

PRAISE FOR *THE GLORIES OF DIVINE GRACE*

“This is another of Matthias Joseph Scheeben’s classic works. It is a work that will be read with joy by priests, religious, seminarians, and laypeople. Its insights into the greatness of grace and into the moral and spiritual life of believers are beautiful and inspiring. One hopes it will also be read by professors of systematic and moral theology—because it has the potential to transform much in those disciplines that is today greatly in need of renewal. Scheeben has such treasures to offer us; his theology brims with living faith and supernatural wisdom.”

Matthew Levering, PhD
James N. Jr. and Mary D. Perry
Chair of Theology, Mundelein Seminary

“In an age where the Church is burdened by the cumulative effects of secularism, naturalism, and horizontalism, we need to rediscover the stunning splendor of God’s program for us—his deifying grace. In this book, Scheeben alerts us to our destiny, making his own the language of a lyric poet while not abandoning the thoroughness that was the hallmark of his theological work.”

Aidan Nichols, OP
Former John Paul II Memorial Visiting Lecturer
at the University of Oxford and author of *Romance and System: The Theological Synthesis of Matthias Joseph Scheeben*

“Matthias Scheeben is quite simply one of the most important and underappreciated theologians of the last one hundred and fifty years. The re-issue of this work in particular is a windfall for the Church. Here Scheeben treats grace and its fundamental importance for the Christian life. He masterfully outlines what grace is, how it works, and how it ultimately leads to our intimate union with God Himself, a union Scheeben so wonderfully describes as ‘drawing down the entire Holy Trinity from Heaven into our soul.’ This work is accessible to all levels of readers, making it

an excellent introduction to the theology of grace. Yet, those well-read on the topic will also find key insights and elucidations throughout. This book is a treasure which will guide the reader to an understanding of how God works in our lives. Scheeben's clarity and zeal will certainly spark the reader to a greater eagerness for God."

Taylor Patrick O'Neill, PhD
Thomas Aquinas College, New England

"Too often we take the greatest gifts for granted. Matthias Scheeben's masterpiece on grace will help you appreciate God's greatest gift in a new and deeper way. In an age of individualism, we prefer to grasp after straws rather than accept the deifying fire that would lift us to glory. Scheeben points us heavenward, a masterful guide into the divine mystery of faith."

R. Jared Staudt, PhD
St. John Vianney Seminary, Denver

"Matthias J. Scheeben may well be the most profound and important theologian many have never heard of or seriously engaged. In Scheeben, we see a grand synthesis of the Church Fathers and the Scholastics, especially St. Thomas Aquinas. Because his thinking is so profoundly rooted in the Church Fathers and Sacred Scripture, his deepest speculative theology makes one want to drop to their knees in prayer, in absolute awe at the glory of who the Triune God is and what he has done for us. This is on full display in his book, *The Glories of Divine Grace*—which, though a devotional work, is thoroughly rooted in incredible theological insight into the mystery of divine grace and how supernatural grace so thoroughly raptures and transforms our human nature and the deepest of human longings. Read this work in a spirit of prayer and study, and your life will never be the same."

Andrew Swafford, PhD
Professor of Theology, Benedictine College,
author of *Nature and Grace* and *What We Believe:
The Beauty of the Catholic Faith*

“Scholastic theology is sometimes said to be at odds with a theology that is mystical and spiritual in content and tone. The work of Matthias Scheeben presents us with an alternative picture, however. This early work of one of the greatest authors of Catholic theology in the modern era is penetrated by scholastic analysis of the mystery of grace. It is also a beautiful and profound work of mystical theology, giving voice to the living experience of the inward presence of God and its transformative power within human nature. A major work of reference and inspiration for those seeking the renewal of Catholic theology today in the service of the spiritual life of the Church.”

Fr. Thomas Joseph White, OP
Rector, Pontifical University of
St. Thomas Aquinas (Angelicum)

THE GLORIES OF DIVINE GRACE

“For the Spirit himself giveth testimony to our spirit, that we are the sons of God. And if sons, heirs also; heirs indeed of God, and joint heirs with Christ: yet so, if we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified with him. For I reckon that the sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come, that shall be revealed in us.”

—Romans 8:16-18

THE GLORIES OF DIVINE GRACE

By

Fr. Matthias Joseph Scheeben

(1835-1888)

Translated by

Patrick Shaughnessy, O.S.B.

*“By whom he hath given us most
great and precious promises: that by
these you may be made partakers of
the divine nature . . .” —2 Peter 1:4*

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FROM THE BOOK . . .

“Not only does grace surpass all natural things, it also surpasses all the miraculous works of God. . . . Thus the work of grace is the greatest wonder of God’s omnipotence. It is even greater than His creation of the world out of nothing. It can be compared only with that unspeakable act of God the Father by which He begets from all eternity His own Son, equal to Himself, and in time unites Him with a human nature.” —*Page 12*

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PUBLISHER'S PREFACE

The Glories of Divine Grace will very likely become the most influential book a Catholic will ever read—and one of the most insightful. For it is all about Sanctifying Grace, which is none other than the life of God imparted to our souls at Baptism. The entire purpose of this book is to show us what that fact should mean to us and how it should affect and alter our lives—indeed, how we who are baptized should therefore live. Few people, including most Catholics, ever give Sanctifying Grace a thought, other than to ask themselves whether they are in the state of grace. But the author of this book—an eminent German theologian of the 19th century—writes sixty chapters about the nature of Sanctifying Grace, how it brings about our union with God, how Sanctifying Grace works, the effects of it upon our souls, and how we can and should grow in it.

