

Preface

WE ARE CONSPIRATORS by nature. How did the negative connotations of that word almost entirely crowd out the equally possible sense of collaboration in pursuit of the good? *The Oxford English Dictionary* offers a citation for the positive meaning of the word from Thomas Starkey in 1538: “The civil life is a political order of men conspiring together in virtue and honesty” (in a modernized spelling). The etymological sense of conspiracy, “to breathe together,” reminds me of a passage from John’s gospel depicting the appearance of the resurrected Christ among the disciples: “And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’” (John 20:22, RSV). To speak of ourselves as conspirators is to be mindful of our communitarian nature and to be open to the breath of the Holy Spirit that is offered to all.

It is illuminating to be mindful that we conspire together for good and for evil. The sociological concept of institutional racism, for example, captures the phenomenon of cooperation in evil, and such cooperation is far more powerful, dangerous, and damaging than individual instances of bigotry alone. In Catholic social thought, the concept of “structures of sin” brings out the damaging consequences of cooperation in sin, while asserting that sin is rooted in individu-

als. John Paul II in his 1987 encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* points to the powerful effects of institutionalized sin: “The sum total of the negative factors working against a true awareness of the universal common good, and the need to further it, gives the impression of creating, in persons and institutions, an obstacle which is difficult to overcome. If the present situation can be attributed to difficulties of various kinds, it is not out of place to speak of ‘structures of sin’” (36). This concept also plays a part in John Paul II’s account of the challenges and opportunities posed by economical globalization in his 1991 encyclical *Centesimus Annus*.

Machiavelli offers a seemingly benign view of such structures when he repudiates the ancient concept of the common good as unsuitable to the exigencies of life as we know it. He proposes instead, as in his play *Mandragola*, an image of human society as consisting of the carefully intertwined pursuit of individual desires and interests in which the so-called common good is nothing other than a pattern of complementary sins in which a kind of stability is achieved because interests are cleverly arranged so that each person is appropriately gratified. *Mandragola* offers an extreme example of such self-interest—an arrangement is established by a kind of organizational mastermind such that an older husband is likely to gain a son and heir, a younger man will gain a lover, and the priest will gain cash donations, while a previously virtuous wife is shown to be enlightened to the new order of mutually intertwined self-interests. Each sinful desire is rendered more likely to come to its (rotten) fruition because it serves the sins of others as well. The arrangement of mutual interests in *Mandragola* is particularly harsh—we can wonder whether the virtuous wife has in fact been corrupted by the sins of her husband, priest, and mother rather than enlightened to the new order—and not all such arrangements are as harsh as this example, but whenever the central story of human cooperation focuses upon the gratification of self-interest, surely we are in danger of losing sight of any higher good in the light of which we can come together.

But we do not go wrong if we recapture the positive sense of the word and speak of worship as a conspiracy of praise in which each breath expressed in hymns joins all others and in which musical harmony is an image and experience of the conspiracy of good. Such structures of good are cooperative efforts perhaps even in a fuller sense than any structure of sin. We find a remarkable and bold attempt to think in such terms on the largest possible scale in *On the Moral Nature of the Universe* by Nancey Murphy and George F. R. Ellis, in which the concept of self-giving and sacrifice captured by the theological term “kenosis” is extended to both ethics and the cosmos: “In short, all living things must participate not only in the taking of life in order to live but also in the painful *giving* of their lives that others might live.”¹ Such an account reverses common and dominant accounts of the natural tendency to build cooperative structures based on the pursuit of self-interest with a profound vision of the bond of love that suffuses the world:

In particular, we reject the “ontology of violence,” which implies that selfishness and violent coercion are basic to human nature. In its place we develop a theory of human life as created for self-sacrifice and nonviolence. This “kenotic” ethic—an ethic of self-emptying for the sake of the other—is in turn explained and justified by a correlative theology: the kenotic way of life is objectively the right way of life for all of humankind because it reflects the moral character of God.²

Such accounts of the order of things as emerging from a deep inner cooperation provide a hopeful vision that can nurture our communal tendency to build social structures in which justice and peace can emerge.

