

# The grace of God and the fathers

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## THE GRACE OF GOD AND THE FATHERS.

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*An attempt to formulate the doctrine of the grace of God, on the basis of the works of the ancient holy fathers and as far as possible entirely in their own words<sup>1</sup>).*

(1) The grace of God, one in its substance, is divided, according to its mode of acting upon man, into the grace of God the Father and the Son and the grace of God the Holy Spirit. The first drawing by the Father and guidance and illumination by the Son acts upon all, both worthy and unworthy; the second co-operation and assistance of the Holy Spirit, as a higher grace, solely upon the worthy.

(2) The first grace, that of the Father and of the Son, taking its stand on the preliminary forgiveness by God the Father of the sins of all mankind, in Jesus Christ, and consequently acting upon all, calls to salvation every one without distinction and may be designated "summoning". It is transformed into one of selection of some and drawing them nearer, consequent upon the penetration into the innermost of a man, into the disposition of his will, which are known to God even before their manifestation in his actual life. The summoning grace, in both these stages, i. e. both as calling upon all and as drawing some, chosen ones, nearer may be designated, in accord with the Encyclical Letter of the Eastern Patriarchs, antecedent.

(3) Man as the object of working of the grace, is a being deeply impaired both in his body and soul by the original sin and consequently infirm, powerless, yet possessing an ineradicable leaning towards good which by his Creator was intro-

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<sup>1</sup>) From a Book: «The teaching concerning the grace of God as found in the works of the ancient fathers and doctors of the Church down to St Augustin»—historico-dogmatical Treatise by A. Katansky, D. D., Emeritus Professor of the Ecclesiastical Academy of St-Petersburg.

duced into his nature, a dimmed, deformed, but not destroyed image of God in his mind, heart and even in his will, wherein evil shoots its roots most deeply, in the shape of evil habits. The work of the grace of God consists in cleansing, regenerating and building up anew the whole human nature and in particular human will, without, however, annihilating its freedom, and consequently with the participation of man himself in the work of his being built up anew. The effectuation of salvation by the grace in those worthy of being drawn nearer to Christ is done in the following manner.

(4) The grace drawing to the salvation in Christ acts upon man at first outwardly and in divers ways: through acquaintance with the Holy Scriptures, through Christian surroundings and by other means which may suit individual cases. Acting upon the mind, the antecedent grace penetrates by degrees into the heart and assists human will by the awakening in it of a desire for salvation. There begin to form themselves in man some elements of faith, but of a belief as yet dogmatical, —belief proceeding from a man, of belief in the sense of agreeing to accept the gospel preaching.

(5) Whilst, however, acting upon the volition of man the grace does not compel his will, it searches his disposition and waits for his inclination. When this inclination follows, there begins to act a special grace—the grace of the Holy Spirit which had been expecting this very inclination in order to vouchsafe to man a yet further, more powerful than formerly, help and assistance. With the working of this special grace begins the preliminary illumination of the Spirit, in the soul there appear rays of light and of knowledge, belief is strengthened, the faith of God begins to germinate. However, for a full illumination of the Spirit, for a plenary measure of belief, for entire cleansing and regeneration, an especial working of the grace is necessary, in the Baptism of water and of the Spirit (Baptism and the Chrism) and, as a preliminary act, as preparation to it—a preparatory cleansing, a cleansing before washing. This preliminary cleansing, consisting in the exercise of good works, is necessary both in order worthily to receive the grace of Baptism and to debilitate in our will the force of sinful habits, which have become inseparable from it and consequently antagonistic to the grace.

(6) In the Baptism of water and of the Spirit (Baptism and Chrism) by the grace are accomplished the cleansing of man of all his sins, regeneration (in the Baptism of water), building up anew, adoption as a son and strengthening in faith and good will (in the Baptism of the Spirit). In the Baptism of water our sins are remitted by the Father, taken up by the Son and we are cleansed from sinful pollution by the Holy Spirit. In the Baptism of water is bestowed upon us the grace of Christ in the Holy Spirit, and in the Baptism of the Spirit (Chrism) the grace of the Holy Spirit through Christ: in both this as well as in the other Baptism we are joined unto Christ in the Holy Spirit and unto the Holy Spirit through Christ,— we receive the ingraftment of both the One and of the Other. From the Holy Spirit (in Chrism) we obtain the breath of true life, the soul of our soul, the commencement of our building up anew, the boldness to call God “Father” and abundant bedewing which moves human nature to render unto the Husbandman of men the fruit of virtue. The working of the grace in Baptism is accomplished, without pains or exertions on our part, with great rapidity, through one short word, in a single moment. In Baptism the grace is invariably present, independently from our will or desire; however, for the successful operation of the grace upon man, he ought to have an ardour for the eagerly desired (regeneration, building up anew).

(7) Baptism is the commencement and the groundwork greatly beneficial, but only commencement. The full building up anew of a man begins only thereat, since the nature of the soul with its faculties and personal peculiarities does not undergo a transition; the root of the evil is by Baptism not entirely extirpated, just as good acts performed before Baptism are not obliterated by immersion in water. One as well as the other, in the shape of *habits*, remain with the will, which, in its freedom, is inviolable for the grace. This makes further working of the grace upon man, its further help and assistance to him indispensable. Evil as well as good can grow from a seed and root to a large tree. Putting a stop to the development of the first and helping on in the growth of the second is the work of the grace in conjunction with man's will. The operations of the grace present thereat uninterruptedness, wise graduation and a variety of methods of acting upon man, whilst

his free will is fully preserved and merely guided in a wise manner.

