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THE ACTION OF GOD IN HUMAN LIFE TOWARDS EXPERIENTIAL DIMENSION OF EFFECTS OF GRACE

INTRODUCTION

Theology as a discipline is complicated; it has many functions. But theology as a task is quite simple; it is an attempt to understand Christian faith and reality in the light of it. Its tools are faith experience, history and critical historical expressions of the faith and try to make critical judgments about what can be said today in their light. It is rational attempt, in faith, to find from what is true, beneath the varied expressions of the past, that which can be asserted as corresponding to our experience of the world today.

A good indication that something is essential in Christian experience is the pragmatic test of time; if something perdures through the varying circumstances of history, it is probably something that belongs to the substance of the Christian experience of grace. The special problems of graces are the problems that are met in the course of studying the history of theology. They are such problems as that of God's action within human beings over against our own freedom and autonomy. Does God toy with persons as with a puppet on the end of a string? What is the relation between the so-called supernaturalism of the Christian economy and the natural world?

One of the objectives of this study, then, will be try to grasp and synthesize the major and common themes in the various theologies of grace. The intention here is not to reanalyze the varieties of the experience of grace or to summarize *all* possible religious experiences. But what should be pointed out as one looks back over the history of the theology of grace is the significance of these experiences and their diversity. First of all, for grace to be real, it must be experienced in some way. And grace *is* real because it is operative concretely and subjectively in people and it manifests itself in their lives. It appears in various forms because it works in persons with different personalities, temperaments, backgrounds, and so on.

Second, then, the working of grace in concrete natures means quite simply that it is to be expected that there will be a great variety of ways in which individuals experience God's grace. Thus, on the one hand, one can say that behind every doctrine

of grace there is some religious experience. There is no doctrine of grace that does not entail and, indeed, rest on some experience of transcendence. An understanding of any doctrine of grace thus implies a grasp of that experience in some form or other. And on the other hand, for different experiences of grace there will be different nuances of doctrine. One can expect a certain pluralism in doctrines that try to express the richness of God's love.

1. EXISTENCE AND GRACE

Karl Rahner (1904–1984), a German Jesuit, has established theologically in terms of Catholic theology, that the action of God in human life can be experienced¹. Grace, that is, God's ordination of human existence to a personal union with himself and his offer of the gift of himself, is an integral part of actual human nature. This means that grace is an indistinguishable element not only of human being, but also of the deepest movements in a person's spirit. An appreciation of the operation of grace in this world requires, perhaps, an analytic or philosophical recognition of human transcendence, but it can also be seen in a descriptive account of how this is played out in conscious religious experience. Concretely, it is on this second level alone, and not on the level of theology, that the problems connected with the doctrine of grace can be met and solved.

The problems involved in any doctrine of grace are both theoretical and concrete. Reductively they can all be reduced to the problem of evil, to the negative or dark side of human existence. The existence and experience of evil in the world – the physical evil of sickness, disease and death and the moral evil of sin and its inescapable effects – is a permanent and internal threat to the doctrine of God's love. The theme of evil is the background not only in Augustine and Luther's theology of grace; it is the permanent background of every theology of grace. In some cases the experience of evil can totally blind a person to a recognition of God's graciousness; in others, the doctrine of grace may be accepted but with the question mark of serious doubt. Evil is experienced by every person, personally and concretely in his or her own life. It is not therefore a distant problem. Without an appreciation of this persistent and dialectical element in human experience, there is a danger that an understanding of and one's talk about grace will be superficial and facile. But if this dialectical element is kept in mind, one has a better chance of meeting experience realistically, understanding it and communicating it to people according to their situations.

Ultimately and concretely, the problems connected with the doctrine of grace find their solution in the experience of grace itself. The Christian apologist who wants to explain and communicate what can be known of God's love will have to point to the human experiences in which it is found and the signs in which it is mani-

¹ He published *Geist in Welt (Spirit in the World)*, Herder & Herder, New York 1968 and *Schriften zur Theologie (Theological Investigations)*, 22 vols., Baltimore, New York 1961–1991. Cf. M. Taylor, *God is Love: A Study in the Theology of Karl Rahner*, Scholars Press, Missoula 1987; K.-W. Weger, *Karl Rahner: An Introduction to His Theology*, Seabury, New York 1980.

fest. Ultimately, he or she will point to Christ, who is the definitive revealer of God's love and who is God's grace, and to his Spirit, which has been poured out in the hearts of his followers and is operative in all of history. But to do this with conviction and credibility it helps to know how that grace of Christ is experienced.

