

NOTES

THE NEGLECTED DIMENSION: GRACE IN INTERPERSONAL CONTEXT

Since discussion of grace has so often been cast in terms of the relationship (or chasm) between nature and grace, this rubric might serve as a convenient departure for further reflections on grace. Nature in this context covers the realm of creation, with man at its summit. In contrast to past views, we appreciate man's ability to control and dominate nature.¹ Further, since most of our nation consists of city dwellers, "mother nature" is a secondary experience, the primary one being the world of technology, whose dynamism is change.² So rapid is the succession of technological change to which we are subject that some see as one of our sociological tasks that of training people to view the future as a way of life.³

We are beginning, as a recent attempt to describe modern experience put it, to move into the world of hyphens, working toward a theory of man/world, just as our contemporary physics has expressed the equivalence of mass and energy, and space/time, and as psychology has come up with the mind/body concept. We may well come to see that there is no meaningful distinction between the world and man except as thinking makes it so.⁴

Though he phrased it in a fashion that now seems a trifle dated, John Dewey captured an equivalent insight when he wrote:

We can recognize that all conduct is *interaction* between elements of human nature and environment, natural and social. . . . The idea persists that there is something materialistic about natural science and that morals are degraded by having anything to do with material things. If a sect should arise proclaiming that men ought to purify their lungs completely before they ever drew a breath it ought to win many adherents from professed moralists. For the neglect of sciences that deal specifically with facts of the natural and social environment leads to a side-tracking of moral forces into an unreal privacy of an unreal self. . . . The

¹ See Lynn White, Jr., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," *Science* 155 (Mar. 10, 1967) 1203-1207.

² "It need scarcely be said that scientific and technological change is the heart of the story of the postwar United States" (John Brooks, "The Anatomy of Change 1939/1966," *Horizon* 8, 4 [Autumn, 1966] 48).

³ See Alvin Toffler, "The Future as a Way of Life," *Horizon* 7, 3 (Summer, 1965) 108-15.

⁴ *Kaiser Aluminium News* 24, 6 (1966) 12. This and previous special issues on man and the future are now available in book form: Don Fabun, ed., *Dynamics of Change* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1967).

intelligent acknowledgment of the continuity of nature, man and society will alone secure a growth of morals. . . .⁵

This citation brings to the fore another aspect of man which is relevant to rethinking the doctrine of grace: the social aspect of man, the fundamental orientation of the person towards others.⁶ It is this datum of human experience which is, I believe, particularly slighted in past discussion of grace and must find place in new thought about it. As Joseph Sittler observed:

The man who is presupposed in Augustine's schema [of nature and grace] does not exist. Actual man is who he *is*, partly and very deeply because he is *where* he is; and where he is is precisely in the community of and in communion with his fellow man. So profound and pervasive and formative of man's self-hood is this existence with the fellow man in communion that any doctrine of grace which would suppose modern man addressable with power by any teaching about God's grace which ignores this fact is a faulty doctrine.⁷

In the thought categories employed by past Catholic theology, this crucial aspect of man was classified as "relation," which, in Eulalio Baltazar's view, was "the most ignored and least respected category. It is labelled *debilissimum* [*sic*] *ens*, that is, the weakest of beings, the borderline between being and non-being. According to this view, essential dependence on another is loss of identity; individuation is freedom from essential dependence. . . . Furthermore, to proclaim man's essential relatedness to God as Absolute Thou would be tantamount to pantheism." As a *coup de grâce* he adds that there seems to be "an inherent contradiction in scholastic theology in accepting, on the one hand, that relation is the weakest of categories, as its philosophy points out, and, on the other, in using this category to portray the nature of the Trinity as subsistent relations."⁸ Though the accuracy of

⁵ John Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct* (New York, 1930) pp. 10 and 13. Dewey's observations might in part be updated by allusion to Marshall McLuhan's thesis that "the world of public interaction has the same inclusive scope of integral interplay that has hitherto characterized only our private nervous systems. That is because electricity is organic in character and confirms the organic social bond by its technological use. . . . The simultaneity of electric communication, also characteristic of our nervous system, makes each of us present and accessible to every other person in the world. To a large degree our co-presence everywhere at once in the electric age is a fact of passive, rather than active, experience" (*Understanding Media* [New York, 1966] pp. 248-49).