(8) The final building up anew, entire change of the soul of man, with active concurrence of his will, is achieved by the grace in the course of his subsequent life after Baptism. The greater part, almost everything in this instance also, as at the commencement of salvation, is to be ascribed to the grace of God; to man belongs only a very small portion. Without forestalling man's desire, so that his will might be safeguarded, the grace expects initiative effort of man's will to draw the grace unto help and co-operation, deep consciousness of the powerlessness of man and his entire trust in God alone, and at the same time constant care of, and attention to, his moral condition and conjoint action of his own feeble powers to the full of their ability in what is being achieved by the grace. The remainder is done by the grace, the workings of which consist in the transformation of man's soul, in its complete change, in final drying up of the root of sin in human will, in the gradual implantation of entire Christ and of the Holy Spirit in all the domains of the soul up to the full union with God, in so far as it is only possible for a finite human being.

(9) Sinful condition—the antithesis of success—consists in a more or less complete domination of sin over the soul; yet the grace of God does not entirely leave the soul which had once been sealed in Baptism, in some manner it still dwells within it, waiting for its conversion. The grace and the sin both sojourn at the same time in the different domains of man's soul. The possibility of conversion of sinful men waited for by the grace lies hidden in the depths of human freedom which is never lost: either in the state of high righteousness, or in the deepest falls of man; consequently the possibility of conversion even of the greatest sinners, just as of a fall of the greatest saints, does never entirely disappear.

Such is the outcome of study of the works of the ancient holy fathers down to the time of S<sup>t</sup> Augustin. For their lithe, equally-balanced mind, well disciplined in the theological controversies (concerning the Holy Trinity and the Person of Jesus Christ),—were impossible such exaggerations and vacillations

in the teaching with regard to the mutual relations between grace and human free will which are met with later when the Western theologians took up the development of this point of doctrine. By the Eastern ancient fathers the three principal ideas which form the groundwork of the above teaching of the Orthodox Church were brought to a perfect agreement and developed in complete harmony, namely—the idea of predominancy, most powerful, all-embracing action in our salvation of the grace of God, secondly—the idea of the inviolability, safeguarded by the grace itself, and of the guidance by it, of human free will, and, lastly, the idea of the conjoint working of God's power and human abilities from the commencement to the very end of individual salvation. None of these ideas overpowered one another, and they were normally developed by those holy fathers who proceeded thereat from the contemplation of the wisdom and goodness of the Triune God—our Creator, Provider, Redeemer and Sanctifier.

The Pelagians having taken up the ancient broad conception of the grace which was called the grace of God the Father and the Son, worked out the conclusion that it embraced only the objective gifts of God to mankind (*gratia naturalis, legis, Christi*). There remained with them, instead of two—divine and human, only one, human, power which, together with the objective gifts of God (*gratia legis, Christi*), took the place of the grace as of God's power which assists us in the effectuation of our salvation.—This misuse of the broad conception was first noticed by S<sup>t</sup> Augustin, but he was led to another extreme,—to the narrowing of the conception by giving exceptional prominence to the grace of the Holy Spirit; thus again there remained only one power which effectuates our salvation—divine alone. Semi-pelagianism consisted of concessions, compromises and mechanical combinations of what does not admit of easy combinations. With their definition of different character and moments of the operation of grace, ancient fathers could speak of both the forestalment and of the non-anticipation, by the grace, of our will and desire; but with the semi-pelagianism the proposition “the beginning of faith rests with man”, in the absence of limitations, had become not only suspicious, but also irregular, incorrect. Besides, having divided the whole process of salvation *equally* between grace

and human power, and ascribing one to the first and another to the latter, semi-pelagianism violated the two fundamental principles of the ancient fathers: (1) the idea of the predominancy of grace and (2) the idea of the constantly conjoined working of the latter with human efforts. To the grace should be ascribed the greater, nay almost the whole, at least two-thirds of the entire work of salvation, but so that the grace never, except at the very commencement and partly at the moment of Baptism and Chrism, works alone without our participation, and that still less can we do anything without the grace.

However, what had been handled and developed by scholasticism of the Middle Ages is now finally and irrevocably accepted by the Roman Church, and her inclination (under the influence of the authorized Anselmo Dunscoth theory of the fall and of the original sin) to the side of exaggerating the importance of human element in the effectuation of salvation found expression in the still more glaring traits (the doctrine of meritorious work, indulgences &c.), so that all the Roman Soteriology is coloured by a tint closely resembling ancient semi-pelagianism.—Protestantism, in its turn, and in its various forms obtained the opposite tint and presents nothing but the repetition and modification of the extremes of the teaching of S<sup>t</sup> Augustin, in its doctrine of predestination and in the principle of solely saving faith, such principle diminishing the importance of human element in Soteriology (good works in the broad sense).

For these Western theories which have cost such an immense amount of labour and which not infrequently are very seductive and splendidly developed, often abounding in psychological analyses, the teaching of the ancient fathers concerning the grace of God might serve as a touchstone whereby to distinguish where and how much of pure gold and how much of an alloy is to be found therein.

N. ORLOFF,  
Professor, King's College, London.

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