

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS:

SOME POST-WAR TRENDS IN *De Gratia*

In the history of our theological society the presidential address has undergone great development. Originally it was a word of greeting and mild encouragement. It soon changed into a brief address that studied the nature of theological wisdom. In the year 1952-1953 the Board of Directors made it a more formal and fixed part of the convention program. They stipulated that the theme of the presidential address generally is to be "a summary of the theological progress of the year, or a period of time, or recent theological developments and trends, a kind of general conspectus of the field."¹ Since that time we have enjoyed outstanding studies of the teachings of Pope Pius XII, of theology and its relation to the *Magisterium*, and of other subjects. We have been challenged by broad panoramic views of the whole sweep of theological development.

Our Society was born almost immediately after the end of World War II, at a time when European universities were re-opening their doors to students from all over the world, when theological periodicals and publications, so restricted by the conditions of war, were again finding a world-wide audience. And so this post-war period, during which our Society has existed, seems a logical period for this presidential address to survey. However, as we all know, these past sixteen years have been years of prodigious theological writings. It is impossible in the short space of a twenty minute presidential address to survey the entire area of theological development. For this reason I have limited myself to the consideration of some trends during the post-war era in the general area of the treatise on grace.

I believe that this limitation is legitimate. First, the developments in this area are typical of the tremendous enrichment going on through all of theology. Secondly, the theme of this year's convention is the eschatological problem; and grace, as the seed of glory and as the invisible life given by the Church and the sacraments, is at the heart of the eschatological problem.

¹ *CTSA Proceedings*, 8 (1953), 174.

I would like, first, to give you a sort of statistical analysis of the theological writings of the period concerning grace, the indwelling of the Trinity, and the supernatural order. After that, I would like to review briefly with you a few of the more prominent areas of theological research.

More than six hundred books and magazine articles have been published in the past sixteen years on the indwelling of the Trinity, the elevation of man to the supernatural order, and on grace.² Of these titles one hundred and twenty eight (that have come to my attention) deal with some aspect of the relation of nature and grace. Eighty-six titles deal with the indwelling of the Trinity in the souls of the just and with our knowledge of and union with the indwelling Trinity. Another fifty titles study sanctifying grace as a participation in the divine nature, as a divinization of man, as adoptive sonship; but many of these articles also study these aspects of sanctifying grace as a basis of our union with the indwelling Trinity. Fifty-six titles study the image of God in man. It is interesting to note that most of the sixty-one titles dealing with justification are written in German, Spanish or Italian, and that very many of these studies are historical investigations into the background of Trent's decree on justification. Besides these principal areas of research many titles treat of the perennial questions such as predestination, merit, grace in the just of the Old Testament, certainty about being in the state of grace, the nature and necessity of actual grace, grace and original justice, grace and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and so forth. There are many historical studies of sanctifying or actual grace in the writings of a St. Augustine, a St. Leo the Great, St. Thomas Aquinas, Suarez and others.

One of the most significant trends in post-war theology has been the growing emphasis on the study of texts against the background of their historical environment. For example, many of the series of Patristic translations appearing recently contain introductions to set

² The "Elenchus Bibliographicus" of the *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 21-37 (1945-1961) lists over five hundred and fifty titles in the special dogma section dealing with the indwelling, the elevation to the supernatural order, and grace; additional titles are found in the general, historical and scriptural sections of the bibliography.

each work in the climate of its own intellectual and spiritual world. We are in danger of misinterpreting the Fathers, in danger of reading our twentieth-century theological notions and categories into a third century writing. And so we must approach a Father of the Church by trying to understand the world that was his, the kind of people with whom he lived and worked, the way he approached things.³ We must cultivate the same historical objectivity whether we are studying a text of Sacred Scripture, or a text of one of the Fathers, whether we are studying a passage from St. Thomas or from one of the Councils of the Church. Of course this is not a new method. But it seems to me that there has been a growing emphasis on its use during the past sixteen years, not only in the total process of theological research but also in the teaching of theology in the classroom.⁴

Perhaps the most dramatic application of this method in the past sixteen years has been in the area of biblical theology. Recall that it was in 1943 that Pope Pius XII issued the *Divino Aflante Spiritu*, the new charter for Catholic biblical research. 1948 saw Father Voste's famous letter to Cardinal Suhard of Paris, and Cardinal Bea's authorized commentary on that letter and its directives. 1950 was the year of the encyclical *Humani generis*, which warned against the dangers of this letter's possible misuse.⁵ And 1947 began the series of discoveries of the Dead Sea Scrolls.⁶ All of this has led to an explosive advance in biblical theology.