If anyone with even a modicum of faith can read the first two pages of this book and not continue on through the end, it would be surprising. For *The Glories of Divine Grace* is not an abstract thesis in theology, but rather a popular book written for *all* Catholics, to show them what an unbelievable gift God has given mankind in Sanctifying Grace. It is a book written with passion and for the salvation of souls, a book of rare understanding, and a book designed and written—with a pen on fire—to shock its readers into an understanding of what they have been for so long taking for granted, without ever really knowing what they possess, and which makes them vastly different in the elevation of their nature from those who do not possess this incomparable gift.

What is Sanctifying Grace? It is none other than the life of God Himself imparted to the soul, whereby man is raised, in a true sense, to the divine level and by which man becomes a friend and a child of God, an heir to Heaven, and

is thereby and thereafter pleasing in His sight—so long as man remains in the state of Sanctifying Grace. Sanctifying Grace is our “ticket to Heaven,” so to speak. When we die, we will ultimately go to Heaven or to Hell for all eternity, depending on whether or not we have Sanctifying Grace in our souls. The presence or absence of Sanctifying Grace in our souls at the moment of death will decide our eternal salvation or our everlasting damnation.

How do we receive this admirable gift? It is received through the Sacrament of the Catholic Church called Baptism. *And how can we lose it?* We lose it by committing mortal sins, which are those sins 1) of a grievous nature (in themselves, or which we think are grievous), 2) which we fully know to be mortally sinful, and yet 3) which we commit anyway, with the full consent of our will.

How do we gain back Sanctifying Grace? We gain it back through the Sacrament of Penance (Confession) when we confess our sins to a priest with true sorrow and a firm purpose of amendment. We can also gain back Sanctifying Grace by making an act of perfect contrition, which is a prayer of sorrow for having offended God *because He is infinitely good and worthy of all our love*. (But, having committed a mortal sin, we still have to go to Confession before receiving Communion, even though we have made an act of perfect contrition.)

Ezechiel the Prophet was speaking of Sanctifying Grace when he said: “But if the just man turn himself away from his justice, and do iniquity according to all the abominations which the wicked man useth to work, shall he live? [I.e., shall he be in the state of Sanctifying Grace?] All his justices which he has done shall not be remembered: in the prevarication by which he has prevaricated, and in his sin, which he hath committed, in them he shall die” [i.e., he will be in the state of mortal sin, with his soul dead to God’s grace, and he will go to Hell if he dies in that state]. (*Ezechiel* 18:24). Again, Ezechiel has written: “And when the wicked turneth himself away from his wickedness, which he has wrought [mortal sin], and doeth judgment and justice, he shall save his soul alive.” (*Ezechiel* 18:27). This is to say

that, when a sinner turns away from his mortal sins and repents in accordance with God's law, he shall gain back Sanctifying Grace.

The term "Sanctifying Grace" is not used in Sacred Scripture, but Sanctifying Grace is referred to in Scripture time and again, and Fr. Scheeben points out to us in this marvelous treatise many of the passages from the Bible that refer to this precious gift of God. Some Scriptural terms for Sanctifying Grace and its effects are "living water," "born again," "wedding garment," "new creation," "children of God," "divine adoption," "life," "justice," "just," "charity," etc.

In *The Glories of Divine Grace*, the author speaks almost always simply about "grace," but by this term he means "Sanctifying Grace," which is "life," spiritual life—the life of God imparted to the soul, which causes the soul to be (as we say) "in the state of grace." This is to distinguish it from "Actual Grace," which is a passing "help" from God to do a certain good thing or to avoid an evil thing. Indeed, the author speaks occasionally about Actual Grace, but for the most part in this book, when he speaks merely of "grace," he is speaking about Sanctifying Grace. And when he speaks about "the glories of divine grace," he is always speaking about Sanctifying Grace, the grace of God that gives life to the soul—supernatural life, the life of God.

He explains most clearly that this "life of God" (Sanctifying Grace) is so much above us that we cannot possibly acquire it on our own; that it is strictly a gift which God freely bestows upon us; and that without it, our "works" (good works) are dead, as far as meriting an eternal reward. But with it, the good or virtuous works that we do have merit in the sight of God and will forever redound to our spiritual credit in eternity. Those who deny the eternal value of good works (i.e., Protestants) are correct with regard to works performed when a person is *not in the state of grace*, for without Sanctifying Grace in his soul, a person merits by his good works nothing at all for eternity. But when a person is *in the state of grace* (has Sanctifying Grace in his soul), that person *does indeed* merit by his good works an eternal reward, because he is now no longer

a mere “natural” human who performs these works, but a child of God who does them. Such deeds done while the life of God is in one’s soul have merit for eternity, for they have been done by no mere natural man, but by an adopted son of God, by a living branch on the vine which is Christ.

We see in the parable of the five wise and five foolish virgins, who have lighted lamps in their hands and are awaiting the arrival of the bridegroom and his party (representing Christ coming at the death of an individual to judge him), that when he was late in coming, they slept, and the lamps of the foolish virgins burned out (they had lost Sanctifying Grace); whereas, the lamps of the five wise virgins had been replenished with the extra oil they had wisely brought with them, and thus they were ready, with their lamps burning (their souls in the state of Sanctifying Grace), to go forth to meet their Lord and enter into the marriage feast (representing Heaven). However, the foolish virgins were left outside (representing Hell). Although the term “Sanctifying Grace” is not mentioned, that is clearly what is referred to in this parable. And *The Glories of Divine Grace* again and again cites famous Scriptural passages that refer to Sanctifying Grace, which is the Catholic term for the life of God received into our souls at Baptism.

