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THE EVOLUTION OF FLANNERY O'CONNOR'S SOCIAL ATTITUDES

THE EVOLUTION OF FLANNERY O'CONNOR'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS SOUTHERN SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

O'Connor's initial outlook in her thesis stories is that social problems are not significant for the salvation of the individual, leading her in subsequent works to ignore the social framework of the South and dwell instead on the moral problems of individuals in the context of conservative Catholicism.

A transitional stage indicates a growing belief that individual salvation depends, to a degree, upon social change, since the racist attitudes of the Southern middle and upper classes are rooted in pride, a sin seriously impeding individual salvation.

Her mature manner only came about fully through the influence of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, who presented individual salvation as being completely bound up with "social convergence," which is to say, the gradual coming together of classes. This manner is illustrated, above all, in her final stories, which show the Southern Negroes moving up in society and affirming their right to advance still farther.

RÉSUMÉ

Dans ses contes de thèse, Flannery O'Connor ne voit pas l'importance des problèmes sociaux dans le salut d'un individu; c'est ce qui l'a amenée, dans ses oeuvres ultérieures, à insister sur les problèmes moraux des individus, dans le cadre d'un catholicisme conservateur, sans tenir compte du contexte social du Sud des États-Unis.

L'auteur passe alors par une étape de transition et en vient à croire que le salut individuel est relié, jusqu'à un certain point, au changement social, puisque l'orgueil, ce péché qui entrave sérieusement un individu dans sa recherche du salut, est à l'origine de l'attitude raciste de la classe moyenne et bourgeoise du Sud des États-Unis.

La pensée de l'auteur n'atteint sa pleine maturité que sous l'influence de Pierre Teilhard de Chardin qui attribuait entièrement le salut individuel à la "convergence sociale," c'est-à-dire, le rapprochement graduel des classes sociales. Cette perspective transparaît dans ses derniers contes qui illustrent la montée des noirs du Sud dans l'échelle sociale et l'affermissement de leurs droits à de plus grandes aspirations.

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PREFACE

Flannery O'Connor affords us the portrait of an author whose work is forged by the two major dynamic influences of the religious values of the Roman Catholic Church and the particular social demands of her Southern region. Although they eventually merge as complementary forces in her final doctrinal position, throughout her career they by no means exist on equal footing, for while we see that spiritual issues remain of concern to her at every juncture of her work, the value of social considerations only rises in her estimation as her career progresses into the 1960's. While the bulk of most critical analysis tends to focus on the more obvious spiritual content of her work, this thesis primarily addresses itself instead to an exploration of the development witnessed in her social attitudes from her debut as a writer of fiction in 1946 to the publishing of her final collection of short works in 1962. The main argument to be put forth for examination is that, since Miss O'Connor viewed her literary role to be foremost that of a conveyor of spiritual truth, social concerns at first held no interest for her, as they were considered to be an unnecessary distraction for her audience. However, once she had come into contact with the writing of French palaeontologist and Christian philosopher Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, who formulated a complex theory of salvation that rested on the premise of a simultaneous socio-religious advancement for man, social matters assumed a definite prominence in the latter portion of her career.

By far the overwhelming majority of the critics examined tend to display exclusive interest in the spiritual import

of her work, as is reflected by the significant number of her commentators who are actual members of various Catholic religious orders and whose approach to an evaluation of her work leans heavily towards debate on various points of Church dogma as they are witnessed in her writing. Among the more notable secular commentators who also choose to address their full attention to spiritual matters are Robert Drake, writing about her for the series "Contemporary Writers in Christian Perspective," and Carter W. Martin, who gives avid proof of religious interest in his lengthy exposition The True Country: Themes in the Fiction of Flannery O'Connor. Also deserving of mention for the perceptive quality of their grasp of her religious intentions are Marion Montgomery, writing on the subject of the defective will in her characters and their particular relationship to Christ, and Ruth M. Van de Kieft, who in her article "Judgement in the Fiction of Flannery O'Connor," Sewanee Review, 76 (1968), pp. 337-56, admirably handles the ambitious task of categorizing according to their common personality flaws all recurring character types that are found throughout the author's fiction. Special attention should also be levied on Caroline Gordon, literary mentor to Flannery O'Connor, whose article "Heresy in Dixie," Sewanee Review, 76 (1968), pp. 263-97, which focuses on the nature of her basic religious convictions, must be accorded added authority having been written by one who was in direct correspondence with the author and can be considered a knowledgeable confidante.

Despite the preponderance of spiritually oriented analysis directed at her work, several critics, seemingly aware of the limitations of a one-dimensional approach to her fiction, branch out to begin discussion of her social themes. Venturing off on this tangent is Walter Shear who, in writing on the topic "Flannery O'Connor: Character and Characterization," Renascence, 20 (1968), pp. 140-46, deals with the relationship that exists between the individual and his environment. As well, we have

Joan Brittain, among the author's most astute commentators, who initiates interest in secular problems with an article entitled "The Fictional Family of Flannery O'Connor," Renascence, 19 (1966), pp. 48-52, that classifies all of her characters according to their social status. Having found such investigations to be a fruitful area of pursuit, Brittain continued to advance social theory along with co-author Leon V. Driskell in their full-length critical survey The Eternal Crossroads. Incorporating both a spiritual and a secular treatment of Miss O'Connor's fiction into the one treatise, they introduce Chardin as the singular factor that allowed for her to give fuller and more harmonious expression to these two previously disparate elements. The influence of Chardin had earlier been focused upon by John Burke in his article "Convergence of Flannery O'Connor and Chardin," Renascence, 19 (1966), pp. 41-47, 52, but Driskell and Brittain writing in 1971 provide the more complete statement of the French philosopher's profound effect on her basic doctrinal position. Among the more creditable recent efforts in social analysis of her fiction are two periodical articles by Elmo Howell, who examines in "The Developing Art of Flannery O'Connor," Arizona Quarterly, 29 (1973), pp. 266-76, the question of her attitude towards the South and, in addition, in "Flannery O'Connor and the Home Country," Renascence, 24 (1972), pp. 171-76, discusses "Judgement Day" as the culmination of her final fusion of social and spiritual themes.

Guided in this direction by the tentative social explorations of the above-mentioned individuals, I have attempted to expand upon their brief but prescient observations by comprehensively tracing the distinct growth pattern of social enlightenment that emerges within the entire body of O'Connor's fiction. Such a systematic examination of her social attitudes has not to my knowledge been previously attempted and as such constitutes an original research topic which sheds light on an integral yet heretofore largely ignored facet of her writing.

A word must be included about the complementary material that will be brought to bear in connection with the formulation of my argument. Since religious concerns to some extent permeate every example of her writing, even those works which concentrate primarily on social matters, it becomes necessary for me to be involved with the particular complexities of a conservative Roman Catholic outlook such as that which was ascribed to Miss O'Connor. In seeking insight into this area of consideration I have relied most heavily on the writing of Karl Adam, author of the book The Spirit of Catholicism, a work close in its own wording to the sentiments held by Flannery O'Connor as expressed in her own voice both in various essays, and through the pointed dialogue and actions of her characters who constantly confront the central expectations of Catholic teaching. Also of particular value to me as source material on this subject has been Rev. John F. Cronin's study on Catholic social thought entitled Catholic Social Principles, a work which provides historical background as well as intelligent commentary on the modern scene. It should be noted that both of these Catholic works possess an imprimatur allowing that they accurately reflect universal Church doctrine and are considered to be authoritative references on questions of dogma.

In addition to the presentation of integral religious information, also included to establish further the relevent context of her work is an outline of the social history of her Georgia home region and a look at the particular ranking of her own family within this uniquely stratified society. Since a lack of extensively recorded personal opinion makes it difficult at times to assess accurately her precise social feeling, one must look mainly to her text itself for confirmation of her social stance during any given period. It is therefore vital to establish the general expectations of the traditional Southerner, both black and white, for the purpose

of comparing in her works the way in which her characters either conform to or reject the demands imposed on them by such a rigid class structure, thereby reflecting the author's own state of enlightenment.

As for the works of Chardin, Sister Kathleen Feeley, author of Flannery O'Connor: Voice of the Peacock (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1972), p. 16, affords us the knowledge that Miss O'Connor had definitely read The Phenomenon of Man, The Divine Milieu, Letters from a Traveller, and Hymn of the Universe. Noticeably absent is any mention of The Future of Man, which was not available in English translation until 1964, but since it was originally issued in 1959, it is most probable that O'Connor would have been aware of its content, for throughout this time she was reading various critical commentaries that dealt in detail with all facets of Chardin's philosophy. From the above-mentioned books by Chardin I have selected for examination The Phenomenon of Man, his earliest effort, since it forcefully sets out the core of his general theory of "convergence," while the subsequent works explore relevant tangents arising for the most part from the thoughts expressed in this first book. Also referred to is The Future of Man, for it contains Chardin's strongest pronouncements regarding the destructive consequences of racism and social stratification, therefore making it pertinent to our efforts in determining the reasons for change in Miss O'Connor's attitude towards Southern society.

Taking into account her knowledge of these several works of Chardin, it becomes possible to comprehend more fully the evolution that took place in her spiritual and social outlook as the decade of the 1950's progressed, a change which saw her retreating somewhat from her beginning conservative stance that made otherworldly concerns the exclusive focus of attention, to her later approach that permitted the problem of earthly co-existence between all men to take precedence over a

concentration on the isolated one-to-one relationship between the individual and God. Chardin's views represented a more radical approach to the traditional Catholic doctrine most familiar to Flannery O'Connor, thus making her attention to his writing all the more significant, for although he may today be regarded as having been merely avant-garde for his time, his divergence from the Church resulted then in so great an outcry that, upon the appearance of his work, he came close to being branded a heretic. Miss O'Connor's willingness to differ with Church authority on this matter, given her own perception of the true value in Chardin's unique outlook, is indicative of an inherent flexibility that also prompted her to mount eventually a degree of opposition to even the time-honoured social laws of the South. Although strongly influenced throughout her life by both "religion and region," and unquestionably dedicated to both concerns, she tried always to retain the inclination to allow her personal beliefs to initiate a challenge to tradition.

Four distinct phases of doctrinal amendment are evident throughout her entire writing span, commencing with an initial outlook established during the years 1946-47. This beginning trend is demonstrated in her earliest thesis works which see her supporting a rigid class structure by offering a condemnation of all contrary views which are portrayed by her as being detrimental to the ordered tranquility of her home region and which further are shown to be in conflict with the majority opinion of the general Southern populace of both races. Chosen to illustrate this early reactionary attitude are three thesis stories, "The Barber," "The Crop," and "The Geranium," each of which focuses on exposing the folly of various liberal crusaders to thus confirm the author's initial support of the maintenance of a completely static Southern status quo.

A second phase, dating from approximately 1952 until 1960, sees her concentrating on the matter of individual salvation

exclusively within the context of her conservative Catholicism. Such spiritual emphasis is manifest in its purest form in the novel, Wise Blood and accordingly will be outlined for our purposes as it appears in this first full-length work. Religious concerns remain consistent throughout her collection of short stories A Good Man is Hard to Find, which contains works written during the period from 1953 to 1955, with the one exception of "A Stroke of Good Fortune" that dates back to 1948. While all the stories in the collection conform to a similar theological pattern, the opening title work has been selected as being the most representative of this group and as such becomes a focal point for examination in determining her spiritual leanings during this period. In justifying the choice of this particular story over various suitable examples, consideration must be given to the observation expressed by John Burke Jr., again in the article "Convergence of Flannery O'Connor and Chardin," that she exercised considerable care in the positional arrangement of the stories comprising each of her collections, with the greatest attention being devoted to the opening and closing works which provided for her a thematic frame that was intended to draw the diverse structural elements of each individual work together into a unified doctrinal statement. Also to be looked at from this collection is "The Artificial Nigger," a work which especially highlights the degree of her lack of interest in social matters at this particular time. Rounding out her period of spiritual preoccupation is the second novel The Violent Bear It Away, published in 1960, through which can be discerned her position at the end of this phase as well as some indication of the different direction in which she was embarking in the new decade.

Even during the intense spiritual concentration being displayed by her in the 1950's, a transitional stage gradually surfaces throughout various of her works. Notice is thus given of a growing belief that individual salvation of necessity relates to the matter of social change because the racial

pretensions of the Southern middle and upper classes represent a manifestation of personal pride that is contrary to the divine will, which deems humility to be a requirement that must be met before any individual can be considered eligible for redemption. Illustrating this stage are two stories included in the first collection, "A Late Encounter With the Enemy" from 1953 and "The Displaced Person" from 1954; as well, one other work to look at for additional corroboration is "The Enduring Chill" from 1958, which is found in the second collection.

Flannery O'Connor's last stage of development, which sees her adopting a more favorable attitude towards social realignment in the South, comes about in the early 1960's and is only fully realized through the impact on her of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, who presented individual salvation as being completely bound up with "social convergence," which is to say, the gradual coming together of all classes in society. Affirmation of this revised social view is offered throughout her second collection of short stories as is immediately apparent once again with the opening story "Everything That Rises Must Converge," which takes its title directly from Chardin's writing. Two other stories to be examined, also written in the early 1960's, are "Revelation" and "Judgement Day," each of which further indicates her acceptance of the upward mobility of Southern blacks.

Since there exists a lack of biographical information on the author which would enable one to assess more accurately the process of doctrinal expansion throughout her career, in order therefore to document its existence from the text alone, there is included in a separate chapter a somewhat lengthy comparison between the early thesis work "The Geranium" and its later revised counterpart "Judgement Day." This section is intended to demonstrate through the actual details of her fiction her movement from the early field of exclusive spiritual

concentration to the broader topic in the 1960's of the relation of the individual, not only to his God, but as well to his fellow man.

CHAPTER I

FORMATIVE WORKS: ALTERNATE SOCIAL AND SPIRITUAL COMMENT

Determining Factors of Region and Religion

Introduction

The work of Flannery O'Connor presents us with a Southern writer whose attitude towards her society underwent significant change as her career progressed. Miss O'Connor's regional Southern background together with her strong Catholic beliefs became closely aligned as the major influences in her fiction, a fact acknowledged by the author as she reflected on her work in a lecture entitled "The Catholic Novelist in the Protestant South." This talk, one of several contained in Mystery and Manners, a posthumous collection of her lectures and occasional prose edited by her close friends Sally and Robert Fitzgerald, makes the following statement: "The two circumstances that have given character to my own writing have been those of being Southern and being Catholic."[1] The evolution of her attitude from an early conservative outlook which supported an outmoded class system to a final more liberal approach that preached racial equality can undoubtedly be seen to have been moulded according to respective changes that occurred in both her personal spiritual views and in the Southern political climate.

When considering the original narrow-minded racial stance that is predominant in her earliest writing, it becomes difficult to reconcile this attitude with the knowledge that much of her academic training was in the field of sociology.

She did, however, graduate in 1945 with a degree in the social sciences from Georgia State College for Women. It is not surprising then that her work should eventually lead her to examine seriously the particular social structure of the South; however, this commitment was not made at the outset of her career, and paradoxically we find her displaying great hostility towards social concerns in general at this point in her writing. That her early university background centred on the social sciences was a fact so underplayed by the author that few critics have deemed it worthy of mention. This phase of her education was never directly discussed nor even briefly alluded to by her; so little evidence is therefore available on the possible influence that her social studies may have had on her writing.

Since Miss O'Connor did not make any formal use of her training and never became a practicing social worker, it would seem evident that her antagonism towards the field must have been firmly established even before the completion of her degree program. Why she originally pursued the study of sociology is a question that was never clarified by her but, no matter what prompted her initial attraction, it is obvious that her belief in the value of the field could not be sustained. The prospect of a different career had presented itself during her undergraduate days at Georgia State where she began to exhibit a strong interest in literary activities. By the time of her senior year this interest had assumed prominence, as is shown by the fact that she became editor of the literary magazine "The Corinthian." It was as a result of her writing done at Georgia State that she was recommended for Paul Engle's Writers' Workshop at the University of Iowa. Here she embarked on a Master of Fine Arts degree that led to the presentation of a thesis containing six short stories which were begun before February 1946 and completed by June 1947. It is in these, her

very earliest stories, that the first public indication of her hostility towards social concerns becomes apparent.

The type of feelings that appear to have generated this initial resistance to social concerns are reflected in another of her lectures entitled "Novelist and Believer." This talk was delivered at Sweetbriar College in Virginia in 1963, but in spite of its later date the fears expressed in it about the handling of social topics are, it seems, more indicative of the rigid conservative stance that is characteristic of her early work.[2] She comments unfavorably on the public's affinity for social analysis and views it as being essentially irrelevant: "The reader has first to get rid of a purely sociological point of view. In the thirties we passed through a period in American letters when social criticism and social realism were considered by many to be the most important aspects of fiction. We still suffer with a hangover from that period" (O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, p. 164). She summarizes the author's responsibility in the area of social concerns in the following deprecating way: "Any psychological or cultural or economic determination may be useful up to a point; indeed, such facts can't be ignored, but the novelist will be interested in them only as he is able to go through them to give us a sense of something beyond them" (O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, p. 165). It is clear that Miss O'Connor indeed feared that social topics might direct the attention of her audience away from the spiritual aspects of her work. She therefore dismissed the notion that any primary significance could possibly arise from the pursuit of secular themes that related to social position. Moral responsibility was in her view based exclusively on religious values, and these were in no way dependent on social class.

Conservative Catholic Support of the Southern Status Quo

Let us now examine why Flannery O'Connor's conservative Catholic background seems to have greatly contributed to her early attitude towards the social structure of the South, why at the outset of her career we find her fully endorsing the status quo of an elitist society. It is apparent in the author's earliest literary works from the 1940's that her confidence in the merits of the Southern class structure was in large measure generated by traditional Catholic doctrine, which stipulated that social position and vocation were determined by God and should not be altered by man's efforts. A most thorough interpretation of the official Catholic viewpoint with regard to the matter of class and rank is presented by noted theologian Karl Adam in his book The Spirit of Catholicism. Assessing the relative value of social position, he points out that the Roman Catholic Church observes all free movement in the natural world as being strictly determined by the laws and statistics of nature and, correspondingly, recognizes a parallel to exist within the supernatural world whereby the free human will is likewise subject to being determined in its own way by the divine laws of God. Noting that this established dogma emanates from the fundamental Catholic belief that the order of all being, both in the natural and the supernatural realm, "is determined not from below, but from above," Adam concludes that no other option remains open to those adherents of the faith but to accept a divine order that does not lend itself to any human influence.[3] The special importance such a doctrine would have as an argument for maintaining the status quo of the rigid Southern class system is, I think, self-evident. Southern Catholics might predictably conclude that, since the social position of the individual, be they black or white, is pre-ordained by God, it should in no

way be tampered with by man. The ugly spectre of racism could in this way seem to be justified without compromising the moral conscience of even the more socially enlightened Catholic Southerner.

Further rationalization which Southern Catholics could bring to bear in support of racist policies lies at the very heart of Catholic life in the form of the doctrine of the Communion of Saints. Exclusive to the Catholic Church, this particular doctrine conceives of a universal spiritual fellowship existing between all believers in the true Catholic faith, who are collectively charged with the responsibility of engaging in an active effort to advance themselves ever closer to salvation. Vital to the matter of class differences is the Church's view that the one way for the individual to properly practice and participate in this "communion" is by diligently carrying out the demands associated with his particular social position, inspired always by the example of Christ as humble servant and the hope that He offers for eternal life. The key to grasping the underlying principles that support this view of redemption rests on a thorough understanding of the basic Catholic concept of grace, which holds to the belief that each soul possesses the potential for salvation throughout its entire life, regardless of the earthly circumstances of the individual. Social alignment has previously been shown to be determined by God; therefore, any attempt to shun an alloted position and move up in the class structure constitutes a questioning of divine law and, by many traditionally-minded Catholics, might be considered a manifestation of pride, thus compromising the quest for salvation.

Since all social roles are thought to have a divine origin, each one is considered by the Church to be of equal importance to the community; so it could therefore be argued by white Southern Catholics that, on this higher spiritual

plane, the vast differences built into the secular class system are ultimately transcended and become devoid of any power. Even the wide discrepancies in material comforts and wealth between the classes cannot provoke extreme moral indignation from such Church members for, as Adam informs us, the concerns of the after-life should ideally be considered more important than the conditions of their present existence (Adam, pp. 211-12 and 214). The practice of asceticism is indeed thought to be of great benefit to the well-being of the soul, and so, if anything, those persons from the poorer classes might be considered to have somewhat of a spiritual advantage over the wealthy who are open to greater distraction from their religious duties due to the many corrupting pleasures that are afforded them (Adam, p. 215). Southern Catholics could therefore say that the wealthy slave owners certainly had no unjust advantage over their impoverished slaves, since both were equally entitled to salvation, provided that they prove themselves worthy by practicing the essential Catholic virtues while remaining content in their alloted social roles.

Adam informs us that the importance of the diverse contributions of persons from every social level was voiced early on in Christian history by the apostle Paul, who illustrated the value of each individual to the spiritual community by citing biblical parallels that attest to the absolute necessity of each separate part of the human anatomy in relation to the proper functioning of the corporal body as a whole.

> 'For as in one body we have many members, but all the members have not the same office: so we being many are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another: having different gifts according to the grace that is given us' (Rom. xii, 4-6). And every one of these particular functions has its importance for the well-being of the Body. There is no grace that may be a purely personal possession, no blessing that does not belong to all. 'If the foot should say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body: is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear should say, Because I am not the

> eye, I am not of the body: is it therefore not of the body?' (1 Cor. xii, 15-16). The ultimate meaning of every vital Christian function lies precisely in its close relation to the complete organism, in its solidarity with the whole.. (Adam, pp. 103-4)

This idea, not only reflected in the actual composition of the Church hierarchy, also has application for every member of the vast Catholic spiritual order, wherein each individual is instructed that the constant, faithful execution of his duties is essential to the spiritual development of the entire larger membership.

In spite of the efforts of the individual to fulfill the requirements of his social position, the problem still arises of overcoming the legacy of sin left to modern man as a result of Adam's fall from grace. When dealing with this matter, Catholicism acknowledges only that the spectre of original sin is a weakening factor in man, but it does not accept it as being a totally corrupting agent; thus the will is always free to co-operate with God in advancing the individual along the Christian path to redemption (Adam, p. 161). The Church further adheres to the opinion that human reason is a positive force that can successfully be employed to assist the will in overcoming the influence of evil, thereby bringing man ever closer to being worthy of receiving God's grace. Applying Church opinion to the Southern social scene, Flannery O'Connor expresses the view that one of the greatest sources of evil from which reason and will, acting as spiritual guides, must afford protection for the individual is the desire to initiate any type of social change. According to her, not only must any major overthrow of the class system be prohibited but, as she demonstrates with the afflictions that befall liberal crusaders in her early fiction, even efforts to alter the rank of just one individual must be discouraged, for in her youthful view the only true Catholic course of action to be followed is to support the status quo, not merely as a time-honored and cherished tradition, but more significantly as a means of benefitting one's future

spiritual advancement. While upward mobility is not in itself regarded as a sin, it is rather the attendant pride displayed by those that move to a higher class, as well as those who elect themselves to the task of re-ordering society, that serves to jeopardize their spiritual standing in the eyes of God.

Delving further into the historically established Catholic position on the issues of class and race, one paradoxically finds the matter of equality forming the foundation of all such thought dating back to the Church's powerful period of moral and social influence in medieval times. Of continuing importance throughout every generation since then is the problematic question of how equality is to be realized within the secular social structure. The general tendency in papal encyclicals of the modern era is to look to a re-distribution of wealth as the most effective means of equality so that all men may share a basic standard of living. Any such issuances, however, purposely avoid advocating the abolishment of class systems, and Catholic teaching, in fact, clearly supports the need for differing classes. Such a position was outlined in 1891 by Leo XIII in his encyclical Rerum Novarum. Leo, the first great initiator of Catholic social policy, asserted that since there are acknowledged natural differences among men in the areas of talent, skill, health, and mental capabilities, "unequal fortune follows of itself upon necessary inequality in respect to these endowments."[4]

Promoting this same thought in the twentieth century and at a crucial time in Flannery O'Connor's literary career, Pius XII, in an Address delivered on October 31, 1948 to representatives of the Fiat Automotive Plant, echoed Leo's statement when he concurred that human physical and mental disparities preclude that all men can be considered equal, further adding his own view that the Church does not give way to unbridled idealism by promising absolute equality, but instead seeks to bring about equality only in the realm of human dignity, a more realistic target for society.[5]

However, while a class system was considered to be permissible, racism and slavery were in no way approved by the Church. Leo XIII, in fact, traced the efforts of Roman Pontiffs to alleviate and whenever possible halt the condition of slavery as far back as the time of Hadrian I in the eighth century, showing that throughout the ages the Church has always spoken out against slavery as an unnatural condition, being the consequence of sin.[6] Offering his own condemnation of the practice in the letter "Catholicae Ecclesiae" of November 20, 1890, Leo specifically assigned to certain Catholic missions "the destruction of slavery" as their proper end.[7]

Slavery, while recognized as a social injustice by the Church, was nonetheless widely condoned through the moral reasoning that evil must be patiently endured in order to preserve the ordered tranquility of society. The Church greatly feared that serious disruption would surely result from radical social change, especially if initiated by the slave classes rebelling against their masters. So one finds for example Leo XIII stating that, while Catholics should work towards the abolishment of slavery, such a reformation must be accepted as a lengthy process in which persuasion and moral instruction, not defiance, should gradually effect a transformation of society. In the meantime, all victims of injustice were urged to fulfill their obligations to those above them while displaying the utmost dutiful passivity in accordance with the biblical instruction of the Apostles.[8]

We thus find that, while Catholicism asserted the theory of equality and social justice, the restrictive statements of both Leo XIII and Pius XII allowed for an interpretation that provided enough latitude to facilitate Catholics from the American South, or from any other rigidly stratified society, in comfortably perceiving that their arbitrary social divisions were well within the moral bounds established by the Church. Yet while certain extremists might seek sanction in such words,

the official position of the Church with its rights to dignity did make Catholic institutions often more liberal than those of their religious counterparts.

