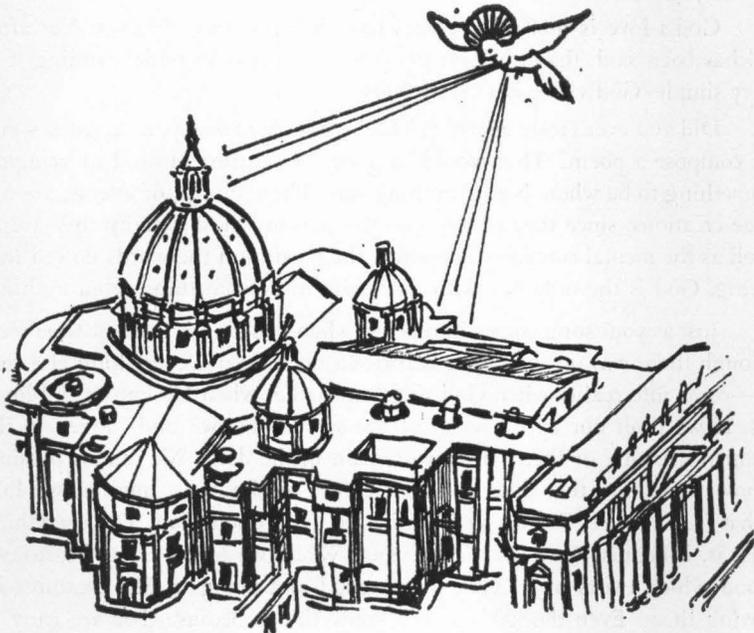


## VATICAN II: THE RETURN OF THE PHOENIX

When a child is given his first half dollar by his mother it is an enchanted moment. It's something like the thrill of wearing long pants for the first time or staying up till ten at night; there is a marvelous sense of liberty about it. That fifty cents might, for all our pint-sized hero cares, be the millions and billions of Fort Knox, because he can imagine things without limit that can be purchased with it. The greatest part of all is the power of decision: the exhilarating sense of independence in being able to determine for the first time what to do with one's fortune.

### **A True Notion of Grace**

This homely example lights up certain prevalent misconceptions about God's gift of grace to us. All too frequently (perhaps exclusively) we act



as if grace were the child's half dollar given to us to purchase good acts so we can put another check next to our names in the account book of eternal merits. We may well be conscious that grace is a gift, but we tend to restrict the sense in which we acknowledge it to be a gift.

To understand grace as not merely a coin of spiritual currency, but as the actual impulse by which God moves us toward Himself, we have to reflect that grace means, literally, the love of God. To understand what this love of God actually is, we have to reflect on how it differs from human love.

The meaning of the word *grace* is a trifle complicated. But this much we easily understand: when someone says that Paul is in the good graces of somebody, it means that this somebody loves Paul. Grace means love. What follows from this love is also called by the name of grace sometimes: the gift given to Paul by the one who loves him is a grace, as well as the graciousness, or thanks, which Paul gives in return for the gift he has received. All of these meanings are held in the action of God reaching down to His human creatures to draw them to His own life of loving and knowing. But, because it is forerunner of the others, the first sense is most important: grace is God's love.

God's love is ineffable. Tomes have been written about it. Yet after all has been said, the only firm grasp we can claim to understanding it is very simple. God's love is a creative love.

Did you ever create anything? Did you ever make up an original song, or compose a poem? That would be a sort of creating, a kind of bringing something to be where before nothing was. These things, of course, are not true creations, since they presuppose the person whose activity they are as well as the mental content from which the music and the words flowed into being. God is the only one who can really make something from nothing.

Just as your song comes into being when you sing it the first time even though there was no such song before, so do we—and everything else that is—come into reality when God sings our name: when He knows and loves us. If we limit our appreciation of the words "know" and "love" to the human meaning of them, then we remain in the dark. We cannot possibly know something that does not exist before we know it, nor can we love what is not there. But no such limitation falls upon God. For everything that is, is because God gave it its being. While we love a being because of good which exists in it, God places good and being in His creatures by loving them. Even though we only know things because they are truly in

reality, God gives His creatures true reality by knowing them. In other words, God's love is creative—of everything that is.