⁶ A recent effective handling of the theme is Robert O. Johann's *Building the Human* (New York, 1968) esp. pp. 82-84.

⁷ "Nature and Grace: Reflections on an Old Rubric," *Dialog* 3 (1964) 254.

⁸ Eulalio R. Baltazar, *Teilhard and the Supernatural* (Baltimore, 1966) p. 126 (text and n. 26).

Baltazar's estimate of past theology leaves much to be desired,⁹ it is probably true that as that tradition was delivered to many students, "relation," especially as it might apply to grace, was slighted. However, it is also worth recall that theology grows out of reflection upon actual human experience in the world. If the modern imagination is captivated by the experience of change, futurity, and the import of interpersonal bonds, it is the *modern* theologian's task to capitalize on the richness of these available experiences in speaking of the ways of God with man.

One who attempts to do this with the doctrine of grace must acknowledge, at least in passing, his debt to such significant theologians as Henri de Lubac and Karl Rahner. De Lubac's painstaking scholarship lent new vigor to reflection about grace by revealing that scholasticism at its best did not view man in any other economy than the present one for which God has designated a supernatural end, and that man has an innate desire to see God.¹⁰

In lieu of the privatively interpreted formula *potentia obedientialis* customarily used in discussing grace, Rahner employed the Heideggerian phrase "supernatural existential" to describe man's radical orientation to see God, a result of a free, revealed decree on God's part.¹¹ A still more fruitful perspective, which skirts this awkward phrase, is Rahner's viewing grace in terms of man's capacity to transcend himself. To understand the phenomenon of man's becoming, "the notion of an *active self-transcendence* (in which the 'self' and the 'transcendence' are to be taken equally seriously) is a necessary notion in our thought," and "this notion of self-transcendence includes also transcendence into what is substantially new, i.e. the leap to a higher *nature*. To exclude the latter would mean emptying the notion of self-transcendence of its content. . . . Man is 'by nature' and by his very being the possibility of transcendence become conscious of itself—the self-conscious reference to the absolute and the knowledge about the infinite possibility. . . . The Christian revelation tells us that all men are offered this self-transcendence as a real possibility of their individual existence, one to which they can close themselves only by guilt."¹²

⁹ Cf. Henri de Lubac, *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, tr. Rosemary Sheed (New York, 1967) pp. 82, 228 n. 30, and *passim*. See also the review of Baltazar's book by Robert L. Faricy in *THEOLOGICAL STUDIES* 28 (1967) 595–96.

¹⁰ See *Le surnaturel* (Paris, 1946) and *Le mystère du surnaturel* (Paris, 1965), the translation of which is cited in the previous note.

¹¹ See *Theological Investigations* 1 (Baltimore, 1961) 297 ff.; Gerald A. McCool, "The Philosophy of the Human Person in Karl Rahner's Theology," *THEOLOGICAL STUDIES* 22 (1961) 537–62; Carl J. Peter, "The Position of Karl Rahner Regarding the Supernatural: A Comparative Study of *Nature and Grace*," *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 20 (1965) 81–94.

¹² *Theological Investigations* 5 (Baltimore, 1966) 165 and 179.

As Rahner's last sentence indicates, recourse to the Scriptures is inevitable if one is to appreciate the newness to which God beckons man. Schillebeeckx observes:

This is all the more important because it is remarkable how Christians of today, living, as they believe, in an age of biblical renewal, seem to listen less seriously and less obediently than in "unbiblical" times to God's Word. . . . Indeed, they appear to confine their interest solely to man's experience of his own existence. But in my opinion this self-interpretation, this examination of our own human experience, only deserves to be called truly biblical and Christian when it is conducted in the light of the revelation of God's Word. . . . Outside this sphere the threat of danger is always present, either from biblicism or from some kind of self-interpretation which is not faith, but self-justification.¹³

Heeding this reminder, as well as that of Walter Ong on the necessity of theology in a post-Darwinian world to view man in the full perspectives of time and space in which he exists and has evolved in the cosmos,¹⁴ I would like to recall some scriptural patterns concerning man as receiver of God's gift.

