Joseph Ratzinger’s Theological Perspective

To place Ratzinger’s notion of a female line in the Bible within the context of his overall theological project, this chapter will explore the main contours of his thought as well as the framework and structure of his theological approach, beginning with his thinking on the God of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ, fully human and fully divine, one person in two natures, mediates Ratzinger’s thought on God and humanity, and the relationality he identifies as essential to Christ is at the core of that thought. I will first explore Ratzinger’s Christology and then his thought on the meaning of God’s self-revelation in the persons of Father, Son, and Spirit. From there I will turn to the role that Mary plays in his thought and how she personifies a number of its important developments and characteristics. Together these will show how all aspects of his thinking interconnect. The framework and structure of Ratzinger’s theology are crucial here, too, particularly the interplay of faith, theology, and tradition, in which the Church continually deepens and develops its understanding of
tradition through the Spirit’s guidance, which creates a generative structure for Ratzinger’s own constructive vision.

**The God of Jesus Christ**

A Pauline Augustinian Christology

Ratzinger’s theological thinking is christocentric in nature: Scripture is interpreted through the light of Christ, which illustrates his view that Christ is the determining factor for the meaning of the whole of Christianity.¹ For as he says, “. . . if it is indeed true that Jesus is the Son of God. Precisely this Being is the tremendous event on which everything else depends.”² It is through the lens of Jesus’ Being and the event of the incarnation, by which he is the Son of God, that Ratzinger views and understands the whole of Scripture, revelation, and tradition. This Jesus Christ is a radical challenge, as well as the answer for all humanity: “The Jesus who makes everything OK for everyone is a phantom, a dream, not a real figure. The Jesus of the Gospels is certainly not convenient for us. But it is precisely in this way that he answers the deepest questions of our existence.”³ Ratzinger anchors his Christology in the Pauline interpretation of Jesus as the second Adam in such a way that it can be described as an interplay of the Gospels and the Pauline material.⁴ This has implications for his overall theology and his understanding of salvation through Jesus Christ. Jesus is the apex and fulfillment of salvation history, such that the movement from creation and the fall

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to incarnation and resurrection are essential to his understanding of the full meaning of Scripture and the theological enterprise to understand and interpret them. This movement from Adam to Adam gives direction to Ratzinger’s theological work and is the principle and starting point of his Christology and soteriology. It is not Jesus Christ as a stand-alone individual, but Jesus Christ as the fullness of time in relation to the whole of Scripture and faith and also the fullness of the meaning and interpretation of humanity itself.

The Pauline aspect of soteriology plays an important role in this interpretation in that humanity requires conversion from the alienation of the fall and each human being’s salvation arises not from his own activity but God’s self-gift in Jesus Christ, even if the human response to God’s initiative is essential. Ratzinger’s thinking here is influenced by what can be called Pauline-Augustinianism, counter to the criticism that identifies his soteriology as influenced by (neo-)Platonic-Augustinianism. His view is that salvation cannot be achieved or brought about within history, and when such is attempted, it becomes totalitarian. This has had important consequences for his engagement with political theologies during his time as prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith. It could be argued that Ratzinger’s style led to a narrow theological approach, while political theologies’ focus is greater than just theology, and includes an active response to the suffering of the world, such as in liberation theology’s desire to respond to the appalling poverty and suffering of the people of South and Latin America.

Critical for Ratzinger’s Christology is his affirmation of the incarnation, that God became flesh and dwelt among us; this is the central proposition of the Christian creed and Christianity. It also


points to the historical nature of Christianity and to the notion of person, and hence relation: “The person of Jesus is his teaching and his teaching is he himself. Christian faith, that is, faith in Jesus as the Christ is . . . the acceptance of this person who is his word; of the word as person and of the person as Word.” The ontological portraiture of Jesus’ being is most clearly manifest in his dialogue with God the Father: The communion with the Father through prayer determines who Jesus is, so that Ratzinger maintains, “the centre of the life and person of Jesus is his constant communication with the Father,” and “the centre of the person of Jesus is prayer.” It is not Christ’s being or person as an abstract quality; rather, it is the relationship of Christ’s being and person with the Father that determines his being and person. The central emphasis on the relational nature of Jesus with the Father is highly significant to Ratzinger’s thinking. It also provides crucial, dynamic dimensions to his Christology and anthropology, and, as will be seen, his concept of “the female line of the Bible.”

