expressed it, the "weightlessness," that has resulted from the decline of religion in Western culture (Lears 41). But unlike most existentialists, these writers view the human condition through the lens of orthodox Christianity. Emphatically rejecting the atheistic implications of most existentialist philosophy, they dismiss the notion that alienation can be overcome either through transcendence of the physical or through the matter-of-fact acceptance of the essential meaninglessess of existence. Here they part company with philosophers like Karl Jaspers and Jean-Paul Sartre, and join ranks with philosophers like Soren Kierkegaard, whose views on the human condition are colored by an explicitly Christian orientation. It is the "Christian existentialist" perspective that constitutes the strongest philosophical bond between O'Connor and Dostoevsky, and that best illustrates the ties linking the more radical nineteenth and twentieth-century antimodernist forms.

Although the relationship of O'Connor's work to American literature and culture has been widely commented upon, her connection to philosophical and literary trends outside
the United States has largely been left unexplored. Robert Drake, reflecting the view of a number of critics, contends that O'Connor's work will ultimately be ranked with that of other "major-minor" writers. "Her range was narrow," he argues, "and perhaps she had only one story to tell" (42). O'Connor, however, was hardly the narrow-minded provincialist critics often label her; she was, despite her conservative, "Southern" viewpoint, very much in tune with the philosophical issues and concerns of the twentieth century (Asals 31). Much of her work was written as a well thought-out defense of the Christian perspective against critiques made by various secularist writers and philosophers. Yet as Thomas Merton notes, O'Connor's fiction deals not merely with issues and themes that are pertinent to the South or to the twentieth century but with ideas and questions that have plagued the human mind from time immemorial. "That is why," he concludes, "when I read Flannery, I don't think of Hemingway, or Katherine Anne Porter... but rather of someone like Sophocles" (257). The relationship of O'Connor's work to that of Dostoevsky is thus well worth examining, for it illustrates the true scope and depth of her literary vision, a vision that transcends the limits of her conservative, Southern background. No evidence exists in either her fiction or her published correspondence to suggest that O'Connor was consciously influenced by Dostoevsky. Nevertheless, a comparison of the work of the two writers reveals a strong philosophical and religious affinity, one arising not so much out of a direct influence, but rather out of a common body of ideas and concerns.

Perhaps what best illustrates the philosophical bond between O'Connor and Dostoevsky is their mutual reliance on the assumption that modern humanity has abandoned God, paving the way for the makings of a world in which there is "No pleasure but meanness" and where "All is permitted." To illustrate this perspective, the writers employ highly similar literary techniques: the use of ironic humor to underscore the ridiculousness of human existence without God; the repeated use of "double" characters who mimic in distorted form the nihilistic and paranoid ideas of the protagonists; and finally, the use of "epiphanic" scenes in which characters experience the grace of God through a vision, dream, or through some catastrophic experience. Each of these varied techniques is used to emphasize a single idea -- that a world without God is a world of chaos, strife and absurdity.

To envision a world without God is a uniquely modern ability, argues Lear's in No Place of Grace. The decline of religious sentiment, in his view, is directly traceable to the nineteenth-century and its increasing fascination with science and technology.
Mainstream Protestantism during that period gradually lost its harsh, Calvinistic edge and slowly adopted an increasingly relativistic theology (Lears 23). Fire and brimstone sermons began to lose meaning to a generation of people who no longer believed in Satan and who viewed Hell as little more than a metaphor for guilt and suffering (Lears 43). Religion was no longer seen as an instrument for salvation, but rather as a vehicle to be used for experiencing the "intensity" of spiritual existence (Lears xv). Stripped of its meaning, religion finally lost any of its true significance for most nineteenth-century intellectuals, who began to look instead to the theories of Darwin and other scientists to provide explanations for the world around them (Lears xvii).

Thus two of the major characteristics of "modernism," in Lears's view, are the decline of religious sentiment and the rise of a secular orientation that places faith in science and technology. What Lears terms "historical modernism" is to be distinguished, however, from the artistic and literary "Modernist" movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Modernist movement in the arts arose in reaction to, and not in support of, the process of modernization. Modernist writers like W.B. Yeats and T.S. Eliot are in reality "antimodern," according to Lears. "Most modernist authors in the twentieth century," he writes, "have been hostile to the secular, urban, bourgeois culture of the modern West. In large measure, literary modernism arose as both religious and secular dissent from historical modernity" (296). "Modernist" artists and intellectuals, according to historian Daniel Joseph Singal, used their work to protest against the sterility of Victorian concepts of civilization and morality, which placed a strong emphasis on rationality, progress, and the perfectibility of the human condition. "The recognition of man's irrational nature, the acceptance of an open and unpredictable universe, the notion of conflict as inherently virtuous, the tolerance of uncertainty, and the drive toward probing criticism -- all are," according to Singal, "part of the Modernist effort to reintegrate the human consciousness and thus to liberate man from the restrictive culture of enforced innocence with which the century began" (8). The Modernists to whom Singal refers share much in common, then, with the antimodernists who are the subject of Lears's study (Lears xvii). Both groups, according to Lears, dissented from the prevailing world view of their time, finding in modern culture a naive sense of optimism and a stultifying lack of vitality and authenticity:

The antimodern impulse stemmed from revulsion against the process of rationalization first described by Max Weber -- the systematic organization of economic life for maximum productivity and of individual
life for maximum personal achievement; the drive for efficient control of nature under the banner of improving human welfare; the reduction of the world to a disenchanted object to be manipulated by rational technique (7).

The antimodernists whom Lears discusses often included people like Theodore Roosevelt, spokesman for the "Cult of the Strenuous Life" and a major proponent of organized sports and outdoor living. His only complaint about modern life centered around the fact that, in his opinion, it tended to promote "softness," that the comforts and amenities of the modern home threatened to rob people of their health and vitality (Lears 108). As the product of a wealthy and privileged background and as a highly respected political leader, Roosevelt, along with similar antimodernist spokesmen, did not desire to change the status quo in any way but sought only to improve existing conditions through various palliative remedies. Therefore, rather than combating the mass production of goods and the detrimental effects of factory regimentalization on workers, leaders of the Arts and Crafts movement, for example, instead advocated woodworking and other crafts as a means of promoting workmanship and providing a creative outlet for bored and alienated laborers. Very few antimodernist leaders, Lears concludes, actually managed to develop any sort of effective analysis of the process of modernization and the cultural changes it produced.

In Lears's opinion, Henry Adams stands as one of the few examples of a genuine antimodernist, a man who not only developed a well thought-out philosophical critique of modern culture, but one who also attempted to live according to the dictates of that philosophy. Skeptical of many of the claims made by scientific leaders, Adams became an amateur scientist, hoping to use his knowledge as a means of illustrating the limits of a purely rational approach. Uncomfortable with the roles imposed upon him by Victorian society, he embraced the "feminine" realm of nurturing and domesticity (Lears 262). In short, Adams was able to rise above the narrow value system imposed upon him by Victorian society. By refusing to allow the circumstances of his background to stand in the way of his intellectual growth, he was free to develop a truly insightful analysis of the modern cultural crisis. "A product of psychic, class, and cultural circumstances," Lears concludes, "his work transcended them all to become a major critique of modern values in crisis" (296).

Despite the analyses of astute critics like Adams, Lears contends that the antimodernist movement under its various guises has largely been a failure. However
disenchanted they may have been with "historical modernity," antimodernists were nevertheless incapable of resisting accommodation. "Half-committed to modernization, writes Lears, "the antimodernists unwittingly allowed modern culture to absorb and diffuse their dissent. Unable to transcend bourgeois values, they often ended by neutralizing them" (57). Too many antimodernists, like Theodore Roosevelt, stood to benefit both from the financial and the physical comforts of material and technological progress. The only lasting contribution that antimodernism in America has made, then, has been to serve warning to those who place implicit faith in the ability of science to answer profound metaphysical questions and in the ability of technology to create a better world without exacting a cost. "The antimodernist dissenters," Lears concludes, "despite their drift toward accommodation, nevertheless preserved a powerful insight, a feeling, sometimes clearly articulated and sometimes only dimly sensed, that the modern secular utopia was after all a fraud" (300).

Had Lears extended the scope of his study beyond the limits of nineteenth-century northeastern America, he might have developed a somewhat different view of the antimodernist tradition. His analysis implies that because the northeastern states have enjoyed "cultural hegemony," determining not only the economic and political course of the nation but the development of its cultural values as well, then any antimodernist movements that have sprung from outside the region have necessarily been of little significance to American culture as a whole. Other scholars have argued, however, that an antimodernist tradition developed in the South that exerted a strong influence on the course of American history, ultimately leading the nation to fight a civil war. Anne Norton suggests that prior to the Civil War there had developed two distinct regional cultures, one Northern and one Southern. "The traits whose continuance Southern culture endeavored to secure were intimately related to the Southern affirmation of classical republican ideology, the primacy of agriculture, and provision as a source of political authority" (Norton 134). Within this framework, the family figured as the basic unit of social and economic organization. In the North there developed, along with industrialization, an entirely different set of values promoting legal-rational authority and objective law, an economic system based on rationalization, and the state rather than the family as the primary unit of social and economic organization (Norton 295). In its resistance to industrialization and the values it promoted, Southern culture remained skeptical of the benefits of modernization.

Northern victory during the Civil War, Norton argues, guaranteed the subordination
of the South's conservative values, but other factors guaranteed that those values would continue to remain a part of the Southern cultural tradition. Richard Weaver contends that the South's defeat in many ways actually helped to solidify its conservative world view (34). The Civil War and the sense of tragedy it created reinforced the Southern tendency to believe that certain forces are simply beyond rational human control. The concept of rationalization is alien to the Southern tradition, according to Weaver, as is the accompanying belief that the logical application of science and reason can uncover the secrets of the natural world (31-34). Thus the Southern mind views science as a "false messiah," one that can never supplant the "true" Messiah, Jesus Christ. This unbending insistence on Christian values tends to promote general suspicion of liberal, relativistic philosophy, and often degenerates, in Weaver's opinion, into a close-minded form of anti-intellectualism (42). Yet whatever its shortcomings, he concludes, the South has nevertheless managed throughout its history to promote a value system that remains skeptical of the ability of science, technology, and material progress to solve the problems of modern existence (389).