2. BASIC PROBLEMS

The legacy of Augustine to the theology of grace is a conception that finally came to sharp focus in his prolonged controversy with Pelagius or with what he understood to be Pelagianism². Grace is understood in the context of and relative to human freedom and love. In Augustine's thought grace is closely identified with the immanent working of the Spirit of God within the human personality and consequently within history. For the profoundly questioning mind of Augustine, grace alone responds to the question of the ultimate source of human goodness, to the question: Why is there human goodness at all in the world? Ultimately, he says, it is God's grace that is responsible for self-transcending love and the consequent expanding of the horizon of freedom beyond mere choice of objects or decisions based on self-centered designs. This understanding has been written into the doctrine of the Church³. For his part Augustine did not extend the working of grace universally beyond the Christian order of things. But it follows from the Augustinian doctrine that where there is authentic self-transcending love, there God's saving grace is operative⁴.

During the course of the thirteenth century and through the assumption of the categories of Aristotle's philosophy of nature, the context for understanding grace radically shifted. The climax of this development is seen in Aquinas's later treatment of grace in his *Summa Theologiae*. Although the central Augustinian assertions remain, Aquinas's understanding of grace is at bottom fundamentally different. In his thought grace is seen relative to the human person and race as finite and limited, as created "nature". In this context grace is a new power and nature, elevating and supernatural, and also divinizing because through this habitual gift to the soul one "participates" in God's own life. Grace is absolutely and metaphysically necessary for attaining eternal salvation because the finite created nature is teleologically incapable of reaching the supernatural and revealed goal of communion with God to which we are called. Human beings, then, precisely as human beings, are transformed and raised up by the infusion of a new quality and level of being called grace⁵.

² Cf. J. Ferguson, *Pelagius: A Historical and Theological Study*, W. Heffer & Son, Cambridge 1956.

³ Cf. G. Greshake, *Libertà donata. Breve trattato sulla grazia*, Queriniana, Brescia 1989, 39–54; E. TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian*, Herder & Herder, New York 1970.

⁴ This Augustinian problematic is a tacit presupposition of Rahner's doctrine of the supernatural existential and of his explanation of how grace is made universally effective in human experience, that is, anonymously through the will. Ultimately, his doctrine may be characterized as "justification through love".

⁵ T. O'Meara, *Grace as a Theological Structure in the Summa Theologiae of Thomas Aquinas*, *Recherches de Théologie Ancienne et Médiévale* 55 (1988), 131–153.

Although such themes as the absolute transcendence and sovereignty of God carry over from the *via moderna* into the reformers, still the development in Luther's theology of grace is really a sharp break with the Scholastic mode of thought. Here the understanding of grace is set in the context of an interpersonal relationship between God and the human person with the Word as the mediator. Grace is defined relative to human sinfulness: God's grace is forgiving. Although this theme is common to both Augustine and Aquinas, it is central to Luther and explained by him in considerably different fashion. Grace is God's mercy, forgiveness and love for the sinner as a person, and in and through this personal relationship, sustained by the Word and an actual faith response, the sinner is transformed even while concupiscence or sin remains⁶.

Much of Rahner's earliest theology of grace, while it retains an absolutely fundamental position in his thought, is directed to overcoming the problems that had become inherent in the Scholastic language of grace. Starting from Scholastic premises, he argues to the primacy of uncreated grace and thereby overcomes the objectivist view of Scholastic categories by justifying personalist categories for talk about grace. Second, arguing against extrinsicism he establishes the unity of the natural and supernatural orders and thus overcomes the dualism implicit in the then current neo-Scholasticism with his concept of the "supernatural existential". The real advance in the theology of grace mediated by Rahner then occurs when he views grace in the context of universal human history and eschatology. God's salvific will is universal, and grace is God's personal offer and presence of himself to all people across the whole of history. While all the major themes of the past are preserved in Rahner's understanding, there is a decided shift and development here, for grace is seen as operating generally and universally outside the boundaries of Christianity in a concrete existential way as well as in a public and social way in other religions⁷.

