

INTRODUCTION: PARADOXES OF FAITH



The Summer 2024 issue of *Communio* revolves around the “Paradoxes of Faith.” The issue reflects on the nature of paradox, its role within the Christian faith, and the impact of our response to various paradoxes. Paradoxes are inextricable both from the Christian faith and from the nature of reality itself. To read the gospels is to be confronted with the paradoxes Christ sets before us: a particular man is also the God of the Jews; the God of the Jews has extended his covenant to all peoples in such a way that not one iota of the law has passed away, and yet the law has been fulfilled by Christ; the last shall be first; those who seek to preserve their own life shall lose it but those who are willing to lose their lives will preserve it eternally; the grain of wheat must die in order to bear fruit; and, perhaps more perplexing still, the immutable, impassible God truly suffered and died on a Cross. The one who accepts these paradoxes in faith does not refuse to think but rather opens himself up to a deeper understanding of the divine mystery and of the mystery of the world as created. The essays in this issue aim to reflect on various aspects of this mysterious reality.

G. K. Chesterton’s distinctive writing style is highly enjoyable to many and highly irritating to some, but it is not merely a matter of style. In “The Inner Necessity of Paradox in Chesterton’s Humble Orthodoxy,” **Thomas Möllenbeck** shows how understanding the artistry of Chesterton’s writing involves “understanding the paradox of the artist.” It is true that Chesterton frequently uses paradox as a way of revealing the

received opinion of his intellectual milieu as the vulgar error it is. But more than this, paradox permeated Chesterton's own life. It was the self-contradictory accusations of the atheist against the Church that first opened for him the mystery of the faith. The comedic nature of his writing is revelatory of his theological and metaphysical convictions: his humor is not the opposite of sincerity; it is in fact a testament to his orthodoxy.

In "The Presence of Mystery: Structures of Paradox in Hans Urs von Balthasar," **Roberto Carelli** argues that the cornerstones of Balthasar's thought are marked by paradox. Balthasar sees paradox not as a limit to or end of thought but "as the sign of mystery and the reawakening of thought." He uses paradox as a theoretical apparatus by which he "avoids committing both of the contrary errors of modern thought: neither substituting theology with anthropology nor, reactively, erasing anthropology from the theological sphere." The mystery of paradox, Carelli argues, finds an "original synthesis" in Balthasar: "He affirms paradox as the characteristic, synthetic figure of an intellectual project centered on *the presence of mystery*, that is, on the hyper-tension between the fullness of God and the incompleteness of man." Carelli walks us through the structures of paradox in Balthasar's thought, exploring how his use of paradoxes evidences the influence of his teachers and contemporaries—Erich Przywara, Gustav Siewerth, Ferdinand Ulrich, Henri de Lubac, and Romano Guardini.

Why do we fall into heresy? **Peter John McGregor** seeks to answer this question in "Heresy: The Rejection of Paradox." He argues that heresy is caused by an inability to come to terms with what Henri de Lubac calls the "paradoxes of faith." In the gospels, Christ sets before his interlocutors a myriad of paradoxes; his very being (both God and man) is a paradox with which the Apostles are constantly grappling. To come to believe in the Gospel is to accept these paradoxes: God is both three and one; Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man; and so on. The one who believes is the one who accepts both poles of the paradox and acknowledges that reality is a mystery that surpasses his own understanding. The heretic is the one who rejects the paradox in one way or another. In this essay McGregor explores five possible responses to paradox—apostasy, false cataphaticism, synthesis, false apophaticism, and acceptance—scrutinizing the major

heresies that have afflicted the Church from Arianism to Hegelianism, and thus shedding light on the nature of Christian faith.

Jeremiah Barker offers a meditation on the possibility and meaning of suffering in God in “Toward a Spiritual Christology: Reflections on the Impassible Suffering of God.” He draws together and compares the early patristic teachings with those of Hans Urs von Balthasar and Joseph Ratzinger. Barker argues that “God is eternally an impassible sufferer, and that this is revealed in the Incarnate Son’s election and sacramental espousal of humanity united as Church in his own pneumatic union with the Father.” Christ’s sacrifice for the salvation of the Church reflects the exchange of love between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It reveals that Christ is both victim and priest: his suffering is something he underwent, but only because he had chosen it from all eternity. As Barker sees it, the impassible suffering Christ endured in his Passion is not essentially different from what he endures when he allows his creation to reject or accept him in freedom.

Through an analysis of the vocabulary of love in the Book of Revelation, **Donal A. McIlraith** argues that the marriage imagery found throughout the book offers us an important insight into the relation between Christ and his bride, the Church. In “The Triumph of Love: Nuptial Imagery in the Book of Revelation,” McIlraith explores how the stages of a first-century Jewish marriage are mirrored in the last book of the New Testament: the seven churches represent the espoused wife; the works of these churches represent the bride’s lengthy preparations before the marriage feast; and the bride’s ritual preparations stand as a testament of the bride’s love for the bridegroom. Correspondingly, the works of the seven churches expose their fidelity—or infidelity—to Christ. McIlraith argues that this exegetical approach to Revelation allows us to see the New Jerusalem as the bride who, by persevering in love, triumphs. She is thus filled with glory at the wedding feast of the Lamb and brought to the final consummation of love.

In “Plato’s *Timaeus* as a Symbol of Greek Culture in Mark 10:46–52: A Contextual Interpretation,” **Christopher V. Mirus** reflects on the healing of the blind beggar “the son of Timeaus, Bartimaeus.” He argues it is plausible that Mark is intentionally referring to Plato’s *Timeaus*. Mirus supports the claim

by situating the reference to the *Timeaus* within the context of the major themes of Mark's gospel: if Mark is referring to the *Timeaus*, he does so as part of the broader question of the relation of the Greeks to the new covenant. Jesus' salvific message is meant for all people, but the gentiles must recognize that the God who saves them is the Jewish God. "Greek culture claims for itself the clearest vision that a human being can attain; Mark responds that such vision is partial at best, and that the best it can manage is to respond to an inspiration of the Jewish God, so as to beg his Jewish son for the gift of sight. We shall never know for certain what Mark read; we can say only that if he had not read these lines, then his choice of the *Timaeus* as a symbol of Greek culture was happier than he realized." According to Mirus's interpretation of Mark, it is faith—not simply philosophy—that gives man true sight. □

—The Editors