
COMMUNIQUE

A Supplement to *COMMUNIO* Vol. 35, No. 4

Number 17, Winter 2008

COMMUNIO STUDY CIRCLES: Update on 2008 Activities

The reports from Study Circle leaders this year continue to confirm great interest in the new series “Why We Need,” which this year featured Glenn Olsen’s article (Spring 2008) on historian Christopher Dawson. Coming soon: Why We Need Ferdinand Ulrich.

We always welcome new study circles. 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.

The *Communio* offices moved onto the campus of The Catholic University of America in late summer 2008. We hope to host a Study Circle meeting in the coming semester, perhaps in conjunction with the Dale City, Virginia group. Readers in the Washington, D.C. area who would like to be added to the list, please send an email to communio@aol.com.

The first volume of the proceedings from *Communio*’s 2005 conference, *Love Alone is Credible: Hans Urs von Balthasar as Interpreter of the Catholic Tradition*, is available from Eerdmans Publishing Company. Also forthcoming from Eerdmans is the first in our three-volume collection of *Communio* articles by Joseph Ratzinger.

The international meeting of *Communio* editors was in Lisbon in May, 2008, where representatives from the fifteen editions of *Communio* met for three days to discuss current and upcoming themes, to catch up on cultural news and events, and to plan the next year of common work.

Bishop Peter Henrici, S.J. will retire as the international coordinator this year, and will be replaced by Cardinal Angelo Scola in 2009. The 2009 May meeting is in Chur, Switzerland. More news and updates can be found at www.communio-icr.com.

Bridgewater, Connecticut

The Promisek *Communio* Study Circle met once a month throughout last year. They continued to focus on articles from the *Communio* journal, but also “branched out” and read the opening section of Hans Urs von Balthasar’s *Theodrama*, the second part of his trilogy. Roger Duncan and Kelly Briney report “lively discussions” on this text. Additionally, several members of the Circle participated in dramatic readings in the Bridgewater area, taking up the new insights gained from their recent readings of the *Theodrama*. “Archibald MacLeish’s *J.B.* and Owen Barfield’s *Orpheus*, with dinner and discussions, yielded much enjoyment and food for thought.”

Wilmington, Delaware

The nascent Wilmington *Communio* Study Circle celebrated its first full year of fellowship in February 2009. Kevin Ruth says, “Our membership has seen growth over the course of this year, from a core group of four to an expanded group of seven. We will be looking to grow the group further in 2009.”

The group met three times in 2008, beginning in February with a discussion of Roch Kereszty’s article, “The Challenge of *Jesus of Nazareth* for Theologians,” and “spent some time wrestling with the notion of ‘confidence’ in New Testament theology today (not to mention the historical method).” Dr. Ruth continues, “We decided that a discussion of Benedict XVI’s book *Jesus of Nazareth* seemed appropriate, and made this the topic of our June meeting. We had a lengthy discussion of various aspects of the book, an exercise which continued to deepen our appreciation for the Pope’s ability to masterfully weave together scripture, tradition, and theological reflection.

“For the October meeting, we chose Jean-Pierre Batut’s article, ‘The Transfiguration: Or, the Outcome of History Placed in the Hands of Freedom,’ from Spring, 2008.

“As we look to 2009, one of our focal points will be to reflect on the life of Fr. Richard John Neuhaus, known personally to a couple of members of our core group. The Study Circle will read his forthcoming book, *American Babylon: Notes of a Christian Exile*, upon its release, and use it as a springboard to address the interplay of religion and culture in America.”

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Kansas City, Kansas

There is a new Study Circle in Kansas City, Kansas this year, whose members include several former employees and friends of *Communio* from Washington, D.C. The group includes families, graduate students, teachers, and scientists, among others, and would like to invite all other interested readers in the Kansas City area to join us. Please visit our website (kcommunio.blogspot.com) for news and updates or to contact the organizer, Elizabeth Rielley, for more information.