As St. Teresa of Avila could come back to earth and appear in vision to a certain person and state that she would gladly live her entire life over again, just to be able to say one more “Hail Mary” and thus enhance the level of her happiness in Heaven, then what should not we be doing to grow and grow in Sanctifying Grace while we can, and thereby gain a higher place in Heaven, where the level of our happiness will be that much greater? And this is why *The Glories of Divine Grace* is so influential: because it will motivate us to attempt at every turn in our lives—just as the Saints have done—to continue to grow in divine grace, uninterruptedly, right to the end of our lives. No other book we know of has such power to influence and persuade people to come to understand properly, to co-operate with, and to augment Almighty God’s divine gift of Sanctifying Grace in our souls, so that we will desire ever to increase our store of it.

This is a book that should become a constant companion at one's bedside, even after a person has once read it, for it is a book that—read a chapter at a time, now and then—will keep before the mind of the Catholic striving for perfection a constant, continually fresh idea of the greatness of this gift of Sanctifying Grace, because, having been baptized in Christ, we need to live as *new men*, “newly created” men and women, people raised up to a level that the unbaptized have no dream even exists!

After reading a few chapters of this book, one will begin to realize why many of the greatest Saints were people who never committed a mortal sin, and why some were even so privileged as never to have committed so much as a purposeful venial sin. In these great Saints, grace built upon grace, and their souls grew in Sanctifying Grace unimpeded, so that their spiritual progress was never set back by their falling into mortal sin. Thus were they able ever to advance in the life of God, their unobstructed spiritual growth being the secret of their spiritual greatness. The lesson for us in this regard from *The Glories of Divine Grace* should be that we should *never* “experiment” with mortal sin, because even after having been forgiven mortal sin, there is left a spiritual debt to be paid because of it, and most likely an inclination to that sin, both of which can sometimes take a lifetime to efface by continual penance. No one would think of putting his hand upon a red-hot burner, even for a few seconds. This would leave a burn mark that would probably last the rest of that person's life. Such a foolhardy deed is somewhat analogous to the effect of mortal sin upon our souls, but with the added effect that mortal sin also throws up a dam before the stream of God's life-giving grace, impeding it from continuing uninterruptedly its beneficial effect in our souls—until we should once again gain forgiveness.

In this book, the author marshalls before our minds all the reasons to abandon sin and to grow in divine grace, because mortal sin drives out Sanctifying Grace. “For grace, being of a divine nature and kind, can co-exist with sin as little as God Himself can.” (Page 39). The author goes on to score point after point that most people have never ever

thought about concerning the action of divine grace. As mentioned, few people ever think about Sanctifying Grace, but without it, we are doomed to Hell; and with it, we are destined for Heaven. Therefore, no study is more important than that which the present book contains. For this book demonstrates, over and over again, that there is no objective in life more important than preserving and growing in Sanctifying Grace. And therefore there is no book, other than the Bible, more important for Catholics to read and understand than *The Glories of Divine Grace*. It promises to be an absolute revelation to most Catholics. For, as Fr. Scheeben states:

“Let us not think that only the great Saints can and should lead a supernatural life. This life does not consist in those extraordinary revelations, ecstasies and miracles with which the Saints are favored by God, but rather in the intimate union with God which grace renders possible for us all and in that holy consecration which the unction of the Holy Ghost communicates to all the actions of true Christians. The common dignity and destiny of all Christians is the foundation upon which the Saints constructed the tall edifice of their virtues and graces; it is the root which in the Saints is developed in all its richness, in all its fullness. We have, then, the same foundation, the same root of sanctity [as the Saints], and if in us it does not attain such splendid development, usually this is because we do not sufficiently cooperate with the work of grace, or perhaps we even place many obstacles in its way.” (Pages 354-355).

In another place the author says: “How is it possible that there are still so many men who are unmindful of their high calling and who rather cling to the earth than allow themselves to be borne to Heaven by God—Christians who prefer to move within the limits of their poor nature than to transcend these limits and with the Angels lead a heavenly life.” A paragraph later, he continues:

“Be this far from you, dear Christian, if you know the meaning of the Christian name and glory in it! Embrace with your noble heart the grace of God, and as a true child of God, endeavor to become more and more like Christ, your Heavenly

Model. Be not guided by the laws of a perverted world, but by the law of grace and of the Holy Ghost. By constant striving after every virtue, keep yourself on the lofty height to which grace has raised you. Soar above the earth and above your own nature through intimate communion with God, your Father. Keep yourself, as much as possible, through constant prayer, in the vestibule of Heaven. This [type of] life alone offers an occupation worthy of your high dignity; in it alone is the realization of the supernatural, divine life that the children of God should lead." (Pages 355-356).

Prepare yourself, dear Reader, for a book quite unlike any other you have ever read, for a book that will explain to you the real meaning of what it is to be a Catholic, a child of God and an heir to Heaven. You have been born again, this time to an exalted state which it is beyond the reckoning of man adequately to appreciate, but you are about to gain some idea of it as you peruse the pages of *The Glories of Divine Grace*.

Thomas A. Nelson, Publisher
August 30, 2000
St. Rose of Lima

A CAPSULE PREVIEW

“By reason of grace, we are living members of Christ. But every action of a member has the same value as if it proceeded from the head. Whatever the members suffer is considered the same as though suffered by the head. In view of this, every work that we perform in the state of grace is a work of Christ, who lives and acts in His Mystical Body. . . .