God’s Self-Revelation as a Relational, Personal Being

The Triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is, for Ratzinger, fundamentally relational and personal. God as a relational being is foremost a scriptural notion, reflected in the self-revelation of God in the Old Testament as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and God’s covenantal relationship with Israel. God’s response to Moses—“I am who I am”—means that God is: God is at work, God acts, God can act, God is an “I,” God is a person. This implies that God is neither abstract nor impersonal, like a mathematical formula, nor is God “nothingness.” Likewise, the relational reality of God is

7. Ratzinger, Introduction to Christianity, 205; see also 204.
in total opposition to the beast of the book of Revelation who, as he says, is a number and makes men nothing but numbers.\textsuperscript{10} God as a personal relational being is most fully actualized and revealed in Jesus Christ, God’s Word.

Ratzinger outlines a relational anthropology in an important 1973 article,\textsuperscript{11} in which he addresses similar issues to those raised by the Russian Orthodox theologian Vladimir Lossky.\textsuperscript{12} Ratzinger and Lossky each offer a constructive examination of the topic and both provides important direction to the development of insights in the theological notion of person and its application to the human being. Lossky’s work takes up “a group of extremely important questions” that Hans Urs von Balthasar touches upon in discussing post-Chalcedonian theology in his considerations on Maximus the Confessor, but which Balthasar does not pursue in detail. The questions, according to Lossky, relate to the distinction between essence and existence and how they relate to the created human being,\textsuperscript{13} which is Lossky’s point of departure. Ratzinger, too, is influenced by Maximus and Balthasar; indeed, Ratzinger contends that Maximus provides the most significant positive clarification of the christological concept of person.\textsuperscript{14} Where Balthasar remains on the surface, as Lossky contends, on the level of Greek (Aristotelian) philosophy, Lossky’s and Ratzinger’s considerations seek to move beyond that and to appreciate how person as revealed in God’s self-
revelation in Jesus Christ fully transitions to the human being. How, based on theological consideration on the triune God, is “person” appropriately applied to the human being? As we will see, both determine this based on Christology, but each takes a different, if complementary, approach. Lossky’s and Ratzinger’s considerations cannot be explored here in the detail required to draw out the full depths and potential of their thought. I can only attempt to identify some lines of thought on divine person and how those are applicable to the human being, which will later help illuminate our main theme, the female line in the Bible. I will first consider Lossky’s and then Ratzinger’s thought.

Lossky on Person

Vladimir Lossky, in his classic essay on the theological notion of person in the divine and human, notes that in the Greek father’s comprehensive doctrine on divine person to express “the absolute and primordial condition of a Trinitarian God in His transcendence,” they used a pair of synonyms, ousia and hypostasis, which denote absolute identity and absolute difference. This “terminological discovery,” as Lossky refers to it, expresses “the irreducibility of the hypostasis to ousia” without “opposing them as two different realities.”15 Lossky argues that, where scholars create distinction between them, they “fall back into the domain of conceptual knowledge: one opposes the general to the particular.”16 Against this Lossky argues that the distinction between these two terms cannot be found in concepts; rather, their theological truth exists beyond concepts that “become signs of the personal reality of God.”17

16. Ibid.
17. Ibid., 115.
The issue of the appropriate application of person to the human being arises when, in the theological language of East and West, the human person coincides with the human individual, “an individual numerically different from all other men.” This situation, Lossky rightly notes, fundamentally distorts the notion of divine person. Lossky asks how “person” sits within Jesus Christ, who is both fully human and fully divine, but whose humanity began at the “moment of Incarnation,” while his person is that of the Son of God which preexisted his humanity in eternal communion with the Father and Spirit. When considering this, Lossky accepts that Jesus’ humanity does have “the character of an individual substance.”