Here then are four fundamental aspects and themes, all of which, except the last, are in a sometimes more, sometimes less, degree common to the history of the Christian understanding of grace. Grace is God's love for human beings, a love that affects, converts and transforms human freedom and loving, a love that is accepting and forgiving, a love that raises a person up to become a "new kind of existence"; and, it may be added, since this love is universally offered to and operative in all human beings, it is at work transforming history.

3. GRACE ITSELF

From the very beginning the word grace in the Christian vocabulary has stood for the favor and love that God bestows upon humanity in Christ and in the Christian

⁶ Cf. J. Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition*. Vol. 4: *Reformation of Church and Dogma (1300–1700)*, Chicago University, Chicago 1984; E. Jüngel, *The Freedom of a Christian: Luther's Significance for Contemporary Theology*, Fortress, Philadelphia 1988.

⁷ Cf. G. Vass, *Understanding Karl Rahner*, 2 vols. Sheed & Ward, London 1985; M. Taylor, *God is Love: A Study in the Theology of Karl Rahner*, Scholars Press, Missoula 1987.

dispensation. The word emphasizes the qualities of that love of God for human beings; it is totally gratuitous, offered to us in complete freedom on God's part. And in this sense everything that God does for humanity in Christ is grace. From this point of view, the word grace has almost no precise content that is distinct from the whole mystery of Christ's revelation and redemption and the gift of his Spirit, in short, the whole Christian economy. It is important to realize that the word can never really be divorced from this very broad context. The study of every aspect of Christian doctrine is thus a study of grace⁸.

Grace, then, refers to the relationship of love that God has established with humanity, and that is revealed in Jesus Christ. The word "grace" stands for *how*, in the Christian experience, God relates to human beings, how he deals with people, and how consequently we stand in relation to God. More and more, especially beginning with Augustine in the West, how human existence stands in relationship with God and how God deals with us began to be understood in the context of specific problems. Thus the history of the theology and doctrine of grace also became somewhat specialized; it deals with humanity's concrete, *here-and-now* relation with God in the Christian dispensation, that is, in Christ. But this involves the most general and basic views of what humanity is, of Christian anthropology, and of how God addresses humankind in this world and in history. These have become the fundamental issues in the doctrine of grace. From a certain point of view, then, the question of grace is absolutely fundamental, and the answers to these questions will determine one's understanding of the very meaning of Christian life and Christian spirituality.

The word "language" concerns much more than the question of vocabulary and the meaning of a word. The idea of language has been employed here analogously to mean a whole system and logic for understanding. Such a system of understanding is determined by its historical context, by the cultural forces at work, by the specific problems encountered and addressed, by the sources of human thought that one borrows to address them, by the personal experience of the user of these sources. For this reason there are diverse languages of grace, that is, diverse ways of understanding it.

Augustine addresses the question of grace in the context of our sin, our freedom and unfreedom to do good, and our ability and inability to accept the salvation that God offers us in his election and love. Grace for Augustine is primarily a force in the inner life of a person calling to faith and assisting the will to do good. Grace becomes the Spirit, the Spirit of love, that turns *cupiditas* into *caritas*, liberates a person from selfishness and gives him or her the very power to love God and what is good. Without this healing grace we are hopelessly prisoners of a will twisted by sin, and this remains a permanent obstacle to our salvation, that is, the final union with and possession of God for which we are ordained. But with grace God quietly, but sometimes with great spiritual turmoil, draws those chosen by his love back to himself. For the first time in the history of Christian thought, Augustine clearly asserts that the power of salvation, God's grace, works internally and directly within the human will.

⁸ Cf. C. Ernst, *The Theology of Grace*, Fides Publishers, Notre Dame, Ind. 1974.

