

On Nature and Grace in *Deus Caritas Est*

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RECEIVED WITH WIDE ACCLAIM, Pope Benedict XVI's first encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* [hereafter, DCE] lays out paradigms for the relations between *eros* and charity and between charity and justice.¹ Striking is the Pontiff's sensitivity to the nuanced reciprocity that structures both relations. Disputing, for instance, the well-known thesis of the Lutheran bishop Anders Nygren (1890–1978), he argues that *eros* and charity are analogical, not equivocal.² God's redeeming activity is the prime analogate of both loves. In the incarnate Word, *eros* and charity are perfectly conjoined. They flow forth from God as universal self-sacrifice, on the one hand, and as passionate yearning to save sinful humanity, on the other. For its part, the *eros* between husband and wife mirrors the divine charity when it comes to completion in conceiving children, nurturing a family, and spreading further to embrace neighbors and friends.

In relating charity and justice, Benedict delves deep into four themes: the nature of the human person, the meaning of prudence, the relation between social justice and ideology, and the relation between Church and state. In exploring these themes, this essay will first lay out Benedict's argument in the second part of his encyclical. Then it will summarize a major critique of the paradigm that the encyclical develops. It will respond to this critique by drawing more widely on Benedict's thought. Finally, it will discuss the rela-

¹ I gratefully acknowledge permission of the editors at the Catholic University of America Press to adapt this article from my *Analogies of Transcendence: An Essay on Nature, Grace and Modernity* (Washington DC, 2016), 90–101, 128–33.

² Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, trans. Philip S. Watson (London: SPCK, 1953).

tion of nature and grace that implicitly governs Benedict's vision. This vision, we shall see, interprets the Second Vatican Council by creatively retrieving touchstone sources of Christianity: the Gospel of John, Augustine, and Thomas Aquinas.

Deus Caritas Est

Part II of the Pontiff's apostolic letter is entitled *Caritas*. Its thesis contends that charity, for the Church, "is not a kind of welfare activity which could equally well be left to others. Charity is a part of her nature, an indispensable expression of her very being" (§25). The work of charity is, in fact, sacramental in a broad sense. It is both a sign and an instrument of the Church's essence. The Church's "*service of charity*" is the overflowing of the life of the Spirit, whose "energy transforms the heart of the ecclesial community, so that it becomes a witness before the world of the love of the Father" (§19). This emanation of love must necessarily extend "beyond the frontiers of the Church." In so doing, it causes what it signifies. Acting to "purify" humanity, it clarifies rational judgment and aids the state better to order the norms of political life (§§25, 28).

In developing this thesis, Benedict explicitly addresses Marxism, perhaps Christianity's leading recent nemesis. Marxism's central critique, he argues, rests on the notion that those who stand on the social and political margins demand justice, not charity. Charity merely assuages the consciences of the privileged by treating the symptoms of the disease. Charity makes no attempt to diagnose and heal the underlying causes of injustice. These are structural; they cannot be eradicated by the purveyors of voluntary goodwill (§26). In agreement with Marxism, the Pope defines justice as giving all their rightful share of the community's goods. Justice, he says, is the "aim and criterion of politics" (§28). It falls properly under the aegis of the state. In parting company with Marxism, however, he reasserts a fundamental imperative of Catholic social teaching. The state bears the moral burden of acting according to the principle of subsidiarity (§26). Far from imposing on the commonwealth a dictatorship of the proletariat, subsidiarity requires the higher orders of society to encourage the lower orders to assume their proper share of responsibility. The higher should not perform what the lower can do best for itself.³

Moreover, the principle of subsidiarity entails that, however deeply

³ Pope Pius XI, Encyclical Letter *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931) [*Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 23 (1931): 177–228; hereafter, QA], §79.

justice reaches into social structures, it never obviates love (§28). “One does not make the world more human,” the Pope asserts, “by refusing to act [lovingly] here and now” (§31). Suffering and loneliness always need compassion and care. These qualities often fall outside the aegis of the state acting according to subsidiarity. They spring from deep within the spontaneous initiative of individuals (§28). Not only must human freedom be respected by the state; it must be promoted. For this reason, the Church casts a wary eye on all ideologies that would compromise the legitimate sphere of responsible human endeavor. These include partisan strategies and programs, including proselytism, that envisage charity tendentiously—merely as a means of promoting an agenda, not as an end in itself. Because love constitutes the essential bond between God and man, its free exchange is “the best defense” of both (§31).

