

# THE THEOLOGY OF GRACE: PRESENT TRENDS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

FRANCIS COLBORN

*St. John's Seminary, Camarillo, Calif.*

**A**LTHOUGH THE theology of grace has not been an area of great controversy in recent years, it has been the subject of a considerable amount of writing. In all of this writing there seems to be a certain tendency for each author to go off in a different direction, without much attention to the related efforts of others. It seems opportune, then, to survey the whole field of the theology of grace, to see what has been written of late, to try to discern the general direction in which theological thought is moving, to point out the problems which have arisen as a result of this movement, and to try to foresee the possibilities for future developments.

The trend which is apparent in recent writings on grace is toward a theology which can be described as phenomenological, psychological, and personalist. The chief difficulties inherent in this approach seem to be methodological, involving the proper use of "personalist" categories to describe the realities of grace. Of my suggestions for future development, the central one is that we may find in contemporary psychology a model and a vocabulary for a theology of the relationship between God and man.

## RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE THEOLOGY OF GRACE

The "recent" developments to which I refer have taken place largely in the past ten years. They are better described as development of theology than as development of doctrine. That is, unlike the developments in recent decades in Mariology and ecclesiology, they are less concerned with the substance of faith than with our manner of understanding and expressing it, with approach, with system, with method.

One approach to the theology of grace, traditional in Christian theology since the time of Augustine, has been psychological, moral, and historical. In this line of thought, the subject matter of the treatise on grace is organized according to the different stages of sin, redemption, and grace in the life of the individual and in the salvation history of the human race. The use of the salvation-history framework for theology is seen not only in catechetical works but also in a theological treatment like that of Flick and Alszeghy.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Zoltán Alszeghy and Maurizio Flick, *Il vangelo della grazia* (Rome, 1964). Basically the same approach is retained in the same authors' more recently written notes for students on theological anthropology.

Although Augustine's approach dominated the theology of grace in Western Christendom for centuries, a different approach arose in the thirteenth century: the metaphysical or ontological understanding of grace.<sup>2</sup> With this we are all familiar. Not only did it dominate the Scholastic and Neo-Scholastic theologies of grace; it remained predominant even in those writers who consciously sought to go beyond their Scholastic heritage, and shaped even the writing of popularized versions of the theology of grace.<sup>3</sup>

The medieval Scholastics were not, of course, trying to add to or change Augustine's doctrine; they wanted rather to interpret it in Aristotelian categories. Similarly, theologians are now attempting to express what has been thought of in terms of salvation history or in terms of metaphysics, this time in terms of contemporary personalism.

All of this is scarcely news to anyone who is at all familiar with the theology of the past ten years. Nevertheless, there remains some confusion about what "contemporary personalism" is and what it means for the theology of grace.<sup>4</sup> Not everyone who cries "Person! Person!" has entered into the realm of personalism.

It should be observed, first of all, that some earlier advances toward the new style of thought remained marked by the old-style context from which they emerged. Think, for example, of the "created actuation by Uncreated Act" or "quasi-formal causality" of de la Taille or the earlier writings of Karl Rahner.<sup>5</sup> Whatever one may think of their

<sup>2</sup> The development between Augustine and Aquinas is summarized by Henri Rondet, *The Grace of Christ* (Westminster, Md., 1967) pp. 199-204. The effect of the metaphysical approach on medieval exegesis of Pauline texts on grace is traced by Zoltán Alszegeh, *Nova creatura* (Rome, 1956). The analogous effect of modern psychology on contemporary use of Scripture can be seen in Paul Tillich's treatment of Romans 7 (cf. "The Good I Will, I Do Not," *Pastoral Psychology* 12, no. 113 (April, 1961) 11-16).

<sup>3</sup> For example, Robert Gleason, S.J., *Grace* (New York, 1962).

<sup>4</sup> The personalist trend is discussed in general terms by Hermann Volk, "Gnade und Person," in *Theologie in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Munich, 1957); Edward Schillebeeckx, *Revelation and Theology* 2 (New York, 1968) 128-33; Otto Semmelroth, "Der Verlust des Personalen in der Theologie und die Bedeutung seiner Wiedergewinnung," in H. Vorgrimler, ed., *Gott in Welt* 1 (Freiburg, 1964) 315-32; Patrick Fannon, "The Changing Face of Theology: Man in Nature and Grace," *Clergy Review* 52 (1967) 331-36; Charles R. Meyer, "The Status of Grace Today," *Chicago Studies* 7 (1968) 27-51; Edward Bozzo, "The Neglected Dimension: Grace in Interpersonal Context," *THEOLOGICAL STUDIES* 29 (1968) 497-504; John W. Glaser, "Man's Existence: Supernatural Partnership," *ibid.* 30 (1969) 473-88.

<sup>5</sup> Brian Kelly, "A New Approach to the Theology of Grace," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 34 (1967) 70-74, argues for the use of such categories in a personalist theology of grace; Paolo Galtier, "Grazia e inabitazione della SS. Trinità," in *Problemi e orientamenti della teologia dommatica* (Milan, 1957), exemplifies their use in a metaphysical, static, and even impersonal consideration of grace.

validity, these theories are clearly framed in terms of Scholastic metaphysics, not of modern philosophy or psychology; they have been aptly, if somewhat ungracefully, characterized as "ontologico-personal."<sup>6</sup> Something similar appears in Henri de Lubac's writings on the supernatural order: an emphasis on grace as personal, but a treatment in traditional Scholastic terms. Even Rahner's theory of the "supernatural existential" is based on considerations of nature and person and finality which are ontological rather than phenomenological.<sup>7</sup>

I do not mean to imply that there is something inferior about the ideas I have just mentioned, but only that there is something different about them; they are precursors of the new tendency rather than part of it. In the more current view, grace is personal not only because it is a gift from person to person but because it is a relationship between persons. This relationship is not so much defined (metaphysically) as it is described (phenomenologically). The important question to be asked is not about the essences of the persons involved but about the origin and development of the relationship between them.