In Aquinas grace is seen in a cosmological framework. Grace is a new form of being; it is a supernatural nature that God in his love bestows on the Christian, on one who responds to his revelation in loving faith, and so raises him up. This new form of being elevates a person and gives one a participation above nature in the divine life itself. And as a principle of human actions, grace enables a person to act on a supernatural level, proportionate to one's calling. By grace we are sanctified and enabled to live a life that is worthy of salvation, that is, final spiritual union with God. In Aquinas, grace is primarily the created effect of God's working within us; it is a new form of being.

In Luther grace is God's word and promise of mercy and forgiveness. As in Augustine, grace is set in the context of sin, but sin now has a significantly different and more comprehensive meaning. Sin has much more to do with a person's being and fundamental worth than with one's actions. In spite of sin, however, God addresses us personally in Christ and guarantees that we are forgiven, acceptable and saved. And this personal relationship of real forgiveness transforms the Christian and allows him or her to live a completely new life of freedom. Grace in Luther is basically external to human existence but assimilated and appropriated by an interpersonal relationship to God in Christ⁹.

In Trent, too, grace is forgiveness, as well as much more. Grace is primarily an inner renovation of the human person, giving one a new birth into a new form of life. Grace is a new state of being, given by God and inhering in us so that it becomes our own. It is a participation in Christ's grace, that is to say, God's love incarnate¹⁰.

In Rahner, grace is most fundamentally God's gift of his very self to human persons in love. This gift is offered to every person at every period of history, and this permanent offer of himself is itself a completely gratuitous decision on God's part, one that raises the world and its history into a supernatural state of existence. While humans are dependent on God for their being, still they are created distinct from God with an autonomy that allows them to freely respond to God's love. The whole of history, then, is a dialogue in which God addresses persons in love and people respond to this offer of God's self-donation as it is manifested in their lives and experience. This offer and call may be implicit, but on the Augustinian principles that underlie Rahner's thought here, any experience of a call to self-transcendence and positive response to it comes as a result of and is an encounter with God's grace. The ultimate grace, however, the fulfillment of grace in this world, is being possessed by the very presence of God in eternity.

What then is grace? Surely it is all of these, and no one of these positive affirmations of what grace is should be taken as excluding any other. Each of these understandings has an internal logic of its own, as was seen. Only with the most extreme care and reticence should these positive understandings, and the experiences that they reflect, be seen as exclusive and used negatively to affirm what grace is not. This is not to deny that every specific positive understanding is by that very

⁹ Cf. B. Gerrish, *Grace and Reason, A Study of the Theology of Luther*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1962; A. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Doctrine of Justification*, 2 vols., Cambridge University 1986.

¹⁰ Cf. H. Jedin, *A History of the Council of Trent*, 2 vols, Herder, St. Louis 1957.

fact affirmative and therefore limiting and exclusive of counter positions. One can say what God, what human existence, and what our relationship with God, are not. But this can be done of another Christian affirmation only if one understands exactly what it means and in terms of that particular language.

4. THE EFFECTS OF GRACE

There are two truths about history, both of them absolute, and they apply as well to the history of the Christian theology of grace. The first truth is that history never repeats itself. The second truth is that history always repeats itself. On the one hand, seeing the twists and turns that history takes relativizes particular languages of grace and invites us to understand in our own terms. On the other hand, all these past languages deal precisely with grace in Christian terms, that is, God's love as manifested in Christ in a point of time and experienced through the same Spirit that was in Christ Jesus. It is to be expected, then, that beneath the varied languages and accents there be common themes, normative themes, that should find their place in every account of grace and any present-day understanding of grace. One should try, then, to point to what seem to be some of the essential effects of grace in Christian life as they have been consistently manifested in Christian experience and articulated in Christian theology and doctrine.

4.1. Forgiving

God's love for people as manifested in Christ and as experienced in his grace is merciful and forgiving. This theme is highlighted in Luther's theology and in Lutheran tradition, but it is commonly present in all the theologies of grace¹¹. In Trent, grace is justifying, a passing out of a state of sin into a state of being forgiven. Justification is the first effect of grace in Aquinas. In Augustine the theme of forgiving does not dominate, but it is clearly present especially in his consideration of baptism. The theme is also present in Rahner who in his later writings constantly refers to grace as both elevating and forgiving.

