

—the living, jumping, writhing catch of so many great non-Catholic biblical scholars. And as their sense of security within the living Word of God grows so will they be able to push forward fearlessly in their work of unification. In the present issue of *THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT* there is barely suggested the foundation of that unification—the Spirit in the Church, the Eucharistic, living Symbol of the Word, where this Word is both spoken to the mind and fed to the will—such is our secure foundation.

Finally a word should be said about the magnificent production of this Commentary which in a few weeks has outrun its first printing of 5,000 copies. That success is due, after the brilliant work of editors and authors, to the non-Catholic firm of Nelson who have made it typographically so attractive. The smallish type is yet clear to read; the binding and general presentation are not drab or undistinguished as so much similar work has been in the past. There is here in fact a unification in production between editors, authors, printers, binders and publishers.



GRACE IS COMMON

ALAN C. CLARK

IT is a strange fact of history that the Church does not escape some loss when she has to engage in doctrinal controversy. So much has been gained, such steps forward in the clarification of doctrine made, that it is only after a period of years that the suspicion grows that the whole truth has not yet been said. Yet closer analysis of the nature of 'controversial theology' shows how inevitable this must be. From the first the Catholic protagonist suffers the disadvantage of being forced to fight on ground chosen by his adversary. If he is able, he will seize his opponent's weapons and turn them against their owner. But what has happened? He is left victorious in a field not of his own choosing and with weapons not of his own making, effective though they were in the historical context of the controversy. Further, the controversies, however much they bear on eternal truths,

are 'of a period' and the terms of reference belong to that period. The exigencies of the moment demand that the Catholic mind be concentrated on the disputed points, and to give an overall picture of the doctrine becomes less important. It is only when the controversy ceases to stir and agitate apologists that the Church has the opportunity of pointing to aspects of the overall doctrine which are equally necessary for its understanding.

Now the theology of grace suffered severely from these limitations. It was the Reformers who chose the ground of attack, proclaiming the utter degeneracy of fallen man and making his justification a juridic fiction, meanwhile reducing efficacious grace to an irresistible force applied to an impotent, corrupt object. The terms and limits of the debate were thereby fixed. The Council of Trent, expounding the deposit of faith, was moved to stress the *reality* of justification for each individual man, to show that *he* was now really a child of God, not merely the same depraved child of sin whose inevitable sinning God decides to overlook. The answers, it is clear, are to Luther's questions: how am I justified? What does *my* redemption mean? How does grace work in *me*? It is the individual man vis-à-vis his Judge which is under theological scrutiny. Trent is answering the great cry of the Christian: what must I be if I am to achieve my eternal destiny?

In the face of the dire attack of the Protestant Reform, the individual Christian received at the Council of Trent the solemn dogmatic declaration of his supernatural birth-right. Nothing had been left to chance by the Fathers of the Council, for they sensed that the genuine rebirth of the Christian by baptism must be defended at all costs against the disruptive, nominalist attack of Luther. In the heavy effort, successful though it was, to consolidate this traditional doctrine, other aspects of the reality of grace had to be left aside: there was at the Council an atmosphere of emergency. It was not to be expected, therefore, that the controversialists and the preachers would escape the self-imposed limitations of conciliar doctrine. They were after all as much children of their time as their opponents. They were as deeply inheritors of the Renaissance obsession for individual

values as were Lutheran or Calvinist. What they said cannot be gainsaid, especially as so much of it is no more than a re-statement of some of the most treasured doctrines of the faith. Nor can one cavil at the fact that they concentrated on these at the expense perhaps of other that now appear to us as more precious: they would have been mediocre controversialists had they not done so. But that their angle of vision should shape all theology since their time, since the age of the Counter Reformation—is this to be desired?

It would be a bad underestimate of the weight of the attack at the Reformation if we restricted it to the dispute over the nature of the individual's justification and its consequences. A serious onslaught was made on the very fabric of church order and government. Luther grouped his *individual* Christians together as the true 'invisible Church' at war with the false visible Church of Rome. The great, hierarchic power of the Catholic Church with its far-reaching visible authority, firmly established by Innocent III, was now being seriously challenged and that challenge demanded an immediate answer. All controversy therefore bent towards establishing anew these widespread claims, and the language in which those claims were defended was predominantly the language of jurists. The most effective counter in fact was to 'juridicise' the Church of Christ, to set forth the bonds that bound all its 'units' together under a supreme authority established by Christ. This defence was skilful and adequate, and the Church has lived to see the day when Protestantism, by an inevitable inner logic, has split asunder into a multitude of sects and groupings, each with its own tenets and each of these tenets valid on the criterion of private judgment. The Church indeed was left undefeated, but its theologians had got so used to their equipment that they were content, it would seem, to allow themselves to be preoccupied with polishing anew weapons they had used in a controversy that was now no longer an issue of the day.

