

THE BEAUTY OF GOD'S HOUSE

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# The Beauty of God's House

*Essays in Honor of Stratford Caldecott*

EDITED BY

Francesca Aran Murphy



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THE BEAUTY OF GOD'S HOUSE  
Essays in Honor of Stratford Caldecott

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*The Religious Dimension in the Thought of Giambattista Vico* (1991), and most recently, in collaboration with Slavoj Žižek, *The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectic?* (2009) and *Paul's New Moment: Continental Philosophy and the Future of Christian Theology* (2010).

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## Introduction

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Francesca Aran Murphy

It is a privilege to write an introduction for a book of essays dedicated to Stratford Caldecott. It would not be accurate to say that Stratford Caldecott has “promoted” the connection of imagination and Christianity in England for the past twenty-five years. It would be better to say that, along with his wife, Léonie, he has *lived* the bond of imagination and Christianity for most of his adult life. This living witness to the beauty of Christian faith has been important for the survival of Christianity in “England’s green and pleasant land.” If William Blake had had the good fortune to know Stratford and his wife, Léonie Caldecott, there might have been less talk of “Nobodaddy,” and more of “Christ the Imagination.” In the ambiance of the Caldecotts, it was natural not merely to see our shared homeland through Blake’s satirical lens, as littered and unpleasant, but also to envision it as that “fairest Isle” of which Dryden wrote in Purcell’s opera, *King Arthur*. This was not because the Caldecotts harbored any fake ideas about accentuating the positive, but because love sees the best in all things. If, as Cardinal Marc Ouellet writes in this volume, grace is a form of love, then we may say that the Caldecotts taught their many friends, associates, and pupils to envisage the world in the light of grace. All of the authors who contributed to this book were eager to do so, in order to thank Stratford Caldecott for his witness to the beauty and thus the truth and goodness of Christian, Trinitarian, and incarnational faith. For all of them, perhaps, Stratford Caldecott helped them not only to see, but to envision the truth. He lived amongst those who readily believe that King Arthur will return in England’s darkest hour (“and [some] say, the sooner the better,” as C. S. Lewis once put it).

This volume assembles essays about Mariology, Thomas Aquinas’s epistemology, aesthetics, liturgics, economics, cosmology, ecumenism, homiletics, Tolkien, and John Henry Newman. The single thread that runs through them is perhaps the principle that in order to know ourselves and to know all else beside, it must participate in what Augustine calls “the light which shines above my mind,” the divine light. That Platonic and Augustinian theme is appropriate, for it typifies Stratford Caldecott’s orientation to

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all reality, worldly and other worldly. "Other worldly" is a phrase that naturally comes to mind when one thinks of the Caldecotts, and a note of otherworldliness can be heard throughout these essays. By his life and thought, Stratford Caldecott has testified that other worlds exist, in imagination but also, *and therefore*, in reality.

I thought that I was editing a Festschrift, which almost by definition is a collection of disparate essays. I find, however, that by the magnetic force of his personality, Stratford Caldecott's name has evoked an exemplary primer in theological aesthetics. In its own way, each of these essays is about the beauty of God—how that beauty is known (Borella), expressed in poetry, literature, and liturgy (Martínez, Cameron, Fagerberg), exhibited in art and in nature (Clayton, D. C. Schindler, Nichols, Taylor), apparent beyond the scope of Christianity (Shah-Kazemi), bodied forth in human lives (Milbank, both Zaleskis, and Cross), most especially the life of the Mother of God (Walker), and how it is or can be incarnate in society (D. L. Schindler). All of the essays are about the manifestation of the beauty of God. It is a great tribute to the Caldecotts' force of personality that they have stimulated such a lively, deep, and unitary collection of papers.

It is impossible to imagine Stratford without his wife, Léonie. I conclude this brief introduction with Dryden's immortal words, which remind us of an England beloved of Venus:

Fairest Isle, all isles excelling,  
Seat of pleasures and of loves,  
Venus here will choose her dwelling,  
And forsake her Cyprian groves.  
Cupid from his fav'rite nation  
Care and envy will remove;  
Jealousy that poisons passion,  
And despair that dies for love.  
Gentle murmurs, sweet complaining,  
Sighs that blow the fire of love,  
Soft repulses, kind disdainings,  
Shall be all the pains you prove.  
Ev'ry swain shall pay his duty,  
Grateful ev'ry nymph shall prove;  
And as these excel in beauty,  
Those shall be renown'd for love.<sup>1</sup>

1. From *King Arthur*, Act 5, Scene 2. Words by John Dryden. Music by Henry Purcell.

## Stratford Caldecott

### *A Brief Biography*

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Philip Zaleski

Stratford Stanley Francis Caldecott was born at King's College Hospital in south London on November 26, 1953. His father was Oliver Caldecott (1925–1989), one of the leading publishers and editors in England, and his mother Moyra Caldecott, née Brown (1927–), a poet and novelist best known for her fantasy trilogy *Guardians of the Tall Stones*.