Benedict further develops his notion of justice by locating its promotion squarely within the realm of practical reason (§28). Wisely, he understands that achieving justice within the complex organization of modern society presents ethical problems whose solutions are often translucent or even opaque to the best minds of the best persons. Moreover, the political order is often blinded by power and special interests (§28). To help lift these shadows, the Church has developed a “set of fundamental guidelines” to enlighten the deliberations of practical reason (§27). Called “Catholic social thought,” these guidelines are grounded in “the natural law” (§28). As such, they are “valid even beyond the confines of the Church” (§27). Although the Church offers its teaching to purify the political order’s understanding of justice, “the political task . . . cannot be the Church’s immediate responsibility” (§28). Not itself a political organ, the Church has no interest in building a theocracy. Consistent with *Gaudium et Spes* §36, its interest lies in respecting the appropriate autonomy of the state (§28).

To further enhance the Church’s respect for this autonomy, Benedict makes a vitally important distinction. On the one hand, the Church’s role concerning justice is indirect. Its mandate serves to awaken “those moral forces without which . . . just [social] structures are neither established nor prove effective in the long run” (§28). Its mandate is hortatory and prophetic. It serves to inform the consciences of the faithful and, more generally, all people of good will (§29). They, in turn, are mandated to form society according to the virtuous use of their own practical reason.

On the other hand, the Church’s role concerning charity is direct

(§29). As a theological virtue, love is the essence of grace that is the very life of God. The Church's work of charity elevates the state's notion of justice (§29). The Pope is careful not to posit that charity is the state's direct concern. He does argue, however, that the Church's witness of love leavens the humanitarian efforts of secular agencies, whether public or private (§30). These efforts share with religion a common motivation. "Love of neighbor," the Pope reminds us, "is inscribed by the Creator in man's very nature" (§31). Consequently, state-sponsored programs like subsidies and relief for heavily indebted countries promote human solidarity. They concretely embody charity. In so doing, they congenially join with the culture of life preached by the Church. This preaching serves to deepen all motivations, whether secular or religious, that are grounded in self-sacrifice (§30).

The Pope concludes his reflection by squarely incorporating the Christian notion of justice within love. No doubt intending to reorder the recently popular slogan "the faith that does justice," he says, referring to Galatians 5:6, that Christians should "be guided by the faith which works through love" (§33). Reminding us of 1 Corinthians 13, he asserts that "practical activity will always be insufficient, unless it visibly expresses a love for man" (§34). For Benedict, justice is not an absolute in itself, but a sign of love and a means to love. Its sustaining furnace is a loving "encounter with Christ" (§§34, 36, 37). Without this, justice becomes dissipated. It devolves into the delusion that its promotion could fully resolve every social problem (§36). Justice cheap in love, even when luxuriant in faith, offers us only another ideology against which the Pope prophesies. Even worse, when justice stiffens into ideology, then fanaticism, terrorism, and despair often result. Love acts justly by being patient and humble in the face of sustained poverty and suffering (§37). Persevering when its own actions seem powerless, justice grounded in the faith that works through love cleaves to the crucified Christ, the paradigmatic victim of injustice, whose wounds never ceased to pour forth life (§38, 39).

Critique

A major critique of Benedict's thesis is developed by Tissa Balasuriya, a Sri Lankan oblate of Mary Immaculate born in 1924. Spending much of his life teaching economics and theology in his native country, he gained notoriety by his 1990 work *Mary and Human Liberation*.⁴ Owing

⁴ Tissa Balasuriya, *Mary and Human Liberation* (Colombo, LK: Center for Society and Religion, 1990; first published in *Logos* 29 [March/July, 1990]).

to errors that the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith found in this book, Balasuriya became the first theologian since Vatican II to be excommunicated. The censure lasted for the year 1997–1998.⁵ His critique of DCE appeared in *Cross Currents*, the well-known journal of the Association for Religion and Intellectual Life.⁶ It launched a frontal assault on the encyclical's reading of the signs of the times and on its paradigm for the relation of love and justice.

The Sri Lankan would have Benedict broaden his reading of the times to include a critique of “neo-liberal capitalism” (247). Balasuriya defines this as a global “system of inequality” by which, for example, “transnational entities rob the poor of wealth” (247, 240). Benedict lacks an even hand, he claims. By focusing only on the errors of Marxism, the Pontiff's bias ignores how “*the [current] world system* is very far from the reign of God promised by Jesus” (251). Benedict fails to censure the Church for its complicity with capitalist structures of injustice, whereas his historical perspective fails to acknowledge the Church's culpable coexistence with feudal and colonial powers (240). As a result, the encyclical sidesteps an adequate account of love (238). As fully realized, Christian love mandates “compassionate activism and efforts at constructive social change” (230). These entail a promotion of social justice going well beyond the Church's works of organized charity (240). Such works do “little to change an unjust global system” (247). Love, he argues, demands “a coordinated strategic struggle” supported by two pillars (240).