If the dominant tendency for many years now has been to follow the pattern highlighted by Machiavelli and to conspire in establishing elaborate structures based on intertwined self-interest, we stand all the more in need of countervailing images. It is possible that in the development of the modern literary tradition such im-

ages are being offered by literary works originating in cultures that have known the oppressive power of the West and that participate in the development of the literary tradition in such a way as to show both structures of sin but also the hope for structures of good. For instance, the famous 1958 novel by Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, certainly shows the blindness of Western imperialism but also highlights the healing power of Christianity. The novel offers some striking images of interfaith dialogue and then provides an account of conversions to Christianity especially among those of the Ibo people who have been most marginalized and subject to violence within their own culture. Some of the violent practices of the culture (certainly matched by the oppressive violence of the British who at one point slaughter many innocent members of a village in an act of retaliation), such as the practice of infanticide applied to twins or the execution of an innocent member of another clan in retribution for manslaughter, are suddenly seen for what they are by a young man at his moment of conversion:

But there was a young lad who had been captivated. His name was Nwoye, Okonkwo's first son. It was not the mad logic of the Trinity that captivated him. It was the poetry of the new religion, something felt in the marrow. The hymn about brothers who sat in darkness and fear seemed to answer a vague and persistent question that haunted his young soul—the question of twins crying in the bush and question of Ikemefuna who was killed. He felt a relief within as the hymn poured into his parched soul.³

The healing power of Christianity takes root, and perhaps one purpose of the novel is to project that vision back upon a Western world whose actions with regard to Africa or with regard to Western nations themselves have lost sight of that vision, just as we can perhaps now see priests trained in Nigeria prepared for the reevangelization of Europe.

A similar effort to recognize but overcome the oppressive power of structures of sin directed upon other cultures by holding out the healing power of Christian structures of good can be seen (or at least glimpsed) in Derek Walcott's 1990 epic poem, *Omeros*. Walcott includes an autobiographical account of his own origins in this work (and in his 2004 autobiographical, extended poem *The Prodigal*) as the son of a Dutch father and a mother of African heritage on the Caribbean island of St. Lucia. A central character in *Omeros* by the name of Achille undertakes a great journey that includes establishing a cultural connection to Africa and witnessing the historical mark of slavery and oppression of indigenous peoples in the United States, but the journey is guided by a bird, the swift, whose wingspan is described repeatedly as shaped like a cross so that when Achille crosses himself it is said that "he made the swift's sign."⁴ Walcott provides a scene in which Achille hears himself addressed by God:

And God said to Achille, "Look, I giving you permission
to come home. Is I send the sea-swift as a pilot,
the swift whose wings is the sign of my crucifixion.

And thou shalt have no God should in case you forget
my commandments." And Achille felt the homesick shame
and pain of his Africa.⁵

The poetry of *Omeros* exceeds the reminders of the destructive power of Western oppression that the work does indeed present and participates in a kind of "reenchantment of the world," a restoration of a sense of the sacredness of creation that is lost in the midst of a world focused on the expansion of wealth and power. An early scene of the poem in which Achille cuts down a tree to construct a canoe displays the spiritual awareness of Achille and the narrator that the tree he cuts down in a sense cooperates with him as he constructs his canoe, and his construction is understood as the release of the

God-given potential of the tree to float and travel swiftly in the medium of water as it enters a new stage of existence—an awareness that repudiates the flat concept of “natural resources” exploited in the service of a lifeless technological order. Christianity continually reminds us that we breathe together in communion with the Spirit and that our work is of greatest value when it is the cooperative work of cocreation in conspiracy of the good.

The first article in this issue of *Logos* exemplifies this theme in urgent and compelling terms. **Derek S. Jeffreys** in **“Eliminating All Empathy: Personalism and the ‘War on Terror,’”** takes up the question of the ethics of employing torture as a tactic in the war following the attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001, and raises the question of what the proper Christian response should be to anyone who advocates the use of torture in war. Jeffreys argues that we need to approach this question through an examination of the concept of empathy, and he develops a rigorous understanding of Christian personalism as preparation for exploring the concept of empathy, especially as that concept has been developed through phenomenological analysis, drawing upon thinkers such as Max Scheler, Alfred Schutz, and John F. Crosby. Jeffreys confronts important questions about empathy in the context of war. Can empathy be dangerous in a time of war? Can we extend empathy to terrorists without sanctioning evil? Does empathy produce weakness and moral relativism? The article asserts the importance of achieving solidarity with others, including with those against whom we might have to fight. The men who killed thousands of people in the World Trade Center refused to extend empathy and solidarity with their victims, and “such deliberate indifference to the person helped produce the horror of September 11.” Jeffreys shows that the U.S. government deliberately used language in a manner that indicates a similar indifference to the value of those persons it deemed enemies: “The U.S. government used the language of unlawful combatant and terrorist to undermine empathy and solidarity.” The danger of undermining our deepest values in the act of defending ourselves must be guarded

