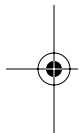




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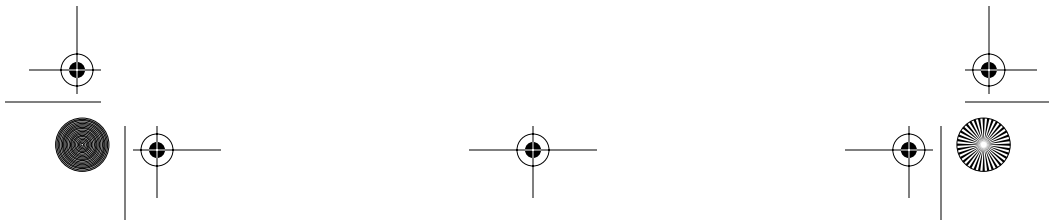


NATURE AND GRACE

The origin of modern man could be traced back to several periods. But I would begin with the teaching of a man who changed the world in a very real way. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) opened the way for the discussion of what is usually called “nature and grace.” They may be set out diagrammatically like this:



This diagram may be amplified as follows, to show what is included on the two different levels:



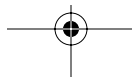


GRACE, THE HIGHER: GOD THE CREATOR; HEAVEN AND HEAVENLY THINGS; THE UNSEEN AND ITS INFLUENCE ON THE EARTH; MAN'S SOUL; UNITY

NATURE, THE LOWER: THE CREATED; EARTH AND EARTHLY THINGS; THE VISIBLE AND WHAT NATURE AND MAN DO ON EARTH; MAN'S BODY; DIVERSITY

Up to this time, man's thought-forms had been Byzantine. The heavenly things were all-important and were so holy that they were not pictured realistically. For instance, Mary and Christ were never portrayed realistically. Only symbols were portrayed. So if you look up at one of the later Byzantine mosaics in the baptis- tery at Florence, for example, it is not a picture of Mary that you see, but a symbol representing Mary.

On the other hand, simple nature—trees and moun- tains—held no interest for the artist, except as part of the world to be lived in. Mountain climbing, for in- stance, simply had no appeal as something to be done for its own sake. As we shall see, mountain climbing as such really began with the new interest in nature. So prior to Thomas Aquinas there was an overwhelming emphasis on the heavenly things, very far off and very holy, pictured only as symbols, with little interest in na-

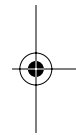




ture itself. With the coming of Aquinas we have the real birth of the humanistic Renaissance.

Aquinas's view of nature and grace did not involve a complete discontinuity between the two, for he did have a concept of unity between them. From Aquinas's day on, for many years, there was a constant struggle for a unity of nature and grace and a hope that rationality would say something about both.

There were some very good things that resulted from the birth of Renaissance thought. In particular, nature received a more proper place. From a biblical viewpoint nature is important because it has been created by God and is not to be despised. The things of the body are not to be despised when compared with the soul. The things of beauty are important. Sexual things are not evil of themselves. All these things are involved in the fact that in nature God has given us a good gift, and the man who regards them with contempt is really despising God's creation. As such he is despising, in a sense, God himself, for he has contempt for what God has made.



AQUINAS AND THE AUTONOMOUS

At the same time, we are now able to see the significance of the diagram of nature and grace in a different



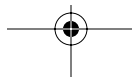


way. While there were some good results from giving nature a better place, it also opened the way for much that was destructive, as we shall see. In Aquinas's view the will of man was fallen, but the intellect was not. From this incomplete view of the biblical Fall flowed all the subsequent difficulties. Man's intellect became autonomous. In one realm man was now independent, autonomous.

This sphere of the autonomous in Aquinas takes on various forms. One result, for example, was the development of natural theology. In this view, natural theology is a theology that could be pursued independently from the Scriptures. Though it was an autonomous study, he hoped for unity and said that there was a correlation between natural theology and the Scriptures. But the important point in what followed was that a really autonomous area was set up.

From the basis of this autonomous principle, philosophy also became free and was separated from revelation. Therefore philosophy began to take wings, as it were, and fly off wherever it wished, without relationship to the Scriptures. This does not mean that this tendency was never previously apparent, but it appears in a more total way from this time on.

Nor did it remain isolated in Thomas Aquinas's philo-





sophic theology. Soon it began to enter the arts.

