

should apply it to ourselves. As a help in this, the Church always finds herself facing a religion and a People which compel her to remember her origins. Everywhere she finds the Jewish People on the same path as herself, scattered as they are, competing with Christians and partly at least possessing the same riches as she herself does. This is a constant reminder that she does not hold these riches from herself but from the divine mercy.

Thus the Christian is continually being encouraged not only to be modest, which is only human, but to be humble, in the sense of acknowledging that he owes everything to God, and through the ministry and instrumentality of other men. The Church has received her inheritance from a People who suffered to preserve it and hand it on. This seems to me to be one of the chief services the Synagogue still renders the Church to this day, and we Christians should never stop thanking God for it.

*(Concluded)*



## THE GOSPEL OF GRACE

P. J. O'MAHONY

**T**HE Fourth Gospel has variously been called the 'Gospel of Grace', 'of Love', 'of the Divinity of Christ', and all these may be applied to it with equal aptness. Perhaps the most striking title is that of 'Grace'. It is the Gospel of hope in our future glory and of our present bliss. We are presented in it with a divinely optimistic view of life because it brings the message of God's infinite and eternal love for mankind. One cannot read it, it seems, and not deepen one's love of God. All this arises from its central theme, which is Restoration. It brings to sinful man new hope of salvation.

If one were asked to produce a text in support of the doctrine of original sin, as a preamble to the doctrine of grace, one could only offer the whole Gospel, for, although original sin is nowhere specifically mentioned, the notion of our estrangement from God is everywhere evident. It is from this estrangement that Christ came to save us.

The Gospel pictures for us the world in a state of utter darkness; in need of light which is the power to believe, for mankind

has not believed. 'Men of the world have never believed in their whole life . . . and in consequence they think an absolute, unhesitating faith in anything unseen to be simply extravagance.'<sup>1</sup> The light which is given them will enable them to believe. If they prefer light to darkness, *life* is given them. They leave the womb of night and come into the light of day—to *life*. But even when this new life has been obtained, all does not end there, for remnants of their former blindness remain and will always remain while they are in the world. They must inhere in the source of life if they are to continue alive. Furthermore, just as they cannot leave the darkness of their own accord, so neither can they persevere in this life unaided; in fact, without this inherence they fall back into the darkness of death.

Such, then, in brief is the teaching of St John on the subject of grace. But we can pursue the matter further, considering certain texts which show, beyond all doubt, St John's clear setting-out of this sublime doctrine.

Christ, who is to give us this new life, is of course the source of it—he is God.

'I and the Father are one' (x, 30).

'By him all things were made' (i, 3).

'For as the Father hath life in himself, so he hath given to the Son also to have life in himself' (v, 26).

We are spiritually dead, so that if this life is to be given to us we must be born again; this time in a spiritual manner.

'Unless a man be born again he cannot see the Kingdom of God' (iii, 3).

We must be born again of 'water and the Holy Ghost' (iii, 5).

But there are *two* necessary prerequisites; the first is *faith*, the second is the necessity of being *called by the Father*. In each case the Gospel is equally insistent. We cannot come to life, to *spiritual life*, by purely natural means.

'Therefore did I tell you that no man can come to me unless it be given him by my Father' (vi, 66).

'I have manifested thy name to the men whom thou hast given me out of the world. Thine they were, and to me thou gavest them; and they have kept thy word' (xvii, 6).

'Holy Father, keep them in thy name whom thou hast given me' (xvii, 11).

<sup>1</sup> Newman: *Discourses to Mixed Congregations*, 4.

By this call there is aroused in us the desire for God. Before it, we were turned away from him just as a man with his back to the sun is turned away from the source of natural light and life. The sun is the occasion of his seeing natural phenomena. He could not conceive the idea of having the sun of which he has never heard, nor the idea of seeing things which naturally he is unable to see. The sun and natural objects precede man. They must be there before he can desire them. No man can dispose himself for supernatural life, in virtue of the fact that such an act rests in a sphere totally above his natural state. One act, that of the natural man, is in the natural order; the other is in the supernatural order. Yet man must be disposed. Just as matter must be disposed to receive a new form, so must the soul of man be disposed to receive the gift which excels its present state. God must dispose or call him. He is the only sufficient cause. The result of this call is the gift of Faith.

"They, therefore, said unto him: "What shall we do that we may work the works of God?" Jesus, answering, said unto them: "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he hath sent" (vi, 28-29).

"For God so loved the world as to give his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him may not perish but may have life everlasting" (iii, 16).

Thus we see that Faith in God is a *sine qua non* condition. These texts might seem to imply that Faith alone is sufficient. It is merely a gateway to the fulness which follows on the gift of Faith. Hence, those 'who sit in the shadow of death' must receive Light before they can see. This light of Faith is the gift of God. It is possible to resist the Divine calling. The Jews did so and our Lord often upbraids them for it. God calls us but does not force us, because fallen man has still the use of intellect and free will. When the call is given, man is expected to co-operate. He must make full use of the 'arousing' grace which is implied in the call. If he responds he is helped still further. All have been called, for Christ 'enlighteneth every man that cometh into this world' (i, 9). Sufficient grace is given, but this can only become effective through man's co-operation. By co-operation he receives 'grace for grace' (i, 16). Consequently, we find our Lord warning his hearers of the dangers inherent in free will:

"Therefore I said to you, that you shall die in your sins. For

if you believe not that I am he you shall die in your sins' (viii, 24).

