

## REFLECTIONS ON HUMAN NATURE AND THE SUPERNATURAL

Does the supernatural affect human nature intrinsically?<sup>1</sup> This question can have a strict or a broad meaning. We shall consider each in turn. In its strict interpretation, this question means: Does grace, entitatively supernatural grace, affect human nature intrinsically? "Supernatural" is narrowed down to mean elevating, salutary grace. This little problem can be quickly dispatched. The answer is yes. Elevating grace is by definition an internal gift. Patently it affects human nature intrinsically. In its broad meaning our question can be formulated thus: Even before a man receives his first salutary grace, is he internally affected by the supernatural? This question is by no means easy to answer. The difficulty will become clearer as we discuss it.

Everyone admits that, even before man receives his first gift of grace, he is called to the beatific vision, which is his sole, formal, last end. God's eternal decree has established that end for man; it has also laid on man the obligation of tending towards it. Does that decree of God affect man intrinsically? Or does it remain quite outside man, summoning into being no echo in man—at any rate, none before he receives his first grace? In other words, before the advent of grace is the supernatural internal or external to man?

Over this issue theologians divide into two camps. We may call the first group "extrinsicists." They may be said to represent the theory of the supernatural that has been dominant and largely unchallenged in the schools up till recent years. These theologians would deny that the supernatural has any internal influence on man before the reception of the first internal grace. The second camp gathers in the many modern theologians whom we may call "intrinsicists." These theologians represent a more recent movement in theology. They challenge the conception of the extrinsicists on the ground that it makes human nature a self-enclosed system to which the supernatural can be added only as a sort of gilding or veneer. They urge that, if God has summoned men to the beatific vision and established it as man's exclusive end, that divine call must find some response in man, even before he receives his first salutary grace. They affirm that it is the end that commands everything; that, if God assigns a final destiny, that destiny

<sup>1</sup> Those familiar with the thought of Prof. Karl Rahner, S.J., of the State University of Innsbruck, will realize how greatly I am indebted to him. See particularly his article, "Ein Weg zur Bestimmung des Verhältnisses von Natur und Gnade," *Orientierung* (Zürich), June, 1950, pp. 141-45.

simply must find some ontological counterpart in man. God's almighty call to man cannot leave man indifferent. He may in the end freely reject it; but his being must echo that call. In some sense the call to vision must be inscribed in man's structure.

Let us look more closely at each of these schools. The advantages of extrinsicalism are great. First, this attitude to the supernatural assuredly safeguards the gratuity of the supernatural. Secondly, if the supernatural has its first intrinsic effect on man when grace comes, evidently God can withhold from man the supernatural and leave human nature quite unchanged. In other words, in this theory it is easy to defend a truth bound up with the very dogma of the supernatural—the possibility of man's non-vocation to the beatific vision.<sup>2</sup> Thus extrinsicalism is obviously perfectly in harmony with what Pius XII teaches in his Encyclical, *Humani generis*.<sup>3</sup>

But extrinsicalism also labors under several quite significant disadvantages. It denies any intrinsic determination of man prior to grace. Yet there are three reasons that seem to suggest that even prior to grace the supernatural must affect man intrinsically.

1) An eternal decree of God establishes for me the beatific vision as my last end, and it obliges me to tend to that end. Now I raise the question, can I consider as truly objective a decree of God's that remains purely outside me and has no effect in me? Is it not Nominalism to insist on the one hand that I am obliged by God to tend to vision and on the other to refuse to admit any created, ontological reality within me, the counterpart to God's eternal decree? Do not sound metaphysics demand that, if I affirm the reality of God's decree, I must also maintain that it puts something within me, some created reality? Briefly, unless the supernatural is intrinsic to me even before grace, then God's decree establishing vision as my destiny and laying on me an obligation to strive after it is fictitious.