Given human existence as it is in the world, one of the primary obstacles to salvation is its sheer unworthiness. No truly religious experience of God can lack some sense of the dichotomy between what human existence is and what it ought to be, and of its utter lack of holiness (wholeness) before the living God. And depending on one's religious sensibility and profundity, one can come to realize the extent to which the human person is hopelessly and inextricably immersed in a situation of sin that is not only exterior but also internal to us. It is for this reason that Christ, his grace and his salvation appear essentially connected with forgiveness. He came to call sinners and we are *prodigal sons*. "Forgive us our trespasses" is part of the Christian's prayer. An essential theme of the good news of the Gospel is the grace of

¹¹ Cf. J. Wicks, *Luther and His Spiritual Legacy*, M. Glazier, Wilmington 1983.

mercy that forgives. And here grace will be experienced more intensely the more our basic unworthiness itself is experienced.

4.2. Healing

God's love for a person is manifested as a positive force in his or her life that heals and cures the sickness that is selfishness and enables one to love God in return. This theme dominates Augustine's theology of grace and is his permanent legacy to the formal doctrine of grace. Human freedom is bound; one cannot freely act for unselfish motives; we cannot love God unless we experience the healing love of the God who first loves us. Again, any realization of this aspect of grace and the necessity of it can only come as a function of the profoundest questioning about human life and motivation. Why is there goodness at all, Augustine asked. And the Christian response is that altruism and true self-transcendence can only come through God's impelling it and drawing it out of a person, by drawing human existence out of itself.

The theme runs large in the New Testament, especially in Paul and in John. Why is it that a person does what he or she does not want to do, and does not do what he or she knows should be done? In Paul, knowledge is not virtue. The virtuous life is only possible through the Spirit of love poured out in a person's heart. If Christians are those who love one another, this can only be through the experience of the power of grace.

4.3. Elevating

In every language of grace, the effect of God's love for human existence is described in one way or another as elevating. This is expressed in the sharpest and clearest terms in Aquinas, where grace elevates human life not only to a new level in the hierarchy of beings, but even to a sharing in the divine nature itself. Participation in the love of God manifested in Christ means participating in, sharing, being flooded with, God's own life. And whether the language here be ontological or mystical, it is not devoid of experience. All religious experiences of grace share in some degree the note of being elevated by contact and union with God through his love.

This theme, then, in whatever language it is spoken, merely reasserts what is announced in the New Testament. Such images as "rebirth", the "new being", in whom "Christ lives", "sons of God" meant for resurrection, all indicate a qualitative change in human existence and a level of life that is qualitatively different from and higher than life untouched by the gift of God's grace. And the mystical language of John and Paul, of "remaining in" Christ and being "incorporated" into his body, is especially relevant to this theme of participating in divine life.

4.4. Freeing

Perhaps the most important effect of the experience of God's love is freedom. This freedom is indeed a function of the other three effects of grace and includes

them. God's grace frees people from their sin; it frees them from themselves by liberating the will to act; it frees them from the world and all fear of it because it bestows on them a value that transcends the finitude of this world. And over and above this, contact with God's love in grace engenders a security and self-possession that frees a person for others and for the world.

It is not surprising that the image of freedom dominates the biblical understanding of salvation and grace. From the freedom from bondage and captivity in the *Exodus* to the freedom from sin and even death in Christ, the idea of what God communicates to human existence by his love is crystallized in the theme of freedom. In a sense a longing for freedom is the most fundamental of all human aspirations. It means movement, fullness of life and vital activity, self-creation and fulfillment, spiritual expansiveness, full possession even in diffusion. It takes the love of God for human beings to complete such a human longing. It is not something that we can attain for ourselves. Indeed, the doctrine of grace is the teaching that God bestowed this infinite longing so that he could fulfill it with his grace.

5. THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

It is a small step from the topic of the effects of grace in Christian life to a consideration of the Christian life itself. One of the basic issues of the theology of grace is spirituality, a fundamental understanding of the meaning and dynamics of the Christian life. It is appropriate therefore that a summary of the theology of grace as it operates in personal life be given in terms of Christian experience of the Christian life.