Again, it should be noted that some writers on grace use an approach that is truly personalist in the fullest sense—but only sometimes and somewhat, not fully and consistently. The work of Flick and Alszegey mentioned above incorporates some ideas on the relationship between God and man as interpersonal; but they do not use these ideas as the framework or as the keystone of their construction. Likewise, the volume on grace published by Baumgartner not long ago<sup>8</sup> drops a phrase here and there about love and friendship, but its general structure is that of a classical manual of dogmatic theology. Some of the best writing on grace as relationship was done by Küng in his study of Barth,<sup>9</sup> but the purpose of that study limited his discussion to certain aspects of the question. There are, however, a number of Roman Catholic theologians whose "personalism" is more fully and consistently developed. The best way to understand what is meant by personalism in this context is to examine their work.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Honorius Rito, *Recentioris theologiae quaedam tendentiae ad conceptum ontologico-personalem gratiae* (Rome, 1963).

<sup>7</sup> Karl Rahner, "Concerning the Relationship between Nature and Grace," in *Theological Investigations* 1 (Baltimore, 1965) 297-318.

<sup>8</sup> Charles Baumgartner, *La grâce du Christ* (Tournai, 1963).

<sup>9</sup> Hans Küng, *Justification: The Doctrine of Karl Barth and a Catholic Reflection* (New York, 1964). Other authors who treat some aspects of grace from a personalist perspective are David Burrell, "Indwelling, Presence, and Dialogue," *THEOLOGICAL STUDIES* 22 (1961) 1-17, and Irene Willig, *Geschaffene und ungeschaffene Gnade* (Münster, 1964). Burrell applies some of Lonergan's ideas to the grace relationship; Willig treats of the centrality of Christ in our understanding of grace.

An interesting example of development in this regard is provided by Karl Rahner. In his earlier article on the "supernatural existential" he suggested the need to rethink the theology of grace in terms of personal relations. In later articles he tends more and more to do just that: to speak of faith as humble surrender to God's love, of charity made possible by the realization of God's love.<sup>10</sup> In *Sacramentum mundi* he presents a brief synthetic view of grace as God's free self-communication, which is both healing and elevating, which is "actual" when offered to man to attract him, "habitual" when fully accepted, and so on.<sup>11</sup> Although he continues to use his "transcendental" method, along with Scholastic concepts (such as the "formal object" of faith), Rahner has become a sort of personalist with a phenomenological bent.

A treatment of grace similar to Rahner's was suggested some years ago by Juan Alfaro in a now classic article "Persona y gracia."<sup>12</sup> Man is defined as a finite spirit, or better, a created person, who seeks fulfillment which he can only receive from an infinite, uncreated Person. Grace is primarily God's free gift of Himself to man; its effect is created grace—in the sinner, a mysterious inner call to personal union with God; in the justified man, a permanent disposition for an I-Thou relationship with God. Other aspects of grace, faith, hope, and charity are explained in terms of these basic principles. Alfaro also acknowledges the necessity of categories not drawn from the sphere of interpersonal relations: uncreated, created, finite, nature, and the like. In later articles he has related his personalist approach to revelation, Christology, and ecclesiology, thus approaching a more complete synthesis in personalist terms.<sup>13</sup>

At about the same time that Rahner and Alfaro were beginning to develop these ideas, Piet Fransen wrote a popular presentation of the theology of grace which remains one of the best of its kind.<sup>14</sup> Basing his exposition on scriptural passages (such as the parable of the prodigal son), he emphasized first the merciful love of God for man. Grace in man he described as an inner invitation to a "fundamental option" of love for God. Thus his treatment paralleled those of Rahner and Alfaro, but avoided some of the technical questions of speculative theology.

<sup>10</sup> See, e.g., the articles on faith and love in *Theological Investigations* 5 (Baltimore, 1966) 439–67.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. his article "Grace: Systematic" in *Sacramentum mundi* 2.

<sup>12</sup> *Gregorianum* 41 (1960) 5–29.

<sup>13</sup> "Cristo, sacramento de Dios Padre; la Iglesia, sacramento de Cristo glorificado," *Gregorianum* 48 (1967) 5–27; "Encarnación y revelación," *Gregorianum* 49 (1968) 431–59.

<sup>14</sup> Peter Fransen, *Divine Grace and Man* (New York, 1962; first published in Antwerp in 1959).

More recently, Fransen has written a much fuller treatment of the theology of grace, which I will discuss later.<sup>15</sup>

Perhaps the most erudite and impressive of the "personalist" theologies of grace is found in Heribert Mühlen's volumes on the Trinity and on ecclesiology.<sup>16</sup> Mühlen's analogy for the procession of the Spirit is Dietrich von Hildebrand's description of the communion of two persons who say to each other not only "I" and "Thou" but also "We." "I-Thou" and "We" express the two fundamental and distinct types of interpersonal relationships. The Holy Spirit unites the Father and the Son as the personal "We" spoken by both of them together; the Church, in which the anointing of Jesus' humanity by the Spirit is continued, draws men into this personal relationship: the Holy Spirit is the Person who is One in many persons. The effects of "personal" causality, such as that exercised by the Spirit, are (again following von Hildebrand) an impression of one person upon another, an intensification of the other's capacity for self-giving, an interpersonal union among those involved; Mühlen finds here an apt analogy for the grace of the Spirit.<sup>17</sup>

Another author, John Cowburn, has also offered a synthesis of Trinitarian theology and grace on the basis of a description of human love; but his synthesis is very different from Mühlen's.<sup>18</sup> He begins with a division of love into "cosmic" love, based on a similarity of nature between lover and loved, and ecstatic love, based on a personal act of commitment which is ultimately inexplicable, not based on reason. The distinct processions of Son and Spirit in the Trinity are explained in terms of these two types of love; so also are the love God manifests in creation and the supernatural, inexplicable love which He gives to the just. Cowburn draws his basic idea of the two kinds of love from a consideration of the discussions among the Scholastics about the nature of love, and supports it by numerous quotations from poets, philosophers, and mystics.