Looking directly at the American South, author John Gunther observed the enforced enlightenment that resulted from the basic Church doctrine. Writing even during the era of the strong white Southern racist consolidation in the late 1940's and early 1950's, he is still able to make the observation that "Catholics by and large are more liberal than Protestants in regard to Negroes, and they proselytize the black communities with vigor. Baptist and Methodist churches in the South operate of course, under segregation; most Negroes are Baptist or Methodist but they have their own separate church organizations and churches. But any Negro may go into any Catholic church, and, though he may not be enthusiastically welcomed, he will not as a rule be rebuffed."[9] Thus one sees that, while Flannery O'Connor may have initially shown great resistance to liberal racial attitudes, the potential for acceptance of the relaxing of conservative racist measures most likely was instilled within her as a result of her Catholic outlook and, although dormant at the start of her literary career, nevertheless lay waiting for future development. However, other than any personal influence on individual members, Catholicism, comprising less than 10% of the total church membership in the South was, due to its small membership, severely hampered in any social efforts and never became a major social force.[10]

Once the official Catholic social position has been recognized, it is necessary to determine the extent of Flannery O'Connor's concurrence with the various theological aspects of the traditional Church outlook. At the outset of her career, those Church pronouncements that lend themselves to the discouragement of social mobility exert the strongest influence in her work, for we find in the earliest stories that the greatest dignity is given to characters who display a passive acceptance

of their lot, even though they may be of a very lowly social rank, while those persons, rank notwithstanding, who interfere with the order of the class structure by attempting to raise either their own position or alter the standing of others are shown to have flaunted divine authority and in the process to have seriously imperiled their souls.

That she chose early on to adopt this approach was not indicative of a deficiency in her individial religious perception but rather reflected the prevailing American disinterest in Catholic social thought. Reverend John F. Cronin, author of an extensive study on American Catholic social principles, points out that American churches and schools were slow to respond to papal social encyclicals with millions of members knowing little of their content (Cronin, p. 42). Even when knowledge became more widespread in the late 1930's, resistance was generated by many of the supposedly enlightened Catholics who refuted them, both by denying that they were binding doctrinal teachings and by refusing to admit that they were in any way applicable to American conditions (Cronin, p. 55). Cronin goes on to explain this innate resistance of American Catholics by emphasizing the following fact:

> In the United States, the idea of social responsibility was largely imposed from without the business community, by law, political pressure, or the economic power of some affected group, such as organized labor. It was not accepted as a personal obligation binding the individual conscience. The virtues of social charity were ignored. (Cronin, p. 45).

Citing the weakness of the Catholic membership with regard to a lack of initiative in correcting social injustices, Cronin comments that "there is a definite need for Americans to recover a strong sense of social morality," for, as he notes, the "enlightened stands" displayed by the bishops and other representatives in authority were not readily accepted by the entire Catholic body (Cronin, pp. 45 and 48). Flannery O'Connor's early conservatism now comes into focus as a general American

Catholic tendency, and one that was most likely magnified in the South. The degree of support that might have been exerted on her in this matter by the Baptist social attitudes remains open to speculation, but the type of regional characters that she focused upon, who were so firmly rooted in its reactionary tradition, suggests that at least at the outset of her career the fundamentalist outlook was a reinforcing agent of conservatism. The Baptist churches, having the largest single membership in the South and therefore the greatest influence, were, by contrast, extremely conservative in their social outlook and altered their racist stance only when the social mood of the general Southern populace dictated the necessity for change.[11]

As for any further speculation regarding the direct influence of Catholicism on the basic structure of her work, it is necessary to look beyond the text of the fiction itself in order to seek clarification of her intent. That she indeed consciously adhered to other specific points of traditional Catholic dogma and that these values had a discernable effect on her writing is a fact that definitely comes to light upon a close reading of selections from her essay work. Much of her occasional prose is devoted to a discussion of the influence of Catholic teaching on the creative mind, and in dealing with this subject her own religious stance manifests itself. Perhaps of greatest value in outlining her true feelings is an essay entitled "The Catholic Novelist in the Protestant South," in which she offers an assessment of the type of spiritual viewpoint that should properly characterize "Catholic" fiction. This paper, originally delivered in lecture form, sees her affirming the Church's dictates with respect to the issue of free will and salvation by saying of work with definite "Catholic" intentions that "it cannot see man as determined; it cannot see him as totally depraved. It will see him as incomplete in himself, as prone to evil, but as redeemable when his own efforts are assisted by grace" (O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, pp. 196-97).

Clearly reflected in these words is the author's faithful reiteration of the basic spiritual tenets set forth by traditional Catholicism with no apparent discrepancies modifying her religious perspective.

Moving from the broad context of Catholic fiction as a whole to the particular example of her own writing, we see her, in an excerpt from one of her personal letters, further demonstrating her commitment to the Church's judgement on key matters of faith by again giving unqualified support to the Catholic view of free will, but this time as it relates especially to her work. She writes as follows:

> My view of free will follows the traditional Catholic teaching. I don't think any genuine novelist is interested in writing about a world of people who are strictly determined. Even if he writes about characters who are mostly unfree, it is the sudden free action, the open possibility, which he knows is the only thing capable of illuminating the picture and giving it life. So that while predictable, predetermined actions have a comic interest for me, it is the free act, the acceptance of grace particularly, that I always have my eye on as the thing which will make the story work.[12]

Thus the pursuit of grace, which in Catholic terms carries with it many strict social obligations, is unquestionably identified as her main fictional objective and is always, as we see, in accordance with the manner prescribed by the Church. This passage is indicative of the views expressed by her throughout her various essays, and it provides an accurate illustration of the very conservative approach to religious doctrine that she maintained at the start of her career.

Traditional Southern Segregationist Heritage

Of course in addition to the influence of Catholic doctrine, which as we have seen would according to interpretation allow her to consider the unequal Southern class system justified, Miss O'Connor's views also reflected the general social and political mood of the South in the 1940's and bore the mark of her own

family position within its class structure. To fully understand the paradox of a student of the social sciences showing great hostility towards such concerns at the start of her writing career, it is necessary to look at the overall Southern environment that surrounded her and, most particularly, at the Georgian social milieu to which she was exposed from birth.

A general assessment of the changing social and political attitudes prevalent in the South during O'Connor's lifetime is offered by Numan V. Bartley in a detailed study prepared by him on this aspect of Southern history. Bartley notes that in the 1930's the majority of Southerners regarded themselves as liberals, owing to the fact that no civil rights legislation had as then been passed, thus allowing Southern citizens to remain unchallenged in their segregationist views.[13] Events of the 1940's, which saw a new sense of social conscience emanating from the North and leading to the establishment in 1946 of a Presidential Committee to report on constitutional amendments needed to establish the equality of Negroes, in Bartley's words, "steadily eroded this [Southern] dedication to a politics of reform, so that by the 1950's the South had totally reversed its earlier political feelings" to become the leading proponent of conservative thought within the nation (Bartley, p. 28).

As a direct result of several landmark Supreme Court decisions and the civil rights policies vigorously pursued by the Truman administation which challenged white supremacy, a protective strategy of "massive resistance" arose within the South which saw the attempt made to have state rights supercede unpopular federal legislation. Miss O'Connor's first fictional efforts produced during the late 1940's and early 1950's therefore coincided with the burgeoning period of Southern white political resistance; so it is not surprising that the social view which she presented highlights the folly of any deviation from the established order.

Emerging of considerable significance in Bartley's study

is the key leadership role assumed by the state of Georgia in the Southern resistance movement. Under the succeeding governorship first of Eugene Talmadge and then, as of 1948, of his son Herman, who emerged as one of the most influential reactionary Southern spokesmen, Georgia became a model for preventive means of stemming the tide of social evolution of the South. Significant in the Southern backlash were efforts made by both father and son to maintain local restraints on the voter lists in defiance of the 1954 Supreme Court decision Smith v. Allwright, which declared unconstitutional the barring of Negroes from Democratic primary elections (Bartley, pp. 29-31).

Herman Talmadge's most noted personal contribution was the revival in the early 1950's of the long-abandoned doctrine of interposition upon which massive Southern resistance came to be formulated in the mid-1950's. This concept promoted the right of individual states to place public school authority under their jurisdiction and thereby interpose the "sovereignty" of the state between the local school level and the federal courts, thus not only circumventing the desegregation order of the Supreme Court, but totally defeating it (Bartley, p. 128). Advancing his efforts in this direction, Talmadge created and headed the Georgia Commission on Education which became, according to Bartley, the most active of all Southern public propaganda centers and eventually disseminated segregationist literature on a nationwide basis (Bartley, p. 183).

The state of Georgia was also deeply involved in activity directed against the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, popularly known as the NAACP, and tried to limit employment of members of the group particularly in the field of education, an area in which many middle-class black activists aspired to work (Bartley, p. 217). Further demonstrating that not modification but total reversal of federal government policy was being sought by the State, the Georgia legislature passed a resolution in 1956 demanding a return to segregation in the armed

forces (Bartley, p. 217). As for public initiative, it is worthy of mention that the revival of the white, lower class, racist Klu Klux Klan was begun in Georgia in 1946 after a period of inactivity and that by the mid-1950's the Association of Georgia Klans was considered to be the official head group with an Atlanta citizen holding the highest title of authority (Bartley, p. 202).

Perhaps the most effective summation of segregationist sentiment in Georgia during this period can be witnessed in an official statement issued by then Attorney General Cook. It pronounced: "For segregation to remain an integral part of Georgia's social customs and traditions it must and will be practiced twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, and three hundred and sixty-five days a year" (Bartley, p. 236). To this end the active preservation of segregation by legal means was incorporated into law as Georgia legislators passed provision to sanction police officers for failure or refusal to enforce racial statutes. Raised in such a region of steadfast segregationist fervor, outstanding even among the states of the South, Flannery O'Connor was most certainly touched by the political air around her, but while its influence was not as permanent upon her as with others, such as certain of the die-hard conservatives portrayed in her fiction, its effect was undoubtedly apparent in the first stories.

Turning from the more general influence of her regional environment, let us now examine the author's specific family background and her approximate position in the Southern class structure. Once again information is not plentiful about this area of her life, but the few facts available are provided by her close friend Robert Fitzgerald who traces the O'Connor lineage in his introduction to her final collection of short stories and offers some details about her early years. He tells us that Flannery was born in Savannah, Georgia, on March 25, 1925 and spent her childhood there until the late 1930's at which time her father became ill with the disease lupus, an

ailment that was also later to strike Flannery, and the family moved from Savannah to Milledgeville, Georgia.[14]

Worthy of our attention is the particular character and style of Milledgeville, a town which had been renowned as the capital of Georgia until after the Civil War. Fitzgerald's personal impressions of the place led him to observe that, with its great number of distinctive pillared white houses, the town harkened back, not only to the expected appearance of the old South, but also, as he suggests, to the strictly ingrained code of manners and traditions associated with this region. All that was typically Southern in nature, such as architectural style, formalized manners, and the everpresent element of racial conservatism, seems then to have been deeply embodied in Milledgeville and would, of course, have made a lasting impression on young Flannery. The property to which the O'Connor's moved was steeped in these long-standing influences, for it had been acquired in 1886 by Flannery's maternal grandfather Peter Cline. The house itself, built in 1820, was representative of the Southern architectural mode and most prominent among its stylistic features were the two story high, hand-carved, fluted columns gracing the entrance. The historical heritage of the South permeated its very foundations, as much of the work was said to have been done by Negro slaves who reportedly made the bricks for both the house and the surrounding garden walls.

The ancestral background of Miss O'Connor's family shows them to have occupied a position of social prominence within the town, a position established on the basis of both long-standing religious involvement and political interests. Hugh Treanor, her maternal grandfather, had the honor in 1847 of having the first Milledgeville Mass celebrated in his apartment; in addition, his wife was to later donate the ground on which the town's Catholic church was built. Both the Treanor daughters Kate L. and Margaret Ida, who bore Flannery's mother Regina, were successively married to Peter Cline, also an established Georgia

Catholic who, as Fitzgerald informs us, was a most prominent gentleman and for many years served as the mayor of Milledgeville.[15]

Thus we see that Flannery O'Connor was descended from upper class Southern stock and, although the family glory seems to have diminished somewhat by her generation, she most certainly was raised in the knowledge that her ancestors had attained a very prestigious position in Georgian society. Almost inevitably, considering the class to which she belonged, she would be naturally inclined to take a conservative approach to social concerns. Indeed her whole development in literature as well as many statements made in her essays and lectures reveal that she never entirely overcame this inherent conservative outlook.

Conflicting statements do therefore occasionally arise in her work which seem out of place at times with the trend towards more liberal ideals that marks the eventual progress of her career. An explanation for their presence can, I think, be found in one of the later stories "Everything That Rises Must Converge," where indication is given that the author is well aware of the brainwashing effect that past family status can have on the mind of the modern Southerner. Clearly this is one of the messages being delivered in the story as she records the particular attitude of both a mother and son towards their own faded upper class family heritage. Miss O'Connor may mock the mother for her foolish attempt to conduct herself as though she were still living in a gracious Southern society that no longer exists, but the author also shows through the son's actions that, even though one may be intellectually sophisticated and seemingly in touch with reality, the rigid Southern class system can indeed still haunt the mind, taking precedence over reason and intended humanitarian beliefs. Her account of the son's stream of conscious inner thought and his subsequent exchange of dialogue with the mother aptly demonstrates this fact.

> He never spoke of it [the decayed family mansion] without contempt or thought of it without longing. . . . It occurred to him that it was he, not she, who could have appreciated it. He preferred its threadbare elegance to anything he could name and it was because of it that all the neighborhoods they had lived in had been a torment to him.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> He suddenly unloosened his tie and pulled it off and put it in his pocket.
>
> She [the mother] stiffened. "Why must you look like that when you take me to town?" she said. "Why must you deliberately embarrass me?"
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Rolling his eyes upward, he put his tie back on. "Restored to my class," he muttered. He thrust his face toward her and hissed, "True culture is in the mind, the mind," he said, and tapped his head, "the mind." (O'Connor, Everything That Rises Must Converge, pp. 32-33)

Portrayed here through the example of the son's futile rebellious stance is evidence of the type of internal conflict that most likely waged within the author herself. Indoctrinated, as it were, by the spectre of an upper class family background, she simply was not able to reject fully the concept of a rigid class system; however, the matter could not end here, because once having been exposed to social theory, Miss O'Connor henceforth had to struggle constantly with the influence of these more liberal attitudes and had also to take such views into consideration when formulating her opinions on the type of relationship to be conducted between the races.

Predominant Anti-Liberal Attitude of Her Thesis Works

Since, however, in the period of the late 1940's Flannery O'Connor did not view social advancement as being significant either for the salvation of the individual or for the progress of Southern society, the few social issues that do appear in her first stories are therefore not treated with great importance. This fact is clearly demonstrated in several of her thesis works. Amond these "The Barber" is the first that touches on the theme of class differences and racial inequality by presenting the

social views of various members of the Southern middle class and the response of a Negro character from the lower class. Southern political beliefs become the focal theme as friction arises in the story between the barber and one of his customers, a man named Rayber, over the issue of supporting either a liberal or a segregationist candidate.

The barber is a small business owner who relies on an earned income. Since he hires a Negro to help him in the shop, economics dictates that he would support racist policies in order to insure lower incomes for minority workers. The barbershop is regarded as the hub of local opinion, and the barber himself is seen as a spokesman for the community; so consequently his trade is very much dependent upon his political and social views being in agreement with those of his customers. The racist attitude of the entire town is therefore reflected by the barber when he voices a popular appeal for a politician to "put these niggers in their places."[16]

Rayber is also from the middle class, but he is a college lecturer, and monetary concerns do not color his attitudes. Taking an intellectual and humanitarian approach to the political situation, he reaches the conclusion that the democratic candidate must be supported rather than the segregationist one. However, his views clash with the outlook not only of the barber but of the other barbershop customers. Rayber receives no support for his opinion from the other characters, nor clearly from the author herself. His liberal attitudes are openly chastized by a colleague named Jacobs whose resistance to these views is integral, for it marks Rayber as a misguided intellectual, and his diminished credibility thoroughly destroys the relevance of his liberal sentiments.

He is, above all, shown to be in error by the representative of the lower class, the young black barbershop assistant who, when asked for his opinion of the election, parrots his employer's view and endorses the segregationist candidate, thereby further mocking Rayber's liberal notions. The Negro's

position is a menial one, and the only task we see him performing is the sweeping of the floors; he is totally subservient to his employer but offers no resistance and instead exhibits a completely passive acceptance of his lesser social role. Since he does not demonstrate any desire for upward mobility, he poses no threat to the white characters, and so no racial tensions are evident in this story. Thus the elitist Southern social structure is seen as being desirable by black characters as well as whites at this early stage in Miss O'Connor's work.

Another thesis work "The Crop" shows that any social questions raised in these first stories are seen to be the fault of misinformed white middle class intellectual do-gooders like Rayber who try to stir up unnecessary trouble. Such a one is Miss Willerton, who aspires to be a topical writer and to aid her research sends away for sociological tracts not available in the local library. Miss O'Connor exhibits an even harsher stand in this story towards those who would meddle with social issues. While Rayber may be misguided in his social efforts, Miss Willerton is shown to be insincere. Her interest in so-called "social problems" stems only from the desire to produce a type of fashionable writing which, one feels, will bring her proper esteem. No valid social problems are, however, revealed by her, and her work degenerates into cheap romanticism. Even if the author had acknowledged the existence of severe social problems in her thesis stories, no effective crusaders are apparently available to offer any important means of change.

Another early variation of the middle class do-gooder can be seen with a youth named Ruller in the thesis story "The Turkey." In this case the boy's social aspirations differ slightly in that they stem from a religious rather than an academic source as is shown when he interprets the capture of a wild turkey as being a supposed blessing from God, signifying that he has been chosen to fulfill a special humanitarian mission. Ruller may not be an intellectual, but his ideas for social aid, like those of the well-educated white middle class

characters, are also shown to be useless. The boy envisions founding a home for tenant children in the heroic tradition of a Hollywood film; however, it is shown that his major concern, as with Miss Willerton, is personal prestige. When he actually confronts several ragged and needy tenant children, it is not with the motivation to help them, but rather with the idea of impressing them by the size of the bird that he has captured; such an action illustrates the extent to which the boy has corrupted the true concept of unselfish Christian charity or caritas. Ruller ignores the immediate fact of the children's hunger, but it is vividly brought to his attention when they wallop him in the face with the bird and calmly make off with his "prize."

The lower classes are thus portrayed here as being able to see to their own needs without relying upon charitable aid from members of the middle class. Any help offered by this group is merely superficial and is seen as being totally inadequate, as is further illustrated by Ruller's other absurd gesture of wanting to donate one dime to any one beggar. The author's Catholic outlook with regard to social concerns emerges more clearly here than in any other of her thesis stories, since she suggests in this work that the vengeance of the Lord will attack anyone who attempts to alter the class structure. This becomes evident in the final paragraph when Ruller fears that some omnipotent force is pursuing him and placing him in danger. The idea thus emanates that, at this stage in her career, Miss O'Connor even went so far as to consider it morally wrong for members of the middle class to endeavor to elevate the lower classes and that attempting to do so would jeopardize one's chance for salvation.

Early Signs of Social Conscience

"The Geranium"

"The Geranium," one work also from the thesis group,

must, however, be observed because it differs somewhat in social content. The full social significance of this story will be examined later on in detail, but at this point in my discussion attention need be drawn only to the fact that it deviates from the pattern seen in other early works, where social advancement of any sort does not appear possible or even desirable for the lower classes. Interestingly enough this story was re-worked later in O'Connor's career for inclusion in her final collection of short stories, and it constitutes the only example from her early fiction which affords any hint that her social attitudes might evolve. "The Geranium" offers this suggestion of her mature manner, for it presents a black character who is integrated into the white society and has attained middle class status; it is therefore the only one of her thesis stories that could possibly have been adapted to suit the enlightened social outlook found in her later works.

"The Geranium" details the plight of an elderly lower class Southerner who moves to New York City and learns that he has a Negro neighbor living in the same apartment building. The Negro character is presented as having achieved economic as well as social parity within the white society by his having moved up from the lower class to the middle class. Although Flannery O'Connor apparently shows a greater tolerance here than in any of the other early stories towards conceding to Negroes the right to advance themselves, it is important to note that she is depicting the society of the North and not the South.

Racial tension exists in the story, but it does not come from the Negro character; he appears as a benign figure who is not attempting to force his way higher up on the social ladder. The tension is caused rather by the resistance of the white Southerner to accept that some Negroes have risen up to his social level. This is demonstrated in the story by the old man's inability to reconcile the informal approach of the articulate Northern Negro with his remembrance of the awestruck and submissive attitude of his black friend in the South. The final

position taken by this white character is an outright refusal to accept the middle class status of the Negro neighbor. Miss O'Connor herself is willing to acknowledge that the class structure is different in the North, and there she will accept the Negro rising in society, but she makes it clear that Southerners are not yet ready to tolerate such changes; thus the conclusion that is offered in this first version of the story ultimately keeps it entirely consistent with the traditional narrow-minded racial attitude of the South that is conveyed throughout all of her early work.

"The Train"

Also offering some indication of a latent social awareness within the author even during her early formative writing period is the final thesis work "The Train." The central character Hazel Wickers, a youth of seemingly lower middle class background, is one who, again like many other members of his class, is vitally interested in matters of social prestige. Such a portrayal emerges through the conduct that he displays during the course of a short train journey taken in the South for we see immediately in the opening paragraph his nature being established by his determined efforts to secure an upper sleeping berth on the train. The exaggerated emphasis that he places on the upper accommodation with its expected promise of added attention identifies him as a social climber, an image that is further sustained through the use he makes of his mother's surname, announcing it loudly and repeatedly as a means of introduction to fellow passengers as though it were a sign of elitism destined to impress all who hear it. Demonstrated by Hazel is the dominant Southern middle class character trait of a relentless desire to create the aura of being an important and well-placed personage, a position which can only be rightfully claimed by those who possess a background of family prestige. This being the case, what may not in reality exist must therefore be invented; taking this into account the

the accuracy of Hazel's social claims, however minor they may be, seem very much in doubt. Totally in keeping with one so obsessed with social position is the racist attitude which Hazel displays towards the Negro porter working on the train. The porter's position as a respected railroad employee equal in status to Hazel cannot be accepted by the white passenger, who would prefer to reclassify him at the very bottom of the social scale according to past historical tradition.

While Hazel's racist attitudes reflect the general trend established for members of this class in the earlier thesis stories, the reaction of the porter represents a departure in form from the usual meek complacency of the Negro figures. He combines his final verbal reply to Hazel's continued attacks upon his family lineage with the more forceful assertion of rudely dumping the boy into his berth by giving a quick jerk to the ladder upon which he stands. Although the work duties of the Negro require him, on occasion, to render assistance to Southern white bigots, he by no means responds as a grovelling servant, but holds his ground as a free and equal citizen. This first instance of an aggressive assertion of social rights seen on the part of a black character denotes an approach that will be further developed in the author's later fiction, but here, as with the preceding story "The Geranium," it is a Northern Negro who has advanced himself, an occurrence that is unacceptable in the South where the new era of rising black status has not been allowed to penetrate.

The story does give some hint that Flannery O'Connor realized the death-knell was already sounding for such reactionary views, since in the concluding paragraph the porter appears to Hazel as a "white" shadow that stands steadfast and unmoving under the boy's gaze, an image evocative of the growing equality between the races and the determination of blacks to maintain their improved status. However, even though some signs are visible of an emerging social conscience, her hesitance in

vigorously supporting its development is still apparent, for she presents the porter as being content to consolidate his present position without showing any desire to advance higher up on the social scale. He therefore poses a lesser threat to the whites than later Negroes will do; significantly, he does not begin the hostility, but only retaliates upon continued provocation from the white youth. Miss O'Connor succeeds in bringing her central white antagonist to the shocking realization that a more liberal realignment in the social order has taken place in certain areas of the country, but it must be noted that she does not as yet force its acceptance upon one from the South. Her own position on the matter at this point in her career tends to remain unclear, for although she does not openly sanction Hazel's efforts to preserve the past Southern social structure, he does not come in for any severe moral condemnation from her. Granted, as a consequence of his reactionary views, he is made to appear ill-at-ease and somewhat foolish, but no grave punishment is meted out to one who puffs himself up with such false pride over what is an illusory social advantage.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Flannery O'Connor, "The Catholic Novelist in the Protestant South," in Mystery and Manners, ed. Sally Fitzgerald and Robert Fitzgerald, The Noonday Press (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1970), p. 196. Subsequent citations are to this paperback edition.

[2]This seeming disparity of such a negative social opinion being expressed at a late stage in O'Connor's career may, in part, be explained by noting Robert Fitzgerald's observation that she confined herself over the years to several stock lectures and these she tended to repeat making only minor changes for each occasion. Some of the material used in 1963 may well have been written much earlier and Fitzgerald elaborates as follows on the difficulty of dating her lecture pieces: "Miss O'Connor left at least half a hundred typescripts for lectures, bearing slight indication as to where they had been delivered and most often none as to when" (Mystery and Manners, pp. vii-viii). To further add to the confusion Fitzgerald also admits to his own additional "shuffling" of passages from some of her unrevised papers and he makes mention of this particular lecture as being one of the talks that was extensively reorganized by him.

[3]Karl Adam, The Spirit of Catholicism, trans. Justin McCann, Image Books (New York: Doubleday & Co. Inc., 1954), p. 132.

