

## THE SUPERNATURAL.

**S**TUDENTS of ecclesiastical history have said that nearly all the heresies in the Church took their rise in some confusion of notions with regard to what is called the natural and the supernatural order of things. If this be so, we need not be surprised to find that this want of clearness of apprehension should lead to errors of the most opposite kinds. And so we do. Certainly the narrow rigor of Jansenism seems to be the very antipodes of that tendency to broad liberality which is the apprehended religious danger of the present day. And yet this confusion is at the root of both these schools of error. In the letter of our Holy Father condemning this liberalism, or disposition to liberalism, he says: "It is hard to understand how those who are imbued with Christian principles can place the natural above the supernatural virtues, and attribute to them greater power and fecundity." Therefore, according to the Holy Father, there are some men at the present time whose ideas are so obscure on this subject that they appear actually to place the natural virtues higher in their estimation than those of the supernatural order. Now what about the Jansenists? Thus Jansenius expresses himself in the introduction to his famous work: "God had to create the first man perfect like the angels, not only innocent, but positively pure, good and holy or happy. This is original grace, which consequently is *natural* to man; it is given to him essentially by and with creation, not as an additional gift." A more radical error could not have been invented; the whole Christian idea of grace is destroyed by making it something due to nature.

Nothing is more clear than the doctrine of the Catholic Church on grace. Nevertheless it is not generally very much explained or developed to our children or the people. The more exterior dogmata of religion are dwelt upon at length. This part of our belief which is innermost in our faith, the soul, so to say, of our doctrine, is, to a great extent, passed over or at least is not exposed very minutely. The writer of this article at one time wished to give a course of instructions on the seven capital sins or vices. He came to envy. Now envy is as existent in the human heart as grass on the fields. He looked over a number of books to find a sermon on envy. He could not find one. Sermons on all kinds of subjects, practical, actual or otherwise. But a sermon on envy, not one to be got. Perhaps, then, at the risk of appearing to write a catechetical dissertation rather than an essay proper to a review or magazine, I may be permitted to give a brief and simple explanation of the teach-

ing of our holy mother the Church on this question of the supernatural as interpreted by the most approved authorities.

According to Christian revelation, as taught by the Catholic Church, grace is *not* due to nature at all. God might have created man and the angels, too, in what is called a state of pure nature. We are told that He made both man and the angels in a sanctified state, giving to the latter a degree of grace corresponding to, or suited to, their individual perfection. Thus if one angel were many times more perfect naturally than another angel, God gave to him so many times more grace. To this one grace the angels corresponded or they did not. Those who did obtained immediately their reward. So that the angels preserve their hierarchical order in heaven, according to the common opinion, the same as if they had been created and remained in a purely natural condition. It is a pious belief that the souls of men are sanctified in various degrees so as to fill the gaps left in this blessed hierarchy by the defection of the fallen spirits. To the first man God gave a certain measure of sanctifying or habitual grace as he saw fit. God might have created him with or without grace, as he is now, in what we call his fallen state, subject, that is, to suffering, with evil inclinations, etc. He did not; He created him exempt from all these things, with the additional possession of grace. Now this grace is always accompanied by, if it is not one with, the theological virtue of charity. For grace is a real something, something existing in the soul, created there by God, not due to nature, of an incomprehensibly higher order than the order of nature, entirely different in kind, something which makes man resemble his Maker as He is personally constituted, as by nature he resembles Him in substance or being.

Without grace man would never have suspected or known the existence of the Trinity; he would not have been called to the beatific vision; God would have been his last end, and after his present life, if his soul were pleasing to God, he would enjoy a happiness great indeed, but incomparably below that to which he is now called. He would see God as from outside, as we look at a picture, or as we look at the outside of a palace; whereas, if he dies in the possession of grace, he will be received into the bosom of the blessed Trinity; he will be like the child of the house, who has the whole run of it and from whom nothing is concealed. If Adam had been created without grace, he naturally would have died and then entered into the possession of his natural happiness, if he deserved it. But being once called to a life of grace, he had no longer the choice to be contented with a state of natural perfection or to aim at that which was higher. He was obliged to correspond with grace, and to die, if he died, in a state of grace. For the grace of God was of two kinds,