Still another description of grace in interpersonal categories is suggested in an article by Charles Meyer.<sup>19</sup> Love is described in Sartre's terms as "wanting to be loved," which seeks to "seduce" the other—though without force or deceit—to "capture his subjectivity"; love is

<sup>15</sup> Peter Fransen, *The New Life of Grace* (Tournai, 1969).

<sup>16</sup> Heribert Mühlen, *Der Heilige Geist als Person* (2nd ed.; Münster, 1967); *Una mystica persona* (2nd ed.; Munich, 1967).

<sup>17</sup> *Der Heilige Geist* . . . , p. 277.

<sup>18</sup> John Cowburn, *Love and the Person: A Philosophical Theory and a Theological Essay* (London, 1967).

<sup>19</sup> Charles R. Meyer, "A Personalist View of Grace: The Ghost of Galileo," *Chicago Studies* 7 (1968) 283-301.

also compared to Jung's "projection of an image" of an ideal on to another, so that the other's defects are no longer seen. God's love or grace, according to Meyer, likewise seeks the love of men, seeks to "seduce" them, and "projects" an ideal on them.

One of the most vehement advocates of a personalist theology of grace is James Mackey.<sup>20</sup> What Mackey presents is not so much a fully developed theology as an argument for a personalist approach. Since Scholastic concepts of nature and the supernatural are too static, are impersonal, and categorize grace without really telling us what it is, Mackey would prefer an approach similar to that of Protestant theologians like Barth and Brunner. Thus he would define grace simply as God's communication of His love to man and man's response of faith, hope, and charity. Still, he admits that ontological categories may be necessary to explain infant baptism and perhaps some other aspects of grace.<sup>21</sup>

Finally, we come again to Fransen, who has written the most recent and the fullest treatment of grace, somewhat along the lines of his earlier work but more thoroughly developed.<sup>22</sup> In this work Fransen begins with scriptural considerations and makes them central throughout his book. For him, the key notion of grace is that of the presence within us of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. Thus he tries to bring out the relationship between grace and the Trinity, as well as to stress the ecclesial dimensions of grace and to relate theology to psychological studies. In short, this is as close to a comprehensive view of grace as anything we have, and it attempts to do justice to all the exigencies of contemporary theological concerns.

Another author deserves mention before this list of "personalist" theologians is concluded. In his latest book Gregory Baum is concerned primarily with the doctrine of God, but he also treats of matters which have to do with the theology of grace.<sup>23</sup> Baum has made his method most explicit: it is the "application of a psychologically-oriented phenomenology" to show that God is present in human life and experience. In his chapter on "redemptive immanence" he discusses explicit, conscious dialogue and the less-conscious experience of communion as two dimensions of life and growth in which a gratuitous, transforming gift is given to men—a gift which enables them to grow in openness and

<sup>20</sup> James Mackey, *The Grace of God, The Response of Man* (Albany, 1966).

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 39, 50, and 59.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. n. 15 above.

<sup>23</sup> Gregory Baum, *Man Becoming: God in Secular Language* (New York, 1970). See especially the section titled "Redemptive Immanence," pp. 37-70. This section is one of the strongest, in my opinion, in a highly debatable book.

humanness. If we are aware of the ambiguities and evils of human life, Baum argues, we will realize that the possibility and reality of growth must depend on some "other" who is present to man. Baum denies, then, that an emphasis on the immanence of God must lead to Pelagianism; on the contrary, the experience of love and friendship as always being gifts convinces us more strongly than ever that self-salvation is impossible; the divine love that is present in our lives can only be gratuitous.<sup>24</sup> A full-fledged theology of grace would require more space than Baum gives the subject in this book, but his approach is worth noting.

Now the meaning of a "personalist" theology of grace should be seen more clearly. All the authors mentioned above are concerned with the person as a conscious subject—thinking, willing, acting—in relation to other conscious subjects, rather than with the person as *suppositum rationale*. Their theology might be called "interpersonal," since they see the relationship between God and man not only as the matter to be explained by theology but as the very key to theological explanation. Although none of them rejects metaphysical analysis, they show more interest in phenomenological description of the grace relationship: rather than ask "Is love an act or a habitus?" they ask "How do human persons experience a love relationship?" They are led, then, to an interest in human psychology, to the study of human knowing and loving, and to a theological emphasis on faith, hope, and charity. Of course, these tendencies are present in all authors to some extent; what is characteristic of the authors listed here as "personalist" is that their theology is *predominantly* interpersonal, phenomenological, and psychological.

Besides these methodological characteristics, it may be well to summarize here the tendencies of recent writings on grace in regard to their content. One tendency is "theocentric": the merciful love of the Father is emphasized more than its effects on man; Uncreated Grace is given primacy over created grace.<sup>25</sup> Connected with this is the central place given to the person of Christ; special efforts are made to show how and why our relationship with God is through and in Christ.<sup>26</sup> An interest in the role of the Holy Spirit in the justification and sanctification of man is also evident in some of the authors mentioned, particularly in Mühlen. Another concern of contemporary theology is, of course, the communitarian nature of salvation; the Church is described

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 127 ff.

