

Introduction

In my previous book (*The Radiance of Being*) I was concerned with the nature of nature, and the relationship between God and the cosmos. That book and this belong together, even though they can be read perfectly well separately. In *Radiance* I found in the doctrine of the Trinity “a key that unlocked everything.” In the present volume I try to apply this universal key to the question of a Christian society, as Western civilization in the 21st 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.

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. Purged, illuminated, and united with God, the true Christian or New Man gives rise to a new civilization, healing whatever is blighted and distorted in this fallen world and allowing God to “make all things new.” If that sounds like crazy idealism, we must remember we are not talking about any merely human achievement, but about divine promises that can never fail. We act not out of any kind of *hubris* but out of the supernatural virtue of hope. We are planting seeds, not raising towers.

Pope Francis has changed both the style and the focus of Catholic teaching, though not, of course, its substance. His insistence that the Church—all the way from the Cardinals through to the youngsters at World Youth Day—should serve the poor and vulnerable and protect the environment merges with the concern for New Evangelization, revealing the latter to be nothing other than a renewal of the Church’s very life in what he calls the “maternal womb” of mercy. It is this synthesis that I hope to draw out in the present book.

Not As the World Gives

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So much for an overview of the book. By why—looking at the title and subtitle—do I call it “Not As the World Gives,” and why give such prominence to the “Way of Creative Justice”?

The main title is taken from John 14:27: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.” Jesus is about to be arrested. This speech comes right after the promise of the Holy Spirit who will *teach us all things*.

Jesus promises peace. He promises to give “his” peace. He promises to give it in a special way, “not as the world gives.” The world gives, only to take away again. The world gives peace, but that peace does not last. Nor is it a peace that frees the heart from trouble or fear. When Jesus gives, he gives the Holy Spirit, and with it comes freedom from fear—a lasting peace. His gift frees our hearts from trouble, so that we may see God (*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God*), and in him learn “all things.”

The title takes us to the Beatitudes, but our emphasis is on the word “gives” rather than “peace.” The idea of *gift*, seemingly so mundane, has an extraordinary depth. Pope Benedict XVI writes in section 34 of *Caritas in Veritate*: “*Charity in truth* places man before the astonishing experience of gift. Gratuitousness is present in our lives in many different forms, which often go unrecognized because of a purely consumerist and utilitarian view of life. The human being is made for gift, which expresses and makes present his transcendent dimension.” Giving is what we are *made for*. The metaphysics and theology of gift restores a dimension to nature long ago stripped away by Nominalism and its successors. It re-establishes the priority of relationship over object, of person over thing, and therefore a sense of natural interiority, of true metaphysical depth, and the wonder that is the root of philosophy.¹

1. Heidegger’s influential critique of medieval “onto-theology” is really a critique of the separation of nature and grace, nature and the supernatural, that took place in late Scholasticism in reaction to Nominalism and Voluntarism and laid the foundations for the disenchanting, graceless cosmos of modernity. The approach I am trying to describe reintegrates nature and the supernatural by allowing theology

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The idea of gift is rooted in the Trinity. *God is love* (1 John 4:7), and love is self-giving. It is the Trinity that shows us what it means to give *not as the world gives*. The Son, dying for us on earth, shows us what it means to give *as God gives*. The Father and Son do not cling to their own nature but give everything to each other, and rejoice in the giving. Creation itself is a participation in the Trinitarian act of being—an act of giving, receiving, and being given.

The Trinity illuminates a rather important fact about giving. Think for a moment about what we mean by the term in everyday life. To *give* means intentionally to separate something from myself in order to make it someone else's. I separate it from what belongs to me, I choose it with the recipient in mind, I perhaps wrap it up nicely, and I hand it over. It is no longer mine, as soon as the other has accepted it. But at the same time, there is a sense in which the gift is never “separate” from me at all, even after it has been handed over. It carries me with it, thanks to the spirit of love in which it was offered and accepted. A gift *participates* in the giver, or carries the giver with it—just as in the Trinity (but more perfectly) the gift is the Person.

We acknowledge that fact in everyday life by recognizing our need to give *thanks* for what has been given to us. If we simply grunt or sigh and shove the wretched thing in a corner, we are not treating it as a gift, and the giver may understandably feel like taking it back. Thus it seems that to accept a gift properly establishes a communion between the giver and the receiver. A *true* gift is something that will ever afterwards remind us of the giver's affection. Every gift, in a sense, “has strings attached,” and to a large extent human society is *held together by these strings*. It is the giving of the self, not just the giving of “things,” that creates society.