The God in whom we believe is creative in the fullest sense and evocatively involved in human history. For if the history of salvation is not a superimposition upon the general history of mankind, neither is it the mere result of the human forces that are at work in this history. "For, over and above man's free activity, there is also the special activity of God Himself and in particular the fact that God gives ever new opportunities to man's free initiatives."¹⁵ Wilson C. McWilliams sees the central point of sacred history "that the ordinary is destined for disaster. At best, the ordinary results in a meaningless cycle of events, permanent and unchanging."¹⁶ Especially in everyday experience, man seems only capable of the ordinary, or at most of widening the sphere of the ordinary. Routine easily shrinks the scope of his desiring. Ultimately, only God's salvific activity with its privileged points of contact, which to a certain extent are independent of man's level of achievement, can proffer new horizons. "That activity is displayed in ever new initiatives even when the preceding situation is not a preparation for it; God exalts the lowly. . . . (God) operates even when there is an obstacle in the way; He forgives sinners. . . ."¹⁷ and loves surprise. It is possible to view human history with respect to salvation as a series of times,

¹³ *Marriage: Human Reality and Saving Mystery* (New York, 1965) p. 10.

¹⁴ *Darwin's Vision and Christian Perspectives* (New York, 1960) p. 146.

¹⁵ Peter Schoonenberg, *God's World in the Making* (Pittsburgh, 1964) p. 72.

¹⁶ "On Time and History," *Yale Review* 56 (1966) 95.

¹⁷ Schoonenberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 72-73.

all privileged with the nearness of God, but varied in the clarity of His presence.

There was a time when a history of salvation was at work, though we do not perceive any signs of it, a time when God gave Himself to man, but during which no pen recorded whether man responded yes or no.

There was a time when agricultural civilizations arose and the history of salvation began to express itself in signs, a time when the specialization of human activity brought with it a form of worship as a proclamation and celebration of God's action toward man and the expression of man's answer. It was a time when man saw God in the seasons, in rain, fire, and fertility, a time when he built temples and told of God as best he could, handing on in tales that grew in transmission, traditions that came to be considered sacred.¹⁸ However mixed with error these might be, the dialogue with God took on form in the fabric of human activity. "Everything bears the mark of man's relation to God, although this very relationship is provisionally an inextricable mixture of his acceptance and refusal of God's offer of salvation."¹⁹ There was a time when God decisively showed His initiative, choosing a pastoral people as His own, wooing them with the revelation of Himself as true and personal and one. The record of their vacillating response seems to verify Kierkegaard's terrifying observation: "Those whom God blesses, He curses." To the people He had made His own, His loving hand grew heavy; their faith gave way to fickleness, their trust to visions of self-sufficiency. They felt then the jealousy of God's love and its consuming quality, brooking no cheap competitors. In the course of its checkered history of yes and no, Israel's faith, purified and transformed, hovered on the threshold of still another time, time grown to fulness, when God took flesh, making everything different, everything new. In Isak Dinesen's brilliant phrase, "God loves a *da capo*."

¹⁸ "Reality is different from, and more than, the totality of facts and events, which, anyhow, is unascertainable. Who says what is—'*legei ta eonta*'—always tells a story, and in this story the particular facts lose their contingency and acquire some humanly comprehensible meaning. It is perfectly true that 'all sorrows can be borne if you put them into a story or tell a story about them,' in the words of Isak Dinesen, who not only was one of the great storytellers of our time but also—and she was almost unique in this respect—knew what she was doing. She could have added that joy and bliss, too, become bearable and meaningful for men only when men can talk about them and tell them as a story. . . . The political function of the storyteller—historian or novelist—is to teach acceptance of things as they are. Out of this acceptance, which can also be called truthfulness, arises the faculty of judgment—that, again in Isak Dinesen's words, 'at the end we shall be privileged to view, and review, it—and that is what is named the day of judgment' (Hannah Arendt, "Reflections: Truth and Politics," *New Yorker* 43 [Feb. 25, 1967] 84 and 86).