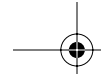
Today we have a weakness in our educational process in failing to understand the natural associations between the disciplines. We tend to study all our disciplines in unrelated parallel lines. This tends to be true in both Christian and secular education. This is one of the reasons why evangelical Christians have been taken by surprise at the tremendous shift that has come in our generation. We have studied our exegesis as exegesis, our theology as theology, our philosophy as philosophy; we study something about art as art; we study music as music, without understanding that these are things of man, and the things of man are not unrelated parallel lines.

There are several ways in which this association between theology, philosophy and the arts emerged following Aquinas.

PAINTERS AND WRITERS

The first artist to be influenced was Cimabue (1240-1302), teacher of Giotto (1267-1337). Aquinas lived from 1225 to 1274, thus these influences were clearly felt quickly in the field of art. Instead of all the subjects of art being above the dividing line between nature and grace in the symbolic manner of the Byzantine, Cima-





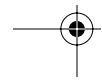
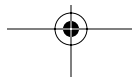
bue and Giotto began to paint the things of nature as nature. In this transition period the change did not come all at once. Hence there was a tendency at first to paint the lesser things in the picture naturalistically, but to continue to portray Mary, for example, as a symbol.

Then Dante (1265-1321) began to write in the way that these men painted. Suddenly, everything starts to shift on the basis that nature began to be important. The same development can be seen in the writers Petrarch (1304-1374) and Boccaccio (1313-1375). Petrarch was the first man we hear of who ever climbed a mountain just for the sake of climbing a mountain. This interest in nature as God made it is, as we have seen, good and proper. But Aquinas had opened the way to an autonomous Humanism, an autonomous philosophy, and once the movement gained momentum, there was soon a flood.



NATURE VERSUS GRACE

The vital principle to notice is that, as nature was made autonomous, nature began to “eat up” grace. Through the Renaissance, from the time of Dante to Michelangelo, nature became gradually more totally autonomous. It was set free from God as the humanistic philosophers began to operate ever more freely. By the

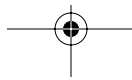
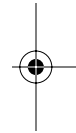




time the Renaissance reached its climax, nature had eaten up grace.

This can be demonstrated in various ways. We will begin with a miniature entitled *Grandes Heures de Rohan* painted about 1415. The story it portrays is a miracle story of the period. Mary and Joseph and the baby, fleeing into Egypt, pass by a field where a man is sowing seed, and a miracle happens. The grain grows up within an hour or so and is ready for harvesting. When the man goes to harvest it, pursuing soldiers come by and ask, "How long ago did they pass by?" He replies that they passed when he was sowing the seed and so the soldiers turn back. However, it is not the story that interests us but rather the way in which the miniature is laid out. First of all, there is a great difference in the size of the figures of Mary and Joseph, the baby, a servant and the donkey which are at the top of the picture and which dominate it by their size, and the very small figures of the soldier and the man wielding the sickle at the bottom of the picture. Second, the message is made clear, not only by the size of the upper figures, but also by the fact that the background of the upper part of the miniature is covered with gold lines. Hence there is a total pictorial representation of nature and grace.

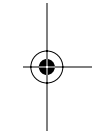
This is the older concept, with grace overwhelm-





ingly important, and nature having little place.

In Northern Europe Van Eyck (1380-1441) was the one who opened the door for nature in a new way. He began to paint real nature. In 1410, a very important date in the history of art, he produced a tiny miniature. It measures only about five inches by three inches. But it is a painting with tremendous significance because it contains the first real landscape. It gave birth to every background that came later during the Renaissance. The theme is Jesus' baptism, but this takes up only a small section of the area. There is a river in the background, a very real castle, houses, hills and so on—this is a real landscape; nature has become important. After this, such landscapes spread rapidly from the north to the south of Europe.



Soon we have the next stage. In 1435, Van Eyck painted the *Madonna of the Chancellor Rolin*—now in the Louvre in Paris. The significant feature is that Chancellor Rolin, facing Mary, is the same size as she is. Mary is no longer remote, the Chancellor no longer a small figure, as would have been the case with the donors at an earlier period. Though he holds his hands in an attitude of prayer, he has become equal with Mary. From now on the pressure is on: how is this balance between nature and grace to be resolved?





Another man of importance, Masaccio (1401-1428), should be mentioned at this point. He makes the next big step in Italy after Giotto, who died in 1337, by introducing true perspective and true space. For the first time, light comes from the right direction. For example, in the marvelous Carmine Chapel in Florence, there is a window which he took into account as he painted his pictures on the walls, so that the shadows in the paintings fall properly in relation to the light from this window. Masaccio was painting true nature. He painted so that his pictures looked as though they were “in the round”; they give a feeling of atmosphere; and he has introduced real composition. He lived only until he was twenty-seven, yet he opened almost the entire door to nature. With Masaccio’s work, as with much of Van Eyck’s, the emphasis on nature was such as could have led to painting with a true biblical viewpoint.

