

XII. THE SUPERNATURAL LIFE

(B) HOW IT WORKS IN THE SOUL

IN the last chapter the channels by which the Supernatural Life comes to the soul were dealt with. In this we must consider the life itself and its effects upon the soul. It is to be observed how careful Scripture is to make clear that grace—the gift of the Supernatural Life—does not destroy Nature, but elevates it. “I make all things new,” says Christ: not “I make all new things.” What He said of the law of Moses—“I come not to destroy but to fulfil”—He might have said of human nature. He took human nature and into it poured a new thing, thus renewing it, making it new. He did not give new faculties to the soul, but He gave the existing faculties of intellect and will new powers of action, powers to act above their natural level. Here again we must follow very closely if we are to grasp the real nature of our road.

Man by nature is a union of body and soul. The soul has two faculties—the intellect and the will. Now every faculty of man has first its own proper *action*; and second its own proper *object*. Thus the eye has its action—namely, to see: and its object—namely, coloured surface. So the intellect has its

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action which is *to know* or be aware of: and its object which is *truth*. Likewise the will has its action which is *to love* and its object which is *goodness*. In other words, the intellect knows things in so far as they appear to the soul true: and the will loves things in so far as they appear to the soul good. Now the supreme truth is God: so that the intellect's highest task is to know God. And the supreme goodness is God, so that the will's highest task is to love God. The natural life of man's soul might be set out as follows:

	FACULTY.	ACTION.	OBJECT	SUPREME OBJECT.
Soul	Intellect	.. to know	.. truth	.. GOD
	Will	.. to love	.. goodness	GOD

Thus if we had no revelation from God as to His purpose in creating man, we might deduce from the study of man's nature that he was meant to know and to love God. And this answer would be, as a mere matter of words, correct. But it would be wrong in fact: for it would not rise above the knowing and loving proper to our nature, and God has revealed to us that our destiny is to know him directly, face to face, and to love Him according to that knowledge. For this, as we have seen, we need new powers, and God gives us these by grace.

When grace comes in, intellect and will are supernaturalized—that is, their nature is not destroyed but given the power of higher ACTION. The *intellect* retains its objects, namely, truth, but its action is

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elevated: in other words, it can get at truth in a higher way: it can now believe upon the word of God, that is, it has the supernatural virtue of *faith*. The will likewise retains its object—namely, goodness—but its action is elevated from love in the natural order to supernatural love, that is, it has the supernatural virtue of *charity*, by which it loves God and makes the love of God the root of all its other loves and therefore of all its other actions. And the will is rendered capable of another supernatural action—the action of *hope*: that is, of aspiring to God in reliance upon His power and His goodness. The Supernatural Life of man's soul might then be set out as follows:

	FACULTY.	VIRTUE.	ACTION.	OBJECT.*		
SOUL	{	INTELLECT. . . .	FAITH. . . .	to believe. . . .	GOD	
		WILL	{	HOPE	to hope.	GOD
				CHARITY.	to love	GOD

Yet the full activity of the Supernatural Life is not in this world. Its completion is in the next. The *intellect* will then see God direct: it will know him face to face. This direct seeing of God is by a double title supernatural. No created being—man or angel—could by his own powers have direct vision of God, the gulf between Creator and creature being measureless. And man cannot by his own powers

* It will be noted that God is not here shown as the *Supreme* Object of *Faith*, *Hope* and *Charity*, but as their Object. He is their Sole Object; they have no other. Hence their name—Theological Virtues.

have direct vision of anything at all. For man knows things by means of ideas: when I claim to know another person, I mean that a certain idea and image of him is present in my mind and not the man himself. It is by means of this idea and image that I know him. But in heaven we shall know God direct, not by means of an idea in the mind. So that faith will disappear and direct knowledge will take its place. For the intellect of man there are three levels of action, all having truth as their object: first, natural knowledge: second (for the man in a state of grace here below), faith: third (for the soul in heaven), direct knowledge. To this we shall return in the final chapter of this book. Here simply note that in heaven faith will be no more, for vision will be unclouded: hope will have yielded to possession: only charity will remain—the love binding man to God. But, since love and knowledge are closely connected, charity in heaven will have a newness of intensity proportioned to the new direct knowledge.

To return to this world: the soul in a state of grace—that is, possessed of the Supernatural Life—has the three virtues of faith, hope and charity. But, as has already been said, it can lose the Supernatural Life. It does so by mortal sin—that is, by a deliberate and wilful rejection of God. It has to be remembered that man's nature is a damaged nature. The sin of Adam did not render human nature totally evil. But it *did* leave it with a tendency or bias

towards evil—a tendency to seek its own interest rather than God's will, and a tendency to judge of its own interest by the vivid picturing of the imagination and not by the judgment of the reason. Grace does not of itself remove this unhappy bias. Man's nature is by grace given powers to act above its own level: yet it retains that uneasy pull towards self-interest and the too-dominant imagination. Grace helps it, principally, because these three new modes of action bring God closer and clearer. But the bias in the nature is cured only by steady striving to work with grace towards the will of God. And the striving may be marred by many a yielding—the lesser yielding of venial sin, the graver yielding of deliberate rejection of God for self. By such an act, the bond of love is broken, for one cannot at the same time love God and be in rebellion against Him: in technical language the soul loses the virtue of charity. The soul in mortal sin thus *necessarily* loses charity: it may retain hope and faith,* but without charity hope and faith are not supernaturally alive and cannot sanctify the soul. The Supernatural Life and the virtue of charity are inseparable: the one cannot be without the other.

