

COMMUNIQUÉ

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Above: Pope Benedict XVI blesses members of the international editorial board, who were gathered in Rome in December, 2007.

COMMUNIO STUDY CIRCLES

The reports from our Study Circle leaders this year included the welcome news of widespread interest in the new series “Why We Need,” which began in the Spring 2007 issue with D. C. Schindler’s article, “Why We Need Paul Claudel.” Various Study Circles have taken up and look forward to continuing the proposal to become acquainted (or re-acquainted) with a selection of “philosophers, poets, scientists, painters, musicians, theologians, and others” who will be featured in this new section of the journal. As will become apparent from the following summaries, the members are discovering and re-discovering new dimensions of beauty in reading these authors, whose widely-varying works shed light on a Catholic vision of the world.

We would like to alert you to three new circles: one in San Antonio, Texas, chaired by Jake and Ramie Samour, one in Wilmington, Delaware, coordinated by Dr. Kevin Ruth, and one in St. John, New Brunswick (see below). Their contact information is in the journal. Additionally, Connie Lasher announces a new location for the Study Circle in Gloucester, Maine; Jim Jacobs hopes that the New Orleans Circle will be able to “resume with more vigor in the coming year” in the wake of Hurricane Katrina; and Fr. Donald Planty hopes to reignite the Dale City group in 2008.

If you would like to start a Study Circle in your area, please contact the *Communio* office at communio@aol.com.

Communio, Washington, D.C.

Two main events marked the past year in *Communio*’s office in Washington: the editorial board meeting and weekend conference in November, and the international

editorial board meeting in December, which included an audience with Pope Benedict XVI.

Communio’s editorial board met in Washington November 29–December 2 for planning sessions and for a weekend conference on “The Convertibility of Being and Love.” Participants met in the *Communio* offices on campus at The Catholic University of America to take part in a series of discussions on being and love, the Trinity and donation, bodiliness, reason, freedom, the Eucharist, natural law, and the natural sciences. The format was simple and very fruitful. A presenter began each session with a five-minute thesis or “infusion,” which suggested and set the questions for discussion. The floor was then opened for the board and other guests to continue the conversation and debate.

The result was much fun, learning, and the opportunity to propose topics and questions among people who have been reading, writing, and thinking about these themes in their academic work. The weekend meeting included Masses and meals together, including an evening of pizza and live music at the home of David L. Schindler. A Study Circle meeting is expected for the summer.

Phoenix, Arizona

A local English pub has been added to the Phoenix Study Circle meeting locations, where the group has begun to meet in a room appropriately titled the “Chesterton Room.” While the group switches between the Irish Guinness of the former meeting place and the new English ales of the “Chesterton Room,” the conversation remains provocative, and *communio* ecclesiology is engaged more heartily than ever. Group coordinator Anthony DiStefano also noted a new feature of the Phoenix group: study circle t-shirts, with a Chesterton quotation on the back and “*Communio* Phoenix Study Circle” on the front.

The group recently met to discuss the first part of Benedict XVI’s encyclical, *Spe salvi*, which Anthony says will take the next one or two meetings to complete. In addition to *Communio*, other readings have included “material from Richard Dawkins on his God delusions, selections from *Paradise Lost*, G. K. Chesterton’s *The Everlasting Man*, and many other readings” of a similar sort. The members very much “look forward to another year together and possibly adding a new member or two.”

Fresno, California

“Our Fresno *Communio* Circle has been alive and well,” says Dori de Joseph. The members continue to meet weekly at the Holy Child Catholic Bookstore on Thursday evenings, with

usually 6 to 9 of the total 14 members in attendance. In Dori's words, they "have had an enjoyable influx of new participants from various disciplines, which has been very stimulating to the group." One of the longtime participants, Mike Standard, completed his doctoral dissertation while attending the meetings. A sincere "congratulations" goes out to him from the members.

Another participant the group wished to mention in the report is Father John Francis Kobler, "a passionate priest from Chicago," who had been a long-distance member for several years. Dori recalls that he had recently celebrated his 50th anniversary of ordination before his death, shortly after Pope Benedict's appointment. His presence, correspondence, and guidance in the group is still sorely missed.

During the year, the Fresno group explored several articles in the area of "art and image." "Reflections on Tillich's 'Protestant Principle' in Sacred Art" by Denis McNamara and D. C. Schindler's "Why We Need Paul Claudel," gave "a breadth of interpretation of meaning, from brokenness to the sacramentality of creation in understanding the visual image of Jesus' love for us, in a true encounter of the holy through art." After reading Rabbi Neusner's response (in the Summer 2007 issue) to Pope Benedict's book *Jesus of Nazareth*, the group has decided to read the whole text of the Pope's book together.