St Prosper tells us that in the gift of Faith, in itself a grace, there is nothing that constrains or compels the will, although the effect of grace is to move the will to incline to God. No, the effect with regard to free will is to lead the will to desire to be subjected to such a sweet yoke.

Perhaps we should next consider the effects of this restoration to our former state. The first effect is union with God, even to the extent as we shall see, of becoming one with him. We become the 'Sons of God'.

'But as many as received him, he gave them power to be made the Sons of God, to them that believe in his name' (i, 2). 'And the glory which thou hast given me I have given to them, that they may be one as we also are one' (xvii, 22).

'I in them and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one' (xvii, 23).

This brings us to the in-dwelling of the Holy Trinity in the soul. For where there is one Divine Person there also are the others found.

'... and my Father will love him, and we will come to him, and make our abode with him' (xiv, 23).

'And I shall ask the Father and he shall give you another Paraclete that he may abide with you for ever' (xiv, 16).

The intimacy which exists between a soul in the state of grace and God exceeds the human imagination. This was the New Revelation. God is our Father—no longer is he represented as the stern exactor of justice as in the Old Testament. He loves us to the extent of coming to abide with us, if we will have him, for he respects man's free will even to this extent.

This union is altogether necessary if we are to live our lives as God would have us live them. Without grace, our participation is forfeited. And the most important thing to be remembered is that we cannot, of ourselves, remain in the love of God. Neither can we do anything that merits eternal reward without his aid.

'I am the vine, you the branches. He that abideth in me, the same beareth much fruit, for without me you can do nothing' (xv, 5).

Here again, as in many other texts, is emphasized man's spiritual inability. All comes from God's bounty.

As to the means whereby we are to abide in his love, we have only to turn to Chapter VI. It is not intended to discuss the chapter but merely to point out pertinent passages relating to the conservation of 'the work begun in us' (Phil. i, 6). It serves to illustrate how united with the Godhead we may become by availing ourselves of the means of holiness which Christ has given to us.

'He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, abideth in me, and I in him' (vi, 57).

'As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father, so he that eateth me the same also shall live by me' (vi, 58).

St Thomas tells us that 'wherever the body of Christ is, there of necessity must be the Godhead. For both are really united, wherever there is one the other must be' (*Summa Theol.* iii, 76. 1). In what conceivable manner could man become more like to God? We live—we feast on the Loving Victim. Just as the food we eat is assimilated and becomes part of our very bodies, so the Body of Christ becomes part of our souls, animating thereby our whole being with the Life of God. Yet this gives rise to another consideration, viz.: our life in Eternity with God.

'If any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever' (vi, 52).

'He that believeth in me, hath everlasting life' (vi, 47).

Statements similar to this last text are recorded in St John's Gospel no fewer than six times. What did our Lord mean when he made these statements? Père Garrigou-Lagrange gives us the following answer:

'He that believes in me with a living faith, that is, with a faith that is united with charity, with the love of God and the love of his neighbour, possesses eternal life already begun.'<sup>2</sup>

This possession of Eternal Life is called the *inchoatio vitae* by St Thomas. In other words, he who believes in Christ has within himself in germ, a supernatural life which is fundamentally the same as eternal life. Our spiritual progress cannot tend in the direction of eternal life unless it presupposes the seed of it already existing in us; seed of the same nature as the life towards which we are tending. This is equally true in the natural sphere where the seed, for example of an oak tree, is contained in a tiny acorn.

'And this is the will of my Father, that sent me, that everyone that seeth the Son, and believeth in him, may have life ever-

<sup>2</sup> *Three Ways of the Spiritual Life*, p. 13.

lasting and I will raise him up on the last day' (vi, 40). What, then, is the fruit of the seed of grace? This brings us to the much-discussed matter of works. St John's Gospel is equally insistent on the necessity. Good works are emphasized as the direct result of the love of God which grace engenders in it. The whole of Chapter XIII is an implicit comment on what grace should cause in us. But there are other texts even more explicit:

'By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, that you love one another as I have loved you' (xiv, 15).

'If any man love me, he will keep my word' (xiv, 23).

Good works, then, are an essential part of the life of the just man. They are the outward expression of the inward contact which he has with God. Grace is the medium whereby we lead a supernatural life as distinct from the purely natural. By grace, then, we live in some sense the very life of God, since our good acts have an eternal consequence.

Thus we see the process which is involved in our becoming reconciled to God once more. God calls us to participate in the life of the Godhead. Just as Adam brought death to us, Christ brings life to us. We are born again. The gift of Grace is a free gift depending on the call of the Father. Co-operation on our side with this gift is essential, but even for this, grace is needed, for as we have seen, unless we abide in Christ and so in the Trinity we 'die' once more. Now a dead man cannot work; the same analogy applies in the supernatural life.

We see then, that the teaching on grace as found in the Fourth Gospel immediately precludes the contention of the Pelagians. Grace is absolutely necessary if we are to live as God wills us. It also denies the error of semi-Pelagianism; we cannot, of ourselves, prepare actively for grace. God gives us the initiating grace and future progressive grace. We cannot continue in the love of God without grace. In a word, our whole status is radically the gift of grace. Outwardly, a man in the state of grace remains *terrenum animal*, but inwardly he is indeed *coelo dignum*, a citizen of heaven. 'To purchase for us this inheritance, Christ, our Lord, poured out his precious Blood upon the Cross. May the thought of what we owe him teach us to love him better and to follow more closely in his footsteps.'<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> G. H. Joyce: *The Doctrine of Grace*, p. 267.