

INTRODUCTION: GOD AND THE CRISIS OF MEANING



The theme of the Fall 2021 issue of *Communio* is “God and the Crisis of Meaning.” A crisis (from the Greek *krinein*, “to judge”) betokens a time of decision and indeed an event in response to which one’s most intimate commitments “come to light.” In John’s gospel, Jesus says he judges no one according to the flesh nor on his own authority (Jn 8:15, 5:30), but that it is in flawlessly carrying out his witness to the Father that he embodies before the world the definitive and perennial standard of love against which each person is intrinsically judged and cannot but be judged (Jn 3:16–21, 19:37). Ours is certainly a time that calls for our decision, and as our theme suggests, the dilemma before man today goes deeper than an array of medical and socio-economic problems that need fixing. Behind these, as ever, stands the question of whether reality, and the God by whom the world is given, can be affirmed as good.

In “The Almighty Father—Put to the Test of the Problem of Evil,” **Jean-Pierre Batut** reflects on the problem of the relationship between the evils we suffer and the sins we commit. He acknowledges, as Christ teaches, that many of the worst evils we undergo are not a direct effect of personal sin, much less a direct punishment for these transgressions on the part of God. Nevertheless, Batut encourages us not to forget, especially in our evaluation of events like the coronavirus pandemic, that catastrophe can be a means of divine chastisement, which is ultimately

ordered toward liberating man from sin and death. “In accompanying human history with his divine providence, God does not intervene in it as a *deus ex machina* but through the human free wills to which he appeals.”

In “American Revolution as Total Revolution: Del Noce and the American Experiment,” **Michael Hanby** examines Augusto Del Noce’s claim that American culture carries the anti-metaphysical bent of modernity to its apex. While accepting and supporting Del Noce’s assessment, Hanby adds that the United States was more than merely susceptible to such a development, for, he argues, its vision has been guided from the first by an essentially technological ideology that obscures any meaning given in reality. “The reconception of freedom and truth as indefinite possibility gives the American project its revolutionary character, concretely realized in the interminable conquest of every kind of ‘frontier.’”

Kenneth R. Craycraft Jr. uncovers the anthropology implied in the American political doctrine of the separation of Church and state in “‘It Neither Picks My Pocket nor Breaks My Leg’: Rationalist Faith, Private Conscience, and a God Who Does Not Command.” Understanding conscience as a matter of private opinion, the founding fathers, far from protecting conscience, effectively rendered religious belief, and indeed any held truth, irrelevant to public action, which falls under government regulation. This means that “[t]he ‘private judgment’ that a properly instituted law violates one’s conscience does not insulate the person from complying with the law, nor does it require a dispensation from obeying it.” In this way, the Lockean idea of tolerance that was taken up by Madison and Jefferson nihilistically displaces the primacy of obedience to God and opens the way for a distinctive form of political coercion.

Larry Chapp, in “Liberalism, the Church, and the Unreality of God,” argues that modernity presents unprecedented obstacles to an integrated living-out of the Christian faith, and that it therefore calls for a radical response on the part of the Church. Liberalism, Chapp holds, erodes a sense for God’s presence in and significance for the whole of human life. This thinning out of religion can ultimately only be answered by Christians carrying out in practice a lifelong glorification of God’s reality in a concrete community. “In reality, a Christian must

affirm that the execution and Resurrection of Jesus are the most public events in history insofar as they reveal to us the deepest structure of the really real.”

In “A Philosophy of God in Man: Maurice Blondel’s Retrieval of Meaning through Fruitful Action,” **Caitlin W. Jolly** presents Blondel’s claim that human action naturally bears God’s presence and is oriented toward free cooperation with God. Blondel enables us to see that man’s action, including his thinking, is most perfectly itself when, in a sacrificial mode, it assents and responds to the generosity of God that empowers and draws it from within. This reaches its consummation in the life of worship where, “vivified by grace to share in the common acting that is divine being, man’s offering becomes that of divine life itself: he is made fruitful of divine life and himself generated in this life.”

In “Thinking God through the Unity of Life and Thought: How *De Grammatico* Clarifies the *Proslogion*,” **John Bayer** defends Anselm’s naming of God as “that-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought” as an act that is inseparably philosophical and pious—that is, authentically contemplative. With reference to Anselm’s philosophy of language, Bayer shows that this divine name rests on an experiential affirmation of God’s transcendence that integrates intellect, will, and action. “For Anselm, the word ‘God’ functions as a name for something we encounter when living a certain kind of life.”

Erik van Versendaal, in “Memory Eternal: Fruitful Death as the Form of Personal Mediation (Part II),” attends to the way in which the reciprocal mediation of two persons is naturally fulfilled when this exchange is itself mediated by a third who exceeds it. This structure is manifested in the family, where the child represents for his parents a promise of life beyond their deaths, but only insofar as they generatively free the child for a future that transcends their own, both in the world and in God. “The root motive that runs through enfleshed desire is the fulfillment of a hope beyond nature’s hoping: the bodily resurrection of the child who may be.” □

—The Editors