<sup>25</sup> Cf., e.g., Alfaro, "Persona y gracia," p. 18; or Rahner's article in *Sacramentum mundi*.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Willig, *op. cit.* (n. 9 above); Alfaro, "Cristo, sacramento . . ." (n. 13).

as part of God's plan, pre-existent in the Word, to give His grace to man; or as the sacrament of Christ; or as the continuation of the anointing of Christ's humanity by the Spirit.<sup>27</sup> Finally, a desire, at least, has been expressed that the theology of grace and community should be integrated into an evolutionary world view.<sup>28</sup>

I doubt that anyone would quarrel with the tendencies toward renewal in content, toward a broadening of perspective, in our treatment of grace. But what is really new and distinctive in recent authors is the methodology which I have described as psychological, phenomenological, and interpersonal. It is this which distinguishes the contemporary theology of grace from that of Aquinas as sharply as Aquinas is set apart from Augustine. And it is this methodology, too, which has raised the most doubts and questions in the minds of observers. It is time, then, to consider some of the advantages and some of the problems of the movement which has been described.

#### THE PRESENT SITUATION: PROGRESS AND PROBLEMS

Some of the advantages brought by this new trend of thought, some of the reasons it has developed, are fairly obvious. Catechists and preachers have long felt the need for an understanding of grace which could be adapted to kerygmatic purposes. When the only available synthesis was a metaphysical one, the education of priests and popular writing for the laity that were shaped by it failed to reach many of those to whom they were directed. Even the newer salvation-history pattern disappointed many catechists whose students found it remote and abstract. As Fransen's writing shows, a phenomenological theology can more easily meet this kerygmatic need.

But even on the level of speculative, technical theology there has been dissatisfaction with purely metaphysical categories. The relationship between nature and grace, the meaning of the divine Indwelling, the significance of Jesus Christ, and other aspects of grace may be understood fully only in terms of interpersonal relations.

Underlying even that reasoning is a still deeper question: that of the nature of theology as a science, of the relationship between theology and contemporary culture. The concrete, the individual, the existential, the experiential are no longer of concern to poets and artists only, but to scientists and philosophers as well. In modern psychology we have an example of a science which deals with the experiencing, think-

<sup>27</sup> These aspects are found respectively in Küng, *Justification*, pp. 133 ff.; in Alfaro, "Cristo, sacramento..."; and in Mühlen, *Una mystica persona* (cf. the author's introduction).

<sup>28</sup> In the articles by Bozzo and Meyer cited in n. 4 above.



ing, feeling, willing person as a conscious subject. Prior to this development a personalist theology could not have been constructed; in the present world of thought its emergence is inevitable.<sup>29</sup>

Nevertheless, since the inception of the personalist trend, objections have been raised against it. That a recently developed approach to theology should encounter problems is no surprise, and no reason to cease moving forward; but forward movement at this point depends on facing and meeting the problems involved.

One set of problems occurs on the level of doctrinal orthodoxy. Obviously, what is in question is not the orthodoxy of the personalist theologians but the adequacy of personalist theology to express orthodox teaching. Thus Hermann Volk insisted some years ago that it is not sufficient simply to describe man's relationship with God: theologians must also define what man is; without the categories of essence and nature, Volk thought, the gratuity of the supernatural order could not be maintained.<sup>30</sup> The state of the question has changed since Volk wrote, but the question of the gratuity of grace remains a serious one for personalist theology. Another aspect of the same problem is apparent in Johann Auer's criticism of Rahner's "Molinist" tendencies; God not only addresses us from without, He also works within us to produce our response; according to Auer, Rahner's view could lead to an overemphasis on Uncreated Grace.<sup>31</sup> Whether or not the criticism is valid for Rahner, it seems to be valid for some other writers. Emphasis on an I-Thou encounter between God and man can make us neglect the work of the Spirit within us—and that way lies Pelagianism.<sup>32</sup> Finally, even where no aspect of grace may be denied, some may be overlooked; adequate attention is not always paid to the effects of grace on man's body, on his historical existence, or on his relationships with other men in community.<sup>33</sup>

Some of these doctrinal difficulties might be solved simply by a more careful use of language by this or that author; other deficiencies will surely be remedied by the fuller and lengthier reflection that must take place in the course of time. But there are deeper and more serious difficulties with methodological roots. We have, in the past, taught the

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Schillebeeckx, *Revelation and Theology* 2, 113 ff.; Bernard Lonergan, "Dimensions of Meaning," in his *Collection* (New York, 1967) pp. 262 ff.

<sup>30</sup> Volk, *art. cit.* (n. 4 above).

<sup>31</sup> Johann Auer, "Das Werk Karl Rahners," *Theologische Revue* 60 (1964) 146-55.

<sup>32</sup> I am thinking here especially of Mackey, who explains the efficacy of divine grace in terms of the impact of one powerful personality on another. This seems to leave man's response outside the field of God's action. Cf. Mackey, *The Grace of God*, pp. 54 and 62.

<sup>33</sup> These difficulties are voiced by Auer (*art. cit.*) and Bozzo (*art. cit.*)—at least as dangers to be avoided in the future development of personalist thought on grace.

reality and gratuity of grace with the categories of "supernatural," "nature," "infinite," "creature," and the like. Within the framework of Scholastic metaphysics we felt safe and comfortable. The question now is: Can the same reality be adequately expressed in phenomenological terms, in a personalist framework?

To put the question another way: Is it possible to construct a theology of grace in purely personalist terms? Or can the new approach be only a useful supplement to the traditional syntheses? The majority of the authors I have mentioned would seem to hold that metaphysical and phenomenological approaches are both legitimate and complementary. Unfortunately, many have apparently not faced the methodological question clearly and explicitly, so that "complementary" means different things to different thinkers.<sup>34</sup> Mackey, for example, suggests that there are some marginal problems in the theology of grace which cannot be treated phenomenologically, such as the justification of infants by baptism. Auer would apparently give equal weight to ontological, phenomenological, and ethical considerations in the explanation of grace. Alfaro, in using ontological categories in his definition of "created person," renounces the possibility of a purely phenomenological personalism. Flick and Alszeghy use personalist ideas within a salvation-history framework. In short, most authors do not believe it is possible to be entirely consistent in the construction of a personalist theology on a phenomenological basis. Gregory Baum is perhaps the outstanding exception in this regard; whether or not his efforts are ultimately judged successful, he at least tries to apply his methodology consistently and thoroughly. I am not arguing that metaphysics and ontology are opposed, that one author ought not to use two approaches, but only that it might be better to recognize that the approaches are two, are distinct, and should not be intermingled. Talk of "interpersonal encounter" cannot plug the gaps of an incomplete metaphysical analysis, nor should reference to a "mysterious ontological change" be used to obscure the difficulty of describing the psychological effect of infant baptism. Neither old patches on new garments nor new patches on old ones are entirely satisfactory. If we cannot as yet give a totally adequate account of grace in phenomenological terms, then we have more work to

