

On Method, Nature and Grace in *Caritas in Veritate*

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POPE BENEDICT XVI'S 2009 encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* [hereafter, CV; cited by § no. in parentheses below] elicited an enormous immediate response by religious and secular commentators. Vatican Radio reported that, two weeks after the encyclical's release, 1,800 articles had been written about it.¹ While the document received some critique from the Catholic left—such as from the liberation theologian Leonardo Boff, who exclaimed, “How good a dose of Marxism would be for the Pope!”—in general, the encyclical drew heavier fire from neoconservative and libertarian supporters of free market capitalism.²

¹ “Vatican Radio: Pope’s Encyclical Got Us Talking,” *Zenit*, July 24, 2009, accessed April 22, 2017, <https://zenit.org/articles/vatican-radio-pope-s-encyclical-got-us-talking/>.

² Leonardo Boff, “The Pope Needs a Dose of Marxism,” *America Latina en Movimiento*, July 20, 2009, accessed April 22, 2017, <http://www.alainet.org/es/node/135122>. Many progressive Catholics praised the document while trying to highlight its support for their own policy recommendations. For example, in Thomas Reese’s reading, Pope Benedict is “to the left of almost every politician in America” (“Pope Benedict on Economic Justice,” *The Washington Post*, July 7, 2009, accessed April 22, 2017, http://newsweek.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/georgetown/2009/07/pope_benedict_on_economic_justice.html?hpid=talkbox1). Douglas Kmiec, writing in the *National Catholic Reporter*, argues that the Pope’s vision presented in CV aligns closely with the economic and social reforms advocated by President Barack Obama (“Pope Benedict Invites All to Think Boldly in Love,” *National Catholic Reporter*, July 7, 2009, accessed April 22, 2017, <http://ncronline.org/news/vatican/pope-benedict-invites-all-think-boldly-love>). The document did receive critique from Catholics of this vein on its sexual ethics, its lack of sufficient attention to conditions that impede gender equality, its failure to name the threat of

For example, according to George Weigel, CV “resembles a duck-billed platypus” with incisive passages written by the Pope himself mixed together with passages reflecting current Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace default positions that Weigel finds unimpressive. He suggests that the reader of CV note the former passages with a gold marker and the latter with a red marker, distinguishing those valuable passages to be kept and pondered from those to be disregarded.³ In a similar spirit, Michael Novak praises elements of the encyclical, in particular its “beautiful” discussion of *caritas*, but nonetheless insists that, “if we hold each sentence of *Caritas in veritate* up to analysis in the light of empirical truth about events in the field of political economy since 1967, we will find that it is not nearly so full in its *veritas* as in its *caritas*.”⁴ Thomas Woods, author of *The Church and the Market: A Catholic Defense of the Free Economy*, offers a boisterous libertarian critique of the encyclical, saying that, at worst, CV is “bewilderingly naïve, and its policy recommendations, while attracting no one to the Church, are certain to repel.”⁵

global warming, and its overly deductive style not easily accessible to many; see Dennis P. McCann, “Papal Disconnect,” *The Christian Century* 126, no. 17 (25 August 2009): 10–11; Maura A. Ryan, “A New Shade of Green? Nature, Freedom, and Sexual Difference in *Caritas in Veritate*,” *Theological Studies* 71, no. 2 (June 2010): 335–49; Drew Christiansen, “Metaphysics and Society: A Commentary on *Caritas in Veritate*,” *Theological Studies* 71, no. 1 (March 2010): 3–28.

³ George Weigel, “*Caritas in Veritate* in Gold and Red,” *National Review Online*, July 7 2009, accessed April 22, 2017 <http://www.nationalreview.com/article/227839/caritas-veritate-gold-and-red-george-weigel>. Speculation about ghostwriters has become an ecclesiastical parlor game in papal documents. While I do not deny its occurrence—nor, necessarily, in this case, Weigel’s particular claims—I regard a document as belonging to a pope’s magisterium once it bears his signature.

⁴ Michael Novak, “Pope Benedict XVI’s *Caritas*,” *First Things Online* 13, August 17, 2009, accessed April 22, 2017, <http://www.firstthings.com/onthesquare/2009/08/pope-benedict-xvis-caritas-1>.

⁵ Thomas E. Woods, Jr., “Truth & Charity,” *Taki’s Magazine*, August 7, 2009, accessed April 22, 2017, http://www.takimag.com/site/article/truth_charity/. Many other commentaries on CV may be grouped with the critiques offered by Weigel, Novak, and Woods. To cite just a few examples:

Joseph LoConte criticizes the document for its call for redistribution of wealth and for some type of world government, concluding that “the encyclical eventually drifts into the realm of fantasy” (“Morals, Markets, and the Pope,” *The American: The Journal of the American Enterprise Institute*, July 17, 2009, accessed April 22, 2017, <http://www.american.com/archive/2009/july/morals-markets-and-the-pope/>).

