

INTRODUCTION: THE FLESH



The Fall 2022 issue of *Communio: International Catholic Review* takes up the theme of “The Flesh.” Many have shared Eric Voegelin’s trenchant accusation that modernity, both in its ideologies and in the ways of life these reflect and produce, represents a relapse of Western civilization into gnosticism. We glimpse this most overtly in the fragmentation that our pervasive technologies effect between personal identities and the individuated body. The appeal of such a separation is not foreign to us, as both our physical and moral infirmities can move our despairing wish to be rid of the flesh’s burdens. But the Christian affirms that bodiliness is purposeful as an education into a patience that can bear fruit, and into a sharing of self with and response to others that is essential to love. God discloses himself and touches us in becoming man, and the redemption this realizes, as John Paul II attended to so profoundly, includes our bodies. The present issue also marks the 100th anniversary of Norwegian novelist Sigrid Undset’s *Kristen Lavransdatter*, a work that testifies to how salvation unfolds through the vicissitudes of embodied life in time.

In “An Apologetics of the Flesh: The Body as the Path to God,” **José Granados** dwells on bodily experience as both necessary for and ordered to life with God. “At the creation of the world, God speaks a word that, out of nothing, inaugurates the corporeal space men will inhabit, where they will be able to respond to him and enter into a covenant with him.” The senses, Granados observes, make us aware of our finitude, but they do

so by always bringing us into contact with things whose actuality surpasses us. In different ways, each of the senses reminds us thereby that we belong with others from the beginning, and leads us from within concrete relationships to the divine origin who holds together the communion of all that is, and who, both by becoming incarnate and by incorporating us into himself, bestows on us the whole of his presence in the flesh.

D.C. Schindler, in “Hearts of Flesh: A Meditation on Human Nature and the Language That Gives Life,” ponders how man’s natural embodiment is centered on his heart, whence his highest spiritual acts flow and whither they return. Reflecting on this theme with Scripture, Aristotle, and Aquinas, Schindler argues that the heart is that place out of which the human person communicates himself publicly and into which he passionately receives the reality of others. “The encounter with the other is part of the meaning of the soul’s taking flesh in the heart. It is therefore not an intrusion on the self but a proliferation of the soul, a communion that gives life.” As the hinge of the intimacy between soul and body, the heart is bound up with man’s characteristic exercise of his being in speaking and hearing the word.

Rachel M. Coleman presents Ferdinand Ulrich’s contribution to the philosophical tradition’s contemplation of material existence in “Matter as Revelation of God’s Love.” In a manner similar to being itself, which is its communication of perfection to beings, “[m]atter ‘is’ not until it is taken up in another, and when it is taken up by another, matter in some sense disappears and all we see is the actualized being in front of us.” This apparent nothingness of matter, Coleman argues, thus manifests God’s own giving-over of his giving to the creature in its gradual self-becoming.

In “‘Riveted with Faith Unto Your Flesh’: Technology’s Flight from Actuality and the Word Made Flesh,” **Michael Dominic Taylor** confronts technology’s spurious promise of salvation from the flesh, drawing upon a wealth of witnesses who articulate the primacy of gift that modernity violently forgets. Interrogating the counter-ontology of post- and transhumanism, Taylor exposes the diabolical figure of these aspirations, which vainly pervert the better hope actually given to man in Christ. “To be ‘trans-humaned’ is the goal of every human life, but it is unattainable through our own ingenuity.”

Emmanuel Falque interprets Charles Péguy's "Dialogue between history and the carnal soul" in "Philosophical and Theological Incarnation: A History That Has Happened to the Flesh and the Earth," finding in this text prescient indications for resolving the phenomenological problem of relation the experienced flesh and the material body. Pivotal for Péguy is the Christian confession that redemption in Christ means the lifting up of the flesh and its time into God without loss. Sanctity, in this light, involves a deeper entrance into the limits of lived corporeality. "To the point of radicalizing his thesis, [Péguy] underscores that there is something worse than becoming a 'beast': namely, to want to play the angel when one is not an angel."

In *Retrieving the Tradition*, we feature **Sigrid Undset's** posthumously published essay "If $2 + 2 = 5$," in which she considers the path to conversion to Catholicism as one of submission to reality. She contrasts the pre-Christian situation to atheism after Christ, imploring her reader to the rediscovery of the God who has revealed himself in an age where sacramental meaning has been aggressively smothered. "The modern heathenism is a new thing—a declaration of war against a God who has spoken, where the old heathenism was a love song to a God who hid himself, or an attempt to *live* with the divine whose power men felt around them."

Undset's essay is paired with an appreciation of the novelist, originally published in 1993, by **Erasmus Leiva-Merikakis** in "Sigrid Undset: Holiness and Culture." Leiva-Merikakis presents the importance of the saint in Undset's novels and nonfictional writings. Undset recognized that the Church has purified and elevated culture only through the incarnate activities of holy men and women. In particular, she gives testimony across her works to how Christianity in representative persons both brought judgment upon the Norse culture of Scandinavia and transfigured it. "The ancient Viking conviction that loyalty to one's fellow warriors is the supreme social value undergoes rebirth in a saint like St. Olav, for whom Christian holiness flows from a covenant of loyalty with the God who is powerful love."

Finally, in *Notes & Comments*, we publish **Robert Spaemann's** "Animal Welfare and Human Dignity." Consumerism's desire to hide the cruelty against animals from which it often benefits brings to light, according to Spaemann, our awareness

of an interiority to the animal's living body that calls for human protection. At stake in this call is, ultimately, our responsibility to fellow persons with whom we share the world and, indeed, our fidelity to our God-given power to honoring real things in their full integrity. "It is not one's own *interest* but *self-respect* that demands that we allow this animal's life, however short or long it may be, to transpire in accordance with its nature and without grave inflicted suffering." □

—The Editors