To avoid the errors of Nestorius and Apollinarius of Laodicea, Lossky argues that there is an irreducibility of Christ’s person to his human nature. This means that in the human being, the person must also be distinguished from its nature or, in other words, its individual substance. A human person, then, is “someone who goes beyond his nature while still containing it.” Such a person exists in his or her nature while constantly exceeding it. Lossky concludes that “person’ signifies the irreducibility of the person to his nature.” This is irreducibility rather than an individual person being irreducible to their nature because that would indicate another nature, there would be two rather than one nature. Lossky’s concern is always to distinguish the person from its nature while never allowing a distinction between the two. The tree persons of God do not make God into three but reveal God as Tri-Unity. As a result, Lossky rightly insists we should abandon designating the human person with individual substance of reasonable nature. This is the opposite of the construal of Karl Rahner’s approach to the disconnect between the

18. Ibid., 116.
19. Ibid., 118.
20. Ibid., 120.
21. Ibid.
notion of divine person and how to date person has been applied to the human being. Rahner, wrongly in my view, argues that the addition of the term, “distinct manner of being” is required to clarify the notion of person in relation to God.\(^{22}\) Lossky’s, and Ratzinger’s, approach, which works to identify how person is appropriately applied to the human being, protects the fullness of person for the human being, discovered in the divine.

The implication of all this is that, in the union of person and nature, human beings are not enclosed in themselves but can transcend, in grace, the limits of their individuality. As Lossky puts it:

The creature, who is both “physical” and “hypostatic” at the same time, is called to realise his unity of nature as well as his true personal diversity by going in grace beyond the individual limits which divide nature and tend to reduce person to the level of the closed being of particular substances. Thus the level on which the problem of the human person is posed goes beyond that of ontology as we normally understand it; and if it is a question of metontology, only God can know—that God whom the story of Genesis shows stopping his work to say in the Council of the Three Hypostases: “Let us create man in our image and likeness”.\(^{23}\)

Lossky provides important technical clarification on the theological notion of divine person, how it can to be applied to the human being, and what it means for the human being. But he does so in an apophatic way, which leaves the question of the true nature of the human person beyond our reach and access. What is strikingly absent from Lossky’s considerations here is the notion of relationality that Christian theology discovered in the triune God. He focuses

\(^{22}\) Karl Rahner stated in relation to this that: “When today we speak of person in the plural, we think almost necessarily, because of the modern meaning of the word, of several spiritual centres of activity, of several subjectivities and liberties. But there are not three of these in God—not only because in God there is only one essence, hence one absolute self-presence, but also because there is only one self-utterance of Father, the Logos.” Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans. Joseph Donceel (New York: Herder & Herder, 1997 [1967]), 106; also see 56–57 and 103–115 for discussion on the issues related to the term *person*.

instead on how the Greek fathers acknowledged the three persons, or hypostases, in the one nature of God and how that is applied to the human being. His primary concern is to ensure person can be acknowledged and expressed while ensuring that person is not distinct from its nature, as if it were another nature. Lossky does not call upon the relationships of the Father and Son in the Holy Spirit to extrapolate how to distinguish the persons of God from the one divine nature. The relations of the person of the triune God are peripheral to Lossky’s considerations.

Ratzinger on Person

Ratzinger, in contrast to Lossky, insists that the true nature and meaning of God as person is accessible to humanity precisely through the person of Jesus Christ. He constructs an anthropology that is fully determined by a relational Christology, in which personal being—the human as image of God—is constituted and defined by Jesus Christ as the second Adam. Person, Ratzinger argues, is a notion that arose out of Christian faith through two questions that presented themselves to the Fathers: What is the God of Scripture? And, Who is Christ? The notion of person develops from the answers to these questions.²⁴ Of significance is the scriptural portrayal of the God who speaks. Utilizing prosopographic exegesis,²⁵ which underscores the dialogical dimensions and effects of story, ancient and medieval interpreters imported from Greek culture prosopon, or persona, which originally meant “the role or mask of the actor who describes dialogical scenes,” and imbued it with theological meaning.²⁶ Christian scholars appropriated, and radically transformed, this word as a mechanism