These responses are noteworthy, given that the previous social encyclical, *Centesimus Annus*, was lauded by Weigel, Novak, and other Catholic neoconservatives.⁶ Upon first consideration, we might attribute the critique that CV elicited from these authors solely to the document's specific economic and political policy recommendations: for example, its calls for redistribution of wealth and a world political authority (§§ 37 and 67). I would like to propose, however, that the

New York University economist Mario Rizzo argues that the "scientific" statements being made in the encyclical are not consistent with the overwhelming thrust of economic liberalism. These statements, Rizzo contends, manifest an ignorance of economic thought and would be destructive to the Church's values ("Neither Truth Nor Charity: The Destructive Influence of a Papal Encyclical," *ThinkMarkets*, July 28, 2009, accessed April 22, 2017, <http://thinkmarkets.wordpress.com/2009/07/28/neither-truth-nor-charity-the-destructive-influence-of-a-papal-encyclical/>).

Terence Corcoran notes that Pope Benedict XVI "totally misses the greatest achievements of our time" by not supporting the free market that has resulted in the past forty years in an explosion of global wealth expansion and progress ("Caveat Venaliciū Libertas," *Financial Post*, July 8, 2009, accessed April 22, 2017, <http://news.nationalpost.com/holy-post/terence-corcoran-caveat-venalicium-libertas>).

Joseph Swanson claims that CV, unlike John Paul II's *Centissimus Annus* [hereafter, CA], does not focus on the modern view of economic development and wrongly suggests limiting free markets. He finds the encyclical's suggestion that economic regulation might have mitigated the recent crash of financial markets to be sad and incorrect. ("Confirmed in *Centissimus Annus*; Perplexed by *Caritas in Veritate*," *First Things Online*, August 19, 2009, accessed April 22, 2017, <http://www.firstthings.com/onthesquare/2009/08/confirmed-in-centesimus-annus59-perplexed-by-caritas-in-veritate>). Some supporters of free market capitalism are positive in their assessment of the encyclical, including its economic theory. Robert Sirico, president and co-founder of the Acton Institute, praises CV and does not regard it as a repudiation of market economics ("The Pope on 'Love in Truth,'" *The Wall Street Journal*, July 13, 2009, accessed April 22, 2017, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB124718187188120189.html>).

⁶ See George Weigel, "The Virtues of Freedom: *Centesimus Annus*," in *Building the Free Society: Democracy, Capitalism, and Catholic Social Teaching*, ed. George Weigel and Robert Royal (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 207–23; Michael Novak, "The Pope, Liberty, and Capitalism: Essays on *Centesimus Annus*," *National Review, Special Supplement* 53, no. 11 (24 June 1991): 11–13; Richard John Neuhaus, "The Pope Affirms the 'New Capitalism,'" *Wall Street Journal*, May 2, 1991, editorial page. Praise of CA has remained a theme in Weigel's work. For a recent example, see George Weigel, "The Enduring Importance of *Centesimus Annus*," *First Things Online*, June 22, 2011, accessed April 22, 2017, <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2011/06/the-enduring-importance-of-centesimus-annus>.

disagreement is more fundamental: it is not about the value of one economic theory or another, but instead about the role of economics as an autonomous science and about the degree to which Christianity should shape our economic and political thinking. The first part of this article will set a backdrop against which to consider these questions. It will offer a cursory exposition of the debate between Catholic neoconservatives (the so-called “Whig Thomists” long associated with the journal *First Things*⁷) and those thinkers associated with the journal *Communio* (sometimes referred to as “Augustinian Thomists”⁸). Second, I will argue that CV places Benedict’s thought in the latter camp. As I will show, this is due less to the content of Benedict’s theology than to its structure. I will suggest that CV contains a methodological newness that distinguishes it from earlier, more Thomistic social encyclicals: in CV, economic positions are obtained through revelation and a theological anthropology developed from Christological and Trinitarian reflection. Third, I will suggest that this methodology is an expression of Henri de Lubac’s position on nature and grace. The essay will conclude by naming several issues that merit further consideration.

Christianity and Capitalism: A Debate

A prolifically sustained argument in recent decades about the Church’s relationship to society has occurred between Catholic neoconservatives and the *Communio* school.⁹ It is not my intent here to offer a full expo-

⁷ While *First Things* remains a publishing home for these authors, the journal has evinced some change in recent years—particularly under the editorship of R. R. Reno—regarding the disputed points that the first part of this essay will present. As Reno himself said at a symposium on the future of *First Things*: “Global capitalism, or at least market-based economic thinking, is triumphant. This reduces the need to defend the market economy, a clear priority in the past, and raises the question of what *First Things* should say in a global system dominated by capitalism” (“Our Challenges,” *First Things* 235 [August/September 2013]: 34).

⁸ For more on these appellations, see Tracey Rowland, “Benedict XVI, Thomism, and Liberal Culture (Part 2),” *Zenit*, July 25, 2005, accessed April 22, 2017, <https://zenit.org/articles/benedict-xvi-thomism-and-liberal-culture-part-2/>.