Despite this skepticism, however, the South has promoted modernization as much as any other region. According to Daniel Singal, though the South lagged behind in its efforts to industrialize, it eventually came to embrace "Progress" as enthusiastically as the rest of the nation. So too did the South come to embrace the values and beliefs associated with industrialization. "One finds the same worship of material success," writes Singal, "the same insistence on diligence and practicality, the same outlook of steadfast optimism. More striking still, these values associated with industrial progress were joined with and subsumed under the moral code of gentility, in the South as in England" (23). This "New South" creed differs little from the modernist value system that Lears attributes to the northeastern states of roughly the same period. Literary critic Louis D. Rubin Jr. agrees with this assessment of the post Civil-War South. He argues, however, that what is important is not whether or not the South succeeded in resisting industrialization and the values associated with it. What is important is that the South continues to view itself and its values as different from those of the rest of the nation. In his introduction to the third printing of I'll Take My Stand, Rubin defends the authors' assertion that the agrarian agenda they present has its roots in Southern tradition:

For there was a southern tradition worthy of preservation, and it had little or nothing to do with racial segregation, Protestant orthodoxy, or states' rights: it was that of the good society, the community of
individuals, the security and definition that come when men cease to wage an unrelenting war with nature and enjoy their leisure and their human dignity. If never in the history of the South had that goal been fully realized and however much it had been largely restricted to only a part of the population, it was not thereby rendered any less desirable a standard to be cherished. At least it had been in men's thoughts (xx-xxi).

The South, however "modern" it may be, nevertheless continues to view itself as a region that appreciates "unmodern" values based on respect for community, God, nature, and the "simple things in life," values that have become increasingly ephemeral and elusive in a world that has all but abandoned its traditional past.

Like the Agrarians, Flannery O'Connor viewed the South as a region that continued to appreciate traditional values. But like a number of other artists born and raised in the South, O'Connor at one time felt a need to escape what she believed to be the restrictive intellectual climate of her native land (Letters 224). She completed graduate work at the School for Writers at the University of Iowa, and later lived for brief periods in New York and Connecticut. Although she enjoyed her stay in Connecticut, where she lived with close friends who were also "expatriates," she generally felt uncomfortable and out of place living north of the Mason-Dixon line. In one of her characteristically wry letters she describes what life has been like in New York for Enoch Emery, one of the characters she created while living there:

Enoch didn't care too much for New York. He said there wasn't no privetcy (sic) there. Everytime he went to sit in the bushes there was already somebody sitting there ahead of him. He was very nervous before we left and somebody at the Partisan Review told him to go to the analyst. He went and the analyst said what was wrong with him was his daddy's fault and Enoch was so mad that anybody should defame his daddy that he pushed the analyst out the window. You can see why we would never last in New York (21).

She goes on to write that Enoch is disgruntled at having to appear in the Partisan Review; he would much prefer to be in Click, a magazine with lots of pictures. O'Connor believed
that she and her cast of characters from rural Georgia could never be at home in a sophisticated place like New York City, where people read intellectual magazines like the Partisan Review and where people with problems visit the analyst instead of the preacher.

Her experiences living "up North" provided O'Connor with a different perspective on the South, one which lead her to a greater appreciation of the region's virtues:

If you're a writer and the South is what you know, then it's what you'll write about and how you judge it will depend on how you judge yourself. It's perhaps good and necessary to get away from it physically for a while, but this is by no means to escape it. I stayed away from the time I was 20 until I was 25 with the notion that the life of my writing depended on my staying away. I would certainly have persisted in that delusion had I not got very ill and had to come home. The best of my writing has been done here (Letters 230).

As the South came under increasing attack for its racial policies, O'Connor became more vehement in her defense of the region (Coles 50). In many of the "grotesque" characters she created who, like Enoch, could never have sprung from anywhere but the South, she saw one virtue: they continued to struggle, albeit in often misdirected and comical ways, against the temptations of the modern secular world. To O'Connor the beauty of the South and its people lay in their various attempts to resist secularization, a virtue she believed to be acutely lacking in the rest of the nation (Coles 60). In her opinion, the South understood better than any other region the futility of attempting to supplant God with the forces of science and technology:

The notion of the perfectibility of man came about at the time of the Enlightenment in the 18th century. This is what the South has traditionally opposed. 'How far we have fallen' means the fall of Adam, the fall from innocence, from sanctifying grace. The South in other words still believes that man has fallen and that he is only perfectible by God's grace, not by his own unaided efforts. The Liberal approach is that man has never fallen, never incurred guilt, and is ultimately perfectible by his own efforts. Therefore, evil in this light is a problem of better housing, sanitation, health, etc. (Letters 302-303).
This attitude is best exhibited in O'Connor's views on the Civil Rights movement. She understood well enough the need for social justice, but she resented the implication that the rest of the country was morally superior to the "evil" South. Thus while the nation concerned itself with integration and how it could best be legislated, she wrote "Everything That Rises Must Converge." The story, though it is set on a newly integrated bus somewhere in the South, manages to ignore the social, political, and even the racial issues behind the problem of integration (Coles 43). The setting is not used, as one might imagine, as a vehicle for illustrating the changing position of Southern blacks but rather as a vehicle for provoking Julian's final revelation that he is not the independent, progressive-minded person he considers himself to be. In reality he is inextricably bound to his mother and all the traditions, racial or otherwise, that she represents. In one of her letters O'Connor comments that in the story, as far as the "race issue" is concerned she intends to "say a plague on everybody's house" (537). From her point of view, all of God's creatures, be they black or white, living in the North or the South, share responsibility for the sins of the world. Redemption, not politics, is what is important to her.

Sin, in O'Connor's opinion, could be found everywhere, not just in the South. Nor could sin be eradicated through legislation or reform; God's grace is the only force that can help the world rid itself of sin (Coles 12). This perspective is vividly illustrated in the briefly sketched but nonetheless powerful character of Old Tarwater, the backwoods prophet of The Violent Bear It Away. To the typical modern reader Tarwater comes across as nothing more than a crazy old man, plagued by visions and voices that no doubt spring from some form of psychological affliction. Most of the early critics of the novel viewed Tarwater in this way. O'Connor, for her part, took a certain amount of pride in provoking liberal protestations with outrageous, though to her mind perfectly legitimate, characters like Old Tarwater (Drake16). "The modern reader," she admits, "will identify himself with the schoolteacher, but it is the old man who speaks for me" (Letters 350). Her main fear about reviews of the novel was that her liberal, secular-minded audience would not be provoked by the book but that it would merely be characterized as yet another "Southern Gothic" novel and thereby dismissed altogether. She writes, "I am not afraid that the book will be controversial, I'm afraid it will not be controversial. I'm afraid it will just be damned and dropped, genteely sneered at, a few superior kicks from one or two and that will be that" (Letters 358). She created Old Tarwater with a modern reader in mind, hoping to use his outrageous backwoods zeal as a means of eliciting some form of thoughtful response in the minds of what she believed to be a cynical and
complacent audience of non-believers.

O'Connor would likely have agreed with Lears's assertion that liberal Protestantism has contributed to the widespread feeling, among intellectuals at least, of religious apathy. Old Tarwater, she argues, could never have been a traditional Protestant, for like the late nineteenth-century critics of religion whom Lears discusses, she believes that modern Protestantism is for the most part an empty religion, devoid of any true sense of God's being:

The Old man is very obviously not a Southern Baptist, but a prophet in the true sense. The true prophet is inspired by the Holy Ghost, not necessarily by the dominant religion of his region. Further, the traditional Protestant bodies of the South are evaporating into secularism and respectability and are being replaced on the grass-roots level by all sorts of strange sects... and sometimes [by] the genuinely inspired (Letters 407).

In her view, the Catholic Church is the only religious body that has effectively resisted the drift toward secularism plaguing modern organized religion. Despite his own ignorance of formal theology and organized religion, Tarwater, according to O'Connor, is a character who has managed to become a what she terms a "natural Catholic": a visionary who has been able to rise above the limitations of his religious background and come to a genuine (i.e. Catholic) understanding of God.

In some ways, then, O'Connor's critique of modern culture, as far as religion is concerned, parallels the arguments used by the Victorian antimodernists Lears discusses. Like them, she believes that religion has lost meaning to a people imbued with values that promote the wonders of humanity over those of God. As Lears notes, many of the Victorian antimodernist leaders, like the prominent architect Ralph Adams Cram, turned to Catholicism as a means of compensating for what they felt to be lacking in mainstream Protestantism (202). Cram and others like him were searching for a religion that continued to emphasize symbolism, ritual, and the mysteries of the natural world. The appeal of Catholicism lay in its theological certainty, its insistence upon absolute moral laws and upon the existence of sin and evil. Yearning to revive the religious fervor and intensity they believed to be characteristic of medieval Catholicism, Protestant authorities, according to Lears, began to develop an unprecedented interest in religious art and ritual:
The secularized postmillennialism pervading the churches undermined a premodern attitude at every point. It questioned self-abnegation and supernaturalism; it proclaimed a knowable, improvable universe; it deified human purpose. To the extent that religious aestheticism sought to rekindle a sense of transcendence, it embodied an attempt to recapture a vanishing, God-centered world view (195).

But as with other antimodernist remedies of that era, the Catholic movement ultimately failed to revive widespread religious sentiment. Few Protestant leaders or laypeople were interested in radically transforming the theological basis of their religion. What appealed to them instead was a religious setting that removed worship from the realm of the everyday, one alluding to a time in the past when religious fervor inspired people to lives of great heroism and self-sacrifice (Lears 194). As interest in and tolerance for Catholicism increased, Protestant churches began to adopt a more ornate, symbol-oriented decor drawing heavily on medieval Catholic forms. Many parishes even sponsored the building of Protestant cathedrals, a course of action that would never have been tolerated by the Lutherans, Puritans or other early Protestant sects. As Lears concludes, however, the Catholic movement merely resulted in a superficial emphasis on the "theatrical over the introspective" (194). Protestant theology, with its increasingly therapeutic orientation, remained essentially unchanged.

Like the Victorian antimodernists, O'Connor recognizes the need for a more profound religious theology than that which is offered by mainstream Protestantism. Her critique of modern religion, however, goes much further: she believes it necessary to adopt more than Catholic symbolism and decor. Catholicism, in her view, is the only religion that genuinely understands the nature of God's being:

One of the effects of modern liberal Protestantism has been to turn religion into poetry and therapy, to make truth vaguer and ... more relative, to banish intellectual distinctions, to depend on feeling instead of thought, and gradually to come to believe that God has no power, that he cannot communicate with us... and that religion is our own sweet invention. I believe what the Church teaches -- that God has given us reason to use and that it can lead toward a knowledge of him, through analogy; that he has revealed himself in history and continues to do so through the Church, and that he is present (not just symbolically) in the
Eucharist on our altars... I find it reasonable to believe even though these beliefs are beyond reason (Letters 479).

In O'Connor's view, one is mistaken to assume that because God's existence cannot be scientifically proven it is irrational to worship Him. To attempt to apply the laws of science and rationalism to faith is futile and will only lead to frustration and doubt. Yet, paradoxically, once the decision to believe is made, it will only be reinforced by the careful application of one's reason and intellect, for God will reveal Himself to those whose minds are receptive. As Christ's emissary on earth, the Catholic Church, O'Connor believes, acts as the mediator between God and humanity, providing those who believe with the sacramental means necessary to experience God's grace. By insisting on the concept of an active, living and knowable God, Catholicism, in her opinion, is the only religion that can effectively resist the secularizing forces of modernism.