²⁴ Ratzinger, “Retrieving the Tradition,” 439.
²⁵ Ratzinger argues, in reference to Sjoberg, that the rabbinic antecedents to prosopographic exegesis should be investigated as this may be an additional basis of the concept of person.
²⁶ Ibid., 441.
to interpret the God Scripture describes. As Ratzinger puts it, “The phenomenon of *intra*–divine dialogue gives birth here to the idea of person who is person in an authentic sense.”27 We immediately see the relationality that is central to Ratzinger’s notion of person associated with Tertullian’s term *prosopon*, which is not as readily available through the terms *hypostasis* and *ousia*.

Two hundred years after Tertullian, Ratzinger argues that Augustine further developed this specifically Christian idea. Augustine identified that person in God means relation, being related, and, even more, that the person is relation. Ratzinger posits that the person exists as relation such that the person is the deed of generating, the act of self-donation. He refers to this as the pure reality of act or pure act-being. God is “the act of relativity toward the other. In God, person is the pure relativity of being turned toward the other.”28 The importance of this, for Ratzinger, is that the person is relation, not substance. God remains one substance, while as person-in-relation is “Tri-Unity,” not three (as Lossky insists). This is where through person Christian thought moves beyond the boundaries of Greek philosophy to something uniquely Christian that is based on God’s self-revelation through Jesus Christ.

The phenomenon of pure relationality, which is “absolute openness of existence without any reservation,”29 appears for Ratzinger most particularly in John’s Gospel. Jesus’ words, “The Son can do nothing of himself” (5:19) and “I and the Father are one” (10:30), demonstrate that the Father and Son are one because Jesus exists in total relativity toward the Father without any delimiting of substance. Furthermore, this is transferred to the disciples through Jesus’ words, “Without me you can do nothing” (15:5) and “that they

27. Ibid., 442.
28. Ibid., 444.
29. Ibid., 446.
may be one as we are one” (17:11). The disciple does not create a self-enclosed existence but, rather, seeks to be in pure relation with the other and with God. In Ratzinger’s view, this phenomenon of God as person, as pure relationality, transforms anthropology through Christology and “indicates the direction of all personal being.”

Christology, in fact, undergirds for Ratzinger an additional, yet fundamental, evolution of the notion of person in the tradition’s development of two-nature Christology—that is, Jesus has two natures, one human and one divine, in a single subject. Explicating the landmark definitions of the fourth and fifth centuries, Ratzinger turns to critique Boethius’s concept of person as the individual substance of a rational mind, contrasting this with Richard St. Victor’s definition of person as “the incommunicably proper existence of spiritual nature,” a critique Lossky also makes. For Ratzinger, Richard correctly sees person on the level of existence, not essence, or, in other words, relation rather than substance, which then breaks out of the limits of Greek philosophy. The person does not fit within the category of substance, person identifies an entirely new category which Scholastic theology developed; antiquity only knew of the category of essence. Where he criticizes Scholasticism most on this matter is its limitation of existence as an ontological category of explanation for Christology and the doctrine of the Trinity. Ratzinger, in contrast, argues that Christology should not be seen as a unique ontological exception but, rather, as the model and fulfillment of anthropology: Christology is normative for the understanding of the human person. This implies, first, that there are primary christological grounds of anthropology by which person and being human are given definition and actualization as opposed to the derivation from a priori analytic or generic/abstract categories of

30. Ibid., 445.
31. Ibid., 449–50.
being. Second, by fully applying the category of relation to humanity, Ratzinger introduces relation to intellectual thought in general, which, if fully realized, will transform it. By giving the category of relation grammar and language, using terms, phrases, and thought patterns to express and describe what it is, something that has hitherto not been integrated into the lexicon of accepted intellectual language, new horizons of reality will open. Faith in the personal, dialogical, and relational God, from the perspective of modern intellectual discourse, will then have solid ground, and cannot nor could not be viewed as “irrational”.32