¹⁹ Schoenberg, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

Ever since, history has as its one and only content the break-through of the fulness that Christ brought and the actualization of this newness in the world and in our whole human existence.²⁰

What the history of salvation reveals, then, is that God is ever near to man. Never exclusively natural in relation to God, man was and is either positively or negatively directed toward God in supernatural fashion. In Jesus Christ, "the fact is once for all established that God does not exist without man." This "is the mystery in which He meets us in the existence of Jesus Christ. He wants in His freedom actually not to be without man but *with* him and in the same freedom not against him but *for* him, and that apart from or even counter to what man deserves."²¹

"If man listens to God," Guardini writes, "an association of a novel sort comes into being."²² If man listens—strives for awareness ("Let him who has ears to hear . . .")—this is a key which the Synoptic writers (who hardly ever use the term "grace") associate with teaching concerning the kingdom of God. The import of this teaching is admirably conveyed in the Marcan pericope concerning Jesus blessing children which enshrines the saying "Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it" (Mk 10:15). Paradoxically, what we are to strive to understand is that not striving but receptivity is primary, that "commerce" with God cannot be forced, domineered by human doing, no more than the maturation of loving mutuality in human relationships. The whole process is a giving and a receiving one. "The very giving of ourselves to God is a receiving of him, and the very receiving of him is already a giving of ourselves. There is no other way of receiving him except by giving ourselves to him; and there is no other way of giving ourselves to him except by receiving him."²³

Not only does the Marcan saying point to receptivity as requisite, but that receptivity is the point of issuance into a kingdom. While this spatial metaphor is now *passé*, it retains the suggestion of community, a concomitant realization that comes from harkening to the God who is near.²⁴ The

²⁰ "For rational beings to see or re-cognize their experience in a new material form is an unbought grace of life" (McLuhan, *op. cit.*, p. 211).

²¹ Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God* (Richmond, Va., 1966) p. 50.

²² *Freedom, Grace and Destiny* (Logos paper ed.; Chicago, 1965) p. 126.

²³ John Burnaby, quoting D. M. Baillie, in "Christian Prayer," *Soundings: Essays Concerning Christian Understanding*, ed. A. R. Vidler (Cambridge, Eng., 1966) p. 237.

²⁴ "Man is this plural and collective unity in which the unity of destination and the difference of destinies are to be understood through each other. . . . That which I *am to be* is denied in the feeling that it was not necessary that I be such as I am, nor even not to have been. . . . The brute fact of existing in such a way, here and now, when it is measured

communitarian aspect of the kingdom is admirably made in Mt 18, where the kingdom sayings are used as descriptive of the Church. "To Matthew, the Church is above all a society of unlimited forgiveness of sins—the forgiveness which we have been granted by God must lead us to grant the same full and free forgiveness to our fellows."²⁵ This would be impossible had not the believer experienced God's graciousness in his personal regard, and it is equally difficult to think of a recipient of redemption failing to extend that beneficence to his fellows. As Paul Tournier remarks, "I cannot be to a patient a messenger of divine grace without having benefited from it myself."²⁶ Personal experience of God's saving ways is nothing if not proleptic of our helping others achieve wholeness. Which is what grace does, as a phrase from Gregory of Nyssa has it: it transforms what is mortal and shapeless about us.²⁷ Thus transformed, each person has the vocation to be for every other the vehicle of a truly creative love—indeed, of the Creator's love, in which and by which alone we all live and move and are.²⁸ "What men lose when they become as free as gods is precisely that sense of being chosen, which encourages them, in their gratitude, to take their subsequent choices seriously. Put in another way, this means: Freedom does not exist without responsibility"²⁹ toward others. What these reflections lead to is that grace is relational, a relation between persons, and that in the fullest sense it is creative of community. What we dare to say is "our," not "my," Father. To appreciate that grace is not a thing is healthy insight, but to confine it to the polarities of God and me is as untrue to the reality of grace as reifying it.

against the demand for totality, emerges as existence that I do not produce, that I do not posit" (Paul Ricoeur, *Fallible Man* [Chicago, 1965] pp. 212–13).—Hopefully, references to the nearness of God in this essay will not be taken as instances of the writer's ignorance of death-of-God literature. Rather, he shares Dag Hammarskjöld's conviction that "God does not die on the day when we cease to believe in a personal deity, but we die on the day when our lives cease to be illumined by the steady radiance, renewed daily, of a wonder, the source of which is beyond all reason" (*Markings*, tr. Leif Sjöberg and W. H. Auden [New York, 1965] p. 56).

