

## Preface

*Qui ante nos scripserunt  
Non domini nostri  
Sed duces fuerunt.*

—Gilbert of Tournai,  
Franciscan, died 1288,  
*De modo addiscendi.*

A train is hurtling swiftly toward its destination. Its gleaming body cuts through the fields like an arrow. Crossing rivers and cities, it slips through the landscape like a thread in motion. Nothing can stop it. It is perfect in form, in color, and in speed.

Inside the whole human drama is going on. Inside there are people of all sorts. Some are talking; others are silent. Some are at work on something; others are resting. Some are looking out on the landscape; others are preoccupied with their own business affairs. Some are just being born; others are on the point of dying. Some quietly go on loving or hating. Some are arguing about the train: it is going in the wrong direction. Some think they have taken the wrong train. Some are opposed to the idea of any train at all. We should never have made trains at all; they pollute the atmosphere. Others accept the train and its advantages gratefully or even envision faster trains. Still others question nothing. They know that they are moving in some direction and will reach some point of arrival. Why fret about it? Some people run nervously toward the front cars. They want to get there more quickly. Others oppose the movement of the train and head toward the back, trying to flee from the train altogether.

The train goes on indifferently, following its certain destiny. It patiently carries all, whether they are excited about it or bored with it. It is even willing to carry its detractors, offering all an opportunity to take a splendid, joyous trip.

All the passengers are traveling for free, gratis. No one can step off the train or flee. They find themselves there inside the train. Freedom is exercised there. They can go toward the front or toward the back. They can alter the train cars or leave them as they are. They can enjoy the passing landscape or get aggravated at their companions. They can accept the train joyfully or reject it bitterly. Yet the train continues on toward its inevitable destiny and courteously carries all of them.

And some people really do accept the train wholeheartedly. They delight in its existence and enjoy its speed. They take pleasure in the passing landscape and make friends with their traveling companions. They try to make sure that everyone feels good and they stand up to those who try to damage the coaches or inconvenience their fellow passengers. They do not let quarrels or delirium obscure the whole sense and purpose of the journey. To them it is wonderful that such a train exists and that it can carry us so quickly back home, where others anxiously await us, where the embraces will be long and love never ending.

Liberating grace at work in the world is like such a train. The destination in this case is God, and so is the route. For the route is the destination anticipated, the goal slowly turning into a reality and carrying human beings along.

Grace carries all, giving all the opportunity to have a good trip. It does not reject the lazy, the rebellious, or the intriguers. Like a train, grace does not change the face of negations. Only human beings change, spoiling their journey. But they are still carried along gently and steadily. God, who is grace, "is good to the ungrateful and the wicked" (Luke 6:35).

When we accept the train, enjoy its course, and wish our fellow travelers well, we are already anticipating the festive joy of our arrival at our final destination. Traveling in that way is like going home. It is grace. Grace is "glory in exile," just as glory is "grace in its homeland." It is heaven.

When we spurn the train, disturb the journey, and ruefully run in the opposite direction trying vainly to flee, we are already anticipating absolute frustration. But the train continues on its course, carrying its opponents inside. God does not change or alter his gratuitousness, but human beings can. Their frustration will be all the greater when they realize that they are being kindly carried along in spite of everything. That is hell.

And you, reader, which direction are you traveling?

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