In focusing on religion, or the lack of it, as being the major crisis facing the modern world, O'Connor shares much in common with existentialist philosophers, many of whom are themselves critics of modernism. According to F.M. Heinemann, one of the themes uniting the various schools of existentialist thought is the concept of alienation:

Alienation is a fact. There exists a feeling of estrangement in modern man which has considerably increased during the last hundred years. It is connected with certain changes in human society, with the agglomeration of millions of people in great cities cut off from Nature, with the Industrial Revolution, and with the collectivizing trend bound up with machine production (9).

The problem for modern humanity, as Heinemann sees it, centers around technology. Mankind must struggle to overcome "technological alienation," that is, the sense of estrangement that has resulted from the subordination of the spiritual and the religious to the realm of the material and the technological (Heinemann 14). Modern existentialist thought, according to Heinemann, began with Kierkegaard. Recognizing the inadequacy of both Marx's emphasis on materialism and Hegel's abstraction of spirituality and religion, Kierkegaard insisted on a philosophy based on a Christian perspective (Heinemann 33). For Kierkegaard, the only means of overcoming alienation is through faith in God and Christ. Later existentialists, though often insisting on the need for a secular perspective,
nevertheless recognized that estrangement from God and nature had lead to a widespread sense of the absurdity and meaninglessness of life (Heinemann 167). Philosophers like Heidegger and Sartre, however, insisted that the only means of escaping alienation was to be found in facing death and in accepting the fact that behind it lay "nothingness" (Barrett 66). Religion, according to this view, is an instrument of oppression, used to restrict human freedom, and impairing the ability of humanity to transcend its age-old need for a spiritual security blanket (Roberts 216). Only when mankind accepts responsibility for its own existence will true freedom be achieved (Kaufmann 47). Yet whether insisting on the need for religion or on the need to escape it, most modern-day existentialists nevertheless agree that humanity is experiencing a spiritual crisis of unprecedented proportion.

O'Connor's antimodernist vision was in many ways inspired by the existentialist climate of her day. Various critics of O'Connor's work have downplayed her relationship to contemporary philosophical and literary trends, suggesting instead that her orthodox view of the world springs not from a contemporary view but from a medieval one (Stevens 4). Other critics, however, have recognized that much of her work was directly influenced by the intellectual atmosphere in which she was working, particularly by existentialist writers like Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, Franz Kafka and Albert Camus (Walters 157). O'Connor read much of the latest existentialist writings and was well-versed in the tenets of the philosophy. Though she had not yet read his work when she wrote *Wise Blood*, the novel nevertheless reveals an orientation that shares much in common with Kierkegaard, a philosopher whose work she later studied and came to admire (Asals 29-30). Like Kierkegaard, she adheres to a form of existentialism that insists on the need for adopting Christian faith as the answer to the pain and uncertainty of living in a materially obsessed and spiritually empty world.

Though most twentieth-century existentialist thought stems from a secular perspective, an existentialist viewpoint has been a standard aspect of Christian theology since the Middle Ages (Roberts 3). Early Christian theologians recognized estrangement from God as one of the more complicated dilemmas of religious life, a dilemma which could be solved only through faith alone (Menu 21-22). Whereas a secularist like Sartre would insist that one must accept "nothingness" as a fact of life, a "Christian existentialist" like Kierkegaard would insist that one must make a "blind leap of faith," trusting in God to deliver humanity from its spiritual alienation and despair. From this perspective it is Original Sin, mankind's fall from grace, which has lead to estrangement from God. Only through suffering, grace and redemption can humanity come again to know
and accept God's love (Menu 22). Contrary to what most mainstream existentialists would insist, the Christian existentialist does not accept lack of freedom as being the price paid for religion. Humanity has been given absolute freedom in the face of God -- the freedom to choose faith over doubt, good over evil -- and it is this very freedom which has led humanity to turn away from God. Only by exercising this freedom as a means of coming to accept God can an individual escape from the spiritual despair that so often accompanies atheism (Roberts 10).

O'Connor, as a Christian existentialist writer, is very much concerned with the issue of freedom. "God made us to love Him," she writes. "It takes two to love. It takes liberty. It takes the right to reject" (Letters 354). She believes that a God who forced people to worship and love Him would not be a God worthy of respect. In her view, however, this freedom is not to be confused with license (Walters 147). To O'Connor freedom implies certain moral and ethical responsibilities (Mystery and Manners 153). Hazel Motes, the protagonist of Wise Blood, embodies both the human impulse toward freedom and the impulse to abuse it. Like young Tarwater, who faces a similar religious dilemma, Haze uses his freedom to reject God and His moral order. His blasphemy, however, takes on a mechanical and half-hearted form, and eventually Haze realizes that his attempts to embrace nihilism have brought him nothing but despair. Indeed, most of O'Connor's characters who do attempt to reject God suffer the alienating and often traumatic consequences. Haze's despair leads him to practise an extreme form of asceticism that degenerates finally into self-mutilation and torture. Tarwater's rejection of his role as a prophet leads him to an encounter with the Devil that ends in a painful and humiliating rape. Other characters, like the Grandmother of "A Good Man is Hard to Find," suffer similar fates: she is forced to witness the brutal murder of her family while waiting for her own death at the hands of the Misfit; Mrs. Greenleaf of the story "Greenleaf" dies after being impaled by an infuriated bull; Julian suffers an emotional breakdown after helping to provoke his mother's stroke in "Everything That Rises Must Converge." The list of violent deaths and nervous breakdowns in O'Connor's fiction is endless, but they are used to prove a point. Robert Drake writes of her use of violent action: "Her damned characters prepare their own ends, they do choose this day whom they will serve. And she refuses to let them off the hook by interfering with the consequences of their actions, which are inevitable" (36). O'Connor's characters act at once as living embodiments of the human desire for freedom at any cost and as warnings to those who would use this freedom as a means of rejecting God.

Were O'Connor an atheist, the fates her characters suffer would seem bleak indeed.
From her perspective, however, physical suffering and death are far from being the worst trials a person can endure (Driskell and Brittain 11). To describe these suffering characters as "damned" is to misunderstand her message. Only through these catastrophic experiences do characters like Haze, Tarwater, the Grandmother, Mrs. Greenleaf and Julian ever come to realize their need for salvation. What most of her characters share in common is an inflated sense of self-pride and a belief that they are free to act as they please with no regard for the consequences of their actions. "For Flannery O'Connor," argues Dorothy Walters, "the instruction of pride through the lessons of humility is, in each story, the means by which the soul is prepared for its necessary illumination by the Holy Spirit" (73). Thus physical violence is not merely a gratuitous aspect of O'Connor's fictional universe. Rather, violence is used as the instrument by which God bestows His grace upon those prideful characters who view freedom as a license to do as they please, regardless of the moral implications of their actions.

O'Connor shares with existentialist critics the understanding that freedom is essential to the human spirit. Yet unlike such "mainstream" existentialists as Camus or Sartre, who believe humanity to be bound only by certain "natural" laws which are beyond the realm of morality, she believes there to exist an unbending, God-given code of morality that may only be violated at a price (Heinemann 128). She also shares certain sentiments with the late nineteenth-century antimodernists who viewed Protestantism as an ultimately unsatisfying religion, with a theology too often prone to change with the prevailing notions of the time and with symbolic forms too often lacking in both content and meaning. O'Connor, however, believes there to be a single and irrefutable answer to the problems of the modern world, and that lies in returning to God and learning to accept His grace. Much of her fiction centers around the often comic attempts of her characters who, lacking the religiously based structural forms through which they might experience grace, must search blindly on their own for a means of communicating with God:

The religion of the South is a do-it-yourself religion, something which I as a Catholic find painful and touching and grimly comic. It is full of unconscious pride that lands them in all sorts of religious predicaments. They have nothing to correct their practical heresies and so they work them out dramatically. If this were merely comic to me it would be no good, but I accept the same fundamental doctrines of sin and redemption and judgement that they do (Letters 350).
The South, in O'Connor's opinion, comes close to a genuine understanding of God, but without a religion that provides the sacramental means of experiencing divine grace, the region will only continue to resist secularization in the same painful and haphazard ways as characters like Haze and Tarwater (Letters 350). To O'Connor experiencing God's grace requires more than faith alone. To experience grace truly one must actively and consciously participate in the sacramental life, above all in the Eucharist, which she considers to be the most essential sacrament. In her view the Eucharist is more than the symbolic presence of Christ at the alter; it is the literal Body of Christ being offered again in sacrifice so that those who partake may share in His love and redemption (Letters 125). Any antimodernist critique that does not acknowledge the need for participation in the sacramental life, the very core of Catholicism, is in O'Connor's opinion ultimately flawed.

At first glance it appears that, in her emphasis on the virtues of Southern culture and the Catholic Church, O'Connor developed a somewhat obscure critique of the modern condition that shares more in common with the ideas and concerns expressed by Allen Tate and the Agrarians than with the viewpoint of the more cosmopolitan antimodernists of the Victorian age. O'Connor's world view was of course born of a unique combination of regional, cultural and historical conditions; yet at the same time her perspective bears a curious resemblance to the philosophical orientation of nineteenth-century Russian writer Fyodor Dostoevsky. A number of factors contributed to this unlikely bond. Dostoevsky, like O'Connor, was born into a conservative, tradition-bound culture undergoing profound change, rapidly developing from a rural, agrarian society into one which was increasingly more urban and industrialized. During the eighteenth century Russia was an agricultural society divided into a strict hierarchical order composed primarily of three distinct classes -- the nobility, the peasantry, and the serfs. By the early nineteenth century, however, these simple divisions were beginning to crumble. The Napoleonic Wars of 1812-1815 exerted a liberalizing influence throughout Russia, as thousands of officers who had served abroad returned home full of praise for Western Europe and its democratic ideals. Socialist groups like The Union of Welfare, composed mainly of aristocratic intellectuals, began to promote democratic reforms, calling for equality of all classes under the law, freedom of religion and the press, promotion of industry for the advancement of economic security, abolishment of serfdom and the establishment of a constitutional monarchy (Dmytryshyn 14-15). These groups, although founded by people of wealth and rank, exerted little influence outside the
intelligentsia and were generally tolerated by Alexander I. But with his death in 1825 came a period of increased surveillance of political "subversives" and increased agitation for reform. Only after the ascension of Alexander II did any genuine reforms actually take place. Russia's defeat in the Crimean War convinced a number of the tsar's advisors that the nation's antiquated economic system had seriously impaired its ability to compete throughout the world. A program of reform, designed to encourage modernization, was developed to include the following: the abolishment of serfdom and the promotion of industry; increased state involvement in education, public health, internal improvements and social welfare; and the introduction of a legal system based on written law and trial by jury (Dmytryshyn 21). In short, what Alexander II encouraged was national development based on the "modern" democratic, centralized, and legal-rationalistic governmental forms predominating in Western Europe and America.

