

INTRODUCTION: PERSON AND COMMUNITY



The Fall 2024 issue is dedicated to the theme “Person and Community.” This theme is at the heart of the *Communio* school, the teachings of our founders, and even the journal’s name. What does it mean to be a human *person*? Is there any room in human personhood for relationality? What is the connection, if any, between human personhood and trinitarian personhood? What is the relation between a human person qua person and his relation to God and other human beings? Can persons *give themselves* truly, or is this only a metaphorical way of speaking? What does authentic relation look like, vis-à-vis both society and the Church? The articles presented in this issue will aim to reflect on some of these questions, drawing on the tradition—Scripture, the theology of Joseph Ratzinger, John Paul II, Thomas Aquinas, and others—as a sure guide and anchor.

In his preparation for the Second Vatican Council, then-bishop Karol Wojtyła wrote that the central task of the council should be to teach on the “theme of Christian personalism.” The teaching of *Gaudium et spes* on the human person became a continual reference point for the subsequent teaching of John Paul II’s pontificate. In particular, the pope drew upon this passage: “Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear” (22). In “The Christian Personalism of John Paul II,” **Nicholas J. Healy Jr.** lays out a philosophical anthropology based on the logic of gift by exploring the “relationship between Christology and anthropology” in the thought

of John Paul II and reflecting on “the gift of the Eucharist as the culmination of Christ’s saving work and as the perfect archetype of the relationship between person and act.” Healy considers particularly how a “Christian way of philosophizing” reveals the significance of relation in the constitution of the human person.

In “Fulfilling the ‘Law of the Gift’: On *Esse* as the Principle of *Agere* in Karol Wojtyła’s Anthropology,” **D.C. Schindler** refutes the interpretation that John Paul II used the phrase “gift of self” merely in a metaphorical sense. Schindler argues that throughout his work John Paul II understood the phrase as having a genuinely ontological meaning. The misinterpretation Schindler contests stems from the pope’s response to an objection made by Fr. Meissner concerning *Love and Responsibility*. Meissner objected to the idea that a person could genuinely give himself to another person, arguing that “in the end we belong only to God, and that nevertheless to insist on this point is to offend against the dignity of the human person, who is *essentially* incommunicable.” According to Fr. Meissner, to be a human person means to be “under the authority of oneself alone (*iuris sui*).” As Schindler argues in this essay, John Paul II overcomes this objection by denying the dichotomy between being one’s own and being another’s, and he does so precisely by recognizing being as gift. “Personhood, as Wojtyła interprets it, intensifies *both* a belonging to oneself *and* a belonging to another in this unique exchange. In this respect, not only does a person not *lose* himself in truly giving himself to another, but he in fact becomes more properly a person.”

In “Marxist Alienation versus Wojtyłian Participation: Toward a Personalistic Vision of Life in Society,” **Grzegorz Ignatik** considers Karol Wojtyła’s refutation of Marxism’s understanding of man in his masterpiece *Person and Act*. Marxism argues that the causes of man’s alienation are external to him; this ideology “reduced man and his actions to nature (biology), society, and history.” While Wojtyła acknowledges that “human action is influenced or even conditioned by man’s biological makeup, social factors, and historical development; he simply does not reduce human action to these elements.” Thus, while economic and political reforms may be necessary, they are not sufficient. Wojtyła’s account focuses on *participation*, which “consists in securing man’s transcendence in his action together with other

people and not—as in Marxism—in presupposing man’s determination by internal or external factors.” His account ultimately provides a more authentically human view of how man can form just and loving communities that fulfill rather than alienate him.

Many may be surprised to learn that Joseph Ratzinger wrote in 1972 that in some cases it could be permissible for the divorced and remarried to receive Communion. However, Ratzinger later retracted this earlier position and became a staunch defender of Pope John Paul II’s teaching. In “Joseph Ratzinger’s Liturgical Theology: Illuminating the Issue of Communion for the Divorced and Remarried,” **Mark Banga** argues that Ratzinger did not rescind his early position simply out of obedience to the Magisterium, although such obedience was important to him. Rather, Banga argues, Ratzinger’s ultimate position flows from the core tenants of his own liturgical theology. When Ratzinger changed his position, he became not only more consistent with the pope’s binding teaching but also more consistent with his own theology. The reason the divorced and remarried cannot receive Communion is primarily liturgical and metaphysical: the Eucharist is the sacrament of Christ’s union with his bride the Church, the archetype of conjugal love, and a married person participates in this mystery in a privileged way, since marriage is the earthly sacramental symbol of this eternal reality. As Banga argues, a divorced and remarried person cannot say “‘yes’ to the form of conjugal love being enacted in the Eucharist, while simultaneously saying ‘no’ (given their current way of life) to that same form still active in their marriage with their first and only spouse.” Ultimately, a “limited form of participation is what calls one home to repentance, reconciliation, and full participation.”

Reflecting on the words of Augustine that “in God there is only substance and relation,” Joseph Ratzinger asserts that Christian theology revolutionizes our understanding of reality because it places relation on an equal footing with substance. In “Transcendental Relationality: A New Proposal on ‘Person,’” **Andreas Kramarz** analyzes the philosophical implications of Ratzinger’s claim. He does so by juxtaposing it with Aristotelian-Thomistic metaphysics and the Augustinian and Thomistic concepts of “person” and the Trinity. Building on the contributions of W. Norris Clarke and Cornelio Fabro, Kramarz argues that “the apparent dichotomy between substance and relation

and the difficulty of squaring trinitarian and human personhood with the Boethian–Thomistic definition of person is resolved not on a categorical level but on a transcendental level.”

Drawing upon French philosopher Michel Henry and Pope John Paul II, **Michael A. Meerson’s** “Human Truth, Dignity, and Deification in John 9” reflects on Jesus’ healing of the man born blind as a case study to explore the “adequate anthropology” presented in John’s gospel, namely that of “deification as re-creation.” “Recognizing Jesus’ voice and worshiping him as the Son of God, the man born blind enters into life, . . . the divine state of being (εἶναι); and the ‘I am’ of his self-awareness, after being re-created by Jesus, mirrors Jesus’ own revelatory ‘I am.’ In this story, the two incognitos, the invisible God and the human self, hidden behind blind eyes and the silence of depravity, come to the light of day.”

It is commonly thought that Darwinian evolution put the nail in the coffin of Aristotelian–Thomistic causality. It is also generally accepted that “fitness” is the driving force behind natural selection. The apparent compatibility of these two claims is, however, called into question when we attempt to give a precise definition of “fitness.” In “Fitted for a Purpose: The Problem of Biological Fitness and an Aristotelian–Thomistic Solution” **Seth Hart** argues that the current debate in the philosophy of biology regarding “fitness” can be solved by a reappropriation of final causality, and thus an Aristotelian–Thomistic teleological interpretation of fitness. According to this interpretation, fitness becomes the fourfold conjunction of teleologically ordered ends in organisms. As Hart argues, this interpretation is actually closer to Darwin’s own view of the role of fitness in natural selection. “Evolution could then be interpreted as the process by which each creature seeks to imitate the divine goodness more fully in a manner proper to its nature. This would, in many respects, represent a return to the cosmological vision of Thomas and the medievals, yet it is one that, more than being merely compatible with our best scientific theories, may actually be the best conceptual fit for them.” □

—The Editors