The symbol "liberation" is fitting to interpret the effects of grace in Christian life and experience and it is chosen as a unifying category¹². If as was just said it is true that freedom is the most all-embracing effect of grace, then the symbol liberation cannot be too far off the mark. The word liberation is a substantive form of the verb meaning to set free, to release from restraint or bondage. As a verbal symbol it embodies a host of meanings that cluster around various experiences of freedom, autonomy and human liberty. Surely the experience of God's grace will entail some form or forms of liberation.

The term *liberation* is chosen as a central symbol for interpreting the experience of grace for several further reasons. God's grace and salvation have always been conceived of in terms approaching some form of liberation as the words *salvation* and *redemption* themselves indicate. And shifting to the present, the experiences of freedom and liberation in various forms are very much part of modern culture. The consciousness of being in history and the relative freedom from the past that historical consciousness mediates, the experience of human autonomy and a new ability and responsibility to control, in some measure, both nature and history, the tendency to define the very nature of the human person as freedom, all these cultural factors make the symbol liberation very germane to modern culture

¹² Cf. G. Greshake, *Geschenkte Freiheit. Einführung in die Gnadenlehre*, Herder, Freiburg im Br. 1977.

and at the same time pose the question of the relation between these experiences and the effects of grace.

The symbol *liberation* is used heuristically, that is, we shall try to inform the term liberation with the content and meaning that is given by the history of the theology of grace. This does not make Augustine, for example, a liberation theologian in the contemporary sense of that title. Quite the contrary; the goal is to discover what Augustine said in terms of liberation and consequently the meaning of liberating grace in the theologies of the past. The method then is one of retrieval that both interprets the past history of the theology of grace from a contemporary point of view and fully allows contemporary affirmations to be informed by the Christian experience of the past. The question, then, is this: How are we to describe Christian experience and the Christian life, in short, Christian spirituality, in terms of the liberating power of grace?

5.1. Liberation from Oneself

Although present as well in the other authors, this experience of grace stands out in Luther because of the personalistic manner in which he frames his understanding. Through faith one receives forgiveness and acceptance by a divine and cosmic power with the tenderness of a personal God. In the experience of God's grace, God's favor, benevolence, mercy and love, a person is accepted precisely as he or she is, in spite of unworthiness and sin. In psychological terms, just as a person gains his or her identity in others' reaction or response, so here the Christian gains an "absolute identity", one that is ultimately positive, even though it includes judgment, because of God's love. Persons can accept themselves, both their present and their past, in spite of the finitude, sin, irresponsibility, that have gone to constitute the self. This is an enormously liberating experience. And in places Luther's description of this experience of grace, although he uses a vastly different language, is remarkably close to the effects of grace as seen by Aquinas in such terms as "elevation", "divinization" and "participation" in the divine life. By an almost mystical union with Christ, according to Luther, and in a love relationship symbolized in a bridal image, the liberation from self transforms Christian life into life on another plane.

5.2. Liberation from Sin

Augustine too described the experience of grace as a liberation from sin but in a way quite different from that of Luther. Here sin is seen as egoism. By sin is meant the turning of human motive and intention and consequent behavior back in upon itself so that value outside the self is not enjoyed in itself but used for the self. The person as a center of consciousness is a center of reality and what is beyond the self is drawn into the self and exists for the self. Sin is thus both a mode of existence and the activities flowing from this stance of autonomy and hubris. Human freedom is trapped or bound within itself so that self-transcendence, any desire for the good as

such, is impossible. Grace breaks this self-enclosed state of human existence. Grace liberates human freedom from sin by engendering in the personality, in the human mind and will, a delight and desire transcending the self and responding to value outside the self and for its own sake. Augustine is most explicit about this liberating experience of grace in the actual moment of conversion and in the life of the believer who lives his life for God. But at the same time he recognized experiences before his own final Christian conversion as impulses of grace causing self-transcendence¹³. Thus the working of grace and its liberating effect is a process that need not be limited in such a way that God is seen as the only explicit motive for acting, need not be limited to the realm of explicitly religious experience, although this indeed is its goal.

