

# Faith Is More Than a 'Once-and-for-All' Act of God

By Fr. Richard P. McBrien

The distinction between the natural and the supernatural has long occupied an important place in Catholic theology, particularly since the Protestant Reformation and the nature-grace debates of the 16th century. The First Vatican Council operated within these categories in its own teachings on divine revelation and faith, and the theology textbooks, catechisms, and popular pamphlets that were produced in the council's aftermath did the same.

The natural-supernatural distinction has had such a wide distribution, in fact, that many Catholics are now disturbed by its conspicuous absence in so much theological writing today. Because they no longer see the terms used on a frequent basis, they

assume that the idea of the supernatural as such is under severe attack.

In the earlier view, everything seemed so clear: there are two separate and distinct orders of reality. The natural order embraces all those elements of creation which have no explicit reference to God or to salvation.

Thus, a man who gives a cup of water to a thirsty stranger is operating at the level of merely natural goodness unless there is some specific religious motivation. In the absence of such motivation, the act itself cannot be described as meritorious or salvific.

The same would be true with regard to faith. It is possible for a

man to come to a knowledge of God as the beginning and end of all things with the use of human reason alone (the "God of the philosophers," he was called), but unless that act of understanding were elevated by grace, this knowledge of God remains natural, i.e., it is not virtuous and it cannot of itself lead to salvation.

Although Catholic theology no longer accepts this particular view of the "natural order," we should not conclude that the reality signified by the term "supernatural" is about to be cast overboard.

On the contrary, Catholic theology has been trying simply to correct some of the misconceptions which have arisen from a too sharp and too uncritical use of the earlier distinction

between the natural and the supernatural. There is a greater concern now with the absolute priority of God's grace, on the one hand, and with the essential goodness of God's creation, on the other.

While it has been a Protestant tendency to exaggerate the sovereignty of God and to deprecate too much the role of human cooperation, it has been a Catholic tendency to so underline the place of human responsibility that the divine prerogatives have sometimes been relegated unwittingly to a secondary place. The Second Vatican Council tried its best to maintain a happy balance.

Del Verbum, for example, placed less emphasis than Vatican I on the signs of credibility and the evidence for faith, while insisting upon the

absolute necessity of the grace of the Holy Spirit (art. 5). On the other hand, the same article speaks of the perfecting of faith, of bringing faith to completion by the gifts of the same Holy Spirit.

Faith is more than a once-and-for-all act of God; it is something which can increase or diminish within man himself. And yet whatever increase there may be is always the fruit of the Spirit working from within.

In the next article, however, it seems that the council is once again endorsing the old distinction between the natural and the supernatural. A man can come to the knowledge of God in one of two ways: through the revelation communicated through Christ or from created realities as seen by the light of reason. Indeed,

the words are the same as those used by the First Vatican Council.

Is Vatican II here restoring in article 5 what it seemed to remove in article 5; namely, the stress on the role of argumentation and reason in the act of faith? Is the council suggesting that there is, after all, such a thing as natural revelation, and if natural revelation, then natural faith?

Out of context it would seem so, but against the background of contemporary Catholic theology (particularly the kind of theology that had a strong influence in the writing of this and other council documents) we would have to draw a different conclusion. In next week's essay, I shall indicate the basis for this assertion.

By ROBERT R. HOEHL  
Courier-Journal  
Special Correspondent

Vatican City — There is conviction among many Catholics here that Pope Paul I is a victim of too much ex-

Eight trips abroad in their say, has dimmed that of both the Pope as a man and the Pope as a power leader in the world today.

It is a matter of record last three trips — to Bolivia, Geneva, Switzerland, Africa — the pontiff felt singly short of attracting forecast.

They also claim that 10 of his personal and political can be seen in emotional response he craved and Switzerland.

His recent trip to Korea, they concede, stirred emotional outpouring the. But they argue that it was far below what it been among a largely un-

Added to this, they no amount of time, money, the mass media throughout spent on his most recent compared with his early India, the Holy Land —

During his 48-hour trip he competed with Pres for the banner-headline spots on radio and tele-casts. In America, and Western countries, Mr. hands down.

During his recent pilgrimage, the pontiff drew as much public attention for the small and emotionally he received at various there as for the historic of his visit to the heart of the World Council of Churches.

Many Church leaders the Pope did far better

CO  
ALL IN  
Sometime

By Sarah Child  
"Would you like to us line?"  
I made the offer know neighbor did not yet have hooked up and with thr enjoying their first taste living the laundry was i- ing.

She looked at me as do you have one? I di lines in anybody's back said, then went on to she had wanted her string some up for her she stopped short with the sentence.

I laughed and under breviated thought perfe

Our own move to hood had been made 1 years ago.

How well I rememb- hemon of standing on thumb in a neighbo seemed to me to be very old and close frier

If you've ever made t the anonymity of a ci to the relative openne ban home, you may symptoms.

No more yelling out

A LAY  
Brazil... (

By Carmen Vi  
Last week before h unfortunate stroke, Pr da Costa e Silva, in the poorest piece of p and public conscience- i announced that his gov- nating \$1.5 million to struction of a new Brasilia.

While this action w- hized, the very sam was expelling Father Talpe of Belgium fo action." This was re National Catholic New received little space i papers, which are cer military regime.  
Father Talpe is the he kicked-out-of-Bri Three-ave-Americans, helping the working i in their battle for bet ditions.  
Angelo Cardinal Ros visited Father Talpe in reported that he felt loyal to his Church praised the priest for spirit.  
There's a further et the \$1.5 million donat dent's wife was in Cathedral Constructio and when the donatio

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Secretaries of parish bowling leagues are invited to submit scores for publication in the Courier-Journal again this year.

Official forms, including rules for publication, will be mailed to secretaries who write to: "Bowling", Courier-Journal, 35 S. Main St., Rochester, N.Y., 14604. Please also include the name of the league when requesting the forms.

**GOURMET SUPPER**

Members and friends of the Rosary Guild at St. Joseph's, Penfield, are invited to take part in a gourmet tureen supper and recipe exchange Sept. 10. The supper will begin at 7:15 p.m., following Benediction at 6:30. Mrs. John E. Schuler is chairman.

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