⁹ An exchange between Weigel and Schindler set the initial groundwork for the argument and is representative of the two positions. See George Weigel, “Is America Bourgeois?” *Crisis*, no. 1 (October 1986): 5–10; David L. Schindler, “Is America Bourgeois?” *Communio* 14, no. 3 (1987): 262–90; Schindler, “Editorial: On Being Catholic in America,” *Communio* 14, no. 3 (1987): 213–14; Weigel, “Is America Bourgeois?: A Response to David Schindler,” *Communio* 15,

sition of this debate. Instead, I would like to focus on their argument concerning the relationship of the Church to economics. Neoconservatives generally see the possibility of a smooth merger between democratic capitalism and Catholicism.¹⁰ At times, particularly in the work of Novak, this entails the strong claim that capitalism can be a source of spirituality.¹¹ For his part, Weigel has proposed this merger by underscoring the virtue of creativity, which he finds present both in democratic capitalism and in Catholic social encyclicals, especially John Paul II's reflections on the participation of the human person in the creative action of God.¹² Both of these authors, indebted to John Courtney Murray, emphasize religious pluralism as an integrally positive feature of liberalism. For these authors, democratic capitalism is understood to be neutral in religious questions. It is a formal conceptual apparatus providing no definite philosophy of its own. As such, it serves as a vehicle that creates space in which various religious and philosophical worldviews, whether Christian, Jewish, or secular, can flourish. The claim is that, because the conceptual apparatus of democratic capitalism is merely formal, it does not significantly alter the worldviews subsequently placed within its empty form. To be sure, these thinkers insist that, for a capitalist society to flourish, the populace engaged in the market must possess a strong morality. But the relationship between morality—and even more so, religion—and economics is extrinsic.

In contrast, the *Communio* school has argued that democratic capitalism, as a form of economic liberalism, is not neutral or “empty” in regard to questions of religion and moral anthropology. No religious

no. 1 (1988): 77–91; Schindler, “Once Again: George Weigel, Catholicism and American Culture,” *Communio* 15, no. 1 (1988): 92–121; Mark Lowery, “The Schindler/Weigel Debate: An Appraisal,” *Communio* 18, no. 3 (1991): 425–38; Schindler, “Response to Mark Lowery,” *Communio* 18, no. 3 (1991): 450–72; Weigel, “Response to Mark Lowery,” *Communio* 18, no. 3 (1991): 439–49. For a recent summary of the status of the debate, see Patrick J. Deneen, “A Catholic Showdown Worth Watching,” *The American Conservative*, February 6, 2014, accessed April 22, 2017, <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/a-catholic-showdown-worth-watching/>.

¹⁰ See *The Capitalist Spirit: Toward a Religious Ethic of Wealth Creation*, ed. Peter L. Berger (San Francisco: ICS Press, 1990), particularly Novak's essay, “Wealth and Virtue: The Development of Christian Economic Teaching” (ibid., 51–80) and Weigel's, “Camels and Needles, Talents and Treasure: American Catholicism and the Capitalist Ethic” (ibid., 81–105).

¹¹ See Michael Novak, *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982).

¹² Weigel, “Camels and Needles,” 96–97.

worldview could be placed without change into its conceptual apparatus. Instead, the form of economic liberalism presents a positive content of its own that implicitly—and sometimes explicitly—makes claims about God, humanity, and culture. At the vanguard of this debate, David Schindler has argued against the supposed neutrality to anthropology of liberal political and economic theories. According to him, such theories possess their own inner logic, which can conflict with the logic of the Gospel. In Schindler's words, "liberalism of *any* stripe—including the liberalism of 'open' capitalism—remains unacceptable insofar as its freedom remains conceived as primarily creative—or rather, insofar as the creativity is not conceived as anteriorly receptive."¹³

Alasdair MacIntyre similarly argues against the supposed neutrality of economic and political liberalism. He does not deny the existence of universal, transcultural truths, but at the same time, he argues for a tradition-constructed rationality, suggesting that the manner in which philosophical principles are conceived varies according to the tradition in which we find ourselves. Thus, there can be no easy transposition of empty philosophical truths from one narrative tradition to another, as those who conceive of a smooth merger between liberalism and Thomism are wont to believe. Rather, for MacIntyre, the narrative tradition of liberalism necessarily conflicts with that of Thomist theism.¹⁴ Tracey Rowland has developed the work of MacIntyre with a particular gaze toward the manner in which narrative traditions are culture-forming. In her words, "modernity is not merely a series of intellectual propositions, but an entire culture, which includes music, architecture, literature, institutional practices, modes of dress and social relating."¹⁵ Rowland understands the culture of modernity to be incompatible with Catholicism and argues that a failure of the Church during and immediately following Vatican II was its negligence in recognizing this point.

These critics aver that a consequence of the neoconservative position is the privatization of religion: it conceives religion as something added from without into the empty form of economic liberalism.

¹³ David L. Schindler, *Heart of the World, Center of the Church: Communio Ecclesiology, Liberalism, and Liberation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 119.

¹⁴ Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 326–48.

¹⁵ Tracey Rowland, *Culture and the Thomist Tradition: After Vatican II*, Radical Orthodoxy Series (London: Routledge, 2005), 83.

In other words, neoconservatives see the relationship of theological truths to economics as extrinsic rather than intrinsic. In a similar vein, Marcel Gauchet draws the distinction between “infrastructural religion” and “superstructural religion.” Infrastructural religion serves as the basis of a society’s values and self-understanding; superstructural religion is relegated to private belief and Sunday practice.¹⁶ Once religion is privatized, economics is given a false autonomy separated not only from religious matters but also from broader questions of human morality and culture. These questions are seen to arise only secondarily from within the claimed neutral conceptual apparatus of liberalism. In such a schema, religion can have little to say to economics because the two realms do not coincide.