<sup>34</sup> Besides the authors mentioned in this paragraph, we might note the following statement of Schillebeeckx: "this living communion with God (though it cannot be fully expressed in terms of relationships of cause and effect) does not fall outside God's universal causality. . . . This explains the necessity of the *gratia creata* as an ontological implication of the reciprocity in grace between God and ourselves. The mere 'phenomenology' of the 'encounter' cannot account for this" (*Revelation and Theology* 2, 109, n. 1). The same point is made by Auer and accepted by Alfaro, but it seems quite far removed from the viewpoint of Mackey or Baum.

do—which is a different conclusion than that personalism can never by itself be a satisfactory basis for theology.

There are, no doubt, many reasons for the methodological problem. One is that the theology of grace depends on the theology of divine transcendence, and the latter is one of the greatest unresolved problems in Catholic theology today. Baum attacks this problem in the book referred to above. I should like to point out another and, after explaining it, suggest a possible solution to it.

The problem I speak of is this. If we are to understand our relationship with God in terms of our human experience of love and friendship, how are we to understand our human experience? If our theology is based on analogy with a model drawn from human relationships, what sort of model shall we use? The different authors whose writings I have catalogued begin with different descriptions of human love and, as a result, arrive at rather different “syntheses” of the theology of grace. Sometimes their diverse views are mutually complementary, but not always—sometimes they are close to directly contradicting each other. Moreover, their starting points almost all involve one difficulty or another. It will be worth while to take a brief look at each of them again to see what the problem is.

I have mentioned that Rahner has been criticized for failing to make sufficiently clear the workings of God’s grace within man. It has also been suggested that Heidegger’s influence has led to a one-sided emphasis on man as conscious spirit, to the detriment of the bodily, historical aspects of humanity. Since divine self-communication is the key notion of Rahner’s theology of grace, a fuller exposition of human self-communication—its presuppositions, its effects, the conditions for its reception—might obviate these difficulties.

The same observations might be applied to Alfaro’s approach to grace. When he speaks of “self-giving,” what precisely does he understand by it? Cannot what he calls the “mysterious inner call” of grace be made a little more intelligible by comparison with the phenomena of human relationships? Could we not explicate more fully the meaning of faith as a personal response? Here again, further study of the phenomenology of human relationships seems called for.

Mühlen’s description of the “we-experience,” taken from von Hildebrand, seems to represent such a study. However, it is questionable whether the analogy between this phenomenon and the theology of the Holy Spirit, as Mühlen develops it, will bear all the weight that he puts on it—whether this analogy really explains and clarifies as much as Mühlen says it does. Be that as it may, the explanation of the effects of personal love which Mühlen gives is certainly not all that

could be said about such effects; in this respect, at least, a more complete phenomenology could add to our understanding of grace.

Cowburn's starting point raises even more doubts. His philosophical discussion of "cosmic" and "ecstatic" love ignores the possibility of a third and higher type, based neither on natural affinity nor arational impulse: the generous and yet reasonable response to another person as other. Cowburn intersperses his arguments with many quotations from literary sources, but this is no substitute for careful study and analysis of our actual experience of human relations—and this, it seems to me, is what is lacking in Cowburn's approach.

Meyer's position is harder to evaluate, since he does not fully work out its implications. However, his quotations from Sartre and Jung present a rather pessimistic picture of human love, almost a description of what "love" can become where grace is not present. This kind of love does not sound like "self-giving" or "self-communication," and one wonders if it can serve as an analogy for the love of God.

Fransen and Baum both make considerable use of illustrations and analogies drawn from our everyday experience of human relationships. Neither, however, develops his notions of interpersonal relations in a systematic way. Fransen relies on scriptural parables (such as that of Ezekiel 16) and on commonplace experiences for many of his examples. Baum has been influenced more by contemporary psychotherapy and personalist philosophy. In each case the result is pleasing—easy to read and understand, apparently sensible and coherent. Yet one might wish for a more systematic explanation of and more critical reflection upon the structure of human experience which we use as an analogy for grace. Both Baum and Fransen exhibit admirable insight into that experience, and both have obviously reflected upon its meaning and use in theology. It would be helpful if they were more explicit about the source of their reflections.

Although I have my own preferences among the theories I have discussed, my point is not simply that some are superior to others. My point is that the whole problem of how to create a superior theory needs some consideration. Just as one cannot build a sound metaphysical theology on a weak metaphysics, so one cannot construct an adequate phenomenological theology on an inadequate understanding of human relations. We might, indeed, presume that everyone knows about human relationships—except that the simple listing of theories above has shown how divergent are the explanations given by theologians of such a basic concept as love.

I have been trying to show that a radically new approach to grace has emerged in the past decade; that this development has been good

and necessary, but that it is not without problems; and that those problems are both doctrinal and methodological. The chief doctrinal problem would seem to be that of safeguarding the transcendence and gratuity of grace. Since it has been difficult to express this transcendence and gratuity accurately, the question has arisen: Can we ever have an adequate theology of grace in purely personalist terms? I have suggested that one crucial problem in developing such a theology (not the only problem, but a crucial one) is the proper understanding of human relations. It would be impossible, and perhaps undesirable, to achieve a complete consensus among theologians as to the best source for such an understanding, the best model for the theology of grace. But unless theologians have some reasonably satisfactory basis for their syntheses, they will always be prey to a double danger: on the one hand, failure to express adequately all the facets of our faith in God's love for us; on the other, a superficiality and shallowness which could leave our theology doctrinally unobjectionable but intellectually uninteresting. To the problem of an adequate phenomenological model I will address myself in the remainder of this essay.