[4]Cited by Rev. John F. Cronin, Catholic Social Principles (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Co., 1955), p. 65.

[5]Ibid.

[6]Etienne Gilson, ed., The Church Speaks to the Modern World: The Social Teachings of Leo XIII, Image Books (New York: Doubleday & Co. Inc., 1954), p. 303.

[7]Ibid., p. 292.

[8]Ibid., p. 298.

[9]John Gunther, Inside U.S.A. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1951), p. 725.

[10]Samuel S. Hill Jr., et al., Religion and the Solid South (Nashville/New York: Abingdon Press, 1972), p. 147.

[11]Samuel S. Hill Jr., Epilogue to Churches in Cultural Captivity: A History of the Social Attitudes of Southern Baptists, by John Lee Eighmy (Knoxville: Univ. of Tennessee Press, 1972), pp. 207-8.

[12]From letters written to Winnifred McCarthy, published in Fresco, Vol. 1, No. 2, Univ. of Detroit, February, 1961. Also contained in the composite section "On Her Own Work," Mystery and Manners, p. 115.

[13]Numan V. Bartley, The Rise of Massive Resistance: Race and Politics in the South During the 1950's (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1969), p. 28.

[14]Robert Fitzgerald, Introduction to Everything That Rises Must Converge by Flannery O'Connor, Signet Books (New York: New American Library, Inc., 1967). All of the information pertaining to O'Connor's background that is cited on this page and the following one originates from this same source, pp. vii-ix. Subsequent citations are to this paperback edition.

[15]Certain other details provided by Fitzgerald are of a more minor importance, but they serve to give further evidence of the traditionally Southern quality of Miss O'Connor's background. He informs the reader for example that Flannery's mother Regina Cline was in her youth a model of that much praised creature the "Southern beauty" and that her father Edward F. O'Connor Jr. was involved in the military forces and served as Legion Commander, Lt. 325th Infantry, 82nd Division.

[16]Flannery O'Connor, "The Barber," in The Complete Stories, Sunburst Books (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1974), p. 16. Subsequent citations are to this paperback edition.

CHAPTER II

SPIRITUAL CONCERNS: A SECOND PHASE IN HER FICTION

Establishment of the Period of Dominant Spiritual Emphasis

Given the fact that social issues had, for the most part, been so thoroughly discredited by the author throughout their brief introduction in the thesis stories, it is not surprising that such considerations virtually disappeared from sight during the second stage of her career. Rather than continuing to divide, not only her own interests, but also those of her audience, between both religious and social matters, she instead resolved to focus all her energies on the spiritual struggles of man. Carter W. Martin, attempting in his study on prominent themes in her work to establish an approximate period that marked the beginning of her dedication to a religious approach to fiction, concludes that this occurred "at some time between the publication of 'The Geranium' (Summer 1946), and the first published portion of Wise Blood ("Train," April 1948)," at which point he observes, "Flannery O'Connor implicitly committed herself as a writer to the Chardinian theme, [a theme] she pursued with persistance and devotion until her death."[1]

Carter Martin unquestionably displays sound insight in his appraisal of the measure of religious influence that is eventually to be found in her work; however, on the basis of our past observations about the author's spiritual background, it is perhaps necessary to further qualify his remarks by noting that her view of salvation, while definitely being a Christian one, must, in fact, more precisely be defined as a conservative

Catholic one. I would also take issue with his choice of the period between 1946-1948 as a date fixing her resolve to assume the task of highlighting religious concerns through the medium of her fiction. No doubt these were important formative years in the development of her creative approach, with the presence of certain spiritual matters in the first thesis stories having already been mentioned, but no absolute commitment to any one overriding religious theme is evident at this point, and least of all, in the story "The Train" mentioned by Martin. As our discussion of this story has shown, religious references are not in any way apparent here, with the emphasis instead falling on brief vignettes more of social interest, similar in type to those which were glimpsed in other of the thesis works.

Rather, "The Train" from 1948 offers the last glimpse that is to be seen for a while of matters of social interest occupying a significant focal point in Flannery O'Connor's fiction. The following year saw two stories, later incorporated into Wise Blood, appearing for separate publication, "The Peeler," and "The Heart of the Park," both of which more accurately mark the introduction of the commitment to Catholic religious values that was to characterize her future work. Carter Martin may have prematurely dated its appearance by one year, but when it finally did surface in 1949, its spiritual intensity in every way equalled his estimation of its importance. The above stories were later reworked in 1950, before their inclusion in the novel, but unlike "The Train," which underwent extensive revision for use as the opening chapter, with particular attention being paid to adding details of religious significance, these two works, even in their earliest form, reveal a full expression of the central spiritual theme that was to form the framework for the novel. As to why religion was suddenly thrust to the forefront of her fiction in 1949, I cannot say. Her essays and private correspondence do not afford any clues, nor do the reminiscences of even her close friend and publisher, Robert Giroux, who remarks on the "amazing" literary progress

made by her between the draft of the first chapter of Wise Blood in 1947 and the novel's completion in 1952; however, he declines to enlighten us with a specific comment on the very notable change that took place in the year of 1949.[2] It may have been inspired by some personal spiritual resurgence which needed at this time to find an outlet in her work, or perhaps it could simply have been the result of an instinctive artistic evolution that led her to align her work consciously with the most universal of human concerns. Whatever the reason, once having embarked on such a direction with the publication of "The Peeler," Flannery O'Connor followed closely upon this course in Wise Blood and throughout her subsequent fiction.

The Christian Quest for Individual Salvation

The particular theme that she so earnestly wished to present was the message of man's potential for redemption through a belief in Christ, and, to this end, O'Connor's work came to display a singular devotion to the spiritual reformation of the individual man. This major goal of enlightenment undertaken by her involved, above all, a strengthening of the essential Catholic virtues within her characters. The question naturally arises as to what constitutes such a virtue, and an answer appears from her in essay form where one of the markedly "Catholic" attributes discussed by her is that of humility. Commenting on this virtue she says, "We hear a great deal about humility being required to lower oneself, but it requires an equal humility and a real love of the truth to raise oneself and by hard labor to acquire higher standards. And this is certainly the obligation of the Catholic" (O'Connor, "Catholic Novelists and Their Readers," Mystery and Manners, p. 189). Although she refers here to the need for humility mainly in terms of artistic elevation, when the subject of humility is raised in her work, it is seen to be directly related to the process of salvation. Humility is viewed as an integral part

of the individual's effort to achieve perfectability, for a lack of this virtue leads man to assume that such perfection has already been attained and causes him to languish in a state of sin without putting forth any effort to repent, thereby seriously jeopardizing his chances for salvation. Humility is thus a vital human attribute that must be demonstrated before any of her characters can be considered adequately prepared for redemption, and, in working towards this end, steps must be taken to destroy the very antithesis of humility that reveals itself in individual pride. Catholic doctrine determined for her that pride must be shown to be the gravest obstacle throughout her fiction which would prevent her characters from moving towards their individual salvation. All instances of pride, no matter what their derivation, ultimately represent the fact of an individual attempting to set his own power above that of God, a condition that cannot be tolerated, and one that can only be rectified when each antagonist has been made to acknowledge and submit to the greater power of the Lord. To this end, the prime spiritual struggle that is replayed time and again in her fiction is the task of bringing the free will of the individual, which leads man oftentimes into a state of sin, into alignment with the preordained will of God that attempts to direct man towards the Christian way of life for, according to orthodox Catholicism, the free human will is always subject to the laws of the Body of Christ as they are eternally perpetuated for mankind through the teachings of the Church.

The commentary of Leon Driskell and Joan Brittain offers unique insight into the characteristics of this phase in O'Connor's development, for by basing their entire analysis around this dual motif of secular versus spiritual choice, they have no difficulty whatsoever in finding a logical raison d'être to account for the many bizarre details that have aroused unfavorable reaction in critics of lesser ability. They note, though, that the battle between human and divine wills is not without precedent in her earlier fiction where it emerges, to a degree,

in the thesis story "The Turkey." Previous discussion of this story made reference to young Ruller's encounter with a supernatural force vaguely defined by O'Connor as "Something Awful," and it becomes obvious, even if only by hindsight, that this force is a powerful manifestation of God's will as it attempts to impose sanction on spiritually misguided human behavior, in order to redirect it towards beneficial Christian action. Driskell and Brittain point out, however, that the full religious significance of the conclusion could never be realized at the time through such a weak presentation, one that they consider is thrust upon the reader without adequate doctrinal preparation. Ruller's actions are also, in their view, far too childish ever to be capable of conveying the complex religious theory intended by the author.[3]

Central Conflict Between Human and Divine Wills as Illustrated in Wise Blood

Wise Blood, O'Connor's first novel, seeks to alleviate any of the artistic shortcomings that marred the spiritual orientation of earlier efforts for, in her chronicling of events in the life of her youthful protagonist Hazel Motes, the depth of mental anguish generated by the polar forces of human and divine will operating at odds within the individual is given its most dramatically successful rendering. Having been well-schooled in Christian history, as a boy, by his preacher grandfather, Hazel realizes the enormous burden that is placed on one who seeks salvation, since the divine will can demand of man not only that he endure persecution, as did Christ, but that he likewise be prepared to sacrifice his life as the price for atonement. Such details as the boy's dread of coffins, plus his disturbing memories of the funerals of loved ones, make it clear that he cannot face the fact of mortality; therefore, by extension, he is unable to allow Christ into his life, since to do so implies that he is willingly able to accept death as did Jesus on the cross. As a

naive young child, Hazel tries to deny a need for Christ by trying diligently to avoid sin, but realizing, as he reaches manhood, the impossibility of this task due to the factor of original sin, he instead tries to deny the relevance of sin itself; hence his attempted creation of a new "Church Without Christ" that makes the concept of sin invalid by denying the legitimacy of both the Fall and the Judgement. Hazel's new church seeks to grant exclusive supremacy to the individual will, but precisely because this will has been impaired by original sin, it proves a most ineffectual guide for man, being shown to be concerned with the present rather than the future, and therefore seeking only to preserve the comforts of the body while ignoring the state of the soul.

The individual will, as shown here, does not look upward to the heavenly realm for emotional sustenance, but seeks to satisfy all such needs by reaching outward towards the community of man as exemplified in the novel by the separate journeys to the crowded city undertaken in search of personal fulfillment by Hazel and his youthful acquaintance Enoch Emory. Reflecting Miss O'Connor's skepticism that any value may be derived from increased human contact, the city with its highly concentrated population is portrayed as a mecca of sin and corruption. Further stressing her disapproval of any encouragement of the mingling of members of society, those characters that concern themselves with their fellow man do so only in a negative sense, being of the unsavory nature of prostitutes and con men such as Onnie Jay Holy, with his soft-sell "Soulease" radio show, and Asa Hawks, gadget vendor and fraudulent witness to Christ, the likes of whom desire only to take advantage of others for reasons of personal gain. Strongest evidence to support her case is provided by the example of young Enoch, who serves as a contrasting counterpart to the spiritually obsessed Hazel by choosing secular rather than spiritual means for fulfillment; acceding totally to the demands of the individual will, he is shown to have his attempts to supplant human contacts for

the love of Christ lead him backwards on the evolutionary scale to a state of primitive bestiality.

The full extent of his downward moral slide is made glaringly apparent through a tragi-comic incident in which the boy dons a coveted gorilla suit that he has stolen from an actor who does public appearances disguised as a popular movie ape named Gonga. As he has seen that the costumed matinee star has adoring fans crowding around to shake his hand, Enoch's emulation represents a last desperate attempt at seeking a satisfying human response to his own insatiable need for love, an aching desire previously left unfulfilled by both his sexual quests and his hero-worship of a shrivelled museum mummy in whom he has hoped to discover an undemanding secular saviour of his own. Through a startling sequence of events whereby the boy accosts the actor after a show and forcibly takes possession of the suit, in order to garb himself, his outer appearance is masterfully made to correspond visibly to his corrupt inner nature; hence his transformation is described as an evil process with many "low and poisonous" growls being emitted by him, thereby rendering his supreme moment of individual destiny a primal regression, rather than an advancement of the highest order for the spirit that can be experienced through Christ. At the novel's conclusion, as a telling contrast to Hazel's emergence as an illuminating ray of light likened unto the risen Christ, Enoch, we are carefully told, reverses the process to become associated with blackness: " . . . a black heavier shaggier figure replaced his. For an instant, it had two heads, one light and one dark, but after a second, it pulled the dark head back over the other and corrected this."[4] According to Flannery O'Connor, the direst results must ensue for those who heed only the demands of their own free human will, since the price demanded in the pursuit of such liberty is the diminishment of one's uniquely human and divine qualities.

Enoch's divergent storyline presents one of the more troublesome aspects of the novel, being slowly developed along

with that of Hazel Motes until it is suddenly dropped, seemingly without any resolution of his situation having been reached, as he is left, still in his absurd ape costume, resting on a rock and gazing blankly out over the city skyline. Some critics have suggested that the chapter's abrupt ending represents poor craftsmanship, while others remain undismayed, being convinced that the entire incident is included only as a humorous interlude designed to briefly lighten the tone of the novel and therefore do not evaluate it by such stringent standards. While it is true that the author keeps a balance between the comic and the tragic elements of her work, the many pointed details of the scene that turn it into a carefully constructed reversal of Hazel's eventual experience of spiritual growth testify to its key thematic importance. Approaching Enoch's actions with this thought in mind, the conclusion, as it is presented, is then seen to be most significant in establishing her doctrinal position. No upward movement is possible for Enoch, as he is devoid of spiritual influence; since outward horizontal movement towards one's fellow man has been ruled out by the author as a positive motion at this time in her career, the boy's final immobile position aptly summarizes the paralysis that Miss O'Connor sees enveloping a society that is preoccupied with man himself, instead of with the divine power. Thus in 1952 she completely dismisses all possibility of human communion having any value; indeed she condemns it as being a perverse motivation of the individual will that diverts man's focus of attention from his spiritual responsibilities owed to God.

Disposing in this manner of Enoch and his representation of an unbridled devotion to the free human will, O'Connor devotes renewed vigor to highlighting, through the character of Hazel, the spiritual duties of the individual that are deemed necessary to prepare one for eligibility for the kingdom of heaven. Aiding in Hazel's reformation is the device of a compelling "ragged" figure of Christ that manifests itself in the boy's conscience; there it affords sustained opposition to his

free human will and acts as a most forceful perveyor of the divine will. The significance of this figure stems from the importance assigned in Catholicism to Christ as the provider of man's prime link with a God who cannot be known directly, but only by way of supernatural reflection (Adam, p. 51). For a world that accepts knowledge only through the senses, the personage of Christ offers a visible Godhead to give credence to belief in the divine power; therefore the presence here of such a figure marks its introduction as a central character in her fiction, a role that according at least to critic Robert Drake, He steadfastly occupies throughout her remaining work.[5]

Such assertions of the individual will as have been demonstrated by Hazel's own singular efforts to disprove the historical basis of all Christian belief constitute so serious a manifestation of pride that extraordinary means are required to dispel them. Throughout the novel the author has relied upon the device of the compelling Christ figure to perform this awesome task by testifying through its wild, tortured appearance to the indisputable existence of sin, which has necessitated such grievous suffering to atone for mankind's transgressions. In addition to establishing conclusively the relevance of sin in every individual's life and therefore disproving the blasphemous claims of Hazel's sin-free church, the Christ figure also offers to the youth proof of the redemptive hope that does exist for those who show themselves worthy of receiving God's grace, which, as we are informed, is the one power that can return a sinner to the rightful Christian path by operating to restore moral goodness to the individual.

Inspired by this Christian hope Hazel commits himself at last to follow the suffering Christ as his spiritual guide, and in the later chapters we see him embarking on a program of rigid asceticism, built upon the severest forms of physical penance through which he seeks to overcome the handicap of original sin. The sight of the youth's broken body, with his

chest wrapped in barbed wire and his shoes filled with rocks, offers a portrayal of modest abasement that thoroughly repudiates the former self-serving actions initiated by the individual will. The dramatic climax of the novel involves what is certainly one of the most striking testaments to religious faith found in all of O'Connor's fiction, as she has the youth further commit his fate to the Lord by blinding himself with lime, the premise being that the faithful do not require physical sight, for they have attained the far greater gift of spiritual vision. Again Miss O'Connor follows prescribed Catholic procedure for salvation, which views such extreme acts of asceticism as being necessary for both the methodical training of the will and the strengthening of the soul to restore it to its original state of purity (Adam, pp. 215-16). Like all sacramental Church ritual, Hazel's actions demonstrate that Catholic worship is not simply designed to evoke a remembrance of Christ, but, in truth, crosses historical boundaries to offer a continual participation in the redemptive power of Jesus (Adam, p. 16).

Such an interpretation is unwittingly affirmed by the youth's landlady. She likens the effect of his ravaged eyesight to a tunnel with only a "pinpoint of light" to view at the end, a light, however, that she associates with the Star of Bethlehem, thus causing her to think of Hazel as moving backwards in time towards this ancient city. The youth is, of course, moving ever closer to an ultimate fusion with God, thereby restoring the bond of union that was destroyed as a result of Adam's sin. The final successful completion of this union, or, as it were, reunion, is carefully presented at the novel's conclusion when the boy sets off from the boarding house, which has been only a temporary accommodation in the sinful secular city environment, to seek his "true" home, ostensibly a permanent spiritual resting place with the Lord. Death overtakes the boy on his journey and, when his battered corpse is returned to the landlady, she views him as having at last <u>become</u> the special pinpoint of light,

a most important metaphoric comparison with her earlier light image that unmistakably heightens the emerging identity of the boy as a Christ figure himself. Critic Gilbert Muller, commenting on the religious import of the ending, further elaborates on the obvious Christ parallel in the following manner: "As Hazel figuratively moves back to Bethlehem, his half-articulated and tortured spiritual state becomes synonymous with Christ's own agonies on the road to Calvary; eventually, in a grotesque crucifixion scene, he is clubbed unconscious by two policemen and brought home dead, although his landlady continues to talk to him as though he were the resurrected Christ."[6]

The fundamental object of the educative work of the Catholic Church, as it applies to the human will, is to make the Christian a second Christ, or "alter Christus" (Adam, p. 16); therefore the Christ parallel presented in the final scene shows that all of the Catholic expectations in the novel have been fulfilled and that the individual has been properly prepared to experience in his own life the same salvation granted to Jesus. Wise Blood offers one of the few instances in the author's work wherein the process of salvation is taken to its fullest completion; this conclusion is made possible only because the youth's pride has been so thoroughly destroyed, thereby allowing his free human will to conform totally to the dictates of the divine will, a task forever demanded of her characters, but one that is seldom fully achieved. Thus the conclusion affirms Flannery O'Connor's belief in the positive results to be attained by those who conscientiously follow the Catholic precepts for redemption, and it sets the pattern of spiritual expectation to be illustrated throughout her fiction of this period.

Focus on Christ as Active Saviour in A Good Man Is Hard to Find

We therefore find the matter of conflict between the free will and the divine will remaining her central interest throughout the first collection of short stories A Good Man Is Hard to

Find, which contains works written mainly from 1953-1954, with the one exception of "A Stroke of Good Fortune" that dates back to 1949. The title story is generally agreed by critics to set the doctrinal tone for the entire collection; it affords in the words of its prime protagonist, a spiritually obsessed criminal known as The Misfit, stunning reinforcement of the moral dilemma of choice that must of necessity be met by each individual and, in addition, affords a portrayal of the unrestrained evil that would ensue in a world devoid of Christian influence:

> If He [Jesus] did what He said, [raised the dead] then it's nothing for you to do but throw 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 (O'Connor, "A Good Man Is Hard to Find," p. 142).

Testing the validity of his spiritual hypothesis, The Misfit orders the brutal murder of an entire family found wandering at the roadside by the criminal and his gang after an automobile accident. Personally carrying out the execution of the elderly grandmother, The Misfit once again shows depravity characterizing the actions of those who try to alienate themselves from the instruction of the divine will as it is made known to man through Christ. However, The Misfit's concluding comment in the story, a remark pertaining to his reaction to the shooting, "It's no real pleasure in life," offers, through skillful juxtaposition with his earlier statement, a condemnation of the path of free will and presents final confirmation of a belief in Christ's redemptive power, once more stressing what Flannery O'Connor proposes to be the only singular resolution of the problem of secular or spiritual direction.

Again observed in this collection are a preponderance of characters endowed with Christ-like features who, following in the lead of the ragged figure from Wise Blood, serve as a constant reminder as to whom the allegiance of the free will

must be dedicated. One can cite the example not only of The Misfit, but also of the artificial nigger statue, the displaced foreign immigrant, and the deformed sideshow freak from the respective stories "The Artificial Nigger," "The Displaced Person," and "A Temple of the Holy Ghost." Such characters are each openly linked to Christ, not only by way of their intense suffering and individual posture of sincere humility, but also by virtue of the vital spiritual influence exerted by them upon recalcitrant sinners. Less conspicuous is the smooth Bible seller, Manley Pointer, in "Good Country People," who, despite his own sinful corruption, is nonetheless portrayed escaping through the surrounding fields in an image reminiscent of Jesus walking on the water. Other characters of differing religious identification include Powell Boyd and his youthful friends, likened to prophets in "A Circle in the Fire," and the innocent young soul Lucynell Crater from "The Life You Save May Be Your Own," who is described as "an angel of Gawd."

Common to all such figures is their vital role in promoting the salvation of the individual by restoring a sense of perspective to those who have puffed themselves up with false pride, be it the intellectual arrogance of one such as Hulga Hopewell who places reason above faith, the smug holier-than-thou disdain of hypocritical women like the elderly grandmother (A Good Man Is Hard to Find), Mrs. Cope (A Circle in the Fire), and Mrs. MacIntyre (The Displaced Person), or the misguided self-righteous moral supremacy of Mr. Paradise (The River), and Mr. Head (The Artificial Nigger), all characters who pay only lip-service to the Christian principles, while striving constantly to exalt their own power.

The "good man" mentioned in the title work refers, of course, to Christ. Only by finding Him can one, in turn, find salvation, which, as the author has stressed, is a most difficult accomplishment. This fact is recognized by the spiritually

aware Misfit; however, it must be strongly impressed upon the grandmother who thinks it to be a right associated with rank, but who comes to find that it is dependent upon fulfilling much more demanding personal criteria. The final moment of confrontation between the grandmother and The Misfit reflects to an extent the concept of the Catholic Communion of Saints through the old woman's final realization of the universal familial link that exists between her and the convict. Moved by compassion over his anguished debate on the existence of Christ, she acknowledges in an emotional reply that he is one of her children and, accordingly, reaches out to offer him maternal sympathy, but her spiritual awareness is still too limited to allow her to extend her sense of affinity beyond her fellow man to God; therefore her outburst falls into the category of a secular distraction and cannot advance her cause for salvation.

Also to be noted is the fact that such a move towards union, occurring as it does between two white figures, once again precludes the possibility of any liberal racial enlightenment taking place in the author's work. Instead The Misfit's final statement, "She would of been a good woman . . . if it had been somebody there to shoot her every minute of her life" (O'Connor, "A Good Man Is Hard to Find," p. 143), emphasizes the dominant religious theme of reforming the individual soul for salvation that was to prevail throughout the collective stories. Pursuant to Miss O'Connor's treatment of pride is the shooting of the elderly grandmother in the title story, an act which seems specifically designed to usher in a more vigorous assault against the particular sin of pride at this juncture in her career. Thus the greater the resistance generated against the divine will, the greater is the effort required to defeat it; no measure is therefore considered too severe by the author if it serves to make a necessary re-adjustment in the spiritual outlook of the individual. The incidents of violent behavioral action that occur in the collection are, therefore, designed to

aid in the destruction of individual pride and can be seen to rise in both frequency and intensity in direct proportion to the growing concern she demonstrates at this time in the spiritual well-being of her characters.

While the grandmother's response to The Misfit constitutes some improvement over her former exclusive self-interest, the reply is nonetheless oversentimentalized and in its mother-to-child structure, attempts to foster union and yet still retain a superior authoritarian role for her. The fact that she is shot in the area of the heart is not mere coincidence but deliberately expresses the need for a destruction of such maudlin sentimentalism that characterizes the woman's general attitude towards both whites and blacks whom she encounters in the story. She is shown to be another of Miss O'Connor's characters who is obsessively concerned with maintaining a respectable social image, as is indicated by the constant attention devoted by her to minor details of dress in a calculated effort to alert those around her to the fact that she is a "lady" and therefore, in her estimation, worthy of preferential treatment. Even the incident of the car accident results from her pretensions. She persuades the family to venture off the main road in search of an old plantation mansion that she remembers having visited in her youth and which she thinks would be a fitting educational sight for her grandchildren to view, for rankling her Southern sensibilities is the disrespectful attitude that the youngsters display towards their region by downgrading it as a backward hillbilly country. Modern Georgian youths are shown to be ignorant of past Southern tradition, a serious moral lapse which the grandmother views as weakening the structure of both society and family: "In my time . . . children were more respectful of their native states and their parents and everything else. People did right then" (O'Connor, "A Good Man Is Hard to Find," p. 131). A serious void would thus seem to exist here, for while no forward social movement of the new

generation is apparent, a return to the past social structure is shown to be an impossible desire. The death of the old civilization is emphasized by the particular name of the town Toombsboro where the grandmother believes the mansion to be located, and also by such scenic details of reinforcement as the Negro graveyard that the family sees centred in a passing cotton field. Further irony arises from the fact that the grandmother's recollections are mistakenly not of a Georgia mansion but rather of one actually located in Tennessee; so the physical search for it is from the outset doomed to failure, just as her mental lapses back into time are all for naught. Her attraction to the past is not based solely on a patriotic loyalty to one's region but stems largely from the feeling that her elitism would somehow have been recognized in such a highly structured system, where manners played a significant part in identifying one's class; however, such supposed elevation is entirely the result of her imagination and does not reflect the present reality of her ordinary middle class status.