This debate concerning the interface of theology and economics is not limited to the sparring between neoconservative and *Communio* thinkers. It has surfaced pointedly, for example, in the recent exchange between Thomas Storck and Thomas Woods concerning economics and Catholic social teaching.¹⁷ Woods has argued that certain elements of Catholic social teaching as proposed in papal encyclicals overstep the limits of legitimate Church teaching because they contradict the findings of economic science. Storck has criticized Woods’s position, arguing that the Church has the legitimate authority to pronounce on the findings of human sciences like economics when they impinge on moral or dogmatic questions. The finer points of this debate are not important for our purpose. Instead, I would like to focus on a more general point of contention well captured by Emil Berendt:

[A] difference in their [Storck’s and Woods’s] views on the economy lies in the question of whether it is a product of culture or whether it has an existence that transcends our humanity. If the former is true, then the marketplace, touched

¹⁶ Marcel Gauchet, *The Disenchantment of the World: A Political History of Religion*, trans. Oscar Burge, with a foreword by Charles Taylor, New French Thought (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997). See also Rowland, *Culture and the Thomist Tradition*, 101–02.

¹⁷ Their debate has unfolded in a series of articles, most of them published online. Representative pieces include Thomas Storck, “A Challenge from Thomas Storck,” *The Catholic Social Science Review* 14 (2009): 85–105, and Thomas E. Woods, Jr., “Catholic Social Teaching and the Market Economy Revisited: A Reply to Thomas Storck,” *The Catholic Social Science Review* 14 (2009): 107–24.

by original sin, can and should be constantly reformed in light of Revelation. If the latter is correct, then Catholics must take the negative consequences of market interactions with the same resignation one takes regarding the suffering the hungry lion will inflict on the gazelle he has singled out. To take this line of reasoning further, if economic institutions are human creations then papal teaching is free to choose whatever language of economics it needs to express the Gospel in truth and charity. If the market is an independent reality, and a particular economic theory provides a comprehensive description of it, then Woods is right that the Church must resort to the concepts espoused by the economist.¹⁸

The pivotal point of contention extracted by Berendt from the Woods–Storck debate also divaricates the neoconservative and *Communio* schools: Is economics a descriptive science that, along with theology, transcends culture? Or is economics a product of culture to be informed by theology? While it is beyond the scope of this essay to assess the debate itself, I have considered it at some length because of the prominence of the authors involved and because it concerns fundamental questions of the Church’s relation to American democratic capitalism.¹⁹

The Method of CV

Having surveyed the fault lines between CV’s two interpretive camps, I will now consider where the encyclical falls between them. I will suggest that the answer can be found less in the content of Benedict’s work than in its method. In an early essay, Ratzinger offers a helpful point of departure. He criticizes the medieval scholastics, particularly St. Thomas Aquinas, for treating the new understanding of the person, garnered from divine revelation, as a “theological exception” to a pre-Christian philosophy. Instead, Ratzinger argues, it is “the *meaning* of this new element to call into question the *whole* of human thought and to set it on a new course.”²⁰ Christ is not to be treated as a “an object of

¹⁸ Emil Berendt, “Response,” *The Catholic Social Science Review* 14 (2009): 137–40, at 138.

¹⁹ Patrick Deneen put it well: “As this debate develops—and, I believe, bursts into public view, and begins to engage the Catholic remnant—major implications for the relationship of Catholics to America, and America to Catholics, hang in the balance” (“A Catholic Showdown Worth Watching”).

²⁰ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, “Concerning the Notion of Person in Theology,”

highly interesting ontological speculation” that “must remain separate in its box as [a unique] exception to the rule and must not be permitted to mix with the rest of human thought.”²¹ Rather, for Ratzinger:

Something methodologically decisive for all human thinking becomes visible here. The seeming exception is in reality very often the symptom that shows us the insufficiency of our previous schema of order, which helps us to break open this schema and to conquer a new realm of reality. The exception shows us that we have built our closets too small, as it were, and that we must break them open and go on in order to see the whole.²²

The point is that the permeation of revelation into areas of natural knowledge applies equally well to CV. The encyclical manifests a dynamism between revelation and the natural sciences, including economics. It evinces a method in which practical economic proposals are based upon anthropological positions that themselves have a theological basis. In short, the movement into economics proceeds first from God and then through the human person. Let us more closely examine this dynamic.

A principal theme of CV is expressed by the phrase “integral human development.” For Benedict, “authentic development concerns the whole of the person in every single dimension” and matters such as economics, technology, and even environmental exploitation are all properly *human* matters (§11). As distinct from those like Woods who grant the economy a certain autonomy from human culture and moral actions, the Pope understands it as a sector of human activity (§45). Business, he says, has a human significance before a professional one. Similarly, technology is rooted in the person and does not possess an autonomy apart from it. So, too, “the *meaning and purpose of the media must be sought within an anthropological perspective*” (§73). Nor should globalization be understood in fatalistic terms, as if it were the product of impersonal forces or structures independent of the human will (§42). Even “environmental ecology,” according to the Pope, needs a correctly understood “human ecology” (§51).