The first meeting focused on a discussion of Adrian Walker's "The Gift of Simplicity: Reflections on Obedience in the Work of Adrienne von Speyr" and Anne Burleigh's article on Wendell Berry and marriage. The second meeting discussed Fr. López's article, "Mary: Certainty of Our Hope." We have enjoyed eating together and wonderful conversations, and are looking forward to future meetings to discuss *Communio* articles.

Boston, Massachusetts

Gregory Gillis informs *Communio* readers that the Greater Boston Communio Discussion Group continues to meet for one Sunday per month at St. Clement's Eucharistic Shrine in uptown Boston. "We come from as far north as Haverhill as well as from Cape Cod." Although the summer Red Sox games can challenge parking and the winter snowstorms can discourage driving, Mr. Gillis acknowledges that the group has persisted through these things and has had some "great discussions," as well as hosted a performance based on some of the *Communio* readings.

This past spring, inspired by the Winter, 2006 issue *Art and Image*, organist Chuck Navien and his wife, Susan, a soprano, gave a well-received Mozart recital and lecture. They decided to open this event to the public. "Following the structure of two similar events that the Boston Circle held in 2003 and 2005 to explicate articles on Bach, Mozart, and Schubert," the Naviens held an all-Mozart concert. Drawing on articles of *Communio* that spanned several years, they "presented a program of eight alternating organ and vocal compositions, interspersed with quotations from various *Communio* articles." The program was held at Trinity Episcopal Church in Haverhill, Massachusetts with the following program:

- I. *Adagio* in C Major, KV 356
- II. *Ora pro nobis (Regina coeli)*, KV 108
- III. *Fugue* in E-flat, KV 153
- IV. *Alleluia (Exultate, jubilate)*, KV 165
- V. *Adagio* in B Minor, KV 540
- VI. *Et incarnatus est* (Grand Mass in C Minor), KV 427

- VII. Church Sonata in C Major, KV 336
- VIII. Cantata "Die ihr des unermesslichen Weltalls," KV 616

Presently, the group is greatly enjoying Gil Bailie's article, "Raising the Ante: Recovering an Alpha and Omega Christology," from the Spring, 2008 issue. Coincidentally, Dr. Bailie will be visiting Cambridge, Massachusetts this spring to lead a series of discussions on the works of René Girard, Christian anthropologist. "That's serendipity!" Mr. Gillis writes, "We hope other groups are getting as much satisfaction from their meetings."

Jersey City, New Jersey

From Matt Laracy we hear that the "North New Jersey Study Circle continues to meet quarterly in Jersey City to converse about the most recent *Communio* issue." He says, "Normally, we gather on a Sunday afternoon for a light dinner and drinks before we join in a short prayer and enjoyable discussion. Over the last year, we lost two members: Michael Flannery and Dr. Bill Toth."

Bathgate, North Dakota

From the Virgil Michel Center and greater Bethlehem Community, Lydia Reynolds reports that many plans of the groups have begun to take shape recently: "A long-desired and worked-for Housing Co-operative has not only come to birth, but has taken the name 'St. Anthony of Padua's Housing Co-op.' This fledgling cooperative is in the process of preparing a building site, situated less than half a mile away from the former church location. It has tilled soil and planted trees around its main acreage, tended vegetable gardens, and above all, has frowned, argued, worried, groaned, and hoped across many, many meetings.

"As we are keenly aware—especially living in this area—to fulfill a social and economic vision, you need the time, the place, and the persons. In this case, it takes only a few who are ready to commit to the degree of poverty that makes for spiritual growth and, ultimately, new life on every level: a young, new family; two single parents; two families with both younger and grown-up children; and a priest and two consecrated women, who contribute essential perspectives.

"Peguy's 'little girl hope' is driving these people—young and old alike—into the 'co-op' of commitment. They are choosing the corral of restrictions to one's freedom that comes with deciding to be involved in giving hours and hours of thought, time, work, and relating together. They are forging a structure of personal cooperation that will enable the physical structure of houses to happen.

"Besides the Housing Co-operative folk, consisting of

some of The Spirit and the Bride Say Come! members (some of whom are also Bethlehem Community members), other guests and friends come, help on projects, show support and decided interest. Bethlehem Community meanwhile represents on its own a different model of a lived experience in what it takes for people to cooperate, in an ongoing way, in housing, ministry, business, and fun!"

