

Foreword

Thomas Aquinas once wrote that being pertains to light. In this new book, Stratford Caldecott shows us that the converse is equally true. Light pertains to being, and its radiance—like the splendor of created wisdom—plays over the face of all that is. Caldecott’s masterful guidance in refocusing our gaze on this jubilant and serene light makes the present work indispensable reading. The *Radiance of Being* shines so brightly because its author constantly reminds us of the “one thing necessary”: not the indubitable brilliance of his own mind, but the beautiful brilliance of being itself.

Caldecott’s literary *persona* reflects the very quality of being’s own radiance. He does not hector or preach, nor does he try to prove. He simply *shows*—deftly opening a series of windows through which the reader may behold the light of being with his own eyes. *The Radiance of Being* is a highly personal work, echoing with a unique voice, but it does not seek to overwhelm us with any merely private vision. Instead of just persuading us to see things from the author’s point of view, it performs the nobler service of freeing us to look at things as they truly are.

The secret of Caldecott’s persuasiveness lies partly in his solid but subtle sense of reality, his cheerful freedom from any urge to imprison the radiance of being in some hasty, one-sided, or reductive human construction. But Caldecott’s realism, like Chesterton’s, is an ever-renewed wonderment over the unexpected, yet appropriate correspondence between the surprising coherence of the world and the even more surprising coherence of Christ. Jesus of Nazareth, who is the “light that enlightens every man” *because* he is a jealously consuming fire, is the source, measure, and end of Caldecott’s entire contemplation of reality.

The Radiance of Being treats an impressive variety of topics, but all of them fit snugly within the tripartite pattern of the whole. The first part of the book is appropriately devoted to a contemplation of

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the radiance of being shining through the inexhaustibly various order of the cosmos. Even contemporary physics, Caldecott suggests here, can help us relearn to see Nature as a prism refracting being's single radiance in a kaleidoscopic interplay of manifold form. Yet the endless fecundity of this display raises the question addressed in the book's second part: Can Nature's sportive delight in "all things counter, original, spare, strange" (Hopkins) really be the manifestation of an ultimately undifferentiated One, as Perennialists such as Schuon and Guénon insist? Or mustn't the unity of the First Principle be essentially Trinitarian "all the way down"? Caldecott's argument for the latter option is reminiscent of Chesterton, but also of Balthasar: It is because paganism cannot account for all that is true in the revelation of the Trinity that the revelation of the Trinity can account for all that is true in paganism. The long passion of *homo religiosus* finds its end, not in esoteric gnosis, but in the Catholic Church, for only the *Catholica* can glory in being "the sewer of history, the tumultuous flowing of human impurity towards immaculate seas" (Nicolás Gómez Dávila).

The third part of *The Radiance of Being* circles back to the first in light of the second: If the divine nature is constitutively triune, what does this radically Trinitarian character imply about the ultimate significance of creaturely nature? Caldecott's answer is both traditional and surprising, for it locates the goal of the divine creative act in the *connubium* between God and man in Christ. The book thus fittingly closes with an orthodox retrieval of Bulgakov's sophiology. *Sophia*, Caldecott argues, is nothing other than the splendor of triune love answered by the glory of the *Assumpta*, who, in the words of Nicholas Cabasilas, is "the fruit of creatures" and the finest "bloom of Nature." *Sophia* is the "analogy of being" manifested as spousal love between God and the world.

The Radiance of Being is a symphony whose master theme is the Trinity, and its pages bear constant witness to the same inexhaustibly simple truth: Being is radiant because it is a gift, not only *from* the Trinity, but also *within* the Trinity itself. In its Infinite Source, in the fathomless abyss of Deity, being is already always one with (triune) love:

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I have said that the act of being is an act of giving, an act of knowing, an act of love. It is Trinitarian. The same cluster of metaphors illuminates the nature of created being, the dynamic relationship to God which is intrinsic to all existing things. Giftedness is the signature of God upon creation. But our being is not simply a gift to us; it is God's gift to himself. Created human nature is a gift that the Father gives to the Son, along with his divine nature. And it is a gift that the Son gives the Father, by being born as Man, dying on the Cross, and rising to new life. Creation is therefore gift both in relation to God, and in relation specifically to each of the Persons. Filled with the Holy Spirit in order to be given to the Father by the Son, it is transformed into the Son's Eucharist or "thanksgiving." The world indwelt by the Spirit is therefore now infinitely more than it was when it was created. It speaks not only with its own voice, but with the voice of the Son, who gives glory to his Father with this transformed creation.

This passage (from chapter ten of the book) illustrates Caldecott's talent for keeping his feet planted firmly on the ground even when soaring up to the loftiest heights of speculation. His ability to combine elf-like vision with hobbit-like common sense lends further credibility to the main thesis of his new book, for if the radiance of being is *gift*, then the first place to look for its (esoteric) depth is precisely on its (exoteric) surface. This is true of the surface of Caldecott's own writing, which is radiant with the joy of being one voice in the multitudinous chorus of creation. The author of *The Radiance of Being* is one of the most important living exponents of Catholic metaphysics, but his vision of being's "publicly sacred mystery" (Goethe) is not just the expression of his own genius. It is first the fruit of his participation in the universal communion of the *Catholica*.