Communio 17 (Fall 1990): 439–54, at 449 [originally “Zum Personenverständnis in der Theologie,” in *Dogma und Verkündigung* (Munich: Erich Wewel, 1973), 205–23].

²¹ Ratzinger, “Concerning the Notion of Person in Theology,” 449.

²² *Ibid.*, 450.

In short, for Benedict, “*the social question has become a radically anthropological question*” (§75). The anthropological *leitmotif* of the encyclical is “gift.” In the Pontiff’s words: “The human being is made for gift, which expresses and makes present his transcendent dimension” (§34). The Pope extends gift into the economic order, where it possesses a “logic” that does not exclude justice. At the same time, he does not conceive of the logic of gift as something added to justice from without. Rather, to use Gauchet’s language, this logic relates *infrastructurally* to the economy. Two passages from CV evince this relation most strikingly:

Economic life undoubtedly requires *contracts*, in order to regulate relations of exchange between goods of equivalent value. But it also needs *just laws* and *forms of redistribution* governed by politics, and what is more, it needs works redolent of the *spirit of gift*. The economy in the global era seems to privilege the former logic, that of contractual exchange, but directly or indirectly it also demonstrates its need for the other two: political logic, and the logic of the unconditional gift. (§37)

It must be remembered that the market does not exist in the pure state. It is shaped by the cultural configurations which define it and give it direction. . . . The Church’s social doctrine holds that authentically human social relationships of friendship, solidarity and reciprocity can also be conducted within economic activity, and not only outside it or “after” it. The economic sphere is neither ethically neutral, nor inherently inhuman and opposed to society. It is part and parcel of human activity and precisely because it is human, it must be structured and governed in an ethical manner. In *commercial relationships* the *principle of gratuitousness* and the logic of gift as an expression of fraternity can and must *find their place within normal economic activity* (§36).

These excerpts establish two points. First, Benedict, in accord with the methodology advocated by Schindler, MacIntyre, and Rowland, does not conceive of economic forms as merely “neutral,” such that a Christian ethics could be externally added to them. On the contrary, he understands that these forms must be internally transformed by gift. Second, the Pope does not derive the logic of gift from a natural

anthropology divorced from revelation. Instead, anthropology is infused with Christological and Trinitarian meaning. For example, he proposes a “metaphysical understanding of the relations between persons” that, taking “inspiration and direction from Christian revelation,” proposes the Trinity as the model for human relationships (§54). Accordingly, when Benedict writes that “God reveals man to himself,” he is speaking not *de Deo uno* but rather *de Deo trino* and of the Word Incarnate (§75). Theology, anthropology, and economics all converge in the logic of gift. Economic logic is to mirror theo-logic: God in his essence is gift, and so is the human person, even in his economic exchanges. Playing on Karl Rahner’s famous axiom, we might say that, for Benedict, the immanent Trinity truly is “economic.”²³

Because the practical conclusions reached by Benedict in CV rest on an explicitly theological foundation rather than a philosophical foundation of the natural law, a new turn in the Catholic social thought is marked.²⁴ If we contrast CV with *Rerum Novarum*, for example, the shift is evident. But we need not go back to the nineteenth century to notice this. Even a document as recent as John Paul II’s 1991 *Centissimus Annus* [hereafter, CA], written by a pope whose personalist thought was Christocentric, evinces a basis in a Thomist natural philosophy largely absent from CV. Thus, while CA states that the Church’s social teaching enters into dialogue with politics and economics, assimilating their contributions while opening them to a broader horizon, CV makes theology determine these other disciplines.²⁵

CV’s shift has major consequences for the neoconservative–*Communio* debate. The neoconservative position on the supposed neutrality of the economic realm fits well with a type of Thomism that separates the natural and supernatural spheres.²⁶ Such a schema provides space

²³ Karl Rahner, “Oneness and Threefoldness of God in Discussion with Islam,” in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 18, *God and Revelation*, trans. Edward Quinn (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1983), 105–21, at 114.

²⁴ CV does make several references to natural law (§§59, 68, and 75), but these are not significantly developed.

²⁵ While CA §55 notes that the “Church receives the meaning of man from Divine Revelation” and states that “Christian anthropology therefore is really a chapter of theology,” these statements remain somewhat isolated and do not determine the document’s overall structure and method.

²⁶ The inverse, however, does not necessarily follow: a clear theological distinction in the orders of nature and grace need not lead one to an autonomous political order understood in secular liberal terms. Andrew Dean Swafford wrongly implies that it should, as he finds an “anomaly” in the position of

for an autonomy of natural human sciences like economics apart from revelation. Benedict's proposal for an economics based on the logic of gift ultimately derived from the Trinity provides no such space. Prescinding from the question of whether theologies that emphasize the distinction between nature and grace are faithful to the thought of St. Thomas, it must nonetheless be conceded that the tradition of Catholic social thought prior to CV allowed for the integrity of the neoconservative position. The robustly theological rather than philosophical structure of CV, however, permits no such position and thus is fundamentally at odds with it.