Bridgewater, Connecticut

Roger Duncan shares the following: "The Promisek *Communio* Study Circle has continued to meet on a monthly basis with a group of five to twelve avid discussants. We read *Communio* articles and spend anywhere from one to three sessions on a designated article depending on interest and the direction of the discussion. This year we read articles by Cardinal Scola and Father Granados and focused for a time on Dr. Chapp's '*Deus caritas est* and the Retrieval of a Christian Cosmology' (taking some of the issues quite a bit outside the territory of the article!). Reading D.C. Schindler's article on 'Why We Need Paul Claudel' has propelled us into reading Claudel's poetry and researching his plays."

On a different note, Roger also reports that "many of our *Communio* members participate in Promisek dramatic readings where we continue to explore the relationship between theater and theology." The most recent performance was a reading and dinner discussion of Archibald McLeish's *J.B.*

Jersey City, New Jersey

The study group chaired by Matt Laracy met regularly during 2007, reading several *Communio* articles, texts written by Pope Benedict, and reflecting on particular cultural questions in view of recent papal events.

One topic, which arose out of reflection on Rabbi Jacob Neusner's article, "Renewing Religious Disputation in Quest of Theological Truth: In Dialogue with Benedict XVI's *Jesus of Nazareth*," from the Summer 2007 issue, was that of

dialogue with Rabbinic Judaism. A lengthy consideration of aspects and categories of this dialogue emerged from this discussion, which concluded in hope in Pope Benedict's work and in the current dialogue within the Church and the world. The group plans to read the encyclical *Spe salvi* next.

As a final note, Matt announced the unexpected death of Deacon Bill Toth, a professor of theology at Seton Hall, on February 3, 2008, due to a heart attack: "I was greatly inspired by this outstanding theologian when he taught moral theology to me at Seton Hall. This is a great loss for our Church and a blow to his family. Let us remember them in prayer."

Bathgate, North Dakota

From the Virgil Michel Center, Lydia Reynolds reports that *Communio* discussions this year often developed "in response to the needs of the children and young adults in our circle." Recently, this has called for a new film study course led by "a 17-year-old budding film-maker," together with a discussion hour. In addition to viewing the films, the group has integrated the material with faith and theology.

"Another ongoing stimulus," according to Lydia, comes from "the Pattern Language ideas introduced by Alexander Kennedy," which have become one of the group's "practical projects." "These are two examples of topics in secular fields, which, through our discussions, we are valuing and sifting through from the standpoint of the fullness of faith."

Omaha, Nebraska

The Cornhusker *Communio* group, as Fr. Ross Burkhalter refers to the Omaha Study Circle, has met faithfully each month. According to his welcome letters of meeting minutes, the gatherings have been quite fruitful and engaging to the regular members in attendance: Fr. Burkhalter, Fr. Val Peter, and Fr. Ted Richling. Among some of the articles the group has discussed are Michael Hanby's "The Logic of Love and Unity of Catholic Truth: Reflections on *Deus caritas est*," "Christian Beauty" by Kevin Hart, Donald Graham's "On Fairy Stories, Families, and Love," "The Eclipse of the Sense of God and of Man" by Livio Melina, "Why We Need Paul Claudel" by D.C. Schindler, and Jacques Servais's article "Restlessness and Anxiety: Toward a Christian Discernment."

Fr. Burkhalter shared some of the main points that have come out of the many discussions: Eros is both helpful to love and human relationships and also in need of "purification"; an eros left in its rudimentary form "brings one to a state of utter boredom." From the standpoint of the beauty of truth, Fr. Burkhalter writes that the "challenge of pastors, priests, and catechists is to help the young see the *beauty* of the sacrificial death of Christ on the cross—not only to see the mere factual reasons for Christ's crucifixion, but to see his death on the cross as the supreme act of love that it is."

In a reflection on the role of mythical and science-fictional literature, the Nebraskan group remarked on the popularity of

various trilogies (e.g. Browning, Lewis, Tolkien, and Rowling) and that many readers were “caught up in the ‘bells and whistles’ of wizards and magic, but missed the themes of self-sacrificial love”; there is little in the culture to make readers sensitive to the themes that were most intended by the authors. “Nostalgia is a way to relive memories without the pain,” but it is important to live genuinely in our present age and to understand what these themes mean in our time. What sort of things are we suffering now and what is the task God is asking of us in our place in history?