Born in 1821 Dostoevsky lived to experience first-hand both the reforms and the intermittent periods of government-sponsored suppression. As a young man he was drawn to the ideas of socialists like Vissarion Belinsky, an influential literary critic, as well as to the ideas of revolutionaries like Nikolay Speshnev. It was his association with Speshnev's "secret circle" of radical agitators that eventually led to Dostoevsky's arrest and subsequent mock execution in 1849 (Frank 290). But rather than creating a hardened revolutionary out of him, his four years of hard labor in Siberia only encouraged the further development of his basically conservative nature. By the time of his death in 1881, Dostoevsky deplored all political and philosophical movements that criticized the tsar, Russia, or the Orthodox Church, aligning himself with the Native Soilers, Slavophiles and other conservative critics. Reacting against those who attempted to push Russia into the modern age, various members of the aristocracy and intelligentsia who, like Dostoevsky, felt threatened by many of the changes that were taking place, formed a philosophical movement known as Slavophilism. Dedicated to opposing both modernization and Westernization (the two terms, for most Russians, were interchangeable), the Slavophiles rallied under the banner of "Autocracy, Orthodoxy and Nationality." They openly denounced the "decadent West," warning Russia of the hazards of adopting the West's love of promoting individualism over communualism, capitalism over agrarianism, and the State over the Church (Dmytryshyn 18). Western Europe, the Slavophiles believed, exerted undue political influence throughout the world, just as it exerted undue artistic and intellectual influence. Part of the impulse behind Slavophilism stemmed from the desire to encourage the development of purely "Russian" political, artistic, and philosophical ideals (Frank 214).
No doubt speaking for many Slavophiles, Dostoevsky describes his impressions of Western culture after a visit to London:

Everything here, apparently, stubbornly insists upon its own way and exists in its own fashion, and apparently, does not harm anything else. Yet, at the same time, here too is the same stubborn, obscure and by now chronic struggle, the struggle unto death between the whole Western world's individualistic bent and the necessity to live together at least in some form ... (Notes from the Underground and The Grand Inquisitor 181).

The Western personality insists on the rights of the individual first and those of society second. But in Dostoevsky's opinion, as in the opinion of many other Slavophiles, the greatest human achievement lay in sacrificing one's own needs and desires for the benefit and advancement of all. In a later essay he further explains his position: "Understand me," he exclaims, "voluntary, completely conscious and totally unconstrained self-sacrifice for the benefit of all is, in my opinion, a token of the greatest achievement of individuality, of its greatest power, its greatest self-control, the greatest freedom of its own will" (184). If each person aspired to and attained such heights of self-sacrifice, then there would be no need to be so obsessed with individual rights, for no one would infringe upon the rights of another and true brotherhood and harmony would be achieved. A brotherhood based on sentiment was, according to Dostoevsky, more realistic than the artificial and enforced brotherhood the socialists sought to create. He understood, however, that given human nature neither form of brotherhood would ever likely be achieved on this earth (187). Nevertheless, he shared the Slavophile belief that Russia and the Orthodox Church offered the best hope on earth for achieving world-wide happiness and Christian harmony. Such harmony would never be achieved as long as Russia continued to repeat the mistakes made by the West.

Like O'Connor's South, then, Dostoevsky's Russia maintained a long-standing conservative tradition that often questioned the value of "Progress" and modernization. Slavophilism was merely the philosophical and intellectual expression of a sentiment widely felt in nineteenth-century Russia among the peasantry and nobility alike (Dowler 4). The peasantry generally accepted the status quo, supporting both the power of the tsar and the Orthodox Church. The Church was highly vocal in its protests against westernization and secularization and eagerly played upon the peasantry's inborn
suspicion of foreign influence and its threat to their traditions. The monarchy also enjoyed general support among the Russian people, who firmly believed in the concept of a just and benevolent tsar as the most desirable form of government (Dowler 4). Those among the noble classes and the intelligentsia who were in favor of westernization and full-scale modernization were actually few in number (Dmytryshyn 15). Nevertheless, their influence steadily increased throughout the nineteenth century, contributing to the conservative backlash that resulted in the Slavophile movement. Like their counterparts in the nineteenth-century American South, the Slavophiles promoted the Russian agrarian tradition, praising the national heritage it represented. Industrialization, they warned, would only encourage a competitive individualism through which relations between neighbors would be based not on sentiment and commonality but on contractual bonds enforced by a rational system of law and commerce (Dowler 8-9). Western-style industrialization, the Slavophiles believed, promoted a rampant materialism that, in Dostoevsky's words, "must certainly lead to universal corruption " (qtd. in Menu: 53). Similarly, the Western fascination with science had already lead, in Dostoevsky's opinion, to a spiritual neglect that would ultimately result in the decline of religion and the death of the human soul.

Dostoevsky was disturbed by the speed with which his native land seemed to embrace modernization, and like O'Connor, much of his work was written as a warning to those who sought to abandon their traditional past and adopt a world-view embracing the wonders of mankind over those of God. He lived during an age characterized by tremendous change and by a wide-spread questioning of age-old values. "Dostoevsky," writes critic Alex De Jonge, "echoes the issues, traumas and psychological stresses of his epoch with an insight and breadth of vision that are virtually unique" (1). He was particularly concerned with responding to the Utilitarian ideas of philosophers like John Stuart Mill and to the Nihilism of Russian critics like D. Pisarev. It was the tendency of modernists like Mill and Pisarev to believe the world could, through logic and reason, be made nearly perfect, and that it was acceptable and necessary to sever all ties with the past, that Doestoevsky deplored (Jones, Introduction, New Essays on Dostoevsky 42). Notes From the Underground was written, on one level, as an anti-Utilitarian diatrabe meant to reveal the inner-workings of a man whose life contradicts the fundamental Utilitarian assumption that people will naturally act according to their own best interest, and that if everyone were permitted to do so, the world would be a harmonious place (Jones, Introduction, New Essays on Dostoevsky 48-49). The Underground Man stands as testimony to the proposition that, self-interest aside, there exist certain people who will
"suddenly for no reason at all... say to us all: 'What do you think, gentlemen, hadn't we better kick over all that rationalism at one blow, scatter it to the winds, just to send these logarithms to the devil, and to let us live once more according to our own foolish will!'" (Notes from the Underground and The Grand Inquisitor 23). And such people, according to the Underground Man, will always find a loyal and dedicated following, for "self-interest" is of little importance when it conflicts in any way with the human impulse to act freely, no matter what the consequences of those actions might be.

Crime and Punishment, in a similar vein, was meant in part to illustrate the futility of certain ideas currently being promoted by the Nihilists, who argued that traditional concepts of morality should be discarded in favor of a more progressive viewpoint based on scientific rationalism and socialism (Dmytryshyn 22). There exist certain people, claimed the Nihilists, who through the sheer power of their will and intellect are above the laws of conventional morality and are thus permitted, indeed bound, to use whatever means available to them to destroy every obstacle in their path standing in the way of creating a better future for mankind. As Raskolnikov explains it, the "extraordinary man has a right-- not an officially sanctioned right, of course, to permit his conscience to step over certain obstacles, but only if it is absolutely necessary for the fulfillment of his idea on which quite possibly the welfare of all mankind may depend" (Crime and Punishment 276). Imagining himself such an "extraordinary" man, Raskolnikov murders the old pawnbroker woman with the idea that he will use her riches to benefit himself and his family, and that he will be doing the world a service by ridding it of a "louse" who has done nothing but take advantage of those around her. He finds himself, however, utterly incapable of committing the crime in a calm and rational manner and comes close to being apprehended at the scene. Later, after he has returned safely home, he becomes haunted by guilt and sickness and has to fight the urge to confess his crime to the police. He finally realizes he is not the "extraordinary" man he hopes to be and that the crime he has committed is petty and base and has done nothing at all to benefit humanity. Thus Raskolnikov is intended to illustrate the futility of attempting to live according to the dictates of abstract philosophies based on rationalism and utilitarianism. His inability to overstep the laws of conventional morality and commit the crime in a rational, logical manner testifies to the power of a higher law, one that is sanctioned by God and that may be violated only under penalty of great suffering.

It is his persistent emphasis on the need to live according to the Word of God that constitutes the philosophical core of Dostoevsky's work. Like O'Connor, he employs what might be termed a "Christian existentialist" framework. Recognizing the spiritual
alienation resulting from the process of modernization, he argues that to counteract this alienation one must maintain faith at all costs. He was at the same time, however, keenly aware of the attractions of a philosophy that denies the existence of a higher power, replacing the concept of God with that of the Man-god, the deified individual who alone is responsible for his own existence (Frank 198). Indeed, the various characters who embody this idea -- the Underground Man, Raskolnikov, and Ivan -- are so vividly sketched they have led many critics to conclude that Dostoevsky embraced the philosophies put forth by his "negative" heroes. Yet in the final analysis his novels are intended to illustrate both the chaos and spiritual suffering that result from such beliefs, as well as the need for faith in God. Even Notes from the Underground, which stands out among his novels as one of the few that does not make a direct appeal for Christianity, was originally meant to contain a passage on faith that the censors deleted from the texts. This situation left Dostoevsky exasperated, as he wrote to his brother Michael shortly after the novel's first printing: "Those swinish censors left in the passages where I railed at everything and pretended to blaspheme, but they delete the passages where I deduced from all this the necessity of faith and Christ. What are they doing, those censors?" (Notes From the Underground and The Grand Inquisitor 195). Like O'Connor, he shares many of the ideas and values common to existentialism, believing that the modern world's devotion to a scientific rationalism denying the importance of the spiritual will necessarily lead to alienation and despair. And like Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky finally concludes that in order to escape this existential despair one must finally make that "blind leap of faith" and learn to accept a God whose existence can never be proven (Frank 198).

A.D. Menu summarizes the Christian existentialist viewpoint to which both O'Connor and Dostoevsky adhere:

Man is God's creation, God's creature; he properly belongs to God, but he is estranged from God in fact by the corruption of Original Sin, and sin destroys this belonging-to-God relationship.... To escape from total despair, man must learn first of all to accept himself for what he is -- a finite creature, struggling courageously for that faith in divine love which alone can lift the human spirit beyond the meaningless transitoriness of mere existence -- to the meaningful and purposive contemplation of ultimate redemption (22-23).