Method, Nature, and Grace

In the final part of this essay, I will speculate about the source of CV's methodological shift. Philipp Gabriel Renczes has shown convincingly the impact of patristic theology on the encyclical's structure.²⁷ An equally important source for the newness of the document comes from its adoption of Henri de Lubac's understanding of nature and grace and the human person's final end. The 1946 publication of his *Surnaturel* was a watershed for Catholic theology.²⁸ It viewed the bulk of the Thomist commentators since Cajetan as misrepresenting the thought of St. Thomas and as leading to an excessive naturalism that unduly separated the natural and supernatural orders. By contrast, de Lubac argued that the person *in concretum* naturally possesses the end of supernatural beatitude. This position, especially due to its fecund development by Hans Urs von Balthasar, became the intellectual cornerstone

someone like Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, who belonged "in the tradition of extrinsicism" concerning nature and grace while simultaneously opposing liberal democracy in his support of the *ancien régime*. Swafford avers that, because of Garrigou-Lagrange's theology of nature and grace, "one would have expected him to have been a friend of secular democracy" (*Nature and Grace: A New Approach to Thomistic Ressourcement* [Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2014], 33).

²⁷ Philipp Gabriel Renczes, S.J., "Grace Reloaded: *Caritas in Veritate*'s Theological Anthropology," *Theological Studies* 71, no.2 (June 2010): 273–90, at 275–76.

²⁸ Henri de Lubac, *Surnaturel: études historiques* (Paris: Aubier, 1946). *Surnaturel* was revised by de Lubac and reissued in two works published in 1965, *Le mystère du surnaturel* and *Augustinisme et théologie moderne*, available as *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, trans. Rosemary Sheed, Milestones in Catholic Theology (New York: Crossroad, 1998), and *Augustinianism and Modern Theology*, trans. Lancelot Sheppard (London: Chapman, 1969). See also de Lubac, "Duplex Hominis Beatitudo," *Communio* 35 (Winter 2008): 599–612; de Lubac, *A Brief Catechesis on Nature and Grace*, trans. Richard Arnandez (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1984).

for the *Communio* school of theology.²⁹ While de Lubac was criticized by Thomists indebted to the previous tradition during his lifetime, his thesis has also received recent criticism from Lawrence Feingold and Steven Long.³⁰ They have argued that de Lubac's position is both wrong *in se* and misrepresents St. Thomas.³¹ Defenders of the "pure nature" position argue against de Lubac that the person, even here and now in the concrete order, is ordered to a proximate, proportionate, natural end distinct from the final supernatural end. The consequences of this position are deep and wide, and here, let us consider one of them: its impact on nature.

We can approach the question by considering the work of one of de Lubac's critics, Long, as well as one of his proponents, Schindler, who arrive at a similar conclusion even if they differ sharply on whether it benefits Catholic thought. For Long, because a thing's *species* is determined by its end, and because de Lubac and Balthasar deny a naturally proximate end distinct from the final supernatural end, it follows that human nature in its *species* can no longer be known or

²⁹ See: Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, trans. Edward T. Oakes (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1992), 251–378; David Schindler "Threads Interview with David Schindler," *La Nouvelle Théologie* (blog), April 6, 2005, accessed April 22, 2017, http://ressourcement.blogspot.com/2005/04/threads-interviews-david-schindler_06.html.

³⁰ For the history of this debate, see Aidan Nichols, O.P., "Thomism and the Nouvelle Théologie," *The Thomist* 64 (2000): 1–19, and Romanus Cessario, O.P., "An Observation on Robert Lauder's Review of G.A. McCool, S.J.," *The Thomist* 56 (1992): 701–10.

³¹ See Lawrence Feingold, *The Natural Desire to See God According to St. Thomas and His Interpreters*, 2nd ed. (Naples, FL: Sapientia Press, 2010), and Steven A. Long, *Natura Pura: On the Recovery of Nature in the Doctrine of Grace* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010). For a summary of the debate and a brief defense of de Lubac, see Nicholas J. Healy, "Henri de Lubac on Nature and Grace: A Note on Some Recent Contributions to the Debate," *Communio* 35 (Winter 2008): 535–64. See also John Milbank, *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate Concerning the Supernatural* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005); Edward T. Oakes, S.J., "The Paradox of Nature and Grace: On John Milbank's *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate Concerning the Supernatural*," *Nova et Vetera* (English) 4, no. 3 (Summer 2006): 667–95; Reinhard Hütter, *Dust Bound for Heaven: Explorations in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 127–246; *Surnaturel: A Controversy at the Heart of Twentieth-Century Thomistic Thought*, ed. Serge-Thomas Bonino, O.P., trans. Robert Williams et al. (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia Press, 2009); Swafford, *Nature and Grace*; and the papers in the book symposium on Feingold's *The Natural Desire to See God* in *Nova et Vetera* (English) 5, no. 1 (2007).

determined. Thus, in Long's estimation, nature for de Lubac becomes merely an empty vacuole for grace that lacks any magnitude of its own. Because Balthasar, for instance, speaks of "nature" as little more than "createdness as such," it loses its theonomic character. Long produces a litany of ills that he understands to arise from this position, including the claim that, in such a schema, nature is unknowable apart from revelation.³²

For Schindler, if the human being *in concretum* naturally possesses the end of supernatural beatitude, it follows that all of reality is to be ultimately understood through the lens of grace. He expresses this in the thesis of his book *Heart of the World, Center of the Church*: "the trinitarian *communio*, present in the sacramental *communio* that is the essence of the Church, reveals the meaning of all of being in its full integrity, and thereby reveals as well the inner logic and dynamic of the Christian presence in the world."³³ Accordingly, it is congenial for Schindler to consider economics in light of the Trinity, a position that Long would understand to compromise the integrity of the natural sphere to act for its own intrinsic purposes.

