

## Johannine Foundations of the Church as the Family of God

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In his inaugural encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*, Pope Benedict XVI follows Vatican II and his predecessor John Paul II in stressing the importance of the concept of the “family” for understanding the Church. “The Spirit is . . . the energy which transforms the heart of the ecclesial community, so that it becomes a witness before the world to the love of the Father, who wishes to make humanity a single family in his Son” (*DCE* 19) (see, with further bibliography, Bechina 1998; Helleman 2001).

In the dominant culture of Modernity, this paradigmatic role of the family, particularly the role of the father, has been called into question at its very roots. Before we turn to the Gospel of John, it is thus helpful to examine at least briefly one radical rejection of the category “family” and particularly of the category “father” in the name of the dignity and autonomy of the person.

### Kant’s Rejection of the Family Image

According to Kant, the government of a state must not intend the happiness of citizens, because this would cast those who govern in a role of father and the citizens in the role of sons. Such a paternal government, Kant argues, denies the personal dignity of citizens and deprives them of all their rights.

If a government is built on the principle of benevolence similar to that of a *father* toward his children, that is, a *paternal government* (*imperium paternale*), in which subjects are treated like children who have not yet come of age and who cannot distinguish what is truly beneficial from what is harmful for them, [a government] furthermore, in which subjects are forced to be passive, in order to await the judgment of the head of state, how they *should* be happy, and his sheer benevolence, whether he actually wills them to be so: this is the greatest *despotism* imaginable (that is, a constitution that annuls the entire freedom of subjects and leaves them without any rights). Not a *paternal*, but a *patriotic* government (*imperium non paternale, sed patrioticum*) is the only government conceivable for human beings who are capable of rights. (Kant 1793b: 290–91)

The superlative in this text is astounding: *the greatest despotism imaginable*. What is the greatest despotism imaginable? A slave state in which the head of state *does not intend* the good of citizens but rules them *for his own ends*, considering them mere means to those ends? No, a state under the benevolence of a father who *does* intend the good of the citizens—this is superlative despotism.

This astounding superlative can be understood in light of Kant’s concept of autonomy according to which moral goodness and hence human dignity consists in the radical self-movement of the will that imposes its own universal law (the categorical imperative) on itself. “The will is not simply subject to the law; it is subject in such a way that it must also be considered *as self-legislative* and for this reason, as the very first, subject to the law whose author it can consider itself to be” (Kant 1785: 431). Human dignity consists in this self-legislative power and self-movement of the human will and reason. If the state were ordered to the happiness of its citizens, it would cast its citizens in a role of dependence, that is, of sonship, under a benevolent father to whose direction and judgment citizens would submit. Dependence, however, is incompatible with human dignity as a dignity that resides in autonomy.

Paternal submission to a benevolent father destroys autonomy even more radically than slavish submission to a violent master, because it implies an interior and spiritual submission, not only an external

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conformity in actions. A slave's heart can be his own; a true son's heart belongs to his father. The direct clash between Kant's teaching on autonomy and the Lord's Prayer is remarkable. If the Our Father is indeed the paradigmatic prayer of Christians, then the destruction of human dignity, that is, the heteronomy of sonship, lies at the very heart of Christianity.

In contrast to the state, a church, according to Kant, can rightly be understood as a family. While the state merely protects the rights of its citizens, a church is ordered to the moral improvement of its members. Yet, the family Kant has in mind seems to be defined as a real brotherhood without a real father.

An ethical commonwealth, inasmuch as it is a church, that is, inasmuch as it is considered as a mere representative of a City of God, does not have a constitution whose principles resemble the constitution of a state. In a church, the constitution is neither monarchical (under a pope or patriarch), nor aristocratic (under bishops and prelates), nor democratic (as sectarian illuminati). It could best be compared to a domestic community (family) under a common, albeit invisible, moral Father, inasmuch as his holy Son, who knows his will and is at the same time related by blood to all its members, represents the Father's place in this community in order to make his will known to these members, who thus honor the Father in him and thereby enter into a voluntary, universal, and enduring union of hearts. (Kant 1793a: 102)

Although in this text he uses the category "family" for the church and speaks of God as Father and Jesus as the Son, Kant does not take away one iota from his radical personalism of autonomy. God is for him a postulate of practical reason. It is morally decent to act as if God existed, but one can neither affirm nor deny the existence of God on a theoretical level.