This reconstruction of anthropology through Christology is given further definition and clarity in connection with two-nature Christology. Ratzinger offers three insights to clarify in a positive way what it means for Jesus to be constituted by two natures in a single subject. First, the essence of the Spirit is going beyond itself, such that by being with the other it comes to itself: the human person actualizes his or her nature in total relationality with God and others without reserve. Thus, Ratzinger can say: “The more the person’s relativity aims totally and directly at its final goal, at transcendence, the more the person is itself.”33 Second, in Christ being with the other is radically realized and that being-with-the-other brings being-with-himself to its fullness. Jesus’ humanity is brought fully to itself and demonstrates the human being’s greatest possibility, that of “transcending itself into the absolute and in the integration of its own relativity into the absoluteness of divine love.”34

As with Christ, in doing so the human being is not subsumed into

32. See the description of faith in Lumen Fidei, whose initial drafts were developed by Pope Benedict XVI. Francis I, Lumen Fidei (Dublin: Veritas, 2013), http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/francesco/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20130629_enciclica-lumen-fidei_en.html.
34. Ibid., 452.
God; rather, the “I” of a human being remains fully an “I” while being in total relation with God. Relationality with the Other and others, by connecting with the Other and others, allows the human being to transcend its individual limits: person denotes this reality.

Jesus as the final Adam, then, provides the space for humanity to gather on its way to relational communion with the triune God. In this way, God, as eternal communion of being, provides the space for the human, such that the divine “we” is opened to and united with the human “we.” The “we” of God is God for (Father), from (Son), and with (Holy Spirit). God is a God turned toward the other, not turned in and consumed by the self. The internally communal being of God, opened outward toward humanity, grounds the definition of humanity as the image of God.\(^{35}\) At the same time, relationality does not abrogate individuality, nor does it subsume humanity into divinity—divine and human being are noncompetitive and asymmetrical in character and relation.

The additional aspect of freedom or, more precisely, free relation needs to be included here. Freedom is an essential aspect of Ratzinger’s notion of person. A person is free only where relationship is self-giving rather than a means to an end. In self-giving, humanity is free as God is: freedom means, for Ratzinger, that in self-possession we have the possibility for self-realization of our being and true nature.\(^{36}\) In being so, we are at one with truth and thus “essence, willing, and acting have at last coincided.”\(^{37}\) True freedom, like person, is revealed through God—through God’s free relation to humanity in Jesus Christ—and is available to the human being as the image of God. Person is relation and that relation demonstrates true

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37. Ibid., 245, 247, 255.
freedom, which, for Ratzinger, is related not to the capacity to do but to being and existing in truth. Ratzinger’s christological recalibration of anthropology here contains four specific contributions. First is the notion that person is constituted by pure relationality and is not simply an attribute of substance. Second, that relationality does not consume the human being but, rather, brings the human being fully to itself. Third, Jesus Christ fully realizes relationality as the human being for all humanity and does so in such a way that mediates the relationality constitutive of God in se as triune and in direct expression of what it means to be a person in relation to others, applicable to every person. Fourth, the full introduction and application of the category of relation is a theological matrix for intellectual thought, both Christian and secular. In particular, Ratzinger achieves the latter by broadening relation from its unique and limited use in Christology and the doctrine of God, and applying it to anthropology. Ratzinger’s own theological work applies it even more widely, infusing every aspect of his thinking.