Yet, Schindler's position is precisely what we find in CV. Benedict all but endorses de Lubac when he claims that the person possesses "a nature destined to transcend itself in a supernatural life" (§29). But more important is the encyclical's nakedly thin account of nature *qua* nature. On the one hand, the document is concerned with matters that in the Aristotelian-Thomist schema fall under the purview of nature (like political philosophy). On the other hand, however, CV understands human nature, including its social and economic dimensions, not through an inductive observation of the person and his operations, but through a deductive consideration of the Trinitarian God. If we place Benedict in Raphael's *School of Athens*, he is not Aristotle pointing out, but Plato pointing up. As a consequence of his adopting de Lubac's position on nature and grace, Long would claim that Benedict has forfeited an intelligible concept of nature. Consequently, he must erect his anthropology, together with his economics, on a foundation of grace, because no other ontological foundation remains.³⁴ In de Lubac's position, it follows that, if the true meaning

³² Long, *Natura Pura*, 48–49.

³³ Schindler, *Heart of the World, Center of the Church*, xvi.

³⁴ Thomas Joseph White, O.P., has similarly argued that failure to make clear distinctions both between nature and grace and among the various particular theological states of human nature risks rendering nature inconceivable apart

of nature is found only in grace, then theoretical considerations of nature apart from grace are artificial.

The thin account of the natural law present in CV is consistent with Ratzinger's recent work. In a 2004 dialogue with Jürgen Habermas, for example, he remarks:

The natural law has remained (especially in the Catholic Church) the key issue in dialogues with the secular society and with other communities of faith in order to appeal to the reason we share in common and to seek the basis for a consensus about the ethical principles of law in a secular, pluralistic society. Unfortunately, this instrument has become blunt. . . . The idea of natural law presupposed a concept of nature in which nature and reason overlap, since nature itself is rational. With the victory of the theory of evolution, this view of nature has capsized: nowadays, we think that nature as such is not rational, even if there is rational behavior in nature.³⁵

We can infer from these words that Benedict avoids the natural law in CV because its arguments are not convincing in today's intellectual climate. To be fair, however, his movement away from neo-Thomism, together with skepticism about *natura pura* divorced from faith, has marked his work for decades. It is seen in more recent works, like *Truth and Tolerance*, in which he writes: "It is my view that the neoscholastic rationalism that was trying to reconstruct the *preambula fidei*, the approach to faith, with pure rational certainty, by means of rational argument that was strictly independent of faith, has failed; and it cannot be otherwise for any such attempts to do that kind of thing."³⁶ This sentiment echoes his 1968 commentary on *Gaudium et Spes*:

from Christ (*The Incarnate Lord: A Thomistic Study in Christology*, Thomistic Ressourcement Series [Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2015], 126–70).

³⁵ Joseph Ratzinger and Jürgen Habermas, *The Dialectics of Secularization: On Reason and Religion*, ed. Florian Schuller, trans. Brian McNeil (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2006) [originally *Dialektik der Säkularisierung: über Vernunft und Religion* (Freiburg-im-Breisgau: Herder, 2005)], 69–70.

³⁶ Joseph Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions*, trans. Henry Taylor (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2004) [originally *Glaube-Wahrheit-Toleranz: Das Christentum und die Weltreligionen* (Freiburg-im-Breisgau: Herder, 2003)], 136.

It can hardly be disputed that as a consequence of the division between philosophy and theology established by the Thomists, a juxtaposition has gradually been established which no longer appears adequate. There is, and must be, a human reason *in* faith; yet conversely, every human reason is conditioned by a historical standpoint so that reason pure and simple does not exist.³⁷

As seen here and elsewhere, Benedict, like MacIntyre and Rowland, emphasizes the historical conditioning of reason.³⁸ For Christianity, this means its conditioning in the context of faith, which partially explains his preference for an historical rather than metaphysical approach to theology (see PCT, 153–90). More importantly, it means that his work tends to avoid even theoretical considerations of nature divorced from faith. Rather, as we have seen, he allows revelation to inform all areas of human thought, a direct consequence of his adoption of de Lubac's thesis.

Conclusion

Edward Oakes, S.J., once quipped, "Look at the headlines, and behind them you will see an implied theology of nature and grace at work."³⁹ I concur with the statement and would also modify it: look at a theologian's method, and you will see an implied theology of nature and grace. This paper has argued that the method of CV, in which economic

³⁷ Joseph Ratzinger, "The Dignity of the Human Person," in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler, trans. Lalit Adolphus et al., 5 vols. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967–1969), 5:115–63, at 120 [originally *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche: Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil: Konstitutionen, Dekrete und Erklärungen. Kommentare*, ed. Josef Höfer et al., 3 vols. (Freiburg-im-Breisgau: Herder, 1968), 3:313–54 (commentary on the first chapter of part I of *Gaudium et Spes*)].