Such a longing to revive a fading era of upper class social glory also reveals itself in her insensitive attitude towards blacks when she recounts a humorous story from her younger days, concerning a "nigger boy" who mistakenly concludes that the letters "E.A.T." which he sees carved into a watermelon are instructions to partake of the fruit, instead of recognizing that they comprise a set of initials identifying the white owner of the melon. Placing the child in a demeaning light during her narration of the incident, she makes him appear to be too simplistic in nature to comprehend the more sophisticated ways of white society. Further illustrating her condescending racial mien, she thoughtlessly refers to a young Negro child spotted at the roadside, by the outdated phrase "little pickaninny" and she dismisses the child's lack of proper clothing with the matter-of-fact observation that "little niggers in the country don't have things like we do" (O'Connor, "A Good Man Is Hard to Find," p. 131). Compounding her callousness, she romanticizes the

boy's obvious hardship to the point where she expresses the desire to be able to capture it on canvas as a scene worthy of preservation. Ample material for productive social examination is therefore available here, but no such appraisal is forthcoming from the author. Although the shooting of the grandmother would seem to be designed, not only to revise her spiritual illusions of divine favor, but also to correct her misconceptions of social elevation, since both emanate from the same root cause of self-aggrandizement, the woman's reactionary wrong doings are not singled out for emphasis at this time in 1953, and their relevance to the climactic outcome could well be overlooked by the reader.

Negro characters are entirely absent from "The River," "The Life You Save May Be Your Own," and "A Stroke of Good Fortune," thus removing the diversion of racial confrontation from these stories. The minimal influence exerted by social issues is also apparent in "The River" wherein the subject of poor parental care is explored; however, the case is built mainly around the spiritual neglect of young Harry Ashfield, who has been denied the foundation of Christian instruction by his parents which, according to Miss O'Connor, is the need that must be most urgently met in his life. Alcoholism and the disintegration of the family unit are mentioned, but only as a subsidiary aspect of the religious context of the problem. The child's death by drowning as he attempts to reach the Kingdom of God, by way of immersing himself in the baptismal waters of a nearby river, receives public sanction from the author as a better alternative to life with his atheistic, earthly parents, again showing movement towards salvation as still retaining dominance over all other concerns.

"The Artificial Nigger": Continued Resistance to Southern Racial Reform

Her particular indifference to racial reform, so characteristic of this period, is best witnessed in one of the collection's most compelling works "The Artificial Nigger." This

tale examines the relationship between an elderly Southerner named Mr. Head and his socially naive young nephew Nelson as they pursue a Dantean journey from their rural home into the city, a trip which provides, among other experiences, the boy's first encounter with blacks. Having no previous knowledge of Negroes, the boy is thus far in his life without prejudice, a situation sought to be remedied by the old man, whose fully formed racist attitudes are brought to bear on Nelson's open-minded outlook, in accordance with the traditional process of familial indoctrination of Southern youth into the intricacies of the class system. Acquainting the boy with the customary manner of black subordination, the uncle takes obvious delight in pointing out, such examples as the city store, where a Negro could be hired to polish one's shoes dutifully and the segregated seating arrangements in the train dining car. Thus the old man's prejudices are most blatant and, in addition to attempting habitually to heap verbal derision upon various black characters that he encounters during the course of the trip, he also boasts of having actively participated in the past in a successful effort to banish all "niggers" from his rural community. As an indication of Miss O'Connor's complacent disregard at this time for secular injustice, she accepts as a matter of course the extreme nature of such bigoted action without making any effort to rectify such a serious social ill. Preferring to ignore the substance of the man's racial pride, she focuses instead on the sin of intellectual pride, as is indicated by her choice of surname "Head," which serves to accentuate his faith in the power of human reasoning alone to provide sufficient guidance for the individual. The conflict between individual desires and divine determinism once again rises to prominence in her work, as Mr. Head attributes his physical and moral fitness to the strength of his own "will and character," without giving any acknowledgement to the necessary aid of God's counsel in directing the affairs of man. Such pride most clearly manifests

itself in his arrogant assertion that he is a man who is never "lost." This boastful statement the author puts to the severest test during the course of his symbolic excursion into the city—a journey conceived by Mr. Head in moralistic terms whereby he will be the experienced instructor of young Nelson. However, the trip eventually sees him becoming the student, as new light is carefully shed on the spiritual obligations demanded of each individual. Verbal play regarding the old man's sense of direction therefore operates on two levels within the story, both encompassing his confidence in his ability to escort the nephew safely through the complicated maze of city streets, and reflecting his belief that he is also an exemplary moral guide for the boy; however, once the two travellers disembark from the train, Mr. Head promptly strays in error from the security of the white neighborhoods into the unfamiliar territory of the black ghetto. A contrast between the economic status of Southern whites and blacks is immediately apparent as the scene abruptly shifts from the well-kept buildings in the white section to the rotting, unpainted wooden dwellings that fill the black sector. Yet rather than developing any of the social questions that might be raised in connection with an urban slum area, the focal point of attention is directed towards the shattering of Mr. Head's confidence that comes about when he must admit that he has indeed lost his way. His poignant plea, "Oh hep me Gawd I'm lost!" strikes both a secular and a spiritual parallel, for he has not only lost his direction with regard to his route in the streets, but through his excessive pride he has also strayed from the correct spiritual path that leads all Christians to their God.

Despite the emphasis that is placed on spiritual issues, the underlying social currents, so much a part of the Southern milieu, while not being given primary consideration, do inevitably surface throughout the story. Noteworthy in this respect is the fact that only two tables are set aside for the use of blacks in the dining car and that of these only one is in use

in comparison to the large number of crowded tables seating white patrons, thereby reflecting the lower living standard of Negroes, most of whom it would appear have neither the monetary ability to afford the luxury of purchasing their meal on the train, nor perhaps even the same opportunity for travel as do white persons.

Not only a varying degree of affluence, but also a lower level of moral respectability is attributed to the Negro race, for the one group of blacks seated in the dining car consists of a flashily dressed black man accompanied by several similarly loudly attired women whose relationship, it is strongly implied, is that of a pimp and his prostitutes. Thus it would seem to be against the natural laws of man for blacks to indulge in the same privileges as whites, and it is suggested that those who do so can only have bettered themselves materially by illegal and immoral means. Further strength is added to the case, since the only black character drawn to our special attention is a predatory woman whose moral integrity would also seem to be most suspect as she addresses the boy in a taunting, seductive manner that successfully arouses his latent sexual desires.

Throughout the story Negroes are constantly associated with unconscious evils, and the author seems to view them, in Christian terms, as being directly related to the expression of man's essentially sinful nature. They are closely linked with the city itself which is viewed as a centre of sin, the purpose being to impress upon such a holier-than-thou character as Mr. Head the sinful state of all mankind and the need for each individual to receive divine aid in overcoming this innate spiritual handicap. Negro characters therefore participate to a large degree in the religious movement of the work, but their role is limited to that of external catalysts, for it is the exclusive spiritual advancement of the white characters that is of uppermost concern to the author. No mention is made of the valid social issues which could be raised regarding a society in which one of the few ways for blacks to gain affluence is

through dealings as immoral as prostitution nor is the fact raised by O'Connor that, like the whites, they may also be in need of spiritual aid as a result of these implied sinful actions.

The only Negro figure seen here that is given a positive spiritual connotation is an inanimate figure, that of a plaster "artificial nigger" statue which Nelson and the old man come across as they grope their way from out of the ghetto area and return back to the white sector of the city. This crumbling statue, with a "wild look of misery" imprinted on its weather-beaten face, again graphically brings to mind in O'Connor's work the physical disfigurement of Christ on the cross providing, as is described, "a monument to another's victory." The statue affords a reminder of the eternal importance to man of Christ's triumph over evil, for despite its battered appearance, it, too, transcends all earthly misery to become a beacon of hope, alerting Mr. Head to the opportunity of salvation that awaits him if only he declares himself a sinner and embraces Christ as his instrument of redemption. Catholic influences definitely prevail here as the suffering of the blacks is made justifiable and indeed is glorified by associating it with Christ's suffering; in fact, hardships are made to appear spiritually beneficial, for the artificial nigger who is surely in the direst physical condition is the purest spiritual soul whose own humility mirrors that of the Saviour. Passive acceptance of existing social conditions is therefore seen as being the noblest and the wisest course to be followed, with the plaster figure providing the ultimate example of unwavering stoicism in the face of earthly hardships.

While the statue may serve as an effective reminder of Christ's own agony, its badly abused condition, coupled with its presence in the white section of the city, where it stands guard at the front of an elegant white-colored mansion, should also convey a definite negative social connotation. The artificial nigger, fashioned with a large piece of watermelon clutched in

his hand, is an example of the worst kind of grotesque stereotype of blacks that emerges from the South, and it should perhaps rightfully evoke some sort of angry response. It is, however, important to observe that no particular mention is made to indicate that Mr. Head is ever forced to repent for his many racial transgressions carried out against numerous blacks, and while it might be argued that his viewing of the statue does foster some sense of common humanity with the black race that stands in contrast to his earlier racist mouthings, Mr. Head's greatest sin is portrayed as being his denial of the nephew, not his reactionary attitude. So it is therefore a reconciliation between the two individual white characters that is of paramount importance, rather than the creation of a more extensive union between the black and white races; thus, the central interest expressed here by Flannery O'Connor remains completely divorced from the promotion of any broad social evolution for Southern society.

The Violent Bear It Away: Final Reiteration of Spiritual Themes

Rounding out the second stage of spiritual emphasis is The Violent Bear It Away which presents, in the experiences of Francis Tarwater, the parallel circumstance of another lower class youth from a rural area who receives religious indoctrination in childhood from a close male relative, in this case his great-uncle Mason Tarwater, but who likewise rejects his spiritual calling to embark on a life of sin and anti-Christian action. The degree of similarity between the two novels is somewhat surprising, resting as it does on the key areas of plot and characterization. Such extensive similarities are certainly not the result of an author reworking old material due to a lack of creative inspiration, but rather represent a planned effort to offer reinforcement of her central religious theme. As we can see in a later preface to Wise Blood, written to mark its tenth anniversary re-issue, she herself readily

acknowledged her own artistic limitations as they existed in the 1950's. Chiding herself for her deficiency in technical "theory," she seems willing to shoulder some of the burden for the widespread misunderstanding that greeted her first full-length work, but while her presentation may be flawed, she takes care to stress the merit of her early religious preoccupation.

Alluding to the fact of her artistic discontent, commentators have noted that the second novel was most definitely written with a view to clarifying the religious message of Wise Blood that was inadvertently missed by many of her confused readers and blatantly ignored by others who refused to acknowledge the powerful spiritual forces being highlighted in her work. Rather than accepting not only her own shortcomings, but also those of the critics and reading public alike, she responded by re-telling her tale in a dramatically heightened manner that placed even greater emphasis on the monumental power struggle continually being waged between the conflicting secular and spiritual wills. So we see not only the devil being personalized here as he attempts in various guises to corrupt the human will, but, further, the "ragged figure" that looms as an indistinct spectre in Wise Blood becomes clearly identified as the "bleeding, stinking, mad shadow of Jesus."

The author's personal discussion of this novel is more extensive than for any other of her works reflecting, no doubt, her eagerness to have finally her spiritual theme more widely understood. Exemplifying her public stand, vivid testament of her desire to lay emphasis upon the moral dilemma generated by the opposing interests of the divine and human wills is offered by her in the following interview excerpt: "I wanted to get across the fact that the great-uncle (Old Tarwater) is the Christian— a sort of crypto-Catholic— and the schoolteacher (Rayber) is the typical modern man. The boy (young Tarwater) has to choose which one, which way, he wants to follow. It's a matter of vocation."[7]

Even though the second novel must, by nature of its content, be regarded as belonging to the phase of spiritual emphasis, the significance of its later publication date cannot be overlooked, for while her concentration on the issue of salvation is the same as that of Wise Blood, her method of handling it shows a reflection of her changing values in the early 1960's. Whereas the main act signifying commitment to Christ in the first novel was solely confined to the brutal penance endured in isolation by the central character Hazel Motes, from the outset of The Violent Bear It Away the matter of redemption is extended beyond the perimeter of any singular character; Francis's assigned spiritual tasks both concern service to others, first, by seeing to the proper Christian burial of his great-uncle, and, secondly, by performing the baptism of his retarded cousin Bishop.

Although Francis is likewise spiritually reformed at the end of the novel, it is of particular relevance in highlighting the development of the author's social attitudes to note that he is not granted immediate elevation as was the case with Hazel in the earlier work. Francis is instead required actively to fulfill his Christian obligation to his fellow man by aiding in the preparation of others for redemption, and, venturing out as a prophet in accordance with his ordained spiritual role, he seeks to spread the word of God's mercy to the sinful masses in the city. Thus suggested is an expansion of her earlier vision which now sees the final spiritual union of the central reformed character being delayed in favor of allowing for the reformation of a much broader segment of society. Unlike the immobile figure of Enoch in Wise Blood, who can only stare out at the urban skyline from a fixed position, the final sentence of The Violent Bear It Away describes Francis as moving purposefully towards the city in order to reform its inhabitants. The importance of this horizontal movement cannot be overlooked, for it reveals a new desire on the author's part to view the earth and mankind as the focus of her spiritual

attention, rather than to continue, as in Wise Blood, looking only to a limited upward and exclusively otherworldly field of interest.

While such an expression of a more secular orientation can undoubtedly be discerned operating beneath the surface of events, this work was not designed to break new ground boldly, but only to offer consolidation of her original spiritual interest. Social awareness, while obviously greatly improved on a personal level for Miss O'Connor, did not then achieve full actuality within the novel. To this end, we see in the matter of her portrayal of blacks that such characters display strict conformation to the Catholic precept of working within the limiting context of one's allotted social position, for each is from the lower classes and, as a reflection of her earlier feelings, they correspondingly possess a spiritual respectability that is, for the most part, denied to more affluent middle class whites. While being few in number and assigned only brief appearances, the spiritual contribution of such Negroes is nonetheless significant as we see demonstrated with the Tarwater's rural black neighbor Buford. He functions as an instrument of the Lord, being largely responsible for the eventual defeat of the devil since it is his effort in completing the chore of burying Mason which insures that the will of God will triumph despite Francis's every effort to thwart it. Another worthy of mention is the so-called mammoth "angle lady" seen near the conclusion who, by way of a certain physical likeness to the prophet uncle Mason, is accorded the seeming authority of one who speaks on behalf of the Lord. Blacks are in this way shown to have made a great deal of spiritual progress, but virtually no advancement is indicated on the social scene and none is overtly pursued by the author so that, despite its late appearance, the novel is more properly classified within the second doctrinal stage of spiritual emphasis.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Carter W. Martin, The True Country: Themes in the Fiction of Flannery O'Connor (Nashville: Vanderbilt Univ. Press, 1969), p. 9.

[2]Robert Giroux, Introduction to The Complete Stories, p. xii. Even though these stories were in all probability begun before 1949, Giroux informs us of the constant rewriting done by the author, so that in most cases we cannot date the introduction of spiritual emphasis from the time of the story's original conception, but only from the year of publication of the final version.

[3]Leon Driskell and Joan Brittain, The Eternal Crossroads (Lexington: Univ. Press of Kentucky, 1971), p. 35.

[4]Flannery O'Connor, Three, Signet Books (New York: New American Library, Inc., 1964), p. 107. Contents: Wise Blood, A Good Man Is Hard to Find, and The Violent Bear It Away. Subsequent citations are to this paperback edition.

[5]Robert Drake, Flannery O'Connor, Contemporary Writers in Christian Perspective Series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1966), p. 17.

[6]Gilbert H. Muller, Nightmares and Visions (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1972), pp. 36-37.

[7]Interview with Joe Wells, "Off the Cuff," Critic, August-September, 1962, cited by Lewis A. Lawson, "A Collection of Statements," in The Added Dimension, ed. Melvin J. Friedman and Lewis A. Lawson (New York: Fordham Univ. Press, 1966), p. 258.

CHAPTER III

THE RISE OF SOCIAL CONCERNS

Transitional Stage: Social Themes Gain Limited Approval

Even during the period of Miss O'Connor's most intense religious concentration, a transitional stage becomes apparent that shows evidence of her once again examining social themes. Three particular stories, "A Late Encounter With the Enemy" (1953), "The Displaced Person" (1954), and "The Enduring Chill" (1958), indicate the re-emergence in a new form of this train of thought. An interesting thematic development takes place in these stories, one which shows her gradually retreating from her initial negative social stance and adopting a more favorable outlook towards such interests. This reversal in attitude comes about as she begins to perceive a link existing between social outlook and religious aspirations; therefore in order to further her spiritual ends, social change becomes for her inextricably related to the central concern of individual salvation. During the second phase of her career, as she continued to focus her attention on exposing various examples of pride in her characters, it was ironically this effort that ultimately led to the need for her to revise her social opinions.

"A Late Encounter With the Enemy"

It is obvious when examining the first story mentioned above, that as early as 1953 she had begun to associate the evils of pride with racial superiority, and, from that point on, her previously conservative attitude towards social change needed to be modified. The Southern class structure began to

be shown by her to be based on a lie, perpetrated to a large extent by the upper classes and those aspiring to belong to this group. She portrays the members of this class as preferring to cling to memories, oftentimes distorted, of past military glory and the historically accepted suppression of the Negro class, neither of which ideal was still applicable to the gradually evolving modern South. The pride that her characters display in both their heritage and social position is thus a false pride which has no basis in reality, and it must therefore be exposed and destroyed before salvation can ever be attained.

Such misguided attitudes are aptly illustrated by General Tennessee Flintrock Sash in "A Late Encounter With the Enemy." Although he is not really a member of the upper class, he is indulgently treated as belonging to that group, and he has come to think of himself as being a genuine representative of the Southern elite. The author's intent in elevating this pompous codger would seem to be to demonstrate that the older, revered Southern upper class no longer exists in reality but, rather, only in the minds of reactionary Southerners who refuse to acknowledge that defeat in the Civil War has brought about a collapse of the traditional order. This class never fully regained their former strength after the war, and any so-called "upper class" characters presented in her work are generally seen to be fixed at a middle class income level, with their past family prestige being only a memory. True upper class status in the modern South would still, of course, be based on financial assets, but the new society had ceased to rest on the economic foundation of the Negro slave and was accordingly becoming divorced from its white-dominated structure.

In this story, although the General is a Civil War veteran, he has for many years tried to deny the historical, as well as the personal, burden of military defeat by retreating into a dream world in which he plays the role of a victorious hero who has fought to preserve the glory of the Old South. These fantasies are likewise supported by his spinster

granddaughter who, although of a more recent generation, still looks back to a vanished past and views the old man as a credible symbol of her supposed social elevation. The hollow pride associated with members of her class is demonstrated by her wish to have him present in a place of honor at her graduation, in order to provide testimony of "what she stood for, or, as she said, "what all was behind her," and was not behind them. This them was not anybody in particular. It was just all the upstarts who had turned the world on its head and unsettled the ways of decent living" (O'Connor, "A Late Encounter With the Enemy," pp. 233-34). The desire of the Sash family to cling to outmoded values seems to be indicative of the entire Southern upper classes. Other details included in the story suggest that this type of attitude is not confined to a few eccentric characters but, rather, that it represents a dominant trend in Southern thinking. The author's descriptions of such annual events as the Capitol City Museum display on Confederate Memorial Day and the Old Home Pilgrimages in the spring make us further aware that a goodly portion of the Southern populace is unwilling to let fade away its past history but chooses instead to keep it alive in an untarnished form.

Since it is a large segment of the Southern society that holds to a belief in the exaggerated glories of the past, a past that we must always remember rested on the principle of social elitism, it is not only individual members like Sash and his granddaughter that must be corrected, but rather their entire class. Although it is not outrightly stated by Miss O'Connor, we can nonetheless see the important idea beginning to develop in this story that individual salvation cannot be attained without a prior purification of society as a whole and a full acceptance by all classes of racial equality. For the first time in her work we begin to see an indication of the rising Negro class becoming a powerful force in the South; however, it must be added that at this point the idea is introduced in abstract terms with the author making symbolic

use of the procession of graduates to express her views. The black-robed members of this procession are described in such a surrealistic fashion that they eventually seem to become a metaphor for the Negro race itself. As the black procession moves forward and bears down relentlessly on General Sash, it would seem to provide a graphic illustration of the growing power and advancement of the Negro race, a circumstance that at this stage can no longer be avoided by Flannery O'Connor in her presentation of Southern society.

This idea is supported by the constant swelling of the "slow black music" that accompanies the procession, for it provides an image suggestive of the Negro spirituals, a musical form also introduced by Miss O'Connor in other stories, the most notable examples being "Wildcat" and "Revelation." The origin of these songs is exclusive to the American Negroes, and their intense emotional quality at times epitomizes the suffering and sorrow of a people held in bondage. Such a reference to the spirituals is in keeping with the long denied historical truths that are being freshly reviewed in the story and, especially, in highlighting the Negro struggle for social equality that has characterized the post-Civil War South.

The racially oriented interpretation that I have placed on the intruding forces of the black procession and its accompanying images, while based, at this point, on an abstract reading of the story, is definitely supported by the expanded social content of the stories from her later collection. The black-robed candidates that assault the General's conscious and unconscious being in this story suggest the new type of aggressive black characters who will appear in the author's final stories where they forcefully assert their right to a higher position on the Southern social scale. Significantly, many of the candidates here are receiving degrees in education, and part of their final learning process includes having "the last beads of ignorance" sweated out of them by the heavy black gowns. The sight of these robes has somewhat of the same

effect on Sash as the rush of candidates approaches him and causes the historical truth of military defeat and its attendant collapse of the old social order to flood his memory. The truth should, in fact, remove his pride and have a purifying effect on the old man, but in Sash's case it kills him. Little hope is offered for his own salvation nor, would it seem, for the salvation of the upper class in general because its members steadfastly refuse to abandon their pride and continue to reject the social advancement of the lower class Negroes.

"The Displaced Person"

Middle class prejudices are next examined by the author in her story "The Displaced Person." Typical of the members of this class is Mrs. MacIntyre, a widow whose livelihood is dependent upon her own self-initiative in running a small farm. Through this character the false pride of the middle class is also shown to be related to their position on the social scale, as was the case with the upper class. Although not ranked as high as the upper class, they are still very vain about their elevation above the lower classes, but while the status of the upper class is mainly derived from family prestige, that of middle class whites is seen as being the result of hard work and shrewd intelligence. The pride displayed by members of this group stems from the fact that they feel their hard work makes them superior to members of other classes, especially to the lower classes, and, in particular, to the Negroes, whom they view as being lazy and totally unworthy of advancement.

The few Negro characters seen in this story are all employed as hired farm hands, but they are ranked well below the hired white help and have had to take orders from a passing parade of various white dairymen who, although new to the farm, are each, in turn, put in charge of the blacks. The social climate is one of stagnation and maintaining the status quo

at whatever cost is considered desirable by both blacks and whites. For example, in spite of Mrs. MacIntyre's own low opinion of the Negro workers, she recognizes her reliance upon their continued assistance and so does not wish to antagonize them. The Negroes, for the most part, seem themselves to be content with their lot; instead of wanting to advance and perhaps jeopardizing their security, we find them more concerned with protecting their low, but relatively secure position.

Racial tensions are not generally apparent in this story; however, an important difference of opinion regarding the issue of black status does briefly surface between the widow and Sulk, one of her Negro hired hands. During the course of a conversation between them she quotes her late husband's words to comment unfavorably on the advisability of black economic advancement: "Money is the root of all evil. . . . He said the reason you niggers were so uppity was because there was so much money in circulation" (O'Connor, "The Displaced Person," p. 281). Sulk's remembrance of the Judge's views is contradictory to the widow's opinion and reveals a more humanitarian outlook on the part of her late husband: "Judge say he long for the day when he be too poor to pay a nigger to work. . . . Say when that day come, the world be back on its feet" (O'Connor, "The Displaced Person," p. 281). The Judge's statement draws to our attention evidence of Miss O'Connor's expanding social consciousness, for it suggests that a reversal of white economic fortune might possibly be a leveling factor that will draw the races closer together and thus greatly benefit society.

Although this sentiment is repeated by the Negro, it is done so wistfully, rather than with a great deal of force, and it would seem that he feels such views are a pleasant thought for the future but have no real application for the present. Despite this general lack of social aggressiveness on the part of the Negro characters, the idea of a growing union between the races is nonetheless maintained as a strong thematic under-

current throughout the story, and stress is placed on presenting increased racial harmony as being a natural outgrowth of the spiritual union of the Christian trinity. Significant in this regard is a particular description that shows the one Negro Sulk being divided by the sunlight into "three distinct parts," providing a probable reference to the essential unity of the trinity that creates an effective device, giving added emphasis to the statement being made by him at the time concerning the common bond that he feels exists between the black and white races.

The idea of the need for racial union is even further developed by Guizac, a displaced foreign immigrant whom Mrs. MacIntyre imports to work on her farm. He serves, in his own way, as a social prophet who inadvertently upsets the traditional Southern pattern of strict separation of blacks and whites by trying to arrange an interracial marriage between his young cousin and one of the Negro farm hands. Never having been indoctrinated into the prejudices of the Southern class structure, Guizac does not view Negroes as being inferior and is therefore in a position to put more liberal racial attitudes into practice. His plan arises as a means of obtaining the girl's release from a European refugee camp by enlisting the financial help of the Negro in order to bring the prospective bride to America. Such a scheme points the way towards a greater freedom of interaction between the races, and the dire plight of his cousin makes it plainly apparent that a breaking down of racial barriers is necessary for the survival of the white girl. In a broader sense, the reader could possibly project that the survival of Southern society as a whole would seem also to rest on an acceptance of the coming together of the classes, since characters such as Mrs. MacIntyre who reject this view go into a state of physical decline and, it is suggested, imperil their souls. Additional strengthening of this link of religious and social elements arises from the

previously mentioned parallel between Guizac and Christ which, in presenting the foreigner as a modern Saviour, makes the acceptance of his liberal social attitudes a necessary criterion upon which individual salvation is now shown to depend.