On the one hand, this struggle means that, pace Benedict, the clergy must be directly involved in the practical administration of justice (245). Such a mandate follows immediately, he argues, from the implication of their vocation to preach the Word and celebrate the sacraments, especially the Eucharist (240, 248). Citing *Justice in the World* (§36), the document produced by the 1971 Synod of Bishops, he asserts that justice should be an essential ministry of the Church (243–44).⁷ Love, in other words, demands the just restitution of compromised rights. Furthermore, barring the clergy from partic-

⁵ “Father Tissa Balasuriya Obituary,” *The Guardian*, March 6, 2013, accessed May 2, 2017, www.theguardian.com/world/2013/mar/06/father-tissa-balasuriya.

⁶ Tissa Balasuriya, “A Companion to the Encyclical of Pope Benedict XVI on ‘God is Love,’” in *Cross Currents* 56, no. 2 (Summer 2006): 229–60. Cited in the text by page.

⁷ Synod of Bishops, Second General Assembly, *Justice in the World* (1971), in *The Gospel of Peace and Justice: Catholic Social Teaching Since Pope John*, ed. Joseph Gremillion (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1976), 513–29.

ipating “in social movements for justice” could deprive a country, especially a developing one, of necessary leadership in times of crisis (246–47). The bishops of the Philippines, for instance, and some in Africa and Latin America “contributed courageously” to the downfall of oppressive dictatorships (246).

On the other hand, Balasuriya’s coordinated strategic struggle requires the clergy directly to formulate a “structural analysis of social justice.” (245) This must be done freed from the perspectives of European colonialism, white racism, and postliberal economics. Regrettably, he contends, Catholic social teaching from *Rerum Novarum* through *Centesimus Annus* remains the hostage of these ideologies. They can be shaken off only by the clergy’s retrieving the Church’s kerygma and applying it to such issues as the distribution of wealth and the root causes of hunger and poverty (245). Unless the clergy undertake this work directly, they will fail to influence the laity to take political action (258). This action must entail non-violent resistance to injustice in all spheres of life (253–54).

A Response

The crux of the difference between Benedict and Balasuriya lies first and foremost in their reading of the signs of the times. Pace Balasuriya, the difference does not consist in Benedict’s turning a blind eye to the problems inherent in capitalism. Because the Pope wishes DCE to stand in the developing tradition of the Catholic social thought that he liberally cites, it follows that he is far from naive about the corrosive effects of unbridled capitalism that this tradition consistently deplores.⁸ The difference lies in Balasuriya’s silence about the problems inherent in Marxism. This silence is due to a deeper problem in Balasuriya’s response. Critical of Benedict’s theological anthropology, he finds untenable what he calls its “mythical presupposition of original sin”

⁸ In general, Catholic social thought mandates that private goods be shared with the needy when they surpass the owner’s need for a reasonable standard of living; see Javier Hervada, “Principios de Doctrina Social de la Iglesia,” *SIDEC* 25, nos. 427–28 (January–February 1983). In particular, QA §§58 and 61 and John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra* (1961) [*Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 53 (1961): 401–64; hereafter, MM] define the common good as requiring the just distribution of goods “within society” (MM §§ 73, 74, 112). Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio* (1967) [*Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 59 (1967): 257–99], passim, adds “to other nations.” MM defines private property as entailing workers’ ownership of the means of production (§96). It also supports their right to form unions and strike (§14). English of all magisterial documents are available at <http://w2.vatican.va/content/vatican/en.html>.

(257). By this he means the notion that “the whole of humanity is placed in sin as offenders against God” (ibid.). His critique of original sin as myth is not further developed, but it is clear from what is already said that his position is rooted in Pelagianism. In this, he and Marxism share a common ideological source. It is precisely Benedict’s awareness of this source that leads him to single out Marxism for special censure.

The Judeo-Christian doctrine of original sin stands as a bulwark against all ideologies based on the naïve notion that the human person is innately perfectible. As Cardinal Newman writes in his intellectual autobiography, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, original sin is striking because of its empirical verifiability. No profound insight into the signs of the times or into human history as we know it is needed to perceive that, if an all good God exists, the human species stands in a consistently radical opposition to him.⁹ St. Augustine, in *Confessions*, traces this opposition to a disease located deep in the human heart over which the person is powerless. Observing its symptoms even in reputedly innocent children, he wonders why a toddler would aggressively force his infant brother away from his mother’s breast. Milk a-plenty flows for both to share, even as the infant depends on it for his very life. Augustine concludes that the concupiscent drive of self-love is natural. By this, he means that human nature acts spontaneously, pre-reflectively, out of a primeval disorder from which only the power of divinity can redeem it.¹⁰

Augustine’s battle against the British monk Pelagius brought the main contours of the Christian doctrine of original sin into relief. Pelagius, desiring to spare Christians from the charge of moral laxity leveled at them by the pagan aristocracy of Rome, contended, in effect, that sinful behavior is learned by socio-cultural conditioning. On this basis, he could then argue that Christianity believed in vigorous moral action—strength of will—in order to overcome the influence of a corrupt and errant environment. The incarnate Word shines amidst this milieu as a luminous example of perfection. To be saved, we need emulate him by a freedom firmly and consistently steeped in virtue.¹¹

⁹ John Henry Cardinal Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (New York: Doubleday, 1989), 319–20.

