

## *On Nature and Grace*

1. God is by nature gracious toward God's creatures.

2. Therefore, creatures are by nature graced by God.

3. God is by nature gracious toward God's creatures not merely in one respect but in two: (1) in *creating* creatures, by so acting that there is always a world of other actors, of whose being and activity God is *the* sustaining *conditio sine qua non*; and (2) in *consuming* creatures, by so reacting to the being and activity of all the other actors in the world as to creatively incorporate their being and activity into God's own.

4. Therefore, creatures are by nature graced by God not merely in one respect but in two, whence the concept of the "double gratuity" of God's grace: (1) in being created as creatures, in that the fact that there is some world for them to be and to act in is no more their own doing, either individually or collectively, than is the fact that there is always a certainly relatively fixed and stable order to the world that allows for the possibility of more good than evil being realized through their own activity; and (2) in being consummated as creatures, in that, being creatively incorporated into God's own being and activity, they are thereby delivered from their bondage to decay and thus from the meaninglessness of not making a difference to anything or anyone more enduring than themselves.

5. But there are creatures, and there are creatures. Specifically, there are some creatures who are so created as to be aware of their own creaturehood and who, being thus aware, are aware in principle of all that either is or could be. Being thus created as self-aware, all-aware creatures, however, is itself a matter of being graced in a special way, even as creating such creatures may be said to be a special act of creation. Included in this special grace of creation is the grace of being created by nature with an "obediential potency" (Rahner), or a capacity for "original righteousness" as well as for "original sin" (R. Niebuhr), which explains why creatures thus created are also graced with a special grace of consummation, in that they are confronted with the gift and demand of actualizing their obediential potency, or their capacity for original

righteousness instead of that for original sin. Their consummation by God thus confronts them already here and now with the gift and demand of faith in that consummation, which confrontation is itself a special grace.

6. Moreover, wherever the decisions of creatures are such as to actualize God's will as regards either creation or consummation, there is a further instance of special grace, either of creation or consummation. The will of God as regards creation is that the local orders that creatures themselves establish through their own being and activity should conduce to actualizing the equal freedom of each and all. In the case of self-aware, all-aware creatures such as human beings, God wills that this also be the case with the social and cultural orders that they have the distinctive freedom and responsibility to create. The will of God in their case as regards consummation is that God's consummation of all things not only be accepted by each of them through obedient faith but also be attested, witnessed to, explicitly as well as implicitly, its being implicitly attested by all they do to promote the equal freedom of all others. But the event of such attestation or witness to the grace of consummation is itself an event of that grace—the decisive witness thereto being the decisive re-presentation of the special grace of consummation toward human beings, and hence itself the decisive event of grace.

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