5.3. Freedom to Love

In Augustine the freedom to love is simply the other side of freedom from sin. Grace does not destroy free choice; on the contrary, it establishes it, expands its horizon and guarantees it. Quite consistently with contemporary understanding, Augustine saw the human personality as a mixture of freedom and determinism. Such was the power of habit and custom to bind freedom itself from within that despite the power to choose this or that object, it is not in the power of freedom to love authentically. God alone through the power of his grace enables freedom to love. This freedom to love – liberty, as Augustine called it – does not strictly speaking add to or multiply the concrete opportunities or objects of free decision. Rather grace releases freedom from its inner constrictions and positively gives it a new horizon and scope, a new motive. The power to love, to delight in good and value outside the self and ultimately the supreme good, God, engenders a whole new existence in a person precisely by altering his fundamental orientation. Grace literally frees one from all objective law because the very ideal that the law points to becomes internalized; the Spirit of love is the generating force of behavior. Quite simply, grace is the force of God working in human existence moving it in love.

5.4. Liberation from Nature

In Aquinas, the reason why human beings need grace is that they do not have the power within themselves to achieve the goal for which they were intended, that is, the utterly transcendent goal of union with God. Human nature is a capacity for personal communion with God even while the active power to achieve this is lacking. This new principle of activity is grace. Grace thus liberates the human person from finitude, from the limited and limiting aspects of his nature. The expansive power, both as a habit and as a *motus* opens up human being-in-this-world to a higher po-

¹³ For example, what may in effect be called Augustine's first conversion to "truth" was a self-transcending experience he credited to God's grace. See *The Confessions* of St. Augustine, bk. III, chap. 4 (Garden City, N.Y.: Image Books, Doubleday, 1960), pp. 81–82.

ssibility, to a higher form of activity and love that is destined for a goal that utterly transcends native possibilities, namely, personal union with God.

5.5. Liberation from Fear of the World

This important theme of liberation from the world is found in all theologies of grace but is most clearly expressed in Luther. By one's union with Christ through grace one shares in Christ's kingship, so that every Christian is by faith so exalted above all things that, by virtue of a spiritual power, he is lord of all things. This is not a physical power, but power springing from union with God as transcendent and absolute. As mentioned earlier, in very different terms but expressive of the same theme, Aquinas speaks of being raised up or elevated by grace in such a way that one participates in divine life; one shares a divine kind of existence. The taking cognizance of this union with God in religious experience is at the same time a relativizing experience of everything that is finite. Grace therefore frees one from all fear of the world; it is a relativization of every cultural product and a liberation from ultimate fear of every human institution. The world and its history as Rahner puts it are demythologized and demystified.

5.6. Liberation from Death

The human person, according to Augustine, desires to be. The internal desire not to cease to exist with time as all other things do, not to pass away but to be permanently, incorruptibly, absolutely and eternally, grounds the dynamism of life itself. Grace, responding to that desire, both by turning one toward God and acting as the medium of the experience of God, liberates from death and establishes human being as autonomous. "If you begin by wishing to exist, and add a desire for fuller and fuller existence, you rise in the scale, and are furnished for life that supremely is"¹⁴. Of course death, and the suffering in this world that is an integral part of death, must still be undergone. And death retains its threatening and fearful aspect, but not ultimately so. To the extent that one is grasped by God's grace and surrenders to it, in the same measure can death be met with peace. Grace liberates from the ultimate terror of death and transforms it from a passion into an action. It liberates also from the terror of time and history, and releases constructive energy in a context of hope.

5.7. Liberation for God (and His Designs)

Liberation from is also a liberation *for*. In all theologies of grace the experience of grace is a liberation for God. In Augustine, through grace one loves God as the source and ground of all good-ness. In Aquinas one's whole nature is recreated through its permanent attitudes (virtues) and in its action toward union with God. In Luther

¹⁴ Augustine, *On Free Will*, bk. III, vii, 21, in *Augustine: Earlier Writings*, ed. John H. S. Burleigh, Westminster Press, Philadelphia 1953, p. 405.

one is by grace already united with God and thus saved; but from a good tree good fruits come. One may add that liberation for God is a liberation that enables God's will to be done. Grace liberates human beings for the designs of God.