Both writers believe that the modern world is misdirecting its efforts; rather than
struggling to solve the mysteries of the natural world through science or create perfection through the use of technology, humanity should instead accept its limitations in the material world and concentrate its efforts toward achieving spiritual salvation. Essential to salvation is the acceptance of God's love and grace, which may only be achieved by adhering to certain religious precepts. For O'Connor, salvation is possible only through participating in the sacramental life of the Catholic Church. For Dostoevsky, this salvation may be achieved only through membership in the Russian Orthodox Church; he in fact derides the Catholic Church as an authoritarian institution that poses a grave threat to the religious freedom of humanity the world over. To him the Catholic doctrines of papal authority and apostolic succession deny humanity the religious freedom Christ granted (Matlaw xxii). O'Connor, on the other hand, firmly believes in the notion of papal authority and accepts the words of Church authorities as having come directly from Christ Himself; to her the Pope is Christ's representative on earth (Letters 307). Despite the theological differences between Catholicism and Russian Orthodoxy, the two faiths nevertheless share many of the same fundamental principles -- insistence upon the mysteries of faith, on the need for participation in the sacramental life, and on the existence of an unbending and eternal code of morality (Fouyas 69). The two religions also share in common a ceremonial emphasis on symbol and ritual that "modernist" Protestant sects view as being both frivolous and idolatrous (Bainton 83). So too do both religions view themselves as being the guardians of the true Christian tradition as handed down by Peter and the Apostles (Fouyas 123). Thus O'Connor and Dostoevsky each embrace a religion considering itself to be the sole protector of the "Holy Tradition" against the innovations encouraged by modern Protestantism and secular humanism (Fouyas 163). Such a religious orientation, focusing as it does on traditional orthodox Christianity, strongly encouraged the antimodernist impulses of both writers.

In order to create a fictional illustration of the chaos and suffering they believe to have resulted from the modern world's devotion to secularism, O'Connor and Dostoevsky employ highly similar literary techniques. First, they each make extensive use of ironic humor, a technique used to illustrate the essential absurdity and ridiculousness of human existence without God. Second, both writers create a gallery of "double" characters meant to mimic in a distorted but revealing form the worst impulses of the protagonists. And finally, they rely heavily on the use of "epiphanic" scenes as a means of illustrating God's grace in action, revealing itself to the protagonist through the form of a vision, dream, or through some catastrophic experience. This strong emphasis on the importance of religious experience, however, does not undermine the potency of the message behind such
irreverent and blasphemous characters as the Misfit and the Underground Man. Though they are writers with an explicitly Christian orientation, O'Connor and Dostoevsky nevertheless manage to endow unsympathetic and "negative" characters with a realism and legitimacy that some have viewed as brutally un-Christian (Gibson 67). But only in creating a powerful and realistic image of a world at its most godless do they believe it is possible to reveal the absolute and urgent need for accepting God's grace.

O'Connor's first novel, *Wise Blood*, is the story of a man who makes every attempt to embrace the godlessness of the modern world. In her introduction to the novel on the occasion of its second printing, O'Connor writes, "It is a comic novel about a Christian *malgre lui*, and as such, very serious, for all comic novels that are any good must be about matters of life and death" (2). To her, comedy is useful only insofar as it serves to underscore the serious nature of her characters' various attempts to avoid worldly temptations in their quest for spiritual salvation (Martin 10). Her use of comedy, then, is never merely to entertain but is always used for a purpose. This form of "serious comedy" is more aptly termed "grotesque," a term frequently applied to O'Connor's work to describe the repeated use of characters or situations that are at once comical and horrifying (Walters 30).

Perhaps no character anywhere better exemplifies the grotesque than Enoch Emery, Haze's sidekick in *Wise Blood*. His appearance, his demeanor, the manner by which he conducts himself -- essentially everything about Enoch is ridiculous. To Haze he resembles "a friendly hound dog with light mange," and like a hound dog Enoch happily trails after him, oblivious to the fact that Haze obviously does not want the boy's company (*Three By Flannery O'Connor* 21). Indeed, few people do desire his company -- even his father, according to Enoch's own testimony, "traded" him away to a welfare woman. Alone in the world, he attempts to establish a friendship with Haze, who is too preoccupied with his spiritual dilemmas to respond to the boy's efforts. Enoch, however, is willing to do whatever is necessary to gain Haze's favor, and it is in his attempt to locate Haze's so-called "new jesus" that Enoch reveals his truly grotesque nature. His quest for the mummified idol involves an elaborate ritual built around, among other things, gilding a washstand cabinet to provide the "new jesus" with an appropriate altar; hiding in the bushes at the pool to watch the women sunbathe; taking a trip to the zoo to insult the animals with curses; and finally, stopping off at the local soda fountain to flirt with the drunken waitress who is fond of referring to him as a "puss-marked bastard." All of these activities are dictated by Enoch's "wise blood," which has propelled him on an absurd
journey finally culminating in the humiliating experience of enduring insult at the hands of Gonga, the movie-star gorilla who tells him to go to hell. Enoch's gullible faith in his "wise blood," his superstitious fear of the portraits that hang on his wall, his image of himself as a flirtatious ladies' man with whom the waitress at the soda fountain must certainly be in love -- these and other characteristics emphasize his comical nature. These comic qualities, however, act as a counterpoint to the essentially serious nature behind Enoch's character, a nature poignantly revealed in his intense need to belong, to find a place for himself in the world. His journey ends in the horrifying realization that he really does not belong -- the only happiness he will ever find is in the guise of a gorilla, as the person underneath Gonga's movie-star suit. Enoch's situation, juxtaposing as it does the ridiculous with the tragic, is indeed grotesque.

But as Dorothy Walters notes, the grotesque is never without a moral purpose (30). Enoch's purpose is to parallel in comic form Haze's own, more profound, search for meaning in his relationship to God and for his place in God's world (Driskal and Brittain 39). Propelled as he is by his "blood's" animal instinct, Enoch can only find meaning through debasing himself in the guise of a gorilla. His tragedy is that he must deny the spirit in favor of the flesh in order to find his place in the world (Driskal and Brittain 52). Haze, conversely, becomes so obsessed with his spiritual salvation that he denies the needs of the flesh, practicing an extreme form of asceticism ultimately leading to his death. Enoch and Haze represent opposing sides of the same dialectical problem, and neither character is possible without the other. O'Connor concludes, "I couldn't have written Wise Blood without Enoch. It would have been impossible mechanically" (Letters 353). His character, though humorous and highly entertaining, serves to underscore an idea which is essential to the central meaning of the novel: both the realm of the flesh and the realm of the spirit must be integrated in order to form one whole individual. To consider the two spheres separate is a modern form of Manicheanism which results, in O'Connor's words, in the "disjunction between sensibility and belief..." (Mystery and Manners 33). True understanding of God may only be achieved through harnessing both the cerebral as well as the earthly aspects of one's own nature.

Fyodor Karamozov, the "old buffoon" of The Brothers Karamozov, serves much the same purpose as Enoch in Wise Blood by parodying in humorous form the ideas of his son Ivan. Most critics have tended to concentrate on the more serious aspects of Dostoevsky's work, downplaying the role that comedy plays in his fiction. But like O'Connor, he uses comedy as a vehicle for highlighting the serious nature of the philosophical and spiritual dilemmas his characters face. Dostoevsky employs "scandal scenes" in the way that
O'Connor uses the grotesque, as a means of, in the words of Malcolm Jones, "overturning conventional norms and expectations [through] the juxtaposition of opposites," creating episodes during which characters engage in the most extreme, outrageous, and often obscene forms of behavior possible (Introduction, *New Essays on Dostoevsky* 6). These scandal scenes run the gamut from the comic to the tragic, from the buffoonery of old Fyodor at the monastery to the utter shamelessness of the Underground Man's conduct at Zverkov's farewell dinner (Jones, *Dostoevsky: The Novel of Discord* 40). What these episodes share in common is that they are designed to alert the reader, either through humor or shock, to the more serious questions and conflicts lurking just beneath the surface.

Fyodor's conduct at the monastery at first glance seems only designed to entertain the reader, who cannot help but laugh at the old man's attempts to gain the "sacred elder's" esteem. His made-up story about Diderot's christening at the Court of Catherine the Great, his attempt at honoring Zossima with the obscene tribute, "'Blessed be the womb that bare thee, and the paps that gave thee suck -- the paps especially,'" his insistence on provoking Miusov by nicknaming him Von Sohn, after a man who was killed in a brothel—all are extremely inappropriate forms of conduct for visitors at the monastery (*The Brothers Karamozov* 47). It is this sense of his extreme inappropriateness that makes Fyodor such a humorous character (Jones, *Dostoevsky: The Novel of Discord* 42). Like Enoch, however, the old man's function is not merely to entertain but to illustrate as well. Although the "old buffoon's" antics are entertaining to the reader, the narrator points out that for the characters involved, Fyodor's conduct is a source of acute embarrassment and humiliation. Indeed, his conduct is so "incredible," the narrator assures us, that as far as anyone can tell it is entirely unprecedented in the history of the monastery. Even the most adamant "freethinkers" and atheists have visited the monks with a feeling of respect and veneration and an "eager desire to decide some spiritual problem or crisis" (46). Alyosha, for his part, is so shamed by his father's display that he is close to tears, resting his hopes on Ivan, the only person who has ever been able to exert any sort of restraining influence on the old man. But Ivan "sat now quite unmoved, with downcast eyes, apparently waiting with interest to see how it would end, as though he had nothing to do with it" (46).

Ivan's conduct throughout the scene is crucial, for not only does it pave the way for the old man's unrestrained buffoonery to run its course, but it also illustrates the potentially disastrous consequences of Ivan's maxim that if there is no God, then "All is permitted." The old man's conduct provides an outwardly humorous, though essentially
serious, illustration of the sort of chaos that may arise when such an idea is put into action. The scene serves as well as a somewhat lighthearted foreshadowing of the deadly results of this amoral philosophy, when Fyodor is finally murdered by Smerdyakov, who takes Ivan's maxim all too seriously. Had Ivan attempted to understand Zossima's assertion that "All are responsible for all," then he would have understood as well his moral obligation to put a stop to the scene at the monastery, just as he would later have understood his responsibility in the development of Smerdyakov's nihilistic and destructive ideas.

The old man, like Enoch, is a humorous illustration of a human being who has lost touch with God and who fruitlessly and comically attempts to find some sort of meaning in life. Ivan and Haze, on the other hand, embody the more serious consequences that result from rejecting God and His moral order. Both O'Connor and Dostoevsky have created a number of characters, humorous or otherwise, who act as "doubles" of the protagonist, revealing to them aspects of their own personalities they would often prefer to forget (Asals 69). This technique is highly visible throughout The Violent Bear It Away, where nearly every character in some way acts as a reflection of another (Asals 169). Young Tarwater is mirrored in both the character of his "friend," the voice who offers him encouragement in his attempt to shun God, and in Rayber, his atheistic uncle who tries to make the boy over in his own image. The friendly stranger, whom Tarwater hears but rarely sees, first appears as the boy is burying the old prophet according to his explicit instructions. His "friend" tempts Tarwater away from his mission, reinforcing his doubts about the old man's teachings. "That schoolteacher," his "friend" explains, "wouldn't consider for a minute that on the last day all the bodies marked by crosses will be gathered. In the rest of the world they do things different than what you been taught" (Three By Flannery O'Connor 138). Why not just go ahead, the voice asks, and cremate the old man? "And lemme ast you this," his "friend" offers. "What's God going to do with sailors drowned at sea that the fish have et and the fish that et them et by other fish and they et by yet others?" (138). Using theories based on relativistic and rationalist systems of thought, the friendly stranger, reflecting the boy's own worst impulses, convinces Tarwater to disobey the old man's request for a proper Christian burial.

