

INTRODUCTION: THE UNITY AND MISSION OF THE CHURCH: *COMMUNIO* AT 50 YEARS



The Winter 2022 issue of *Communio* is dedicated to the theme “The Unity and Mission of the Church: *Communio* at 50 Years.” From its founding, the guiding task of the journal has been to cultivate reflection on how the Church permeates the heart of the world toward its redemption, and indeed to foster a community of friends who seek to live in accord with this prior gift in solidarity with all. Its end is to honor the catholicity of the communion bestowed in Christ through affirming, at once through the holiness of thought and the holiness of life, the goods of nature and of grace in their interrelation. The essays collected here, many of which originated in papers presented at a conference at St. Bernard’s School of Theology and Ministry celebrating *Communio*’s anniversary, reflect this concern through taking up such fundamental themes as worship, art, ecology and dominion, Christology, metaphysics, and contemplation, and revealing to us how gratitude for creation and the defenseless hope for universal salvation orders our commitment to reality in each of these spheres.

First, on the theme of worship in the context of the liturgy, **Robert Sarah** presents the development of Joseph Ratzinger’s understanding of liturgical reform in “The Inexhaustible Reality: Joseph Ratzinger and the Sacred Liturgy.” Out of a lifelong love for the liturgy as a gift entrusted to the Church’s care, Ratzinger

recognized and increasingly articulated the centrality of the Eucharist for theology and the whole of Christian life. He accordingly sought to remain “grounded in the fundamental disposition necessary for any celebration of the sacred liturgy: we, God’s creatures, come before him in all humility and reverence to worship him as worthily as we are able.” This perspective guided Ratzinger to avoid the two extremes of archaism and progressivism, so that he embraced the revival of the liturgy, without rejecting the older rite, as at the service of deeper fidelity to the tradition and the mystery it safeguards.

Taking up the problem of secularism in “From Extrinsicism to a World That Denies Both Nature and Grace: A Polyphonic Analysis of Secularism,” **Tracey Rowland** highlights the work of some among the paramount Italian, French, German, and American figures who have helped in recent decades to shape *Communio*’s approach toward reconciling domains of reality and of human life that modern culture characteristically sets in opposition, such as metaphysics and politics or religion and culture. “[A]uthentic Christianity,” Rowland reminds us, “unites what other religious traditions seek to separate.”

Three essays address the prominent theme of art, specifically poetry. First, **Jennifer Newsome Martin**, in “The Ever-Prior Act: Claudel and the Poetics of *Communio*,” pursues Hans Urs von Balthasar’s claim, put forward in his essay “*Communio*—A Program,” that the givenness of communion in Christ demands of the Church a greater readiness to undergo the risk of speaking to and with the world. “The pragmatic outcome of this christological starting point for Balthasar is that efforts of dialogue toward communion should be performed without the faintest hint of triumphalism, in a mode of complete humility and care for the other.” Martin finds one model of such risk in Paul Claudel, whose poetics manifest a vulnerability that seeks to recapitulate Christ’s own experience of dereliction on behalf of all mankind.

Second, in “The Whole in the Fragment: The Vocations of Philosopher and Poet for the Salvation of the World,” **Erik van Versendaal** unfolds the theological and metaphysical principle that every prior reality dignifies the “secondary” by elevating it into communion with itself. Philosophy and poetry, each in their own irreducible way, repeat this given dynamic anew

by contemplatively cherishing the surface and the participant, thereby sharing in the Church's mission to perfect the world's integrity in Christ. "To be taken with the superfluous dance of the parts within and beyond the whole is the beginning of contemplation, whose pious safeguarding of the show and shine of things expresses why perfect knowledge is convertible with perfect wonder."

Third, in "Poetic Communion: Literary Form and Divine Encounter," **Dwight A. Lindley III** examines how literature serves the contemplation of being in its distinctive mode of mimetic representation of an event, and how it thereby effects an answering transformation in its audience. "The presence of an object implies a subject, and to go out after the object is to change your life. It is to move and adjust oneself in response to the call of the other, and this is what poetry *is*: the record of one soul going out after another, an image or expression in the words of that response." Turning to various lyric poets, Lindley shows how the poem exhibits an internal communion that both reflects the order of reality and mediates our placement within that order.

