

## GOD-FATHER

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CENTURIES AGO, the prophet Isaias, his mind aflame with rays of divine illumination, foretold the birth of Him for Whom uncounted generations in Israel had longed. He prophesied the coming of the Messias who would redeem man from sin. To that promise, Isaias added a description that must have sent a thrill of expectant hope coursing through the minds and hearts of his audience—"A child is born to us, and a son is given to us. . . . His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, God the Mighty, the Father of the World-to-Come, the Prince of Peace" (Is. 9, 6). These were words with a depth of meaning, yet they were enshrouded in mystery for those to whom the prophet first uttered them. These people knew that this child, this son would be one especially marked off from other men—yet just how each of these names was to be applied to him they were not given to know.

For us who possess both the prophecy and its fulfillment as historical realities, some of the shadow of mystery is dissipated. Gifted with the two-fold advantage of time and knowledge, we can look back upon the birth of the Christ-child, the promised redeemer, and see verified there the details of Isaias' prophecy. The meaning of each of these names is not equally apparent, however. We can easily enough understand how this Child can be called "Wonderful"—both in the manner of His birth, and in His miracles during life there was always something of the amazing, the awe-inspiring, the *wonderful* about Him. Likewise, the profundity of His teaching, from the crib to the cross, both by word and example, gives Him ample claim to the title "Counsellor." \* For those who, with the eyes of faith, see in this Child the Son-of-God incarnate, one endowed therefore with the same omnipotence as the Father, the name "God the Mighty" offers no difficulty. Equally apt is the title "Prince of Peace," in view of the fact that the very reason for the birth of this Child among men was to reconcile humankind to God; with His very own

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\* Although in the Hebrew text these first two names form but a single title, i.e., "Counsellor Wonderful Things," it seems better for our purposes to follow the Douay translation in which they are taken as forming two separate titles.

Blood, this Child was to sign the peace pact between God and man. The remaining title in Isaias' prophecy—"Father of the World-to-Come" seems somehow not to offer itself to the understanding quite so readily as the others. It is to this Messianic name, then, that we shall turn our attention and attempt to show its meaning as well as the special glory that it sheds upon its bearer.

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The true World-to-Come is not this world of ours as it will exist in some future generation or in some yet-unborn century. The world of Greece, the world of Rome, the world of the Middle Ages were all, at the time of Isaias, "worlds-to-come," yet they were not *the* "World-to-Come." They have all dawned, known glory, and died. They are now "worlds of the past" even as some age, lying to our future, inevitably will become. The *true* "World-to-Come" has a note of permanence about it. It is a world which, once having dawned, will know no eclipse, taste no dying—a world which will terminate all others and which itself will be replaced by none. Toward that world all human things have gravitated from the moment when the *fiat* of Genesis was spoken. The "World-to-Come" is the world of eternity and Divinity—it is the world of heaven and of those who dwell therein.

Fatherhood in our present life is shared by a multitude; in the world of heaven it is to be the exclusive right of Christ. Heaven's citizens are Christ's spiritual sons—this is what we mean by the title "Father of the World-to-Come." the source of this fatherhood lies not in any physical begetting, but in a *spiritual* generation of sons. Christ becomes the Father of the blessed in heaven by implanting in their souls, while they are yet upon earth, His seed. The *semen Christi*—Christ's seed—is the spiritual seed of grace, which ultimately fructifies and ripens into the glory of heaven. Grace is but glory in germ. It is the life of glory begun upon earth, and he to whom Christ gives it already begins to live within the divine lifestream. This then is the plan of God's providence: that from Christ, as from a unique source, grace is to pass into the souls of men, there to take root and develop, and then, when the death of the body comes, to be converted into the life of glory in heaven.