²⁵ F. W. Beare, *The Earliest Records of Jesus* (New York, 1962) p. 148.

²⁶ *Guilt and Grace* (New York, 1962) p. 177.

²⁷ Quoted by Jaroslav Pelikan in his contribution to *The Scope of Grace*, ed. Philip J. Hefner (Philadelphia, 1964) p. 96.

²⁸ Johann, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

²⁹ The lines quoted, which are Philip Rieff's, are preceded by these equally pertinent insights: "There is no feeling more desperate than that of being free to choose, and yet without the specific compulsion of being chosen. After all, one does not really choose; one is chosen. This is one way of stating the difference between gods and men. Gods choose; men are chosen" (*The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith after Freud* [New York, 1966] p. 93).

In *Man's Nature and His Communities*,³⁰ Reinhold Niebuhr relates with painful clarity the tragic results in Christian life that derive from individualistic conceptions of grace.

Orthodox Christianity partially veiled what it sought to clarify by an undue emphasis on the distinction between "saving grace" and "common grace." The former meant an ultimate redemption from self-regard by the infusion, sacramental or evangelical or experiential, of divine grace into the dynamics of human selfhood. This distinction implied the superiority of conscious striving for grace over unconscious forms of it. Thus grace mediated through the security of parental affection, or the self-forgetfulness prompted by a crisis or the pull of the exercise of creative capacities or of responsibilities and loyalties to a cause greater than the self, all of which are the daily experiences of mankind, are minimized in favor of a "saving grace" mediated by the church and consciously sought by the believer.³¹

He admits that a commitment to God, or to God in Christ, is a necessary aspect of grace, a commitment more ultimate than the conflicting web of human loyalties, but laments the fact that these latter were ignored in favor of an idolatrous parochial loyalty. What Niebuhr would urge us to remember is

that the forces which draw the self from its undue self-concern are usually forces of "common grace" in the sense that they represent all forms of social security or responsibility or pressure which prompt the self to bethink itself of its social essence and to realize itself by not trying too desperately for self-realization. . . . These complexities also reveal that the distinction between saving and common grace has been too much emphasized by the religious communities. This emphasis has obscured the true situation of the human self, has made for religious self-righteousness, for a meticulous rather than generous moral ethos. . . .³²

Though Niebuhr's grace terminology differs from that usually employed in the Catholic tradition, the point remains that grace cannot be conceived individualistically, as a static quality in which the believer basks instead of a dynamism which proves itself in concern for others. If grace means essentially God's gift of Himself to man, if the divine nature manifests itself in no other way than through human nature, if the logical consequence of the Incarnation is that man is for man the way to God, then grace can be nothing else than communal in its drive. This insight is lost whenever aspects of the usual teaching about grace are offered as a kind of cocoon of private solace instead of a mission to brotherly care. For example, tradi-

³⁰ New York, 1965.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 118-19.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 125.

tionally listed as an effect of grace is divine adoption: the graced Christian is made a brother of Jesus Christ.³³ Interpreted individually, the fact that grace makes one a brother of Christ evacuates the fact of its deepest meaning. To take the Pauline themes regarding the co-sonship of the Christian with Christ as a point of support in the face of life's difficulties, or to stir up hope for a blissful future, is to miss Paul's point: the vocation of the Christian is to be Jesus all over again.³⁴ Throughout the Bible, election is never indicative of private privilege, but of a call to aid others; "the chosen is always chosen for the sake of the one not chosen."³⁵ The reality of the risen Christ is demonstrated in the Christian's power to love others. "A true *parousia* of Christ takes place wherever a man recognizes and affirms the claim on his love that goes out from a fellow man in need."³⁶ Hence, co-sonship with Jesus is indubitably an effect of grace, but if one interprets that as a private trophy, he has reason to believe he lacks the privilege in which he takes pride. The energies of the Resurrection cannot be kept locked in a human heart.