actual and habitual. Habitual grace was a permanent thing which was infused into Adam's soul at the moment of his creation, and which is now received by infants with their baptism. Actual grace is the help or assistance God gives to the soul in order to enable it to perform actions of the supernatural kind. To man God did not give so much habitual grace and no more. On the contrary, so long as man lives he can increase the sum of his habitual grace, and this he does by corresponding with the actual graces he receives. Every time that man coöperates with the impulse of the Holy Ghost, accomplishes an act of obedience and love for God, the Almighty at the same time increases in a proper proportion the amount of grace in his soul. This is similar to what takes place in the natural order. Habits are strengthened by acts. It is by repeated acts that we become confirmed in our habits both of virtue and of vice. The supernatural virtues grow in the same way, only in this case God must Himself cause the augmentation directly by His creative power in the supernatural order. Of course, God always creates or preserves us in the natural order, too; but in the natural order man's action has something to do with the increase of the habit.

By his sin Adam lost the grace of God. But there is no difference between the grace of Adam before his fall and that which he afterwards received and which we possess through the death and merits of our Lord Jesus Christ. Here the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church is contradictory to that of all the so-called reformers of the sixteenth century, and infinitely more worthy of our conception of the Deity. But to occupy ourselves in this place with their monstrous imaginings would be to lose our way and our time. The grace of God was amissible both to Adam and to Christians. Grace was given and is offered freely, and just as freely man may accept or reject it. If he rejects it, then he is no friend of God. Nor will he be his friend in the life to come. Heaven was closed to all the sons of Adam when he fell. But Christ died, and heaven was opened again. All men may enter there, because all men may obtain and keep the grace of God. All men are called to do so. Christ died for all, and all men are under an obligation to profit by His death.

Here comes a tremendous question. How can they? How can the Negroes of Central Africa, how can the inhabitants of Thibet know of Christ and profit by His grace? How, indeed, to come nearer home, can the majority of the people living all around us know that the Roman Catholic Church is the true church? To be saved we must believe and be baptized. Sometimes we answer questions by recounting a fact. A story then is told of Hermann, the pianist, who was a converted Jew, and who died in the odor of

sanctity. When he was thinking with grief of the death of his Jewish mother, who would not see or speak to him, our Lord made known to him interiorly that He Himself had appeared to the dying lady, declared that He was the Messiah, and she, like St. Paul, believed and was saved. She obtained the baptism of desire. God can communicate His gifts independently of the visible organization which we call the church. How often does He do so? Always, it seems to me, in this sense, that He always offers His grace, the first grace first. If the soul corresponds to that one, then He offers another. Christ died for all, all are under the obligation to lead a supernatural life. Therefore God must offer them His grace. Theologians tell us there is a moment when every man reaching the age of reason is obliged to choose what is morally right or morally wrong. Why should God not give him the grace to choose supernaturally? St. Thomas says that God would send an angel to instruct a well-meaning man rather than let him die in ignorance and sin. The Lord has many angels. What is to prevent them from suggesting thoughts of repentance even to sinning and guilty men? Who knows what takes place between the soul and its Lord at the hour of death? No one has ever told us that. The chief one of His attributes which God was pleased to reveal in the work of creation is that of mercy. The whole work of creation is a manifestation of mercy. This is true of both the natural and the supernatural creation. In the natural order nothing can be more miserable than nothingness itself. Mercy means goodness to misery. To give existence to that which was not is certainly an act of mercy. To give the life of grace is an additional act of mercy. To restore divine charity to the guilty soul black with sin, that surely is a most wonderful act of mercy. And to be desirous to forgive, and willing to forgive again and again and again, that is mercy indeed. But to take the nature of guilty man, and in that nature to die for him, that all men might be saved—who can call in question the proof that the one object of creation was to show a power of being merciful limited only by the divine omnipotence and wisdom itself? We know that all men need this mercy; and, although we cannot sit in judgment on the Almighty, still, when He chooses some souls and rejects others, we know that it is not without reason and justice. We know that always and at all times and under all circumstances this God of infinite charity and of infinite mercy wishes every soul of men to be saved and wishes it intensely. Our God is a God of love. Our God is not only not a tyrant or a selfish being who acts like a kind of blind fate, but to every child that has been formed by His own hand we believe that He is the tenderest of fathers, more loving than a million mothers. Another thing to be remembered is this: we

know positively all that the Church has made known to us dogmatically from revelation, and we know the conclusions which follow necessarily from such premises; but all this is comparatively little. Outside of that little our ignorance is immense. We are like a man who walks out in the morning in a fog; he sees before, behind, to the right and to the left, a little but enough. When we die the fog will be lifted and the whole glorious horizon shall appear distinctly to our satisfied view.

