copal church were helpful, but then a change in location left them with no better option than to attend a Catholic church. I say “no better option” to indicate their state of mind at the time, which was still influenced by the deeply anti-Catholic prejudices of the Cosmo world. Once inside the Church, however, it became for them a Tardis, a world that is bigger on the inside than it appears to be from the outside. The riches of the Catholic intellectual tradition opened up for them a comprehensive interpretation of history and of their own personal histories. The experience of sacramental confession, as recounted by the author, was a life-shaking experience.

I am left with only one hanging question. If the author had not been “forced” by geographical circumstances to begin attending a Catholic church, would she still be a Protestant to this day? The book itself does not provide an answer, but it is worth noting that the other three authors mentioned at the head of this review—McCorvey, Nathanson, and Johnson—all became Catholic. I cannot help but recall Girard once again—specifically his comments on “the unity of novelistic conclusions” in the wake of deep experiences of conversion.

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Stratford Caldecott’s Not as the World Gives offers a Christian vision of social and cultural change—of how to make the world a better place. In this respect it is no different than other utopian social theories, even Marxism. After all, for Marx the point was not simply to understand the world but to change it. So too for Caldecott, and, we must keep in mind, for Jesus Christ. But here the similarity ends. For Marx and company, the world is understood to be deficient and defective by design. There is nothing good at the foundation of this fallen world to renew it, to overcome the evil in it. Thus, man is on his own. He must use his own ideas and his own power to redeem the broken world. Autonomous man cannot accept society until it has been perfected in his own imagination and established as fact. This is to be done preferably through something like “education,” but, should that fail, through force.

For Caldecott, in contrast, man is not alone because a loving God is the source of the world, and if the world is to be redeemed it will only be in and through God’s love. We must, as it were, tap into the source of eternal
love if we hope to make the world a better place. Cut off from this source we are without hope, left with man-made schemes of revolution or reform that will only add misery to an already miserable world.

For those, like me, reading Caldecott for the first time, Adrian Walker’s tightly written Foreword is especially helpful. From Walker we learn that this new book follows Caldecott’s The Radiance of Being, a book of Catholic metaphysics in light of the “key that unlocked everything”—the mystery of the Trinity. In Not as the World Gives, Caldecott looks to extend his Trinitarian thinking to social and cultural matters. As he puts it, “In the present volume I hope to apply this universal key to the question of a Christian society as Western civilization in the twenty-first century begins to face its gravest challenges. Above all, here I want to show how the radiance I spoke of in the earlier book can shine through not just the natural but also the social and cultural worlds.”

Early on, Caldecott gently but firmly sets aside the kind of “Catholic Social Teaching” that ignores or attempts to replace “spirituality and the moral life”—specifically the Beatitudes, which offer a portrait of Christian existence lived to the full” (4). He is rightly wary of those who have in effect lost their Christian identities to the world (to be in the world but not of it) and so subordinate living the love of Christ to the pursuit of earthly power and man-made utopias. He is interested in fixing on the source of Christianity—Christ, and the Trinity—and working out what lives lived in Christ can mean for the world. He has no time for ideologies, even Catholic ones.

Not as the World Gives is divided into three sections, each of which contains three chapters, followed somewhat oddly by three appendices called “Essays.” (I have read elsewhere that Caldecott was somewhat enchanted with numerology.) It was hard for me to see much that distinguished the chapters from the appendices. The book is only a monograph in the sense that what holds it together is the author and his vision; otherwise it is a collection of essays or meditations on a variety of topics having to do with bringing, through our own lives, Trinitarian life and love to a sick and dying world. These topics include “The Radiant City,” “A Divine Society,” “Catholic Social Doctrine,” “The Rise of the Machines,” and chapters on gender, politics, culture, and beauty, as well as essays (i.e., appendices) on St. Francis of Assisi, Gay Unions and Marriage, Neo-conservatism, Distributism, and a concluding essay co-authored with his wife Leonie entitled “Slow Evangelization.” While something of a hodgepodge, I found this to be no impediment to my delight in or understanding of the author’s project. Every chapter and essay is well worth reading, and reading again. Moreover, given that the book was written and published when the author was himself sick and dying, we must first be thankful to have it at all before worrying about tidiness.
Caldecott’s book, like all good efforts at social theory broadly understood, attempts to *illuminate social reality*, but it differs from many such theories in emphasizing what my old leftist comrades used to call “praxis,” where theory is understood as in some sense performative. In this view theory is less about naming things than changing things. But here again Caldecott departs from humanist thought in an essential way: The illumination does not come from man, but from God. Its source is not natural, but supernatural. The world is to be lit up by those who participate in the love that is the source of all that is.

So, what can we make of Caldecott’s Christian utopian thinking? I think it’s brilliant. Caldecott cannot be dismissed as an unrealistic utopian because Christianity is the only utopian thinking that is grounded in reality, in *truth*. As signaled in the book’s title, the peace to be given to the world *does not come from the world*, from man, but from beyond it, from God via Jesus Christ. It is man who looks to change the world with his imagination and power. Jesus Christ is the only one truly able to imagine a perfected humanity because He *is* perfected humanity, and His vision is therefore not “utopian” at all, but instead comes from—and at the same time *is*—the source of all reality, as He so often tells us in the Gospels. And so there is to be no salvation, no peace, until all live in and through Him. This is not utopian; this is real. The “way of creative justice” is therefore nothing less than the transformation of the world through the Church, through the Mystical Body of Christ.

We can see the work of “creative justice” at work in the Church, but specifically in the lives of the saints. As Caldecott writes, “This supernatural light does not just illuminate but transforms the world from the inside out. It opens us to grace and draws us into the life of the Trinity” (1). The effect of Caldecott’s book is to sweep away and simplify the business of “Catholic Social Teaching” and reduce it to its essence. If we are to make the world a better place according to Christian thinking we must look to Jesus Christ and the saints. We should strive ourselves to be saints—nothing more, nothing less.

I know I am into a good book when I start typing up passages and quotes to file away for future reference. If I don’t do this then it’s unlikely that I care to remember what I have read or feel the need to return to it. A forgettable book can be a useful book but not a good one. *Not as the World Gives*, by the late Stratford Caldecott, is a good book. I look forward to returning to it often in the years ahead.

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