Mrs. MacIntyre is one of the many conservative Southerners who are unable to accept a new social order, and she views Guizac's plan as an inexcusable breach of the Southern class code. The extent of her prejudice is revealed by the fact that she wishes to fire him and is willing to accept a financial loss by resorting to less efficient white Southern help. A veneer of harmony with the blacks may be maintained by this woman, but her deep contempt for them becomes apparent when she refers to the prospective bridegroom in the most demeaning of terms as a "half-witted thieving black stinking nigger" (O'Connor, "The Displaced Person," p. 287). Even though her corrupt Southern sensibilities prevent her from willingly accepting Guizac's scheme, the reality of at least having to concede that someone might consider a union between the white and black races brings about a beneficial "interior violence" within Mrs. MacIntyre, which, according to Flannery O'Connor, gives her a widened view of life and at least prompts a re-evaluation of her narrow-minded racial outlook.

Considerable social advancement is seen here over that which occurred in "A Late Encounter With the Enemy." In the earlier work only death resulted from social knowledge, and there appeared to be no solution to the corruption of the upper classes, but here, although Mrs. MacIntyre is greatly weakened by the shock of Guizac's enlightened racial attitude, she remains alive to ponder its meaning. Some hope seems therefore to be offered for her individual salvation, as well as for the salvation of her entire class, provided they are able to break free from their belief in an elitist class and race structure and acknowledge the spiritual and social message of Christian tolerance and compassion that is conveyed by Guizac. The foreigner's views also seem to have a revitalizing effect on

Sulk's latent social aspirations, for after the D.P.'s death the Negro "is taken with a sudden desire to see more of the world" and leaves the farm. Thus we see that the needed reorganization of Southern society depends, not only on the middle class making itself amenable to social change, but also on the lower class blacks taking the initiative in pursuing these changes. Although Sulk's departure and Mrs. MacIntyre's expanded views are minor points in the total context of this particular story, they represent an important indication of the general movement towards even further social awareness and racial advancement that will be seen in Miss O'Connor's later work.

"The Enduring Chill"

"The Enduring Chill," written in 1958, also dwells on social issues by offering an early attempt at sustaining the focus of a story on the subject of union between the white and black races. The characters that it presents are, however, extensions of types already seen; so, as in the earlier works, only minimal social progress can actually be achieved. The class relationship is very similar to that in "The Displaced Person" as another middle class widow attempts to run a dairy farm with the assistance of several black hired hands. Once more the blacks do not appear to be highly motivated, and they are again portrayed as being satisfied in their subservient role. They are given a very broad, almost stereotyped Southern accent and, if anything, are shown to be far less articulate than the black characters found in "The Displaced Person." Since the workers are so passive, the harmony between them and the widow is essentially better here than in the other story, with no evidence at all of latent discontent on the part of the blacks being visible.

The central antagonist that emerges is the widow's ailing son Asbury, a frustrated writer and pseudo-intellectual

who returns home from the North puffed up with the ideals of phony liberalism and proceeds to promote a spirit of human "communion" between himself and the Negro farm hands. As with other such liberal figures seen in the thesis stories, his efforts are likewise misguided and are conducted on the most superficial level, without any true understanding being established between the races. His every attempt to create a rapport with the blacks involves encouraging the men to break certain rules of employment, either by smoking in a restricted area, or by drinking unpasturized milk, thus risking losing their jobs. Such behavior which blatantly defies his mother's strict rules more accurately serves Asbury's need to assert his own personal freedom from this dominating, overly possessive woman, rather than contributing to the social enlightenment of the Negroes. Even though he does not realize it, any bond which he feels with them does not spring from a sincere outpouring of human compassion but is most likely a reflection of their common dependence on the widow. In addition, he is motivated by the selfish desire to cultivate the friendship of the Negroes in order to write a play about them; thus he perpetuates the middle class exploitation of blacks in a far more devious manner than would any employer. The elitist pride associated with the higher classes leads him to believe that the blacks would naturally welcome his patronizing gestures of friendship, but this is not the case, for the Negroes, being perfectly content with their circumstances, reject Asbury's pretentious overtures, and in consistence with the fate of all earlier "intellectural do-gooders," he is made to appear extremely foolish.

In spite of the boy's naive social actions, additional support is nonetheless given to the principle put forward in "The Displaced Person" that improved racial understanding is necessary for the ultimate spiritual salvation of many members of the Southern populace. Salvation is, in fact, defined at the very outset of "The Enduring Chill" as consisting of the

destruction of a single prejudice, and, as the story progresses, Asbury recognizes that his previous inability to establish harmony with the blacks is the most important failing that must be corrected before his anticipated death. Significantly, he equates the need for communion between himself and the Negroes with the spiritual purpose of the Last Sacrament, and, in this respect, he is absolutely correct, since both are shown by the author to be necessary prerequisites for individual salvation.

The reason Asbury cannot immediately fulfill his social aims is that his approach is seriously flawed, for pride has led him to believe wrongly that by his own singular efforts he can generate a feeling of brotherhood with the blacks and thereby help to insure his own final salvation. However, salvation cannot be attained except with the guidance of the Holy Ghost, a fact clearly stated in the story, first by the Jesuit priest whom the boy encounters in New York, and secondly, for added emphasis, by the local priest that he summons to his bedside at home. Only a higher spiritual power is capable of creating the type of meaningful accord which leads to a true communion between the races. At the conclusion of the story, the Holy Ghost is portrayed as actually descending upon the boy ostensibly, it would seem, for the express purpose of correcting his social illusions. One is tempted to say that this story shows the author again advocating an abandonment of social efforts by the middle class and suggesting a return to the conservative racial view displayed in the thesis works. This is further implied by the absence of any punishment being meted out to the widow, even though she displays many of the same prejudices toward the black workers as did Mrs. MacIntyre. It is therefore true that the author's personal sentiments appear to lie with those characters that support the maintaining of the Southern class structure, but, rather than signalling a total renunciation of her movement towards a more liberal outlook, this one backward step simply represents, I tend to feel, yet another indication of the continuing struggle which she

faced in completely restructuring her own deeply ingrained reactionary social beliefs. The enlightened attitudes that were starting to become apparent in "The Displaced Person" may have intensified this inner conflict, thus prompting her to shrink from advocating total social reform at this point in her career. What must, however, be understood is that it is the method of social change which is, in reality, being most strongly criticized here, while the underlying principle of its importance to individual salvation still remains constant. Like Mrs. MacIntyre before him, Asbury is kept alive at the end, so that salvation still remains a possibility for him and for other such members of the middle class, providing they are able to reform both their spiritual and social prejudices in accordance with the Catholic virtues of humility and compassion.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin: Beyond Individual Salvation

Familiarity With the Writings of Chardin

The transitional stories all demonstrate to some degree Flannery O'Connor's growing awareness that social concerns could indeed provide a complementary force to spiritual redemption. However, the full flowering of her belief in the need for a complete reformation of Southern society only reaches its fullest positive expression in those works published during the early 1960's. We might justly wonder what finally prompted her to elevate social considerations to a level of major importance in the latter stages of her career. Her various critics, in addressing themselves to this particular problem, seem to be agreed that the answer lies in her coming into contact with the work of the French palaeontologist and Christian philosopher Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. Robert Fitzgerald estimates that she had been reading Chardin "at least since early 1961," and of the nine stories comprising

her second collection Everything That Rises Must Converge, it is most significant that the profoundest social statements are contained in those pieces that received their original publication after 1960.

It is not by mere chance that the doctrinal changes characterizing her mature fiction coincide with her increasing interest in Chardin, for, upon reading his work, she seems to have acknowledged an immediate kinship with him. Fitzgerald recalls that in 1961 she began to make known to her friends her enthusiasm for his writings, but even slightly earlier evidence dating her interest in him can be found in The Bulletin of the Catholic Laymen's Association of Georgia, a periodical to which the author was a contributor. The issue of this journal for the 15 October 1960 carried a review by Miss O'Connor on a book about Chardin written by author Nicholas Corté. Her continued interest in Chardin's unique Christian philosophy is indicated by the fact that, dating from this first article in October 1960 until April 1963, she published three more Bulletin pieces which dealt with Chardin's work. These included another review of a book about Chardin, this one by Oliver Rabut, as well as two additional articles dealing with the original Chardin volumes The Divine Milieu and Letters from a Traveller.[1]

Her affinity for Chardin is perhaps most clearly indicated by the fact that the title of her second collection is a direct translation from the French "Tout Ce Qui Monte Converge," a phrase used by him as a heading for a particular section included in an anthology of his writings. Although the use of this title as an overall one for the collection was originally selected by her publisher Robert Giroux, it was given full approval by the author herself, who seemed quite willing to have had her final works so strongly identified with the Chardinian view of the progress of man.[2] Considering the use of this title in the collection's opening story, a selection which brings to light the advancing move towards racial equality

in the South, Chardin's phrase appropriately serves to indicate the new social direction that Miss O'Connor's later work would follow.

Chardinian Theory of Convergence of the Species

Chardin sets out a complex theory, derived from his advanced studies in palaeontology, that details the progress of the planet and the human species, but behind the imposing scientific terminology, his basic philosophy rests on the simple fact of the natural affinity towards "union" which he perceives as being the central force dominating the development of all forms of matter. Tracing its constant movement towards convergence from the minutest sub-particles such as atoms, which are drawn together to bond into crystals; he follows the process through the ever increasing cellular complexity of all species from the plant and animal kingdoms, until the highest manifestation of "union" is seen in man, the most advanced life form; to him this implies that the members of the human species are biologically compelled to join together in ever expanding societies.[3]

Chardin's view of evolution is based on two main hypotheses: first, the physical evolution of all matter, and secondly, the mental progress of matter, both of which he sees as having as a goal increased cerebralization (Chardin, Phenomenon of Man, p. 160). The process of physical union, which is reflected in cellular cohesion, leads, as one moves up the evolutionary scale, to the development of ever more refined nervous systems until finally the large brain capacity of man is attained, resulting in the power of thought becoming an integral part of the life cycle. Physical development has in the past brought about the gradual formation of the visible biosphere, which Chardin describes as a living envelope of plants and animals that surrounds the earth; Chardin asserts that there also exists, corresponding to the formation of the

biosphere, above and beyond it, another layer created from the psychic energy generated by the accumulated process of thought—this additional layer he refers to as the noosphere (Chardin, Phenomenon of Man, pp. 201-2). Chardin notes that the earth has now reached the stage where biological advancement has slowed down and, in such a highly developed species as man, may have ceased entirely. Precise documentation is offered by Chardin to illustrate that whenever union ceases, the species involved fragments itself and begins to die out; therefore, if life is to be prevented from going into a state of decline, the process of union must somehow be continued, and he reasons that this is possible by focusing on the growing mental affinity that exists between members of the human species.[4]

Man alone possesses the power of reflection which provides in him a centre of consciousness that allows for the vast experience of all mankind to be absorbed in his person, so that each individual has the means of becoming linked with all other individuals. If the co-ordinated effort of millions of cells housed in the individual brain can produce this immense power of human reflection, Chardin postulates that the combined thought of all mankind will produce an energy so great as to be capable of elevating the entire species and moving it forward in renewed evolutionary advancement (Chardin, Future of Man, p. 172). Chardin suggests that the evolutionary movement of the world must now be entirely concentrated upon the development of a collective consciousness for mankind and that this can only be accomplished by forging the diverse elements of society into a unified whole. Since man has the ability to reason, he no longer has to leave the development of the species to chance biological occurrence, and he must instead strive to control his own future growth (Chardin, Future of Man, p. 150).

Chardin makes it clear that the only possible direction in which mankind can move is towards a harmonious union between members of the species. This union is, above all, a union of

minds and is intended to expand the area of mental energy that comprises the noosphere. In order to make this theory of noospheric mental union less abstract, Chardin refers directly to our own age which provides the example of world unity being fostered by the convergence of many minds engaged in similar problems of scientific research. He further cites the rapid technological advances made in recent years in the field of communications, progress which has led to a link in "universal consciousness" by permitting many individuals to tune in simultaneously, as it were, to the same global sensory experience. Just as hereditary characteristics have been preserved and transmitted through genetic means in order to maintain the biological development of the species, a similar continuity in the development of the human mind is now provided by the mental stimulation of culture, tradition, and education, all of which are dependent upon technology for their storage and dispersal. According to Chardin, a complicated world network of intertwined economic and intellectual interests is already in existence over the earth's surface, and he concludes that inevitably, increased social union must follow as a result of this established pattern (Chardin, Future of Man, p. 177). Placing this constant growth of psychic energy in the context of the noosphere, Chardin elaborates that it leads to an expansion of this mental field which, due to the curvature of the planet and its restricted global surface, will eventually result in a tightening of the noospheric layer until a period of "infolding" occurs, and, as with the process of reflection, the collective mental power of all mankind will be centred back onto the individual. Although all thought and invention originally emanate from the individual, it is only when they have been absorbed on a collective level that the individual can attain his maximum fulfillment through them (Chardin, Phenomenon of Man, p. 289).

However, even this new mental evolutionary direction becomes eventually limited, as was the case with the past

process of physical development, for mankind can only rise to a certain level on its own. In keeping with the constant progressive move towards union, the noosphere must, in turn, be centred upon something greater than itself, a problematic situation which marks the stage where biological principles and religion begin to merge in Chardin's philosophy. Once the union between the mind of each individual man and the human spirit of collective mankind has reached its maximum degree of noospheric affinity, he theorizes that the noosphere will, in a final unifying culmination, centre itself on an ascendent point which he calls Point Omega (Chardin, Phenomenon of Man, p. 288). It is essential for an understanding of Chardin's thesis to recognize that Omega is not merely a nebulous juncture that exists somewhere in the universe, beyond the planetary confines of our world; it is, rather, a personalized Being that is capable of combining directly with man and elevating to the highest plane all human characteristics. Chardin, having previously stressed that each successive stage of union represents a rise in both consciousness and personalization, as well as a strengthening of sympathy and love between all individuals, draws the conclusion that Christ is the only external centre that is capable of providing this ultimate elevation of mankind. The process whereby man becomes one with God through the action of the Redeeming Incarnation, not only provides spiritual salvation for the individual human soul, but also satisfies all the scientific precepts that are laid down by Chardin for the supreme evolutionary union of mankind that will assure the immortality of the human species. Biological fact and Christian spiritual belief are thus fulfilled in each other, with added credibility being given to each view through their merging (Chardin, Phenomenon of Man, pp. 319-26).

The thematic focus of Miss O'Connor's fiction had amply demonstrated her intense personal interest in the movement of man towards eternal salvation; so we can therefore easily see why the content of Chardin's philosophy would arouse her

immediate interest. Critics Joan Brittain and Leon Driskell remark in unqualified terms that "his 'point omega' was precisely the goal toward which she, as Christian and as writer, was moving" (Driskell and Brittain, Eternal Crossroads, p. 136). However, even though salvation may have been the same end result which both writers dedicatedly pursued, the means by which they hoped it could be attained were radically different in approach. The process of salvation, as has been seen in Miss O'Connor's early fiction, followed a repetitive pattern in every work, with the same basic flaw of pride being corrected in each individual sinner. This emphasis on the spiritual preparation of the single soul was consistent with the influence of conservative Catholicism which held the idea that salvation was a matter involving a direct affiliation exclusively between God and each individual. Chardin, however, did not retain this limited outlook in his philosophy, since any religious dogma which isolated the individual stood in conflict with his view of the biological and spiritual evolution of the human species that was based on the precept of ever increasing union. He firmly believed that salvation could only be achieved simultaneously for the whole of mankind when union among all members of society had reached its maximum degree; according to him, it was not a process that could be repeated time and again for individual man existing as a separate entity. Thus Chardin's greatest influence on Flannery O'Connor's spiritual outlook was that he caused her to modify her own heretofore unbending religious doctrine and to thus perceive of salvation as encompassing a much broader base of relationships in which the fate of the individual became inextricably related to the advancement of the larger human society.

Direct Influence on Flannery O'Connor's Social Outlook

This leads us directly to the key influence exerted by Chardin in altering the course of the most problematic area of her fiction, that of her vacillating attitude towards the segregationist class structure of the South. Some progress in reversing this trend was observed in the transitional stories, but it is not until her reading of Chardin that total acceptance of liberal ideals becomes apparent in her work. The impact of man's biological survival and eventual union with God being linked to the necessity for social reorganization had naturally a profound effect on an author such as Flannery O'Connor whose entire literary background had been formed in a racist structured society. Through Chardin's entire career, he took an unwaivering position against racism which is documented most forcefully in The Phenomenon of Man, p. 271 where he asserts that "racial heresies" must be abolished "since no evolutionary future awaits man except in association with all other men." Given his unequivocal commitment to the concept of evolutionary progress through social union, he attacked racism particularly on the grounds that it was a divisive force which threatened to weaken human affinity. He further deduced that a continuance of such division would eventually take the world backward towards the plurality of molecular matter that characterized its most primitive state.

Perhaps of even more immediate importance to Miss O'Connor than the foreshadowing of racism leading to the biological extinction of the human species was Chardin's view that any individual who presently attempted to block the progress of mankind towards greater union would condemn himself to sin and damnation. Since at the outset of her career she had dedicated her work to illustrating man's potential for redemption through Christ and, since this religious task was still of paramount concern to her, the only way that she could

continue to effectively pursue it, in the light of Chardin's beliefs, was to attempt to purge from her work any lingering sympathies for the reactionary Southern social structure. Those characters that clung to such views could no longer be considered as champions of a finer way of life, but must now be exposed as being among the worst of sinners whose souls were deeply imperiled by their racist leanings.

The reluctance on Miss O'Connor's part to admit the value of sociological concerns in fictional works devoted to presenting a sense of the mystery and power of God was finally resolved after her exposure to the writings of Chardin. His convincing presentation of individual salvation as being completely bound up with the gradual coming together of classes or, in his own words "social convergence," therefore effectively reduded the last vestiges of her resistance to social change. This new wave of social concern, seemingly springing up unannounced in the early 1960's, was, in fact, visible to some degree before this period. The transitional stories had offered the first hint of a need for social reform by showing that racial superiority was an outgrowth of pride and could seriously impede an individual's chances for salvation. Chardin's work substantiated this view by vehemently condemning any elevation of the individual, and his added voice provided the final thrust that moved the author even further towards a more moderate racial stance. Through the influence of Chardin's philosophy, she at last found evidence that her university training in the field of sociology need not be considered in opposition to her spiritual beliefs. Chardin had demonstrated that both outlooks were in fact complementary to each other, and this knowledge finally resolved the conflict that had arisen between the diverse teachings of both her narrow Catholic unbringing in the home and her more liberal intellectual moulding received in the academic world.

In assessing the role of Chardin's philosophy on the doctrinal progress of her work, Leon Driskell and Joan Brittain

echo this thought by stating that "Teilhard's unification of 'fundamental Christian vision and scientific knowledge' was probably the culminating influence upon Miss O'Connor's treatment of her South and of her people" (Driskell and Brittain, Eternal Crossroads, p. 144). These same critics offer perhaps the most incisive summation of the extent of Chardin's influence in directing the course of her career when they assert that contact with his views enabled her to come to the realization "that for all the value of internal as opposed to external progress, the universe and man are such that even mere humanist-oriented concern with appearance and social welfare may provide a 'positive force capable of growth by merging' with spiritual values at the point omega" (Driskell and Brittain, Eternal Crossroads, p. 142). To conclude, I would, however, take exception to their use of the word "mere" to describe Miss O'Connor's final social considerations. Chardin makes it quite clear that such values are the very cornerstone upon which the eventual salvation, not only of the individual soul, but also of mankind depends, and were she not in firm agreement with the importance of these concerns, it is unlikely that they would have received such rapid elevation to prominence and favor in her work.

Concept of Convergence as Reflected in the Later Works

"Everything That Rises Must Converge": Exclusive Social Application

Her mature manner, which shows the Southern Negroes advancing in society and affirming their right to move still higher up in the social ranking, is illustrated above all by three works of major doctrinal importance from the second grouping of short stories: the opening selection, "Everything That Rises Must Converge"; "Revelation," one of her final efforts from 1964; and "Judgement Day," the concluding story

in the collection. An intensified concentration on the Southern racial situation strikes the keynote of the title work, for this story marks one of the few examples from Miss O'Connor's fiction where religious concerns do not receive direct attention, with primary interest being given entirely to social themes. Of vital significance is the fact that the setting is in the South, presenting the first instance in the author's fiction where blacks are shown to have attained middle class status in their home region, instead of only in the North.

Events centre around the confrontation that develops over the action of a dignified, refined white woman attempting to give a black child a penny as they debark from a city transit bus, ostensibly a minor incident of misguided charity, but one which is made the focal point of emphasis in illustrating the demeaning paternal approach towards Negroes still displayed by certain reactionary white Southerners. The central white antagonist personifying this attitude, a woman descended from an older upper class family and identified only by her illustrious maiden name, behaves in a similar fashion to General Sash and refuses to acknowledge that military defeat has changed the South. Rather than admitting that she has been demoted in prestige to the level of the middle class, which would require her to accept the more tolerant social structure of the new South, she prefers instead to cling to her memories of mansions and family prestige. Combined with this insensitivity to historical amendments is her benevolent approach to the local Negroes that is reminiscent of the old master/slave relationship. Her monetary pittance is revealed to be offered solely for the selfish purpose of increasing her feeling of superiority over blacks, and even the friendly smiles which she directs towards various anonymous Negroes are described as being yet another hollow gesture that she makes towards those whom she considers to be inferior.

Liberal views are introduced in vain to this woman by her college-educated son, Julian, who lectures her on her

outmoded racial responses and urges her to face the reality of the changing social order. Julian, although possessing for his part the ability to present enlightened views convincingly, nonetheless falls into the mould of intellectual do-gooders for whom Flannery O'Connor still has no use even during this period of social awareness in her fiction. The only racial contact he wishes to promote is with educated blacks who are well off and obviously not in need of any aid, but even with blacks of this higher social level his main desire is to demonstrate a sense of sympathy for them. Unlike the Chardinian concept of a sympathy arising from genuine Christian compassion, Julian's feelings are but another manifestation of the type of patronizing benevolence that is meted out to blacks by people such as his mother. Any interest which he displays in associating with them is seen to be motivated, not by true humanitarian concern, but rather by a wish to shock his mother as a means of personal rebellion. In reality, Julian is also a reactionary figure who feels cheated out of a life of grandeur as a result of the changing social order and who indulges in similar fantasies to those of his mother—dreams that long secretly for a restoration of the past.

Not only is it the major white characters that display a deep loyalty to the racist system of social elevation, it also appears in the conversation of their fellow passengers on the bus, thus stressing that it is a widespread reactionary attitude which must be corrected. Looking only at the white characters found in this story one would be hard pressed to discern any social advances being made in Miss O'Connor's fiction, with racism obviously still firmly etched in the minds of all her visible white Southerners. However, the important factor distinguishing this later story from the earlier works is the reaction tendered by the mother of the young "charity" recipient, an openly challenging black figure whose hostile reproach to the white woman's air of superiority differs radically from the more passive behavior displayed by previous

Negro characters.

The knowledge of her capacity for aggression is made immediate through Julian's description of her which contrasts sharply with the meek demeanor of preceding blacks: "Her face was set not only to meet opposition but to seek it out. The downward tilt of her large lower lip was like a warning sign: DON'T TAMPER WITH ME" (O'Connor, "Everything That Rises Must Converge," p. 39). Recognizing the demeaning offer of the penny to be an action designed to perpetuate the historically low status of members of the black race, she offers not only a stern verbal rebuff to Julian's mother: "He don't take nobody's pennies," but further retaliates by using her purse to deliver a resounding blow to the face of the offending white antagonist.

Unlike the ineffectuality of the earliest black figures, who showed no signs of wanting social advancement, as well as of the transitional figures, who harbored the wish to advance, but were powerless to make much progress, this black woman definitely succeeds, through resorting to physical violence, in establishing her right to a position of equal status with the whites. Through her presence, the author brings Chardin's philosophy to the forefront of attention by demonstrating that the rising blacks will no longer consent to being relegated to a different side of the fence but will instead push for inclusion in the privileged white society, thereby initiating in her fiction the first definitive movement towards his desired convergence between the races. Further promotion of the concept of modern racial union is provided by the author as she shows both the Negro mother and the white mother to be wearing identical hats. Julian's mother had, we are told, purchased the expensive millinery accessory as an indisputable badge of elitism, and the Negro woman's casual wearing of it again confirms the strides toward equal parity already made by her race. The full social implication of the action and

appearance of the Negro woman is elaborated upon by Julian as he chastizes his mother in the following manner:

> "Don't think that was just an uppity Negro woman. . . . That was the whole colored race which will no longer take your condescending pennies. That was your black double. She can wear the same hat as you, and to be sure," he added gratuitously (because he thought it was funny), "it looked better on her than it did on you. What all this means," he said, "is that the old world is gone. The old manners are obsolete and your graciousness is not worth a damn." (O'Connor, "Everything That Rises Must Converge," pp. 42-43)

The collapse of the old order and the resulting changes in black status are highlighted in various ways throughout the story. For example, the integrated seating arrangements on the bus attest to the legislated social advances granted to Southern Negroes; in addition, the male Negro passenger that boards the bus is portrayed as a well-dressed executive type who takes for granted his civil rights and remains unimpressed by the feeble attempt at communication proferred by Julian in a calculated liberal spirit. Also of notable importance is the fact that this passenger does not represent an isolated example of black business success, since brief reference is made to other "better type" Negroes whom Julian has encountered on the buses. Finally, in a total reversal of the racial climate found in other of Miss O'Connor's works, all of the black characters introduced here are at perfect ease in the white-oriented Southern environment, while it is instead the caucasian figures who struggle valiantly to maintain their racial identity.