¹⁰ Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin (Harmonsworth, UK: Penguin Books, 1987), 27–28.

¹¹ See Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church* (Harmonsworth, UK: Penguin, 1983), 227; also personal communication from Professor Rowan Greer of Yale University.

Augustine saw the error lightly hidden in this position. If original sin is learned by bad example, if it is merely external to the human person, and if Christ's role is principally exemplary, then it is logically possible for human volition to save itself. For Augustine, therefore, the deepest problem in Pelagianism is not anthropological, but soteriological. He answers Pelagius with the notion of traducianism. Original sin, inbred in humanity, is handed down in the person's very generation in sexual intercourse.¹² This is a compellingly reasonable position once it is granted that original sin must condition human nature. And so it must, if Christ is to be humanity's necessary perfecter and not merely an aid in humanity's task of self-perfection.

Benedict locates the modern rehearsal of the error of human perfectibility in the thought of Joachim of Fiore (ca.1135–1202).¹³ For Joachim, history is a divine progression in which the Holy Spirit will ultimately render both Church and state redundant.¹⁴ Joachim is subtler than Pelagius in that he attributes humanity's perfectibility in time and space to a divine agency. Nonetheless, to the extent that his immanent soteriology loses fulfillment in an other-worldly future that is divine, it is Pelagian in its root. It follows, therefore, that Marxism, as grounded in the messianism of the proletariat's dictatorship, recapitulates errors that Christianity has long countered. Infected by an anthropology that ignores a traducian understanding of original sin and by a purely immanent theory of redemption, it proffers a dangerously delusional hope for humanity. In so far as Balasuriya's sympathy for Marxism is grounded in his rebellion against traducianism, his position is fairly deemed Pelagian. If so, then his reading of the signs of times is fairly deemed as dangerously delusional as the ideologies that it assimilates.

Balasuriya's critique also takes issue with the paradigm that Benedict develops for the relation of love and justice. According to the Sri Lankan, justice, as entailed in charity, should occupy the Church's direct work, especially the clergy's. He would have bishops and priests develop their own social analyses, plan their own strategies

¹² See Augustine, *The Grace of Christ and Original Sin* (esp. ch. 42), in *An Augustine Reader*, ed. John J. O'Meara (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1973), 447–90.

¹³ Ratzinger deals with Joachim and his relation to Bonaventure in *Theology of History in Saint Bonaventure (Habilitationsschrift)*, trans. Zachary Hayes (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1971) [originally *Die Geschichtstheologie des heiligen Bonaventura* (Munich: Schnell and Steiner, 1959)], *passim*.

¹⁴ D.Vincent Twomey, S.V.D., "The Mind of Benedict XVI," *Claremont Review of Books* 4 (Fall 2005): 66–71, at 66.

based on them, and then serve as the executors of these strategies in the political arena. Compromising the autonomy of the temporal order that *Gaudium et Spes* calls upon the Church to respect, this proposal is seriously flawed. It misunderstands the necessary relation, not first and foremost between love and justice, but between justice and prudence.

Although St. Thomas defines justice as what is “properly and in itself right,” he nonetheless understands justice to be the subject of prudence, as it discerns the natural law.¹⁵ In determining what is right, justice mediates between humanity’s need for self-defense and its vindictive instincts, on the hand, and its fundamental tendency toward social communion, on the other hand.¹⁶ Prudence consists in the skilled ability to choose and execute appropriate means to bring about objectively good ends. Prudence governs justice, therefore, when the question of how a complex social organization prone to conflicts among rights can best promote the mediation required by justice. In the first instance, this question is not religious, but fittingly secular. It is, in other words, a matter for rational reflection apart from any consideration offered by the Church, based as it is on natural virtue.¹⁷ Consequently, as Benedict rightly adumbrates, people of sound prudence, whether Christian or not, will differ about what constitutes prudent means to achieve just ends. Because love mandates justice through the agency of prudence, it follows that, if the Church closely allies itself with particular social and political agendas, its credibility risks serious compromise. The Gospel’s eternal truths constitute ends that ought not be sacrificed on the public arena’s altar of reasonably disputable means. Doing otherwise exposes the Church’s kerygmatic mission as the prey of partisan ideology.