Stratford's parents came from South Africa, immigrating to England around 1950 partly on account of his father's anti-apartheid activities; at least one linguist, a Benedictine monk, claims to discern traces of the veldt in Stratford's soft, musical voice. Stratford was raised, with two siblings (Julian, b. 1956; Rachel, b. 1960), in a lively London household piled high with books and frequented by well-known writers, a number of them in the vanguard of New Age thought as Oliver Caldecott's publishing interests ran increasingly in that direction. As a young child, Stratford suffered from poor eyesight, eczema, and asthma—once a lung collapsed, requiring a stay in hospital—reasons enough for his favoring intellectual endeavors over sports. Nonetheless, upon entering Dulwich College on a state scholarship he learned to love cricket, and he also developed an interest in history and science, astronomy in particular (the seed of this fascination with the heavens may have been planted in early youth, when one night his parents woke him up and led him to a front room where a telescope had been set up to view the moon through an open window: a beautiful, haunting image).

Stratford was not baptized, as his father wished him to determine his own religious beliefs. Instead, he drew early spiritual nourishment from literature, including fantasy novels and American comic books, and from dreams of a most peculiar nature, “dreams that seemed to be more than

dreams . . . bearing revelations that can never be expressed in words," as he later described them.<sup>1</sup> These influences awoke in him a firm if fledgling belief in God. At the age of fourteen, while questioning the claims of materialism during a family visit to South Africa, he had a realization that transformed his life that "the very awareness of the question" was itself non-material. "It is hard to convey," he wrote, "the force with which this insight impacted upon my life, or the horizons it opened up for me." This profound, if adolescent and as yet untutored insight, combined with another into the unity of "matter, consciousness, and time," set him upon a metaphysical and religious path to which he has kept ever since. He studied arguments for the existence of God, devoured counter-cultural religious texts—many of them published by his father—and spent a year in America, working as a male au pair and exploring the country by bus and hitchhiking, before arriving in Oxford on a scholarship to study psychology and philosophy at Hertford College.

At the time, behavioral psychology and analytical philosophy dominated at the university. They proved thin gruel for a young man on the lookout for spiritual truth, and Stratford soon grew disillusioned with his studies. Instead, he pored over the writings of Sufis, in particular Jalaluddin Rumi and Ibn Arabi, along with the books of the modern Traditionalist school of René Guenon, Frithjof Schuon, and Ananda Coomaraswamy, and he encountered followers of the Russian esotericist G. I. Gurdjieff. He sensed in the Traditionalists and Gurdjieffians a spiritual elitism that troubled him, and yet he learned to his benefit, through these unconventional explorations, the dangers of religious syncretism on the one hand and of a religionless "spiritual search" on the other. While at Oxford, he also enjoyed a far more important encounter, "the event that would truly change my life": he met his future wife, Léonie Caldecott (née Richards), destined to be his partner in so many endeavors on behalf of the church. She came up to Oxford a year after him, entering Hertford to read philosophy and theology. Stratford was assigned as her mentor and the two fell in love, their romance surviving the occasion when the smitten man, demonstrating to his young angel his skills with a punt, plunged headfirst into the river, ruining his black suede jacket.

The couple married in 1977 at Oxford's Anglican church, Saint Mary Magdalen. After a brief stint as a sales assistant and clerk in a London bookstore, Stratford followed in his father's footsteps by beginning a career as a publisher and editor. He had developed a deep interest in the teachings of the nineteenth-century Persian religious leader Bāhā'u'llāh and found his

1. Caldecott, "Gnosis and Grace," 169.

first job as an assistant editor for the small Bahá'í publishing firm of George Ronald in Kidlington. Upon losing his faith in Bahá'í, Stratford moved on to the London firm of Routledge & Kegan Paul, famed for its impressive philosophy and spirituality lists. Meanwhile, Léonie worked as a journalist, writing on the arts, nuclear issues, and ecofeminism.