Nevertheless, every man coming into this world is obliged to enter the Roman Catholic Communion. He cannot take this step, however, till he realizes the obligation so to do, nor could any Catholic priest baptize him until he says that such is his conviction. How long persons remain in good faith before entering the Church, how many of them are in a state of grace, how many die outside the visible fold of the Church really in friendship with God, how many, though they may have sinned grievously, repent and are saved, God knows; we do not. This is the safest way to talk on this subject. God alone sees men's hearts. What we do know is—and this is a ground for almost infinite hope—that He is infinitely good, and has perhaps a thousand secret ways of saving souls of which we possess no knowledge. Our duty is to tell people to revere God and to pray, to be ready to give a reason for the faith that is in us, to preach the Gospel if we are priests, to help our neighbors in every way in our power, especially by good example.

But the natural virtues are very beautiful! Undoubtedly they are, as everything is which God has made—the stars, the mountains, the forests, the fields, the sea. And things which God has made in the intellectual and spiritual order are more beautiful than anything in the merely animal or vegetable or mineral kingdom; the song and flight and plumage of birds, the fragrance and bloom of flowers, the brilliancy of the Aurora Borealis, the cataract of Niagara, what are these to the beauty of moral virtue? This moral virtue is the highest gift of God to man—in the natural order. To be brave, to be generous, to be true, to give and to forgive—that is glorious! To take one instance out of the hundreds we read of every day in our papers of man's fidelity to duty, of our firemen or policemen, of life-savers on the seacoast, of locomotive engineers, of that commonest of kinds of heroism which men will never tire of admiring, of physical courage; take the example of that Japanese soldier—he may have been a Christian, most probably he was a pagan—who, when there was no other way, rushed forward and blew up the Chinese breastwork, blowing himself at the same time into eternity. That man was another Arnold Winkelreid. But the natural virtues are not confined to mere animal courage under the

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excitement of the enthusiasm of a moment. All the moral virtues can exist in the natural order. And all these virtues are God's gifts. What has man got which he does not owe to his Creator? And his Creator is ready to help him to gain increase and become perfect in the practice of these virtues, too. Only in practice we find that too often the men who have left us examples of the exercise of these heroic gifts were inconsistent. Read Plutarch's lives of his heroes; you will find that those men who at one time were merciful, at another were cruel; he who in one circumstance proves himself chaste, in another shows himself libidinous; and so on. But ordinary Christians cannot reproach the great men of antiquity very much, for they themselves are often little better. And no wonder; for Christians, too, are generally poor travelers who stumble on the way. Only the saints were consistent men.

These natural virtues possess another great, very practical advantage, for they dispose a man to be more fit to receive the gifts of a higher kind. The absence of vice is not a virtue, the presence of natural virtue is not a proof of grace. But certainly if we remove impurities from the water which we drink it is less liable to be injurious to our health. It is clearly a matter of common sense that a soul rich with these natural virtues is a better field in which for God to plant the seed of His grace than a soul which is choked full with the weeds and thorns of vice. Nevertheless God may show Himself liberal to the sinful soul and apparently withhold His mercy from the more upright men. He may do this because he is free. He may do it for reasons simply inscrutable to us at present. He may do it because He sees things in the heart of the so-called naturally just man which displease Him and finds probabilities in the sinful man which appeal to His designs of mercy. Who can understand His ways and who can call Him to account? What we know is this, that not all the natural virtue which has ever been exhibited is equal to a degree of supernatural grace. The grace received by an infant baptized in danger of death deserves a greater recompense than the merits of all the natural acts of virtue of all mankind from the day of Adam till the day of doom. Without it no man shall see God; with it that child shall rejoice in the happiness of His presence during an eternity of glory. More than this, all the valor, patience, self-control, fidelity, truth, benevolence, spirit of sacrifice that have appeared in the history of all men are not worthy, in the sight of God, to deserve one degree of that grace which was first freely given to Adam, but which is now imparted to the believing soul only in virtue of the merits of the blood of Jesus Christ. The first act of faith is a free gift of God. The first supernatural grace, actual grace, the inspiration to pray, is a thing which cannot be bought

of the Holy Spirit by all the combined efforts of a purely natural kind of all the race of men and all the angels of heaven. So that here is a great gulf fixed.