The notion that promoting justice within the complex organization of modern society will entail conflicts among rights underscores Balasuriya’s naivete in urging the clergy to direct political action. As John Langan observes, when people’s *prima facie* rights collide

¹⁵ Josef Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, trans. Donald F. Coogan et al. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1965), 164 (the essays in this collection were originally published under separate titles by Kösel in 1954–1959).

¹⁶ Gerard Gilman, S.J., *The Primacy of Charity in Moral Theology*, trans. William F. Ryan, S.J., and André Vachon (Westminster, MD: Newman, 1959), 332, cited in John P. Langan, “What Jerusalem Says to Athens,” in *The Faith That Does Justice: Examining the Christian Sources for Social Change*, ed. John C. Haughey (Ramsey, NJ: Paulist Press, 1977), 152–80, at 163.

¹⁷ Langan, “What Jerusalem Says to Athens,” 153, 163.

with those of others, the result is often aggressive tension and angry impasse. These can be transcended only by the voluntary “resignation of rights [and] normally justified claims.”¹⁸ If, as Balasuriya argues, love demands justice, it is equally necessary that justice defer to self-sacrificing love if social communion is to obtain.¹⁹ Long aware that justice needs to be enfolded in love, the Church realizes that a justice which will not yield to love can never bring about secular order, much less the fullness of the Kingdom.²⁰ Pope Paul VI observes in *Progressio Populorum*, for instance, that it is true charity that motivates people to uncover the sources of misery and to find effective means to combat it (§75). Foreshadowing Benedict, Paul opines that the deep sickness of the world ensues more from a lack of brotherly solidarity than from problems in the means of production (§§66–67). Incorporating these themes of his predecessor into his own Johannine vision, Benedict locates the struggle for justice within the pierced side of Christ, the living font of wounded love that serves as the “starting-point” and focus of his encyclical (DCE, §12).

In short, it is the direct role of the clergy to mediate the transformation of justice into love. Directly plunging them into political activity risks pulling the heart out of the priesthood. This heart embodies what Benedict calls “the sacramental mysticism” of the Eucharist. By it we are drawn immediately “into Jesus’ [own] act of self-oblation” (DCE, §13). The heart of the priesthood, therefore, is not prudence. It must be nothing less than the selfsame heart of Christ, the “Saving Victim, opening wide.”²¹

Nature and Grace

The subtle relation that Benedict develops between love and justice is structured on an implicit paradigm of nature’s relation to grace. The core of this paradigm is lodged in his understanding of the sacramentality of charity. Charity is an efficacious sign of the Church. As a sign, it is the pouring forth of the life of the Spirit who conforms the Church evermore to Christ’s pierced side. As an instrument, charity extends well beyond the Church’s frontiers, drawing all humanity into the life-giving blood and water that flow from the universal Savior. As an efficacious sign, charity constitutes the essence of grace, the trans-

¹⁸ Ibid., 168–69.

¹⁹ Ibid., 175, citing Augustine, *On the Morals of the Catholic Church*, esp. ch. 15.

²⁰ Ibid., 172.

²¹ Thomas Aquinas, first line of hymn *O salutaris hostia*, trans. Edward Caswall.

formation of humanity that the Church as the Body of Christ offers the world, both directly through baptism and indirectly through the loving activity of Christians everywhere. Charity is a sacrament, therefore, only because, in the first instance, the Church is the sacrament of Christ in and through the Spirit. Following Henri de Lubac's seminal work that Vatican II incorporates, Benedict posits the Church as the prime sacrament that vivifies the seven sacraments as channels of the grace that leads to glory.²²

Ironically, however, the notion of universal charity raises deep suspicions in Benedict. For him, this notion is the real "myth." By this he means an ideal whose fruition here and now is as delusional as that of human perfectibility. Universal charity "can be realized only in the concrete form of brotherly love" (PCT, 54). This love takes shape in pockets or small units of care, compassion, and concern grounded in and molded by the Eucharist (PCT, 54).