Omaha, Nebraska

The "Cornhusker" Communio Study Group met several times last year. Fr. Ross Burkhalter, Fr. Val Peter, and Fr. Ted Richling came together to discuss the articles in *Communio* over the past year. One of the articles discussed was "America's God" by Stanley Hauerwas. Fr. Burkhalter reports: "We discussed how the Protestant religious ethic has fostered an individualistic mentality," which implied that "people should be free of any undue influence" or responsibility toward the other. "An individualistic mentality, however, will always be foreign to Church teaching and praxis. As Catholics, we were taught that there are limits to freedom. We were trained as children in the natural law and taught that freedom has built-in limitations. There are no absolute rights for anyone in the United States or anywhere."

At another meeting, the members discussed "how everything is dependent on the generating power of God the Father." This fatherly generating is seen in "Abraham, a pagan, who is called to be the father of many nations because of his fidelity. Beginning with Abraham, all God's action follows the same pattern of election, generation, and covenant through the Jewish people, all the way to Jesus's carrying of the Cross." In the same way, the group reflected on the fact that truth is generated within the covenant Christ makes with the Church. "The Church is the soul of the body of truth," the group emphasized. "Freedom means to develop the message of truth from the faith, as generated in the Church. An academic institution must understand what real freedom means. The institution must be faithful to the truth as the Church interprets it," which means remembering its roots. The Jewish people help the Church to remember her roots and to be faithful to the covenant.

The group also read Stratford Caldecott's article "'Face to Face': The Difference Between Hindu and Christian Non-Dualism" from the Winter, 2007 issue. As in ancient times the Church interacted with the Greco-Roman world, so in "our own times we need to interact with the Asiatic religions, particularly with Hinduism. As we received the good from the Greco-Roman world, so we must receive the good from the Hindu faith." According to the members, the problem with accepting the Hindu search for unity, is "getting there." We have to move

toward unity in such a way that it remains *trinitarian* unity. "The Hindu people could learn from us to love the diversity that will not swallow up individuality. With the breakdown of the family in the West, we need the family of love imagery that the Trinity illustrates."

Center Valley, Pennsylvania

"The Lehigh Valley Communio Group ventured out last year from its typical format. First of all, we missed Larry Chapp, who spent the fall semester working in Rome. Secondly, we tried two different sorts of meeting formats. In one, we read an article on Church music from Joseph Ratzinger's *New Song for the Lord*, and discussed it after attending a Latin Mass with a traditional *Schola Cantorum*. Instead of simply reading about Gregorian Chant, we first listened to it.

"At the next meeting, we viewed Robert Bresson's film rendition of George Bernanos's *Diary of a Country Priest* at the Howsare house. Afterwards, we had a lively and interesting discussion of the film. In the final meeting of 2008, we read and discussed Glenn Olsen's, 'Why We Need Christopher Dawson.'" The discussion was led by the Circle's "token historian," Brennan Pursell, in a group already "enthusiastic about the 'Why We Need' series." Finally, the members read and discussed the small essay by Balhasar, "On the Theological Concept of Person."

Denton, Texas

The Denton Circle also "continues to enjoy the 'Why We Need' series." In fact, the group expanded on the background of the *Communio* text, by asking each member to read a work (or part of a work) related to the person featured in the article. For example, one of the members read Christopher Dawson's "Medieval Essay" in conjunction with the *Communio* article, "Why We Need Christopher Dawson." According to Rose Marie Chisholm, this method "has greatly enhanced our understanding of these great Catholic authors and thinkers."

Dale City, Virginia

"The D.C. area study circle, coordinated by Father Planty, has been dormant but hopes to begin again in 2009. Washington area readers please be alert for information regarding new meetings."

Martinsburg, West Virginia

Don Patthoff reports the following: "The Martinsburg Communio Study Circle continues to integrate its bi-weekly meetings with the Shepherd's Gate Christian Life

Community (CLC). Starting in 2005, articles and passages from recent issues of *Communio* were used to match the themes of each week's Spiritual Exercise reflection. An open invitation continues to be extended to the members of our St Joseph parish and the local community.

