

# RELIGION I

**Section Moderator: Dr. Andrew Watts**

**Room: Massey Business Center 203B**

**Time: 4:00 – 5:30 PM**

**4:00 – 4:30**

**“A Shocking Revelation: Conversion in the Fiction of Flannery O’Conner”**

Luke Barnhart

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Darrell Gwaltney

Readers encountering various characters throughout fiction get the effect of a mirror being held in front of them. We may discover characters that we recognize in stories, but most of all we discover ourselves in a way that may not be possible through abstract rationale or self-contemplation. Often, through fiction, we are confronted with our own grotesqueness, making it a powerful medium for the exploration of religious themes. O’Connor understood that reading fiction powerfully affects those that are open to its transformative powers as a revelation, and not simply a philosophical proof. She wrote that, “For the fiction writer, the whole story is the meaning, because it is an experience, not an abstraction.” The powerful experience in literature contains the necessary ingredients for a confrontation with oneself, and therefore an opportunity for conversion.

O’Conner’s stories function primarily as a means of inducing conversion. She believed that all great stories involved conversion in a character. She notes that in her own stories grace acts upon the characters to bring about this conversion. This conversion, although it takes place *specifically* in her stories amidst *specific* circumstances and *specific* characters, also represents a kind of general conversion from one state of mind to another. O’Connor saw the most prevalent evils of modernity as the passing from a widespread medieval religiosity to a pervasive modern humanism and materialism, devoid of all spirituality. Thus many of O’Connor’s characters experience a conversion leading them to a mindset more like her own.

**4:30 – 5:00**

**“The Authority of the State to Kill”**

David R. Kumler

Faculty Advisor: Andy Watts

The New Testament clearly presents us with an ethic of love and forgiveness. This ethic is made evident in the Sermon on the Mount and comes to culmination through Christ’s sacrificial death on the cross. Though it is clear

that Christians are to forgive rather than seek retribution, many would argue that the Bible grants the state the authority to practice retribution—even to take life—in order to keep peace and institute justice.

In this paper, David Kumler argues that the state is not ordained to use capital punishment as means of instituting justice. Kumler examines Romans 13 in its historical and literary context to show that, though this passage is often used to support arguments that the state is ordained to kill, Romans 13 clearly does not give the state such authority. Kumler then appeals to the threefold office of Christ to argue that under the authority of Christ, Christians have the obligation to attest to an ethic of love and forgiveness, even within the secular realm. Finally, Kumler addresses the claim that an ethic of love and forgiveness neglects the need for justice. Here Kumler argues for a reconciliatory concept of justice that takes into account God's own attitude towards the unworthy, an attitude of acceptance, forgiveness, and reconciliation.