Benedict's distrust of universal ideals by no means arises from an experienced leader's tendency to sense the futility of human action in the face of intractable problems. It arises from the virtue of Christian hope grounded in the nuanced eschatology taught by the Gospel of John, so influential, as we have seen, in DCE. More clearly than any other New Testament writer, John articulates the tension between realized and future eschatology. His adage, for instance, that "the hour is coming and now is" (John 4:23 and 5:25) crystallizes the paradox of Christian life. On the one hand, within the post-resurrection Church, true worship is given to God in Jesus because the hour of the Spirit's indwelling has come. On the other hand, Jesus's Messiahship is not yet fully realized. Our worship in and of him, although authentic, still but anticipates the consummation of worship in heaven, whose earthly sacrament it is.²³

Accordingly, the Christian must own a dual vocation: to live for Christ *in* this age and *for* the age to come. A disciple cannot feed on the flesh of the Son of Man and become in any way an autonomous

²² Joseph Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, trans. Sister Mary Frances McCarthy, S.N.D. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987) [originally *Theologische Prinzipienlehre: Bausteine zur Fundamentaltheologie* (Munich: Wewel, 1982)], 47; this work will be cited parenthetically in text as "PCT." Ratzinger cites Henri de Lubac, *Catholicisme: les aspects sociaux du dogme* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1941), 50–51, and *Lumen Gentium*, §48 (ch. VII).

²³ C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1978), 68.

prisoner of history.²⁴ To be sure, feet must be washed here and now. But for John, the sacramental encounter with the living Christ gives Christians a share not only “in the descent of the Redeemer to an obedient death, [but also] in his ascent through death to the glory” of the Father.²⁵ Both given and pledged, this glory inspires Christians in this world “to endure injustice patiently [while yet also working] unceasingly for justice.”²⁶

Against this backdrop of grace as both sacramental and eschatological, Benedict develops a flexibly analogical notion of nature. The crux of this lies in his assertion throughout DCE that grace serves to purify nature. Given the paradox of the Christian vocation, nature is both recalcitrant to grace and yet charged with it. Traducianism means that, until the full fruition of the eschaton, history will ever demand a conversion—a *metanoia*—a change of heart within individual persons (PCT, 51–52). Unless human freedom is liberated in its fundamental core, no social communion, based either on justice or charity, will prevail. This liberation obtains as a function of the Church’s sacramentality. Unless, in the first instance, humanity accepts God’s gratuitous offer of friendship, even the best and most humane solidarity movements will “succeed only in miring man more deeply in his tragic situation” (PCT, 53). The path deep into inward conversion is the purification that grace first offers nature. This path and “the path that draws [humanity] together [into communion] are [thus] not in conflict; on the contrary, they need and support each other” (PCT, 52).

Furthermore, not only does nature need purifying from sinfully hardened hearts, but it also needs elevating so that it can ever more represent the kingdom that is to come. To effect this goal, grace purifies nature in two further senses. On the one hand, natural prudence, even when cleansed of sin and thus able to manifest “the will of God,” still needs further guidance (Paul VI, *Humana Vitae*, §40). This is supplied by counsel, a gift of the Holy Spirit, that, as St Thomas posits, inspires an intuitive sense of truth that transcends prudence’s skilled ability to assess options for action.²⁷ As Benedict himself puts

²⁴ Ibid., 69–70.

²⁵ Ibid., 84.

²⁶ Twomey, “The Mind of Benedict XVI,” 69.

²⁷ Anselm Stolz, *The Doctrine of Spiritual Perfection*, trans. Aidan Williams, O.S.B. (New York: Crossroad, 2001), 187, expounding Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I-II, q. 52, a. 2; q. 68, a. 2.

it, “Faith enables reason to do its work more effectively and to see its object more clearly.” (DCE, §28)

Catholic social thought is thus the point where “politics and faith meet” (DCE, §28). Based on its reading of the natural law in light of grace, the Church offers counsel to practical reason. Doing so does not entail the Church’s direct involvement in politics. It entails only that the Church preach its understanding of justice. This understanding is natural, although it is evinced under the influence of grace. Reason can reach its own integrity under grace’s influence, even when reason does not accept the truths of grace in an act of faith. Kant himself posits as much. He opines that Christianity helps reason to grasp the full implications of the moral law more quickly than it would otherwise have done on its own.²⁸

Moreover, grace purifies nature in an even higher sense. As we have seen, because justice is a sacrament of love, the Church acts so to change the hearts of humanity that love will enfold justice. This means, in other words, that natural justice will spring from love and lead to love, even while retaining its ground in nature and remaining subject to prudence. Following St. Ambrose, Benedict believes that the transformation of justice by love finds its source in the Church, from which it can exercise an elevating effect on the secular order.²⁹ This effect is both dialectical and synthetic. As dialectical, the Church shows the natural order that a communion of love constitutes both the basis for and the finality of the natural order’s promotion of justice.³⁰ Without the Church’s eschatological witness, the ensuing “loss of transcendence” will evoke, according to Benedict, “the flight into utopia” and its ideological delusions.³¹ As synthetic, the Church leavens the prudence of consciences by its own vision of justice. It incites them to a self-sacrifice that transcends justice. Consequently, the Church is able to draw the secular order into its own immediate ambit, even while respecting its autonomy.

