

**The Common Good as a Participation in the Kingdom of God:
Insights from Radical Orthodoxy and the Recovery of a Participatory Ontology**
Maura Donahue

Abstract

This paper shows how a participatory ontology, in which all materiality participates in God, offers a fuller understanding of freedom and provides a corrective to the consumerist model of relationships by restoring the role of persons in community. By engaging the work of John Milbank, D. Stephen Long, and others who, following Thomas Aquinas, articulate a participatory ontology, the paper argues that such an ontology is critical to understanding human work and participation in the economy in an effort to promote the common good. A participatory ontology allows the opportunity to question the prevalent understanding of individual freedom and its resulting lack of a unified economic *telos*. The framework provides a transcendent *telos* for the human person, a *telos* that is shareable in traditioned community and can serve as the basis for understanding the common good as a participation in the Kingdom of God. When we conceive of the common good as a temporal goal that points us toward beatitude with God and the fulfillment of the Kingdom of God, we are free to employ our gifts and talents in meaningful work and economic exchange that promotes human flourishing.

Participative ontology reclaims the ontological difference between God and creatures, and holds that all materiality, which is created by and sustained by God, participates in God. The paper addresses implications of a participatory ontology for a kenotic understanding of freedom, persons in community, *telos*, work, and the exchange of goods and services. By analogy, the paper will show how, as our participation in community is a participation in the Trinity, the temporal common good that we seek to bring about is itself a participation in the Kingdom of God. This change in perspective regarding the common good, viewing it not a goal in itself, but as an earthly participation in the heavenly Kingdom of God, provides a positive correction for the aims of business and further moral grounding for persons engaged in economic exchange.