Some critics, misunderstanding O'Connor's intent, have interpreted Tarwater's "friend" as being a product of the boy's imagination, rather than a separate character (Driskall and Brittain 138). O'Connor, however, intends the voice to be that of the Devil himself -- who to her is a literal being readers should easily be able to identify. "My Devil has a name, a history and a definite plan," she explains. "His name is Lucifer, he's a
fallen angel, his sin is pride, and his aim is the destruction of the Divine plan" (Letters 456). This same Devil appears again to Tarwater as he makes his way back to Powderhead after having simultaneously drowned and baptized Bishop. Wearing a panama hat like that of his "friend," the Devil offers the boy a ride, drugs him with liquor and marijuana, and rapes him. Tarwater is only vaguely aware of the resemblance between his "friend" and the man who offers him a ride, but the reader is meant to understand that the two are personifications of the same being, both with the same plan in mind. Tarwater's "friend" mimics the boy's doubts about his uncle in order to reveal, through almost comical exaggeration, the essential uselessness of a creed that views evil as a relative concept, refusing to accept anything that cannot be rationally proven. Similarly, the "stranger" forces the boy to endure the painful physical consequences of rejecting his uncle's warnings about the dangers and temptations of the world, in order to reinforce Tarwater's awareness of the evil and chaos lurking within the godless creed he hopes to embrace. It is only after his encounter with the "stranger" that he finally comes to understand the futility of his desire to blaspheme and learns to accept his part in carrying on his uncle's prophetic mission. As a character who is able to reveal to Tarwater the uselessness as well as the utter sinfulness of his ideas, the Devil, in his various guises, plays a vital role.

"In general," O'Connor writes, "the Devil can always be a subject for my kind of comedy one way or another. I suppose this is because he is always accomplishing ends other than his own" (Letters 367). The Devil of The Violent Bear It Away manages to provoke Tarwater into the realization that he must accept his prophetic mission as a man of God. But the Devil is not alone in his influence. Rayber, the boy's schoolteacher uncle, provides yet another mirror image of Tarwater's own ideas at their worst (Asals 162). The physical similarities between the two are apparent from the start, and to Rayber at least, are slightly unsettling. "When Rayber had first opened the door in the middle of the night and had seen Tarwater's face -- white, drawn by some unfathomable hunger and pride -- he had remained for an instant frozen before what might have been a mirror thrust toward him in a nightmare" (184). Not only do they resemble each other physically, but Rayber and Tarwater share many of the same opinions about the old man as well. Like his nephew, Rayber was kidnapped as a child and taken to Powderhead, where the old prophet preached the Truth to him, cautioning the young boy to prepare his soul for salvation or suffer eternal damnation. Rayber's parents quickly saved him from the old man's clutches, but the experience nevertheless left a strong impression on the boy. It was a number of years before he was finally able to "cure" himself of his "affliction" and
come to accept the real truth, which is that faith in God is merely the result of childish insecurity and neurosis. Tarwater was not so fortunate in his experiences with the old man, however. He was kept at Powderhead long enough for the old prophet's influence to permeate his entire being, and it is Rayber's goal to cure his nephew in the same way he cured himself. Although Tarwater remains suspicious of Rayber and his intentions, his uncle's atheistic and rationalist views nonetheless hold a certain attraction for the boy. He insists that he does not want to baptize Bishop, that he no longer believes anything the old man taught him, and that he now wants to go to church only so that he can spit on it. Tarwater makes every attempt to embrace Rayber's way of life; to him Rayber represents all he would like to become, if only he can escape the old man's grasp.

Even after he has given in to his "compulsions" and baptized Bishop, Tarwater continues to resist the old man, emphasizing to himself the fact that he was able to murder the boy. Thinking like Rayber, he at first sees the drowning as evidence of having been "cured." Leaving the city and heading back to Powderhead, he feels as though he is returning a free man, "tried in the fire of his refusal, with all the old man's fancies burnt out of him, with all the old man's madness smothered for good, so that there was never any chance it would break out in him" (254). Only after his pivotal encounter with the Devil does he realize how blind he has been.

Despite his many protests to the contrary, however, Tarwater never could fully embrace Rayber's viewpoint, suspicious as he is of the man's reliance on a piece of machinery in order to hear, his insistence on performing tests and his attempts to reduce human behavior to the level of equation and rational deduction. Seeing his own doubts about God reflected back to him in the person of his bespectacled schoolteacher uncle, Tarwater cannot help but feel somewhat repulsed. From the boy's perspective, Rayber represents pure intellect in its worst form, devoid of the ability to take action:

'I ain't like you. All you can do is think what you would have done if you had done it. Not me, I can do it. I can act.' He was looking at his uncle now with a completely fresh contempt. 'It's nothing about me like you,' he said (238).

However much he may be attracted to his uncle's atheism, Tarwater nevertheless remains unable to overcome his inbred contempt of Rayber's schoolteacher intellectualism, and it is the boy's determination not to be made over in his uncle's image that contributes to his final acceptance of God's plan.
The sense of revulsion that arises out of seeing one's own worst impulses reflected in another most often provokes characters to reject their "doubles" and all they represent. Like Tarwater, Raskolnikov, the protagonist of Crime and Punishment, experiences the horror of seeing his ideas mirrored back to him by other characters, and like Tarwater, he too experiences a sense of revulsion and contempt that ultimately leads to his own salvation. Perhaps the most humorous, though no less repulsive, double Raskolnikov encounters is Luzhin, his sister's fiance. Luzhin's comic nature stems from the fact that he is possessed by an extreme arrogance and inflated sense of his own importance, offending nearly everyone he meets. Yet he remains oblivious, convinced he is a most charming and intelligent man. Although seemingly harmless, Luzhin has a a dark and dangerous side to his nature, stemming from his selfishness and his complete lack of regard for others. He espouses a creed that, according to the laws of science and utilitarianism, is based entirely on self-interest. Fancying himself a man who is truly in touch with the "younger generation," he attempts to explain his views to Raskolnikov and his friends:

'As the Russian proverb has it, "If you run after two hares, you won't catch one." But science tells us, "Love yourself before everyone else, for everything in the world is based on self-interest..." And economic truth adds that the more successfully private business is run... the more solid are the foundations of our social life and the greater is the general well-being. Which means that by acquiring wealth exclusively and only for myself, I'm by that very fact acquiring as it were, for everybody and helping to bring about a state of affairs in which my neighbor will get something better than a torn coat, and that not through the private charity of a few, but as the result of the higher standard of living for all' (167).

Luzhin's standard of conduct differs only by degree from Raskolnikov's own ideas regarding the existence of certain "extraordinary" men for whom conventional codes of morality mean nothing. In his article on the subject, Raskolnikov argues that these "extraordinary" men are often compelled to overstep moral boundaries in order to lead the rest of the "ordinary" world toward a better future. All great leaders, he argues, have also been ruthless murderers, as it is often necessary to spill blood in order to achieve great ends. Both Raskolnikov and Luzhin justify these ideas with the rationalization that
they are only logical and, furthermore, they help to promote the general welfare of all mankind. Raskolnikov, recognizing the similarity between the two perspectives, remarks to a shocked and offended Luzhin, "Well, if the principles you've just been advocating are pushed to their logical conclusion, you'll soon be justifying murder" (170).

However much he may recognize the philosophical similarities between himself and Luzhin, Raskolnikov nevertheless remains contemptuous of the man, for he understands that Luzhin's cold-blooded principles are to be applied in his relationship with Dunya, Raskolnikov's sister. Hoping to create an advantage for himself, Luzhin is pleased at the prospect of acquiring a poverty-stricken wife who will likely be forever grateful to him for his generosity in marrying someone who has no dowry. According to his utilitarian principles, any girl who is poor will naturally feel indebted to any man who will take her, and this indebtedness will be a source of great power to her future husband:

Here he had something much more than anything he had imagined in his wildest dreams: here was a proud girl, a girl of character, education and mental and spiritual development superior to his own (he felt that), and this human being would be slavishly grateful to him all her life for his disinterested action; she would humbly and reverently acknowledge him as her lord and master, and he would have her entirely in his power! (323).

Not only would marriage to Dunya, in Luzhin's eyes, be a source of power, but so too would it be a means of furthering his social position. A beautiful, intelligent, and virtuous woman could only enhance his standing in society; influential people would naturally be attracted to him with someone like Dunya as his wife. Luzhin does not undertake any action, even one as intimate as marriage, without first assuring that his interests are being furthered and that he will somehow benefit.

When Raskolnikov sees this selfish principle applied to his own sister, he naturally feels repulsed, much the same way he feels when he encounters a young, half-naked, and drunk girl walking alone in the streets, stalked by a man who obviously intends to take advantage of her vulnerable state. When he first spots the girl he attempts to interfere on her behalf, calling the attention of a nearby police officer. But soon Raskolnikov feels disgusted and somewhat embarrassed by his altruistic impulses, believing them to be useless and irrational. "Let them devour each other alive for all I care," he declares to himself. "What business is it of mine?" (68). Then, however, it slowly dawns on him
that the girl could very well have been his own sister:

It's essential, they say, that such a percentage should every year go -- that way -- to the devil -- it's essential so that the others should be kept fresh and healthy and not interfered with... So soothing. Scientific. All you do is say 'percentage' and all your worries are over... And what if Dunya should somehow or other find herself among the percentage? If not that, then another? (69).

When Raskolnikov is able to personalize theories that, like his own, require a certain "percentage" of people to be sacrificed so that the general good might be promoted, he begins to understand the fundamental immorality behind his own proposal to kill the old pawnbroker.

Although Raskolnikov is disgusted when he hears theories like his own stemming from the mouth of a man as unattractive and base as Luzhin, he nevertheless continues to justify his act of murder to himself, and later to Sonia as well. It is not until another, more sinister, double appears that Raskolnikov truly begins to see the grave moral error he has committed in assuming murder may somehow be justified. This second double appears in the character of Svidrigaylov, Dunya's former employer. Luzhin, though he too may threaten Dunya's future happiness with his selfish desire to tyrannize her, pales in comparison to Svidrigaylov, a man whose utterly nihilistic and evil ways threaten Dunya's very soul. For Svidrigaylov has carried Luzhin's principle of self-interest beyond all limits, declaring that there is no moral order and therefore, to use Ivan's words, "All is permitted." Having adopted this attitude, Svidrigaylov lives a life of idle pleasure and cruelty, passing away his time gambling, drinking, and pursuing young girls. His obsession with Dunya provoked him to murder his wife, an act to which he confesses quite openly. But in his view murder is an insignificant act; indeed, he has been implicated in the deaths of two of his servants, yet he tells Raskolnikov his conscience is clear. Svidrigaylov has become so jaded over the years that his only remaining pleasures are in the pursuit of cruelty and vice. In fact, he does not really consider anything he does to be "vice," per se; he believes that if examined "without prejudice," that is, without moral judgement, then his life will be viewed as quite natural and quite normal. He has not taken "advantage" of any of the poverty-stricken, defenseless young girls who have sought employment in his home over the years. Rather, he has merely been following the natural course of events that occur when a healthy, full-blooded man finds himself attracted to a
beautiful young woman. In fact, in Svidrigaylov's opinion, if anyone was victimized by his affair with Dunya, it is himself, as he is the one who was painfully rejected by the woman he so passionately desired. He prefers, however, not to think of life in moral terms but rather to simply accept it in all of its moral ambiguities. For death, he explains to Raskolnikov, is likely no better than life:

"We're always thinking of eternity as an idea that cannot be understood, something immense. By why must it be? What if, instead of all this, you suddenly just find a little room there, something like the village bath-house, grimy, and spiders in every corner, and that's all eternity is?" (305).