“Accordingly, the value and merit of our deeds is, according to St. Thomas (*S. Th.* 1-2, q. 114, a. 3), not to be measured according to our natural power and dignity, but according to the infinite power of the Holy Ghost, who is in us. This is also one of the reasons why the Apostle calls the Holy Ghost the ‘Spirit of promise,’ the ‘pledge of our inheritance’ (cf. *Eph.* 1:13-14), and us, the children of promise. (Cf. *Romans* 9:8).

“O incomprehensible dignity! O inexhaustible wealth of divine grace! It is not only a great good in itself, but it is a source of numberless supernatural, heavenly gifts. It weighs so much in God’s scales that we miserable, earthly men can, with our insignificant works, balance the whole Heaven. ‘For that which is at present momentary and light of our tribulation,’ says St. Paul, ‘worketh for us above measure exceedingly an eternal weight of glory.’ (*2 Cor.* 4:17). What can give such an immense value to our troubles and sufferings, which are in themselves but trifles? . . .

“ . . . where grace is concerned, nothing is unimportant, because all these works and sufferings are those of God’s children. Dipped in grace, the chaff becomes gold; filled with its rays, the drop of water becomes the brightest pearl. Thus, every good work, though little in itself, becomes, through grace, of very great value, capable of purchasing for us the greatest treasure, Heaven and God Himself.” —*Page* 240

FOREWORD

Within the profession of theology, Matthias Scheeben (1835–88) has never been forgotten. At least once every generation, some major thinker comes forward to propose Scheeben as the premiere model and guide for the renewal of theology. The Jesuit Cyril Vollert made that case in the pages of *Theological Studies* in 1946. Father Eugene Kevane (urged on by Joseph Ratzinger) made a similar argument in 1988, as did Bruce D. Marshall in *First Things* in 2012.

Scheeben has never been forgotten. But neither has he been adequately remembered. He is universally recognized as a giant in his field, but he has remained mostly unread and thus unassimilated. Though he died well before the end of the nineteenth century, most of his work had not yet been translated into English by the beginning of the twenty-first century.

The book you hold in your hand is an exception and an outlier. It is not, strictly speaking, a work of theology. It is a popular work intended to reach a wide audience, and it was the only one of Scheeben's major works to be rendered in English during his lifetime. It sold very well, in fact, in Europe and in the United States.

Matthias Scheeben was born in 1835 and early discerned a vocation to the priesthood. His genius was apparent at a young age, and he was sent to Rome for studies at age seventeen. For seven years, he lived at the German College and attended lectures at the Gregorian University. He was ordained to the priesthood in December 1858 and returned to his homeland with two doctorates in hand, one in philosophy and the other in theology. He was only twenty-four years old.

He spent a year at a parish before receiving the assignment he would fulfill for the rest of his life. He was appointed professor of theology at the archdiocesan seminary in Cologne. The same year, he published his first book, an anthology of Marian passages selected from the Church Fathers and major poets. He also composed an article that contained, in seed form, the ideas that would distinguish his thought throughout his remaining years. It was about the doctrine of the “supernatural” and its significance not only for Christian thought but also for Christian life. In 1861, at age twenty-six, he produced *Natur und Gnade* (*Nature and Grace*), the first of his major works.

From that time forward, his output was astonishing. He wrote book after book by night—including several multivolume works—while he taught nine courses per term for his seminarians by day.

He read voraciously, yet in a disciplined way. He possessed an easy familiarity with centuries’ worth of theology in several languages. When he couldn’t find the right textbook for his classes, he would sometimes translate a vintage foreign work, adapting it freely as he went.

The Glories of Divine Grace was one of his freely adapted translations. It is based upon the work of Juan Eusebio Nieremberg, a seventeenth-century Spanish Jesuit, but Father Scheeben managed to make it entirely his own.

Perhaps Scheeben’s best known work is *The Mysteries of Christianity*, which he composed from articles he had written for his archdiocesan newspaper. Some theologians grow more specialized as they age, refining their interest to a single point of expertise and then confining their work to that point. Scheeben developed in quite the opposite direction. He was fascinated by the interrelation and interdependence of one doctrine upon another. Catholicism was, for him, a sturdy but delicately wrought web of supernatural mysteries. Though they could be examined individually, each held together with all the others. Remove any one mystery in the web and the others fell apart.

He drew his most memorable analogies from marriage, the nuptial mystery. The Catholic faith requires us to see

unity where others see opposition and division: between nature and grace, humanity and divinity, threeness and oneness, the Old Testament and the New. Scheeben drew the fine distinctions, but he distinguished in order to unite—the more explicit his distinctions, the more profound the unities.

His studies were systematic—not in the way a machine is systematic but in the way a living body is. Works such as *The Mysteries of Christianity* and his later seven-volume dogmatic theology are undeniably crafted by a scholar of genius, but they nonetheless convey a faith intensely lived.

Scheeben was given to raptures as he pondered the central mysteries of Christian faith. He reportedly had visions, which informed his work. His raptures, however, gave way not to emotional outbursts but rather to pages characterized by the purest intellectual clarity. The usually reticent *Catholic Encyclopedia* stated without qualification: “Scheeben was a mystic.”