The conclusion of the story sees the white woman dying as a result of the blow received from the angry Negro mother, in this way once more stressing that the bigotry of the remaining upper class descendants is too deeply entrenched for them ever to change; hence they cannot be saved, but must perish if the evolution of the new Southern society is to proceed unimpeded. Judgement is for the moment reserved in the case of Julian, who is left in a state of limbo at the end, for

since he is farther removed from the past, change may yet be possible for him, but the author's final description showing him being swept back towards his dead mother in a "tide of darkness . . . postponing from moment to moment his entry into the world of guilt and sorrow" (O'Connor, "Everything That Rises Must Converge," p. 43), strongly suggests that a full awareness of the social consequences of the Civil War may even prove to be beyond his comprehension.

"Revelation": Emergence of Social and Spiritual Concerns as Complementary Forces

While the emphasis in "Everything That Rises Must Converge" is strictly confined to social matters, with the question of salvation not being overtly raised, "Revelation," the second major short story from the 1960's, openly stresses the correlation between both social and religious concerns in accordance with the theories of Chardin. The entire early portion of the story takes place in a doctor's waiting room where the central white antagonist, a woman named Mrs. Turpin, has accompanied her ailing husband. The setting is most appropriate, since both her conversation with the other patients and as well her inner dialogue reveal that he is in a perpetual state of waiting, not for medical aid, but for her ultimate spiritual redemption. Further significance is implied by the setting, for although seemingly in good health, it is apparent that the woman is, in fact, suffering from the poisonous social ailment of bigotry, and no salvation will be possible for her until she is cured of her intolerance.

Like Julian's mother, Mrs. Turpin covers her prejudice with a guise of altruistic concern, but her humanitarian interest in blacks is shown to involve nothing more than empty clichés, for interspersed with her bursts of compassion for the Negroes, she engages in conversation with other whites on such racist topics as transporting all the "niggers" back to Africa. We see in her a misguided woman who is obsessed with

the complex structure of the obsolete Southern class system. Prestige, in her estimation, is still determined by the holding of land, as was the case in pre-Civil War society, with the absence of slave ownership being her one concession to present times. Using this form of measure in determining her own exact position, she places herself in the upper middle class by virtue of owning both a home and land, while above her are similar, but wealthier, landowners. The lowest rank at the very bottom of the social scale she reserves for the blacks, who, although no longer bonded to the whites, will still not be granted any higher ranking by her. However hard she may try to maintain the vestiges of these rigid class categorizations of the Old South, disconcerting evidence exists all around her to indicate that a new era in Southern society has arrived—one in which the entire past order has been overturned. Mention is made of upper class gentry who have lost their money, of the present nouveau riche who lack good breeding, and most notably, of those colored people who are now property owners. The growing power of Negroes from all economic levels is given even greater emphasis here than in any previous work. The ability of blacks to become members of the professional class is illustrated by the example of a prosperous colored dentist in the town, but it is not only the well-educated blacks that demonstrate advancement; complaints are made by Mrs. Turpin, and echoed by other white persons, that many employable Negroes no longer will do such menial jobs as picking cotton, preferring instead "to be right up there with the white folks" (O'Connor, "Revelation," p. 172). This positive assertion of equality is even carried through in the minor character of a black messenger boy who refuses to be cowed by Mrs. Turpin and displays haughty indifference to the condescending advice which she gives him. A reminder of the passive subservient type of Negro character is still offered by several of Mrs. Turpin's black female farm helpers. These woman lavish undeserved praise upon her and are in complete

agreement with her every word, but somehow it is not the Negroes who are demeaned, but, finally the white employer, possibly for encouraging such a false loyalty which prevents any sincere and meaningful contact between the races.

Mrs. Turpin refuses, however, to acknowledge any of the broad or subtle changes in the class structure, but most serious of all, compounding this ignorance, is her mistaken belief that salvation is related to one's position on the social scale. Being of the middle class, she prides herself, again like Julian's mother, on her innate "respectability," considering this to be the main criterion for salvation. She goes so far as to offer blasphemous praise to Jesus for granting her an elevated social status here on earth and, therefore, she thinks, marking her for future spiritual election. Thus feeling quite certain that such a fine individual as herself will receive redemption, she constantly confirms this eligibility by downgrading those persons with whom she compares herself. Her greatest contempt is particularly reserved for lower class members of her own race, whom she refers to as "white trash," and, of course, for the Negroes. As events unfold, the social reformation of this hypocritical woman is seen to also constitute the central action of the story, with the destruction of her racial prejudice being specifically linked to her chances for salvation.

No major hostile black appears in this story to correct Mrs. Turpin's racial intolerance; instead, this function is taken over by a white character, that of an unattractive and surly young female college student. The girl's very name, Mary Grace, in itself indicates the role she will occupy in acting as a spiritual catalyst to make Mrs. Turpin eligible to receive the grace of the Lord. From their first glimpse of each other in the waiting room, the student displays hostility towards Mrs. Turpin. She sits seething while the older woman expounds a corrupt, racist social philosophy, until finally the girl is driven to an explosive outburst and launches a violent physical attack against her. After Mary Grace has been restrained,

Mrs. Turpin approaches her only to have the girl pierce her mantle of self-righteousness by hurling the accusation at her that she is a wart hog who belongs in hell. This condemnation later causes Mrs. Turpin to experience a powerful religious vision in which she is forced to confront the shattering knowledge that salvation is in no way assured for her and indeed may not even be probable. In this vision Mrs. Turpin observes a huge company of souls marching upwards, through a field of fire towards heaven, but, contrary to her every expectation, the blacks and the white trash are in the forefront while she occupies the place at the very end. This compelling vision demonstrates that the rising power of the Negro race has not only equalled that of the whites, but has surpassed them, as should rightfully be the case, in keeping with the Christian tenet that states "The last shall be first." The order of the participants also bears out Chardin's prediction that racial divisions are self-defeating, since the continued isolationist policies of reactionary white Southerners are here graphically shown to have resulted in the weakening of their social power, and, most importantly, to have impaired their moral fitness for redemption.

Also interesting from the point of view of Chardin's influence is the fact that the procession of souls shows the fate of members of all levels of society being decided upon in unison, and, significantly, Mrs. Turpin is not alone, but stands with all other reactionaries from her class. Unlike earlier works in which the spiritual scope was more limited, the final culminating revelation that is seen here does not just involve the redemption of one individual but is concerned with the salvation of the collective society. Greater optimism is expressed here for the salvation of the middle class than was offered for the upper class; Mrs. Turpin does not perish at the end of the story, as did the upper class antagonists, but instead we see her thoughts have remained directed towards the social and religious insight conveyed by the vision. Again

Miss O'Connor follows the dictum of Chardin, for if one previously damned individual is made eligible for grace, then the process can be repeated for other such sinners until all are reformed when, according to him, redemption will be possible for the whole of mankind.

An additional word might be mentioned regarding the character of Mary Grace, since she is obviously the key figure in a work that is most central to an understanding of Flannery O'Connor's doctrinal direction. I cannot help but believe that the girl is meant to represent the author herself, and that it allows Miss O'Connor to make a direct intrusion into the story. No mention of this fact seems to come from any of the critics, but certain evidence does exist to lend support to this observation. The most prominent similarity between the author and her character is in name, with Flannery O'Connor also having the first name Mary, and this being the one by which she was called until the start of her writing career. The second point of comparison is their educational background; social science has been earlier identified in this thesis as the author's major interest at college, and particular mention is made in the story of Mary Grace having taken a course in this field. One might add that she is the only one of Miss O'Connor's intellectual characters who is not mocked by the author. Her taste of education has made her wise beyond her years, unlike that of all other such characters, among them Julian and Asbury, in whom it has produced nothing better than pompous fools. It is perhaps a small pique of vanity that Miss O'Connor would not wish to include herself in this latter category. Finally, a parallel might be drawn between the physical appearance of the two Marys, for it is clear that the author also perceived of herself as being unattractive. She was known to have produced unflattering drawings of herself during her stints as a cartoonist on various school papers, therefore, it is not implausible that she might also caricaturize herself in one

of her fictional works. The reason for this would most likely be to indicate that the strong influence of Chardin, observed in "Everything That Rises Must Converge" in 1961, was to be of a continuing importance in her fiction. Human Development, the title of the book which Mary Grace is seen reading, plainly suggests Chardin's influence, for it reflects his broad approach to the study of man that encompassed biological, spiritual, and moral observations. The choice of this particular title gives indication of the expansive development that was taking place in Miss O'Connor's own religious outlook as a result of her exposure to the work of Chardin. She had often spoken in lectures and essays of the difficulty in communicating one's views to the reader; so no better opportunity could have existed to clearly stress her commitment to Chardinian union than to express it directly through a fictional extension of her own personality.

FOOTNOTES

[1]The dates of publication and the titles of these other articles are as follows:

4 February 1961. The Divine Milieu, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

23 December 1961. Teilhard de Chardin, Oliver Rabut, O.P.

27 April 1963. Letters from a Traveller, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin.

[2]Giroux, Introduction to The Complete Stories, p. xv.

[3]Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, The Phenomenon of Man, trans. Bernard Wall, Fontana Books (London: William Collins Sons & Co. Ltd., 1959), p. 130.

[4]Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, The Future of Man, trans. Norman Denny, Fontana Books (London: William Collins Sons & Co. Ltd., 1964), p. 172.

CHAPTER IV

SUMMATION OF SOCIAL ADVANCEMENT FROM EARLY TO MATURE FICTION

Comparison Between "The Geranium" and "Judgement Day"

"Judgement Day," rounding out the doctrinal framework of the second collection, sustains the established pattern of introducing upwardly mobile blacks, with the example again being seen of their having attained a high economic and social standing within the white society. In questioning why this story, written in 1961 at the start of her period of social interest, would be chosen by the author to stand as her final statement on the subject, one possibility open to consideration is the fact that the advancement of the blacks that is shown here takes place on the very broadest geographical basis, being seen in both Northern and Southern locales, thereby indicating that racial enlightenment is a spreading force throughout all areas of the United States. Also to be considered is the outstanding degree of realization of Chardinian ideas that is reached in this particular effort. He had given clear indication of the urgency of instituting racial reform in society to ensure the chance for salvation, and, in working towards this end in her own fiction, her strongest case is presented in this story, as is expressed by the title itself which serves notice that the moment of final social and religious reckoning has at last arrived.

Similarity in Thematic Structure of Both Stories

As has been previously noted, "Judgement Day" is a revised version of one of the early thesis stories "The Geranium" which, as one of the purely social stories from the earliest phase of O'Connor's career, easily lends itself to expressing the renewed interest in this field that came to occupy her work in the 1960's. The author retains an older lower class white as the main character; Old Dudley in "The Geranium" becomes transformed into the personage of T.C. Tanner in "Judgement Day." He, too, experiences severe cultural shock when he leaves his rural home region in order to seek lodging with a more affluent relative in New York City and likewise finds himself confronted by the unfamiliar equality of Northern Negroes. A loss of former power occurs on a dual level in each work: first, within the restricted sphere of individual family life where these men are now seen to be dependent for survival upon their children; and secondly, on a much broader social expanse that shows them to have slipped drastically in their own estimation because they are no longer dominant over Negroes. Older members of the lower class are shown to be as reactionary in their views as those of all ages from the upper class and prove themselves to be doubtlessly more inflexible than middle class citizens. Since their standing on the social scale is only marginally above that of Negroes, in order for them to preserve even a slight advantage, they cannot allow for any change in their conception of the subservient role of blacks in society. Younger lower class whites are, however, inclined to display a greater open-mindedness regarding racial tolerance, since by gravitating towards the wealthier liberal areas of the country and assimilating the prevailing views of the populace there, they are able to improve their situation, as is evidenced with the material gains made in New York by the daughters of these men. However, it must be added that they are severely rebuked by their respective fathers, who do not equate social prestige with one's

financial state.

Significant Social Elements in "The Geranium"

Lingering Reactionary Southern Resistance to Social Change

The thesis work opens with Old Dudley already residing in New York and offers only a brief account of the reason behind his move, relating it to an appealing cinematic portrayal of life in the city, an image that spawned in him the desire to be an inhabitant of such an important place, as if the outstanding reputation of the place itself might in some way, add to his own prominence. Despite Dudley's expectations of fascinating urban sights, the focus of his attention is directed towards the opposite ledge of a neighboring apartment building on which sits a poorly kept geranium plant that becomes the story's unifying symbol of social disruption. Constant comparison is made by Dudley between this pallid city geranium and the more robust specimens he remembers from the South, whose thriving health he attributes to the care given them by a hired Negro couple, Lutish and Rabie, employed at the boarding house where he was a former resident. Although Dudley's admiration for the extensive knowledge of nature displayed by the blacks seems genuine, and while the white New York neighbors obviously do not know much about plant care, one wonders whether his extreme anger at their failure to make the plant thrive might not be provoked by the feeling that such a task as tending plants is the rightful work of blacks and can therefore never be successfully handled by the whites, since to do so represents an aberration of the proper social scheme. Also highlighting the old man's inability to tolerate any sort of break in established order is the unwarranted agitation which he summons up over the inconsequential matter of the plant not being placed in view by half past ten of a morning in keeping with the normal routine. His concern with rigid social stratification is even more clearly reflected by his distaste for the modern

one-level layout found in apartment housing and his preference instead for the upper and lower arrangement of levels in the Southern boarding house, which, we might add, places sufficient distance between his refined white companions on the upstairs floors and the Negroes residing in the basement.

Owing to Dudley's professed friendship with Rabie, one might tend to classify him mistakenly as a progressive Southerner, but upon closer examination of their relationship, it can be seen to serve merely as a deceptive cover for the innate bigotry of the white man. All of his communication with the Negro is in strict conformance with the Southern code of white supremacy and black servitude; accordingly, he does not miss Rabie's companionship in the city but only regrets no longer having a compliant body to run errands for him. Also, he reminisces about Lutish's fondness for the sash on her maid's uniform and considers this liking to be common to most "niggers," again confirming his belief that they are fit only for servile duties. Further, when it is proven that Lutish does not require real prescription lenses to aid her vision, he mocks her defiant purchase of dime store glasses to wear for weekend occasions and concludes that her action is an indication of the mental inferiority of the entire Negro race.

The character of Lutish does not make a direct appearance in the story, but that of Rabie is introduced by means of several flashbacks in which he stands out as one of the most submissive Negroes seen throughout all of Flannery O'Connor's fiction. Not only does he accept without hesitation his lowly status, but in effect, contributes greatly to its continuance, for even though he is not in Dudley's special employ, he still refers to this white man as "boss" and addresses him with the respectful term "suh." Rabie remains in constant awe of what, to him, is the seemingly endless knowledge of the old man, and worthy of special note is the mention that the Negro is fascinated, in particular, by the white man's skill in the operation and handling of guns. The gun is used by Dudley to ensure a position

of supremacy for himself, mainly in terms of his role as the protector of the female residents at the boarding house. However, not to be ignored is the connotation that the gun also functions as a tool of racial repression, for although he does not overtly threaten Rabie with it, the gun nonetheless contributes greatly to the mystique of power that he exerts over the Negro.

Northern Negroes are shown however, to differ from their Southern counterparts, having risen economically to the level of the middle classes, and hence having become accepted as social equals to the whites, a fact initially impressed upon Dudley with his maiden excursion on the subway where he finds to his immense horror "black and white and yellow all mixed up like vegetables in a soup" (O'Connor, "The Geranium," p. 7). Significant is the fact that this racial confusion is seen occurring at the lowest city level in a cave-like atmosphere, which corroborates his feeling that such association signifies immediate social decline. More relevant perhaps to the overall social development in Miss O'Connor's work is the fact that she emphasizes that Dudley is too slow to cope with the rapid movement in the city and becomes ill therefore requiring that he be assisted home by his daughter. This not only indicates his failure at dealing with the transit system, but as well serves notice of the weakening strength of reactionary figures in the face of enlightened racial mores flourishing in New York. We might note here the author's early instinctive demonstration of Chardinian principle, for in a similar fashion to the action of his particles of matter that fuse due to constant compression, greater union between the races is first introduced in her work in a heavily populated urban area where the restrictions of space likewise dictate human convergence.

Disdaining to be an active participant in such an open system, Dudley refuses to venture outside of his own building, preferring instead to sit by the window and observe the daily

treatment of the geranium. The geranium, in all its aspects, represents for him the old dignified Southern order, from the very color of the plant, which is said to match the drapes in the formal parlor of the boarding house, to its paper bow that reminds him of Lutish's Sunday uniform sash. Its association with the South is further strengthened, since we are told that to Dudley's eye it does not resemble a flower but is rather more reminiscent to him of a sickly youth from his local region. A correlation exists in his mind between the sickness of the plant and the evident sickness he perceives existing in a society that allows for such free association between the races; however, for the author's purpose, the rapidly waning geranium emphasizes the debilitating results of Southern intolerance, and it serves as a parallel to the inability of Dudley's transplanted racial divisions to survive in the liberal climate of the North.

Social Significance of the Benign Negro Neighbor

The rapid breakdown of arbitrary social barriers is, above all, illustrated in the story when a Negro neighbor assumes occupancy of the adjacent apartment. That he is a bona fide member of the middle class is shown by his manner of daily dress, which sees him sporting a tie, white collar, and sharp-toed shiny shoes, an outfit reserved by Southern Negroes for weekends only, as their jobs require the wearing either of a uniform or suitable clothing for manual labor. The presence of a black inhabitant in the apartment building not only stresses the already appreciable economic advancement made by Negroes, since they are able to afford the substantial rental cost for such accommodation, but, as well, testifies to their new degree of social autonomy, as is evidenced by the absence of legislative prejudice through housing segregation laws which are obviously not applicable in New York. Curiously, the detail about the Negro neighbor that stands out most in Dudley's mind is the sight of the man's socks, described as being grey with a black fleck in them.

Undoubtedly, it is an unusual focus of attention, likely arising from the mixing of the two colors black and white to produce the variant shade of grey which may symbolize the merging of the races, an occurrence so despised by Dudley, but nevertheless characteristic of modern society wherein the identifiable role of each racial group is no longer distinctly exclusive. Regarding the significance for Dudley of the black flecks in the socks, a trivial detail, yet one which arouses great antagonism within him, such variations stand out noticeably against the background, much in the way that he finds Northern Negroes occupying a more obtrusive presence in the white society than those residing in the South.

All that is socially correct, both in terms of genteel manners and strict racial classification, is embodied for him in the South, as opposed to the social chaos of the North, where such proprieties are alien, as "Yankees let niggers in their front doors and let them sit on their sofas" (O'Connor, "The Geranium," p. 9). Considering himself and his daughter to be above this type of moral corruption, he reminds her of her very correct upbringing in such a way as to reaffirm staunchly his inflexible segregationist outlook: "You ain't been raised to live tight with niggers that think they're just as good as you . . . he didn't know his own daughter that was raised proper would stay next door to them—and then think he didn't have no more sense than to want to mix with them. Him!" (O'Connor, "The Geranium," p. 9). However, highlighting the futility of his efforts to preserve the familiar antiquated social structure is his first face-to-face encounter with the Negro neighbor, who, surprising Dudley in the stairwell, comes upon him holding an imaginary gun and harking back in a daydream to his experience with Rabie.

All aspects of their encounter point to the realignment in power taking place between the races of the present generation, and, as is shown with Dudley, in some cases it is not merely an equalization process but instead a complete reversal from the former scheme. An immediate reduction in his concept

of supremacy is brought about as the Negro, in his initial address, refers to him as "old-timer," a reference obviously limited by the speaker to Dudley's chronological age but one that in the context of the story is also applicable to his outmoded ideas. Indicative of the weakening physical strength of the old man, as well as his concomitant decline in social power, is the fact that the confrontation immediately reduces him to a dependent child-like state, and the imaginary gun that was a symbol of his former prowess shrinks in his estimation in both size and efficacy to become a harmless toy pop-pistol. Further lessening of the old man's power results when the Negro expresses an interest in guns, as did Rabie; however, since the Northerner is himself educated, unlike the Southern Negro, he does not approach Dudley with awe but instead participates actively in the conversation and indeed displays a far more extensive knowledge of the subject than the white man.

The Negro neighbor is a non-aggressive personage who condemns the principle of violence by announcing his general dislike for "any kind of killing" and voicing specific disapproval of Dudley's favorite pastime of hunting. Since his objection to the second instance is based on the concept of game conservation, often regarded as a concern of the intelligentsia of the population, his emergence as a perceptive erudite citizen is thereby strengthened. Thus by contrast, he makes the white character appear barbaric and totally insensitive to the broader effects of his actions, with regard not only to his hunting, but also, one would presume, to his racial prejudices, therefore allowing for the Negro to emerge as being by far the more enlightened individual on all counts. Seeming content with the accompanying lifestyle of his present rank, he does not demonstrate the desire to engage in conflict with whites to better his social position, nor, being completely secure within it, does he feel the need for violence in order to maintain this status. Having no fear of white repression, he is fully at

ease with members of the other race and displays a willingness to befriend them, as is shown by his sympathetic overtures to Dudley.

Given the author's scrupulous attention to pertinent detail, it is not improbable to assume that the stairwell setting has been specifically chosen to relate to the continuing theme of social mobility, for the actual movement of the characters in this scene mirrors exactly their altered social positions in the story. Certain Negroes are obviously rising in status, while reactionary whites, like Dudley, are dropping in prestige; correspondingly, at the time of their encounter the Negro neighbor is seen climbing up the stairs towards Dudley until he reaches the same level as him, whereupon the white man slips falling down several steps. Recognizing the old man's frailty, the Negro kindly offers to assist him up the rest of the stairs and, taking a firm grip on his arm, ushers him along, much to the chagrin of Dudley who is appalled at the thought of appearing to be reliant upon a "nigger." The sight of the two individuals, one black and the other white, with their arms locked together points towards the later emphasis to be given to the necessary benefits of a merger between the races, and, again, it is expressed prior to the period of Chardinian influence, almost as if in anticipation of his schematic system of convergence.

Retreat From Full Approval of Social Upheaval

The conclusion of the story shows the author bringing Dudley to a full and most painful awareness of his lowered status, for, in recalling the incident with the black neighbor, he observes that "the steps dropped down like a deep wound in the floor. They opened up through a gap like a cavern and went down and down. And he had gone up them a little behind the nigger" (O'Connor, "The Geranium," p. 4). Accentuating the undeniable fact of social change, and further stressing the

loss of power of elderly Southerners, the word "pop" is once more included by the author as a demeaning taunt delivered to the old man by the angry owner of the geranium, who resents Dudley's spying upon it; as well, it is again mentioned as an actual physical sensation experienced by him as his throat feels about "to pop on account of a nigger" (O'Connor, "The Geranium," p. 14). Both the sound and the image associated with the word "pop" suggest the bursting of Dudley's social fantasies, a reality that is subsequently further impressed upon him with the destruction of the geranium, so symbolic to him of Southern values, as it plummets from the upper story window ledge and smashes down into the alley. The view that meets his eye of the overturned plant, resting with its roots in the air, represents a reversal of the natural order that is akin to the social upheaval which Dudley finds existing in the city. However, in spite of his announced intentions to rescue the overturned plant, not wanting to risk further contact with the Negro neighbor or with any other middle class black, he makes no motion to restore the geranium to its former condition, thus indicating that social progress will therefore remain constant without any serious opposition from reactionary figures.

Notwithstanding the author's responsible recording of Northern racial advancement, it must be considered doubtful that she was entirely sympathetic towards the final resolution which sees the crushing defeat of the champion of the Southern cause, for, as has been stated earlier, although he is made aware of the reality of the situation, he is permitted to reject acceptance of it without suffering any consequences. Extensive social examination surprisingly disappears from her work after this singular probing at the outset of her thesis works, but the intensity of her presentation leads one to wonder whether the cryptic concluding line of the story that reads, "I only tell people once," and is delivered by the

white neighbor, does not possibly serve as Miss O'Connor's indication that she had given her all in this one outing and was about to retreat in the immediate future from such sensitive concerns.

Examination in "Judgement Day" of the Changing Southern Social Order

Growing Reversal in Power Between Southern Blacks and Whites

The progressive social growth made by Flannery O'Connor from the time of "The Geranium" to the publication in 1964 of "Judgement Day" is readily apparent as the central reactionary figure, T.C. Tanner, is shown to be in a much more debilitated state than even Old Dudley. Having suffered from a stroke, he lacks control of his physical movements, making him totally dependent upon the care of his daughter, a decline paralleled by his loss of economic autonomy due to the political and social evolution of the South. Tanner, in contrast to Dudley, does not move to the city willingly but is forced to go when the land upon which he has lived rent free for numerous years is purchased by a wealthy Negro. Being given the alternative to stay, if he agrees to continue the operation of his illegal liquor still on behalf of the new owner, Tanner instead chooses exile, rather than condescend to work for a Negro, and, in an ironic historical reversal, it is the white man who must escape to the North in order to avoid bondage to a black employer.

Doctor Foley, the purchaser of Tanner's land, typifies the more recent generation of aggressive Southern Negroes who have come, like the Northern Negroes, to base their rank in society upon monetary considerations. Sporting a gold watch and chain as a visible emblem of his wealth, he shows open disdain for less financially successful whites, whom he predicts will occupy a reduced role in the framework of the new Southern social order. Glancing at his watch to punctuate his remarks, Foley emphasizes the expiration of time for the reign of white

supremacy as follows:

> "The day coming," the doctor said, "when the white folk IS going to be working for the colored and you [Tanner] mights do well to git ahead of the crowd."
> "That day ain't coming for me," Tanner said shortly.
> "Done come for you," the doctor said. "Ain't come for the rest of them." (O'Connor, "Judgement Day," p. 215)

The author acknowledges that the end of white dominance is inevitable, but through the doctor's final remarks, she does not admit to a complete changeover having as yet taken place; however, she uses Tanner as an example of the inevitable decline that lies ahead for all reactionary white powermongers.