5.8. Liberation for the Neighbor

Although explained in different ways by different theologies of grace, liberation for the neighbor appears in all as an essential element and in some the very criterion for the operation of grace in human life. In Aquinas grace informs the whole person and in the will it appears as charity. And charity, which is primarily love of God, plays itself out toward salvation through the moral life of love of neighbor. This conception has the advantage of integrating grace into the whole of life as it moves through history. In Luther, however, the liberating effect of grace for the neighbor is dramatically and idealistically represented. An essential component of God's grace is a spontaneously and utterly gratuitous, altruistic love of neighbor. *Caritas* in Luther means primarily love of neighbor, and one does not love the neighbor in order to love God, nor does one love God through the neighbor. Rather, having received grace a person is internally liberated and turns to the neighbor for his own sake. The Christian is a servant without desire for reward. In Rahner, finally, love of God and love of neighbor, although they can be distinguished objectively, tend to merge into a single transcendental reality of self-transcending experience at the very deepest level of experience. And here one has rejoined the Augustinian existential tradition: Where there is self-transcendence, there is the movement of grace.

5.9. Liberation for the World and History

The affirmation that grace effects a liberation in human personality for the world and for history is both a climax of the summary of the personal experience of grace. The discussion has centered up to now on the effects of grace within the human person and in personal life; indeed, the theology of grace is narrowly focused on the personal reality of grace. But at the same time the effects of grace include a liberating or opening out of personal existence to God and his designs, to the neighbor, and consequently to the world understood as other people in history. Salvation as it is begun in this world in a life under the influence of grace is a concrete, visible and external life lived among other people in a public way. To say that the effects of grace are lives lived for the world and for history, therefore, is to shift the whole context of the discussion to that of the public or historical effects of grace, the question of the history of salvation, the social manifestations of grace and a theology of history.

THE ACTION OF GOD IN HUMAN LIFE
TOWARDS EXPERIENTIAL DIMENSION OF EFFECTS OF GRACE

Streszczenie

Podobnie jak w tekstach Pisma Świętego, tak samo w pierwszych, już niekanonicznych tekstach pierwotnego chrześcijaństwa, u Ojców Kościoła, znajdujemy bardzo zróżnicowane sposoby rozumienia łaski samej w sobie, jej działania w człowieku, jej roli w całości dzieła zbawienia. Jest to oczywiście skutkiem odmiennych uwarunkowań kulturowych poszczególnych Kościołów, odmiennej sytuacji społecznej, a także odmiennych osobowości, odmiennej duchowej i intelektualnej formacji poszczególnych teologów.

Zachodnia tradycja mówienia o łasce dotyczy przede wszystkim jej relacji do grzechu. W starożytnym Kościele zachodnim nauczanie o łasce znajduje się zdecydowanie pod wpływem św. Augustyna. To właśnie od niego poczynając, można mówić o teologii łaski w sensie ścisłym. Zasadniczymi pytaniami teologii stają się pytania o istotę i rodzaje łaski, o relację między łaską i naturą, o granice łaski, a więc również o granice predestynacji. Inaczej jest w tradycji wschodniej. Pojęcie łaski ukazuje się zwykle w wieńcu takich pojęć, jak: usprawiedliwienie, zbawienie, oczyszczenie, przebaczenie, grzech. Centralną ideą wschodniej teologii jest przebóstwienie człowieka jako ostatecznego celu procesu wychowawczego.

Artykuł prezentuje skrótowo myśl niemieckiego jezuitę Karla Rahnera (1904–1984), który twierdził, iż działanie Boga w życiu człowieka może stać się przedmiotem doświadczenia. Rahner mocno podkreśla, iż łaska pozostaje trwałą tajemnicą, gdyż jest to wprowadzenie człowieka w tajemnicę najbardziej pierwotną, tajemnicę życia Trójcy i dlatego – obok Wcielenia – stanowi jedną z trzech największych tajemnic chrześcijaństwa i całej rzeczywistości. Łaska jest czymś jak najbardziej boskim, a zarazem czymś jak najbardziej określającym człowieka, czymś jak najbardziej obiektywnym, realnym, a zarazem czymś jak najbardziej osobowym, relacyjnym (jak istnienie Boskich Osób jest istnieniem w relacji).

Słowa kluczowe: łaska, egzystencja, doświadczenie, natura, skutki łaski, przebaczenie, uzdrowienie, wyniesienie, uwolnienie, wyzwolenie od grzechu