And he was. Like Saint Basil the Great and Saint Thomas Aquinas, he was a man of colossal intellect who was nonetheless a prodigious and productive worker. There was nothing of the airy dreamer about him. He worked hard, and he was engaged in the great movements of his moment in history. He delighted in the documents of the Vatican Council, and he was a great champion of its decision on papal infallibility. He was courageous and outspoken in defense of religious liberty when Otto von Bismarck’s government seized control of Catholic education and even the Church’s episcopal appointments.

Like Basil and Thomas, he was immersed in sacred tradition and knew its monuments with an unrivaled mastery. It is both a cliché and an understatement to say that he was also similar to Basil and Thomas in that he was far ahead of his time, anticipating developments that would emerge more fully in the century ahead.

And like them, he would be admired in his time, though not fully understood or appreciated. It took the Church more than a century, after all, to recognize what it had in Aquinas.

Alas, once again like Basil and Thomas, he died relatively young and left his greatest work unfinished, as did Thomas.

It has been my privilege to speak with two popes in my lifetime, Saint John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI. I was in awe of both men, and as I approached them, I wondered what I could possibly say to them. Both times, spontaneously, I decided to bring up the name of Matthias Scheeben, and in both cases, I saw a smile, and a rich conversation followed.

Not long ago, the theologian David Augustine described Scheeben as “The Best Theologian You’ve Never Heard Of.” But now you have this book, so the statement does not apply to you. We are living, moreover, in the midst of a Scheeben revival in the field of theology. A generation of young scholars have discovered the man’s work and are engaging with him as others should have engaged with him long ago. At last, too, his books are appearing in English translation.

I believe you’ll love this one. I consider it to be the most inspiring and challenging book I have read on the spiritual life. When you reach the end, you will not be quite the same Christian you were when you began. You’ll be closer to the heart of the mysteries.

Scott Hahn

AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

1. *"All good things came to me together with her, and innumerable riches through her hands. She is an infinite treasure to men, which they that use, become the friends of God, being commended for the gifts of discipline."*¹

These beautiful words which the Book of Wisdom speaks in praise of the wisdom that comes from God, may also be applied to Divine grace. The true and heavenly wisdom of which Holy Scripture speaks, is, indeed, that super-natural enlightenment which the sun of eternal wisdom infuses into our souls from the bosom of Divine light. This wisdom is itself a grace, or rather the most beautiful and glorious fruit of grace in our soul.

When, therefore, St. John, in the beginning of his Gospel, wishes to express in a word the whole plenitude of the treasures and gifts which the Son of God brought into this world at His Incarnation, he says: *"We saw His glory, the glory as it were of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."*² Grace again it is which the Apostle Paul, at the beginning and at the end of his Epistles, wishes the faithful: *"Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ."* We do not hesitate, then, to say that grace is the most precious, and, since it contains all other gifts, is the only great good, which is the subject of the Gospel, that joyful heavenly message brought to this earth by the Son of God. By grace we are made true children of God and acquire the right to the possession of the highest gifts that God can bestow upon His creatures, even to the possession of God Himself, who wishes to become the inheritance

1. Wisdom vii. 11, 14.

2. John i. 14.

of His children, with all His infinite glory and happiness.

“Most great and precious promises,” St. Peter tells us, *“hath God given us by Him; that by these you may be made partakers of the Divine nature.”*³ They are *most great*, because they surpass all created things, be these ever so good and noble, and *precious*, because they contain the best that God, in His omnipotence, can give us; they are infinitely precious, as is the price paid for them, the blood of the Son of God. The prince of the Apostles indicates himself the reason of this greatness, when he adds: *“that by these you may be made partakers of the Divine nature.”* Can there be anything greater for a creature than to be elevated from its natural lowliness and nothingness, to participate in the nature of the Creator and be associated with Him?

This one word expresses the whole greatness and glory of grace, and tells what a great and sublime *mystery* grace must be. Grace is that *“mystery of Christ,”* of which the Apostle says: *“Which in other generations was not known to the sons of men, as it is now revealed to His holy Apostles and Prophets in the Spirit. That the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and co-partners of His promise in Christ Jesus by the Gospel.”*⁴ Grace is that mystery of which the same Apostle says, it hath not entered into the heart of man, but could be revealed to us by the Spirit of God, who searcheth all things, even the profound things of God.⁵ The more grace is a mystery, the more concealed it is from our natural eye, the more incomprehensible and ineffable it is; the greater must appear to us its value, the higher its glory, and the more comprehensive its riches.

2. This sweet and sublime mystery is too little known even among Christians, although the teachings of Holy Scripture and the Holy Church sufficiently enlighten us about it, and the lack of this knowledge is the more lamentable, as the knowledge of the doctrine of grace alone can lead us to understand and appreciate our exalted dignity, our great hopes, and the inexhaustible wealth of the merits of Christ.

3. II. Peter i. 4.

4. Eph. 111. 4-6.

5. I Cor. II. 9, 10.

At the mention of the grace of God, we often represent to ourselves nothing but the restoration of God's favor, lost, by sin, or such gifts of Divine love as will assist our weak nature in avoiding sin and in the practice of virtue. Certainly, *forgiveness of sins* and this *protection and assistance* must also be accounted effects of God's grace, but these effects alone do not constitute its highest value and its innermost nature.

Forgiveness of sin is a grace on the part of God and restores to us that benevolent love which God bestowed upon us before sin. But we must ask: *Which* love did God bear us previous to our sin; was it a love equal only to the worth of our human nature, or was it a greater, an ampler love, that gave additional beauty to our nature, and elevated it to the heart of God unto a fraternal union with His Divine Son?