Thus the *first* result of the possession of the Super-

* Faith, hope and charity being habits are only destroyed by actions contrary to them. Mortal sin—being rejection of God—is contrary to love of God and therefore means the loss of Charity. But it is not necessarily contrary to Faith and Hope. Hope will be lost as a result of a mortal sin directly contrary to it—*e.g.*, despair—and Faith likewise by a mortal sin directly contrary to it—*e.g.*, unbelief.

natural Life is that in this life we have access to God by these three paths—faith, hope, charity—all of them totally above the *natural* powers of our soul.

A *second* result is that man is enabled to perform actions which will merit a supernatural reward. The life of heaven, be it remembered, is a life above our nature. Therefore we could never merit it by our own natural powers. Natural action could obviously never merit a supernatural reward. Only if we are supernaturalized and thus made capable of acting above our nature can we merit a reward above our nature. For a soul in a state of grace, this is simple enough. What of a soul which lacks the Supernatural Life, either having lost it or never having had it? Such a soul has only the natural life and as such can make no step supernaturally. If it is to be enabled so to act as to gain—or regain—the Supernatural Life, it must receive a special “impulse” from God. Such an “impulse” is called Actual Grace. This must be distinguished from the Sanctifying Grace—or Supernatural Life—we have been treating of so far. Sanctifying Grace is really a quality given to the soul, elevating it from within, abiding with the soul till it is lost by sin. Actual grace does not abide with the soul, does not sanctify it. It is God moving the soul, giving it a kind of impetus, enabling it to perform some supernatural act—of faith, or trust, or fear—which by its own nature it could not perform. If the soul responds to actual grace and makes the appropriate supernatural act, it receives Sancti-

fyng Grace. To put it in another way, if the soul responds to Supernatural Impulse it receives Supernatural Life.

A *third* result is, as has already been stated many times, that man's soul is *fitted* for the life of heaven.

A *fourth* result is that men by grace become sons of God. By birth we are creatures of God, servants of God, but not sons. Once we receive the Supernatural Life we have received that which will one day enable us to know Him directly. But it is proper to God's own Nature—and to no other—to know God directly. Thus, by a gift of God, we are enabled to do something which belongs to God's own Nature, hence there is a real similitude of nature which is rightly expressed by the word "Sons." This is what St. Peter means when he says that we shall be made partakers of the Divine Nature: and the Church expresses the same truth when she says that grace is a "created participation in the life of God."

Any man possessed of the Supernatural Life is of necessity possessed also of faith, hope and charity. There is no limit to the degree of intensity of the life. By baptism we receive it. If by mortal sin we lose it, then by the Sacrament of Penance we regain it. By the Blessed Eucharist principally, it receives addition. By prayer and by meritorious action of every kind man obtains from God increase of the Supernatural Life. And the whole purpose of man's life upon earth might be stated as the obtaining,

preserving and increasing of this life of Grace in his soul.

We are now at last in a position to take stock of the life of the member of Christ's Church. The primary fact about him is that he is not an isolated unit, pursuing his own solitary path to his own private goal. He is a cell in a living Body, the Body of Christ. As such he has a special relation to Christ: for Christ's life flows through every cell in Christ's Mystical Body. The cell—that is to say, the individual Catholic—may yield his will wholly to Christ, or partially, or not at all: and, according to which of these he chooses to do, he will have the Life flowing through him in plenitude, or less fully or not at all: for a man can be a dead cell in the Body, retaining faith, but not vivified by charity. But in so far as his will is right, then Christ lives in him; and because Christ, then the Holy Ghost likewise: the Spirit of God, proceeding from the Father and the Son, in His own adorable essence the bond of love between Father and Son and so ever known by the Church as the Giver of Life: for the Supernatural Life is inseparable from the virtue of charity, which is love. Thus the member of the Church, living supernaturally, is indwelt by the Holy Ghost, organically united to Christ who is God the Son, and by Him brought to the Father.

The relation of all the redeemed to Christ involves a relation of all to each other. The one life flows through them all: all are sharing in the divine life

that pours out from the Head. So that whether in Heaven or in Purgatory or upon earth, all members of Christ are members one of another. And as in a body one part can help another because of the life it has, so in the Church one person can help another because of the life that flows to him from the Head. Thus when our Lady obtains graces for us by her prayers, she is acting not by her own power, but by virtue of the life that is in her from Christ—a life which is also in us, though in her the life is a thousandfold more intense because of the greater perfection of her love of God here upon earth.

