

## Abstract

William R. Hamant, "*Iusta autonomia* and the Relational Ontology of Joseph Ratzinger."

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This dissertation explores the theology of creation of Joseph Ratzinger, asking how, in light of the ontology it presupposes, he would understand the statements of the Second Vatican Council regarding the "just autonomy of earthly affairs" (*GS* 36, 41, 59). We conclude that Ratzinger's ontology serves to correct a simplistic yet prevalent sense of creaturely autonomy in light of the relational existence of the person, who finds himself through the union of love.

Chapter One describes the meaning that "autonomy" came to have after the Enlightenment, discussing the themes of knowledge, meaning, and "relation," particularly in the realm of the sciences. Chapter Two challenges the Enlightenment's epistemology with Ratzinger's emphasis on our openness to truth, and then justifies the claim that Ratzinger's use of the category of relation presupposes an ontology in which relation is the ontological category *par excellence*. Chapter Three develops this relational ontology further in light of the meaning of "person," grounding creaturely personhood particularly in the filial personhood of the Son. Chapter Four then discusses personal creaturehood as being most fully realized as "response," an insight that is employed in

two main directions. First, it allows us to challenge the Enlightenment's loss of meaning through creaturely responsiveness to being as *good*. Second, it provides the key for seeing how Ratzinger understands sin and evil. Chapter Five brings Ratzinger's relational ontology onto the stage of salvation history, and argues that every earthly reality is fully "itself" ("autonomous") to the extent that it is open to its own fulfillment from without. This openness is discussed as a dynamism inherent in all of reality, which leads to the person as the purpose of all of creation (described by the term, "personalization"). Ratzinger's exegetical method, as well as Christ's teaching, the Kingdom of God, and Christ's mediatorship, all serve the purpose of elucidating the theme of "personalization." Chapter Six applies Ratzinger's relational ontology to the "autonomy" enjoyed by Mary, the martyrs, the Church during the Sacrifice of the Mass, and the "purely" earthly realities of the state and culture.