Foley is portrayed as a leader of sorts among the local blacks, who depend upon him for a variety of services, ranging from the legitimate skills of druggistry and real estate management down the scale to the occult art of the casting and removal of spells; therefore, he combines within his personality both the past black heritage of primitive African origin and the future trend of economic development that leads toward ever increasing business orientation. The fact that he is a doctor might suggest that he is bringing about a sociological cure within his Southern community or, at the very least, arresting as best he can the disease of discrimination. In accordance with Chardin's projection of the amalgamation of all the races, Foley's ancestry is not limited to the Negro race but is said to encompass both Indian and white extraction, thereby representing the three major American racial groups that must each come to terms with the expectations of the others if the democratic form of society is to succeed. While only a minor alteration in her general pattern of presenting pure-blooded Negroes, it is yet a significant change that may reflect her knowledge of Chardin's strong views on the subject. However, despite her illustration of Chardinian precepts, wholehearted approval of the mixing of the races does not seem to be forthcoming from Miss O'Connor, since Foley's interracial background is treated more as a matter for scorn, rather than

being regarded as an admirable quality, thus providing a puzzling point of discrepancy that will later be more fully examined in our final assessment of her agreement with the French philosopher.

The character of Rabie is replaced in this revised version by Coleman, a figure of similarly low rank, whose name appropriately underlines the fact of his color. Whereas in the thesis work Rabie has a fixed place of residence and a secure job in the employ of whites, Coleman appears first on the scene as an unemployed itinerant bent on disrupting Tanner's group of black laborers. Since he manages for a time to muster defiance against the white boss, Coleman emerges as being more aggressive than Rabie, and, although he eventually accedes to the dominance of Tanner, it must be remarked that he seemingly does so, not out of fear, but rather as a decision of free choice, thus showing some advancement here even for poorly educated blacks who must still rely to a certain extent on white support.

Unlike Dudley, who did not exert real power over any blacks with the possible exception of Rabie, Tanner is a labor foreman in charge of Negro workers at a sawmill. He does not require a gun to gain the respect of the Negroes but instead maintains his advantage through the less powerful means of a penknife; however, he uses his weapon in a more aggressive fashion than Dudley by openly threatening the black workers with it to ensure their obedience to his commands. Of special interest is the mention that Tanner originally began carrying the knife to practice the art of whittling as a means of concealing from the Negroes his recurring arm tremors, the result of a kidney ailment— a debilitating affliction that again points to the weakening condition of whites in the Southern structure.

Social Ramifications of Federal Government Intervention in Southern Racial Policy

Worthy of note are the special efforts made by the author to clarify that Tanner is not by nature a blood thirsty individual but, rather, one who would never go so far as actually to kill a Negro for fear of being consigned to hell, in accordance with his deep religious convictions. Strongly intimated is the fact that he has been forced into such a show of agression due, mainly, to the liberal attitude of the federal government, which has encouraged modern Negroes to shirk their labor duties. This stance, in the opinion of white Southerners such as Tanner, has caused much harsher methods to be applied to satisfy Negro work quotas, in contrast with the domination by mental skills alone that successfully ensured productivity in the past.

The role of the government in promoting social upheaval occupies more prominence here than was apparent in any other of her works, reflecting the spreading local effect of the civil rights measures that had been put into effect in the 1950's. With the strong federal integration stand taken in the Little Rock, Arkansas, education confrontation in 1957, Southern officials came to realize that only by closing the school systems could they defy federal authority, a move that would seriously threaten Southern institutions and weaken the whole structure of society.[1] A more liberal turn of events thus came into being, which, while beginning with the federal push for integration of the schools, soon spread to other sectors of society as blacks themselves took the initiative and pressed for the desegratation of public transportation and eating establishments.

The close of the 1950's decade therefore saw the decline of massive official resistance, with even such reactionary leaders as Georgia Governor Talmadge voicing in 1959 the opinion that the Supreme Court school integration ruling "might have to be recognized as a legitimate expression of the nation's highest

court."[2] By September, 1961 Atlanta schools were desegregated without major incident thus paving the way for the spread of open school systems in other Georgia cities.[3] Whatever defiance could still be mustered against social change was, from this time on, left to the personal domain of private white citizens, as we see demonstrated in this O'Connor story.

While the history of the South's political conflict is not directly referred to by the author, either in this story or throughout her work, the resentment of many Southerners towards external intervention is nevertheless conveyed by Tanner as he pinpoints the government as being a major cause of his own disadvantage in dealing with Foley: ". . . you ain't got a thing to hold up to him but the skin you come in, and that's no more use to you now than what a snake would shed. You don't have a chance with the government against you" (O'Connor, "Judgement Day," p. 211). Corroborating this low opinion of legislative meddling, even Foley himself affords that he is in agreement with Tanner on this matter, since he expresses a similar dislike for the unwanted intrusion of officialdom by boldly stating, "I don't like the governmint [sic] no bettern you" (O'Connor, "Judgement Day," p. 215). Such legislative harrassment, so despised by Southerners of both races, resulted from the increasing political pressure placed upon the federal government by Northern representatives, who viewed the reform of Southern society as proceeding at too slow a pace for their liking. Reflecting this trend, open hostility between the races is not shown occurring here in the South, but, rather, is placed in the Northern setting from whence sprang in the view of Southerners the root cause of their racial problems of the late 1950's and early 1960's.

Hostile Upwardly Mobile Northern Negro Neighbors

Racial conflict is thus found erupting in the story between Tanner and his Northern Negro neighbor, a far more outspoken type of individual than the one presented in "The Geranium." As opposed to Dudley's distaste for the idea of a Negro neighbor, Tanner views the prospect with great hilarity, considering it to be justly ironical that his daughter, who so scorned his close living arrangement with Coleman, should now find herself residing in such close proximity with blacks. However, beneath this superficial difference lies the same prejudiced desire to regard the situation solely in a reactionary light, with the Northern Negro again being regarded as a surrogate to take the place of the white man's former subservient Southern Negro companion. Unlike the thesis story, wherein the black neighbor is the one who is rebuffed in his attempts to befriend the white character, Negroes are now shown to be the ones disdaining racial contact. The later neighbor shows no desire to fraternize with Tanner and ignores the old man's innocuous attempts to initiate conversation, responding only in anger when he is addressed by the demeaning title of "Preacher." Being in the mould of such forthright blacks as the mother in the collection's title work, he is another who vents hostility against antagonistic whites through direct physical attack. So when verbal denials do not dissuade Tanner from continuing to use this derogatory form of reference in subsequent encounters, the Negro finally reacts with a violent assault that sends the old man reeling into his apartment. Shaken by such an uncharacteristic outburst on the part of a Negro individual, Tanner resolves to return to the familiar social milieu of the South, where, in his opinion, the races are better able to communicate with each other.

As was the case in "The Geranium," the Negro takes occupancy of the adjacent apartment following the departure of the previous white tenants, thus signifying the increasing

displacement of whites by upwardly mobile blacks. Detailing that this is a relatively recent occurrence, the Negro's furniture is described as being both new and cheap, not only stressing the rapidity of the rise in social position made by certain black citizens, but, in addition, suggesting through the reference to the inferior quality of their goods that this advancement is based only on a shallow materialistic display, thereby casting aspersions on the legitimacy of their claim to a more elevated rank. Pretense is closely associated with the Northern Negroes introduced in the story, being seen in the Negro neighbor himself as well as being readily displayed by his female companion. She is a young "tan-skinned" woman with bright copper-hued hair, possibly the product of racially mixed parentage, but no confirmation of this fact is provided by the author; however, as was the case with Foley, any hint of an impure genetic background draws a negative reaction from the author. If not a mulatto, this woman is at the very least one who has altered her appearance seemingly to downplay her Negroid characteristics, for her hair is not the normal black color and her greatest concern during the move is for the safety of her make-up. Further, in reference to the possible phoniness of even her upward economic and social climb, she is shown to be strutting about in very dressy shoes with high heels that are covered by a garish artificial gold paint. Continuing through with the development of this motif of deceit, the profession of the Northern male Negro is revealed to be that of an actor, implying to the reader that he is one who is perhaps also posing as well in his private life where neither his methods of advancement nor his supposed level of attainment reflect the true reality of black accomplishment and aspirations.

Together both Northern Negroes emerge as being morally corrupt, with the image of promiscuity being promoted through the woman's bold manner and sensual apparel, as was the case in "The Artificial Nigger." While the exact nature of the

relationship that exists between the two is never specified, one is led to believe that they are not married; however, in any event, their indiscreet sexual teasing in the apartment hallway brands them as being of low breeding. The male, in particular, is portrayed as a most evil character, being described as wearing "horn-rimmed" spectacles and a decorative "goatee," suggesting perhaps the image of the lascivious goat-like satyr. This is in keeping with the sexual overtones associated with this pair or more significantly identifies him as a Satanic influence, for it would seem, according to the author, that it is characters such as he who are responsible for the corruption of modern society.

Evaluation of the Differing Northern and Southern Approaches to Racial Union

The contemptuous portrait drawn by the author of Northern society and Northern Negroes would seem to indicate a renewed opposition to the concept of social advancement, since those negroes who have made the greatest rise are also presented in the most negative light. Such a paradox is all the more unsettling coming as it does in one of her final works, and, most particularly, being seen in the representative example chosen by her to be the concluding statement for the entire collection of later stories. One significant alteration from "The Geranium," which supports her reluctance to advocate full scale social reform, is the more rigid racial stance that characterizes the outlook of the daughter in this subsequent version of the story. In contrast to the readiness of Dudley's daughter to embrace the Northern social reforms and to mock in turn her father's traditionalism, Tanner's off-spring on occasion defends his racist attitudes and disputes openly with the contemptuous liberal sentiments of her "Yankee" husband, thereby reinforcing the author's opinion of the unsavoriness of the social currents emanating from the North and showing renewed respect for the Southern social system that was absent in "The Geranium." However, even the daughter's

particular expression of Southern loyalties is not looked upon as a totally satisfactory response, for she emerges as more of a bigot than Tanner, being unable to tolerate his close contact with his Southern Negro companion Coleman. It is the character of Coleman that provides the eventual key to an accurate summation of Flannery O'Connor's ultimate social vision, making it necessary to examine at further length the bond that develops in the Southern environment between him and Tanner, for it constitutes a tremendous extension beyond the racial contact demonstrated in other works. Notwithstanding the fact that the friendship is still based on the foundation of white supremacy, it does nevertheless attain an important spiritual depth previously unseen in her writing.

Worthy of mention is the fact that all overtones of violence are spurned by both men in their first encounter at the sawmill, a meeting that is clearly orchestrated, not by the human will, but by a far greater power which overrules, in this instance, the normal behavioral patterns to which both characters would be accustomed to conforming. Tanner therefore wields his penknife, not as a threatening weapon to bring about the added submission of this Negro as he has done with all the other black workers, but under the sole direction of an "intruding intelligence," he uses the knife as a tool to carve a pair of wooden spectacles which he offers to Coleman in an unprecedented gesture of friendship towards one of his race. Coleman, for his part, overlooks the opportunity that is presented him to overpower the foreman when, significantly, the pleasure of retaliation against the white boss is displaced by a more intense external motivation that causes him to accept the glasses readily. Following Tanner's instructions, Coleman puts on the glasses, ostensibly to better his own sight, but in actual fact it is the white man's spiritual vision that is improved, for he becomes aware of the common human link that exists between him and the Negro, when for a brief second the

black man appears to be "a negative image of himself as if clownishness and captivity had been their common lot" (O'Connor, "Judgement Day," p. 214). While wearing the spectacles Coleman also seems momentarily oblivious to racial differences, for when he is questioned on what he sees through them he identifies Tanner by using the most fundamentally equal term "a man," and it is only through continued prodding that he is again brought to realize that the "man" is white and therefore deserving of added respect in the Southern social context.

The composition of the spectacles themselves points to certain negative aspects felt by the author to be characteristic of the newly evolving Southern society. The bark from which they are fashioned reflects the sharp manner in which Tanner has come to address Negroes in order to continue to hold the upper hand, an advantage which had formerly been maintained through a more compassionate paternal approach. Such a debasement of human interaction, showing a regression to an animalistic level, is attributed to the social void that results from the modern shift to monetary values, an emphasis demonstrated by the "two holes the size of half dollars" that Tanner carves into the bark. As a final appropriate touch, he attaches earbows formed from scraps of "haywire" which, considering the ironic tone that is so much a part of the author's style, must be viewed as a critical assessment by traditionalists such as Tanner of the chaotic result of the changes that confront them. The glasses, however, enable both Tanner and Coleman to see beyond the current social situation and to restore in their own lives the old order which they now recogize as being more desirable. Coleman, for example, backs down from his defiant stand and accepts the domination of the white man while Tanner, having regained his authority, forms an association with the black man that is far removed from the limited work relationship that characterizes his general dealings with the black race during his period of employment at the sawmill. Implied by the author is the belief that Coleman had no permanent place in society because he dared

to defy white authority, but in accepting that dispensed by Tanner the situation is rectified, for he attaches himself to the foreman with whom he comes to live for many years in a type of close-knit familial arrangement that sees each one being responsible for the other's welfare.

Both men are deeply moved during this incident by a force beyond their personal comprehension, but one that can be identified, taking into account the author's Catholic influences, as the manifestation of the divine presence of God as He works upon the human will to bring about a resurgence of the Christian Communion of Saints, which focuses on the unification of all men as they struggle in a spirit of universal brotherhood to overcome their common "human imperfection" and to come to terms with their essentially "grotesque" situation. Tanner's revelatory vision, emanating from a divine origin, comes closer to the type of ideal union favored by Chardin than the relationship that exists between Dudley and the Negro Rabie in the early thesis effort, or for that matter, in any other interracial contact displayed in her subsequent writing. The full significance of the Southern Negro's name supports this claim, for coal is the product of a long-term process of natural crystallization, just as a character like Coleman is derived from a lengthy historical line of black Americans. The author states that, although the other Negro mill workers claim no knowledge of a previous acquaintance with him, he is nevertheless related to all of them, not necessarily in a family sense, but on more common human grounds; therefore, in effect, he serves as a kind of "everyman" or universal representative of the evolving Southern black populace. Given the broad social import of such a one as Coleman, the meaningful spiritual union that is achieved between him and Tanner brooks future optimism for a more widely spread coming together of the races, and one, which she obviously feels, can be achieved within the basic Southern social framework.

By contrast, the Negro actor is portrayed as the exact opposite of the Southern black, a difference that is stressed near the story's end by his reaction to Tanner's delirious call for Coleman, his original companion, which initiates from the Northerner the following mistaken response: "Ain't any coal man, either" (O'Connor, "Judgement Day," p. 223). Granted that through this terse denial he does rightfully reject the unsavory element of Southern history which saw the utilization of blacks as a cheap labor resource; however, by denying all connection with his lowly racial ancestors, such as those represented by Coleman, he completely cuts himself off from the ever-continuing positive train of natural racial evolution. He is, as a result, shown to be a less desirable example for social conduct that Coleman himself. Perhaps of even greater significance is the Northern Negro's expression of atheism and his condemnation of Christianity as being nothing more than "crap," for even if one were to make allowance for his misguided secular attitude, his rejection of all religious values so decisively conflicts with Chardinian principle that he can under no circumstances be considered as a suitable exponent of a proper method of social change. Social action that is devoid of divine guidance cannot, in the opinion of either Chardin or Miss O'Connor, lead to any ultimate spiritual transcendence of a harmoniously unified mankind.

Tanner's feeling of racial union is, however, very fleeting, for his vision is said to fail him before he is able to decipher it; therefore no lasting change in his attitude towards blacks is evident. Yet regardless of the lack of immediate transformation of the white character, the fact cannot be ignored that this compelling scene serves as a model for future Southern social direction by conforming to the plan for convergence specified by Chardin who stresses that, above all other considerations, the union of mankind must be directed by a divine source. Further illustrating the measure of Chardinian influence on the author's later doctrinal development, wherein

spiritual belief and social outlook receive equal emphasis as complementary elements in human progression, Tanner is severely punished for his unrelenting bigotry, unlike Dudley who is allowed to refuse acceptance of social change without sanction in "The Geranium." While the thesis story concludes with the old man refusing to venture down the steeply declining stairwell, for fear of losing even more prestige by further contact with socially advancing Negroes, and choosing instead to remain a prisoner of the upper floor, the revised version continues to show Tanner attempting to negotiate an escape by way of the stairs, with the worst expectations of Dudley here being confirmed as the weakened man "pitches forward," coming to rest "upside down in the middle of the flight" where he is found by the two Northern Negro neighbors. The social implications of the final mid-point landing spot and the topsy-turvy pose of Tanner, who is shown lying in a heap with the Negroes looming over him, suggests again the total reversal that has taken place among the black and white middle classes; on the other hand, the forward motion of the fall, alluded to more than once by the author in her description of the incident, stresses that this reversal is ultimately regarded by her to represent a beneficial progressive alteration.

An interesting aspect of this social movement is that, since one group is going up while the other is at the same time going down, there must be a meeting point during this transition where both races are equal in rank. It is, above all, this sense of equality which Tanner and others of his class fear more than anything else, for the only genuine shame which this character exhibits is when his daughter reminds him that although she may only be a descendant of "plain people," she is nonetheless by rights not the kind to "settle in with niggers" as he has done. Attempting to justify his allowance of a blurring of the segregationist barriers with regard to Coleman, Tanner discredits the positive racial merger that has been attained between them by downgrading the black man's role

to that of a servant who performs only the most distasteful menial tasks for his white master. Furthermore, despite the fact that Coleman is reputedly a paroled criminal, in Tanner's view he is not a "bad nigger," which is to say, one who would harbor any hope of advancing. Although Tanner, of all Southerners portrayed in Flannery O'Connor's fiction, shows the greatest potential for achieving an ideal state of union, as we have seen, the interference of the human will, which gives paramount importance to personal prestige, blocks his ultimate acceptance of the principle of convergence.

Sanctioning of a Simultaneous Social and Spiritual Union

"Judgement Day," as has been underscored, marks the final stage in Miss O'Connor's doctrinal development wherein spiritual belief and social direction come to receive equal emphasis under the guidance of Chardinian philosophy, so that, in addition to the secular implications of Tanner's fall, the action must also be examined in a spiritual context. His physical tumble down the staircase strikes a parallel with Adam's original fall from God's grace, since both incidents result from human pride making the individual disobedient to the divine will—Adam, by seeking knowledge not meant for man and Tanner, by looking to preserve intact a class system that in its most rigid traditional form prevents the fullest realization of human biological and spiritual affinity. We might look back briefly to another of the thesis stories "Wildcat," in which the similar technique of punishing pride by administering a physical fall is seen in connection with the person of Old Gabriel, as the author shows him crashing down from a ledge where he has attempted to raise himself up to avoid the ensuing danger of an approaching animal. Like the aging Tanner, he is another who assumes himself to be worthy of salvation, going so far as to envision his entrance into heaven where he imagines himself sitting "judging life" at the

side of the Lord. Since both men aspire to elevate themselves to a God-like level, Gabriel in attempting to rule nature by subduing the wildcat and Tanner in seeking control over other men, they are both guilty of the severest form of pride in which the human will endeavors to usurp the divine power of God, thus, in reality, severely limiting the probability of their salvation. Destruction of this false pride is a necessary step in the spiritual reform of each character, but, whereas in the earlier example it is seen solely as a closed struggle between the individual and God, here in "Judgement Day" it becomes expanded to involve a social class struggle in which the relationship of the individual to his fellow man becomes the determining factor affecting his future redemption. Significantly in this story O'Connor makes the first direct connection between pride and segregationist beliefs as the daughter articulates to her father that social obligation is the major motive that sustains her opposition to fraternizing with blacks: "If you don't have any pride I have and I know my duty and I was raised to do it. My mother raised me to do it if you didn't. She was from plain people but not the kind that likes to settle in with niggers" (O'Connor, "Judgement Day," p. 210). At this juncture in Flannery O'Connor's career such justification is no longer acceptable, for even pride that manifests itself under the guise of family honor and patriotic duty must be destroyed if individual and universal salvation are eventually to be attained.

Delirious from the effects of his landing jolt, Tanner slowly revives, thinking that he has successfully completed his journey back to the South. So upon hearing the footsteps of the approaching Negro neighbors, he weakly comes forth with a greeting for his fellow Southerners, "Judgement Day! Judgement Day! You idiots didn't know it was Judgement Day, did you?" (O'Connor, "Judgement Day," p. 223), words delivered only with comic intent yet which again reveal the spiritual overtones which come to dominate the author's conception of the story.

What emerges as the key phrase of the work relates to a dream previously experienced by Tanner in which returning home in a coffin after his death, he envisioned that upon arrival he would rise up once more alive supposedly as will the souls of the faithful on the Lord's Judgement Day. The coffin image reaffirms the author's support of Chardin, for it is consistent with the dire fate predicted by him for those who refuse to endorse actively the concept of convergence, and it seems to serve as her own warning of the projected demise of all reactionary Southerners. Unbeknownst to Tanner, he speaks the truth in announcing that the time for spiritual accountability has arrived, a fact furthermore clarified by the Northern Negro who sarcastically voices the spiritually loaded statement "maybe this here judgement day for you" (O'Connor, "Judgement Day," p. 223). The moment of reckoning that does, in fact, subsequently confront Tanner would seem to be the chance to gain a merciful reprieve by showing final acceptance of Chardinian precepts, for, in his altered state of consciousness, the two faces of the dark Negro and his lighter-skinned companion, corresponding perhaps to those of Coleman and Tanner in the original version, begin to waver before his eyes as if to merge again as had occurred before. Despite his weakness, by exerting an extreme "effort of will," Tanner is nonetheless able to keep the figures in separate focus, thereby rejecting his last opportunity to accept a union between the races and showing the human will refusing to bow to the demands of the divine will.

All movement on Tanner's part in this scene shows him engaged in a futile effort to lift himself upward again, as if in a last desperate attempt to regain his former elevated social status, from his futile grasp of the railing to the final command that he delivers to the Negro: "Hep me up, Preacher. I'm on my way home!" (O'Connor, "Judgement Day," p. 224). He extends his hand to the neighbor; however, he does so, not out of friendship, but in order that the neighbor may help raise him up. Such an

action shows that no appreciable change has modified his racial outlook, since he attempts to repeat the long engendered historical social pattern wherein white elevation has been dependent upon black support. The use of the word "preacher," while in a sense being applicable to the unintentional spiritual truth voiced by the black neighbor, is most likely introduced again as a derogatory term to further emphasize Tanner's continued downgrading of members of the Negro race, for its use at this point coincides with its previous application to Coleman, similarly at the exact moment when the earlier vision had failed him. As for the reference to his homeward journey, Tanner means foremost a physical return to his Southern environment, but on a spiritual level it also applies to his final return home to the side of God, an end which the old man feels certain of attaining, since he has conformed in all respects to the Southern social code and has, in his estimation, therefore already fulfilled the major criterion that will in his view make him eligible for salvation.

Tanner has previously defined Judgement Day in terms that highlight the idea of separation and, as well, fit in with the tradition of Southern elitism by referring to it as the time when "the sheep'll be separated from the goats. Them that kept their promises from them that didn't. Them that did the best they could with what they had from them that didn't. Them that honored their father and their mother from them that cursed them" (O'Connor, "Judgement Day," p. 216). Judgement to him is obviously closely allied to the matter of being faithful to one's heritage, and, in this case, involves allegiance to a rigid system of class stratification; however, as Chardin has made explicit in his writing and as Miss O'Connor attempts to repeat in her own work, one's chance for salvation cannot be gained through strict social division, but only by promoting greater association between all individuals, regardless of status or race. In refusing to acknowledge the future social movement towards integration that is implied by the vision, Tanner has not only spurned secular destiny, but has as well denied

the will of God that also moves the individual towards greater communion with his fellow man, a connection now recognized by the author after her exposure to Chardin, and one which demands that a swift verdict be rendered in the case of this later character.

Such a task is carried out by the Northern Negro who, finding himself provoked by the white man's final display of authoritarianism, shoves him between the rungs of the banister, thereby promoting the chastisement motif by giving him the appearance of a man who has been put in the stocks. Appropriately Tanner is sentenced for his racial sins by a surrogate representative of those whom he has wronged in the past; however, the wrath that descends upon him in the end is not limited only to the personal revenge extricated by the Negro neighbor for his social slighting, but, above all, it is the divine retribution of God which is made manifest through this black character. That the old man's punishment is directly related to his social transgressions is, accordingly, established by the fact that his dead body has to be cut from the railing with a saw, a choice of instrument which refers back to the sawmill incident from Tanner's past in which he struggled to perpetuate a class order of white rule long after its time had even then expired.