#### FUTURE DEVELOPMENT: SOME SUGGESTIONS

Positively, the question facing us is how to retain and exploit the advances of recent years. Negatively, the question is how to avoid or overcome the difficulties we have encountered. Some of the suggestions I will offer in this section are fairly obvious and should be easily acceptable; others may reflect my own personal preferences and interests; I offer the latter to suggest possibilities, to raise questions, and perhaps to express my own hopes for the future direction of the theology of grace. This theology can best be developed, I believe, by deeper contact with the tradition of the past, by closer connection with other aspects of the theology today, and by more profound reflection on human experience.

The usefulness of more careful study of our theological tradition should be fairly obvious. We do not need to jettison Augustine and Aquinas; we need rather to translate them into our own language; this would scarcely need to be said were it not for the negative tone used by some "personalists" (e.g., Mackey) toward metaphysics. I have been arguing that the classical and contemporary approaches are complementary, not contradictory. This means more than that we should speak of the dead with reverence. It means that the struggles of the past are instructive for us today. Augustine, for example, only learned in his later years to express unequivocally the gratuity of God's grace; his earlier commentaries on the epistles of Paul were not sufficiently

clear in this regard. More than eight hundred years later Aquinas had to go through a similar "deepening" process in his understanding of God's free initiative in saving man.<sup>35</sup> If we cannot totally avoid their earlier mistakes, we ought at least to be able to learn from them. When we understand what it was that they were struggling to express and why they had such difficulty with it, we will be better able to express that same reality in our contemporary, "personalist" terms. Again, this means recognizing not the opposition but the distinction between the classical and the personalist approaches. Crossbreeding the two will produce not a hardy hybrid but a sterile mutant. Listening to the past, not in order to repeat it but in order to learn from it, will help us to develop our own phenomenological theology of grace.

It should be equally clear that the theology of grace must develop in close relationship with the other aspects of theology. Our understanding of our relationship with God depends on our understanding of God, and especially of the meaning of divine transcendence. It is the difficulty of expressing transcendence in personalist terms that has made some theologians hesitant to adopt a thoroughly personalist approach; and it is Baum's merit that he has seen this problem clearly and attacked it directly.<sup>36</sup> Even if Baum's solution is not entirely satisfactory, anyone thinking about grace from now on will have to grapple with the problem as he does, and show the implications of God's immanence and transcendence for the theology of grace. Since the problem of language about God is one of the greatest unresolved questions of contemporary theology, this might seem to postpone progress for the theology of grace to the indefinite future. However, one need not always reason from the logically prior (doctrine of God) to what is logically subsequent (doctrine of grace). One can also clarify one's notion of God by first reflecting on one's relationship with Him: the influence of the two areas of theology is reciprocal. In a series of articles on Aquinas' theory of grace,<sup>37</sup> Bernard Lonergan once showed how our inability to comprehend the relationship between divine causality and

<sup>35</sup> Augustine in his earlier writings attributed man's preparation for grace to man himself—a position he later withdrew from (cf. Rondet, *The Grace of Christ*, pp. 102 f.); Aquinas, too, failed in his earlier works to stress sufficiently the gratuity of grace and the divine initiative, as later reflection led him to see more clearly (cf. Henri Bouillard, *Conversion et grâce chez s. Thomas d'Aquin* [Paris, 1944] pp. 20–38, 67, 140, 149, 190). Today once again we find some difficulty in stressing God's initiative with sufficient clarity—a difficulty which might be overcome more quickly by recalling the experiences of earlier theologians.

<sup>36</sup> See nn. 4 and 34 above, and Baum, *Man Becoming*, pp. 162 ff.

<sup>37</sup> "St. Thomas' Thought on *Gratia operans*," *THEOLOGICAL STUDIES* 2 (1941) 289–324; 3 (1942) 69–88, 375–402, 533–78.

human action pointed the way to a greater appreciation of divine transcendence. In a similar way, our reflection on the phenomenon of sin and conversion can lead us to a realization both of God's transcendence and of His immanence.<sup>38</sup> Thus the theology of transcendence and the theology of grace can and should develop together. Another very closely connected branch of theology is pneumatology. As the theology of the presence of God in man, this area of thought ought to be brought into contact with the theology of grace too; and the need for this has been so often expressed that we may hope that some fruitful future work will be done along these lines.<sup>39</sup> A third instance of a theological concern relevant to the theology of grace is that of the recent interest in eschatology. Theologians were just beginning to explicate the connection between grace and classical eschatology<sup>40</sup> when the new version of eschatology appeared on the scene. It is evident that those concerned with the theology of grace cannot ignore this new development. Through reflection on all three of these areas—transcendence, the theology of the Spirit, and eschatology—our understanding of grace in personalist terms can be broadened and deepened.

Having briefly discussed contact with tradition and contact with other aspects of theology as sources of future development for the theology of grace, I would like to spend a little more time on a third avenue of progress: contact with human experience. Reflection on the experience of Christian conversion and Christian life already is present in writings on grace. Of the many possible aids to such reflection, I would like to call attention to the potential value of one, phenomenological psychology, by offering some examples of its possible contributions to our theology.

The "contact with experience" of which I speak is exemplified for me in two popular books on Christian life, one by a Catholic laywoman and one by a Protestant layman. Rosemary Haughton's *The Transformation of Man*<sup>41</sup> is more literary and elegant, while Keith Miller's *The Taste of New Wine*<sup>42</sup> is more personal and direct. Neither, perhaps, can be called theological in the academic sense, yet both manifest a sensitivity and an awareness of the reality of grace which theologians can no longer afford to ignore. What we need to be in touch with, of course, is not Rosemary Haughton's sensitivity nor Keith Miller's experience of

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Baum, *op. cit.*, pp. 45 ff.