At this point it will be instructive to consider the Catholic objection against the Protestant contention of an imputed justice. In this celebrated controversy we can distinguish two aspects, negative and positive. The negative aspect concerns the forgiveness of sin; that was perhaps the chief

<sup>2</sup> Cf. V. de Broglie, *De fine ultimo vitae humanae*, I (Paris, 1948), 250: "A quaestione . . . possibilitatis naturae purae (quae determinatam quamdam philosophiam 'naturarum' omnino supponit) sedulo distinguenda est quaestio (multo simplicior, et omnium hominum captui accommodata) merae possibilitatis *non-vocationis nostrae ad visionem Dei*, quae . . . non mere theologica sed *dogmatica* esse videtur, utpote cum ipsa notione traditionali gratuitatis vocationis praedictae omnino connexa."

<sup>3</sup> "Alii veram 'gratuitatem' ordinis supernaturalis corrumpunt, cum autem Deum entia intellectu praedita condere non posse, quin eadem ad beatificam visionem ordinet et vocet" (*Acta apostolicae sedis*, XLII [1950], 570).

issue between Catholics and Protestants. Briefly, the Catholics argued: "If my sins still remain and are merely cloaked over by Christ's justice being imputed to me, then God's veracity is attained. I am still a sinner; God refuses to be realistic! He does not forgive my sins; He simply closes his eyes to them. If I am a sinner, God, all-truthful and all-holy, cannot act towards me as though I were not what I am." On the positive side—the question of the infusion of justice—the Catholic position, it seems to me, comes to this: "Justification cannot be whittled down to the mere imputation to us of Christ's justice. Justification must not be simply extrinsic to man, but intrinsic to him—some created, physical gift infused into man's soul. The reason why it cannot consist just in God's external favor is that such a justification is a stark chimaera. Grace is either something intrinsic or it is unreal, a mere figment of the mind."

Justification means that God now loves a man, whereas before He did not. Unless that love is to be counterfeit, there must be a real ontological change somewhere. There must be some new reality, showing a love now where before there was none.<sup>4</sup> No change can be in God; hence it must be in man. Justification and the supernatural love it implies are sheerly fictitious, if there is not in man some new ontological reality to attest, as it were, their authenticity and reality. This is particularly true since God's love is creative.<sup>5</sup> Unless I am mistaken about our stand against the Protestants, we have to affirm that grace, justification, charity are realities affecting man intrinsically, because to deny this is to be forced into the Protestant theory of a mere extrinsic, imputative justice.

I submit that perhaps much the same might be said in the broader case

<sup>4</sup> Justification implies a *union* between man and God, a new *union*. All Catholics will and must grant that this new union is not merely moral but real, ontological, physical. If that is granted, we can immediately invoke the principle so crisply stated by St. Thomas: "Si aliqua duo prius fuerint non unita et postmodum uniantur, oportet quod hoc fiat per mutationem utriusque, vel alterius tantum. . . . Impossible est autem quod divina essentia moveatur. . ." (*Contra gentiles*, III, 53). St. Thomas' conclusion is that the change must be in man; and, as he is dealing with the Beatific Vision, he finds the new ontological reality in the created *lumen gloriae*. In the case of justification, the new reality is sanctifying grace.

<sup>5</sup> St. Thomas says: "Amor Dei est infundens et creans bonitatem in rebus" (*Summa theologica*, I, q. 20, a. 2 c). "Dilectio Dei est causativa boni quod in nobis est, sicut dilectio hominis provocatur et causatur ex aliquo bono quod in dilecto est" (*Contra gentiles*, III, 150). "Dilectio Dei qua nos diligit consequenter aliquem effectum in nobis relinquit, scilicet gratiam" (*De veritate*, XXVIII, 2). Cf. R. Morency, *L'Union de grâce selon saint Thomas* (Montreal, 1950), pp. 75-80: "L'amour divin n'est pas causé par le bien; il est cause du bien. . . . Tandis que la dilection humaine présuppose l'amabilité de la personne aimée, la dilection divine pose l'amabilité dans la personne aimée. La dilection divine est donc un acte de la volonté divine qui a le bien pour effet" (pp. 75-76).

now being canvassed. If we would be consistent, shall we not have to hold that, even before grace comes, somehow the supernatural affects man intrinsically? If this is not affirmed, will not God's decree constituting vision as our end and binding us to strive after it, be drained of all objective reality?<sup>6</sup>