Aware therefore that an outright divorce between Church and state would compromise the authentic humanism of nature, Benedict does envisage a public role for the Church. This role is mediated

²⁸ Immanuel Kant, *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, trans. Theodore M. Greene and Hoyd H. Hudson (New York: Harper and Row, 1960) [originally *Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der blossen Vernunft* (1792)], 143–44.

²⁹ Langan, “What Jerusalem Says to Athens,” 160.

³⁰ David L. Schindler, “Charity, Justice, and the Church’s Activity in the World,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 33 (Fall 2006): 346–76, at 360.

³¹ Twomey, “The Mind of Benedict XVI,” 69.

by robust preaching and educating.³² Not insensitive to the need to change those social structures that embody injustice, the Pontiff is nonetheless too steeped in Augustinian realism to give these a priority over the actions of individuals. Ironically, this realism gives him tangential contact with some postmodern thinkers, such as Jean-François Lyotard, who is skeptical of all grand schemes and narratives.³³ Temperate in his expectations of the fruit that practical reason will bear in the secular state, Benedict knows that structures do not change themselves. Change results from converted human hearts.

We are now in a position to understand Benedict's analogous concept of nature as it represents a creative development of Christian sources. Following *Gaudium et Spes*, he posits an appropriate autonomy between grace and nature, between the Church and the secular order. In exploring the limits of this autonomy, the Pontiff hearkens to a framework broadly put forth in Augustine's *City of God*. The Church embodies the divine city as its sacramental image in history, where it is nonetheless placed squarely in the midst of the secular city deeply marred by traducianism.³⁴ For Augustine, the Church stands as an uncompromising alternative to an alien and hostile world and as a refuge from it.³⁵ Nonetheless, the Father of the West envisages a salutary traffic between nature and grace. Members of the human city, despite their sin, can occupy positions in the Church and rightly order it. Conversely, sanctified members of the Church can perform the same function in the human city.³⁶

These themes from Augustine's magnum opus remind us that the relics of original sin are ubiquitous, strewn even throughout the Church, which nonetheless offers the means of *metanoia*. Converted people, justified before God and availing themselves directly of the means of grace, can strengthen the vestigial presence of divine providence in the human city's natural order. But ultimate love lodges in the Church as the representation of the heavenly city that is still fully to come. Individuals fortified by grace are thus able to draw forth and strengthen what St Thomas calls the good of utility

³² Ibid., 71.

³³ Kenneth L. Schmitz, "Postmodernism and the Catholic Tradition," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 73 (Spring 1999): 233–52, at 244.

³⁴ Augustine, *City of God*, especially ch. 19.

³⁵ R. A. Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Thought of St Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 106.

³⁶ Deane Herbert, *The Political and Social Ideas of St Augustine* (New York: Columbia University, 1963), 31.

(*Summa theologiae* I-II, q. 109, aa. 2, 5, 6). In other words, they lead natural human virtue that is not meritorious of glory ever closer to the baptism that justifies.

In sum, by situating nature squarely within the Johannine tension between realized and future eschatology, Benedict gives nature a dynamic adaptability. Even when nature is incorporated into the kingdom by the Church's justifying work, it nonetheless requires further growth and development. Even as justified, even as nature awaits the fullness of its future transcendence, it expands under the influence of prudence. Nonetheless, whether exercised by the Christian or the secular humanist, prudence must further dilate into the counsel given by the Spirit. By grafting the promotion of justice onto prudence growing into counsel, Benedict brings St. Thomas's virtue theory into his Johannine development of Augustine. Finally, the Johannine *eros* of Christ's pierced side inspires the Pontiff's view that nature, even when prosperously graced by wisdom, still needs drawing into the plenitude of love. From the lance, love flows forth toward sinners, not asserting its rights, but offering only self-sacrifice. Buried in the Church's sacramental mysticism, this love, which alone incarnates the City of God, so drives nature into grace that, for all intents and purposes, the limits between them will ultimately be lost.

Conclusion

One can only marvel at the subtlety with which the Pope develops his own vision of love and justice in light of the Church's tradition and his reading of the signs of the times. The resulting paradigm is bold, flexible, and nuanced. Nonetheless, it leaves us with a probing theological question that we might briefly consider. Does a state of pure nature disconnected from grace exist? Are there, in other words, a natural justice, prudence, and love that, conditioned by original sin, remain untouched in their origins by the gratuity of the divine life? Aspects of Aquinas's thought may seem to support such a theory, although this support has been questioned by recent scholarship.³⁷ *Fides et Ratio*, the 1998 encyclical of Pope John Paul II, is implicitly critical of it.³⁸ Both

³⁷ See Louis Dupré, *Passage to Modernity: An Essay in the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 171–72.