The abundance of grace is one of the chief realities characterizing the Christian religion and distinguishing it from the Old Law. St. Paul writes: "You are not under the Law but under grace" (Rom. 6:14-15). And St. John says almost the same thing in his prologue: "The Law was given by Moses; grace and truth came

³ J. Danielou, S.J., in the Introduction to *Gregoire de Nysse: Contemplation sur la Vie de Moïse, ou Traité de la Perfection en Matière de Vertu*, the first volume of the collection, *Sources chrétiennes*.

⁴ *National Catholic Education Association Bulletin*, 58 (1961), Major Seminary Department, Very Rev. J. McQuade, S.M., "Development of Doctrine as Framework for Teaching Theology."

⁵ A. Robert and A. Tricot, *Guide to the Bible*, 1 (Desclée, 1960, second edition; tr. Arbez-McGuire), 170.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 113-123.

through Jesus Christ" (Jn. 1:17). And so the biblical scholars set about tracing the Scriptural usage of such words as grace, justice and judgment, truth and fidelity, goodness and tenderness. They point out that St. Luke is the only synoptic writer to use the word *χαρις*, and that he uses it in the sense of a special predilection and favor of God shown on behalf of Christ and Mary. The word occurs more frequently in the Acts of the Apostles, where it generally means the work of redemption God has accomplished in the world, a work manifesting his generosity and power. In the meaning of the Acts the word comes to signify the Gospel itself, the new religion, the supreme witness of God's unlimited generosity. But with St. Paul the word means the free gift of salvation without any human pretension to justification by works; it expresses the religious feeling, so powerful in the infant Church, of being submerged in the infinite generosity of God, a feeling of absolute newness and transformation in Christ.⁷ But this one word, grace, cannot express the full richness of the divine reality, and so in St. Paul and St. John it is linked with words that have a rich past in the Old Testament. St. Paul links grace and justice, while St. John speaks of grace and truth. And these words, too, must be traced in their multi-layered meaning.⁸

A study not only of the words but also of the themes and the literary forms of the books of the Bible in which they occur gives us a richer understanding of the life of grace.⁹ For example, we

⁷ J. Guillet, *Themes of the Bible* (Fides, 1960), 20-24.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 24-95.

⁹ A. Robert, and A. Tricot, *op. cit.*, 1, 48-52; 476-583; Pius XII, *Divino Aflante Spiritu*, 35. (The interpreter must go back wholly in spirit to those remote centuries of the East and) determine what modes of writing, so to speak, the authors of that ancient period would be likely to use, and in fact did use. . . . 38. Hence the Catholic commentator, in order to comply with the present needs of biblical studies . . . should also make a prudent use of this means, determine, that is, to what extent the manner of expression or the literary mode adopted by the sacred writer may lead to a correct and genuine interpretation; and let him be convinced that this part of his office cannot be neglected without serious detriment to Catholic exegesis. . . . 40. Let those who cultivate biblical studies turn their attention with all due diligence towards this point and let them neglect none of those discoveries . . . which serve to make better known the mentality of the ancient writers, as well as their manner and art of reasoning, narrating and writing." (Translation in *Rome and the Study of Scripture*, Grail, St. Meinrad, Ind.)

know that in John's Gospel to present his message Christ frequently uses words of more than one meaning, that will cause misunderstanding; and when the misunderstanding arises, he uses this as an occasion to explain his doctrine more fully. Also, while the audience that witnessed Christ's words and deeds will understand the narrative according to the historical meaning of the passage, John primarily intends to bring out to Christians the full meaning which only they could understand, because the message of Christ had been preached and prayed over in the early liturgy. Joining these literary characteristics with the themes of the first part of John's Gospel, we see a richer meaning in the Nicodemus incident. As the first creation of man narrated in Genesis was a manifestation of God's generosity and power in his seven days of work and rest, (John begins his Gospel with the seven days of the re-creation of man in the revelation of Christ). The second section has the theme of the replacement of Old Testament institutions: Cana replaces the Jewish purifications; the cleansing of the Temple foreshadows the rejection of the Jewish temple; the Nicodemus incident replaces the need of birth in the chosen people with birth into the new chosen people, the Church.

The whole (Nicodemus) discourse will stress that what is on the natural level, the level of flesh, cannot reach the divine level without being boosted up. And that lifting up is accomplished by God descending from heaven to the human level, and then returning again to heaven, drawing man up with him—the whole Johannine theology of the incarnation, redemptive death, resurrection and ascension.¹⁰