As the next phase in what had become by now a mutual religious quest, Stratford and Léonie explored Buddhism under the Tibetan Rinpoche Namkhai Norbu, a practitioner in the rDzogs-chen lineage. They valued the meditational serenity imparted by this tradition but harbored serious reservations; Léonie was convinced that the sacramental element, such as one finds in Christianity, had to be at the core of any spiritual path. Stratford then began to read intensely in Saint Thomas Aquinas and his most prominent modern interpreters, Étienne Gilson and Jacques Maritain, and eventually came to realize that Christianity “is not to do with states of consciousness,” that it “is about salvation . . . an ontological change, a change in the substance of reality itself, brought about by the sacrifice of the Son of God.”<sup>2</sup> At around the same time, he experienced a powerful dream of the Holy Grail appearing in his parents’ Dulwich home: “In the dream, or vision, I prostrated myself before it: the sense of a sacred presence was overwhelming.” Thus spurred on by reason and imagination, philosophy and art, theology and vision, he received instruction from a local priest and, in November 1980, on his twenty-seventh birthday, was received into the Roman Catholic Church. “The Absolute had always loomed on my interior vision as the source and goal of my thinking,” he wrote. “But it was only in the Church that this interior God approached me from outside and invited me to trust him as absolutely as a God ought to be trusted. In the teaching of the Church I recognized the God of my interior horizon . . . to reject the invitation of that God would have been to deny my true self.” Léonie, after much prayer and discernment, entered the church three years later.

In 1984 the Caldecotts moved to Boston, where Stratford worked as philosophy and social sciences editor for the American branch of Routledge & Kegan Paul, while Léonie continued her journalism career. Here they encountered the Harvard Catholic scene, attended meetings of the newly founded branch of Communion and Liberation, and studied the works of John Henry Newman, Hans Urs von Balthasar, G. K. Chesterton, Romano Guardini, Henri de Lubac, Joseph Ratzinger, and other outstanding nineteenth- and twentieth-century intellectuals. Here, too, they discovered the international Catholic review, *Communio*, founded by Ratzinger, von

2. All the quotations in this paragraph come from Caldecott, “Gnosis and Grace,” 175–77, 180.

Balthasar, Louis Bouyer, and others, and began their long, intensive, and fruitful relationship with the journal and the circle around it.

Pope John Paul II influenced them profoundly with his brilliant encyclicals and his emphasis upon cultural evangelization; on a brief trip back to Europe, they attended a private papal Mass and afterwards met the pope in his library. On the same journey, they encountered Carlo Cardinal Caffara, who told them that “the most important thing you can do for the church is to work in the area of faith and culture.”<sup>3</sup> These words entered their hearts; they felt that they had been given their mission.

A year or so later, they returned to England, an infant daughter (Tessa) in tow. They lived first in Wimbledon and then in Oxford, and two more daughters (Sophie and Rosie) entered the family. At this time their work for the church began in earnest, exploring and elucidating the marriage of faith and culture. Stratford shouldered this task with the same astonishing energy and enthusiasm that permitted him, in his youth, to leap down stairs four or five steps at a time. He worked as an editor at HarperCollins, then for T. & T. Clark. He organized conferences, beginning with one in Zagreb on the economy. He and Léonie founded a Centre for Faith and Culture, initially located at Westminster College near Oxford, and convened a number of important gatherings: on Saint Philip Neri, on Chesterton, on Christopher Dawson and the Catholic vision of history (leading to the 1997 book *Eternity in Time*), and, most notably, on the liturgy, resulting in the Oxford Declaration on the Liturgy,<sup>4</sup> a document that wielded considerable influence upon Catholic thought in Britain and abroad. Stratford also put together a series of Hans Urs von Balthasar lectures at the Oxford Chaplaincy and worked on the organization and maintenance of the Chesterton Library (created by Aidan Mackey and now owned by the Chesterton Library Trust), the principal collection of that great and benevolent writer's books, manuscripts, and personal artifacts.

Meanwhile, the Caldecotts established a journal of faith and culture, the finest English-language Catholic effort of its kind, titled *Second Spring* after Newman's celebrated sermon. From 1992 to 1999 it appeared as an eight-page insert in *Catholic World Report*, but with the new millennium, it took on new life as a full-scale independent journal. The first issue appeared in 2001, designed, edited, and mailed from the Caldecott kitchen table. It continues to this day, a venerable, widely read journal, each issue offering some of the best Catholic writing in the English-speaking world. The *Second Spring* website ([www.secondspring.co.uk](http://www.secondspring.co.uk)) became and continues to be a

3. Interview with Léonie Caldecott.

4. See <http://www.secondspring.co.uk/spirituality/declaration.htm>.



nexus of Catholic intellectual life—and a place for Stratford to offer not only theological and social reflections, but also pastoral advice.

Perhaps here the author of this memoir may be permitted a brief personal aside: one of Stratford's most striking characteristics, which my wife and I have had the opportunity to observe on many occasions, is his generosity and gentleness in conversation with those seeking to understand (or undermine) the Christian faith. During one very long car ride across snowy Massachusetts, for example, we watched him, when challenged on abortion and birth control, provide on the spot a cogent, insightful explanation of orthodox teaching combined with a humble admission that he and the church need to do better in communicating the truth—the last not the sort of self-deprecating remark many would willingly advance.

