

INTRODUCTION: REFORMING THE CHURCH



Having begun in the spring of 1974, the North American (English language) edition of *Communio* celebrates this year its fiftieth anniversary. In thanksgiving for this milestone, we recall the guiding words of our founder, Hans Urs von Balthasar: “Experience teaches us that leading a Catholic life today is only possible where the mystery has retained its complete depth. . . . Only by assuming a non-polemic role of tranquility in the center will it be possible to assume genuine responsibility for the whole. Here the tensions can be addressed that are characteristic of all living things—including the Church of Christ—which are not necessarily cause for alarm: tensions between the spirit of Pentecost and the institution, between personal and ecclesial conscience, and the like” (“The Mission of *Communio*,” Fall 1992).

This Spring 2024 issue is dedicated to the theme of “Reforming the Church.” In *Lumen gentium*, the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council tell us that “the Church, embracing in its bosom sinners, at the same time holy and always in need of being purified, always follows the way of penance and renewal” (8). Henri de Lubac attempts to capture these seemingly contradictory qualities thus: “The Church is at once human and divine, at once a gift from above and a product of this earth”; she remains “a Reality that will always remain beyond the reach of my natural intelligence” (*The Church: Paradox and Mystery* [2021], 11–12). At the same time, this Reality, paradoxical and mysterious, is our mother, the bride of the Lord, “very dark, but comely” (Sg 1:5). Yet how can the Church be “purified,” as *Lumen gentium*

suggests? What is this “way of penance and renewal”? As Livio Melina notes in his contribution to the present issue, “The thing that is most fundamental, most important in the mission of the Church is the spiritual renewal of the family.” Recognizing the timely wisdom of this insight, this issue shows the intrinsic connection between ecclesial renewal and the necessity of a renewal of the family. Each author featured below presents a unique reflection on a facet needed for renewal: sanctity as a complete confidence in and surrender to God; the trinitarian prayer unique to Christianity; filiality and the bond of marriage within the family; substance and receptivity as philosophical keys to an adequate anthropology; the primacy of God and the sacred in political, common life; and the meaning and substance of our ongoing participation in Christ’s atonement (cf. Col 1:24).

In “A Blood Transfusion for Theology: Pope Francis’s *c’est la confiance*, Thérèse, and Teresa,” **Lisa Lickona** responds to Pope Francis’s call for theologians to appropriate and draw out the conclusions of St. Thérèse’s theology. Lickona shows that Thérèse’s spirituality flows from that of another great Carmelite: St. Teresa of Ávila. Although both are Carmelites, the strong connection between their spiritualities is not obvious. Teresa’s mysticism, filled with remarkable visions and spiritual ecstasies, seems rather remote from Thérèse’s “little way.” Lickona, however, shows how Thérèse’s asceticism and emphasis on “confidence” flows from Teresa’s mystical charism; both women are united in their testimony to the “primacy of God” in their lives. “In the charisms of these two women, taken as a whole, the mystical informs the ascetical in a way that unleashes the Church’s true evangelical potential, which is joy, the joy of the Gospel.”

Catholic theologians have traditionally considered the family from a moral perspective, but St. John Paul II’s theology of the family “took on a fundamentally anthropological connotation” and became “the possible key to a theology coextensive with the whole mystery of Christian revelation.” In “The Historical Impact of Saint John Paul II on the Church’s Doctrine of the Family,” **Livio Melina** examines the profound historical impact that the pope’s theology of the family has had on the Church. John Paul II took seriously the trinitarian analogy of the family and used it to elucidate the nature of community and, by extension, the common good. This anthropology of community

and the family on the one hand reveals the incoherence of the modern depiction of man as an isolated individual bound only by personal choice, and on the other hand shows how the family is at the center of the Church's mission today.

Joshua R. Brown's "Confucianism and Catholicism on the Family" opens an illuminating dialogue between Confucianism and Catholic social teaching on the family. Confucianism, Brown argues, has the potential to stand in a similar relationship to Catholicism as Aristotelianism or Platonism—which is to say, Confucianism can be a helpful handmade of theology. In particular, he considers Zengzi Confucianism's focus on filial piety, which is a serious lifelong reverence and obligation extending even beyond the death of one's parents. This marked emphasis on filial piety differs from that of modern Catholic social teaching, which primarily focuses on the marital bond between husband and wife. Brown makes the case that Catholic social teaching could organically incorporate the Confucian notion of filial piety in keeping with traditional Catholic doctrine, thus helpfully bolstering the Catholic understanding of the human person and the family from the prevailing atomistic anthropology of our time.

