

Preface

FLANNERY O'CONNOR IN "GOOD COUNTRY PEOPLE" presents us with a woman who feels herself to be enlightened because she believes in nothing (her intellectual stance bolstered by her reading of Heidegger's *An Introduction to Metaphysics*), but who is startled to discover at the end of the story that her commitment to nothingness masks a deep need to be recognized and loved by others within community. O'Connor merely implies the collapse of the woman's carefully constructed worldview, a view that is driven above all by resentment against Christianity, suggesting through the action of the literary imagination that the truth of Christianity will speak deeply to the human spirit once culturally constructed obstacles, illusions, and idols have been shattered or have collapsed because of their inherent flaws.

A homily delivered by the Rev. Arthur L. Kennedy at the funeral of O'Connor's friend and editor, Sally Fitzgerald, and printed in this issue of *Logos*, brought that scene to mind as I prepared this preface, and the scene offers a way of viewing the wide-ranging studies in the Catholic intellectual tradition found in the articles published in this issue. The articles in this issue show us how the powers of literary imagination, philosophical analysis, and theological insight, when grounded in the Catholic intellectual tradition, illuminate the true nature of the human person and the deep value of human dignity on the basis of which human communities flourish.

The articles show us a variety of twentieth-century illusions concerning the nature of the human person and show us how careful reflection upon such illusions can contribute to their collapse and can prepare the way for Christian renewal, a renewal that touches individuals and transforms cultures.

Georges Bernanos and Graham Greene found their literary powers most fully activated when engaging the illusions of twentieth-century culture, as is well demonstrated by several articles in this issue, and a wide-ranging essay on “literary converts” in Great Britain opens up a broader context for viewing the Christian intellectual encounter with predominant aspects of twentieth-century British culture. Moreover, this issue indicates the richness of Catholic literature in the twentieth century by introducing readers to a Catholic poet whose work has not been recognized as fully as it deserves with an article on poet Robert Lax, who died in Olean, New York, at the age of eighty-four on September 26, 2000, while this issue was in preparation.

Readers will also find in this issue that philosophical analysis of the nature of human dignity and of the proper understanding of religious pluralism can demonstrate how contemporary culture in all of its complexity can flourish when grounded in “bedrock truths.” This issue also offers theological reflections on the phenomenon of the flourishing Catholic Church in Africa, juxtaposed with the economic and political turmoil prominent on that continent, bringing to the surface dimensions of the Christian encounter with contemporary culture that are highlighted with particular clarity beyond the limits of the West. Theological reflection on the meaning of interreligious dialogue offered in this issue demonstrates a Catholic encounter with the relativist illusions that emerge understandably and inevitably from the fruitful friction of cultures in the contemporary situation of global awareness.

Adam Schwartz in a review essay of *Literary Converts* by Joseph Pearce and *Catholic Converts: British and American Intellectuals Turn to*

Rome by Patrick Allitt examines the variety of paths that led a number of prominent British writers and intellectuals to turn to Christianity as a result of their deep dissatisfaction with the predominant intellectual and spiritual views of twentieth-century western culture. “Orthodox Christianity’s ability to attract such a large portion of these generations’ leading minds into its ranks at a time when antithetical attitudes were at their apex is thus one of the central phenomena of twentieth-century British culture,” Schwartz argues in this wide-ranging and insightful analysis.

The theological aesthetics of Hans Urs von Balthasar offers a rich resource for literary studies, and **Mark Bosco, S.J.**, in “**Seeing the Glory**,” demonstrates a keen understanding of Balthasar and a deft hand at applying the insights of Balthasar’s theological aesthetics as he undertakes a study of Graham Greene’s *The Power and the Glory*. Bosco shows how Greene uses a “wasteland landscape” as the background from which emerges the glory of the Christ-form, manifested through the whiskey priest who is transformed by love in spite of his many flaws.

Another novel by Graham Greene, *The End of the Affair*, is discussed by **J. C. Whitehouse** in an article titled “**Men, Women, God, and So Forth.**” Whitehouse shows that Greene is interested above all in the “exploration of certain modes of knowing and picturing the human being in a framework within which certain—that is, Catholic—beliefs and ideas are taken both as a starting point and a final frame of reference.” Whitehouse also contrasts Greene’s novel with the recent film based on the novel.

The title of an article by **William Bush** makes clear the claims he makes persuasively for the importance of Catholic novelist Georges Bernanos: “**Georges Bernanos’s *Monsieur Ouine*: The ‘Great Novel’ of ‘The Greatest Novelist of His Time.’**” Bush demonstrates the profound analysis of contemporary culture that is part of Bernanos’s artistic strength, and shows that Bernanos finds a basis for Christian hope even in the darkest aspects of the contemporary

world: “Bernanos’s insistence that man’s self-hatred is indeed intimately related to the innate, atavistic, but now forgotten instinct for purity that lurks in the heart of post-Christian man might well help explain why men turn against themselves and seek their own and others’ destruction in a nihilistic spasm.”

Readers perhaps are unfamiliar with Catholic poet Robert Lax, whose importance is assessed by **Jeannine Mizingou** in “**Robert Lax: Poet, Pilgrim, Prophet.**” The article proposes that it is the absence of the typical twentieth-century element of “angst” in the poetry of Lax that has made it difficult for contemporary readers to recognize his modern greatness, and goes on to analyze the “spiritual poetics” at the heart of Lax’s work.

What does it mean to speak of the dignity of the human person as a “bedrock truth”? **Teresa Iglesias** in “**Bedrock Truths and the Dignity of the Individual**” analyzes this concept by tracing it philosophically to its roots. Her article goes on to place this concept within a contemporary political and cultural perspective by showing how this concept is a prominent part of a wide variety of twentieth-century legal instruments throughout the world.

Linda Zagzebski explores questions related to religious pluralism in “**Religious Diversity and Social Responsibility.**” Zagzebski confronts the deficiencies of various views of pluralism and sets forth a position that enables us to “combine total commitment to our own faith with the openness to others” that a sophisticated understanding of faith requires.

A theological understanding of contemporary religious pluralism is offered by **Francis Cardinal Arinze** in his article, “**The Church and Interreligious Dialogue.**” Cardinal Arinze is president of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, and his deep experience with interreligious dialogue is evident in the analysis provided by his article, an analysis that surveys the situation of interreligious dialogue throughout the world.

The flourishing of the Catholic Church in Africa in the twentieth century is a striking phenomenon, and **the Reverend Emmanuel**

Katongole examines the situation of the Church in Africa in “**Prospects of Ecclesia in Africa in the Twenty-first Century.**” Father Katongole deflects the question of whether we might soon see a pope from Africa, choosing to concentrate instead on what the Church as a whole might learn from the strength of Catholicism in Africa in this century, calling upon Catholics everywhere to exercise the power of “social imagination” to address issues of social and economic justice that must be acknowledged as significant challenge in many places in Africa.

Sally Fitzgerald has been a member of the Editorial Board of *Logos* since our first issue, and we mourn her death by publishing the homily delivered at her funeral mass on June 20, 2000, by **the Reverend Arthur L. Kennedy**. Father Kennedy offers a deep reflection on the contributions to the life of faith and letters made by Sally Fitzgerald, and we at *Logos* were privileged to have had an affiliation with Mrs. Fitzgerald and to have published one of her last essays.

Michael C. Jordan
Coeditor