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# Social Justice: Creating a New Trinitarian Culture

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**Stratford Caldecott**, *Not as the World Gives: The Way of Creative Justice* (Second Spring Books, 2015).

*Not As the World Gives* is not your typical book on Catholic social teaching. We tend to consider the “social teaching” of the Church a separate body of writings to be applied to secular society. In this way, the Church’s teaching becomes functionalized, for the secular world is treated as the standard by which to judge everything else. The title *Not As the World Gives* is the author’s attempt to reverse our thinking of the secular order as primary and the Church as secondary. For Caldecott, Catholic social teaching is more than a means to solve social issues. The key premise of the book is that “[t]he primary human society is the Church herself.” Rooted in this theological principle, *Not As the World Gives* inspires us to put our hope for a just social order in God’s divine promise, not in human achievement alone.

The chapter “The Rise of Machines” attempts to combat the tyranny of mechanism which reduces all of nature, including human nature, into something merely mechanical. Caldecott insists, by contrast, that human nature has a spiritual dimension which transcends time and death. This spiritual dimension—a relation to the absolute—affords man a dignity that not only sets limits to both market and state, but also informs them from within. Caldecott inquires into the nature of human society and bases his argument on an understanding of human nature as metaphysical and spiritual rather than mechanical.

The book’s argument, furthermore, depends on an understanding of the Church as a communion between God and man. Caldecott believes that the Church makes human unity possible in the most complete sense. This does not mean that the Church is already perfect, or she is a perfect society. Nevertheless, the Church is mankind on the way of being transformed into the City of God: “She is the *only* society that bridges the gap between the moment of our Redemption and the moment of *Parousia* (Second Coming), when the perfect society, the society of saints, will finally be revealed.” If this is true, it follows that the attempt to separate the Church from the secular order is the root cause of modern social issues.

A key principle of the book is that the social doctrine of the Church cannot or should not be separated from spirituality and the moral life, especially the Beatitudes. Therefore, a just social order lies less in programs and techniques than in the Beatitudes. [1] Caldecott believes that purity—*blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God* (Matt 5:8)—is essential to the living of a Christian life and the creation of a Christian society. Thus, the purpose of the book is not so much an introduction of the Church’s social teaching, but rather, it is to help to initiate readers to a trinitarian way of life. It is the Trinity that

shows us what it means to give *not as the world gives*, but as *God gives*. In the Trinity, it is the giving of the Self, the Person, not just the giving of “things,” that creates divine society. Furthermore, Mary is the “pure heart” at the center that enables the Church to see God. Therefore, for Caldecott, authentic human society can be created when the human person participates in the self-gift of the Son through the corporate person of the Church, the immaculate Bride of Christ.

Once we see social justice in its proper theological context—man’s vocation to bring the whole creation into trinitarian communion—we can understand better why Caldecott gives such prominence to the “Way of Creative Justice,” the subtitle of the book. For Caldecott, *Creative justice* is justice in its fullest sense. To be just is to be inventive: to create social forms and structures that make the good visible on earth.<sup>[2]</sup> But what exactly do we create? Echoing St. John Paul II and Pope Francis,<sup>[3]</sup> Caldecott’s answer is nothing short of creating a new culture, a new civilization. For Christians who worship a living God (again, social justice cannot be separated from spirituality), it is not enough to be fair, or to balance one person’s rights against another’s. Indeed, we need to recognize “moral action once again as a creative work, and to allow the living moral power to enter into it” (from the epigraph by Guardini). This way of understanding our engagement with the world reminds us that Christians are called to be a new creation (2 Cor 5:17). Caldecott suggests that our call to creative justice is to incarnate God’s divine love in social and cultural worlds.

How can we be creatively just in the way Caldecott proposes? I think the chapter entitled “The Way of Beauty” provides an essential key. Since we are not God, we do not create in the strict sense. Our creativity is the fruit of a freedom God has granted us out of love. To be creative is to cultivate the soil of our own human nature. Drawing from Plato’s *Symposium*, Caldecott suggests that “[o]nly when man looks at beauty in ‘the way it can be seen’ will he be able to give birth to virtue—and, along with virtue, all the glories of human civilization.” For Caldecott, the most effective way is to gaze on the beauty of God in the liturgy, where we see God made visible to the human eyes in the incarnation of the Word. In fact, the liturgy and, more generally, prayer, is the school of freedom and creativity. For Caldecott, “it is this turning towards the Transcendent in faith and worship that orients our ascent within ourselves, and gives a direction to our search for beauty.”

*Not As the World Gives*, the last book by Caldecott (d. 2014), presents the Church’s perennial teaching on the Trinity while incorporating the most up-to-date content from the Church’s social teaching, up to Pope Francis’ *Joy of the Gospel*. In addition to a masterful command of trinitarian theology, the author’s breadth of knowledge, ranging from early modern European history and art history to Islamic mysticism, shows how the Church’s social teaching can engage in friendly dialogue with all branches of knowledge.<sup>[4]</sup> By embracing the One, the divine love shared between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Caldecott can enter into a myriad of social issues and show that the true form of social justice is rooted in Trinitarian love.

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[1] As Adrian Walker puts it in the Foreword, living the Beatitudes is the Church’s characteristic way of being in the world precisely by *not being of it* (xvi).

[2] Christians are called to bring justice from heaven to earth: “Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” Our work for justice is necessarily a creative act, because our freedom is an image of God’s freedom who creates everything out of nothing.

[3] Pope Francis says, “John Paul II had a very bold phrase: a faith that does not produce culture is not a

true faith. He emphasized this: creating culture.” This quote comes from the epigraph.

[4] See *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, nos. 76–78.

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