While engaged in *Second Spring*, Stratford moved his center of operations for a time to Plater College, a Catholic educational institution for adults in Headington, Oxford. There he taught, directed the G. K. Chesterton Institute, and oversaw the G. K. Chesterton Library. He and Léonie initiated at Plater a series of summer schools, including a memorable one in 2001 on the Mission of the Baptised, with James Cardinal Stafford, then head of the Pontifical Institute for the Laity; Angelo Cardinal Scola also visited at Stratford's invitation, but before the two could develop a planned association between Plater and the Lateran University in Rome, Stratford's relationship with the college came to an end. Plater closed in 2005; since then, the Caldecotts have organized other summer schools under other auspices, including one on Shakespeare with Clare Asquith and Fr. Peter Milward, SJ, at Saint Benet's Hall (where Stratford is a G. K. Chesterton Fellow), and they have offered for many years a regular Oxford summer program in partnership with Thomas More College on such subjects as the cultural crisis of the Reformation and the nineteenth-century Catholic revival.

When Pope Benedict XVI paid his “Cor ad Cor Loquitur” visit to the United Kingdom, culminating in the beatification of John Henry Newman on the nineteenth of September, 2010, a special international English edition of *Magnificat* (a liturgical journal founded in France in 1992) was launched, containing the text of the liturgies and public prayers for that historic occasion. Since then the editing of the UK/Ireland *Magnificat* (based upon the existing U.S. edition) has been the shared responsibility of Stratford, Léonie, and Tessa, the latter serving as managing editor. *Magnificat* embodies the sensitivity to beauty in word and image and the conviction of Christ's presence at the heart of the church's liturgy, the same qualities that are the hallmark of *Second Spring*.

The labors described above have occupied much of Stratford's time, but for many, his greatest accomplishment is his writing. His books, essays,

and reviews have made major and lasting contributions to the evangelization of culture across an unusual number of fields, ranging from social ethics, economic development, and education to literary criticism, biblical exegesis, and metaphysics. His books on education have helped contemporary parents and teachers rethink what it means to shape young minds, and his books on the Catholic mythopoeia of J. R. R. Tolkien have been an eye-opener for fans of *The Lord of the Rings*. In all his writings on theology, society, and culture, Stratford embodies an irenic *intellectus fidei* very welcome in these embattled times.

The following bibliography of Stratford's major writings is provided for students of his work:

- Stratford Caldecott and John Morrill, editors, *Eternity in Time: Christopher Dawson and the Catholic Idea of History* (London: T. & T. Clark, 1997).
- Stratford Caldecott, editor, *Beyond the Prosaic: Renewing the Liturgical Movement* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2000).
- Stratford Caldecott, *Catholic Social Teaching: A Way In* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 2001).
- Stratford Caldecott, *Secret Fire: The Spiritual Vision of J. R. R. Tolkien* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2003), together with its American edition:
- Stratford Caldecott, *The Power of the Ring: The Spiritual Vision behind The Lord of the Rings* (New York: Crossroad, 2005). Second edition: Stratford Caldecott, *The Power of the Ring: The Spiritual Vision behind The Lord of the Rings and The Hobbit* (New York: Crossroad, 2012).
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- Stratford Caldecott, *Beauty for Truth's Sake: On the Re-enchantment of Education* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2009).
- Stratford Caldecott, *Catholicism and Other Religions: Introducing Interfaith Dialogue* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 2009).
- Stratford Caldecott, *Fruits of the Spirit* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 2010).

- Stratford Caldecott, *All Things Made New: The Mysteries of the World in Christ* (San Rafael, CA: Angelico/Sophia Perennis, 2011).
- Stratford Caldecott, *Beauty in the World: Rethinking the Foundations of Education* (Tacoma, WA: Angelico, 2012).
- Stratford Caldecott, *The Radiance of Being: Dimensions of Cosmic Christianity* (Tacoma, WA: Angelico, 2013).
- Stratford Caldecott, *Not as the World Gives* (Kettering, OH: Angelico, 2014).

A partial list of the journals and magazines that have published Stratford's work includes *Communio*, *The Chesterton Review*, *The Tablet*, *The Catholic Herald*, *Parabola*, *Sacred Web*, *Catholic World Report*, *Inside the Vatican*, *Thirty Days*, *National Catholic Register*, *The Sower*, and *St. Anthony's Messenger*.

Links to Stratford's three blogs ("Beauty in Education," "All Things Made New," and "The Economy Project") can be found on the Second Spring website.