

## PART ONE

### Grace in Its Essence



## I. *Habitual grace and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit*

I SHOULD like to speak to you first of the *essence* of grace, according to St. Thomas' treatise on grace; then of its *existential states*, for which I shall make use of data drawn from other sources, notably Aquinas' treatises on Christ and the sacraments.

1. The very first thing, one which must never be forgotten, which we shall never adequately grasp, is that the Judeo-Christian revelation is the revelation of *the love of God for us*, of a love which will never cease to astonish us here below because it surpasses all we could possibly conceive, and of which we can never plumb the depths. To know the depths of God's love for us, we should have to be God. And the effects of this love are disconcerting and surprising to us, precisely because we are unable to comprehend its Source. They are disconcerting to the purely rationalistic reason, even to reason pure and simple.

2. The first act in which God's love pours itself out is *creation*. God is the Infinite, the Absolute. He possesses being, intelligence, love, beauty to an infinite degree. We should not say he *has* being, intelligence, love; rather, that he *is* Being itself, Intelligence itself, Love and Beauty themselves. He dwells in himself; he is lacking in absolutely nothing. Why, then, did he create the world?

When man acts, it is always to procure for himself some benefit; but God could gain no benefit from creation. So then we are compelled to say that, if he created the world, it was through pure superabundance, pure desire to communicate his riches, pure disinterestedness, through love. Here we border on the mystery of his *presence in creation*. This is a

presence at once of causality and conservation; the same divine omnipotence that makes the universe emerge from nothingness keeps it above nothingness; just as I exercise the same force to lift a weight and to keep it at the height to which I have raised it. The divine presence envelops and penetrates all creatures. It is a *knowing* presence, which pierces the secrets of hearts; a *powerful* presence, which gives beings their activity, gives to the rose bush, for example, the power to produce a rose; a presence of *essence*, which also gives the rose bush the power to "be" what it is. These are the three aspects of his presence in creation. It is intimate to creatures. Strictly speaking, God is more present to things than they are to themselves. "God who art in my heaven more my heaven than heaven," said Père Chardon; he is in me more me than myself. And if for one instant he were to forget the world, it would fall immediately into nothingness.

Yet God who is so mysteriously present to the world is not immersed in the world; he is not dissolved in things. He keeps his absolute transcendence. If, then, he fills all things, it is as the infinite Cause of an effect that is imperfect and limited: "Do not I fill heaven and earth?" (Jer 23: 24), he asks, and the psalmist says, "If I ascend into heaven, thou art there; if I descend into hell, thou art present" (Ps 138: 8).

There is a second act of God that is still more overwhelming. It is a little like the act of a mother who feels the child she has brought into the world is too remote, and takes and presses him to her heart. God unites himself in a new way to the souls who open themselves to his grace and his love. This is a presence still more mysterious, more hidden, the *presence of indwelling*. We read in the Book of Proverbs (8: 31): "My delight is to be with the children of men," and in Sirach (24: 11-13): ". . . I sought rest, and I shall abide in the inheritance of the Lord. Then the Creator of all things commanded and said to me, and he that made me rested in my tabernacle. And he said to me: Let thy dwelling be in Jacob, and thy inheritance in Israel."

That God desires thus to come down secretly into our universe to find his dwelling in it is a truth already perceived dimly in the Old Testament. But the fullness of this revelation is to be found in the New Testament. Consider, for example, the opening verses of chapter 21 of the Book of Revelation: "I, John, saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. And I heard a great voice from the throne, saying: Behold the tabernacle of God with men; and he will dwell with them. And they shall be his people, and God himself with them shall be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and death shall be no more. Nor mourning, nor crying, nor sorrow shall be any more; for the former things are passed away."

In this second way, God cannot dwell in material things; but where there is a spirit, he is able to come down and hold converse with that spirit. And this presence of indwelling is conditioned by the descent, in that spirit, of grace in its fullest meaning. You see the importance of grace: it transforms the soul and fits it for the immediate indwelling of the divine Persons.

3. The word "grace" has three interdependent senses. The first is that of well-wishing. We say of someone: he has the favor, the grace, of the king. So it is an *act of love* that comes down to make contact with some being. The second sense is that of something given to a person to signify or symbolize this well-wishing. So it is a *gift*. And the third sense is that of gratitude on the part of the person who has been favored: he is *grateful*, he gives thanks. You see the interdependence: the favor precedes the gift, which, when it is received by someone worthy of it, calls forth the act of thanksgiving.

The *uncreated divine grace*, the uncreated divine favor, causes in us *created graces*, created gifts and benefits, for which we render acts of thanksgiving.

We shall leave aside this third meaning and consider the first two.

There is one great difference between God's love and

man's, between God's favor or grace and that of a man: God's love is creative, *it pours out being and goodness into things*, whereas man's love *presupposes the goodness, the beauty of things*. It is *because* a thing is, because it is good or beautiful, that it draws me to love it. When it is fully good, it ravishes me; when it is only partly good, it invites me: I can love a human creature in spite of all it lacks, because there is some good in it, because I think of it as willed by God, redeemed by the blood of Christ. Someone may be uncongenial to me, but if I remember the words of St. John of the Cross: "Put love where there is none, and you will reap love," my love will go out to meet him in the attempt to provoke response.

But I am not able by my love alone to produce or create the goodness or beauty of any thing; not even a mother, by her act of loving, can change the heart of her son who is a sinner. It is otherwise with God's love, which is prior to the being and goodness of things. That is easy to grasp: before the creation, there was nothing; God could not look on the world and be in love with its beauty. God first willed the world—willing and loving are the same with him—and the world budded forth and grew, as the outcome of his act of love. The world exists because God loved it; it continues because God continues to love it. There is, therefore, an inversion to make when we go from man's love to God's: man's love follows upon the goodness of things, God's is creative of the goodness of things.

4. We must now observe that God's love is of two kinds:

(a) a love which St. Thomas calls *common*, by which God loves the blade of grass, the star, the pebble of which the film *La Strada* speaks. . . . All these beings *are*, and they are by an act of divine love and volition. Even the sinner has his being, even the devil, and this being would not subsist did not God continue to will it. What is evil in the devil is his perverted will, the act by which he annuls the love offered to him; but his being itself is a richness; being is always a splendor, a participation in the divine Source. In this sense we can say that