Along these lines, Fr. Burkhalter refers to D. C. Schindler’s article on Claudel. Claudel is forgotten because the “western world seems to have lost imagination,” and Catholic literature portrayed by writers such as Flannery O’Connor and Tolkien “seem to be relics of the past. Today there is not much depth in the spiritual literary works of many Catholic authors.”

Finally, the group mentioned its discussion of the “two types of restlessness” referred to throughout the Summer 2007 issue. The members located them in a modern context: “the inability of man ‘to remain quiet in his room’ amid the radio, TV, news commentary, and video games,” serves the purpose of “drowning out the pain and anxiety of mortal life.” The second type of restlessness *affirms* the knowledge of our mortality and the “desire that draws man towards God who satisfies the longing of our hearts.” Fr. Burkhalter concludes, “we will always experience pain and anxiety, but, in admitting the pain and anxiety, we admit our frail human condition and our inability to make ourselves happy. As long as we realize that our faith will not take away the pain of life, we will be open to the infinity of God.”

Center Valley, Pennsylvania

The DeSales University Study Circle met six times in 2007 to discuss a variety of articles from the Spring and Summer issues of *Communio*. The group met at the homes of Larry Chapp, Rodney Howsare, and Stephen Loughlin. It also met once at Villanova University for a gathering hosted by D. C. Schindler and his wife, Jeanne.

Memphis, Tennessee

This is the completion of year number two for the Memphis group, which meets every month for a Rosary for Pope Benedict XVI’s intentions and group discussion. This group has recently given much attention to the Holy Father’s writings. This past year, they read together the Pope’s book *Jesus of Nazareth* and his autobiography, *Milestones*. As Glenna Bradshaw states: “When we discuss what we’ve read, it becomes clearer to us all!”

Glenna says that the fact that the members do not come from backgrounds of formal theological training leads to the occasional struggle with the weightier textual references. They persist happily, however, and look forward to working on the new encyclical *Spe salvi* in the coming year.

Denton, Texas

The Denton Study Circle continues to meet at the Mount Carmel Center, hosted by the Discalced Carmelites, Rose Marie Chisholm reports. Father Jerome, one of the Carmelite Fathers, participates in the group’s discussions when he is able.

In keeping with the renewed interest in “forgotten” literary figures, generated by the new series “Why We Need,” the group recently focused on Claudel, inspired by the Spring 2007 article, “Why We Need Paul Claudel.” The Circle members began with a discussion of his life, politics, and artistic philosophy, before moving on to the reading and conversation of his works. The group read and discussed his *The Satin Slipper* (with reference to Holger Zaborowski’s article in the Summer 2005 issue, “Loving the World and More Than the World: Tragedy and Transcendence in Paul Claudel’s *The Satin Slipper*”) and the poem “La vierge à midi,” and listened to recorded excerpts from Arthur Honegger’s opera, “Jeanne d’Arc au Bûcher.” The libretto of the latter, Rose Marie remarks, Claudel wrote somewhat unwillingly, at first. Finally, the group engaged some of Claudel’s essays on art and religion from *Ways and Crossways*. All in all it was a very Claudel-inspired year.

Martinsburg, West Virginia

The Martinsburg Study Circle has continued its bi-weekly meetings with one of St. Joseph’s small faith groups, Donald Pathoff reports. The ten members of the Shepherd’s Gate Christian Life Community (CLC), after formally completing the Ignatian Nineteenth Annotation Spiritual Exercises, are still hosting the *Communio* Study Circle. (This relationship began in 2005.) Over the past few years, articles were selected from recent issues of *Communio* to match the themes of each week’s Spiritual Exercise reflection. Others from the parish and the wider community were, and continue to be, invited to participate or model this gathering format.

Starting in November, the group elected to begin a sequential journey through Pope Benedict XVI’s *Jesus of Nazareth*. The bi-weekly meetings will continue the CLC Ignatian discernment process, but will draw on a few pages of *Jesus of Nazareth* to help bring Pope Benedict’s voice and vision to the small group.

Don writes that “organizing the *Communio* Study Group within the small faith community format over the past two years has worked well. It began when the former Pastor at St. Joseph, Fr. John DiBacco, helped the study group explore ways it could offer the Spiritual Exercises and *Communio* way of life to more members of the parish.” *Communio*, then, “continues to enrich the discussion and prayer life of the members of this group. It is hoped that the issue on *Restlessness* will allow the group to let its attention be further drawn to the nature and image of desire. This is the restless desire that dwells and rests in the Persons of God and sheds light on the reality of and search for truth, beauty, and goodness.”