The institution of the sacraments in the Christian Church may throw some additional light on this matter, especially what are called the sacraments of the dead, baptism, penance, extreme unction. Before the coming of our Lord, to be forgiven their sins men were obliged to make acts of perfect contrition. There was no other possible way of obtaining pardon. Now we are forgiven through the sacraments without perfect contrition. How? By acts of natural sorrow? Not a bit. All the natural sorrow in the world will not deserve forgiveness of sin. A man may go to confession with regret for his misdeeds, from excellent motives, but all in the natural order. He may make a good confession, so far as the mere accusation of his faults goes, imagine he has been pardoned, be in perfect good faith and yet remain guilty before God. This is why Catholic theologians have established the distinction between perfect and imperfect contrition. If perfect contrition were necessary, as it was before the time of Christ, then the sacraments would be useless. Mere natural repentance does not count. Therefore they concluded that there were two sorts of sorrow, both of the supernatural kind, one which deserved at once the remission of sin, the other which was imperfect and incomplete in its kind. This latter, however, as it is supernatural also in its origin and character, so disposes the soul that it may be elevated by additional grace to that perfection of repentance which brings with it the infusion of sanctifying grace and charity. It is this additional grace which is received more easily and expeditiously through the sacraments. Probably before the coming of our Lord no Jewish rabbi would have thought of making this distinction in the ways of loving God and grieving for offense against Him. But its reality helps to enlighten us more on the absolute abyss which extends between the highest energy of mere nature and the lightest influence of grace.

This may explain some things apparently unintelligible or which may scandalize persons of weak mind and especially of weak faith. These natural qualities of honesty, industry, sobriety, etc., which are found in men of every religion and no religion at all, deserve some recompense. That recompense cannot be in the life to come. St. Augustin says the Romans were rewarded with the empire of the world for their natural virtues. Why should not nations, and individuals, too, be recompensed in the same way to-day as well as in past times? An individual may become rich, a family may prosper, a nation may obtain a great empire, and this may be the return made by heaven in this life, for their practice of natural virtue,

to those whom God shall call to account for their neglect of supernatural grace in the next.

Then, however, the natural virtues shine out most resplendently when they have been vivified by a supernatural principle. When the hero who fights for his country at the same time fights for God; when he who, knowing that he leaves a wife and children desolate, throws away his own life to save that of others, does it from a motive of religion as well as a natural sense of duty, ah! then you have the grandest thing in man. When the Indians tore out the heart of Father de Brébœuf, burning at the stake, that they might infuse into themselves something of his courage by drinking his blood, it was because Brébœuf was naturally a brave man. But compare his constancy with that of the savages who tortured him. They, from a motive of pride characteristic of their race, would endure every torment without flinching. The priest bore his sufferings with a quiet dignity as superior to the bravado of the savage as his religion was above that of the manitou and the sorcerer. Great are the natural virtues, good are the natural virtues; but it is because the Creator intended that, in the present disposition of things, they should be elevated to a higher plane, so that by their use the souls of men should not only give greater glory to God on earth, but earn higher crowns for themselves in heaven. By all means let us admire everything that is good in our neighbors and give them credit for it, and let us try to practise ourselves all the moral virtues, only with a supernatural motive.

This article would not be complete without some more direct allusion to the momentous question of the distribution of grace. The scholastic theologians tell us that all questions end in mystery. If there be anything, then, which is a mystery to the human mind, it is this most serious question of the distribution of grace. Why does God give so much to some and so much more to others? If Christ died for all, why are not all saved? It is the same question and the same mystery as the permission of evil. Why does God permit suffering, sin, the loss of souls? Why was Abel innocent and Cain a reprobate? Here we can only bow down our heads and adore, knowing that God is not unjust. He would not force the human will. He permits evil to draw from it greater good. To save the fallen race of Adam, Christ became man. But there was no special incarnation for the race of Cain. On the contrary, God tells us that He will punish the sins of parents on their children to the third and fourth generation, while he will show mercy to thousands of those who love and serve Him. God would not force the human will. With infinite prescience He knows which is the proper and fitting grace to give to every soul. That grace is always sufficient

for salvation, probably superabundantly sufficient. If the soul corresponds with the grace which it receives, that grace becomes efficacious, and if the soul preserves and corresponds to its final grace, it will be saved.

