ABSTRACT

Flannery O'Connor included in a series of modern spiritual masters. Her name evokes the passions of Southern firebrands battling ineradicable forces, and her fame rests securely on her novels and short stories. Besides being a story teller, O'Connor was an accomplished letter writer, literary critic, religious thinker, and public intellectual. One can hear yet another voice in her repeatedly astute observations on scripture and God, but she denied having any authority on these sacred subjects. O'Connor is too quick in discounting her level of engagement with divine matters. Her various forms of writing treat God, his attributes and relations with universe. As a Christian, O'Connor has only one ground of identity, namely, God.

Her inner drive for O'Connor was always toward home and the true abode and final shelter with God. Everything she wrote has this double momentum of home and faith and their counterparts of exile and unbelief. In her fiction, the characters all seek a place of rest and safety. Typically, the physical act of getting home implies the moving nearer to God. Wise Blood is her first novel, published in 1952. O'Connor reminds us that the body is made for him who made it and that we can trust in God's compassion. In the end the body teaches the soul about God's plan to restore all things to him.

Her penetrating vision became evident when her first novel, Wise Blood, appeared in 1952. This novel tells the story of Hazel Motes, who as a boy was told by his preacher grandfather that he, “a sinful and unthinking” youngster, was one of the millions for whom Jesus had his “arms and legs stretched on the cross” and that Jesus “wasn’t going to leave him ever”. Unlike the liberal, rational and enlightened persons in the novel who have had the moral and spiritual sense bred out of them, Motes, regards sin, Jesus and redemption as serious matters of life and death. Haunted by his sense of sin and terrified by a pursuing, Christ, such a church sets out to remove pain and ends up precluding transcendence.

Throughout O'Connor's works, there are significant biblical allusions which have been overlooked. O'Connor's unique approach, that is her attempt to engage her biblical source material in a unique way in order to reach a mass audience, grows out of her frustration over her parish's tendency to avoid the intellectual and spiritual problems confronting Christianity in the twentieth century since the time of the great reformers. O'Connor's work is littered with characters like Hazel Motes, who start a heretical Church and preach in the name of the church without Jesus. O'Connor drew several biblical counterparts. She was opposed to practiced forms of worship that enabled people to recite ready-made prayers instead of searching their own souls; instead O'Connor frequently encouraged growing interest in biblical studies. The novel Wise Blood recapitulates the story of St. Paul of the New Testament. This study compares Hazel Motes with the Biblical parallel St. Paul.

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sin, yet he still maintains a wordless conviction… that the way to avoid Jesus was to avoid sin” (O’Connor, 1988).

To prove his own freedom from Redemption, Hazel Motes starts his own church, the church without Christ. Like Saul, Motes’ church teaches, “Nothing matters but that Jesus was a liar,” is positioned in direct opposition against Christianity (O’Connor, 1988). Hazel fails in almost all of his endeavours; even with his attempts to sin.

Like Saul, Motes starts ministry as the persecutor of the Christian church:

“Where has the blood you think you been deamed by touched you?”

“Rabble rouser,” the little man said. “One thing I can’t stand it’s a rabble rouser.”

“What church you belong to you boy there?” Haze asked, pointing at the tallest boy in the red satin lumber jacket.

The boy giggled.

“You then,” he said impatiently, pointing at the next one. “What church you belong to?”

“Church of Christ,” the boy said in a falsetto to hide the truth.

“Church of Christ” Hazel repeated. “Well, I preach The Church Without Christ. I am member and preacher to that church where the blind don’t see and the lame don’t walk and what’s dead stays that way” (O’Connor, 1988).

He satirizes the basic tenants of the Christianity. He claimed that there is no need for redemption, no resurrection and no miracles. Through these teachings he takes on the role of Saul, the Church's persecutor. Paul writes: “I persecuted the Church of God violently” (The Holy Bible, 1991).

Before his conversion Saul was against the disciples of the Lord and persecuted them. As he was travelling, it was happened that he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him, and he felt the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” And he said “who are you, Lord?” And He said, I am Jesus whom you are persecuting, but get up and enter the city, and it will be told you what you must do” (The Holy Bible, 1991).

This encounter which physically blinded Saul serves as the catalyst for his paradigm shift, transforming him into an outspoken Christian Evangelist and saint of the Christian Church. He became an active missionary, epstlter, and a principle leader of the early Christian Church.

Many events in the life of Paul are recapitulated through Hazel Motes’ own experiences in Wise Blood. Hazel’s own background serves as an inverse to Paul’s formal education. Paul received the best education available to him. Hazel attends “a country school where he had learned to read and write but that it was wiser not to. The Bible was the only book he read” (O’Connor, 1988). Motes’ grandfather was a circuit preacher who preached sermons from atop his car, a tradition Hazel follows.

While Paul had a strict jewish upbringing and was subject to the “spiritual and cultural forces of his youth,” Hazel’s own tutelage under his grandfather serves as an apt parallel. Hazel carries a black Bible and a pair of silver trimmed spectacles” with him throughout the novel, reinforcing the religious and vision motifs (O’Connor, 1988).

Hazel does not have the privilege and respect like Paul; rather he is poor, uneducated and ignored by his peers. Hazel Motes like young Saul achieved a pharisaical understanding of the law. Motes never really accept the tenants of Christianity. He realizes that to follow Jesus is to invite uncertainty. He believes that the “way to avoid Jesus was to avoid sin” (O’Connor, 1988). The wild ragged figure of Jesus haunted him in his every movement.

Paul and Motes play a major role in murder. Saul's participation in Stephen's death, the first Christian martyr, is unclear. But when the participants beganstoning Stephen, they “laid aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul” who is in hearty agreement with putting him to death” (The Holy Bible, 1991). Hazel Motes uses his car to kill Solace Layfield firsthand, in a way re-enacting Stephen's death. Hazel is shocked when Layfield becomes a martyr similar to Stephen through his death.

The strongest parallel between Hazel Motes and Paul occurs within their conversions. Both conversions occur right after an execution. In the two conversion stories blindness serves as a catalyst. Similarly both take place on the road and each figure functions as a persecutor of Christ.

Hazel is pulled over by a policeman, who explains to Hazel that he didn't pull him over for a legal violation, but rather because “I just don't like your face”