St. John, New Brunswick

There is a new *Communio* Study Circle in St. John, New Brunswick. Coordinator John Roderick reports:

“Upon returning home to Saint John following two years at the John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family, I desired to share the beauty and wonder I experienced pursuing theological studies. The first Study Circle session was held October 22, 2007, at Saint Peter’s Church, to discuss the purpose and mission of the Study Circle, and to discuss Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger’s lecture on the 20th anniversary of the founding of *Communio*, ‘Communio: A Program.’ We began by reading David L. Schindler’s entry for ‘*Communio*’ from the Catholic Social Sciences Encyclopedia, and then the proposed text by Cardinal Ratzinger. We found that each text helped enlighten the meaning of the other and beautifully explained the foundational work involved with the formation of the journal. Those who attended shared their personal experience of the confusion and many changes that followed the Second Vatican Council. It was a great learning and witnessing of faith among those who attended the study session. Following the session, copies of the journal were made available for those interested in becoming more acquainted with it. We will be working next on Cardinal Ratzinger’s ‘The Holy Spirit as *Communio*: Concerning the Relationship of Pneumatology and Spirituality in Augustine’ (Summer 1998). Let us pray that in our work we will be inspired and guided toward a greater love and participation in the life and mission of the Church.”

Waterloo, Ontario

Peter Erb reports from Waterloo:

In addition to the regular first Friday gatherings to discuss selected *Communio* articles, the Waterloo *Communio* Circle held two Study Days in 2007; the first on June 9 at which some 40 persons gathered for lectures and seminar sessions on Revelation, centering their attention on a reading of *Dei Verbum*. The session was followed by a second on October 27, “Towards a Perfect Society,” a workshop on the nature and unity of the Church, in which we sought to invigorate our understanding of the Church and of ecumenical dialogue by drawing upon the idea of “perfect society” in a way that harmonized with Vatican II’s notion of the church as “mystery,” presented in *Lumen gentium*. The opening address was given by Mark Morley, a seminarian of the Diocese of Hamilton (St. John’s Parish, Guelph), which was followed in the afternoon with an Evangelical response by Norman Klassen, professor of English Literature (St. Jerome’s University, Waterloo), and a workshop directed by Deacon Charles Fernandes. Three special events are planned for the spring of 2008 in addition to our regular sessions, and, as has been the case with earlier Study-Day presentations, it is our hope to publish the October 27 lectures in pamphlet form.

Zouk Mikayel, Lebanon

The Study Circle group in Lebanon, under the guidance of Edward Alam, has decided to spend the year reading Hans Urs von Balthasar’s “Theology of History.” Edward writes: “We are now reading the third chapter on the ‘Role of the Holy Spirit.’ One particularly interesting insight thus far, which we continue to explore in the light of the present book, concerns the uniqueness of the Christian teaching on the Incarnation, which is central to the idea of the recapitulation of history in Christ as the norm of history. In this regard, we have been comparing the Hindu tradition of the ‘incarnations’ of Vishnu, who becomes man not once, but many times, and not only a man but also a woman, at different times and eras. It is as if the Divine needs continually to be ‘penetrating’ history in order to save and divinize it. Though this is a valuable insight, the plethora of incarnations in this tradition eventually weakens the very thing that it is trying to achieve: a solid, historical, definitive, factual unity between the divine and the earthly realms, as the sheer volume and variety of incarnations eventually become interpreted in that tradition as ‘myth’ or ‘legend.’ With the help of von Balthasar, we have been trying to establish how the Christian Incarnation can thus be communicated to the whole of history in some sort of universal, lasting, normal sort of way; since ‘limiting’ the Incarnation to one time, place, woman, culture, period of history, etc., brings with it its own possibilities for scandal. In this, the procession and mission of the Holy Spirit provide us with an answer: the Church, the Sacraments, and the Saints.”

The Chesterton Institute for Faith and Culture

Stratford Caldecott writes that the Thomas More College of Liberal Arts in New Hampshire under the presidency of Jeffrey O. Nelson has started several initiatives that might be of interest to *Communio* readers. The institution, which recently became the publisher of the journal *Second Spring*, is beginning an associated book publishing program and has recently acquired a small house in Oxford where it hosts the G.K. Chesterton research library. In the same house, Stratford is developing the College’s new “Center for *Ressourcement* Studies.” He hopes to have occasional meetings of a *Communio* Study Circle with visits from Adrian Walker and other *Communio* contributors during the coming year.

Sara Trudeau, Editor, COMMUNIQUÉ
Communio, P.O. Box 4557, Washington, D.C. 20017
 Phone: (202) 526-0251, Fax: (202) 526-1934
communionnewsletter@gmail.com