But here comes in another consideration. Do we know that we correspond with the grace of God? Absolutely, with a positive knowledge, no. The grace of God and the whole supernatural order is something insensible and invisible. We cannot be conscious of the presence and the action of grace. The supernatural world is something nature and our natural faculties cannot be cognizant of. We can conclude the presence of grace, however, by its evident effects. By their fruits ye shall know them. A good tree produces good fruit. Those who live up to the norm and standard of Christian ethics we may believe to be actuated by the Christian spirit. But this is only a guess, a probability or what is called broadly a moral certitude. No man knows, the Scripture says, whether he be worthy of love or hate. My conscience reproaches me nothing, says St. Paul, yet not therefore am I justified. God alone sees the heart; we do not know our own. Not that this possibility of doubt should discourage us. In this life, in almost every business, we must act on probabilities, and in the all-important business of our salvation we must act on this moral certitude, this great probability. If we live in doubt and darkness, we know that God is good and wise, merciful and loving. It is well for us that we should be in a state of incertitude in this life; it stirs us to exertion and vigilance and keeps us in God's holy fear and in a salutary humility. More than this, even if we were aware that we were now, this moment, in God's friendship, we know not what the future may bring about. Therefore we can despise no one. We can never say, like the Pharisee, I am righteous and this man a sinner. And even if we did know that we were in God's grace and our neighbor in a state of sin, we know not how it will be to-morrow, and especially when the end comes. We may yet be reprobates, we may have a comparatively low place in heaven, and he whom we now despise may be high up among God's blessed in the celestial hierarchies.

In the light of eternity all God's ways will be made evident and plain. Now and here even an almost infinitely beautiful variety manifests itself in the distribution of his natural gifts, subject to some hidden unity of plan; the day will come when His ways in the spiritual world will be justified before all men, and we shall see that all was well and all was wise and all was done in goodness. Meanwhile we must not allow ourselves to be influenced by the Thomas-like incredulity of those who fear to believe—and fear to hope—because with moles' eyes they cannot

pierce the sun. To be men as well as Christians we must stand by what is certain, no matter how many difficulties present themselves to our exceedingly weak intellect in the explanation of details. God is necessarily, absolutely, infinitely good; He loves all things that He has made, He wishes all men to be saved, and Christ died for all, and the God-man did this with a charity so great that all the angels that could ever possibly be created would not begin even to appreciate it. So we must conclude that, whether men correspond with these designs or not, it is the ardent wish of heaven that all mankind should lead a supernatural life and enjoy in the hereafter a supernatural reward. Therefore if any of us come to grief, not only will it be by our own fault, but in spite of earnest, careful, sincere, to speak humanly, whole-hearted efforts on the part of our Creator to prevent our going astray. Short of forcing the human will, and so far as is consistent with the dictates of his omniscient judgment in the organization of things which he has chosen to establish, He endeavors to make every one lead a supernatural life, kindly and energetically, infusing into men's souls, as the beginning of wisdom, His holy fear, but wishing them to love Him with a love, if possible, as boundless as His own beauty, goodness and immeasurable mercy.

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### THE MYSTIC RITES OF ELEVSIS.

IN many natural religions there are performed at certain recurrent festivals and on the occasion of portentous events, peculiar clandestine and orgiastic rites which may be witnessed only by members of the clan or brotherhood. Secret ceremonies of this kind were not absent from the old Hellenic religions. Of all mystic sanctuaries to which only properly qualified and duly approved spectators were admitted, the most celebrated in the classic ages and in subsequent history was the shrine of the twain goddesses at Eleusis.<sup>1</sup>

Investigators are unable to date the first beginnings of this Attic town of Eleusis. However, the discovery of prehistoric tombs near its ancient citadel indicate that it was well inhabited in the second millenium before Christ. Its advantageous position made it a centre of opulence. It owned the fertile Rharian fields which stretch westward along the sea towards the Megarid, and the equally productive plain of Thria which extends eastward along the road to Athens.

<sup>1</sup> Pausanias Description of Greece, 10, 31, 11; Diodoros Historical Library, 5, 4; 5, 77.