<sup>39</sup> The work has been begun, especially by Mühlen (n. 16).

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Alfaro, "Persona y gracia," for an explicit connection between "grace" and "glory," in a personalist context.

<sup>41</sup> Rosemary Haughton, *The Transformation of Man* (Springfield, Ill., 1967).

<sup>42</sup> Keith Miller, *The Taste of New Wine* (Waco, Tex., 1965).

conversion; what we need to be aware of is our own experience of sin, of doubt, of faith, of prayer, of the presence and absence of God. I do not suggest that theology must always be written in terms of personal witness, but that the theologian's own personal Christianity must *somehow* be expressed in his writing on grace. And, indeed, such expression is found more and more in the writings of "academic" theologians. The more recent writings of Rahner, for example, or Fransen's latest book could evidently not have been composed by men who were not themselves Christians or who had not reflected on their own Christian experience. With Baum, this experiential approach becomes an explicit methodology.

Experience, of course, is not enough to make a man a theologian. Experience must somehow be reflected upon, absorbed, understood, conceptualized, and expressed in a coherent manner, if it is to be useful in theological work. It is at this point that we can and should turn to others, to nontheologians, for help. I have mentioned above, in discussing the problems of personalist theology today, some of the various sources to which theologians have turned for analogies, for phenomenological models of the grace-relationship: they have made use of classical philosophers, of contemporary (especially existentialist) philosophers, of poets and novelists, and, last but not least, of psychologists. Undoubtedly theologians will continue to derive useful suggestions from all these sources. Here I wish to call attention to one particular source which will, I believe, be of increasing importance to theologians: contemporary psychology.

Several times already I have mentioned Gregory Baum as one whose thinking has been strongly influenced by humanistic psychology; I doubt that many will be totally satisfied by Baum's conclusions, but, I would argue, that does not mean that his approach is all wrong. Even more explicitly psychological in orientation is William Meissner's attempt to delineate an "image of man" acceptable to the contemporary psychologist and to the theologian as well.<sup>43</sup> Meissner's results, too, are tentative, incomplete, imperfect—yet his attempt is in itself stimulating. Fransen also could be mentioned as one whose work shows the effects of psychological influence, even though his method is less explicitly dependent on psychology than Baum's. Protestant theologians, particularly Paul Tillich, have been even more influenced by psychology than Catholics.<sup>44</sup> In short, a number of theologians have already found in

<sup>43</sup> William Meissner, S.J., *Foundations for a Psychology of Grace* (Glen Rock, N.J., 1966).

<sup>44</sup> Among many relevant writings of Tillich might be cited "The Theological Significance of Existentialism and Psychoanalysis," in *Theology of Culture* (ed. R. C. Kimball;



modern psychology a useful source for the development of a phenomenology of interpersonal relations which can be analogously applied to our relationship with God. The help given by psychology is not that of substituting for our personal experience of the Christian life, but of clarifying, organizing, and expressing that experience. If we are to exploit this source more fully, we shall have to study it more intensively and use it more systematically; we shall have to give increased attention to the writings of psychologists and to the scope, limits, and methods of their work. Then, I suggest, the future progress of theology can continue along the lines it has been following in recent years: toward a more solidly based and more systematically worked-out phenomenological, psychological, personalist theology of grace.

At this point I have already passed over from prognostication by extrapolation from existing tendencies to expression of personal preferences and hopes. For me, the study of psychology, particularly humanistic, phenomenological psychology, has been of great help in understanding the theology of grace. I hope that this resource will be of benefit to Catholic theologians in general, even more in the future than it has been in the past. In what follows I would like to give a brief description of precisely what is meant by "humanistic, phenomenological psychology" and offer some examples of how psychologists can be of help to theologians.

By "humanistic" or "phenomenological" psychology I mean that current or tendency in American psychology which is called the "third force," in contrast with the psychoanalytic and behaviorist schools.<sup>45</sup> It is humanistic in that it is concerned with man as a person, conscious and responsible, rather than as a machine responding to stimuli or driven solely by instinct. It is phenomenological in that it tends to focus attention on what is given in the person's consciousness or perceptual field. While not a well-defined school of thought with a definite membership, this tendency is associated with the names of men such as Abraham Maslow, Carl Rogers, and Rollo May. Since these men are concerned with many of the same issues which arise in the theology of grace—freedom, responsibility, love, and so forth—and since they de-

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New York, 1964) pp. 112-26. Thomas Oden, following Tillich, proposes a psychologically-oriented theology in *Kerygma and Counseling* (Philadelphia, 1966) and in *Contemporary Theology and Psychotherapy* (Philadelphia, 1967); a similar approach is found in Don S. Browning, *Atonement and Psychotherapy* (Philadelphia, 1966), where the therapeutic process is offered as a model for the understanding of soteriology.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Gardner Lindzey and Calvin S. Hall, eds., *Theories of Personality: Primary Sources and Research* (New York, 1965) esp. pp. 468 ff.; Leon Gorlow and Walter Katkovsky, eds., *Readings in the Psychology of Adjustment* (2nd ed.; New York, 1968).

scribe carefully many aspects of interpersonal relationships, their writings on psychology are rich resources for a phenomenology of grace. The following three examples may suggest both the style of "humanistic psychology" and its relevance to our theology.

