

## IN MEMORIAM

### **Nella FILIPPI 1921 - 2004**

In October 2003 the new academic year got under way as usual and Prof. Nella Filippi began her course *La nostalgia per l'Assoluto nella letteratura contemporanea* with her habitual enthusiasm and dedication. Within a month she had become so unwell as to need hospitalization. For the first time in over thirty years of teaching, she was not going to be able to complete a course.

The sense of loss in the whole Accademia – professors, students and staff – was very evident, for the “Professoressa” as she was affectionately known, had endeared herself to all by her cheerful and charming presence, her openness and availability, her competence and clarity as a teacher. As the weeks passed and hopes of a recovery faded, the concern turned to profound sadness at the imminent loss of one who had been so much part of the life of the Accademia for so long. On January 21<sup>st</sup>, 2004 Prof. Filippi entered into eternal life after weeks of intense suffering.

Nella Filippi was born in Chiari near Brescia in the north of Italy on December 26, 1921, one of a family of three. She pursued literary studies at the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart in Milan and gained a Doctorate in Letters and Philosophy in 1943. Beginning in that same year she taught courses in literature at secondary school level up until 1965. Encouraged by Paul VI, of whom she was a close relative, she undertook theological studies, first at the Institute “Mater Ecclesiae” and later in the Theology Faculty at the Pontifical University of St Thomas in Rome.

She obtained a doctorate in theology in 1971, the first woman to receive such a qualification from a pontifical university in Italy. Her doctoral thesis examined the topic “*Cristianesimo adulto in Dietrich Bonhoeffer: L'angoscia di Dio in Resistenza e Resa*”, and was published by Herder (Rome) in 1974. From then on, the study and teaching of theology became a passion with her. In this she followed faithfully the counsel of Paul VI, who when receiving her in private audience encouraged her to continue the teaching of theology because “theology that passes through the heart of a woman, will have much to offer”.

In the early seventies Nella Filippi took up the teaching of theology at university level, first at the Pontifical University of St Thomas Aquinas, the “Angelicum” (1971), and then at the Accademia Alfonsiana (1972). She also taught at the “Regina Mundi” Pontifical Institute (1972-1993) and later at the Pontifical Atheneum, “Regina Apostolorum (1993- 2004). Initially she specialized in the areas of patrology and Christology, and the Christological foundation of theology as well as the study of the Fathers of the Church became a lifelong preoccupation with her. Indeed, the last seminar she proposed at the Accademia was entitled *La morale cristiana nelle “Enarrationes in Psalmos” di San Agostino*.

At a time when literature was not generally regarded as being a source for the study of moral theology, Nella Filippi, from her wide reading in both literature and theology, began to study theological themes in contemporary literature and developed her own unique method of linking moral theology and literature. Some of the themes which she explored with students of the Accademia Alfonsiana in contemporary literature were: the silence of God; the problem of good and evil; love as eros and agape; modern man coming to grips with the finite and the infinite; human experience between the enigma and the conquest of freedom; utopia and hope; yearning for the absolute; the human search for God; the human encounter with Christ; sin and grace;

She also examined particular theological themes in the writings of well-known modern authors. Among these were:

*La speranza “disperata” ne “La Storia” di Elsa Morante;*  
*Il cammino dell’uomo dalla negazione di Dio alla ricerca della verità in*  
*Albert Camus;*  
*La rivolta dell’uomo ne “Il Diavolo e il buon Dio” di Sartre;*  
*Il problema del male e il destino dell’uomo in “Madre Courage e i suoi*  
*figli” di B. Brecht;*  
*La tragedia del male e la difficile ascesa verso la liberazione in W.*  
*Faulkner;*  
*Il tema del dolore nell’opera di A. Solzenicyn;*  
*L’uomo di fronte alla morte in M. Yourcenar;*  
*L’opzione morale in Simone de Beauvoir;*  
*Grandezza e miseria dell’uomo di fronte a Dio come “Nulla” e “Nessuno”*  
*in J. Luis Borgos.*

The generosity and openness of Prof. Filippi as well as her evident competence in exploring moral theological themes drew many students to ask for her guidance in the preparation of their license and doctoral dissertations. During her tenure as professor in the Accademia Alfonsiana, 67 students completed license dissertations and 21 their doctoral works under her direction.

At the Accademia Alfonsiana she was greatly esteemed for her professional and intellectual honesty, for that “*educazione del gusto*” which she knew how to pass on naturally to others. Her constant quest for scientific standards was always joined to great personal kindness as well as an exemplary self-control, which instilled serenity and confidence among students. Her capacity to make others, both students and colleagues, work in collaboration, her generous availability, her great humanity and wisdom, her rich cultural experience were gifts that made her long service profoundly valuable to the Accademia Alfonsiana.