Grace strengthens our weakened nature against the temptation to evil and in the performance of good works; it facilitates the fulfilment of our duties and the attainment of our last end. But here again the question presents itself: Does grace unite itself with man in his natural condition, and, by co-operating with his inborn virtue, assist and strengthen nature, does grace only temper nature—or does it elevate and transform it, and communicate to it a new nature, a new force, a new life, and new laws of life?

A correct solution to these questions is of primary importance, and we can arrive at it easily by a clear and distinct definition of the term "*Christian Grace*:"

3. Grace means, in the first place, that *benevolent love* which a superior entertains for an inferior, for instance, a master for his servant, a sovereign for his subject, and in our condition, God for His rational creature, especially when this love is united to the *pleasure* and *complacency* which the former takes in the good qualities and good deeds of the latter.

At the same time, however, we apply the word grace also to the *effect of that love* and to the *object* or the *cause* of *that pleasure*. Thus we say that we ask a grace of God or of man when we ask Him to grant us a *favor* on account of the

condescending, benevolent love He bears us. Holy Scripture, likewise, applies the name grace to that beauty, goodness, and loveliness which render us worthy of the pleasure and love of God: "*Grace is poured abroad in thy lips: therefore hath God blessed thee for ever.*"⁶

But we must add another distinction of importance, viz., that we receive a *twofold* favor and grace from a superior person; first, a certain *general, ordinary, merited, and necessary grace*; and then, a *very special, extraordinary, undeserved, and gratuitous grace*; and this latter alone is, *strictly and properly speaking*, grace. Let us illustrate this by the conduct of a good and noble sovereign. He will truly love all his subjects, though they are inferior to him, or rather on that very account, because they are his subjects, and all will share his favor and goodness according to their relative position and merit. If he does no more than this, he fulfils only his duty and obligation, and he may be called gracious and kind, but he will not be said to receive any one unto special favor. This will be the case, then, only when he loves all or some of his subjects in a greater degree and bestows upon them greater gifts than he is in duty obliged, and their position or services are entitled to claim. Especially, then, will he be gracious, when of his own free will he embraces his subjects with the full love that he bears his own children and himself; when in his kindness he condescends to associate with them as with his friends, thereby elevating them from their lowliness and surrounding them with royal honors; when he, in consequence, raises them above their original condition and makes them, as far as possible, equal to himself and his children.

Let us apply this example to the grace of God, of which royal favor is but a faint shadow. God is the highest King of Heaven and of earth, because He has created all, because all things are His and are destined for His service and glory. As He has created all things out of love, so He loves all His creatures ineffably and with most gracious condescension, but He naturally loves the rational more than

6. Ps. Xliv, 3.

the irrational, because they are His image and are capable of knowing and loving Him. His Divine complacency rests upon them, because He has created them good, as long as they do not offend Him by mortal sin and remain worthy of His first love by faithful observance of His commandments. In a certain sense, then, the rational creature can, even by its nature and its natural good works, merit the favor and love of God. For the same reason we may, according to the opinion of St. Augustine, call every natural good and gift of God a grace, since God was not obliged to create us and has given us all these natural goods out of gratuitous love.

But *when* once He has created us. He must, as a good and wise Creator, love us as His creatures, and grant us all those things that are indispensably necessary to attain to our natural destiny. That favor and grace, then, which we have just mentioned, is grace not in a particular and strict sense, but only in a general sense of the word. Nor is it the *Christian grace*, which Christ has brought into this world and which His Gospel, His Apostles, the holy Fathers, and Holy Church proclaim. This is grace in the highest and strictest sense of the word: *a very particular, gratuitous, condescending, and full grace of God, which makes us His particular favorites.*

By the first kind of grace God loves us, as we deserve it on account of our nature and our natural good works. By the latter grace, however, He loves us in a very particular manner, in a *supernatural* manner, infinitely more than we would deserve according to our nature. From pure and spontaneous love He descends from the height of His royal throne to our lowliness, in order to elevate us infinitely above our nature. He loves us with an unbounded and overflowing love, as much, so to speak, as is in His power; He loves us as Himself and as His only begotten Son; He assumes, therefore, our soul as His child. His friend, His spouse, makes it the associate of His own glory and happiness, and gives Himself to the soul for eternal possession and enjoyment.

As we now, in a perfect and in the Christian sense, call only this supernatural love of God for us grace, so we in

the same sense designate only those *gifts* of God as graces, that are entirely supernatural and precious above others and proceed from that supernatural love of God. In the same manner, not every *pleasure* that God may take in His rational creature is grace in the Christian sense, but that pleasure alone by which He delights in our soul on account of the supernatural beauty and loveliness it has received from Him by His supernatural love.

4. Here we must point out a very essential difference between the grace of man and the grace of God: man may love others more, and confer upon them greater gifts than they desire, but he is unable to make them more amiable and pleasing to himself than they are in themselves. God, however, by His supernatural love, confers a supernatural beauty and amiability on the soul, by which it becomes similar to Him in His Divine nature and reflects the image of His Divinity.