We must acknowledge the tremendous enrichment that the pres-

¹⁰ R. Brown, S.S., *The Gospel of St. John; The Johannine Epistles*, no. 13 of the *New Testament Reading Guide* (Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minn., 1960), 27; A. Robert and A. Tricot, *op. cit.*, 1, 532ff.: "The intention of its author (John) continually manifests itself as doctrinal; the views and principles which summarize and govern the theology of the Incarnation are already presented in the prologue; Christ gives here a definition of His Person and His mission, the full understanding of which presupposes faith; the ideas of Life, Light, and Truth, are given a primary place; the work of Jesus is regarded as a manifestation of the eternal light and leads to a communication of the divine life." Cf. L. Cerfaux, *La Théologie de l'Église Suivant Saint Paul* (Paris, 1948, 2e édition revue), especially 165-173; *Le Christ dans la théologie de saint Paul* (Paris, 1951), especially 153-274; F. X. Durrwell, C.S.S.R., *The Resurrection* (Sheed and Ward, 1960) especially 202-249.

ent cultivation of positive theology is bringing to our understanding of the divine teaching. But we realize, too, that:

positive theology cannot be on a par with merely historical science. For, together with the sources of positive theology God has given to His Church a living *magisterium* to elucidate and explain what is contained in the deposit of faith only obscurely and implicitly. This deposit of faith our Divine Redeemer has given for authentic interpretation not to each of the faithful, not even to theologians, but only to the *magisterium* of the Church.¹¹

We recognize, too, that positive theology is not all of theology, that it is one method of theological research, that speculative theology has its role to play in our understanding of the divine message. Some brilliant biblical and patristic studies have, in my opinion, been marred by unwarranted, and sometimes untrue, criticisms of scholastic theology. Scholasticism is rooted in revelation; it has historical continuity with the Fathers and with Scripture. It may not repeat all of the mystic symbolism found in the Greek Fathers, and in that we have been deprived—but we have not been completely impoverished. Its terminology is sometimes abstract and colorless, instead of being concrete and vivid as is the biblical language. But when we define sanctifying grace as a created infused habit, which is a physical formal analogous share in God's own life, we have said more to the *intellect* about the nature of sanctifying grace than we do when we say with Paul, "you have been made a new creature." Our task as theologians is to exploit fully the riches of biblical and patristic research and to wed this rich understanding of the divine message with the intellectual precision of speculative theology.

The most important trend in speculative theology regarding grace in the past sixteen years has been, I believe, the investigations into the trinitarian and christological structure of our life of grace.¹² This study has centered around the answers to three inter-locking questions. And the answers to those questions have been so many and

¹¹ Pius XII, *Humani generis* (N.C.W.C. translation), 10, n. 21.

¹² P. de Letter, S.J., "Current Theology: Sanctifying Grace and the Divine Indwelling" in *Theological Studies*, 14 (1953), 242, "By reviewing, therefore, current theology on the divine indwelling we necessarily touch on most of what has been written recently on sanctifying grace."

so varied that we can give only the briefest indication here. Even the sequence of the questions will vary from author to author because of varying approaches to theology.

First, is the indwelling of the Trinity something common to the three persons and only appropriated to the Holy Spirit, or is there in the indwelling a particular and distinct relation (or relations) of union and assimilation to the proper characteristics of each of the Persons? Many theologians believe that the statements of Scripture and of the Fathers can be satisfactorily explained by appropriation. And they argue that since all actions of the Three Persons *ad extra* are common to the Three, are actions that proceed from the one and same divine nature, there is no room for the *proprium* theory.¹³ On the other hand, many theologians see in the statements of Scripture and of the Fathers a demand for more than mere appropriation.¹⁴ They think that there is a basic trinitarian structure to grace, that grace relates us to God not only as he is one in nature but *precisely* as he is three in Persons, that sanctifying grace relates us to the proper characteristics of each of the Persons.¹⁵ They strive, consequently, to explain how such a relation (or relations) is reconcilable with the common and certain teaching that all divine actions *ad extra* are common to the three Persons.

The second question, closely linked with the first, is what is the formal constituent of the special presence of the indwelling Trinity? For some the ultimate explanation of God's presence in the soul of the just is not by efficient causality, but by way of objective presence, that is, God gives himself to the soul to be the object of the soul's activity of supernatural knowledge and love. Here on earth God does not give himself to us in immediate knowledge, but he is present

¹³ P. Galtier, S.J., *Le Saint Esprit en nous d'après les Pères grecs*, (Rome, 1946).

¹⁴ G. Philips, "Le Saint Esprit en nous, à propos d'un livre récent," *Ephemerides theologicae Louvanienses*, 24 (1948), 127-135.