against carefully if our defense is to include a meaningful defense of those values. In the terms developed previously in this preface, we risk unwittingly conspiring with our enemies by echoing their evil if we lose touch with our own core values.

In **“Greek Tragedies: From Myths to Sacraments?”** Christopher D. Denny examines Hans Urs von Balthasar’s approach to ancient Greek tragedy. According to Denny, “Balthasar credits ancient Greek tragedy with achieving a model of anthropological integration. In other words, the plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides create literary worlds within which human beings are brought into harmony with the whole of being.” But this integration comes about only through suffering and death in tragedy. As a result, the worldview of Greek tragedy “mirrors the Christian focus on the centrality of Christ’s passion. This is why Balthasar claims that the myths of Greek tragedy provide a model of the ‘tragedy of Christ.’” Denny then shows how Balthasar explores the extent to which “the myths of classical Greek drama are capable of conveying grace, even in an attenuated form,” so that “the boundaries between the world of Athens and that of Jerusalem need to be reconsidered and perhaps redrawn.” Denny brings careful scholarly scrutiny to this important dimension of Balthasar’s work and closely examines the challenge of preserving the proper distinctions between Christianity and other religions while exploring degrees of continuity.

It is a pleasure to welcome **James V. Schall, SJ**, to the pages of *Logos* once again. Schall in this issue offers an insightful account of Chesterton’s incisive encounters with modern modes of thought in **“Chesterton: The Real ‘Heretic.’”** Schall presents an account of the “uproarious thinking” of Chesterton who dares to assert to a skeptical world the proposition “that Christianity, in its central positions about God, world, and man, is true” and that Christianity “describes reality better than any contrary theory or supposition alive and flourishing in the modern mind.” Schall examines the path of thought Chesterton followed as he engaged with what he found to be the defective thinking of many of his contemporaries, a pro-

cess that led him to claim that he found himself inventing what he at first thought to be a heresy but that turned out to be a rediscovery of orthodoxy, demonstrating what Schall calls an “uncanny . . . ability to see the truth in the midst of error.” The article identifies what Schall calls the “prophetic” strain in Chesterton’s thought as Chesterton attacks the smug assertions of modern modes of thought that attempt to explain everything through our own power but end up denying the reality of the world we encounter: “Rationalism is a closed system that wants to explain everything by reason including the existence of reason itself and its very reasonableness. But the human reason that we know and possess did not create itself. It was simply given with whatever it is we are made to be.” Chesterton challenges modern assumptions concerning reason and will and reasserts the full reality of each as illuminated in a Christian understanding of the world.

In **“Man-Woman Complementarity: The Catholic Inspiration,” Prudence Allen, RSM**, offers an insightful analytical overview of gender concepts in Western thought from ancient to modern times and then examines the conceptual innovation and power of contemporary Catholic views of gender complementarity as developed especially by Dietrich von Hildebrand, Edith Stein, and John Paul II. Stein’s account of such complementarity culminates in her call for personal integration: “The person can and should integrate the feminine and masculine aspects of the complementary gender. This integration protects a woman or a man from the extremes of either gender propensities.” Stein suggests that Jesus Christ is the best example of this integration, and she points to St. Teresa of Avila also as an exemplar of integration. Allen acknowledges a tendency toward a “stereotypical account of masculine and feminine characteristics” in the writings of Stein while situating her thought within the wider framework of contemporary Catholic personalism. Allen then explores the contributions made by Karol Wojtyła in writings extending from 1960 through his last published works as Pope John Paul II, noting especially the indebtedness John Paul II acknowl-

edges to the writings of Edith Stein. The importance of the contemporary Catholic views examined by Allen is far-reaching: “The most recent Catholic inspiration for integral gender complementarity has moved from an intellectual theory derived from the revelation of the *communio* among the three equal but significantly different Divine Persons in the Holy Trinity to become a precept for transforming the world through a new evangelization of cooperative and interpenetrating work by women and men.” The article concludes with a glance at the first encyclical of Pope Benedict XVI, which provides an “elaboration of differences and unity among persons through eros, filia, and agape.”

