

Social Grace and the Religions: A Response to Robert Doran, S.J.
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I am personally delighted in the direction that Bob is taking with this conference in its theme, "Doing catholic Systematic Theology in a Multireligious World." Some of the most significant issues in systematic theology in our time relate to the correlation between Christian beliefs and theological accounts for the salvation of non-Christians. Doran's paper, "Social Grace and the Mission of the World," addresses the larger theme of the conference by identifying the mission of the Spirit, the gift of divine love, as playing a constitutive role in social grace. Although the topic of social grace and the mission of the Word does not necessarily have to be put in conversation with the questions of the status of non-Christian religions, Doran does so, and my comments reflect my attempt to understand that relationship more fully.

I.

I begin with a few comments on Doran's understanding of love and social grace. As I understand Doran, the gift of the Spirit and the created gift of sanctifying grace which the Spirit brings, is the reception of an actively spirating love which establishes a supernatural relationship to the uncreated Holy Spirit. As such it also establishes a created relationship to the Father and the Son. This created love of the Holy Spirit, expressed in charity, is universally accessible to all human beings. Thus all human beings have a relationship, not only to the Father, but also to the Son, identified in Doran's work with judgments of value. These judgments of value are the foundation of a universalist faith that Doran asserts is present in all authentic religion (p. 8).

First Observation:

Charity is here identified not as a natural virtue, but a supernatural virtue that establishes a relationship of participation in the divine mission. As Doran says, "created grace has a Trinitarian form" (p. 8). Question: Is there a presupposition here that the virtues of faith and love in the Lonerganian scheme of things are always graced and thus always supernatural? On page one, Doran makes the claim that "the gift of the God's love, that is, the gift of the Holy Spirit is the condition of the possibility of sustained personal integrity." This in turn is the condition of genuine meanings and values informing cultural values, which is, in turn, the constitutive dimension in the establishment of local structures and intersubjective habits that would result in an equitable distribution of vital values to the human community. This seems to presuppose that all genuine cultural meanings and values are graced.

Missing from this presentation—although Doran may have argued it elsewhere—is the foundation for that claim. There seems to be a presupposition that the faith of all authentic religion is graced, and it is graced by the very nature of the love whose source is the Holy Spirit. Some engagement with the scholastic

tradition which posits a distinction between natural virtues and supernatural virtues would make Doran's position more universally persuasive. There is a fundamental discussion underlying these presuppositions that engages the relationship between nature and grace.

That this may be done is evident, for this scholastic theology connected explicit moral acts with implicit salvific grace. Not all traditions make this connection, though. Perhaps all that is needed is an explication of what constitutes authentic religion. However, it also remains to be argued whether all authentic cultural values are graced.

II.

My second set of comments with respect to social grace concerns the relationship between notion of the invisible mission of the Word and the notion of social grace on the one hand, and the relation between the visible mission of the Word and the notion of social grace, on the other hand. In other words, I'm thinking about the relationship between what is invisible and what is visible. First, it must be emphasized that Doran is speaking of social grace, that is, that grace identified as "an articulate set of cultural values that arise from the collective discovery, expression, validation, criticism, correction, development, improvement of the formulations of the judgments of meaning and value that flow from the gift of God's love that Christians call the gift of the Holy Spirit" (p. 12). In short, social grace is the opposite of social sin. Whereas judgments of value are identified with the invisible mission of the divine Word and "a graced participation in the procession of the Son from the Father in the actively spirating Word breathing Love from which the Holy Spirit originates" (p. 9, 11), social grace, on the other hand, implies a visible and public sharing of understanding that constitute a common cultural world. They make the world this world and not some other world. Culture is visibly identifiable. This visible reality of social grace is established by something invisible, namely the knowledge born of religious love that is faith (p.15).

If I understand this correctly, the relationship to the second mission of the Trinity is invisible or inchoate because not acknowledged, while social grace, insofar as it is truly a manifestation of the Spirit in the world, is visible. The relationship to the Son is invisible, while the relation to the Spirit is visible in a sort of interesting reversal to the second mission being visible in the Incarnation and the third person as Spirit being invisible. The second mission is, of course, visible in Jesus of Nazareth, but the relationship to this visible person is invisible in the order of grace from the perspective of the religions. On the other hand, while the manifestations of the Spirit as precisely manifest are visible even though the Spirit, as divine person, is not visible

Second observation:

The movement of gift and mission is a descending movement, while the movement of participation and knowledge is an ascending movement. In the invisible giftedness of an individual by grace enabling that person to participate in the divine communion of Trinitarian persons, the Father sends the Son to give the

Spirit, a descending movement of mission. From the side of participation, however, the social reality is first constituted by love. It is love that establishes just social structures. It is by the virtue of expressed love that these structures are visible and able to be judged to be fruits of the Spirit. Love leads to and is the precondition of knowledge, whose expression is universal faith, to use Doran's language. This knowledge is an ascending movement. Love is constitutive of the community, which participates in the divine missions by the power of this love.