From here another conclusion can be drawn: every time God loves someone, His creative love places some good, positive reality within him. Grace, then, as God's love, is a true reality, given by God freely, without the slightest trace of obligation on His part. It is at one and the same time His love, His gift in us, and the creation of that state of gracious encounter and rapport with God in which we recognize His bounty.

Man encounters God's grace at two levels. At the one, God moves us from a condition of dormant ability to the very activity of our vital operations. We always have need to be moved by God from mere capacity to actuality; but this becomes a special kind of moving impulse when God is moving us to Himself, for He is completely beyond the realization of our natural powers. When He moves us to His own supernatural goodness to enjoy it with Him according to our full capacities, this is actual grace.

On the other hand, God has to change us if we're to be able to enjoy His divine goodness. For everything He is in infinite simplicity is like a divine heartbeat which we can only hear when we put our head right on His breast and listen. Grace for us in this sense is like eyeglasses for a very nearsighted man; we'll never see God, even in faith, without the addition of lenses for the eyes of our soul. This grace, sanctifying, proportioning grace, elevates, heals and enlightens us.

The work of grace, then, is God's work in us. We can destroy the divine good placed in us by God's creative grace by failing to consent to the divine activity within us. But that does not mean that grace depends on us for its efficacy; it only means that we can refuse a divine gift which works wonders within us. "When we consent to grace," St. Thomas Aquinas mentions, "that is not a cause of grace but an effect of it. The whole business belongs to grace."<sup>1</sup>

### **Grace in Our World**

These notes on the operation of grace set the context for an effective examination of our world, our century, and the modern attitude to a Church which very soon will enjoy the extraordinary favor of a most special infallible grace to guide it in session during the Second World Council of the Vatican. I hope to show three things in this article. First, the demands of a secularized society for the divine action are similar to the needs of fallen man for restorative and directive grace. Second, the needs of the Christian world are basically needs for an increased operation of grace,

needs to be answered with a renewal of pastoral life in the Church. Finally, I hope to illustrate the mobilization of pastoral channels of grace as the action of the paternity of God, an action by which the Church exercises a true fatherhood over the souls of its children.

To return to our opening comparison, it should be clear that the "graced" Christian should enjoy an appreciation far different from the intoxication of independence of the small "rich" boy. Grace gives a spirit of exaltation, but far nobler than self-gratification. Perhaps the happiest expression of the condition would be Scripture's phrase, "the liberty of the sons of God."

Yes, liberty is another thing from independence. That may not sound democratic and American and all, but it's true. A quick reflection brings home the realization that without dependence there could be no liberty at all. For we depend on God for our creation and our existence and our human powers, we depend on Him, moreover, for the exercise of the very powers He has given us. We can only be free because He has willed that we act freely. Obviously, then, to cut oneself off from the vital dependence on God's continuing creative love would not be liberty; what it would be is annihilation.

Notions such as these naturally rub us against the grain. The American democratic mystique boasts the cult of the self-made man: the poor but

### THE SALVATION PATTERN OF MAN AND SOCIETY

	MAN	SOCIETY
Becomes "graced" by adoption	In Adam through the Gift of Grace Given to Human Nature	Through the Operation of Grace in Institutions of Family, University, State
Becomes "turned away"	Original Sin	Rejection of Sacramental Life Rationalism Naturalism Radical Materialism
Converted	Actual Grace Moving Man to Supernatural End Sanctifying Grace Elevating and Healing	Through the Sanctification of the Members of the Social Body Through Graces Given to Society

talented lad born on the wrong side of the tracks who becomes a millionaire by pulling himself up by his own bootstraps. Nor is it very congenial to the opposite pole of Americana to suggest to the bearded lads in dungarees that they are anything other than self-made beatniks. We take it for granted that if someone has to help us, we'll only be doing a second rate job. The fact of the matter is rather arresting in its simplicity: without God's help and movement we wouldn't be doing anything.

Just so it won't remain entirely mystifying why anyone bothers to speak of "grace in the world," let's not forget what we're talking about. Grace belongs to the area of activity not of knowledge. It may or may not be true that the only time grace has ever knowledgeably meant anything to you was when you read about it or heard it preached. The fact, however, remains true that just as thinking about gasoline never moved a car, so merely thinking about grace is not the dead-end of its reality. The reality of grace is the vital dynamism which God puts into our human souls to recreate our executive powers of intellect and will and sweep them along in the movement of His own divine influx toward Himself. All this takes place every day in plumbers and politicians, hod-carriers and housewives whether in Boston or Baltimore or Baton Rouge. But there is an influence on these divine operations by reason of the dispositions we receive from our environment and our society.