³⁸ See Benedict XVI, "Relativism: The Central Problem of Faith Today," in *The Essential Pope Benedict XVI: His Central Writings and Speeches*, ed. John F. Thornton and Susan B. Varenne (New York: Harper, 2007), 227–42, at 239 [originally "Address to the Presidents of the Doctrinal Commissions of the Bishops' Conferences of Latin America, Guadalajara, Mexico, May 1996," in United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Origins* 26 (October 31, 1996): 309–17]. See also Ratzinger, *Values in a Time of Upheaval*, trans. Brian McNeil (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2006) [originally *Werte in Zeiten des Umbruchs: Die Herausforderungen der Zukunft bestehen* (Freiburg-im-Breisgau: Herder, 2005)], 69.

³⁹ Oakes, "Paradox," 671.

and social positions are deduced from Christological and Trinitarian reflection, evinces an implied adoption of de Lubac's understanding of nature and grace. Moreover, it has illustrated the consonance of this method with Benedict's larger theological *oeuvre*. Finally, it has situated CV within the contemporary debate concerning Christianity and democratic capitalism, which may have significant impact on the Church's future relations with liberalism.

Several points merit further consideration. First, I have considered the method of CV and suggested, without much detail, that it contrasts with the more traditional Thomist approach of his recent papal predecessors. A more comprehensive study of this contrast could be beneficial, including a consideration of Benedict's debt to patristic sources, especially Augustine, over St. Thomas.

Second, tension exists in Benedict's thought concerning the relation of the Church to politics and economics. On the one hand, he repeatedly claims that the Church has no specific political agenda.⁴⁰ He likewise praises elements of liberalism, especially its understanding of the relation of Church and state, whose model he finds in the United States and Alexis de Tocqueville.⁴¹ Yet on the other hand, Benedict proposes political and economic principles based ultimately on revelation. We might wonder whether only Catholics can get economic questions right! David Nirenberg's reading of CV contains a kernel of truth when it criticizes Benedict's insistence that the only

⁴⁰ Benedict XVI, "Liberation Theology," in *The Essential Pope Benedict*, 217–25 [originally private document preceding the Congregation for Doctrine of the Faith's August 6, 1984, *Instruction on Certain Aspects of the "Theology of Liberation,"* accessed April 22, 2017, www.christendom-awake.org/pages/ratzinger/liberationtheol.htm]. See also *Deus Caritas Est* (2005), §28, and Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, trans. Adrian J. Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2007) [originally *Jesus von Nazareth*, vol. 1, *Von der Taufe im Jordan bis zur Verklärung* (Freiburg-im-Breisgau: Herder, 2007)], 42–43.

⁴¹ See: Benedict XVI, *Pope Benedict in America: The Full Texts of Papal Talks Given During His Apostolic Visit to the United States* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2008); Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism and Politics: New Essays in Ecclesiology*, trans. Robert Nowell (New York: Crossroad, 1988) [originally *Kirche, Ökumene und Politik* (Cinisello Balsamo: Edizione Paoline, 1987)], 237–38. See also Ratzinger's remarks on Tocqueville on the occasion of his 1992 induction in the *Académie des Sciences Morales et Politiques of the Institut de France*, accessed April 22, 2017, http://www.asmp.fr/fiches_academiciens/textacad/ratzinger/installation_ratzinger.pdf.

possible answer to global questions is Catholicism.⁴² Whether or not this tension in Benedict's theology is contradictory or creative merits further consideration.

This tension leads to a third issue: whether or not the theology of CV compromises the integrity of the natural sphere and, if so, whether natural sciences like economics possess an autonomy apart from revelation. We might ask how we can practically implement CV's speculative principles drawn from theology, like the logic of gift and "quotas of gratuitousness"? Perhaps they can meaningfully be transposed into general social and economic activity. Yet we might well wonder whether theological language is stretched too far as to sacrifice meaning.

Finally, it would be valuable to consider more widely the impact in Benedict's theology of de Lubac's thesis on nature and grace and man's final end. While I have suggested a heavy indebtedness, others like Long have argued that the Regensburg Address moves away from de Lubac.⁴³ Part of the difficulty is that Ratzinger's extensive theological corpus contains few explicit treatments of the question of nature and grace.⁴⁴ Greater insight into it will be of value as the Church begins the task of appropriating the teaching of this theologian-Pope. N V

⁴² David Nirenberg, "Love and Capitalism," *New Republic* 240, no. 17 (September 23, 2009): 39–42.

⁴³ Long, *Natura Pura*, 212–22.

⁴⁴ Perhaps the most explicit treatment is Joseph Ratzinger, "Gratia Praesupponit Naturam," in *Dogma and Preaching: Applying Christian Doctrine to Daily Life*, ed. Michael J. Miller, trans. Michael J. Miller and Matthew J. O'Connell (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2011) [originally in *Dogma und Verkündigung*], 143–61.