To believe in him [God] morally and practically means . . . acting in a manner as if such a rule of the world were real. (Kant 1796: 396, emphasis added)

[The proof of the three practical postulates: the freedom of the will, the immortality of the soul, and the existence of God] is not a proof of the truth of these statements seen as theoretical

statements and, thus, not a proof of the objective existence of the objects corresponding to them . . . , but one that has only subjective and practical validity, one whose instruction is sufficient to produce the effect of our acting as if we knew that these objects were real. (Kant 1804: 298, emphasis added)

Since one cannot say on the level of theoretical reason that God exists (or that he does not exist), one cannot say that he is (or is not) a Father in the sense intended by the Christian tradition, namely, as the real Creator who gives the real gift of real being and orders all things to their real end. Kant excludes real dependence and real obedience.

Just as Kant's personalism of radical autonomy is shielded against the real existence of God as Father, it is shielded from radical dependence of the Son. In fact, the true point of the doctrine of the divinity of the Son of God is the doctrine of the divinity of all human beings.

That which alone can make a world the object of divine decree and the end of creation is Humanity (rational being in general in the world) in its full moral perfection, from which happiness [that is, man's happiness] follows in the will of the Highest Being directly as from its supreme condition. — This man, who is alone pleasing to God ["This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased" (Mt 3:17)], "is in him from all eternity" ["The Word was with God" (Jn 1:1)]; the idea of man proceeds from God's being; man is not, therefore, a created thing but God's only begotten Son [Jn 1:18; 3:16–18], "the Word (the Fiat) through which all other things are, and without whom nothing that is made would exist" [Jn 1:1–3] (since for him, that is, for a rational being in the world, as it can be thought according to its moral determination, everything was made ["All things were created through him and for him" (Col 1:16)]). — "He is the reflection of his glory" [Heb 1:3] — "In him God loved the world" [Jn 3:16], and only in him and through the adoption of his dispositions can we hope "to become children of God" [Jn 1:12]; and so on. (Kant 1793a: 60–61).

Kant's appeal to key trinitarian passages in Scripture can easily obscure the central point of his rational faith: he sees man, not as a creature, but as the absolute locus of all true meaning from itself, a se. The Son,

that is, the man, is equal to the Father, but not born from the Father. The human personal self has no origin distinct from itself. Its autonomous self-movement is the highest value and the final purpose of all things.

Concerning man (and thus every rational being in the world) as a moral being, one cannot ask further: For what end (*quem in finem*) does he exist? His existence has the highest purpose in itself. He can, as far as possible, subject the whole of nature to this purpose. At the least, he must not submit himself to any influence of nature contrary to this purpose.—Now if the beings of the world as beings that are contingent in their existence are in need of a highest cause that acts according to purpose, then man is the final purpose of creation. For, without man the chain of purposes subordinate to each other would not be explained in its entirety. It is only in man, and in man only as the subject of morality, that an unconditional legislation concerning purposes can be found, which thus enables him alone to be a final purpose to which the whole of nature is teleologically subordinated. (Kant 1796: 435–36)

While man is unholy enough, the *humanity* in his person must be holy to him. In all of creation, everything one might want and over which one has power can be used as a *mere means*. Only man himself and with him every rational creature is an *end in itself*. For, in virtue of the autonomy of his freedom, he is the subject of the moral law, which is holy. (Kant 1788: 435–36, cf. 5:131; see also Kant 1797: 434)

The practical imperative is thus the following. Act in such a way that at all times you treat human nature in your own person as well as in the person of every other human being simultaneously as a purpose, never as a mere means. (Kant 1785: 429)

One can rightly call this view “personalism” because it sees man as the highest value to which all other values are subordinated. It is a radically anti-trinitarian personalism: all light is focused in the unrelated person, in the person’s moral dignity understood as self-legislative autonomy. Man’s glory is not a reflection of glory; rather, it stands absolutely in the autonomous self. Kant obliterates the relational character

of trinitarian language (Father-Son, glory-reflection, and so on) in favor of this autonomous self, more precisely, in favor of each and every autonomous self, a series of juxtaposed selves that can enter into relation but are not defined in their very being by any relation.