ADRIAN WALKER

Preface

In the Beautiful Logos all things cohere. In the Word of words all threads of meaning are drawn together, and the notes and noises of our lives add up to parts of a symphony or a song we could never have guessed. The truth that has been revealed to us in Christ is the beginning of our eternal life.

The present book is based on essays written in many places and times, now revised and developed in a new context. At my publisher's invitation I took an opportunity to revisit this material and try to weave it into an ordered whole—to bring my scattered thoughts towards some kind of conclusion. The resulting book is in three parts, concerned respectively with the nature of nature, the nature of God, and the nature of divine Wisdom. It opens in Part One with some reflections on the history of science and cosmology, using the metaphor of “light” to suggest a bridge between scientific and religious thought. Part Two, about our conceptions of God, is largely concerned with the notion of the Trinity, which makes Christianity so unique among the religions of the world. Part Three explores the intimate relationship between God and man—man viewed as the link or mediator between God and the rest of creation.

The doctrine of the Trinity emerges as the overarching theme of the book. Year after year, Christian preachers get up in the pulpit and try to deliver a sermon on Trinity Sunday. Sometimes it is a lamentable failure. Occasionally it seems they are embarrassed about the wonderful doctrine of the Trinity. They certainly seem to struggle to put into words how one God can be three persons. Perhaps they feel a bit like quantum physicists, trying to explain to laymen how light can be a particle at the same time as being a wave.

But the doctrine of the Trinity does not just make sense of a few experimental observations in a laboratory. It makes sense of human life as a whole. It is the key that opens every lock, an insight that

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reveals the center of the universe. It shows us the pattern that underlies physics, history, psychology, economics, and the arts. It is the most beautiful, elegant, and simple doctrine in the world—a true “theory of everything.”

That is why the central part of this book is my attempt to think through, as a Catholic layman, the doctrine of the Trinity and its implications for cosmology. There is also an important element of inter-religious dialogue in the book, because no theologian, amateur or professional, can ignore the challenge posed by these other great living traditions—a challenge, in some ways, directly to our understanding of the Christian Trinity.

A word is therefore needed concerning my attitude to the other world religions and my approach to dialogue. I believe in the truth of the Catholic faith as taught by the Church, and have since I was baptized into her at the age of twenty-seven. However, our circumstances today do not encourage triumphalism. Of course, many Christians are dying for their faith. This is a fact we should not minimize or ignore. But just as shocking in another way is the fact that many more Christians are living a lie—they are not living in a Christian way. And there are many who can stand the hypocrisy not a moment longer. A friend wrote to me:

Please, in these ugly days, make a plea for tolerance, for the integrity of the piety of nature and piety of Being that motivates those who, like me, have been so torn up or offended by Christianity/Catholicism as to no longer feel able to stand within it. Please make a plea for tolerance and the Catholic responsibility to seek always the heart of goodwill in others. Call your fellow Catholics to do what only they can do (doctrinally, theologically speaking)—defend the integrity of natural piety, and the integrity of dialogue and diversity.

I have tried to do so. But tolerance and integrity are the virtues of love and freedom, both of which must be aroused, grown into; and sometimes they come more gradually and more painfully than we would have expected. Much of the time we think we are loving and free when in reality we do not even know what these words imply. For example, the whole world currently seems to believe that freedom grows with the number of options placed before us. But God’s

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love teaches us something different. “Perfect freedom is the total inability to make any evil choice,” says Thomas Merton. “Therefore, the simplest definition of freedom is this; it means the ability to do the will of God.”¹

To do the will of God: indeed that does sound simple. And how do we know the will of God? Jean-Pierre de Caussade reminds us that it is revealed to us in every moment of every day. God’s words to us take the form of all that we see and hear. They change moment by moment. They are addressed uniquely to us, and call for the unique response that God hopes for. God himself does not “choose,” he simply “is,” and he “creates.” For our part, made in God’s image, we too must learn to create, bringing into the world possibilities that are not already laid before us. We can only astonish God by participating in God’s own creative life. But nevertheless, we have a revelation of our own to make, one that no one can make for us. The importance of this will come to the fore later in the book, as we delve deeper into the meaning of freedom, God’s creation of the world, and the relationship between nature and grace.

Influences, Sources, and Acknowledgements

Some chapters of the present book are based on material first developed as articles in journals such as *Communio* and *Second Spring*, or booklets I have written for CTS, and I am grateful to the original publishers. The material has all been extensively reworked. If at times the text resembles a mosaic of quotations and the footnotes start to grow wings, I can only say that it is good to be able to quote others when they say something more eloquently or authoritatively than oneself. A book like this can be nothing more than a work in progress, and many loose threads remain.

I write not as a professional theologian, but as an editor of theology, and an interested observer. I want especially to thank the following (in no particular order) for their encouragement and fellowship over the years in the development of the thoughts expressed in these pages: among them Adrian Walker, Wolfgang

1. Thomas Merton, *Seeds of Contemplation* (London: Hollis & Carter, 1949), 120, 122.

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