Complementary Visions of Person

Ratzinger and Lossky offer two different, but complementary, presentations of the theological notion of person. One emanates from the Greek tradition and the other from the Latin, or Tertullian-Augustinian, tradition. Based on the doctrine of divine person developed by the fathers, each theologian seeks to clarify and develop how divine person is appropriately applied to the human being. Lossky’s is a more technical discussion, concerned with ensuring that the notion of person applied to the human being in Christian thought aligns fully to the notion of person discovered in trinitarian theology. Specifically, that person can be distinguished without creating a
distinction of natures. Lossky shows that person in the human being, as in God, means the irreducibility of the person to one’s nature. The person is not distinct from their nature rather they remain one with their nature while nonetheless can be distinguished from their nature. The irreducibility of the person enables the human being to transcend their nature. The human being is not trapped in their nature but can go beyond their nature while remaining itself. Ratzinger, on the other hand, is concerned with demonstrating how the christological relationality provides for the notion of person and how that applies through Christ without reserve to the human person. In this way, Ratzinger draws out the meaning of person as relation, communion, and dialogue. Ratzinger’s considerations, while drawing on Augustine’s thought on person, is also critical of it, in this case Augustine’s projection of the divine persons into the interior life of the human person. By contrast, Ratzinger applies those relations fully to the human being through Christ.

Together we can say of Ratzinger’s and Lossky’s reflections on the theological notion of person, that there are not two types of person but one, even if the full theological realization of person in the human being is occurring long after the articulation of the notion of person in relation to the divine. Person as the act of pure relationality toward the other is that irreducibility of the person to its nature. The person is relatedness, and it is that potential for relationship with the Other and others that distinguishes the person from their nature. The human being’s person and nature are not distinct as it two natures—two different things—rather the relationality is not contained within or by the nature. This means the individual human being is not imprisoned in itself, but in grace can break out of its limits through and in relationality, by encountering or connecting with the Other and others. Their considerations together inform each

other and provide a more complete view of the theological notion of person and its appropriate application to the human being than either does alone. Importantly, though, Ratzinger provides a critical addition, namely, that the true meaning of person is not limited simply to God, as per Lossky, but is available to us through God’s self-revelation to humanity. Each human being has the free choice to be an individual or a person. By choosing to be person, the human being in relationality remains oneself while going beyond oneself. Both Ratzinger and Lossky’s work on the notion of person in the divine and the human are important contributions to and impetus for the Church’s continuing development and deepening of its comprehension of God’s self-revelation and the true meaning and potential of Christian anthropology. Needless to say, much is left to consider, including whether the way in which person applies to the human being has any implications for our understanding of the body of Christ.

Person and Individualism in Community

Before concluding this discussion of the meaning of person in relation to God and humanity in Ratzinger’s thought, let us compare two other perspectives on the notion of the human person in concrete reality that offer the possibility of extending both Ratzinger’s and Lossky’s considerations. First, Rowan Williams, former Archbishop of Canterbury, explicitly responds to Lossky’s argument that Christianity has yet to develop the vocabulary to distinguish between “two things that its absolutely vital to hold apart”: between the subject (or the unique instance) of God and the quality of God, or between hypostasis and ousia. Williams concern

is how the nature of a thing is distinguished form the unique consciousness of the person: “when we talk about being ‘a person,’ we’re talking of something about us as a whole that isn’t specified, that isn’t defined just by listing facts that happen to be true about us”.  

Williams maintains that the critical distinction in relation to the individual is primarily that between individual and person, not between the individual and the community. This is an important contribution to the idea of person and the place of the human being in the community. Williams places the distinction on the human being’s way of living and existing, between being in relation and being closed in on oneself. Williams describes person as the mysterious, relational, conversational, environment-building activity, which is set up against the individual who sets one’s own agenda disconnected from others. Person involves an act of faith, wherein we step out of our individual existence into the midst of a network of relations. For Williams, theology is probably the only true way of speaking of the human being in relationship because God, and our relationship with God, is at the root of everything. We are persons rather than individuals because of God. As he puts it:

It is in turning away from an atomised artificial notion of the self as simply setting its own agenda from inside towards that more fluid, more risky, but also more human discourse of the exchanges in relations in which we’re involved, and grounding that on the basic theological insight that we are always already in advance spoken to, addressed, and engaged with by that which is not the world and not ourselves.