### **Grace in a Secularized Society**

It is a foregone conclusion that we live in a secularized society. Rather than prove what may be obvious (or at least what has already been adequately demonstrated<sup>2</sup>), it is more useful to arraign the black charges levelled against our twentieth century.

The root problem, of course, is the abyss which lies between man in the state and man in the Church. For one man to belong to both societies now, he has to be at least partially schizophrenic. And the personality split is seldom right down the middle; most of his life is spent in the workaday world which belongs to the mores and social order of 'state.'

For our purposes here, however, the problematic of a secularized society is that it involves a turning away from God. Western society was, in fact, God-orientated for some thirteen to fifteen centuries. It is, in fact, now man-orientated to the exclusion of the historical focus of institutions and mores on God and His order.

By doing a little theological gymnastics, we can profitably make a

comparison between fallen man and fallen civilization and see the needs of both for the healing and protecting grace of salvation. The foundation for this comparison is the fact that in both instances the cause of the "fall" was a turning away from God. This turning away, moreover, is in itself a destruction of the order placed by God both for man and for redeemed society. God gave grace to Adam in paradise not as a personal gift but as an endowment for the whole of human nature; Adam lost grace and destroyed man's order and relation to God not just in himself but in each one of us who follow him.

Similarly, the defection of society—or better, of civilization (if it still exists)—is a turning away, a jilting of the divine organization of men and institutions. Christ in fact became God-Man to realign man on God's side and offer the proposal and means of salvation. The means of salvation established by the divine order included the establishment of acts and institutions of material creation as channels and fountainheads of the divine assistance of grace. Thus, for example, the family itself had become a sort of *ekklesia*: it was not the mere postulate of natural demands for the preservation of the race, but a gathering of the faithful in which the supernatural mysteries of faith flowed along with the facts of life.

### **The Need for Conversion**

What Adam lost for mankind were not merely the preternatural gifts of immortality and impassibility,<sup>3</sup> but a far more radical and far-reaching organization of the human organism called original justice. This gift of original justice, in the comparison of St. Thomas,<sup>4</sup> was like the keystone which kept all the elements of the arch of human perfection in their proper places. As in any arch, once the keystone goes, each of the other building blocks falls of its own weight into disorder.

The building blocks in question, of course, are the natural capacities and faculties of man. Each of the sense faculties, each of the appetites and their passions, tend by the metaphysics of their nature to goods cut-down to the demands of their particular capacities. The good of vision is the visible object, that of touch, the sensible good felt and embraced: this is nature, not perversion. The marvel of the gift of original justice was precisely this: it ordered these faculties not away from their proper objects, but above their individual objects to the higher good of reason. Thus the surge of touch or sight for particular delights proportioned to their thirst for pleasure became sublimated in the nobler quest of the whole human person for the good of reason. The good of reason—the proper and only

adequate objective for a creature endowed with spiritual faculties—was achieved with ease by Adam before the fall.

The loss of the keystone meant the release of the senses and their appetites from the control of right reason so that they became in fallen man impulses to be forcibly subdued to reason as well as impulses which can abandon the properly human good to go their own way unrestrained. This they did in the sinful Adam; this they do in us when they are not checked by "graced" faculties of intellect and will. For grace returned with Jesus Christ; original justice did not.

Moreover, the true end of man is the supernatural end of the beatific vision wherein God Himself becomes the object and fulfillment of our existence. In other words, by His creative love, God has willed for us the absolute gift, the absolute good: Himself. The natural powers of man are nowise proportioned to this infinite good. Grace—which Adam had; which he lost for himself and for us; which Christ gives in His Church—is the proportioning quality which recreates the human person and endows it with the properly divine powers capable of knowing and loving God in His supernatural infinitude.

The needs, then, of sinful Adam were many; these are the needs of all his progeny as well. To be "turned back" to God, fallen man needs the motion of God's grace to sweep him toward a good utterly beyond what his nature can realize of itself. To exercise acts of mind and heart directed at the supernatural, a new creation (the new capacities of intellect and will qualified by sanctifying grace) is required. To heal the disorders of the wily impulses of senses and sense appetites galloping each its own way, the medicinal and directive influx of divine grace is demanded.