Daniel A. Dombrowski takes up a challenge by the prominent modern philosopher John Rawls to the view of happiness advocated by St. Ignatius of Loyola when Ignatius argues that all we should do should be done for the greater glory of God. Rawls calls this a “dominant end” view and thus Dombrowski’s article, “**All for the Greater Glory of God’: Was St. Ignatius Irrational?**” defends this concept as a dominant-end view from the charge leveled by Rawls that such a view is “irrational” or “mad.” Much is at stake in responding to this charge: “This saying [all for the greater glory of God] is the motto not only of the Jesuit order he founded but could also be seen as the motto for all theists in the Abrahamic traditions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam). As a result, nothing trivial is at stake in the effort to understand Rawls’s meaning and his apparent hyperbole.” Dombrowski examines and clarifies the claims made by Rawls about dominant-end views, acknowledges that some dominant-end views could indeed be called irrational or mad, but then shows that such charges of irrationality do not stand up when directed at the concepts presented by St. Ignatius. The role of discernment in the thinking of Ignatius is stressed, and the article concludes by showing that seeking the greater glory of God is fully consonant with the views of justice emphasized by Rawls in his work.

In “**The Role of the Fine Arts in the Spiritual Life,**” **Basil Cole**, **OP**, and **Jem Sullivan** take their orientation from the thinking of

Thomas Aquinas to show that “the appreciation of the fine arts is a kind of moral virtue, and it is not adequate to approach art as a consumer of culture or as a listener seeking emotional release or entertainment or as a passive receiver.” Theologians need to take the fine arts seriously because our response to works of art has deep implications for our spiritual well-being, as the article demonstrates, and the relationship between beauty and contemplation holds great significance in our lives. The authors show how

art, architecture, and sacred music can serve, as they have in the past, as concrete modes of catechesis, particularly moral catechesis. The need to engage the arts as concrete modes of catechesis is made all the more urgent within a visual culture in which multiple images shape and define thought, values, and identity. Television, billboard advertising, the Internet, and blockbuster movies, all of these sensory forms express and communicate the content and values of our culture, for good or ill.

The article demonstrates the deep connection between contemplation as experienced in our response to works of art and moral virtue and, as the title promises, helps us to understand the importance of the fine arts in our cultivation of the fullness of spiritual life.

Michael G. Brennan examines the early writings of Graham Greene in “**Graham Greene’s Catholic Conversion: The Early Writings (1923–29) and *The Man Within***” and offers an important reassessment especially of the novel named in the title:

Although modern critics have found little to admire in Greene’s earliest published attempt at novel writing, this article proposes that *The Man Within* continued to hold a deeper and more lasting significance to the author, who converted to Catholicism in 1926, primarily as the first published work in which his new-found faith, along with some poignant echoes of his Anglican past, formed a central and insistent strand of his creative impulse as a novelist.

Brennan provides a rich biographical account of Greene's life as it pertains to his early novels and especially to *The Man Within*, emphasizing Greene's spiritual journey during these years, and points especially to the strong likelihood that the canonization of St. Thérèse of Lisieux in 1925 exerted an influence on Greene in his writing during that period. Brennan helps us see how the spiritual elements in *The Man Within* can be seen to play a more important role than commonly thought in the novel, and he thereby connects Greene's early novels more fully to some of the later writings with more overt religious themes.

Michael C. Jordan

Editor

Notes

1. Nancy Murphy and George F. R. Ellis, *On the Moral Nature of the Universe* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 213.
2. *Ibid.*, 17.
3. Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (New York: Fawcett Crest, 1969), 137.
4. Derek Walcott, *Omeros* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1990), 8.
5. *Ibid.*, 134.