One of the authors mentioned above, Rollo May, has received wide attention since the publication of his *Love and Will*.<sup>46</sup> The relationship of this work to theological subjects is evident even from a glance at the table of contents: "Love and Death . . . Love and the Daimonic . . . Intentionality . . . Communion of Consciousness." Looking more closely, one sees that May is discussing the distinctions between "wish," "will," "intentionality," and "freedom," giving examples of each from his experience as a psychotherapist.<sup>47</sup> Now theologians have for some time been discussing precisely these same realities, and have developed the category of "fundamental option" or "basic choice" as a conceptual tool to clarify the relationship between grace, freedom, and human action.<sup>48</sup> This concept has been of tremendous value in the theology of grace. When, however, one considers it more closely, one discovers that theologians have considerable difficulty in saying exactly what this "fundamental option" is, to what human experience it corresponds; it is much easier to give an abstract definition of the term than to describe the reality concretely. May, on the other hand, does not use the term "fundamental option," but it is clear that his "intentionality" is at least analogous to it. Theologians, I suggest, could learn a great deal by studying the examples which May takes from clinical psychology, and by rethinking the notion of "fundamental option" in the light of the experiences he describes.<sup>49</sup>

Less well known, but equally worthy of consideration, is Abraham Maslow's study of the "psychology of being."<sup>50</sup> Of the many interesting themes in the book, one may be singled out: the recurring contrast of "Being-love" and "Being-cognition" with "deficiency-love." In the section of this paper on the different phenomenologies of interpersonal relationships used by different theologians, I pointed out the lack of

<sup>46</sup> Rollo May, *Love and Will* (New York, 1969).

<sup>47</sup> See especially "Intentionality in Therapy," pp. 246-74.

<sup>48</sup> Cf., e.g., Fransen, *The New Life of Grace*, pp. 236 ff.; Maurizio Flick and Zoltán Alszegehy, "L'Opzione fondamentale della vita morale e la grazia," *Gregorianum* 61 (1960) 593-619; Rahner, "Guilt and Its Remission: The Borderland between Theology and Psychotherapy," in *Theological Investigations* 2 (Baltimore, 1963) 265-82.

<sup>49</sup> Another important theme in humanistic psychology which is of relevance to the theology of the fundamental option is that of the tendency to self-actualization of which Maslow, Rogers, and others speak; cf. the article on self-actualization by A. Angyal in Clark E. Moustakas, ed., *The Self: Explorations in Personal Growth* (New York, 1956).

<sup>50</sup> Abraham Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being* (New York, 1962).

agreement on just what sort of "love" should be used as an analogue for divine love. For Maslow, "Being-love" is the highest form of human love. It results not from one person's inadequacy and craving for affection from another, but from a secure sense of personal worth; it is an overflowing of one's love and esteem for oneself into love and esteem for others. One would have to read Maslow's entire study to appreciate the richness of his development of this notion. I want at this point only to suggest that reflection on his description of love might serve as a good starting point for consideration of the generous outpouring of God's love of Himself to man.

Phenomenological psychology may supply us, not only with descriptions of particular factors in interpersonal relationships, but with a conceptual schema or framework which can serve as a model for understanding the entire process of justification, conversion, and growth in grace. I am thinking here of Carl Rogers' theory of the therapeutic relationship and of growth-producing relationships in general.<sup>61</sup> According to Rogers, the necessary and sufficient conditions for effective psychotherapy are a certain set of attitudes in the therapist and the perception of these attitudes by the client; when these conditions are present, the client tends to change in fairly well-defined (and in fact measurable) ways. The attitudes or qualities which are helpful in the therapist are called "congruence" (authenticity, honesty, realness), "unconditional acceptance" (caring for the other person no matter what his behavior may be), and "empathic understanding" (a felt appreciation of the other's feelings). These attitudes are communicated and perceived on a variety of levels: explicit, implicit, conceptual, experiential, conscious, subliminal. The person who experiences this kind of relationship tends to become more "congruent" and more accepting himself, to move towards greater self-understanding, self-reliance, and acceptance of self and others. Rogers has described all of this in considerable detail and has conducted research to seek verification of his hypothesis that this is indeed an adequate description of the therapeutic relationship. What is significant for us as theologians is that each element in this picture of a growth-relationship has its analogue in the traditional theology of justification.<sup>62</sup> The authenticity and acceptance of the "effective thera-

<sup>61</sup> His most easily accessible account of this is in *On Becoming a Person* (Boston, 1961) pp. 39-58; the most detailed and technical, in Simond Koch, ed., *Psychology: A Study of a Science* 3 (New York, 1959) 184-256; the most recent, in Carl Rogers *et al.*, eds., *The Therapeutic Relationship and Its Impact* (Madison, 1967) pp. 97-130. Here I offer only a brief sketch of the theory.

<sup>62</sup> Some of the analogies have been studied by Oden and Browning (see n. 44 above) and by the author of this article in an unpublished doctoral dissertation, *Grace As Acceptance* (Rome, 1969).

pist" are analogous to the unfeigned and unmerited love of God for man. To the multiple levels of communication between therapist and client correspond the diverse modes of God's revelation of His love to man. Between self-understanding and faith, between self-reliance and hope, between acceptance-of-self-and-others and charity—in short, between the outcomes of effective therapy and the elements of the process of justification—striking similarities can be traced. In other words, Rogers' "theory of therapy" can provide a framework for a phenomenological theology of justification.

A good deal more thought needs to be given to the whole question of the use of psychological models in theology. The very basic meaning of analogical predication of human concepts about God, the fundamental questions of theological methodology, are involved here. I do not pretend to have solved these questions. I have wished simply to suggest one possible line of development, one way in which our theology of grace can be given greater intelligibility and coherence. The examples I have given in the last few pages are only that—examples. They are meant to illustrate a point which can be stated very briefly in summarizing this whole article.

Our theology of grace has tended in recent years to become increasingly personalistic, phenomenological, and psychological. In this movement numerous problems have been encountered, not least of which is the difficulty of understanding and conceptualizing the human relationships which serve as analogies for our relationship with God. Considerable help can be derived, in my opinion, from contemporary phenomenological psychology. Through greater contact with tradition, with other areas of theology, and with human experience, we may all grow in that limited but fruitful understanding of our relationship with God which is the goal of the theology of grace.