

SUPERNATURALITY AND EXISTENTIALITY OF GRACE IN COMMUNICATION THEOLOGY

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The issue of grace and nature is so important and crucial in theology and especially in the Communication Theology. It is important because it helps us to understand the fact that we can no longer dichotomise the understanding of God's self-communication of grace. While this self-communication could be traced into two moments but it is nevertheless important to realise that both moments fall under the same umbrella of grace as God's self-communication and gift. So in a way, there are two moments in God's self-communication of grace. The first position looks at grace as given and communicated by God intermittently in privileged situations during the life of the human being.

This is clear in the bible when God specifically intervened in the life of specific human beings at historical times. For example the wonderful stories of Israelites winning the wars, Jesus at baptism, Abraham called by God, God's intervention in David times, God's theophanic manifestations, God's assistance to the apostles, to Paul, Peter and several New Testament figures at historical times. This is one side of understanding how God intervened and communicated his grace in history. God specifically intervened in the lives of the people and inspired them in specific ways. This intervention was particular and historical. It was not something that was constant or daily but an eventful intervention of God in history. This happened in different ways and sometimes in dramatic ways. This was clearly manifested in the life of Paul especially at the calling of Paul when God intervened in a strong and dramatic way with his grace-filled power. This was a special moment, a special revelation, a special intervention and something that was unique. Not only did this happen at that time but it happens in the life of everyone – when in a special way God intervenes in a strong and sometimes in a dramatic way in the life of the person. This intervention is a grace-filled moment. Such grace is a divine gift communicated to the person and God does not owe it to

any creature – it is communicated free at specific times for a specific function. In this way, one would look at grace as depersonalised, and limited to unusual mystical situations.¹

The problem of looking at grace in this way – namely that its presence is limited to unusual and mystical situations is that it can easily lead to the dichotomy between nature and grace. The dichotomy exists in the sense that one would think about nature or the human person or human nature as belong to one pole and then grace belonging to another pole – that is to say that grace once in a while descends, helps the human person and then returns to its abode. Understood in this way, it would mean that grace is communicated to the human person only at specific times but that it belongs to its own sphere.

Grace understood exclusively in this way, would have big consequences on pastoral and religious life because one would easily be led into a dichotomy between the Church and the world – the Church as the arena of grace and the world as the arena of non-grace. Additionally, one would be led into a dichotomy between theology and philosophy, in which theology would be understood as the arena of grace and philosophy as the arena of non-grace.² There would also be dichotomy between God and the person.

But then we can also understand grace as part and parcel of nature – the fact that we live in an engraced world – that by God declaring that all was good at creation – it is because nature is engraced – that grace is inbuilt in creation – that all that comes from God is already blessed and therefore engraced – the creation centred theology – that because we are, therefore we are already blessed. It is in this context that in theodicy we say that creation is the imprint of God – that we can discover God in creation, precisely because creation is blessed – the twittering of the birds, the crow of the morning cock, the quacking sounds, the wonderful scents from the flower petals, the beauty and colour changes of the chameleon, the slowness of the tortoise – the beauty and magnificence of creation – can such beauty, coordination, mysteriousness be without any grace-basis? Many theologians including me, answer in the affirmative – that creation is grace-filled.

Having laid down these two positions – it is important to realise that it is the position of this author to agree with both positions. Firstly, it is true that at specific moments of history God has intervened in the life of the human person. The moment at which St. Paul fell to the ground is one example – the baptism of Jesus and the voice of God and the Spirit descending on him is another example. It is historical and theological as well. In this case we talk of grace

¹ Cf. John P. GALVIN, *The Rahner revolution I: Grace for a new generation*, in John P. GALVIN – Anne CARR, “Commonweal: Contemporary theology issue, The Rahner revolution,” (25.01.1985) 40.

² Cf. GALVIN, *The Rahner revolution I*, 39-40.

that has been infused in the human person for a specific purpose. It is what happens at ordination, at the profession of the religious, at the marriage blessing, at confirmation and baptism. Grace is communicated to the human person for a specific reason at a specific time. So there is grace that is given at a specific time, in a specific moment, to a person for a specific purpose. However, it is also true that creation is indeed engraced as we have noted above.

Nevertheless, it is important to somehow think of grace as a continuous process – that one lives in a state of grace already – but that God is at liberty to bestow on the human being specific graces for a specific purpose. In this way, we could think of grace not as being foreign to the world of human persons. The human person is body and soul/spirit – the person is embodied – but he or she is also ‘spirit in the world’ - the orientation of this spirit is towards God³ and this is done through two acts of knowing and willing.⁴

Grace was God’s free, personal fulfilment of this natural openness, which nothing less than the infinite God could ultimately satisfy; offered universally, though freely, God’s self-gift transformed the core of human life. Since human openness toward God would be meaningful even without grace, as the enabling condition of human knowledge and volition, nature did not require that grace be given. Yet, when offered, grace touched the core of human life and permeated every aspect of human existence and human history.⁵

We would also do well to think of the terminology of *supernatural existential* - that grace is supernatural because it is a divine gift communicated to the human person. It is supernatural because the source of grace is God who is divine and supernatural. The origin of grace is not the human sphere but God who is supernatural. Grace is also existential because it permeates the entire human existence and all the categorical experiences of the human person. Creation is already engraced. If we understand grace in this way as supernatural existential then in one term, we will have succeeded in overcoming the dichotomy between grace and nature, the church and the world, theology and philosophy.

The *world* in which we live is in fact *supernatural*, that is, a world which as a whole is ordered to the personal, Trinitarian God beyond the world. It is ordered as a whole to a supernatural end: originally graced as a whole, then fallen as a whole (for truly ‘all creation groans for redemption’), yet a world ever under the binding call of the God of supernatural life, shot through by the rays of primitive Revelation and even before Christ stirred by grace, at last redeemed as a whole in Christ. The whole of Nature, then, has always been embedded in a supernatural context.⁶

³ Cf. Karl RAHNER, *Knowledge and self-consciousness of Christ*, in Karl RAHNER, “Theological investigations, Volume 5, Later writings,” London, Darton, Longman & Todd, 1966, 202.

⁴ Cf. GALVIN, *The Rahner revolution I*, 40-41.

⁵ Cf. GALVIN, *The Rahner revolution I*, 40.

⁶ Karl RAHNER, *Theos in the new testament*, in Karl RAHNER, “Theological investigations, Volume 1: God, Christ, Mary and Grace,” New York, Crossroad publishing company, 1982, 80-81.

It is in this way that we can understand grace especially as an important concept that features in Communication Theology – that is, grace is not communicated in a dichotomous process but as *supernatural existential*.⁷

Rahner also succeeded in explaining the fact that all men are called to God’s salvation. All people live in an existential situation in which they are all invited to accept God’s offer of self-communication through God’s “supernaturally divinizing”⁸ grace.

⁷ Mary STEINMETZ, *Thoughts on the experience of God in the theology of Karl Rahner: Gifts and implications*, in “Lumen et Vita,” 2 (2012) 3.

⁸ Karl RAHNER, *History of the world and salvation-history*, in Karl RAHNER, “Theological investigations, Volume 5: Later writings,” London, Darton, Longman & Todd, 1966, 103.