“Anti-trinitarian” is not a philosophical category. One might therefore object to its use in this brief sketch of Kant’s personalism. In response one can point out that Kant himself understood his philosophy as an affirmation of absolute autonomy in conscious encounter and contrast with Christian revelation. He is fully aware of trinitarian language and makes use of it. At the same time he undercuts it by proposing his philosophical religion of moral autonomy as the true subject of the biblical text, as the enlightened philosophical religion that must eventually replace the ecclesial religion expressed in sacred books.

#### Roots of Personhood according to John

Kant’s personalism has the great merit of raising the question of personhood on a level of reflection that goes to the very roots of personhood. His clear exaltation of autonomy as the root of the dignity of the person challenges Christian theology to give an account of personhood on a similarly radical level. When one examines the Gospel of John in light of this challenge, two words stand out as particularly important: *love* and *gift*.

#### *Trinitarian Foundations*

One can see these two words at work in the first extensive controversy between Jesus and the Judean authorities in Jerusalem. The controversy takes place after Jesus heals a lame man on the Sabbath (see Jn 5:1–15). The authorities “persecuted Jesus, because he did this on the sabbath” (5:16). Jesus’ response to his adversaries is highly theological in a manner characteristic of the Gospel of John. “My Father is working still, and I am working” (5:17). This response seems to presuppose the doctrine attested in Jewish sources that God (and God alone) is not bound by the Sabbath command. He works even on the Sabbath to continue his life-giving providence over the world. The authorities

conclude from Jesus' statement that he was "making himself equal with God" (5:18). On this basis, they resolve to inflict on him the most extreme form of punishment, death. Death corresponds to the gravity of the sin, because what is at issue is the very center of Israel's faith. "Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God is one LORD" (Deut 6:4).

Jesus responds in a long discourse (5:19-47) that articulates the new trinitarian understanding of God in continuity with Israel's profession of the oneness of God. Let us take a look at the first two verses of this discourse.

Truly, truly, I say to you,  
the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees  
the Father doing;

for whatever he does, that the Son does likewise.

For the Father loves the Son, and shows him all that he himself  
is doing. (Jn 5:19-20)

The statement "the Son can do nothing of his own accord" responds directly to the charge he was "making himself equal with God". Contrary to this charge, Jesus does not arrogate anything to himself; he is not setting himself up as a second God independent from and in competition with the Father; rather, he remains completely subordinate to the Father in all his activities. "The Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing." To be a son is to have being and life from another. Thus Thomas Aquinas connects "the Son can do nothing of his own accord" with the begetting of the Only-Begotten.

Christ, as the Divine Word, shows the origin of his power when he says: I cannot do anything of myself, in the way he said above, "the Son can do nothing of himself" (5:19). For his very doing and his power are his being (*esse*); but being (*esse*) in him is from another, that is, from his Father. And so, just as he is not of himself (*a se*), so of himself he cannot do anything: "I do nothing of myself" (below 8:28). (Thomas Aquinas, *Super Ioannem*, cap. 5, lect. 5, 794-98)

The next statement counterbalances the note of subordination contained in "the Son can do nothing of his own accord" by generalizing

the claim to an exclusively divine activity made in 5:17: "For whatever [the Father] does, that the Son does likewise" (5:19). The prologue to John makes a similar statement about God's act of creation, which is shared by the Logos. "All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made" (1:3). Yet, while the prologue refers only to the creative activity of the Logos in union with God ("through him"), 5:19 makes a more sweeping claim: there is no activity of the Father that is not also one of the Son.

Although there is a certain opposition between the two clauses, subordination and equality, they are closely tied together by a causal link. The all-encompassing equality of activity between the Father and the Son is the reason why the Son's activity is not independent and separate. He can do nothing of his own accord because (Greek: *gar*) whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise. Nothing in the Father is closed to the Son: everything is open and communicated. Correspondingly, there is nothing emancipated and private in the Son over against the Father.