In Williams’s reading, not only does person mean relation, but those relations create connections with others that bring into existence a network of persons operating together. This resonates with what we noted in relation to Ratzinger and Lossky, that relationality allows the individual to remain oneself while bursting through one’s individual limits.

Mauro Giuseppe Lepori, a Cistercian monk, offers an additional perspective. He explores the individual in community, specifically religious community, but in a way that is also relevant to community in general.\(^{42}\) He views individualism as “a flight one takes before the misery of one’s own heart,” when a human being makes the choice for “sterile autonomy.” But for him, it is not just the individual human being that can make this choice. Communities, which are closed in on their own project and image, rather than God’s work, also choose individualism. It is in communion with the Trinity, through Christ and the grace of the Holy Spirit, “in the Love that God is, the Love that unites the Father and the Son,” rather than in the community itself that the true meaning of the individual and the community is to be found. Lepori distinguishes communion in relation with others and with God from simply being and existing in a community: unless a community offers and asks of an individual only that which is of the origin and ultimate end, a distortion of true community results. Lepori sees that the mission of the religious (consecrated person, monks, nuns, priests), and I would add all Christians, is to live in such a way that individuals experience the communion of love that is the Trinity. The mission is not to solve the problems of the world; rather, it is to offer the world access to salvation through Jesus Christ.\(^{43}\)

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43. Ibid., 374–79.
Williams sets the individual against the person rather than community, and for good reason. Individualism, as per Lepori’s contribution, is not confined to the individual but can be pursued by a community. Person, whether as an individual or community, is a way of living and existing. It is relation with others, which means being in communion, not a community, with others. The human being as person is openness rather than closure, and this openness connects with the openness of others to form a web of relatedness. This relatedness, however, is ultimately a relatedness through and with the communion of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The person who is in true relation toward the other, who transcends itself by going beyond itself in relatedness, as we learn from Ratzinger and Lossky, is a we, not simply with God and the Church, but a “we” open to communion with the wider community. Ratzinger and Lossky clarify the meaning of the person, and Williams and Lepori offer clarity on the person vis-à-vis individualism, which allows us to posit that, for the human being, person is communion in relation with other persons through God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We see here the “we” of God to which Ratzinger points, around which humanity gathers.

Finally, Ratzinger not only provides an historical outline of the development of theological anthropology but also reveals crucial elements of his own theological approach. First, as noted earlier, the Augustinian influence on Ratzinger is quite apparent, which is inflected by Pauline, rather than Platonic or neo-Platonic, notes, as per much criticism of his thought.44 Second, Ratzinger starts his consideration not from modern thought but, in a signature methodological approach, he commences by exploring the origins, in this case with the fathers, to identify the meaning of specific aspects

44. Corkery, Joseph Ratzinger’s Theological Ideas; Rausch, Pope Benedict XVI.
of Christian thought. His point of departure for his engagement with modern theological thought is through understanding why and how something in theology developed and exists. In this way, his thought remains anchored within the river of tradition that provides for a deep comprehension of theological issues, which is then used to respond to how those issues present themselves in the modern period.

Mary, an Essential Element of Authentic Christianity

The God of Jesus Christ, for Ratzinger, as we have seen, is mediated through God’s self-revelation in the Son. The incarnation is the point of entry of the Son into history. This was not simply God’s act, but critically an act that sought a response from created humanity. Mary, in her yes, provided that positive response and is an essential aspect of the God of Jesus Christ. What is noteworthy here is that there has been a movement with regard to the importance of Mary in Ratzinger’s thinking. So, while the christocentric nature of his thinking has remained a constant, the place of Mary has evolved from being an aspect, though not central, to becoming a central aspect of his thinking, and this has profoundly shaped his post–Vatican II theology. What changed was the context within which Christ is to be placed. According to his own assessment, early in his career he was influenced by the primacy of the christological in Christianity associated with the liturgical movement and the dialogue with Protestantism,45 but this evolved when he appreciated the critical nature of the link between Mary and the Church. In The Ratzinger Report, this intellectual journey is described as somewhat like a conversion.46 As a young theologian, before and during Vatican