¹⁵ M. J. Donnelly, S.J., "The Inhabitation of the Holy Spirit" in *Theological Studies*, 8 (1947), 445-470; "The Theology of the Indwelling of the Holy Spirit" in *CTSA Proceedings*, 4 (1949), 39-77; P. de Letter, S.J., *op. cit.*, 271-272, "Another feature of present-day theology of the divine indwelling is its widespread dissatisfaction with the appropriation theory as an explanation of our union with the Three Divine Persons. Theologians look for a frankly trinitarian concept of grace."

in us as the immanent terminus of our charity.¹⁶ But for many more theologians the special presence of the indwelling involves more than just the presence as the habitual object of supernatural activity; it involves, likewise, efficient and exemplary causality. Some explain this in accord with the doctrine of appropriation,¹⁷ while others find in this explanation a basis for the *proprium* theory. They explain that efficient causality common to the three determines their presence in the soul, and that exemplary causality particular to each Person is the principle of assimilation. Because of this special exemplary causality of each of the Persons, we enter through grace into special relations with the Persons.¹⁸ A third explanation of the special presence of the indwelling introduces the concept of quasi-formal causality.¹⁹ These theologians argue that efficient causality is common to the three Persons of the Trinity, and that the exemplary and final causality are dependent upon and measured by the efficient, so that all relations based on these types of causality are common to the three Persons. This leaves room only for appropriation. Consequently, a trinitarian aspect of grace can be held only when one explains the indwelling by quasi-formal causality. Some hold that the relationship of the soul to the Persons is threefold (or triune) because of its termination at three really distinct Persons,²⁰

¹⁶ S. I. Dockx, O.P., *Fils de Dieu par grâce* (Paris, 1948).

¹⁷ P. Galtier, S.J., *op. cit.*; T. Urdanoz, O.P. "La inhabitación del Espíritu Santo en el alma del justo," in *Revista española de teología*, 6 (1946), 465-533; "Influjo causal de las divinas personas en la inhabitación en las ánimas justas," in *Revista española de teología*, 8 (1948), 141-202.

¹⁸ W. Hill, O.P., *Proper Relations to the Indwelling Divine Persons* (Washington, D.C., 1956); L. Chambat, O.S.B., *Présence et union: Les missions des personnes de la sainte trinité selon saint Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris: Abbaye de saint Wandrille, 1945); J. M. González Ruiz, "La semejanza divina de la gracia, explicación de una inhabitación formalmente trinitaria," *Revista española de teología*, 8 (1948), 565-600.

¹⁹ M. J. Donnelly, S.J., *op. cit.*; P. de Letter, S.J., *op. cit.* surveys many of the applications of the quasi-formal causality to the indwelling; these two also wrote some articles clarifying their respective positions in *Theological Studies*, 13 (1952): De Letter's being entitled "Sanctifying Grace and our Union with the Holy Trinity," 33-58; and Donnelly's, "Sanctifying Grace and Our Union with the Holy Trinity: A Reply," 190-204; Father de Letter wrote a later article in favor of quasi-formal causality, "Grace, Incorporation, Inhabitation" in *Theological Studies*, 19 (1958), 1-31.

²⁰ P. de Letter in articles just cited.

while others insist that relation gets its unity or multiplicity from its cause or subject, and so they find in created grace a miniature of the trinitarian life.²¹

The third allied question is "Does our reception of grace from Christ involve a special relationship to the Person of the Word?" Is our Christian grace essentially a participation in the natural sonship of the Word, a participation in his personal relationship, so that we are the adopted sons of the Father and not of the Trinity? Some have explained sanctifying grace as an image of the Son, who is the Image of the Father, so that we are made adopted sons of the Father only.²² For some the indwelling properly consists in a relation produced through the God-Man in whom we are incorporated to the Verbum and in the Verbum we are related to the Father and the Holy Spirit.²³ And Father Mersch, S.J. writes,

When we are united to (the Son), therefore, we are, in Him and through Him, adopted sons of the First Person; with regard to the Second Person, we are members of the Word and share in His intellectual sonship; and with regard to the Third Person, we are associated in the work of love that has its terminus and its summit in the Holy Spirit.²⁴

Other theologians reject a necessary connection between trinitarian grace and incorporation in Christ; our dependence upon Christ for our sanctification belongs to the present economy of salvation freely decreed by almighty God.²⁵

These are some of the trends of theological development in the general area of grace over the past sixteen years: a growing emphasis on positive theology, particularly an explosive growth in biblical theology, and a deep intellectual concern with the inner structure of our life in Christ and unto God. As Christians we rejoice in the loving kindness of God who adopts us and abides within

²¹ M. J. Donnelly, S.J. in articles cited.

²² J. M. Gonzales Ruis, *op. cit.*

²³ H. F. T. Borgert, C.S.S.R., *In Geest en Waarheid: Over de Inwoning Gods in de Zielen* (Nijmegen, 1950).

²⁴ E. Mersch, S.J., *The Theology of the Mystical Body* (St. Louis, 1951), 330.

²⁵ P. de Letter, S.J., "Grace, Incorporation, Inhabitation" in *Theological Studies*, 19 (1958), 30.

us. As theologians we glory in our vocation to penetrate ever more deeply and present ever more effectively the riches of the divine message.

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