The immediately following clause pushes the causal line of thought one step farther (second *gar*): the reason for the comprehensive unity of activity between the Father and the Son is the love of the Father: "For [*gar*] the Father loves the Son, and shows him all that he himself is doing" (5:20). To bring out the order of objective foundation affirmed by 5:19-20, one can invert the steps: The Father's "love" (5:20) stands at the origin. It is a total or radical love and therefore a love in which the Father "shows" whatever he does to the Son. Due to this gift and its completeness, the operation of the Father and the Son forms an inseparable interrelated whole. Since their operation forms such a whole, Jesus does not act "of his own accord", contrary to the charge that he "makes" himself equal with God.

The category of gift is implicit in "showing". "Gift" is made explicit in 5:26 where Jesus says that the Father "grants" life to the Son. "For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself." To have "life in himself" is the specifically divine way of having life in contrast to human beings who have "life in his name" (20:31).

How can the simultaneity of the subordination and the equality of the Son in 5:19 be understood? Do they not stand in tension with

each other? Does subordination not lead into Arianism, in which the Son is the first and greatest of creatures? Does equality not lead into Sabellianism, in which Father and Son are not distinct persons but mere aspects of one and the same divinity? Verse 5:20 suggests a point of unity from which both sides of the tension can be understood as necessary and correlative, namely, the completeness of the gift made by the Father. According to 5:20a, the Father loves the Son and therefore shows him *all* he does. Verse 5:26 continues one step deeper in the same vein: The Father gives his own life to the Son, and this gift is so complete that the Son has "life in himself"; cf. "All that the Father has is mine" (16:15). "All mine are yours, and yours are mine" (17:10). As a complete *gift* the Son's activity and life are subordinate to the Father's activity and life; as a *complete* gift they are equal with the Father's.

One could also say, as Hilary does, that even according to the divine nature the Father is greater than the Son, yet the Son is not inferior to the Father, but equal. For the Father is not greater than the Son in power, eternity, and greatness, but by the authority of a giver or beginning. For the Father receives nothing from an other, but the Son, if I may put it in this way, receives his nature from the Father by an eternal generation. So, the Father is greater, because he gives, yet the Son is not inferior, but equal, because he receives all that the Father has: "God has given him the name that is above every name" (Phil 2:9). No less than the giver is he to whom one and the same being is given. (Thomas Aquinas, *Super Ioannem*, cap. 14, lect. 8, 1971)

Other passages in John describe the Father's love in a similar way. "The Father *loves* the Son, and has *given* all things into his hand" (3:35). "Father, I desire that they also, whom you have *given* me, may be with me where I am, to behold my glory which you have *given* me in your *love* for me before the foundation of the world." (17:24).

A first conclusion can be drawn from the evidence presented so far. In the key discourse 5:19ff., which makes the step from the faith of Israel ("Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God is one LORD") to the revelation of the new and distinctively Christian understanding of God, Jesus uses the conceptual pair "love" and "gift" to articulate the new

understanding. From the Father's radical love, a gift comes forth that is total and unreserved, the gift of the entire divine life and being. This gift shows how subordination and equality fit together. Since he receives himself from the Father's love as a complete *gift*, the Son is subordinate to the Father. Since he receives himself as a *complete* gift, the Son is equal to the Father. John Paul II calls the systematic account and application of this logic of love and gift "hermeneutics of the gift" (John Paul II 1997: 58, 66).

#### Sharing in Trinitarian Life

It remains to be shown how, according to John, the logic of love and gift extends from the Trinity into the community of Jesus' disciples. Two important passages spell out this extension: 13:34–35 and 17:20–23.

(17:20) I do not pray for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their word,	(22) The glory which you have given me I have given to them,	A new commandment I give to you,
(21) THAT [ <i>hina</i> ] they may all be one; even	THAT [ <i>hina</i> ] they may be one even	THAT [ <i>hina</i> ] you love one another; even
AS [ <i>kathōs</i> ] you, Father, are in me, and I in you,	AS [ <i>kathōs</i> ] we are one, (23) I in them and you in me,	AS [ <i>kathōs</i> ] I have loved you,
THAT [ <i>hina</i> ] they also may be in us, so	THAT [ <i>hina</i> ] they may become perfectly one, so	THAT [ <i>hina</i> ] you also love one another.
THAT [ <i>hina</i> ] the world may believe that you have sent me.	THAT [ <i>hina</i> ] the world may know that you sent me and have loved them even AS you have loved me.	By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. (13:34–35)

These three panels follow the same pattern. After an introductory clause, all three have a sandwich formed by two final clauses with the conjunction *hina*: ("that", "so that", "in order that") surrounding a comparison introduced by *kathōs*: "as". The pattern concludes with another *hina* clause in 17:21 and 17:23, a main clause in 13:35, all

three of which point to the effect: so that the world (or all) will know and believe.

