

Editorial

*The Riddle of Integral
Human Development*

A certain Apollodorus describes a pivotal encounter between Oedipus and the Sphinx at the Greek city of Thebes, a scene that sets the stage for the events of the Sophoclean tragedy *Oedipus Rex*. The Sphinx, a mythical chimera, would stop travelers coming to Thebes and ask them a riddle: “What is that which has one voice and yet becomes four-footed and two-footed and three-footed?” Those unable to answer the Sphinx would be ignominiously eaten. Oedipus comes to Thebes and is in turn confronted by the Sphinx. Unlike other hapless travelers, however, Oedipus is able to answer the Sphinx, as Apollodorus relates: “Oedipus found the solution, declaring that the riddle of the Sphinx referred to man; for as a babe he is four-footed, going on four limbs, as an adult he is two-footed, and as an old man he gets besides a third support in a staff.”¹ At this response, the Sphinx is destroyed and Thebes is freed from its fearful domination.

Oedipus’ anthropological answer to the Sphinx’s riddle mirrors the anthropological question at the heart of “integral human development.” This idea has been brought to the fore in development thinking influenced by Roman Catholic social thought over the last century. However, the importance given to anthropology draws on a much older tradition. “What is man that You take thought of him,” wonders the Psalmist, “And the son of man that You care for him?” The Psalmist goes on to observe that man has been made “a little lower than God,” and crowned “with glory and majesty!” (Ps. 8:4–5 NASB). This confession of praise gets at the complex nature of the human person as made in God’s image to act with authority as the divine representative in the created order. When exploring the nature of the human person, the Christian tradition has rightly emphasized

both the material as well as the spiritual aspects of humankind. The derogation of one at the expense of the other leaves us with a partial, and in some cases distorted and truncated, picture of human nature.

The first set of essays in this collection on the theme of integral human development written by Héctor Rocha, Luca Sandonà and Uchechukwu Aladi, Angelina N. Christie, and Maria Sophia Aguirre illustrate the methodological challenges endemic to bringing social scientific insights to bear on anthropological questions. Paradigms, theories, experiments, and approaches can have valid and significant things to teach us about the human person and social life. Yet they remain circumscribed in their applicability, given the limitations inherent in the methodologies of various disciplines. As these contributions illustrate, economics is central to our understanding of the human person and human society. Nevertheless, economics, while often providing anthropological insight, does not cover the entirety of what it means to be human. As Pope John Paul II writes, “it is not possible to understand man on the basis of economics alone, nor to define him simply on the basis of class membership.”²

Indeed, given the anthropological focus to the concept of integral human development, highlighted in this volume by Jean-Yves Naudet and Antoine Suarez, it becomes necessary to move beyond questions of the human person in his or her individuality and in abstraction. The integrality of the human person consists not only in the comprehensive picture of the interrelationships among body, soul, and spirit but also in the dynamics of human community and interrelationships. Thus the articles by Raquel Lázaro, Jim Wishloff, and Wolfgang Grassl wrestle with the particularly social nature of the human person and the implications of this reality for an accurate understanding of humanity in relational dimensions, both horizontal as well as vertical.

A final series of contributions to this volume build thematically on the insights of the human person existing as an individual in community by focusing on questions related to the temporal nature of human society. At the level of the individual, Oedipus’ answer indicates that we are time-bound creatures who are born, mature, grow old, and eventually pass away. At the level of societies and states there is an intergenerational dynamic of development as parents leave legacies, for good or ill, to their succeeding progeny. Geoffrey Strickland, Robin Klay and Todd Steen, and Vincent Bacote each deal in diverse ways with the multifaceted factors involved in evaluating the development of human communities over time and throughout history.

This issue also features a pair of review essays dealing with a crucial and formative institution of human society and development: the family. Eduardo J. Echeverria examines the significance of the Dutch Reformed theologian Herman

Bavinck's reflections on the Christian family as "an image of the covenant fidelity and love between God and his people." Eric Schansberg examines the last half century of social trends in his review essay, which looks at Michael Harrington's *The Other America* (1962) and Charles Murray's *Coming Apart* (2012). As Schansberg argues, "Examining the two books together provides insight into the problem of poverty in our own time."

Paul Myers and Victor V. Claar debate the significance of the Fair Trade phenomenon for international development efforts in this issue's Controversy feature. In addition to a valuable set of book reviews, the issue culminates with a selection concerning "The Moral Organization of Humanity as a Whole," from Vladimir S. Soloviev's larger work, *The Justification of Good*. The Russian Orthodox philosopher's reflections on the moral order and its significance for the diversity and history of human social life serve as a fitting capstone to this special volume on integral human development.

As the Sphinx's query and all of the rich reflection on integral human development contained in this special issue demonstrate, the human person in all its variegated and paradoxical dimensions remains something of a riddle. C. S. Lewis once observed, "There are no *ordinary* people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilization—these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit—immortal horrors or everlasting splendours."³ Zachary M. Mabee's contribution, which concludes the articles in this issue, makes an important point: the person and work of Jesus Christ in his "compassionate gaze" provide the most significant context for our understanding of the human person and thereby of what it means to become more fully human in a comprehensive and integral sense. The church father Irenaeus of Lyons said that "the glory of God is the human person fully alive," and to understand what it means to be fully alive, we must remember that Jesus Christ came so that we "may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10 NIV). As Irenaeus concludes, "the life of man consists in beholding God. For if the manifestation of God which is made by means of the creation, affords life to all living in the earth, much more does that revelation of the Father which comes through the Word, give life to those who see God."⁴

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Notes

1. Apollodorus, *Library*, trans. James George Frazer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1921), 3.5.8.
2. John Paul II, encyclical letter *Centesimus Annus* (May 1, 1991), 24.
3. C. S. Lewis, “The Weight of Glory,” in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 46.
4. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 4.20.7, 490, translation modified: “Gloria enim Dei vivens homo, vita autem hominis visio Dei.”