2) Apart from the singularly privileged Mother of God, every man born into this world by natural processes is stained with original sin. The Council of Trent expressly declares that this sin is internal.<sup>7</sup> But how are we to explain that fact? Is it enough to say that original sin is an infringement of an entirely external decree, binding man to vision and a birth in the state of grace? Some may feel that no further explanation of the internal quality of original sin needs to be furnished, beyond insisting that original sin is a privation of grace which is an intrinsic endowment of man. It is indeed true that the whole mystery of original sin pivots around the mystery of grace; beyond the mystery of grace, original sin contains no mystery. Nevertheless, does the fact that original sin is a privation of grace radically explain it precisely as internal? After all, the soul that is stained with original sin has never been adorned with grace. One must go further, it seems. God's external decree, privation of a grace that has never been in man—these do not put the internal property of original sin on a satisfactory metaphysical basis.

Original sin must be described as a violation of, and a challenge to, something abidingly stamped in man's very structure. If indeed original sin is internal to man, it is not enough to say that it hurls defiance at a divine decree that remains in every sense outside man; nor is it enough to say that it is just the lack of some splendor that should be in man's soul. Original sin, as internal to man, means that there is within him a contradiction and a thwarting of some positive and unconditional tendency. Original sin is in-

<sup>6</sup> Prof. Rahner argues thus: "Selbst wenn man eine solche verpflichtende Hingeordnetheit nicht zu den Konstitutiven der menschlichen Natur als solcher rechnet, wer kann beweisen, dass sie dem Menschen nur als schon rechtfertigende Gnade innerlich sein könne . . . ? . . . Muss nicht vielmehr, was Gott über den Menschen verfügt, eo ipso 'terminativ' ein inneres ontologisches Konstitutiv seines konkreten Wesens sein, selbst wenn es nicht ein Konstitutiv seiner 'Natur' ist? Ist nicht eo ipso für eine Ontologie, die begreift, wie das konkrete Wesen des Menschen von Gott restlos abhängt, dessen verpflichtende Verfügung nicht nur ein juridisches Dekret Gottes, sondern genau das, was der Mensch *ist*, ist nicht das Seinsollen, das von Gott ausgeht, das dem Menschen Innerlichste?" (*art. cit.*, p. 142).

<sup>7</sup> *Decretum super peccato originali*, Sessio V, 3: "Si quis hoc Adae peccatum, quod origine unum est et . . . omnibus inest unicuique proprium, vel per humanae naturae vires, vel per aliud remedium asserit tolli, quam per meritum unius mediatoris Domini nostri Jesu Christi . . . A.S." (Denzinger, n. 790).

ternal to man because it sets up a conflict with an intrinsic orientation to the beatific vision. We shall see later that this orientation must itself be conceived as supernatural.

3) Consider the punishment of loss which the damned suffer in hell. Its essence consists in the peremptory banishment of the soul from God, from the glory of the beatific vision. How are you to interpret this fact in a fashion that will do justice to the supreme, excruciating nature of this punishment? It hardly seems enough to say that the soul has failed to reach an end established by an absolutely external decree, and so falls a victim to the punishment of loss. Can this punishment be explained otherwise than by showing that the soul, by the sheer stress and energy of its concretely existing being, pants after the possession of God Himself in the beatific vision? The punishment of loss is so dire and is the supreme punishment possible for man precisely because God has lodged in man's being an intrinsic, unconditional tendency to vision. The capital catastrophe of hell is surely here in the fact that the damned soul has forever lost the God of the beatific vision, and yet, by an energy and dynamism planted in the very marrow of its being, it is forever driven on towards this God.

These three reasons, weighed in their cumulative force, strongly suggest that even prior to grace the supernatural must affect man intrinsically. These three considerations certainly militate against the system of extrinsicalism.