Affirmation of the Potential Spiritual Value Inherent in Traditional Southern Social Mores

Flannery O'Connor thus supports in her conclusion the need for social convergence; however, she obviously does not approve of the way it is being instituted in the North. While the Northern Negro is portrayed as an evil force whose means of racial advancement are not sanctioned by her, on the other hand, the reticent conduct of Coleman is not given full approval; yet she holds out more hope for a successful Chardinian union being reached through the Southern modus operandi, as its flaws are less serious in her opinion than those of the abrasive Northern society which she sees contributing in actual fact to

increased isolation of the races, rather than promoting convergence. That it was indeed her desired preference in the latter stage of her career to allow for an unimpeded natural evolution of the South is clearly stated in a personal interview published in June of 1963 in which she observes:

> The South has survived in the past because its manners, however lopsided or inadequate they may have been, provided enough social discipline to hold us together and give us an identity. Now those old manners are obsolete, but the new manners will have to be based on what was best in the old ones— in their real basis of charity and necessity. In practice, the Southerner seldom underestimates his own capacity for evil. For the rest of the country, the race problem is settled when the Negro has his rights, but for the Southerner, whether he's white or colored, that's only the beginning. The South has to evolve a way of life in which the two races can live together with mutual forbearance. You don't form a committee to do this or pass a resolution: both races have to work it out the hard way. In parts of the South these new manners are evolving in a very satisfactory way, but good manners seldom make the papers. (Interview with C. Ross Mullins, Jubilee, June 1963, quoted in Appendix to Mystery and Manners, p. 234)

Tanner's extraordinary reversal in form which sees him willing to serve as a "nigger's white nigger," in preference to his leisurely life in New York, finally can be seen as a last desperate attempt at retaining some semblance of the old order, for although in working for Foley the racial roles may be reversed, the symbiotic relationship between blacks and whites that lies at the very heart of the Southern system is still maintained. Thus Tanner comes to realize that such an existence is more faithful to his heritage than participation in a social system wherein the Northern Negroes have no use for him and in which therefore no possible relationship at all can exist with them. Since the reliance of each individual upon his fellow man forms the basis of the Chardinian outline of human development, the South, therefore to Miss O'Connor's thinking, has the potential structure to evolve so that while the existing society must be revamped, it should under no

circumstances be destroyed. Such a fact brings into clearer focus the story's brief epilogue which sees the daughter declining in health after laying Tanner's body to rest in New York, and only being restored upon his reburial in Corinth, Georgia, a somewhat cryptic conclusion but one that affords the author her own final word of affirmation in defense of the South. Of notable importance is her selection of a Southern city bearing a Greek name, perhaps an intended allusion to the great civilization founded by the ancients, who fashioned a society that also incorporated slavery into its structure but one which still proved of inestimable value to the advancement of man.

The seeming dualities that appear to arise in "Judgement Day" do not, then, imply a contradiction of Chardin, nor do they constitute a return to the vacillating approach to social issues that marked her earlier work; instead, they represent a most earnest attempt to interpret accurately the correct application of his ideas to society. Throughout his work Chardin stresses that the naturally slow pace of evolution, be it biological or social, must be followed without fail, even if the process at times seems to encompass an infinitely lengthy period. For him no rapid solution is foreseeable, for all outside efforts to accelerate social change lead eventually to coercion of the populace and spark the rampant spread of dictatorial ideologies such as fascism and communism which were a loathsome anathema to one so concerned with guiding the attention of man towards a divine ruler. Reflecting this concern, Miss O'Connor is of the opinion that the federal government intervention which inspired the course of violent action of Northern Negroes was artificially accelerating the process of Southern social development to such an extent that total destruction of the society, rather than integration, would be the end result.

Tanner's sin therefore lies not so much in his refusal to embrace the extreme liberal currents of the North, but in

his inability to accept any modification whatsoever in the Southern class order. Even the long-standing relationship between Coleman and Tanner, by mutual agreement an unequal partnership, finally proves no longer immune to changing social mores and is seen to undergo a natural process of social reversal without prompting from either party. Tanner recalls that Coleman in his youth looked like a bear, while he himself resembled a monkey; however, in their later years a change overtakes their roles as Coleman becomes more like a monkey while Tanner is transformed into the bear. The particular choice of animals, one noted for brute strength and the other considered to be highest in rank on the primate scale, illustrates through the transference of characteristics the increasing tendency of blacks to utilize their mental capabilities as a means of advancement, making whites such as Tanner dominate by force alone and thus sink to a lower position on the biological scale.

Relevant to the matter of Southern custom is the fact that neither Coleman nor Tanner welcome any variance in their status and try throughout the story to sustain their alloted racial positions, even when the partnership undergoes geographical separation. Coleman, for example, addressing Tanner in absentia in New York by way of postcard still refers to him in his messages as "boss," while Tanner, for his part, seeks to renounce the alien liberal policies of the North by imagining how he would explain the city to Coleman, were he with him, in terms that strongly convey to the Negro the more advantageous environment that is his in the South. Further illustrating his desire for a restoration of white power, Tanner makes certain that, even during his imagined tour with Coleman, proper racial convention is followed, with the Negro always remaining "behind" him and being treated like a small child who requires constant advice and supervision to ensure his safety. It is this inflexible resistance to change, demonstrated on the part of both

archetypal black and white Southerners, that Miss O'Connor condemns rather than the structure of society itself, which, as we have seen, still has considerable merit in her estimation.

Taking into account all aspects of this story and noting most particularly the renewed respect for the Southern social structure that was absent in "The Geranium," the thesis work seems not to have necessarily been inspired by a reformist zeal, but instead may have been motivated more by her uncompromising artistic integrity which led objective reality ultimately to overrule sentiment. Chardinian philosophy did, to a large extent, resolve the social dichotomy that had been present from the outset of her career; however, while the intellectual resolution may have been immediate, total emotional acceptance was less easily arrived at for O'Connor.

Final Social View

With the publication of Flannery O'Connor's last stories evidence is apparent of the dramatic reversal in social outlook that characterized her career. While the attempt has been made to demonstrate a parallel between her changing personal attitude and the corresponding development that took place, not only in American Catholic social thought, but, as well, in the more amenable political stance adopted during this same period by the Southern states, greatest emphasis must still be placed on the influencing force of the work of Teilhard de Chardin.

Beginning from an ultra-conservative outlook that sought to avoid examination of the relationship between individuals within an ordered society, she moved, under Chardin's tutelage, to a more flexible position on social matters, one which saw her eventually focusing exclusively on the theme of human interdependence. Thus we see that whereas condemnation of the white liberal crusader is the rule of thumb in the early thesis works, at the close of her career with the publication of certain later stories in her second collection Everything That Rises Must

Converge, sanction is shifted to the Southern white reactionary figure whose individualistic interests are now shown to be in error.

While this attitude is clearly expressed in the title story, as well as in "Revelation" where the respective Southern white antagonists are forced to confront the inevitability of the eventual total collapse of the old social order, it is also necessary to account for the modification seen in "Judgement Day," wherein renewed respectability is granted to Southern mores. Uppermost in our concern is the need to explore the possibility that her attitude might suggest some growing contention towards Chardin's doctrine of the potential spiritual and biological evolution that awaits a convergent mankind.

Looking to the critics for assistance in this matter, we find such outstanding voices as Joan Brittain, Leon Driskell and Sister Feeley commenting only on points of similarity. Martha Stephens, one of the more recent students of O'Connor's fiction, briefly confronts the issue of divergence in "Belief and Tonal Dimension," the opening chapter of her full length work entitled The Question of Flannery O'Connor. Directing her observations to Teilhard's The Divine Milieu, Stephens remarks on his belief that one need not renounce the world to find God since He exists within each individual, and knowledge of the divine can be gained by looking towards one's fellow man, a contrasting opinion to that of O'Connor who, according to Stephens, sees no positive value in human life. Attempting to strengthen her case, Stephens catalogues the various grotesque images employed by the author in her description of human figures and concludes that in O'Connor's view: "Human beings are ugly in every way; the human form itself is distinctly unpleasant to behold; human life is a sordid, almost unbelievably hideous affair. The only human act that is worthy of respect is the act of renouncing all worldly involvement, pleasure and achievement.[4]

While it is true that the pursuit of asceticism characterizes an early work such as Wise Blood, Stephens is wrong in extending her analogy to the later stories for, considering the divine revelations that are frequently conveyed through the grotesque figures that appear in them, one can readily dispute the validity of her claim. No further proof of her flawed perception need be offered than the example of the power of spiritual instruction bestowed upon the deformed sideshow freak in "A Temple of the Holy Ghost," a character whose very presence in O'Connor's fiction confirms Chardin's notion of the existence of the divine within each man. Furthermore, it is unlikely that Miss O'Connor would have differed from Chardin in this matter for, among his many concepts, it is one of the closest views corresponding to the traditional Catholic doctrine espousing the inherent dignity and value of all members of the human race.

Having dismissed Stephens' observations, one is still left to deal with the problem of whether conflict actually existed between the views of Chardin and O'Connor, or if her resurgence of Southern loyalty was simply a question of limiting the degree of acceptance to which she would commit herself. Although no personal guidelines seem to have been provided by the author to define her position as regards Chardin, one can surmise, after consideration of the full content of his socio-religious theories, that the latter explanation holds true in her case. Since Chardin did not directly refer to the South in his various works, it was unnecessary for Miss O'Connor to counter with an overt rejection of any of his stated principles, but her guard would no doubt be raised considering that several points discussed by him set forth a condemnation of all rigidly stratified societies.

His strongest admonishment of the anomalies of a fixed class structure presents itself in The Future of Man where one cannot fail to note how closely his description of a flawed static society corresponds to the existing conditions in Miss

O'Connor's home region:

> A perfectly-ordered society with everyone living in effortless ease within a fixed framework, a world in a state of tranquil repose, all this has nothing to do with our advancing Universe, apart from the fact that it would rapidly induce a state of deadly tedium. Although, as I believe, concord must of necessity eventually prevail on earth, it can by our premises only take the form of some sort of tense cohesion pervaded and inspired with the same energies, now become harmonious, which were previously wasted in bloodshed: unanimity in search and conquest, sustained among us by the universal resolve to raise ourselves upwards, all straining shoulder to shoulder, towards even greater heights of consciousness and freedom. (Chardin, Future of Man, p. 159)

In keeping with his scientific orientation, Chardin's conception of a lengthy, yet volatile process of sociological change is much more open to unrestrained experimentation than is Flannery O'Connor's view, which in this respect conforms more closely to traditional Catholic doctrine and regards an advance characterized by plodding stability to be the ideal. Although violence occupied an important role in her work, it is more favorably sanctioned by her when displayed by those characters looking to bring about spiritual change, rather than in the case of those who seek to initiate social change.

Also diverging from the mainstream of Chardinian thought is her intense desire to preserve so much of the Southern heritage, which, as we have seen, becomes a most concerted effort in her later works. Chardin, for his part, attaches no importance whatsoever to the preservation of any one society, citing in support of his view the fact that, although the total destruction of various past civilizations has occurred during the course of mankind's history, the "organized consciousness of the universe," an entity of human thought above and beyond the individual political state, has nevertheless survived to flourish in ever greater form.

A second Chardinian reference that receives scant mention in the fomulation of Miss O'Connor's social principles arises

in The Phenomenon of Man, p, 230, where we see him offer criticism of the process of human "symbiosis" as being a negative force representing "the enslavement of one group by another" and which is, in his view, appropriate only to "inferior organisms, or the most socialised insects." The intricate arrangement of class dependency common to the South, and so lauded by Miss O'Connor, would not then seem to be within the bounds of his definition of convergence, for it represents to him an economically forced coming together, and, as he elaborates on in The Future of Man, p. 77, any unification among men that is based on coercion, rather than on mutual attraction, only materializes instead of spiritualizing mankind. While the author is quick to perceive of the negative connotations manifesting themselves in the economic interdependence of blacks and whites in the North, she is less inclined to recognize their applicability to the South. She does concede in "Judgement Day" that the only true union between blacks and whites must be based on an external spiritual force that transcends the concerns of secular advantage. Nevertheless, she still presents the economic bonds of Southern society as an appropriate vehicle for this transformation, which is a vote of confidence that seems to somewhat mitigate Chardin's concept of the free association of all men, limited only by the natural confines of the planet, but never by the secular political structure.

Before losing perspective in these few instances of a limited acceptance of his beliefs, it should be observed that, for the most part, Miss O'Connor's variance rests largely on a matter of interpretation, centering upon which of Chardin's many statements she chooses to lay the most stress. For example, he acknowledges himself that, although the end result of total spiritual convergence is for him conclusively established, the exact means of achieving "human totalisation" through political, economic and psychological means yet remains to a degree obscure; therefore, her choice of options can still quite logically be supported by the details of his work (Chardin, Future of Man,

p. 270). She is not then repudiating any of his theories with her stand, but is, instead, for her own purpose of discouraging radical change, placing greater emphasis on cautionary remarks such as those in which he warns that the creation of better material living conditions for any social class holds no merit for speeding up the process of convergence, or, indeed, of even furthering it at all (Chardin, Phenomenon of Man, p. 291).

Perhaps the most important issue yet to be explored is what prompts her in the final analysis to be so adamant in exploiting those aspects of Chardinian philosophy that can be adapted to a defense of the Southern social system, when she must surely have known of his disdain for this type of structure. Searching for insight into this problem leads us to note that Chardin's writing deals with two aspects of convergence, not only the spiritual infolding of all members of the human phylum, but, as well, their growing physical attraction which, when taken to its logical conclusion, as he is resolved to do, leads to a profusion of racially mixed persons.

Mankind's spiritual union can easily be accepted by Miss O'Connor without hesitation, as is shown by the prominent vision in "Judgement Day," but what is intolerable to her is the complementary parallel of biological union. While the bulk of Chardin's attention is devoted to promoting mental convergence, he cannot avoid the corollary of a physical coming together of the people of the earth; this leads him to promote a future scheme for human refinement based upon the principles of individual eugenics, or selected breeding to produce the best singular human specimen, and racial eugenics which calls for the controlled intermixing of different ethnic and racial types to improve humanity as a whole (Chardin, Future of Man, p. 243). Whether or not O'Connor was ever aware of this specific recommendation is uncertain, but such an eventual outcome of the theory of convergence would, no doubt, have been recognized by one schooled in Southern racial sensibilities, long before the actual enunciation of such a scheme.

Of interest in connection with her own sensitivity to the matter is her handling of the issue in "The Displaced Person." Looking again at this story we can note the extraordinary resistance that is generated against the thought of an inter-racial marriage by Mrs. MacIntyre, the white antagonist, who thinks that anyone capable of even considering such an occurrence poses a serious threat to the entire Southern system. The strength of the woman's convictions, as well as the depth of her fear, is indicated by the fact that she is willing not only to suffer a financial loss by replacing Guizac with a less efficient and more conservative white Southern worker, but even risks losing her soul by being a silent party to the foreigner's murder as he is deliberately run over with a tractor driven by Mr. Shortley, the white replacement hand. Interestingly, of the three people linked in "collusion" with Guizac's death, neither Mr. Shortley the murderer, nor the witnesses Mrs. MacIntyre and Sulk the Negro, both of whom fail to warn the victim of danger, stand to gain from his demise. Their obligation to remove him from their midst seems beyond the realm of personal gain and relates instead to an overwhelming commitment to protect the accustomed Southern racial divisions with which they find themselves most comfortable.

As for the author's own position at this time, Southern racist attitudes are at last acknowledged by her to be contrary to Catholic instruction, as is shown by the story's conclusion which informs the reader of Mrs. MacIntyre's declining health and confinement to her room where her only visitor is the local Catholic priest who regularly comes to explain to her "the doctrines of the Church." Progress is therefore seen as Flannery O'Connor moves beyond her former religious rationale for the strict maintenance of the status quo, but we find that, although Mrs. MacIntyre's flawed Southern loyalties cannot be condoned, she is nevertheless treated with compassion at the end by the priest and therefore it would seem also by the author who hangs back from bearing down exceedingly harshly on her as

has been done with other such antagonists.

Thus O'Connor again seems intellectually certain of the necessary moral direction of the South which must tend towards racial intermingling, but once more emotional conditioning tempers her enthusiasm. The dilemma of Mrs. MacIntyre, who is unable to fully accept the consequences of her charitable Christian intentions, is not unlike the author's own difficulty in coming to terms with Chardin's ultimate projection of a biological union for mankind. It is not surprising to find that the author's seeming reluctance to offer too harsh a condemnation of this character is supported by the change of heart that manifests itself in her later work! While in 1953 it might be relatively safe to indulge in the liberal idealism represented by one such as Guizac, by the time of "Judgement Day" in the early 1960's the advancing social progress being achieved by American Negroes brought a greater immediacy to the possibility of racial merger; so the past example of attaching religious import to the issue of racial intermingling falls from favor by the time of this later story. We find, instead, an admittance of her personal disapproval being brought to the forefront as those characters of seemingly mixed racial blood, notably Doctor Foley and the female Negro neighbor in the North, are treated with the utmost contempt by O'Connor.

Why then this refusal by her to make a total commitment to biological as well as spiritual union among the races and her decision instead to take a backward step in this one area of racial relations, in opposition to the general social progress that was characteristic of her fiction of this period? An important clue in comprehending such behavior is offered by Swedish professor Gunnar Myrdal, reknowned for his lengthy study of Southern mores, a work compiled through the auspices of the Carnegie Corporation and published in the early 1940's under the title An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy. Briefly, the crux of his argument centres around the premise that the achievement of full social equality for

Southern blacks was unacceptable to white citizens, as it implied the eventuality of intermarriage which would, in turn, mar the purity of the white race, and eventually destroy Anglo-Saxon civilization. Evidence of this apprehension was, in his opinion, visible in the strong belief espoused by Southerners that the Negro was by nature a biologically inferior individual and therefore not fit to intermingle with the white race, an unfounded prejudice which the professor felt must be completely dispelled before any dramatic social progress could be achieved in the South.[5]

Identifying the fear of amalgamation as the basis for Southern white rationalization of all segregation, Myrdal methodically explains the intricacies of the system established by them to insure separation of the races. Beginning with the paramount restriction of a "ban on intermarriage and other sex relations involving white women and colored men," which he describes as "the end for which the other restrictions are arranged," he moves on to mention a host of supportive deterrents that are seen in a variety of "taboos and etiquettes in personal contacts; segregation in schools and churches; segregation in public conveyances; and, finally, inequality in politics, justice, breadwinning and relief" (Myrdal, pp. 587-88).

Of significance with respect to the guarded development of O'Connor's liberal attitudes is his summation of the important pressure exerted by public opinion in limiting any individual relaxation of the protective sanctions. In Myrdal's own words:

> The degree of liberalism on racial matters in the white South can be designated mainly by the point on this rank [as detailed above] where a man stops because he believes further segregation and discrimination are not necessary to prevent "intermarriage." We have seen that white liberals in the South of the present day, as a matter of principle, rather unanimously stand up against inequality in breadwinning, relief, justice and politics. These fields of discrimination form the chief battleground and

> considerable changes in them are, as we have seen, on the way. When we ascend to the higher ranks which concern social relations in the narrow sense, we find the Southern liberals less prepared to split off from the majority opinion of the region. Hardly anybody in the South is prepared to go the whole way and argue that even the ban on intermarriage should be lifted. Practically all agree, not only upon the high desirability of preventing "intermarriage," but also that a certain amount of separation between the two groups is expedient and necessary to prevent it. Even the one who has his philosophical doubts on the point must, if he is reasonable, abstain from ever voicing them. The social pressure is so strong that it would be foolish not to conform. Conformity is a political necessity for having any hope of influence; it is, in addition, a personal necessity for not meeting social ostracism. (Myrdal, p. 588)

Myrdal's study, respected in academic circles as the most accurate and extensive examination of the development of Southern racial attitudes to have been produced up until that time, may have preceded Miss O'Connor's very first stories by approximately ten years, but his well-researched observations provide, not only an indication of the specific racial fear that would have been deeply ingrained within her during her impressionable early years, but also suggests the type of reactionary pressure that would have surrounded her even throughout the 1950's, for sociologists agree upon the continuing validity of Myrdal's hypothesis until that decade and even beyond it. Indeed, Arnold Rose, a collaborator on Myrdal's original study, confirmed in an introductory essay to the Twentieth Anniversary Edition of the work which appeared in 1962 that, even as of the early 1960's, pressure to maintain absolute racial purity lingered on. Rose notes that intermarriage, while on the increase in the North, was still illegal in the Southern states, largely due to the fact that so ingrained was this prime sanction that even influential Negro groups were reluctant to bring the matter before the courts, thinking it unwise to challenge such a longstanding barrier until their desegregation policies had gained wider ground.[6]

To complete our examination of the general Southern response to racial intermingling it is necessary to look at one more work of established sociological merit and that is the joint effort Deep South: A Social Anthropological Study of Caste and Class, released in 1941 by Allison Davis, Burleigh B. Gardner and Mary Gardner, as the culmination of an extensive probe into the unique duality of the Southern social framework. Mention must be made that this work is referred to by Myrdal himself in his own text, and, in addition, that Allison Davis is cited as having provided aid both in the planning and research phases of his Carnegie Corporation Study.

Determining that both caste and class barriers are operational factors in governing social mobility in the South, they observe that while one may move with relative ease from class to class, numerous strictures prevent the crossing over of black and white caste lines to become assimilated into the opposite group. A caste organization, as defined by them, has two important distinguishing features; first, the inclusion of specific obstructive mechanisms to enforce the unequal rights and duties between its upper and lower groups and, secondly, as stressed by Myrdal, a ban on marriage between members of the two groups that serves to keep each one mutually exclusive.[7]

Their conception of Southern society since the Civil War sees the traditional horizontal line of caste division that separates upper, middle, and lower class whites from exclusively lower class blacks, gradually being turned on its axis as the growing economic, educational and social advantages among the Negro caste members has caused middle and upper class divisions to develop within this group. This has with time resulted in the vertical movement of the higher Negro groups being extended slowly upwards, so that they have come to achieve a position of greater prominence in class distinction than that of lower class whites. While the Negro may however be moving

upward in class, he still remains inferior in caste even to the lowest ranking whites, a situation which creates psychological conflict within both racial groups as the struggle for advancement among middle class blacks must always be diligently undermined by all classes of whites who maintain a necessary solidarity, even with their inferior members, in order to protect the superior social status of every individual white Southerner (Warner, Introduction to Deep South, pp. 10-12).

Any social conflict that arises in Flannery O'Connor's work can thus be seen to conform to this unique pattern for, while she eventually sanctions class advancement for Negroes, the breaking down of caste restrictions is never realized in her work, nor is it ever openly promoted by her as a social ideal. This then is the one limitation that mars the otherwise consistent advancement in social attitude that occurs from her thesis works to the final collection of short stories. That she was fully attuned to the implications of Negro aspirations as they pertained both to the developmental core of Chardinian thought and to the realm of American social reality is obvious from the title of the second collection, which in itself clearly states the inevitability of union as the lower classes rise in rank. However, as we see throughout her fictional career none of the characters, nor would it seem their creator, can tolerate the actuality of total physical amalgamation between the black and white races that is portended by class reshuffling; therefore, her social progress always falls short of complete realization.

Of significance is the fact that, even as late as 1964, the vision of social realignment experienced in "Revelation" by such a major character as Mrs. Turpin shows change taking place only in class ranking but still keeps the caste organization intact, as blacks and whites are shown marching towards heaven with each confined to their own separate groups. The author takes care throughout this passage to sustain the

feeling of exclusivity by employing such terms of differentiation as "companies," "bands," and "battalions," until finally, in the case of the middle class whites, the strongest means of group identification is attained through the use of the word "tribes." Considering the earlier reference to Greek civilization that was noted in the story "Judgement Day," it must be mentioned, as a matter of speculative interest, that the Greek word for sex transliterates as the zoological term "phylon" meaning tribe or race. No available information merits developing the parallel further since O'Connor's intent cannot be proven, but in any case her uncanny appropriateness of choice in diction is nonetheless deserving of comment.

Still in the same vein of thought we can look once more at the character of T.C. Tanner in "Judgement Day" to observe that what prompts him to flee from the North is, above all, his strong distaste for the physical encroachment of so many Negroes over whom he has no means of control. So again the conclusion offers a valid expression of the author's own traditional Southern opposition towards any growing physical convergence between the races. To expect that Flannery O'Connor could have brought about within herself a total revision of a lifelong principle felt to be essential to self-preservation is perhaps asking for too much to be accomplished, even with the moral support provided by Chardinian philosophy. Nevertheless although she had not overcome this hurdle of racial intermixing that, at the time of her death, blocked her path to the advocation of completely unrestricted equality between the races, it must be remembered that her views are still representative of the vanguard movement of social enlightenment that swept the Southern American scene in the late 1950's and the early 1960's.

Arnold Rose, again in his introduction to Myrdal's study, states that by that time social progress had become firmly established as an ongoing process in the South, and he notes unmistakable signs that "caste and racism" had already

been "debilitated," leading him to predict that "the dynamic social forces creating inequality will . . . be practically eliminated in three decades" (Rose, Introduction to Twentieth Anniversary Edition of An American Dilemma, p. xliv). Given his optimistic view of future social development, it seems only right to conclude that within that time he must expect racial amalgamation to gain wider acceptance among a considerable segment of the Southern populace, a speculation also voiced earlier in 1940 by Lloyd Warner again in the introduction to Deep South. There this writer postulates that, if the process of Negro class advancement were to continue to move forward unimpeded, caste restrictions might conceivably be weakened in the future, thus allowing for intermarriage between the races and the destruction of the definitive nature of each of the Southern groups (Warner, Introduction to Deep South, pp. 11-12). When taking into account Flannery O'Connor's considerable open-mindedness for her own period, one can, I think, reasonably conclude that, had she lived, her own social and artistic evolution would within the forthcoming decades most likely have followed these predictions and would have eventually been completed to fulfill, in their entirety, all of Chardin's requirements for the highest form of spiritual and biological advancement of mankind.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Bartley, p. 320.

[2]Bartley, p. 333.

[3]Bartley, pp. 333 and 335.

[4]Martha Stephens, The Question of Flannery O'Connor (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1973), p. 10.

[5]Gunnar Myrdal, An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy (New York: Harper & Row, 1942; Twentieth Anniversary Edition, 1962), pp. 86-87.

[6]Arnold Rose, Introduction entitled "Postscript Twenty Years Later" to Twentieth Anniversary Edition of An American Dilemma by Gunnar Myrdal (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), p. xiiii.

[7]W. Lloyd Warner, Introduction to Deep South by Allison Davis, Burleigh B. Gardner and Mary Gardner (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1941), p. 9.

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