It cannot be forgotten, however, that the preoccupations of theologians have an extensive influence on the way in which the doctrine of the Church is emphasised in pulpit or confessional. In fact, the spirituality of the Church takes

definite shape and form from that emphasis. Not that the truth is not preserved intact: but the integrity of the truth does not prevent over-emphasis in one direction which in turn forms a certain 'mind' in the Church. Let us face the fact that in much Catholic theology the idea of the Christian is synonymous with the idea of the *individual* Christian, and Christian life identified with the life of the *individual* Christian. We will examine the implications of such an attitude in a few moments. But here it is well to note that even the pastor of souls, being responsible before God for each and every one under his care, tends to *think* of their salvation as so many independent salvations. As so often happens, Catholic practice has transcended theory, and the priest who sees his people as a community in need of being energised by real charity if they are to progress in grace, is not in fact the exception. The existence of the missions, the great sense of the need for reparation among the faithful, the constant self-sacrifice shown in many works of mercy and charity: all these facts give the lie to any suggestion that the Church has ever lost the perception of the living unity of her members one with another. Even the busy Fathers of the Council of Trent did not fail to give the outline of the dignity of the just man in terms of his participation in the divine life along with his fellows. But the *individualistic* attitude still remains with us, and sometimes even shows signs of hardening rather than yielding. This is understandable in face of the fact that the 'collective' idea has been given a distorted presentation by avowed enemies of the Church. That is true but does not explain fully why there is not nearly enough participation by the faithful in the liturgical life of the Church, and ignorance of the Scriptures still remains one of our besetting sins. Often enough the reaction to attempts to introduce 'reforms' in any of these directions is lukewarm, even hostile. But the time has surely come for us to re-examine our position in all fields but especially in the theological field, and to ask ourselves whether the theology of grace does not need some new research.

It is time then to make some simple, undisguised assertions, some of which may be regarded as obvious, others perhaps as unwarranted inferences from the facts. The first

fact has already been stated in the foregoing paragraphs: that there still exists a strong attitude of mind that sees salvation as a purely private responsibility. That attitude, we assert, has as its part cause at least an unbalanced presentation of the doctrine of grace and the supernatural life which arises from the uncritical assumption that answering the questions put by the Protestant Reform about *my* salvation yielded an integral doctrine of grace. The wrong inference has been made that these questions indicate the principal issue for the Christian: that he must from the time of his baptism busy himself with the isolated problem of his own salvation. But such a preoccupation, if I put the matter personally, means that I have forgotten who is this 'me' I am planning for. After all, I can hardly have a right attitude of mind until I am quite sure what I am now in the new dispensation. The blunt truth, paradox though it may first appear, is that, taken on my own and in isolation, I do not really count because I simply am not there to count! For that is not the way I have been re-made in the grace of God. In the hypothetical order of nature it may make sense to think in individualistic terms: but in the real order of grace it is quite honestly nonsense. God loves me as I really am, not as I may think I am. God loves me in fact as a member of Christ along with all his other disciples. My whole worth is that I am a small shoot on a very great Vine which is Christ: there are thousands of other branches, big and small, on that Vine. The idea, then, that my own isolated needs are important independently of the all-round growth of the Vine is not God's idea. Indeed, my own salvation could never be something merely individual and private, for it is the heart of Christ's message that outside the Vine there is no salvation. The conclusion therefore is that my salvation cannot be discussed save in terms of that Vine: it is irrevocably bound up with the salvation of other men.

The Christian angle of vision can never accept such a person as an isolated unit in the community of grace. We have been too long passive in the face of the liberal and purely ethical philosophy of the value of the isolated person. It is philosophically valid to consider such a conception as long as we do not forget that it remains an 'abstraction'.

We can indeed, and we do, examine the inter-relations of these 'abstractions', their rights and duties and so forth, in that hypothetical world of reason. But such considerations have never been the mainspring of Christian thinking: the Gospels hold no brief for such speculations. It comes to this, that there will not be any really progressive Christian thinking until the subject of that thought is man as he really is: in the order of grace, not nature. The whole force of theological discussion on the necessity of grace lies in the fact that without grace it is impossible for fallen man to live *humanly*. A sinner obviously does not cease to be a man, but he does cease to be the man whom God envisaged when he made him to his own image and likeness. The revelation given us by Christ presents us with the mystery of our re-making in grace, what we *are* now that Christ has redeemed us. We are free to contract out of God's supernatural destiny for us: but we will never see our way to living that supernatural destiny unless we accept ourselves as we really are.