"In November 2007, the ten-member core group began a year-long sequential journey through Pope Benedict XVI's *Jesus of Nazareth* to help bring Pope Benedict's voice and vision to the small group. As that journey came to a close, the 2008 *Communio* Summer issue on Hope came out. Tracey Rowland's article: 'Variations on the Theme of Christian Hope in the Work of Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI' fit nicely. It helped the group transition to this year's gatherings which will examine a new approach to exploring the Ignatian Principles and Foundation. It will be based on some previous work of one of our members, Edith Darrow, who was once part of the world CLC headquarters in Rome, and a member of the Sodalities for almost fifty years. Some passages from Fr. López's 'Mary, Certainty of Our Hope,' which was in the same issue, contributed to a very moving Advent season and meaningful Christmas."

Waterloo, Ontario

In the past year, the Waterloo Communio Circle continued to meet monthly to discuss articles from the journal. "In addition," Peter Erb reports, "during the spring of 2008, we met on a Sunday afternoon to review and respond to Charles Taylor's work, *A Secular Age*, and are planning two additional sessions this coming year." One of these sessions will be a "full day of analysis of a draft article by a member on the Church as a 'perfect society.'" Later in the summer, the group will review and discuss Henri de Lubac's book *Catholicism*.

Zouk Mikayel, Lebanon

The Lebanon Study Circle members sent an update of the last year: "In spite of the plethora of other activities occupying the members of the *Communio* study circle in Lebanon, the group was able to continue its meetings for the thirteenth consecutive year. The group held two meetings in the 2007-2008 academic year, one in the fall and one in the spring. The fall meeting was devoted to the first part of Pope Benedict XVI's encyclical on Hope. The group met in the home of Dr. Habib C. Malik, and, as usual, the universal church was duly represented by Greek and Syrian Orthodox members, Greek Catholics, Maronites, and a Latin Rite Jesuit all in attendance. Dr. Edward Alam presented the first part of the encyclical, drawing attention, among other things, to the way the Pope masterfully, as 'philosopher' and 'shepherd,' embodies

in his own life and writings a 'proof' that the things to come, the promises of Christ, are not only a reality that we await, but a real presence here and now.

"The second meeting was held in the home of a founding member of the group, Dr. Doumit Salameh, with Mr. Riad Moufarrej of the Orthodox Church presenting the second part of the encyclical. His presentation was powerfully and effectively interwoven with personal testimony, and highlighted the 'substance' (hypostasis) of hope and faith in his daily journey towards union with Christ. Both presentations generated lively and informed discussions both during and after the generous dinners provided by both hosts."

Aberdeen, England

Anthony Schmitz wrote to say that the Aberdeen Study Circle has been "somewhat dormant" recently, but that they "hope to recommence activities this autumn."

The Chesterton Institute for Faith and Culture

Stratford and Leonie Caldecott's Center for Faith & Culture continues to flourish under the patronage of Thomas More College in Merrimack, New Hampshire. In November they invited Adrian Walker, Michael Waldstein, and Aidan Nichols, O.P. to speak alongside Scott Hahn in a conference on the liturgical theology of Pope Benedict XVI.

As the editor of Sophia Institute Press, Stratford is looking for authors. His own book, *Beauty for Truth's Sake: On the Re-enchantment of Education*, comes out from Brazos Press in July. This book is based partly on ideas developed at the Arkwood seminars with David L. Schindler, hosted by Nicholas Healy, and he hopes to give some talks based on the book in the U.S. in the fall.

Stratford writes: "so far a Communio Study Circle has never gotten off the ground in Oxford, but a new attempt is being made to start one on a small scale after Easter. Contact Stratford Caldecott for details, and check the Second Spring website for announcements of forthcoming events, talks, and publications."

Upcoming Themes in *Communio*

"The Entry Into Jerusalem," "Paternity," "Money," "Silence," "Hell," "The Paschal Mystery," "Science," and "The Mystery of Israel."