This life in the Body is the first thing to be noted. Every member of the Body who is not in rebellion against God possesses it, as it were, automatically. Normally, also, though not automatically, he possesses two other things, only less important than the life: for, as a member of the Church, he has the means of knowing the laws God has made for right conduct: and all the truths which will enable him to understand the meaning and purpose of his life. Thus he knows all that mass of truth concerning God (who made him and who rules him and to whom he must come) which have already been indicated: and principally he knows that God is love—a piece of knowledge which is a most powerful stimulus to right action of every kind and which, as has been seen, marks the supreme difference between Christianity and all other religions whatsoever. He knows, further, all sorts of truths about

himself: including the damage wrought in his nature by the sin of the first man, which makes of every man, be he never so great a saint, a kind of convalescent—one, that is, on the road to health but weakened in constitution and not secure from relapse until he enters heaven. He knows how the original weakness of his nature (which he cannot help) and the damage caused by his own sins (which he *can* help) may be repaired. He knows the meaning of sin—both in its attraction for himself and in its ugliness before God. He knows something of the meaning of suffering, and knows, therefore, how it may be used for the eternal enrichment of his own soul and offered to God for the souls of others. He knows that in a world over-ruled by the providence of God nothing is of necessity evil, save only sin.

In the mere detail of his life, he has the supreme advantage of possessing a standard by which all things can be judged. His own career in life, his love of his neighbour, his duties to his neighbour, the entangled claims upon him of family, nation, humanity at large: in judging of all these he can apply principles, where other men can only be puzzled by a crowd of instincts or emotions. For in a tremendous number of instances, the law of God is quite explicit, so that no discussion arises: and where he cannot clearly hear the law of God, he knows what man is made for and can at any rate make the effort to judge by that: is this or that

condition of things helpful to the saving of men's souls, or a hindrance? Once this primary matter is settled, other considerations—as to his own and his neighbour's temporal well-being—must receive attention. But urgent as such questions may be, they can never be his first concern.

For every man, the one really vital thing is that he should have the Supernatural Life in his soul, for one day he will die.

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Discussion Aids

What is the effect of the Supernatural Life upon human nature—destruction or elevation? What does it do for the existing faculties of the soul, intellect and free will? Explain what is meant by the *action* and *object* of a faculty. Illustrate. What is the *action* of the intellect? the *object* of the intellect? What is the *action* of the will? the *object* of the will? What is the highest task of the intellect? of the will? What is the difference between the knowledge and love that we may have for God according to our nature and the knowledge and love we may have for God according to the revelation He has made to us? When grace enters, do the intellect and will still retain their *object*? What influence does grace have on the *action* of these faculties? In the next world, does the intellect believe in God, or does it know God direct, that is, face to face? By what power is this possible? Can a man by his own power have a direct vision of anything at all? How does a man know things? How does knowing things by means of an idea differ from the knowl-

DISCUSSION OUTLINE FOR A MAP OF LIFE

edge we shall have in heaven? In heaven, what becomes of faith? What takes its place? What are the three levels of action of the intellect of man? What becomes of hope in heaven? Of the three theological virtues, which one will remain in heaven? How will it differ from charity on earth? What virtues are infused into the soul at baptism? Are these virtues present in every soul in the state of grace, that is, in a soul possessing the Supernatural Life? How may a soul lose the Supernatural Life? Does grace remove from man's damaged nature his tendency to seek his own interest rather than God's will? How is this bias in his nature cured? Is man's effort towards doing the will of God always successful? When he fails and sins, what virtue is lost? Is the Supernatural Life inseparable from Charity? Do faith and hope remain in the soul after the loss of charity? In what condition are they, separated from charity? What is the first result of the possession of the Supernatural Life? A second result? Make very clear the difference between Actual Grace and Sanctifying Grace, or the Supernatural Life. What is a third result of the possession of the Supernatural Life? A fourth result? Explain what it means to be a "son of God." Discuss the definition of grace that it is a "created participation in the life of God." What is the whole purpose of man's life upon earth? How is this purpose accomplished? In taking stock of the life of a member of Christ's Church what do we

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find to be the primary fact about him? How is this cell (which he is) related to Christ? What three courses are open to this cell, the member of the Church? What results follow in each case? May he become a dead cell? What is the glorious condition of the living cell? What is the relationship existing among the living cells whether in heaven, in purgatory, or on earth? How can they help one another? What has each living cell, each member, in addition to the Supernatural Life? Catalogue the important pieces of knowledge that the member of the Church has about himself. Discuss his advantage over other men in having an objective moral law. What is the really vital thing for every man?

Practice: Make your "technical" preparation for heaven as complete as possible by availing yourself of all the means at hand, especially the Mass and the sacraments.