Here we are, then, with need of the divine assistance of grace not merely for its proportioning influence to elevate us to the supernatural end for which God made us, but, in this fallen condition, even for the successful performance of purely natural acts. For we can't even attain the properly natural human good, the good of reason, without the healing power of grace subduing the rebellious forces of our lower nature.

### **Conversion of the Social Body**

There is a parallel to some degree in the social order to this narration of the turning away and turning back of Adam and his progeny.<sup>5</sup> There was in fact a social order which enjoyed a special friendship with God, a special quality of dispensing grace in and through its institutions. This rapprochement of society with the divine was lost: society may be said to

have estranged itself from God, turning little by little from God through the rejection of sacramental life, the rationalist abandonment of the supernatural, the naturalist dirge over the very divine order in nature so that in the end (in our day) there is no such thing as a divine orientation of institutions and public mores, no community of belief enlivening the bloodstream of humanity. Here and there intimations of what might have been stir even in unlikely places, but secularism is accepted as a reigning reality.

While there is room for comparison, it is nevertheless imperative to take notice of the differences in the salvation pattern of fallen man and fallen society. Although we don't wish to deny that grace is given to the social order as such (special graces undeniably are granted to the Church as society as well as to political societies<sup>6</sup>), still grace is not given to society as a community in the manner that grace was given to human nature (through Adam) as a community. Before the fall, the individual man would have received grace through the nature; after the sin of Adam, human nature receives grace through the sanctification of individual men.

Saint Paul apparently worked out an appreciation of the reflexive action of "graced" man and "graced" society on one another. The eighth chapter of his Epistle to the Romans gives us an insight into what happens:

The created universe waits with eager expectation for God's sons to be revealed. It was made the victim of frustration not by its own choice, but because of him who made it so; yet always there was hope, with the hope that the universe itself is to be freed from the shackles of mortality and enter upon the liberty and splendour of the children of God (Rom. 8:19-21).

Pere Lyonnet, S.J., remarks on this text that the intent of St. Paul seems to be that the material world, created for man, partakes of human destiny. Wounded as a result of Adam's sin: "Cursed be the earth because of you" (Gen. 3:17), material creation will also participate in man's glorification. "Greek philosophy wanted to free spirit from a matter which it considered bad in itself; Christianity redeems matter."<sup>7</sup>

This "redemption" of matter enters into the very structure of society. The wounds of the physical universe are only hurts inflicted because of us. When material creation is the object of the unrestrained appetites of man's lower nature, then it is as wounded; it has lost the dignity intended for it in God's plan when He gave it to man to serve the human race. In this sense nature "groans" to be liberated: it groans to be given the dignity accruing to it from the right order in our use of material creation.

But there is moreover a reflexive influence of nature upon man, and here is where grace plays its part in social order. The social order is the environment in which the human person makes his choice of conformity to divine order or animal disorder. The environment influences, strongly influences our activity. Thus the use of material creation plays its reflexive role. Materialism and naturalism (the reversal from man's dominion over matter to his subservience to matter) not only obscure the supernatural end of man, but replace it with the ironic substitution of mineral and vegetable divinity! We are then left with a society turned away from God and in need of conversion.

The conversion of the social body can only be effected by grace, and here is where the ecumenical council comes in. The dynamism which will guide institutions (family, community, university, etc.) gently back to a divine orientation can only be provided by the influx of grace into the community life of these human, communal organizations. There is need for the infusion of a new light, a new creation of social institutions so that they too become "graced." There is need for a conversion, a redirection of goals to the supernatural end of man. There is finally a need for healing grace, to direct separate institutions to the unity which will overcome the separatist tensions of each divided block of the human brotherhood to go its own way.

What is the social "faculty" which will direct all these diverse members of the social body to the supernatural end? It is the "graced" Church of Christ: the Church flowing from the redeeming side of our Savior carrying in itself the channels of grace and salvation.

### **Pastoral Renewal of Society Through the Ecumenical Council**

The areas wherein grace must deliver its impact to our world are the areas where materialism has been allowed to reign for quite some time. The abyss which separates man in the state and man in the Church has to be spanned, the cultural gap has to be closed.