It is not surprising that many theologians have been led to abandon extrinsicalism and to protest against it. Some say that its whole concept of an ontological end is faulty, that it anthropomorphises God. A man who possesses an alarm-clock can use it arbitrarily for different ends; he may use it to tell the time, to wake him up, to embellish his mantelpiece. But God cannot so act. He cannot be the victim of whim or caprice. If He assigns to man the beatific vision as his end, that end, far from remaining something coldly outside man, must penetrate him through and through, must be inscribed in the structure of his being, must be internal to him.<sup>8</sup>

Such considerations have so deeply influenced certain modern thinkers that they have gone on to assert in man an unconditional, positive orientation to vision. And some—by no means all—have ventured further still.

<sup>8</sup> Rahner suggests an interesting consideration against the self-enclosed nature of extrinsicalism: "Wenn der Mensch, so wie er sich von sich aus existentiell erfährt, eigentlich nur reine Natur ist, ist er immer in Gefahr, sich auch tatsächlich nur als blasse Natur zu verstehen und als solche zu handeln. Er kann dann den Ruf Gottes über diesen menschlichen Kreis hinaus nur als Störung empfinden, die ihm etwas—mag dieses in sich auch noch so erhaben sein—aufzwingen will, wozu er nicht gemacht ist..." (*art. cit.*, p. 142/A).

They have identified this orientation with nature's dynamism. They have asserted that this orientation is part and parcel of human nature, that it is natural in the technical sense in which nature is contrasted with the supernatural. The positive, unconditional orientation to vision that they uphold is something woven into the warp and woof of nature.

Against such a radical intrinsicism strong protests have been made. Critics ask how the supernatural can be gratuitous, if it has a counterpart in nature that is part of nature's own equipment. Radical intrinsicists reply that the supernatural cannot but be gratuitous, for it is nothing except the gift of boundless love. The critics' subsumption is that, on this showing, the supernatural has no gratuity beyond that of the natural order; it becomes merely one moment in the gratuity of creation in general.

It seems to me that the attackers of radical intrinsicism score a success here. They show how this form of intrinsicism jeopardizes what must be maintained at all costs—the special gratuity of the supernatural. On the other hand, the intrinsicists allege against extrinsicism charges that cannot be lightly brushed aside.

And so the mind is drawn hither and thither; each position labors under no slight difficulties. In this problem of the supernatural, is there no middle course, where one can shun the Scylla of extrinsicism without being shipwrecked on the Charybdis of radical intrinsicism? Is there no happy position where one can safeguard the special gratuity of the supernatural and be in perfect harmony with *Humani generis*, and at the same time do justice to the arguments of intrinsicists that before grace the supernatural must somehow affect us internally? In other words, is there not some position in which you could reap the fruits of both extrinsicism and radical intrinsicism, whilst discarding their errors?

It seems to me that a felicitous solution can be found simply by asserting that the positive, unconditional orientation to vision is not natural but already supernatural. The golden mean, the steady equatorial line of truth, lies in a moderate intrinsicism. The advantages of this position are manifold.

First, as much as the most unbending extrinsicism, it defends the special gratuity of the supernatural. The supernatural orientation to vision has all the special gratuity of both grace and vision. Moderate intrinsicism, then, squares in every way with *Humani generis*, and with that very important implication of revealed truth, the possibility of man's non-vocation to the beatific vision. Secondly, this theory admits the full force of the arguments against extrinsicism, for it upholds the intrinsicism of the supernatural before grace comes. Thirdly, it avoids the grave weakness of radical in-

trinsicalism, which identifies the positive, unconditional orientation to vision with a natural desire. Moderate intrinsicalism gives full credit to the defenders of extrinsicalism in their view that radical intrinsicalism makes the supernatural owed to nature. Fourthly, this solution we sponsor is not a compromise like the velleity-theory of certain theologians. These theologians regard the supernatural as intrinsic to man, yet they shrink from endangering its special gratuity. So they resort to the notion that man has a velleity for the supernatural. It is a milk-and-water theory that can satisfy no one. Conspicuously it fails to do justice to what an analysis of concrete human nature, carried out in the light of revelation, certainly seems to attest: the positive, unconditional yearning of human nature for a happiness that is personal, that can be satisfied ultimately with nothing less than an immediate, personal union with the Infinite, with nothing less than the beatific vision.