Coming on to Filippo Lippi (1406-1469), it is apparent that nature begins to “eat up” grace in a more serious way than with Van Eyck’s *Madonna of the Chancellor Rolin*. It was only a very few years before that artists would never have considered painting Mary in a natural way at all—they would paint only a symbol of her. But when Filippo Lippi painted the Madonna in 1465 there is a startling change. He has





depicted a very beautiful girl holding a baby in her arms, with a landscape that you cannot doubt was influenced by Van Eyck's work. This Madonna is no longer a far-off symbol; she is a pretty girl with a baby. But there is something more we need to know about this painting. The girl he painted as Mary was his mistress. And all Florence knew it was his mistress. Nobody would have dared to do this a few years before. Nature was killing grace.

In France, Fouquet (c. 1416-1480) painted, about 1450, the king's mistress, Agnes Sorel, as Mary. Everyone knowing the court who saw it knew that this was the king's current mistress. Fouquet painted her with one breast exposed. Whereas before it would have been Mary feeding the baby Jesus, now it is the king's mistress with one breast exposed—and grace is dead.

The point to be stressed is that, when nature is made autonomous, it is destructive. As soon as one allows an autonomous realm one finds that the lower element begins to eat up the higher. In what follows I shall be speaking of these two elements as the "lower story" and the "upper story."

LEONARDO DA VINCI AND RAPHAEL

The next man to examine is Leonardo da Vinci. He





brings a new factor into the flow of history and comes closer to being a modern man than any before him. His dates (1452-1519) are important because they overlapped with the beginning of the Reformation. He is also very much a part of a significant shift in philosophic thinking. Cosimo the elder, of Florence, who died in 1464, was the first to see the importance of Platonic philosophy. Thomas Aquinas had introduced Aristotelian thinking. Cosimo began to champion Neo-platonism. Ficino (1433-1499) the great Neo-platonist, taught Lorenzo the Magnificent (1449-1492). By the time of Leonardo da Vinci, Neo-platonism was a dominant force in Florence. It became a dominant force for the simple reason that they needed to find some way to put something in the “upper story.” They introduced Neo-platonism in an attempt to re-instate ideas and ideals—that is, universals:

GRACE—UNIVERSALS

NATURE—PARTICULARS

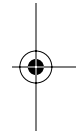
A painting that illustrates this is *The School of Athens* by Raphael (1483-1520). In the room in the Vatican where this picture is located, on one wall a mural by Raphael represents the Roman Catholic Church, and this he balances with *The School of Athens*, representing





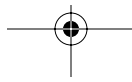
classical pagan thought, on the opposite wall. In *The School of Athens* itself, Raphael portrays the difference between the Aristotelian element and the Platonic. The two men stand in the center of the picture and Aristotle is spreading his hands downward while Plato is pointing upward.

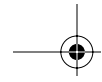
This problem can be put in another way. Where do you find a unity when you set diversity free? Once the particulars are set free how do you hold them together? Leonardo grappled with this problem. He was a Neoplatonist painter and, many people have said—I think quite properly—the first modern mathematician. He saw that if you begin with an autonomous rationality, what you come to is mathematics (that which can be measured), and mathematics only deals with particulars, not universals. Therefore you never get beyond mechanics. For a man who realized the need of a unity, he understood that this would not do. So he tried to paint the soul. The soul is not the Christian soul; the soul is the universal—the soul, for example, of the sea or of the tree.¹ One of the reasons he never painted very much was simply that he tried to draw and draw in or-



¹SOUL—UNITY

MATHEMATICS—PARTICULARS—MECHANICS





der to be able to paint the universal. Needless to say, he never succeeded.

Giovanni Gentile, one of the greatest of Italian philosophers until his fairly recent death, said that Leonardo died in despondency because he would not let go of the hope of a rational unity between the particulars and the universal.² To have escaped this despondency Leonardo would have had to have been a different man. He would have had to let go his hope of a unity above and below the line. Leonardo, not being a modern man, never gave up the hope of a unified field of knowledge. He would not, in other words, give up the hope of educated man, who, in the past, has been marked by this insistence on a unified field of knowledge.



²Leonardo da Vinci (Reynal & Co., New York, 1963), pp. 163-174, Leonardo's Thought.