This would of course be impossible if God's grace had no influence over material creation; but it surely does. God entered into this cosmos of ours; He walked with us using our time and our motion and our matter, transforming them by His use. This is the basic Christian mystery which can be briefly expressed in the words of St. John:

So the Word became flesh; he came to dwell among us, and we saw his glory, such glory as befits the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth (Jn. 1:14). For God is love; and

his love was disclosed to us in this, that he sent his only Son into the world to give us life. In this is the love, not that we have loved God, but that he has first loved us, and sent his Son as the remedy for the defilement of our sins (I Jn. 4:9-10).

God's coming into the world signifies a radical transformation of the meaning of things and of history:

We have become so accustomed to our catechetical formulas that we have almost reached the point of failing to see that if God has come into the world everything is in some way fulfilled, everything has received its meaning and, apart from this, nothing has any real purpose.<sup>8</sup>

The re-enthronement of this basic Christian mystery in its place of honor over the whole of reality will provide the source for the new creation of the social order. The beginning of this work will have to be most fundamental: it will have to commence with pointing out the very fact that the divine mystery does enter into time and motion. A new catechesis is demanded. It is as though we twentieth century creatures were all so many rationalists demanding proof of the fact that a real world outside ourselves actually does exist; for in the supernatural order, the secularist attitude toward salvation mystery is much the same as the secularist attitude toward Mother Goose.

What the Second Vatican Council will be chiefly occupied in doing is reinstating the influence of the basic mystery of the Incarnation over the "secular" world. How can this be done? The colossal efforts of three years' preparatory work are proof enough that such a question is not feasibly answered by mere conjecture. Surely the fundamental instruments of interaction of natural and supernatural will be examined and modified for maximum impact: the rites and explanation of liturgical acts, the pastoral duties of the priest (particularly preaching), the Catholic universities and schools of Christian doctrine on national, city-wide, and parish levels. More modern means for broaching the impasse will certainly play a major part in the council: the status and apostolate of the Christian layman as a basic and indispensable apostle to secularized society, the apostolate of public relations and public communications, the apostolate of Christian unity.

There are fifteen commissions set up for the preparatory program of the Second Vatican Council; each of them has worked steadily for almost three years to plan and organize the work of Christian renewal. Just to

itemize the commissions (too long a task for our purpose) gives an indication of the breadth of purpose undertaken by the council to bring about the turning back of society and institutions to the divine order of things.

The general mobilization of pastoral activity on every level will have to be the means of introducing "graced" members into the secular world, "graced" families into civic communities, "graced" institutions into the human brotherhood. In this supernatural activity, the first two senses of grace, mentioned earlier, will be most evident. But there is need for grace in the third sense: the recognition of the divine encounter of the world with God and the resulting rapport in which the motion and assistance of God is acknowledged as an utterly gratuitous blessing. Society must not only allow God's creative love to make it over as a new social creation, it must also acknowledge the good of divine order placed inside itself as the effect of God's creative embrace.

### **The Paternity of God and His Church**

Whenever there is a question of speaking of the activity of God and of men in the same breath, there is an implicit necessity of affirming the ineffable transcendence of God, of recognizing that our manner of speaking of God is drawn from analogy with objects of our natural knowledge. So when we speak of grace, we draw on divine revelation for the knowledge of its existence and its effects while we can only draw on human experience to describe the manifestations of that grace in ourselves and our activities.

The gift of grace, however, can be recognized according to this manner of speaking as an operation of the paternity of God toward His adopted children. He makes us a new creature by grace by lifting us into that whirlwind of divine love where the divine goodness itself becomes the object of our vision and our delight. He makes us, so to speak, of the same nature with Himself, by participation in that activity which is only proper to the divine nature.

It is with an appreciation of the complete freedom and liberality of God on His part in giving us grace that we can create an attitude apt to receive the great graces needed in every area of private and public life. This, of course, is the fundamental problem at present. The materialist mystique has conquered part of the heart and soul of every one of us. But we have to be ready to do more than smile at God and say, "Thanks for the collateral." We have to get through our thick heads the profound mys-

tery which supports and transforms our activities and relations not just to God in Himself, but also to God through society.

