

A good man cannot
be found not even
one

Literature



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here August A Good Man Cannot Be Found... Not Even One One cannot read Flannery O'Connor's short story, "A Good Man Is Hard to Find," without taking away a strong spiritual message. O'Connor interprets her story as one that is religious in nature, as it would be very difficult for the reader to ignore or fail to see the spiritual undertones. However, some critics discredit O'Connor's religious explanation of her story, and instead, attempt to dismantle the grandmother's character because of her imperfect and flawed nature. They fail to see her as an agent of grace or as a witness extending the message of salvation. Even though the author leaves an open-ended question at the end of the story ? and in her explanation ? as to whether or not the main antagonist, the Misfit, will end up being saved as a result of his encounter with the grandmother, it is quite evident that O'Connor's analysis of her story as being a religious one with the grandmother as an authentic agent of grace is an accurate one, despite the arguments of some critics. Due to a lack of understanding of man's fallen nature and God's extension of grace and salvation to any who ask of Him, many critics with a secular interpretation of the Bible believe that a true follower of Christ must fit the definition of "good" in order to be genuinely saved or to be a legitimate witness to share God's salvation. They note the grandmother's hypocrisy, worldliness, and selfishness, presupposing that "true Christians" should be virtually devoid of a sinful nature. According to the Bible, this is not true – as Jesus says, "There is only One who is good," (Matt. 19: 17) ? and even though the grandmother exuded a sinful nature, this did not prevent her from being a messenger of God's salvation, as only God (who is One with the Son and the Spirit) is good. The Bible is clear that Christians are still, in fact, sinners, and in need of forgiveness each and every day for their many sins.

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Therefore, when literary critic Martha Stevens quotes the Misfit, who said of the grandmother, " She would have been a good woman if it had been somebody there to shoot her every minute of her life," (Pegasus), to prove that the elderly woman wasn't a " good" religious woman (Schilb, 1264), it holds little sway, as God doesn't save people because they are " good," but because of their faith in Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Stevens emphasizes that because she doesn't regard the grandmother as a " good woman," that she automatically loses her status as a Christian with a genuine faith in Christ. This is simply not true, and, as O'Connor stresses, the flawed elderly lady could very well have planted the words in the Misfit that led him to salvation later in life. Critic Madison Jones also errantly discounts O'Connor's insistence of the story's strong religious significance by pointing to the Misfit's choice to live life by what he sees, instead of by faith. When the antagonist says, " I wisht I could have been there. If I had of been there I would have know and I wouldn't be like I am now," (Pegasus), he is merely giving an excuse for doing evil. However, Jones uses this statement to claim that the Misfit truly believed that truth can only be found in what he could physically see. Yet it is evident that the Misfit knows right from wrong, and that there are eternal consequences for his sin, which is seen when the grandmother reaches out to him in grace after his accomplices murdered her family. As soon as she touched him, he pulled back as if a snake had bitten him, showing that she was convicting him by her forgiveness and grace. And, in the Bible, Satan is often referred to as a snake or serpent, symbolizing that the devil was keeping him from receiving God's grace. Once again, the religious intonations of this story are strong, and the author uses the flawed grandmother as someone with whom God used to extend His grace to fellow

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sinner. Another critic of O'Connor's, Stephen Bandy, also unsuccessfully tried to discredit the author's use of the grandmother as a legitimate witness of God's grace and forgiveness. He alleges that the grandmother was not a true Christian and tried to deceive the Misfit with flattery and false grace to save her life. But he fails to address that the grandmother could have likely been in shock with her family virtually assassinated right in front of her, and that she still had kind words for the man responsible for the carnage and invited him to pray and ask Jesus to forgive him of his sins. Yet Bandy comments, "If grace was extended to the Misfit, he refused it and that is the end," (Schilb, 1272). This exposes Bandy's ignorance of God's grace, which is an open invitation until the day a person dies, with many people accepting Christ on their deathbeds (Piper, 171), showing that one is saved by faith and not by works (Eph. 2. 8-9). The grandmother was indeed an imperfect vehicle of God's grace that He sacrificially extended to the Misfit. Despite arguments to the contrary, O'Connor effectively and believably used the grandmother in "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" as an agent of God's grace, as 1 Cor. 1. 27 stresses that God uses the foolish and weak things of this world to shame the wise and strong. The three arguments discounting O'Connor's use of the grandmother as a true messenger of God's grace and love are not from a biblical standpoint, but from a secular or worldly understanding. The grandmother had a flawed character and a sinful nature that was quite apparent, however, this did not impede God from reaching out to the Misfit through her to bring him the message of salvation through Christ. Even though the reader does not know whether the Misfit would someday repent and seek salvation, it is quite evident that O'Connor's use of the grandmother as a witness of God's grace was both believable and biblical.

Works Cited “ A Good Man Is Hard to Find.” Pegasus. com. Pegasus. N. D. Web. 1 August 2001. Piper, Don. 90 Minutes in Heaven. Grand Rapids: Revell. 2004. Print. Schilb, John and Clifford, John. Making Literature Matter: An Anthology for Readers and Writers, Fourth Edition. New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s. 2008. Print. The NIV Study Bible. Ed. Kenneth Barker. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House. 1995. Print.