

# WORLD YOUTH ALLIANCE BOOK LIST

## Lost in Cosmos

By Walker Percy

Lost in the Cosmos takes readers on a long and humorous exploration of the human person by asking us to engage in a self-help questionnaire. Those who attempt to answer Percy's questions will find themselves challenged to confront truths about the human person from the mysterious to the mundane.

### About Walker Percy

Walker Percy was born in 1916 in Birmingham, Alabama. When he was a teenager he moved to Greenville, Mississippi, to live with a cousin, following the deaths of his parents. Walker was intellectually stimulated by his cousin, himself a writer. Walker enrolled in the University of North Carolina in 1934, studying chemistry, and entered medical school at the Columbia College of Physicians and Surgeons, from which he received his medical degree in 1941. Working as a pathologist in New York, he contracted tuberculosis. During three years of convalescence, he explored the humanistic interests that he had been unable to pursue during his medical training: French and Russian literature, philosophy and psychology.

Known primarily as a "philosophical novelist", Percy has to the credit of his name some six novels, in addition to three works of non-fiction. Percy died of cancer on May 10, 1990.

### Guide questions for discussion groups

- In the last question Percy brings up two possible options for the self: first, to travel to New Ionia leaving behind the world and all of its problems to start a new enlightened existence; second, to travel to Tennessee accepting the world and all of its problems and to try to start a new enlightened existence. Why does Percy give these two options? Which option leaves the self most open to truly discover itself?
- Discuss the two Space Odysseys. Compare the views presented with other views of the modern world?

- Does this book actually help the self in raising these questions and providing an alternative theory to explain our uniqueness in the cosmos (semiotics), or does it merely point out the flaws in our current thinking, thereby leaving it up to us to help ourselves (it is after all called a self-help book)?
- What did you learn about yourself and other people from reading this book?