Svidrigaylov is a man who, like Raskolnikov, has concluded that traditional morality is an obsolete concept that should be discarded for a more "progressive," more "natural" point of view. This conclusion, though it has allowed him to live a life of utter decadence, has left Svidrigaylov a cynical, unfeeling man, one who sees nothing but vulgarity and emptiness wherever he looks.

Unlike Svidrigaylov, Raskolnikov believes that the laws of morality may only be suspended for a certain few, and then only when the general welfare of humanity is being promoted. But Svidrigaylov sees no purpose in exempting only a few, and he recognizes the futility of attempting to determine just who these "extraordinary" individuals might be. If morality does not apply to a few select individuals, then there is no reason why it should apply to anyone at all. Thus Svidrigaylov's moral philosophy does hold a certain logic Raskolnikov cannot refute, and though he continues to feel repulsed, he nevertheless listens attentively to what his "double" has to say about life and morality. Svidrigaylov claims, for example, to find a certain integrity in the pursuit of "vice" and "sin," for only through these pursuits is he able to experience genuine feeling and desire:

'Let's say it is vice. There is something permanent in this vice; something that is founded on nature and not subject to the whims of fancy; something that sets it on fire and that you won't perhaps be able to put out for a long time, even with years. You must agree it's sort of an occupation, isn't it?' (482).

Were it not for vice, he concludes, he would have no other choice but to "blow his brains
out." Life has simply lost all meaning for Svidrigaylov, and his character offers Raskolnikov a vivid picture of what he has to look forward to, should he too lose his ability to value life.

Svidrigaylov, in short, is the living embodiment of Raskolnikov's ideas carried to their logical conclusion. During one of their "chance" encounters, Svidrigaylov entertains Raskolnikov with stories from his past. Highly amused at his shock upon hearing tales of murder and seduction, Svidrigaylov laughingly points out that the two men are really just "birds of a feather." "Look at the Schiller!" he taunts. "A regular Schiller! So that's where virtue has taken up her abode! Do you know, I think I'll go on telling you these stories just for the sake of hearing your fantastic protestations. Delightful!"

Raskolnikov, disgusted and ashamed, is unable to defend himself, for he is beginning to understand that the murder he has committed has done no more to promote the cause of progress than have the various "sins" Svidrigaylov has committed. "Do you suppose I don't know how ridiculous I look at this moment?" he replies in exasperation (494). Raskolnikov is slowly beginning to understand the kinship between himself and Svidrigaylov, and after he hears the news that his "double" has indeed "blown his brains out," he realizes that he must choose between life and death. Knowing he too will be driven to suicide if he continues to live by a code that refuses to acknowledge the existence of good and evil and the value of life, Raskolnikov makes the decision to reject Svidrigaylov and all he represents, finally agreeing to confess his crime to the police. His confession is the first step toward his ultimate acceptance of Sonia and the moral and religious tradition represents: love of God and of the life He has given and an understanding of the need for suffering, repentence, and the salvation of the soul.

For Raskolnikov, however, salvation does not come easy. Only after he is in prison and experiences a terrible nightmare, a vision of the world in the grip of a deadly virus, does he come to a final acceptance of humanity's need of God and of the moral code that He has ordained. In this terrible dream people who became infected with the virus "at once became mad and violent." But never before had everyone "considered themselves as wise and as strong in their pursuit of the truth... " (555). World-wide chaos and destruction result, and eventually only a few survivors are left, people who, endowed with the spirit of God, are immune to the effects of the virus and understand that there exist not many truths, but only one everlasting Truth. This dream leaves a profound impression on Raskolnikov, clearly revealing to him for the first time what would take place in the world if everyone adopted his ideas. Both O'Connor and Dostoevsky make extensive use of such "epiphanic" scenes, episodes in which the protagonist is suddenly, and often quite
rudely, awakened to the Truth. These scenes, in which God often reveals Himself, serve as illustrations of a viewpoint that stands in direct contrast to the modern tendency to deny the realm of the spiritual and the supernatural.

Epiphanic scenes proliferate throughout the body of O'Connor's work, from the scene where Haze's automobile is pushed over the embankment in *Wise Blood*, to the scene where Hulga loses her wooden leg to the Bible-thumping shuckster in "Good Country People," to Tarwater's rape in *The Violent Bear It Away*. But perhaps the best-known and most illustrative of O'Connor's epiphanic scenes takes place in "A Good Man is Hard to Find," where the violent circumstances surrounding her death force the once blind Grandmother to recognize and accept the presence of God's grace. Salvation is offered to her through an encounter with the Misfit, a gun-toting nihilist philosopher who bears a distinct resemblance to Svidrigaylov, Raskolnikov, and Ivan. He has recently escaped from prison, where he was serving time for a crime he cannot remember committing. "'I found out the crime don't matter,'" he explains to the Grandmother. "'You can do one thing or you can do another, kill a man or take a tire off his car, because sooner or later you'll get punished for it'" (*A Good Man Is Hard to Find* 26-27). The Misfit has decided to live a life of crime because, like many of Dostoevsky's characters, he cannot accept a God whose existence cannot be proven. His inability to accept religious uncertainty has led him to the conclusion that beyond death there is most likely absolutely nothing. Thus he finds no value in life, concluding that if there is nothing beyond the flesh, no spiritual life, then there is no reason to restrain his criminal impulses. He explains this philosophy to the Grandmother:

'Jesus was the only One that ever raised the dead... and He shouldn't have done it. He thown (sic) everything off balance. If He did what He said, then its nothing for you to do but thow (sic) away everything and follow Him, and if He didn't, then it's nothing for you to do but enjoy the few minutes you got left the best way you can -- by killing somebody or burning down his house or doing some other meanness to him. No pleasure but meanness' (28).

The Misfit has managed to take up the philosophical challenge posed by Svidrigaylov, Raskolnikov, and Ivan. Each of them in one way or another is eventually overwhelmed by the implications of his nihilistic ideas: Svidrigaylov finds his life so utterly empty and unfulfilling that he feels compelled to kill himself; Raskolnikov is so haunted by doubt and
guilt that he bumbles his crime, leaving far too many clues, and is forced to give himself up and repent; Ivan continues to insist on the validity of his ideas, refusing to acknowledge his responsibility in his father's death, but he too is so tortured by his increasing sense of guilt that he contracts a nearly fatal brain disease. The Misfit, on the other hand, simply accepts the conclusion that if Jesus was a fraud, then there truly is no code of morality by which one must live. Thus he indulges himself in the most heinous of crimes with no apparent feelings of regret or remorse. He has concluded, with full understanding of the implications of his idea, that amorality and nothingness are facts of life, and he acts accordingly.

The Grandmother is naturally horrified when she comes face to face with a man who is at once so casual and so brutal about the implications of his beliefs. She insists that he must, underneath his criminal facade, be a truly good man. Begging him to pray for Jesus' help, she hopes that he will allow the "goodness" in him to work its way into his heart. "Jesus!" the old lady cried. "You've got good blood! I know you wouldn't shoot a lady! I know you come from nice people! Pray! Jesus, you ought not to shoot a lady! I'll give you all the money I've got" (28). Half cursing, half pleading, the Grandmother calls to Jesus in the vain hope that He may somehow help her. But here she exhibits no true faith or understanding, merely a desperate, clinging and utterly selfish hope that will grasp at anything to save her -- Jesus, her status as a lady, her money. Indeed, she has from the beginning been concerned above all with her own safety, pleading with the Misfit only to spare her life; so preoccupied is she with her own safety that she all but forgets the other members of her family.

The Grandmother's pleas go entirely unnoticed by the Misfit, who is himself too preoccupied with his thoughts on Jesus and his own spiritual fate to care about what happens to the Grandmother. Only after she collapses under the weight of the realization that she will be shot along with the rest of the family does the Grandmother begin to see the Misfit in a different light:

'Listen lady,' he said in a high voice, 'if I had of been there I would of known and I wouldn't be like I am now.' His voice seemed about to crack and the grandmother's head cleared for an instant. She saw the man's face twisted close to her own as if he were going to cry and she murmured, 'Why you're one of my babies. You're one of my own children!' She reached out and touched him on the shoulder (29).
The grace and presence of God has worked its way through the Grandmother, who in a single moment of epiphany suddenly loses all concern for herself, realizing her responsibility for the Misfit and for all the children of God (Driskell and Brittain 70). Her response at the moment of her death provides a poignant refutation of all the Misfit represents, answering his claim that "All is permitted" with Zossima's reminder that, in the body of Christ, "All are responsible for all."

The Misfit, too, has been touched by grace. As O'Connor explains in one of her letters, "The Misfit is touched by the Grace that comes through the old lady when she recognizes him as her child, as she has been touched by the Grace that comes through him in his particular suffering" (389). Thus this horrifying scene ending in death and destruction serves as the catalyst through which God bestows His grace upon those who were once blind to His ways. This transformation would never have been possible were it not for the violent and traumatic circumstances provoking it. The Misfit himself notes that the Grandmother "would of been a good woman... if it had been somebody there to shoot her ever minute of her life" (29). In O'Connor's viewpoint epiphanic moments, moments of genuine understanding, are possible only under the most traumatic circumstances, for it takes a force most powerful to awaken those who are imbued with "the poison of the modern world" (Letters 403).

The theme of spiritual regeneration and awakening is also common throughout the body of Dostoevsky's work. The characters he considers to be his heroes -- Raskolnikov, and later, Alyosha -- are those characters who experience moments of true understanding of the power and love of Christ. Alyosha is a particularly interesting example of one of Dostoevsky's "reborn" characters, for he is surely at the same time one of the most pious and devout. From his early childhood Alyosha has been "a lover of humanity," and in turn has been loved by nearly everyone who has known him (The Brothers Karamozov 16). Entering the monastery seems the natural course of action for one as loving and as full of faith as Alyosha. Yet, as the narrator notes, the boy's motivation in becoming a monk is not nearly as simple as it appears; indeed, there is a side to his nature that is keenly aware of the presence of evil and darkness. "He entered upon this path" according to the narrator, "because at that time, it alone struck his imagination and presented itself to him as offering an ideal means of escape for his soul from darkness to light" (25). There is, then, a dark and even slightly obsessive side to Alyosha's nature. As the narrator explains, "If he had decided that God and immortality did not exist, he would have at once become an atheist and a socialist," a path that Dostoevsky believes will certainly lead to spiritual ruin (26). Like the Misfit, Tarwater, Haze, Raskolnikov, Svidrigaylov, and Ivan, Alyosha recognizes that the choice between belief and non-belief is an all-or-nothing proposition. And like these other characters there is a tiny part of
Alyosha's being that has the potential to do evil, and in the trilogy Dostoevsky planned to write Alyosha was to later undergo great trials during which he abandons faith and, before he comes to a final and complete understanding of God, leads a life of sin (Jones, The Novel of Discord 176).