Continuing the theme of communion, we have two essays on man's relation to the natural world. First, **Matthew Ramage** ponders man's role in honoring God's Sabbath affirmation of creation through his reverent labor of humanizing it in "Covenantal Communion between God, Man, and Creation: Reflections on Joseph Ratzinger's Ecological Thought." Following Ratzinger, Ramage discusses how contemplating the natural cosmos in light of the Paschal mystery reorients man's sin-wounded relationship to creatures toward a participation in God's "it is good." "[T]he mystery of the dying and rising grain of wheat (Jn 12:24) is not merely a truth of nature: it is a logos that reveals something of him in whom and for whom all things were created (Col 1:15–16)."

Second, in "'Only If We Do Not Lose Creation': *Communio* and the Battle for the Meaning of the World," **Michael Dominic Taylor** discusses both the tragic consequences of ignoring the giftedness of reality and the possibilities for renewing wonder in the world's goodness. Investigating how much of contemporary ecophilosophy remains beholden to the underlying principles of the technocratic paradigm it rejects, Taylor calls for

a recollection of creation's deep structure of communion centered on Christ. "The fact that we depend on the death of other creatures for our own life is a continual symbol of Christ, who sacrifices his life for us and feeds us with his very flesh unto eternal life, and ought to fill us with humble gratitude."

Next, we have three essays that open up the meaning of creation specifically in relation to Christ. First, **Keith Lemna**, in "O Christ, Ever Greater: De Lubac on Teilhard and the Cosmic Scope of Jesus Christ's Humanity," shows how de Lubac took up Teilhard's christocentric interpretation of the evolutionary universe. Crucial to Teilhard's naming of Christ as "Omega point" is his conviction that the Incarnation both fulfills the inner aspirations of all matter in its development toward the loving consciousness of God *and* endlessly surpasses this aspiration by preceding it as an apocalyptic miracle. By acknowledging this, Lemna holds, Teilhard overcomes the pitfall of relativizing the unique life of Jesus in history to which some of his epigones succumbed. "The Incarnate Lord unifies the cosmos in his flesh."

Second, **Rodney Howsare**, in "God's Universal Salvific Will and the Mission of *Communio*," lays out the difficulty of finding the "narrow way" between two competing accounts of salvation, a limited predestination that would abandon the world, on the one hand, and, on the other, an apokatastasis that would undermine the absoluteness of Christ. He brings Balthasar's "christocentric universalism" to bear on this dilemma, a proposal which recognizes that the relationship between Christ's two natures discloses at once God's power to liberate man's "yes" to his saving act and the scope God grants man to utter this "yes" for and from himself. It is from the standpoint of the drama of hope that this paradox sustains that we can rightly understand the character of the Church's "worldly mission." "God's providential care over the created order occurs precisely *within* God's prior decision to unite all things to himself in the person of the Incarnate Word."

Third, **Travis Lacy** reflects on how the Church's integration of all natural goods to the glory of God is modeled on the Paschal mystery and thus is properly cruciform in "Divine Exuberance: Erich Przywara on the Metaphysics of Catholicity." According to Przywara, the Cross is already foreshadowed in the natural tensions between finite metaphysical principles and

between spheres of creation. In his kenosis unto death, and in the Church as sacrament of our redemption, Christ gathers up and perfects these relationships within his own praise of the Father. “[O]ur reply, our ‘thank you,’ consists of God himself, the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ, offered in a sacrifice of praise to him who first addressed us with his Word.”

Finally, returning to the theme with which the issue began, namely worship, we close with a reflection on the central importance of prayer in the context of Scripture. In “Prayer in the Work of the Exegete,” **Thomas Esposito** argues, in keeping with patristic testimony and practice, that the interpretation of Scripture cannot be perfectly carried out apart from prayer, for only prayer allows the exegete to commune in the Holy Spirit with the inspired author’s own experience of revelation. “The codification of St. Paul’s experience of God in his letters, for example, allows Bernard and other readers to channel that same experience. . . . Exegesis, therefore, is by necessity participatory in nature.” The exegete’s need for contemplative discipleship is rooted in the Church’s role as both co-author and first recipient of Scripture. □

—The Editors