The three panels point to three important dimensions of Christian life:

(1) the first is the dimension of the *future* in which the Father will realize unity (17:20-21): unity appears as a desired future result for which Jesus asks the Father;

(2) the second is the dimension of the *past* and *present* in which the gift of "glory" or grace has already been given by Jesus (17:22-23): here unity appears as an event or fact that has been and is taking place;

(3) the third is the dimension of *ethics*, of what should be done, summarized in the "new commandment" (13:34-35).

Each of these dimensions is essential for Christian life. A certain primacy of place, however, belongs to the second dimension. What is first is not hope for the future, and especially not ethics, but a past and present event.

*We have come to believe in God's love*: in these words the Christian can express the fundamental decision of his life. Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction. Saint John's Gospel describes that event in these words: "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should . . . have eternal life" (3:16). (DCE 1)

The key element in Jesus' prayer is the trinitarian exemplar in which man is to participate. Thus St. Thomas writes about John 17:11 ("Keep them in your name . . . that they may be one, even as we are one") as follows.

They are preserved for this goal, namely, to be one. For, our entire perfection consists in the unity of the Spirit, "Take every care to preserve the unity of the Spirit by the peace that binds you together" (Eph 4:3). "How good and joyful it is when brothers dwell in unity!" (Ps 133:1).

But he adds, "as we are one". There is a difficulty in this statement. They are one in essence; therefore we will also be one in essence. But this is not true.

Response: The perfection of each being is nothing other than a participation in the divine likeness. For we are good to the degree in which we are made like God. Our unity, therefore, is perfective precisely in the degree to which it participates in the divine unity.

Now, there is a twofold unity in God, namely, the unity of nature (cf. "The Father and I are one" [Jn 10:30]) and the unity of love in the Father and the Son which is the unity of the Spirit. Both of these are in us, not in equality of rank, but by a certain likeness. For the Father and the Son are numerically of one nature, but we are one in nature according to our kind. Again, they are one by a love that is not derived from the gift of someone else but that proceeds from them. For the Father and the Son love each other by the Holy Spirit, but we by a love in which we participate as something derived from a higher source [that is, the Holy Spirit]. (Thomas Aquinas, *Super Ioannem*, cap. 17, lect. 3, 2214)

The deepest roots of the Christian conception of personhood lie here. As St. Thomas puts it, "Our entire perfection consists in the unity of the Spirit . . . which is the unity of love between the Father and the Son." While for Kant the dignity and perfection of the person lies in the autonomy of self-caused moral willing, for the Gospel of John (as interpreted by St. Thomas) it lies in the unity of love between the Father and the Son, which is the unity of the Spirit. Sharing in the divine likeness in exactly this respect constitutes the deepest meaning of being a human person.

#### The Church as the Family of God according to Vatican II

John Paul II sees the increasing awareness of sharing in the trinitarian likeness as the main thrust of Vatican II. In his book on Vatican II, *Sources of Renewal*, Wojtyła sets himself the task of outlining the implementation of Vatican II in a manner that corresponds to the actual intentions of the Council. The original guiding question of Vatican II, he argues, was, *Ecclesia, quid dicit de te ipsa?* Church, what do you say about yourself? (Wojtyła 1980: 420) "The People of God"—this is the Council's answer, Wojtyła claims (Wojtyła 1980: 112-54). The way

both the question and the answer "People of God" must be understood, Wojtyła adds, is pastoral. How can the Church *grow in her awareness and life* as the People of God? Although the question is in the first place a question about the Church as a *social* organism, the growth of the Church's awareness must take place in the life of the individual persons that constitute her. It must take place in their lived experience of personal subjectivity.