³⁸ See Stephen Fields, S.J., "Nature and Grace after the Baroque," in *Creed and Culture: Jesuit Studies of Pope John Paul II*, ed. Joseph W. Koterski, S.J., and John J. Conley, S.J. (Philadelphia, PA: St Joseph's University Press, 2004), 223–40.

Hans Urs von Balthasar and Karl Rahner find it problematic, although Balthasar's position seems more congruent with Benedict's.

For his part, Rahner postulates that, after Christ, grace defines the concrete order of reality. Nature is reduced to a "remainder concept" whose hypothetical existence safeguards the gratuity of revelation and redemption.³⁹ Yet, if nature's existence is only theoretical, then one wonders whether it is sufficiently robust to maintain the position of Trent over against the Reformers. For Trent, nature and grace are congenial and complementary, since nature does not "do absolutely nothing in receiving" grace, even as grace enables nature's free activity.⁴⁰ For Calvin, although nature contains a vestigial seed of its Creator that cannot be uprooted, still nature "is so corrupted that by itself it produces only the worst of fruits."⁴¹ Karl Barth suggests that Protestantism is too "diastatic" in relating nature and grace and that it might learn from Catholicism's analogous understanding of the relation.⁴² By "diastatic," he means that nature is so separated from grace that its independent subsistence is compromised. As merely a remainder concept, nature tends toward the diastatic, not the analogous. In other words, its ability to serve as grace's necessary sacrament—as its finite means and created vehicle—is devalued. It may well be that nature will subsist as a remainder concept when the eschaton fully obtains. But, here and now, as Benedict reminds us, in the Johannine world of realized eschatology, nature asserts its independent muscularity. Even as analogous to grace, nature continues its resistance to it. Hence any model of their relation must assimilate this paradox while forthrightly protecting nature's integral vitality.

Accordingly, Balthasar, like Benedict, understands nature and grace as dialectically analogous. Although nature continues to be riddled by sin and its effects, it retains, as Benedict avers, a plasticity that expands under grace's ubiquitous accessibility and that contracts under the

³⁹ Karl Rahner, "Concerning the Relationship Between Nature and Grace," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 1, *God, Christ, Mary, and Grace*, trans. Cornelius Ernst (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1974), 297–317, at 312–13.

⁴⁰ Council of Trent, "Decree on Justification," ch. V (Session 6, January 13, 1547), in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, ed. Norman P. Tanner, S.J., 2 vols. (London: Sheed and Ward, 1990), 2:671–81, at 672.

⁴¹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, bk. I, ch. IV, ed. John T. McNeil, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols. (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1960), 1:151.

⁴² Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God*, trans. John Newton Thomas and Thomas Wieser (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1960), 44. Barth's suggestion is owing, as he says, to Balthasar.

influence of evil. Balthasar sees nature's origins as implicitly graced; they flow forth from nothing as mediated by the preexistent Word "through whom all things were made" (John 1:3). The Fall is not so cataclysmic as to eradicate the vestiges in nature of the divine life. As a result, post-lapsarian nature retains some similarity with its former state.⁴³ This must be the case, because nature forms the basis in Jesus for the Word's Incarnation.⁴⁴ This event joins nature and grace into a unity-in-diversity, such that there can be "no slice of 'pure' nature in this world."⁴⁵ Nonetheless, nature retains an analogous similarity with its post-lapsarian subsistence. As a result, as Benedict reminds us, although nature will finally realize the eschaton, it now embodies "the world [that] hates you, [even as] it has hated me" (John 15:18). The dialectical tension between grace and the world remains even while it awaits its future resolution

Consequently, although natural justice, prudence, love, and all other virtues can be practiced without a directly conscious connection to grace, their existence is ontologically impossible without some connection, however seminal, with the grace that leads to glory. This connection cannot be conceived as such a theoretical remainder that it suffices for justification in light of original sin or that it discounts sin's perduring corrosiveness. Yet, it cannot be conceived as so diastatic that it loses its original congeniality with the Word. It is, after all, the selfsame divine Logos who redeems what his creative agency brings forth. It is he who restores the luster of nature's disfigured face by the beauty of his crucified and resurrected own. There can be no pure nature that would render the Word himself equivocal. Derived therefore from a common source in the gratuity of the divine love, nature and grace originate in an analogy. In the created order, they sustain this analogy in a dialectical series that accounts for nature's pre-lapsarian and post-lapsarian states, its redeemed subsistence, and its anticipation of its finality when grace "may be all in all" (1 Cor 15:28).

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⁴³ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth: Exposition and Interpretation*, trans. Edward T. Oakes, S.J. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 283.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 287.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 288.