As for “Creative Justice,” this phrase comes from Pope Francis and Romano Guardini, in the two quotations or epigraphs that open the book. There Pope Francis writes, “I believe that the one who worships God has . . . a mandate of justice towards his brothers. It is an

to illuminate and reveal the true nature of the “God of the philosophers,” avoiding the misinterpretations of Plato and Aquinas that have become all too common in the literature of postmodernism.

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extremely *creative justice* because it invents things; education, social progress, care and attention, relief, etc. Therefore, the integral religious man is called to be a just man, to bring justice to others. In this aspect the justice of religion, or religious justice, creates culture.” The quotation seems to capture the heart of what I am trying to say in this book: that to be just to others, or to build a just society, it is not enough to be fair, or to balance one person’s rights against another’s. We need to be inventive. We need to create something new—a new culture, effectively.

Pope Francis is saying that the justice that Christians are called to is “religious justice.” Religious justice does not simply restore things the way they were. It does not just improve them a little. It changes them—often radically. In *The Radiance of Being* I made the point that creativity flows from the heart when human nature blossoms and flowers. It is the use we make of our freedom; it is the fruit of freedom. God does not impose it upon us, but he gives us this power and rejoices in it with us. *Be fruitful and multiply*, we are told. This can be read not only as an instruction to have children, but to be creative with what we have received; to cultivate the soil of our own nature, and to produce more than we were given—like the man with five talents who made five more (Matt. 25:16).

There is a brief discussion of “creative justice” at the end of Chapter 6. “Insofar as justice is required of us personally, and not simply as a society, we need to rise to a new level, to do something fresh, as though breaking the pattern of the past, or at least the pattern set by sin.” This establishes an important principle: that the *social doctrine* of the Church cannot or should not be separated from *spirituality and the moral life*—specifically the Beatitudes, which offer a portrait of Christian existence lived to the full. “It is time for us to recognize moral action once again as a creative work, and to allow the living moral powers to enter into it” (from the epigraph by Guardini).

Catholics sometimes talk of “Catholic Social Teaching” (CST). There is a danger of treating this as a kind of ideology—a system of ideas—as though we were gleaning from the Church a body of advice to be applied to secular society. The Church’s teaching becomes functionalized, and the secular world is treated as primary. We can prevent this not only by avoiding the acronym, but by refus-

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ing to separate the subject itself from ethics, spirituality, and the creation of culture.²

Structure of the Book

Not As the World Gives can be roughly divided into three groups of three chapters (followed by the Appendices). The first triad is about Catholic social doctrine, its history, and the nature of human society and the Church. From a Catholic point of view, the primary human society is the Church herself. Constituted by Baptism and the Eucharist, the Church is the sacrament of unity between men, as she is also between man and God. She is mankind on the way to being transformed into the City of God. In the third chapter, I look at the Church's formal teaching up to Pope Benedict's *Caritas in Veritate*, and end by trying to get a sense of where Pope Francis is leading us.

The second triad addresses the present-day challenges to this teaching, and broadens the scope of the book accordingly. Chapter 4 confronts a new historical era dominated by technological power. Our counter to the Order of the Machine is presented in Chapter 5—an understanding of human nature as metaphysical and organic rather than mechanical. (This chapter is essentially an exposition of John Paul II's "theology of the body" and its implications.) Chapter 6 goes more deeply into notions of moral order and freedom, picking up the spiritual theme from the first chapter.

The third triad of chapters is concerned with evangelization, understood not as proselytism but as the creation of a culture. In other words, this is *creative justice* in action. Pope Francis is seeking the renewal of the Church's life in the "maternal womb" of mercy.

2. Two other commonly used phrases must be distinguished: Catholic social doctrine, and Catholic social thought. The first refers to what the Church teaches, and the second to what Catholics think. The first is (for Catholics) authoritative, the second not so much. For a complete presentation of social doctrine, the reader should look to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and the *Compendium of Social Doctrine*. My own attempt to summarize the doctrine is available in *Catholic Social Teaching: A Way In*. Rodger Charles SJ's magisterial two-volume historical study, *Christian Social Witness and Teaching* and his short *Introduction to Catholic Social Teaching* are also listed in the Bibliography.