Christ is, so to speak, the well-spring of grace. He confers grace upon men because He Himself first possesses it in all its fullness within His sacred Humanity. Christ's is no half-way possession of grace, as though it were parceled out to Him according to some measured share. In Him is grace without limit—grace in all its intensity and power. The more a person emerges from shadow into

sunlight, the more lightsome he becomes. So it is with Christ. He is sanctified in a superlative way because He among all men is closest to the source of grace, for He contains that very source—the Godhead Itself—within His own Person. His human soul, united to the Godhead, is set ablaze with the rays of grace. His soul becomes incandescent. No mere sharer in the light of grace, Christ is the lamp of grace itself, illuminating all men who enter the world of supernatural life. Moreover not only does Christ possess grace in all its intensity, but also in all its effects. He is the most loving, prudent, just, firm and temperate among men. Of all men, He is the most docile to the movements of the Holy Spirit.

For all this, though, Christ is no miser. Resident within Him is a treasure that knows no price, but for once value and availability are not opposed. Christ's grace is no jealously-guarded hoard, destined to remain hidden away, forever unseen, unsought, and unshared. Neither lock, nor bolt, nor bars imprison Christ's grace, for He gives freely of it to all men, and there is no man, who is sanctified, to whom He has not given.

The ordinary and infallible means which Christ employs in the transmission of His grace to the souls of men are the sacraments. They form the channel through which grace passes from His soul to theirs. A good father not only bestows existence upon his children, but he also raises them, caring for their needs, preparing them for life, till the time when they reach maturity. Christ, the truest and most perfect of fathers, does no less for His sons. In Baptism, He imparts to them the life of grace; in the Eucharist He nourishes that life; in Confirmation, Order Matrimony, and Extreme Unction He equips them for Christian living and Christian dying; in the sacrament of Penance, He accomplishes what no human father is capable of achieving—He restores to His spiritual children that life which sin has taken from them. And all the while, behind each sacramental ministrations, He stands, offering the example of His own life as a model for theirs. In this way does Christ, the God-Father, as it were, of all Christians, bring them to Himself.

One final point should be brought out here. It is this: although Christ did not acquire full title to *bestow* grace upon men until His Passion and Death, yet long before that time He *merited* grace for men. Long before Calvary, long before Nazareth, long before Bethlehem even, Christ merited a vast treasury of grace in view of that moment when, in possession of the rights which His Death had won, He could begin to lavish that grace upon men. When did He begin to acquire this merit?—when he began to be! From that sublime

moment of the Annunciation, while the thunder-clap of Mary's *fiat* was yet upon her lips, when divinity enfolded humanity in embrace in the bridal-chamber of Mary's womb and Christ was conceived, from that moment Christ merited grace for men. At that corresponding moment in the lives of all other men, when they are mere embryos, shapeless masses of tissue, devoid of all power except that power to be formed into human beings, Christ possessed the power to acquire merit. Through the exercise of Divine omnipotence He was even at that instant perfectly formed, perfectly sanctified, perfectly in possession of the vision of the Divine Essence. From that moment until His last gasp upon Calvary, He ceaselessly merited for men a title to participation in the life of God. Thus it is that Christ was preparing for His spiritual fatherhood not merely at an age when most men are fathers in the physical order, but at an age when all other men are incapable of exercising anything above mere vegetative life.

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As sons are indebted to their fathers for the natural life they possess here on earth, so the blessed in heaven owe to Christ the life of glory which is theirs. They are glorified in eternal bliss only because Christ, the Divine Midas, has stooped to touch the base clay of their humanity, and has raised it, not to the dignity of gold, but of God. In the soul of each of these, Christ has implanted the seed of glory, the seed of divine life—grace. He has tended and nurtured these sons father-like, with direction and with the example of His own life. At last, into His own true home He has gathered them to Himself in their maturity as sons of glory. There for all eternity He will receive from them honor and veneration as the Father of the race of the saved—Father no longer of the World-to-Come, but of the World that eternally *is*.

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“AND THE WORD WAS MADE FLESH”

“The Evangelist, wishing to make clear the ineffable condescension of God, here speaks of the flesh, that we may praise His mercy; since, for our salvation, He took upon Himself that which is so unlike, and so remote, from His own Nature; namely, flesh.”

Theoplectus