This internal, real, and supernatural *amiability* and *pleasingness* to God of our soul is also called grace, and that in an eminent sense, first, because it is the principal effect of God's supernatural love, and again, because it is the special object of His highest pleasure. It is that which we call habitual, sanctifying grace, the grace of sonship, or simply and directly grace, and which is described by the Roman Catechism in the following words: "*Grace, according to the definition of the Council of Trent,⁷ a definition to which, under pain of anathema, we are bound to defer, not only remits sin, but is also a Divine quality inherent in the soul, and, as it were, a brilliant light that effaces all those stains which obscure the lustre of the soul, and invests it with increased brightness and beauty.*"⁸

We shall, then, in harmony with the use of the Church and the Council of Trent, speak of grace especially in the last sense, when we treat now of its glories and its inestimable value. We must observe, however, that the so-called supernatural *actual* graces and the virtues of faith and hope, which may be separated from sanctifying grace, are

7. Sess. 6, C. 7. De justif.

8. De bap. N. 49.

not made to suffer by this distinction, but rather thereby appear in the full lustre of their glory and value. As they serve only to convey sanctifying grace to the soul, or to increase or preserve it, it is evident that their Divine power and great importance is rendered more prominent by portraying the full greatness and glory of the latter.

5. Ineffably great are the mysteries that we are about to reveal, and it is difficult to describe them in a manner worthy of their greatness and at the same time suitable to every capacity.

Yet we are consoled by the words of St. Leo, spoken with reference to the mystery of redemption, but equally applicable to the mystery of grace: "Although this is difficult, yet the priest is not free to withhold from the faithful the ministry of his word in this great mystery of Divine mercy, because the very ineffableness of the subject furnishes matter for speech, and when that which we say can never suffice, enough always remains to be said. *May human weakness, therefore, always succumb to the glory of God, and always find itself insufficient to explain the works of His mercy.* May our sense be troubled, our understanding embarrassed, our expression deficient; *it is good that whatever knowledge concerning the Divine Majesty we do acquire, we find it less than we wish to possess.*"⁹ Moreover, we may confidently hope that the grace whose glories we describe will, if ever, especially now enlighten us and our readers, if we only approach its consideration with childlike simplicity, with a pure heart and deep humility. For as God "resisteth the proud and giveth grace to the humble," so He will let the humble understand the greatness of this grace. To the mysteries of grace the words of Christ are aptly referred: "I confess to Thee, O Father, Lord of Heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them to little ones."¹⁰

If, however, Christian reader, in the course of this explanation, now and then something should appear to you altogether singular, new and unintelligible, remember what

9. Serm. 11, On the Passion of our Lord,

10. Matthew xi. 25.

St. Paul says of the riches of grace:¹¹ “*God is able to do all things more abundantly than we desire or understand,*” and rest assured that we shall advance nothing that is not supported by the clear teachings of Holy Writ, or the distinct utterances of the greatest Doctors of the Church.

The following is a synopsis of the contents and division of this work:

The *first book* explains the *nature* of sanctifying grace, and shows that it is a supernatural quality infused into our soul by God, by which we are elevated above our own nature and participate in the Divine nature or become similar unto it.

The *second book* describes how our soul is *united to God* in a supernatural and wonderful manner by this elevation, and is made His child, friend, and spouse.

The *third book* continues to explain *the effects* which grace produces in our soul, especially the supernatural, heavenly, and Divine life it creates in us.

The *fourth book* adds some other effects and prerogatives which ought to lead us to prize grace very highly.

The *fifth book* finally indicates how we may acquire this grace, whose glories and prerogatives we have considered, and how, once having acquired it, we ought to guard and esteem it, and co-operate with it.

Fr. Matthias Joseph Scheeben

11. Eph. iii. 20.

—*Part 1*—

WHAT IS GRACE?

Chapter 1

HOW DEPLORABLE IT IS THAT MEN SHOULD HAVE SO LITTLE REGARD FOR GRACE

THE GRACE of God which we are to consider here is a ray of divine beauty, infused by God into the soul of man. There it sheds such a bright and beautiful light that the soul delights the eye of God and is most tenderly loved by Him; it is adopted as His child and spouse and is elevated from earth to Heaven, above all the confines of nature. By grace the soul is received into the bosom of the Eternal Father and, together with the Divine Son, participates in the nature of the Father on this earth, and in His glory in the life to come.

Unfortunately, our intellect cannot keep pace with our tongue, which proclaims new wonders at every word that it utters. And how should we be able to understand these sublime heavenly gifts, when even the blessed spirits—who already possess and enjoy them—cannot fully comprehend and appreciate their value? They too, in beholding the throne of Divine Mercy, can only admire in deepest reverence His unbounded grace and goodness. But they must also marvel at our incredible, miserable blindness when we esteem the grace of God so little, seek it so negligently, and lose it so easily. They sorrow over our most unspeakable misfortune when we, by sin, cast ourselves from the throne of that heavenly sublimity to which grace had raised us, a position exceeding the natural dignity of the highest angels. From this height sin casts us into the deepest abyss, into the company of the brutes and of reprobate spirits. And we are not horrified, we do not shudder, we scarcely experience the slightest regret!

St. Thomas teaches that the whole world and all it contains

is of less value before God than the grace of a single soul. (*S. Th.* 1-2, q. 113, art. 9, ad 2). And St. Augustine maintains that the whole Heaven, together with all the Angels, cannot be compared to this grace. (*Ep.* 1 *ad Bonif.*, cap. 6). It follows, then, that man ought to be more thankful to God for the smallest share of grace than if he had received the perfections of the highest spirits; than if he were made king of heaven and of the whole world, with full possession of all power and dominion. How infinitely superior in value is grace to all the riches of this earth! And yet the least of these riches is often blindly preferred to grace. The most detestable created good induces us to cast away grace sacrilegiously—in playful jest, as it were. There are always men who wantonly surrender to the enemy of their soul this plenitude of gifts, including God Himself, for the mere indulgence of one sinful, unchaste look. More inconsiderate than Esau, they lose an inheritance greater than the world for the sake of a miserable momentary enjoyment!

“Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and ye gates thereof, be very desolate.” (*Jer.* 2:12). If one brief, sinful pleasure would cause the sun to disappear from the world, the stars to fall from heaven, and all the elements to be disturbed, who would be so rash and insane, who would be so mad as to sacrifice the whole world to his lust? But what is the destruction of the universe compared to the loss of grace? Yet this loss occurs so easily and frequently to many people. It occurs every day, every moment. How few are those who seek to prevent this loss in themselves or others, or who at least mourn over such a loss!

We are awe-stricken at an hour’s eclipse of the sun; at an earthquake that buries a whole city; at a pestilential disease that swiftly carries off men and beasts in great number. Yet there is an occurrence far worse, far more terrible and deplorable, which we behold thousands of times every day without emotion: the neglect and loss of the precious grace of God by so many men.

Elias could not bear the sight of the destruction of a mountain (*3 Kings* 19); the prophet Jeremias was inconsolably grieved at the desolation of the Holy City; Job’s friends

mourned seven days in silence at his lost fortune. We may eternally grieve and weep, but our sorrow will not even in a slight degree equal the misfortune that befalls us when sin devastates the heavenly garden in our soul; when we cast off the image of Divine Nature; when we lose the queen of virtues, holy charity, and all her heavenly court; when we spurn the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit Himself; when we reject the sonship of God, the prerogatives of His friendship and the claim to His rich inheritance; when we squander the price and fruit of the Sacraments and our merits; in a word, when we lose God and all Heaven by the loss of grace.

The soul that loses grace may truly apply to itself the words of Jeremias in his *Lamentations*: “How hath the Lord covered with obscurity the daughter of Sion in his wrath! *how hath* he cast down from heaven to the earth the glorious one of Israel, and hath not remembered his footstool in the day of his anger! The Lord hath cast down headlong, and hath not spared, all that was beautiful in Jacob.” (*Lam.* 2:1-2). But who considers this great misfortune? Who grieves over it? Who is restrained from new sins? “With desolation is all the land made desolate; because there is none that considereth in the heart.” (*Jer.* 12:11).

How little we love our true fortune, our true advantage! How little we understand the infinite love with which God comes to offer us His most precious treasures! We act in the same manner as did the Israelites whom God desired to lead out of the slavery of Egypt and the barren desert into a land that flowed with milk and honey. They despised the inestimable gift that God offered them; they despised the manna that God gave them on their journey; they abandoned God, and longed again for the fleshpots of Egypt. Now the promised land was a figure of Heaven; the manna was a type of grace—a figure of our nourishment and source of strength on the road to Heaven. But if God “lifted up his hand over them [“who set at nought the desirable land”]: to overthrow them in the desert” (*Ps.* 105:24-26), how great a responsibility do we incur through our disregard for Heaven and grace!

We disregard grace because we permit ourselves to be too deeply impressed by our senses with transitory things and because we have but a superficial knowledge of lasting, heavenly riches. We must therefore endeavor to correct our error by deep and very careful reflection. Esteem for eternal things will increase in us in the same degree as that for the temporal diminishes. We must draw as near as possible to the overflowing and inexhaustible fountain of divine grace. The glory of its treasures will so delight us that we shall henceforth have contempt for earthly things. Thus we shall learn to admire and esteem grace; and he who admires and praises grace, says St. John Chrysostom, will zealously and carefully guard it. Let us then, with the divine assistance, begin "the praise of the glory of his grace." (*Eph.* 1:6).

And Thou, great and good God, Father of light and of mercy, from Whom cometh every perfect gift (cf. *James* 1:17), Who hast predestined us to be adopted through Jesus Christ as Thy sons, according to the purpose of Thy will (cf. *Eph.* 1:5), Who hast chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and unspotted in Thy sight in charity (cf. *Eph.* 1:4), grant us the spirit of wisdom and revelation in deep knowledge of Him, enlighten the eyes of our heart that we may know what is the hope of Thy calling and what are the riches of the glory of Thy inheritance in the Saints. (Cf. *Eph.* 1:17-18). Give me light and strength that my words will not be prejudicial to the gift of Thy grace, by which Thou dost raise men from the dust of their mortal origin and receivest them into Thy heavenly court.

Christ Jesus, our Saviour, Son of the living God, by Thy Precious Blood which Thou hast shed for us poor creatures and which Thou didst not consider too great a price for us, grant that I may in some measure reveal the inestimable value of grace to those whom Thou hast redeemed and restored to Thy favor.

And Thou, highest and holiest Spirit, Pledge and Seal of Divine Love, Sanctifier of our souls, by Whom the grace and love of God is infused into our hearts, by Whose Seven Gifts

this grace and love is developed, Who gives us Thyself with grace, teach us what grace is and how precious it is.

Blessed Mother of God, and therefore Mother of Divine Grace, permit me to make known to those who have by grace become children of God and thine own children the treasures for the procuring of which thou hast offered thy Divine Son.

Holy Angels, ye spirits filled and glorified by the light and fire of divine grace, and ye holy souls who have already passed from this place of exile into the bosom of the heavenly Father and there enjoy the sweet fruit of grace, assist me by your prayers, that I may for myself and others dispel the deceptive cloud before our eyes and that I may reveal the sun of grace in its brightest and undimmed splendor, so as to kindle in our hearts a living and everlasting love and desire of that very grace.