Not only the Scriptures, but constants in the best of scholastic thought concerning grace, support the communitarian tendency of grace. In the thought of the *Summa Alexandri* and St. Bonaventure, grace was for use (*uti*), not enjoyment (*frui*). When Bonaventure employed *habitus* as descriptive of grace, it signified possession of an action guiding us toward God, in the sense of having been set free from ourselves by an act of love, caused in us by God. This insight is especially valuable for its suggestion that grace is best seen in the context of love, and love as accountable by the nearness of God to man. For Thomas, the gifts of the Spirit were instruments for use, not medals. As he used the term *habitus*, it did not signify *state* of grace, but a dynamic reality, God-given knowledge and love (awareness, I would like to say) poised for action. And to talk of increase of grace meant simply that one was governed more by the Spirit. These effects were the result of the continual presence and activity of God—the action continuous and the Giver always more important than the gift.³⁷

Upon the basis of the scholastics' dynamic, existential conception of

³³ See, e.g., F. Cuttaz, *Our Life of Grace* (Notre Dame, 1961) pp. 65 ff. and 86 ff.

³⁴ See Barnabas Ahern, *New Horizons* (Notre Dame, 1965) p. 94 and *passim*.

³⁵ Joseph Ratzinger, *The Open Circle: The Meaning of Christian Brotherhood* (New York, 1966) p. 112.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

³⁷ The tangential references to scholastic thought on grace are drawn from chap. 3 of C. Moeller and G. Philips, *The Theology of Grace* (London, 1961) pp. 24–29.

grace, recent writers, such as Juan Alfaro,³⁸ have appreciated the fact that grace can be meaningfully discussed in personalistic terms of an I-Thou relationship. What I see as the difficulty here, however, is that though a modern personalistic terminology is exploited, the polarities bounding the discussion remain God and *an* individual, so that it is still possible to ignore the social character of grace even while employing more relevant language. Grace so discussed is still susceptible of misunderstanding and distortion unless the interrelational structure which is constitutive of human persons is sufficiently emphasized. As Rahner remarks:

Human beings love other human beings before they come face to face with their task, as Christians, of integrating this love, positively, into their life as Christians; nor are they likely, except in the rarest cases, to begin loving anyone in the first place because they love God and as an actualization of that love. The world and grace are both given initially, in their original plurality, before we are confronted with the task of realizing their hidden and as yet unconsummated unity.³⁹

Hence, a modern discussion of grace can begin from what is true of human persons: we need others to be ourselves. At its deepest, this means we need to be loved and to love others if personhood is to be achieved. Seeing that persons are so structured that each is essentially dependent on what can only be gratuitously given by another provides a valuable clue for developing the doctrine of grace as effective of human community. In the third section of Eulalio Baltazar's book (pp. 213 ff.) this aspect of the person is employed to show how, before God, the person is constituted for grace and yet grace remains freely given, just as love between persons is a fundamental need and yet a gift that can only be bestowed in freedom. Were this approach used to talk of grace, more might appreciate Caesar's remarks in Thornton Wilder's *The Ides of March*: "Lucretius may be right and our jesting world wrong. I seem to have known all my life, but to have refused to acknowledge that all, all love is one, and that the very mind with which I ask these questions is awakened, sustained and instructed only by love."⁴⁰

The pressures of modern technological society in which men are herded into cities and where privacy is a rare commodity do not necessarily defeat the practicality of discussing grace in the context of love. Rather, they can serve to validate the point that only reliance on the Self who is the correla-

³⁸ "Person and Grace," *Theology Digest* 14, 1 (Spring, 1966) 3-7.

³⁹ *The Christian Commitment* (New York, 1963) pp. 69-70.

⁴⁰ Quoted in Hermine I. Popper, "The Universe of Thornton Wilder," *Harper's Magazine* 230 (June, 1965) 81.

tive of all human selves can effectively create community. Only He can provide the stable source of strength for our aspirations toward unity, and the clarifying vision of others as His gift to us and not annihilating threats. Each of us lives on the grace of others and all by the grace of the Absolute Other. St. Thomas called sanctifying grace *gratia fraterna*, grace that creates brotherhood,⁴¹ which is a telling way of pointing up how much we need it, how much we lack it, and how wonderful a reality it is.

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⁴¹ E. Schillebeeckx, *The Church and Mankind* (New York, 1965) p. 71.