It is not to be denied that the re-assessment of ourselves, and the need for all Christian thinking to take as its terms of reference the redeemed world of grace which breaks down the frontiers of the 'natural' does not give rise to a thousand doubts and queries. What, for example, of personal merit? Of personal guilt? Of personal sanctification? These also are specifically Christian ideas. How are they to be reconciled with these others we are elevating to a supreme place in Christian thought? We admit the force of such objections but hold firmly to the need for pursuing our central idea before they can be satisfactorily answered.

If it is true that my status in the world of grace, the real world in which I live, is not that of an isolated Christian but a member of Christ, then God will see me as this when he dispenses his grace. When therefore he gives me grace, he is not just thinking of me or loving me for my own sake. I am indeed of immense worth in his sight, for I was redeemed by the precious blood of his Son; but my worth remains always that of a member of the Mystical Body of his Son. So, in dispensing grace, he is looking at the whole living Body. He is thinking of all those whom under the power of that grace I shall meet who need the warmth and

strength of divine love. He is providing for his poor, his sick, for those in need of comfort and sound advice, for children, for experts, and for those burdened with heavy responsibilities. He cannot go against his own handiwork and consider me apart from his other cherished and dearly loved sons. I am what I am in his sight—a member among members: never at any moment in thought, word, deed, or desire can I be anything else.

The world of grace, however, is the world of freedom. We are living members one of another, free to welcome divine love, able unfortunately to reject it. It has always been so. Though God looks through and beyond me when he enlightens my mind and strengthens my heart, he also asks me freely to accept this mission. In fact, in so far as I freely share in the redemption of the world, my personal dignity is far more vindicated than it would have been in a 'private' economy of salvation. I am working with God, not just being fashioned by God. Questions of personal merit and guilt receive therefore far greater significance. I am being asked not merely to sanctify myself, but to sanctify myself that others may be sanctified, and my responsibility is vastly increased. My sanctification comes in fact in the degree that I 'lose' myself in others.

But there is an obverse side to this tremendous truth which is full of life-giving consolation. If God is thinking of others when he grants grace to me, he is equally thinking of me when he grants grace to others. How fully does one's personal experience corroborate this: the favours, the services, the love and wisdom that have come to us from friend and even perhaps foe. Our personality has grown in the warmth and friendship of the Vineyard, and our spiritual debt is often to creditors unknown. The Body is jointed tightly in the tension of grace.

This doctrine has an all-embracing importance. It suggests to the theologian that grace should not be divided into '*gratum faciens*' and '*gratis data*' as between two *contraries*. The former carries with it something of the formality of the latter. It suggests that grace is given in respect of the Mystical Body of Christ. It shows rather radically that the Catholic theologian and the Catholic sociologist are condemn-

ing their inquiries to some degree of sterility unless they take as their criterion of judgment the *operative* law of the redeemed world of fact, the law of charity, for it is only in terms of that law that we see the real status of man. This is not a denial of the validity of considerations based on natural law; but it does suggest the ultimate ineffectiveness of such a closed system of reference. In the light of this doctrine much of Christ's teaching becomes clearer. Christ's identification with his brethren ceases to have the stamp of extrinsic appropriation. The parable of the king at the Last Judgment is seen to be true allegory, even as the parable of the vine. The Christian before his judge is examined according to the basic law of charity. It is taken for granted that he is dead to serious sin; the degree to which he has turned all his life and effort away from himself and towards Christ in his brethren will decide his glory. In fact, what we have here is in the nature of a revolutionary change of emphasis—the older emphasis did not lack something of Protestantism in it. We are guided here in our thoughts on the value of the Liturgy and the direction of all apostolate. But the doctrine remains principally a spur to the theologian in his expositions of the treasures of the faith. For the theologian remains the creator of Catholic thought. From his patient and humble inquiry there arises a body of principle which specialists in all fields must draw on and see whether they themselves, after all, are not mistaking the road. There will always be a tension between the claims of the individual and those of the community. The Mystical Body is to be seen as the *living* synthesis of these two fundamental energies, neither of which can be denied without destroying the other. Alone on the plane of Grace can we see the beginnings of a unity which the human heart is ever seeking.