Thus Alyosha's trial of faith after the death of the elder is no easy matter, for his doubts threaten to disrupt his being at its very core, turning around every belief he has ever held dear. His test of faith comes under what most would consider to be quite trivial circumstances. As the narrator notes, however, these circumstances were a matter of the utmost importance to Alyosha:

I may add here, for myself personally, that I feel it almost repulsive to recall that event which caused such frivolous agitation and was such a stumbling block to many, though in reality it was the most natural and trivial matter. I should, of course, have omitted all mention of it in my story, if it had not exerted a very strong influence on the heart and soul of the chief, though future, hero of my story, Alyosha, forming a crisis and turning point in his spiritual development, giving a shock to his intellect, which finally strengthened it for the rest of his life and gave it a definite aim (396).

This "shocking" event is simply the unexpected and surprisingly rapid decompostion of the elder Zossima's body. Believing in his saintliness, the people of the town, as well as many of the monks, assumed that upon his death Zossima's body would have remained "pure" and "untainted," performing miracles for those who touched it. When this "proof" of Zossima's saintliness does not present itself, those of little faith are quick to come forth with attacks on his character, claiming that this "breath of corruption" from his body is a sure sign of God's judgement. Alyosha cannot bear to hear Zossima's saintliness questioned by people so unworthy of him, and here begins his short-lived, but nonetheless important, "rebellion." Alyosha simply cannot understand why God has allowed such a blasphemy to occur:

He could not endure without mortification, without resentment even, that the holiest of holy men should have been exposed to the jeering and spiteful mockery of the frivolous crowd so inferior to him... Where is the finger of Providence? Why did Providence hide its face 'at the most critical moment'... as though voluntarily submitting to the blind, dumb, pitiless laws of nature? (408)
Remembering his conversations with Ivan concerning the "unacceptability" of God's world, Alyosha grows increasingly resentful of God and begins to lose all concern for the rules of the monastery. He rebels in small ways at first, but later decides to go and visit Grushenka, the most notorious sinner of the town, mistress to both his father and his brother. Expecting to find in her a "wicked" person, he visits Grushenka hoping to wallow in evil and baseness. What he finds instead is a sympathetic and understanding soul, one who is momentarily able to overcome her "wicked" designs on Alyosha and share in his grief and anguish over the death of Zossima. Alyosha's meeting with Grushenka acts as the first step toward his eventual acceptance of God and His plan, no matter how "unseemly" and "corrupt" it may seem to be. He is slowly able to recover from his feelings of grief and humiliation and begins to accept Zossima's death with a feeling of joy and thankfulness that provides the emotional climate during which his will experience his moment of epiphany.

After leaving Grushenka's, he immediately returns to the monastery, where he joins Father Paissy in his vigil over the body. Alyosha finds himself mesmerized by Father Paissy's words, which are drawn from the Biblical passage regarding Christ's first miracle at the marriage in Cana of Galilee. Entering a state of rapture, Alyosha feels himself drawn to the site of the wedding feast. There he sees the bride and bridegroom, their guests, and to his utter surprise and delight, Zossima, who tells the boy of the "terrible greatness" and infinite mercy of Christ, who is forever drawing new guests to the site of the feast. Alyosha is overwhelmed with joy, and though he awakens from his reverie, he vividly remembers the words of Zossima and the beautiful face of Christ, and he realizes that his soul has been visited so that he may be relieved of his terrible burden of grief:

But with every instant he felt clearly and, as it were, tangibly, that something firm and unshakable as that vault of heaven had entered into his soul. It was as though some idea had seized the sovereignty of his mind and it was for all his life and for ever and ever. He had fallen on the earth a weak boy, but he rose up a resolute champion, and he knew and felt it suddenly at the very moment of his ecstasy. And never, never, all his life long could Alyosha forget that minute (437).

Alyosha has been touched by the grace of God, a force that will instill in him the strength and perseverance he will need to complete his "sojourn into the world," where he, like Tarwater, will minister to the children of God (Jones, The Novel of Discord 189).
In O'Connor's opinion the modern world is largely populated by people who have little understanding, if any, of God's grace. She found it difficult, as a Christian writer, to communicate her orthodox perspective to a modern, secular-minded audience:

The novelist with Christian concerns will find in modern life distortions which are repugnant to him, and his problem will be to make these appear as distortions to an audience which is used to seeing them as natural, and he may well be forced to take ever more violent means to get his vision across to this hostile audience (Mystery and Manners 33-34).

O'Connor's violent technique is most often exhibited in the manner by which she resolves the fates of her protagonists. Few of them manage to escape death or physical and emotional trauma, yet those few who do manage to emerge from her stories unscathed are the least fortunate. To O'Connor, violence is often a positive force, offering the only opportunities her "blind" characters will ever have to experience and truly recognize God's grace in action. Rayber, for example, is spared any physical harm. He has, however, been given the opportunity to experience the pain and suffering of Bishop's death, yet as the narrator notes, he cannot bring himself to feel any grief. "He stood waiting for the raging pain, the intolerable hurt that was his due, to begin, so that he could ignore it, but he continued to feel nothing... and it was not until he realized there would be no pain that he collapsed" (243). Here Rayber encounters divine grace in the death of his only son, the boy whom he has so dearly loved and so cruelly rejected; it is the only means by which a man as blind and as unfeeling as he will ever be able to come to a true acceptance and understanding of God. The fact that he continues to resist, refusing to allow himself to experience pain and suffering, assures Rayber's spiritual demise. O'Connor notes in one of her letters that she would like for Rayber to have been saved, but she doubts his ability to love, suffer, and seek forgiveness and redemption (357). It is only the characters able to accept their suffering as a sign of God's presence and grace who will ever manage to redeem themselves and achieve salvation.

Dostoevsky, like O'Connor, is concerned with the problem of communicating his religious perspective to an audience that generally remains skeptical of the power of God. He chooses, however, to reveal the workings of God in a more benevolent manner. Though Alyosha experiences a traumatic moment during which his faith is shaken, his ecstatic vision of heaven provides him with a spiritual strength and joy that will be with him forever. Similarly, Raskolnikov experiences great suffering in his refusal to accept responsibility for his crime, but all suffering disappears as the grace of God works through him:
And what did all, all the torments of the past amount to now? Everything, even his crime, even his sentence and punishment appeared to him now, in the first transport of feeling, a strange extraneous event that did not seem even to have happened to him... he could not think of anything long... he could only feel (558).

Tarwater, Haze and O'Connor's other reborn characters, on the other hand, experience shock rather than ecstasy, pain rather than joy, in their encounters with God. The narrator of *The Violent Bear It Away* describes the painful aftermath of Tarwater's moment of revelation during his struggle with the Devil:

He stood clenching the blackened burnt-out pine bough. Then after a moment he began to move forward again slowly. He knew that he could not turn back now. He knew that his destiny forced him on to a final revelation. His scorched eyes no longer looked hollow or as if they were meant only to guide him forward. They looked as if, touched with a coal like the lips of the prophet, they would never be used for ordinary sights again (262).

God's grace has worked Its way through Tarwater's soul so rapidly and so violently that he has not merely been touched, but scorched by It. Though they may view the mechanics of grace differently, O'Connor and Dostoevsky nevertheless share a vision of God as a living, active Being who makes His presence manifest in the souls of the most brutal of criminals as well as in the hearts of the most pious of prophets.

This orthodox view of mankind's relationship to God sets Flannery O'Connor and Fyodor Dostoevsky apart from many of the other writers and philosophers of the modern age. They share with existentialists the recognition that the modern world, devoid of any concern for its spiritual health and obsessed with material progress, has alienated itself from the source of its own being. Like many existentialist thinkers, O'Connor and Dostoevsky remain contemptuous of any philosophical system that seeks to restrict human consciousness by limiting it solely to the realm of the material. Characters like Rayber, The Misfit, Luzhin, and Svidrigailov are meant to illustrate the limits of modernist concepts based purely on rationalism, utilitarianism, and materialism. Yet these characters take anti-materialism one step further, by insisting on the need not merely for a "spiritual" life, but for a religious life as well, one steeped in ancient Christian tradition. As Christian existentialist writers, O'Connor and Dostoevsky emphatically insist on the necessity of maintaining orthodox Christian traditions; to O'Connor this
meant embracing Catholicism, to Dostoevsky this meant embracing Russian Orthodoxy. Nevertheless, both writers share highly conservative views on spiritual matters strongly encouraged by their participation in Christian religions that emphasize above all the sanctity of the "Holy Tradition." As devout Christians in what they perceived to be an age of disbelief, both writers felt isolated from the intellectual and cultural mainstream of their day. O'Connor considered herself to be a part of the conservative Southern tradition; Dostoevsky felt kinship with the Slavophile movement of the late nineteenth century. Being "outsiders," they felt free to develop a critique of the modern world which was both unrelenting and unforgiving, yet which nevertheless offered the possibility of hope. Both writers loved their native lands, finding in the South and in pre-Soviet Russia a respect for God, community, and tradition which they believed to be rapidly disappearing throughout the rest of the world. If modern humanity could relinquish its pride and learn once again to accept God's grace and love, O'Connor and Dostoevsky believed, then mankind would be delivered from its present state of estrangement, frustration, and uncertainty.

"Dostoevsky," concludes his biographer Joseph Frank, "... finally chose to take his stand with the existential irrational of the 'leap of faith' against [the] demand that religion be brought down to earth and submit to the criterion of human reason" (198). O'Connor arrived at the same conclusion. Human reason, with its ever-expanding ability to manipulate the natural world through the use of various scientific methods, will never create a better world as long as mankind continues to resist God. Characters like Haze, Tarwater, Raskolnikov, and Alyosha are meant to illustrate the idea that God alone, and not humanity, can fulfill the promises made by the promoters of the "modern secular utopia." That two writers who on the surface might appear to bear little resemblance to one another should share in common so many ideas and literary techniques illustrates the fact that antimodernism has not been confined primarily to a single century, nor to one region or continent; nor is it a tradition that, as Lears implies, has offered little but reassuring advice and palliative remedies to people who find little solace in the materialistic obsessions of the modern world. O'Connor and Dostoevsky offer a critique of modern culture that has little patience with those who seek simple answers but which claims much for those who are willing to accept the responsibilities and uncertainties of living according to the Word of God.
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