

1750ADTE040

The Formal Object of Supernatural Acts

Translation by Michael G. Shields of 17500DTL040

1 The Council of Orange (DB 179 f.) and the Council of Trent (DB 811-13) state that man without grace cannot elicit a salutary act.

This necessity for grace is absolute: that is, grace is given not just to facilitate such acts but to enable them to be at all.

Ever since the Council of Trent, it has been the common opinion among theologians that grace is absolutely necessary because salutary acts are entitatively supernatural.

2 But a further question usually arises, namely, whether these supernatural acts are related to their formal objects in the way that natural acts are related to their proper objects.

Cf. *Sum. Theol.* I, q. 87: the essence of the soul is known from its potencies; potencies are known from their acts; and acts are known from their objects.

For example, why is the human soul different from that of an animal? Because man has an intellect and free will. Why is the intellect considered as a special power? Because in our consciousness we discover the specific nature of our cognitive acts. And what is that specialty? It is that which attains what **is**, what is true.

3 There are two opinions on this matter: Boyer, p. 84 ff; Lange, p. 212 ff.

One group holds that supernatural acts in this life are supernatural in their entity alone.

They distinguish between the entity of an act and specification from its object; they assert that two acts, one natural and the other supernatural, can have the very same specification.

If you raise the objection that an act is specified by its object, they will reply that it is also, but not solely, specified by the object.

If an object is supernatural, they go on, point out to us what that supernaturality is.

Their argument is that if an object is supernatural, psychological reflection will enable us to distinguish between the supernatural and the natural--but in fact we are unable to do so.

The other group holds the contrary, that a supernatural act corresponds to a supernatural object. But salutary acts are supernatural; therefore the object is supernatural.

4 We agree with the latter.

But we will conclude to an act as supernatural from an object that is supernatural.

We hold that it is absurd to say that a new man in Christ is new in this way because of some entity that is unknown in itself but known extrinsically and per accidens inasmuch as this is deduced by theological reasoning. Christ died and the church preaches so that acts may be good and meritorious. This goodness is knowable in itself, and not in some unknown entitative perfection.

But we grant that (1) because the object is God as he is in himself, the object of the act is not perfectly understood; (2) because psychological analysis is very difficult (Kohler, apes*), and because ordinary acts depend upon habits, not everyone is capable of discerning the supernaturality of an act; and (3) because self-examination more often arises from a feeling of insecurity than from the objective love of God, this sort of analysis is not to be recommended to everyone indiscriminately.