

GRACE

Introduction:

The Catholic religion is not just a dogma to be believed, or a moral code to be practiced. It is above all a life of union with God, enabling the truth received to be “transformed” into fidelity to God.

The principle of this new divine life is **grace**.

I. THE NEED FOR GRACE

“*Without me, you can do NOTHING*” (Jn 16: 5) said Our Lord.

Nothing in the supernatural order. For the Catholic religion is entirely founded on this distinction between what is:

- **Natural:** body, soul, intelligence, will, passions and all the activity that follows for a natural end.

- **Supernatural:** grace, the virtues, the gifts of the Holy Spirit for the supernatural end, which is the vision of God:

“*You shall see and your heart shall rejoice*” (Is. 66:14).

These two “orders” complement and presuppose each other: “*Grace does not suppress nature, but rather elevates it*” (St. Thomas Aquinas), but they are radically distinct. To mix them up is to destroy the religion of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Grace is made necessary by original sin, which deprived us of it even though we should have had it at birth. Moreover, our wounded nature is incapable even of its own good, so that **without grace a man cannot even practice the Ten Commandments of the natural order.**

II. DEFINITION OF GRACE

The Greek word means “**favor**”, a “**free gift**”. Grace is God’s supernatural help in making us live His life. It is a participation in the divine nature (and life).

How does it work? The love of God (charity) is not like our natural, submissive love: we love things because they are already good. On the contrary, charity makes good what is not good. God doesn’t love **His creatures because they’re good, but creatures become good because God loves them!** This divine favor deposited in us by God’s love is grace (...to meditate on!). “*He brought me into the cellar of wine, He set in order charity in me*” (Canticle of Canticles 2:4).

III. DIFFERENT TYPES OF GRACE

SANCTIFYING (habitual)	➔	Sufficient
ACTUAL	➔	Effective

- Grace, strictly speaking, is **sanctifying** or **habitual** grace. It is the divine favor that remains with us as long as we do not reject it. Sanctifying, because it makes us holy and pleasing to God. Habitual, because it dwells within us (hence the state of grace. We are in it even if we don't think about it, even if we are asleep, for example).

- **Actual** grace is a temporary help, a divine motion given to us in a given act (hence its name) to make it supernatural. We can receive actual grace without being in a state of grace (... fortunately!).

- **Sufficient** grace is that which (present at least) God does not withhold from anyone in order to effect salvation. But it is not effective, it does not produce its effect because of the sin that refuses it. On its own, it would be sufficient.

- **Efficient** grace¹ is that which produces its effect (hence its name). It is effective because of God, from Whom alone comes all salvation... A mystery!

IV. THE GIFT OF GRACE

“But to every one of us is given grace, according to the measure of the giving of Christ.” (Eph. 4:7)

Primary grace (as opposed to secondary grace: increase of grace) is ordinarily given through the sacraments of Baptism and Penance (sacrament of the dead).

Secondary grace is given by all the others (ordinarily).

But God, infinitely free with His gifts, He can give grace to whomever He will, whenever He will, in whatever measure He will. He has promised to grant it to prayer, so the two channels of grace are prayer and the sacraments.

- **Grace is lost through mortal sin.** For the effect of grace is, in being pleasing to God, to love Him above all things. Now, in mortal sin, we prefer something else to God, which is to do Him a grave injustice. We therefore lose this precious gift: *“The wages of sin is death”* (Romans 6:23).

- **But sanctifying grace never diminishes:** *“God’s gifts are without repentance”* (Saint Paul). We may have the misfortune to lose grace, but as long as we have it, it can only increase... Venial sin predisposes to mortal sin but does not affect grace.

- **Grace is recovered** (to its former state) **by confession, or perfect contrition**, both of which are acts of God’s love above all else.

- **Grace is the principle of merit.** Without grace, there is no merit: *“Every tree that My heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted”*. What a waste in most human lives!

¹ Grace, however effective, leaves man free. Besides, we are always free to do good, and slaves to do evil. Grace only makes us do good...