What is the content of the notion the "People of God" that should be received in the experience of personal subjectivity, according to Wojtyła? In his retreat for Paul VI, at the highpoint of the retreat, the beginning of the seventh talk, he writes,

Let us turn our thoughts to God who is gift and the source of all giving. The fathers of the second Vatican Council were convinced that the complex reality of the Church cannot be adequately expressed in societal terms alone, even when the society constituted by the Church is called the "People of God". In order properly to describe this reality and appreciate its underlying significance it is necessary to return to the dimension of mystery, that is to the dimension of the most Holy Trinity. That is why the Constitution *Lumen gentium* starts with an introductory account of the divine economy of salvation, which ultimately is a trinitarian economy (cf. *Lumen gentium*, nn. 2-4)... Love, an uncreated gift, is part of the inner mystery of God and is the very nucleus of theology. (Wojtyła 1977: 53 and 55)

What is to be received from Vatican II in the lived experience of the believer is thus the mystery of the Trinity as a mystery of love and of gift that gives its deepest form to the society called "Church". There are two texts of Vatican II to which John Paul II returns again and again, because he finds in them in miniature this core heritage of Vatican II.

The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light. For Adam, the first man, was a figure of Him Who was to come, namely Christ the Lord. Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear. (GS 22, 1)

Indeed, the Lord Jesus, when He prayed to the Father, "that all may be one . . . as we are one" (Jn 17:21-22), opened up vistas closed to human reason, for He implied a certain likeness between the union of the divine Persons, and the unity of God's sons in truth and charity. This likeness reveals that man, who is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself, cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself (cf. Lk 17:33). (GS 24, 3)

Both of these key texts have a rich trinitarian content on which all other details depend. In *Gaudium et Spes* 22, 1, the revelation of the mystery of the Father and his love fully reveals man to himself and makes his supreme calling clear. In *Gaudium et Spes* 24, 3, the likeness between the union of the Divine Persons and the union of human beings shows that man can only find himself in a sincere gift of self. There is a close connection between the two main results affirmed by these texts: "reveals man to man himself" and "man fully finds himself." These two formulations seem to aim at one and the same thing: for man to be fully revealed to himself and to find himself seem identical, though "be revealed" may have a more cognitive character, "find" a more comprehensive existential one.

This close connection suggests a similarly close connection between the causes or conditions that lead to such revelation and finding, namely, on the one hand, the revelation of the mystery of the Father and his love and, on the other, the sincere gift of self. The union between the Divine Persons proceeds, according to John, from the love of the Father, who is the source of the Son's life. The union between human beings is to be shaped in accord with this prior divine union. In view of this fact, one would expect fatherhood to play a central role in human life, particularly in the life of the Church. One would expect not only divine fatherhood, but human fatherhood in many analogical forms. From a Kantian point of view, which identifies personal dignity with individual autonomy, this pervasive presence of the family image in general and of fatherhood in particular will necessarily come under suspicion as a way of enslaving the weak and serving the interests of the powerful. Yet, Christians are bound by the example of Christ, who did not come to be served, but to serve.



A bishop, since he is sent by the Father [that is, God] to govern his family, must keep before his eyes the example of the Good Shepherd, who came not to be ministered unto but to minister, and to lay down his life for his sheep. (LG 27:3)

In this text it is quite clear that the bishop is father in the sense that he represents the true, divine Father of the family. He does not have the source of his authority within himself. He can only exercise his fatherhood according to the example of Christ's unreserved gift of his life.

In this perspective one could unfold the texts of Vatican II that speak about the Church as the family of God (for example, LG 28, 32, 51; *Christus Dominus* 16; *Unitatis Redintegratio* 2; see Bechina, 1998: 22–228). A single norm runs through all these texts, namely, the “new commandment” articulated in the Gospel of John, which is linked as a golden chain with the mystery of the Father’s love: “Love one another, even as I have loved you” (13:34). “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you” (15:9). Love and gift, rooted in the trinitarian exemplar, above all in the Father, are the basic defining elements of the Christian understanding of the person. *Gaudium et Spes* 24, 3, formulates a principle of human dignity very similar to Kant’s personalist norm. Kant says, “Act in such a way that at all times you treat human nature in your own person as well as in the person of every other human being simultaneously as a purpose, never as a mere means” (Kant 1785: 429). Vatican II says, “Man . . . is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself” (GS 24, 3). The crucial difference lies in what Vatican II adds. “Man, who is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself, cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself (cf. Lk 17:33).”

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