"The Church's Universal Apostolicity at the Heart of Ecclesial Movements," originally a speech delivered in Italian in 2023 by **Paolo Prosperi**, FSCB, offers a reflection on the role of ecclesial movements in the life of the Church. Prosperi begins with the then-prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith Cardinal Ratzinger's 1998 report, which sketched out for the first time a theology of ecclesial movements. These movements, Ratzinger taught, find their home in the structure of the Church as a new expression of her perennial apostolic mission. Ratzinger saw two central features of these movements: first, they reveal "the pure joy of being Christian," a renewed awareness that "ordinary baptismal faith is an *extraordinary gift*"; second, they possess "the ardent desire to communicate this gift to others." After laying out Ratzinger's initial sketch of the theology of apostolic movements, Prosperi reflects on the last twenty-five years of development since 1998. Taking into consideration later reflections on the movements—including *Iuvenescit Ecclesia*, issued in 2016, and "Associations of the Faithful," issued in 2021—and addressing the potential pitfalls of ecclesial movements, Prosperi concludes with his reflections on how to confront these problems.

In “Completing What Is Lacking in Christ’s Afflictions (Col 1:24): A Biblical Exploration of Ecclesial Co-atonement,” **Nina Sophie Heereman** lays out a biblical foundation for understanding how exactly we can complete “what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions.” Christ’s sacrifice of his body is the means of our salvation: through baptism we die with Christ, and through the Eucharist we are joined to his body. “It is through participation in this sacramental sacrifice that our sufferings are transformed into an act of atonement, thereby ‘completing what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for his body, that is, the church.’” This unification of the guilty party to the sacrificial offering of atonement, as Heereman shows, has its roots in the Old Testament. Co-atonement does not mean that Christ’s sufferings are insufficient, but rather that as a member of the body of Christ one’s sufferings are united to his and made fruitful for salvation. The mystery of co-atonement, in other words, is the mystery of the Church.

In “A Theological Reading of the Russian Regime: Sergei Bulgakov and the Theocratic Principle in 1917 and Today,” **Matthew J. Dal Santo** considers the history and political theology of the Russian people. Dal Santo argues that, in contradistinction to the secular West, Russia is to be understood as both a post- and subtheocratic regime in which political authority continues to be implicitly understood as deriving—*ideally*, if not strictly speaking *in law*—*not* from the act of human association itself but from God through analogical participation in the cosmic order. The key difference between Russia and the West, therefore, lies in the status of the sacred. This theocratic principle, abolished explicitly by the revolution of 1917, is showing itself today not in the current political regime but in the canonization and popular veneration of Tsar Nicholas II. In this, Russia shows that “political authority is not a burden generated from below, the ‘empire of the least evil,’ but rather a gift to be received from above as a sign and analogy of God’s providential kingship over the universe.”

Michael Joseph Higgins takes a more philosophical approach to the theme of the family in “First of All Receptive: Aquinas on the Place of Relation and Receiving in Created Being.” Higgins considers the recent debate in Thomism regarding whether substance is unilaterally prior in the human person vis-à-vis God or whether our relation to God as our Creator is prior to our substance. This seemingly abstract philosophical debate has profound practical

implications for the human person. Higgins argues that, in Aquinas's mature view, "my act of receiving precedes my substance in every respect, and my relation precedes my substance in one respect and follows my substance in another respect." This view is not blind to the paradox that *my* receiving somehow precedes my *substance*—which is to say that *my* receiving somehow precedes *me*. Higgins thus aligns himself with David L. Schindler and W. Norris Clark, contending that their view is not only closer to the spirit but also the letter of St. Thomas's philosophy.

In *Retrieving the Tradition*, we publish **Henri de Lubac's** preface to the French translation of Pope St. John Paul II's *Love and Responsibility*. In this short work, the cofounder of *Communio* describes how the pope rigorously develops a theology of marriage and the family that renews and revitalizes the Church without in any way weakening the radical message of the Gospel. Recognizing the power of the book, de Lubac writes that "Wojtyła sets us along the road that will make our faith more 'contagious.'" Seventy-nine years later, we can appreciate de Lubac's foresight.

When we pray, to whom do we direct our prayer? **Jean Corbon**, OP, answers this question simply: we pray "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." In *Retrieving the Tradition*, we present a translation of Corbon's "To Pray in the Holy Trinity," which was first published in French in 1999. Here, Corbon reflects on the hidden depths of these routine words that begin every Catholic prayer. To pray in the Holy Trinity, he says, is the essence of the novelty of Christian prayer; it is why Christians can pray in the company of non-Christians but not *with* them. Although Christians pray on behalf of all human beings, only they "have been given the ability to pray to God." In this reflection, Corbon offers thirteen deeply scriptural vignettes on the nature of trinitarian prayer, revealing the trinitarian nature of the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist, and unfolding how the triune nature of God permeates through every act and aspect of Christian prayer. □

—The Editors