This analysis of the descending/ascending dynamic and the invisible/visible dynamic of grace is evocative of the distinction that Yves Congar has made between Christ instituting the church, a descending movement, and the Spirit constituting the church, an ascending movement. According to Doran's paper, the interreligious community comprised of Christians and non-Christians alike is constituted by love, which is to say by the Spirit. It is then by the power of the Spirit in the Spirit's love of the Son that the church is brought into participation with the mission of the Word, the Son. This is a community constituted from below, as it were, and then through the power of the Spirit initiated into divine communion on the strength of the inherent communion among the divine persons. The challenge, however, is that while the attributes of that community are visible—manifested in the fruits of the Spirit, primarily love—the depth of the communion effected in the Trinitarian life remains implicit on the part of the world religions. As Doran says, "to be related to the Holy Spirit must entail being related to the Father and the Son as terms of distinct relations" (p. 6). Thus if love is a created grace establishing a relationship to the Spirit, there follows a necessary relationship to Father and Son.

Even though Doran's exposition proceeds in a Lonerganian key, in the end how much does this differ from a Rahnerian perspective? Are we still left with anonymous Christians? If we share a common community characterized by love, in this framework it is also necessarily a Christian community of some sort, although not on the visible level. I personally think this may be inevitable from a Christian perspective from which Christ is the unique Savior, and the Trinity reflects distinction within the unicity of God. We do not need to be apologetic from our own faith perspective although we do need to give a systematic account of the relationship, as Doran acknowledges.

III.

A third point I would like to examine is the nature of the community constituted by the Spirit and manifested by love. Reading the paper I found myself thinking about communities loosely configured by a number of external affinities versus intrinsic, more organically constituted communities. The first type of community is one that may share values and engage in common action. It may be constituted by a bond of love where love is understood a mutual regard, care for mutual well-being, sacrifice for the common good, and so on. These communities may remain somewhat unthematic, joined as they are in a loose affiliation.

Doran identifies the work of interreligious dialogue as the promotion of "the emergence of a community that is not only potential through shared experience, but

also formal through shared meanings, actual through shared affirmation of fact and value, and constitutive of our human world through common decisions and actions” (p. 5). This is a move towards a more intentional community. He stresses that at the present time this is only a potential community.

Where Doran says that the gift of divine love becomes thematic in the mission of the Son (p. 3), I think of the community constituted by the Spirit achieving identity as the people of God and the body of Christ, necessary insofar as a relationship to the Spirit also establishes a relationship to Father and Son. An unthematic community is thus revealed to be in communion with the Son, which is to say to be members of his body in some fashion. This raises the question of the relationship of the interreligious community constituted by the Spirit to the church of Christ, perhaps not in an institutional formal sense, but insofar as the church is the Spirit-constituted members of the body of Christ in history. How is the interreligious community bonded by love related to the church?

Minimally, we can say that there is a bond of communion in the power of the Spirit. This remains an invisible relationship to the extent that it is unacknowledged just as the relationship to the mission of the Son is unacknowledged. However, this communion is visible through bonds of love expressed in shared meanings, affirmed values, and common actions.

Third Observation:

It seems to me that the extrinsic or external bonds of communion be seen as signs of an even deeper, more intrinsic communion. Christians and non-Christians do not just share common values and action born of love, which is the fruit of our common giftedness by and in the Spirit. More deeply, the bond we share makes us brothers and sisters to one another because of our common Father, this paternity being testified to by the Spirit. The community we share is only potential because this common paternity and our relationship as brothers and sisters has yet to be fully acknowledged.

Even if we begin from below with a manifold manifestation of the Spirit on the part of a multiplicity of religions, we must arrive at a unity of relationship expressed in the unicity of familial relationships. Human relationships become analogous to the Trinitarian missions: caused by them and reflecting them. Doran assumes the doctrine of the Trinity, and in a sense starts there. By stressing our relationship to the Trinity as beginning and being grounded in the Spirit universally poured out on all humankind, he stresses that which unites us rather than what divides us at the same time maintaining the inherent directionality of the ascending movement of participation in Christ so that we may all be reconciled with the Father.