Perhaps, then, the problem of human nature and the supernatural may be solved in this way. In this supernatural order there exists in every human being an unconditional and positive tendency to vision. This tendency, which is a created ontological reality, is the counterpart in each man which answers to God's decree binding men to strive after their exclusive supernatural end. God's call to vision has not indeed left man indifferent. That summons is objectively most real; it has its echo in us. That is why we feel ". . . through all this fleshly dress/Bright shoots of everlastingness." Even before we receive our first gift of internal grace, already the supernatural is intrinsic to us. But—and this must never be forgotten—it is intrinsic to us through an element that is itself not natural but supernatural. Indeed we may ask, how could the supernatural be intrinsic to us through some element that is only natural? When radical intrinsicalists affirm that the supernatural is intrinsic by a natural desire, surely they are guilty of a big mistake. If before grace comes to me the supernatural has already sunk its roots into me, those roots must be homogeneous with vision itself. They must belong to the order of vision, not to the order of human nature as contrasted with the supernatural.

From the nature of the obediencial potency it is quite clear that the positive, unconditional orientation of which we speak cannot be identified with the obediencial potency.<sup>9</sup> The obediencial potency is simply identical with

<sup>9</sup> This obediencial potency is not something purely negative, a bare non-repugnance of notes. It is not just a figment of the mind, an airy and insubstantial *ens rationis*. On the other hand, an obediencial potency must not be conceived too positively, or better, as too positively distinct from the spiritual nature. For it is not a reality tacked on to human nature as an appendage. Nor is it to be confused with the ordinary exigent potencies, active or passive, that belong to human nature. For these manifold active and

nature as personal and spiritual; its reality is the tremendous reality of spiritual nature. But this orientation to vision is in no sense to be identified with nature; it builds on nature, but it is quite different from it. It is entitatively supernatural.

May we in any sense identify this positive, unconditional orientation towards vision with the celebrated natural desire of the beatific vision? Certainly not, if "natural" is taken in its technical Scholastic sense. If, however, "natural" is understood in a sense that is pre-Scholastic and canonized by insertion in official documents, we may identify the orientation on vision with the natural desire.<sup>10</sup> For in this sense "natural" means what is found with nature from the start, what is given with nature, what is transmitted with nature or meant to be transmitted with nature. In this sense Adam's preternatural and supernatural gifts are rightly styled "natural." In this sense, too, every man in this actual supernatural order has right from the start an unconditional orientation to the beatific vision, that is *natural*. But if we are using Scholastic terminology, then we must say that the positive tendency towards vision that is in us is strictly supernatural and clearly demonstrates to us a vivid ontological reality resounding through every man that comes into this world.

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passive potencies demand their connatural fulfillment. In no sense does the obediencial potency demand the supernatural. What in fact is it? It consists precisely in that spiritual, personal nature as such. It enjoys all the dynamic reality of the nature as spiritual and as open to the infinite, to the infinite God in Himself. The obediencial potency is such a spiritual, personal nature insofar as its real notes are not repugnant to the notes of the supernatural. An obediencial potency means that certain well-defined natures can be the subjects in which the supernatural can lodge itself.

<sup>10</sup> St. Thomas says of Adam's supernatural endowments: "Quod quidem donum quodammodo fuit *naturale*: non quasi ex principiis naturae causatum, sed quia sic fuit homini datum ut simul cum natura propagaretur" (*Contra gentiles*, IV, 52). Note the following words of St. Leo the Great, from one of his stately sermons: "Si fideliter, dilectissimi, atque sapienter creationis nostrae intelligamus exordium, inveniemus hominem ideo ad imaginem Dei conditum ut imitator esset sui auctoris, et hanc esse *naturalem* nostri generis dignitatem, si in nobis quasi in quodam speculo divinae benignitatis forma resplendeat. Ad quam utique nos quotidie reparat gratia Salvatoris, dum quod cecidit in Adam primo, erigitur in secundo . . ." (*Serm.*, XII, 1 [*PL*, LIV, 168]).