### **Return of the Phoenix**

The work of Christian renewal has already begun. This century has seen a renaissance both in speculative and practical areas of Church life. Beginning with Pope Leo XIII's call for a theological revival, steady progress has been made in Catholic theology both in Europe and in the Western hemisphere. The liturgical movement begun in Europe in the early years of the twentieth century and launched here in the twenties has demonstrated the capacities of Catholic tradition to laminate daily living with layers of liturgical piety and natural order through the Christian mysteries. These and other signs are what give such optimistic hope to the hearts of Christians in these last days before the manifestation of the Holy Spirit in the work of the ecumenical council itself.

The actual convocation of the ecumenical council is a visible manifestation which embodies in this physical collectivity the content of many streams of activity. It recalls the fabled bird of Egyptian mythology, the phoenix, which lived for hundreds of years and then fell into a sacred fire only to resurrect itself reincarnate from the ashes of its would-be annihilation. The Catholic Church has been given up for dead many times. The Protestant reformers spoke of it as the "corpse" of Christ's Body. The nineteenth century rationalists recited joyous incantations over the destroyed remains of what "had been" the myth of the Church. And yet here we are on the doorstep of a great Christian manifestation of the life of the Church.

These reflections are just one more indication of the operative habits of God's creative love. Efforts have stirred in the bosom of the Church through all the troubled years that have preceded us, and yet success only crowns a work not because of human zeal and efficiency, but because of the gratuitous efficacy of God's grace. If the pastoral renewal of society comes to realization, it will be through the paternal gift of a God Who would have us realize how thoroughly He loves us and has "so loved the world," that He gave His only Son so that out of His side the Church might flow forth bringing rivers of living water: rivers of grace.

Secularized society has given the Church up for dead. But when the phoenix rises from its ashes and spreads its wings of fantastic, brilliant plumage—when the Church opens out arms of mercy wide over men and

families and institutions, it will be a new story. Mother Goose will be left far behind.

—Paul Philibert, O.P.

<sup>1</sup> *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 111, a. 2, ad 2: *Dicendum quod Deus non sine nobis nos iustificat, quia per motum liberi arbitrii dum iustificamur, Dei iustitiae consentimus. Ille tamen motus non est causa gratiae, sed effectus. Unde tota operatio pertinet ad gratiam.*

<sup>2</sup> In *The Crisis of Western Education* (Sheed & Ward: 1961), Professor Christopher Dawson traces the genesis of the secularizing of American society through its historical stages. His examination points out that the triumph of naturalism has defrauded the 'American way of life' not only of the Christian heritage of moral values, but also of the supporting fibre of authority received in the Western tradition of discipline in education and in the sphere of cultural activity.

<sup>3</sup> The preternatural gifts commonly accepted by theologians are four: *immortality*, immunity from death; *impassibility*, immunity from suffering; *science*, immunity from ignorance of things which ought to be known; and *integrity*, immunity from depraved movements of the sense appetites. These gifts were effects of grace in Adam and therefore were lost along with Adam's loss of grace. In the dispensation of divine providence, they are not restored in regenerated man with the receipt of grace through Christ.

<sup>4</sup> *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 85, a. 5, ad 1.

<sup>5</sup> The Latin terms for "turning away" and "turning back" are *aversio* and *conversio*. They imply a radical relation of the person with God, *aversio* including union with God through the supernatural virtue of charity and a subsequent abandoning of this union and loss of God as final cause actually influencing every human act, *conversio* including the subsequent adherence to God as true final cause through a supernatural attitude established by charity.

<sup>6</sup> In view of what we will have to say regarding the paternity of the Church, it is well to point out here that the state exercises an imperfect kind of paternity. Just as Christ is the perfect *image* of the Father while man is the imperfect *image* sharing only adoptively the nature of divinity, so the Church can be called the perfect image of the divine paternity. For as perfect image the Church, through grace, brings forth sons adoptively generated into the divine life, whereas the state exercises this regeneration of its members through its laws and by its protection only acting under the domination of the Church and the divine.

<sup>7</sup> *La Sainte Bible de Jerusalem*, p. 1502, note c.

<sup>8</sup> I. H. Dalmais, O.P., *Introduction to the Liturgy*, (Baltimore: Helicon, 1961), pp. 56-57.