

The Theology of Grace According to the Pauline Corpus

Abstract:

What is grace? Christian theology proposes a dossier on grace so dense and opaque, so mired in polemics, that it inspires legitimate apprehension – a strange fate for a notion that actually evokes a freely-given gift and implies the hope of the glory of God. Ploughed in all directions, this field has no shortage of workers; one is always the last to enter, behind so many others. Within the confines of the article format, this study limits its scope to the Pauline corpus. The economy of grace as it unfolds in teaching to the first Christian generations can only be fully considered with reference to the fertile soil of the religion of Israel and the Greco-Roman cultural context. It is, therefore, appropriate to start with the Old Testament (1), before examining the theology of the Pauline corpus situated within the Greco-Roman context and first-century Judaism (2).

It appears that grace designates the *relational dimension* of God's gift in Jesus Christ. God's freedom is affirmed in the election of Israel and the calling of the chosen; in Jesus, it sets in motion the new dynamic of a free, superabundant, universal gift that commits the faithful to conform what they are and what they do to this magnanimity through the expression of gratitude to God and solidarity with their neighbour. The theme of grace emphasizes the powerful work of God, who frees man from sin and death to establish him in peace and make him reign "in life through the one man Jesus Christ" (Rm 5,17b).

Absent from the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, the notion of grace is an *action noun* like the theme of the *Kingdom*, which corresponds to certain aspects of grace in the preaching of Jesus in these gospels. Like grace, the Kingdom is God's gift par excellence, which he alone has the initiative to grant, and everything must be sacrificed in order to acquire it (parables of the treasure and the pearl; Mt 13,44-46), and like grace, the Kingdom is the divine energy that grows in those whom it penetrates in order for life to triumph (parables of the mustard seed and the leaven; Mt 13,31-33, and par.). Where the Kingdom focuses attention on the eschatological sovereignty of God and the paradoxical kingship of Jesus, grace signifies the act of liberation of man and the active work of God in him to lead him, if he consents, to final glory.

This study shows that the Pauline theology of grace embraces the scope of God's great purpose, which the Bible presents in so many different ways. In short, God shares himself with the faithful in his Son and the Spirit in order that they may live

in the freedom of love, which is his own life. By grace, God places his human partner in harmony with the Trinitarian relationship. Grace conveys from the depths of God to the depths of the human heart the pulse of unquestioning love, creator of communion, as expressed in the concluding formula of 2 Corinthians: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all!”

Introduction

What is grace? Christian theology proposes a dossier on grace so dense and opaque, so mired in polemics, that it inspires legitimate apprehension – a strange fate for a notion that actually evokes a freely-given gift and implies the hope of the glory of God. Ploughed in all directions, this field has no shortage of workers; one is always the last to enter, behind so many others. Like Ben Sira, taking his place in a long line of writers, let us enter this vineyard like a “gleaner after the grape-pickers” (Si 33,16). Presented in these terms, the question of current issues in a theology of grace is intimidating. If the subject inclines us towards prudence, the exercise in homage to which this volume is devoted invites boldness, firstly because frankness is the only language among friends, and secondly because, as the years go by, time is no longer on our side and we must get to the crux of the matter. “The heart has its reasons, which reason does not know” (Pascal 1976: 127, Lafuma n°423, Brunschvicg n°277). So let us talk about grace. This article proposes a biblical theological sketch on the theme of grace.¹

Where to start? The lexical criterion, based on the terms *charis* (χάρις), *charizomai* (χαρίζομαι), and *charisma* (χάρισμα), is clearly established, although it is extended to other terms. In its primary sense, the Greek term *charis* (χάρις) refers to the seduction inspired by the charm of dazzling beauty. It can also be applied to the radiance of goodness and finally extends to the tangible gifts that express this generosity. The corresponding verb means to grant generously, to give freely. The word *charisma* (χάρισμα) designates a particular gift, sometimes linked to empowerment for an activity.

1 The approach followed here will be that of a biblical theology whose rationale has been presented in previous works: Bourguine, B. 2019a; Bourguine, B. 2019b; Bourguine, B. 2020b.

The Greek root of grace is found predominantly in the Pauline corpus (Proto-Pauline, Deutero-Pauline, Pastoral epistles)² and the Lukan³ corpus; it is present in the epistle to the Hebrews⁴, the Catholic epistles,⁵ and the Johannine corpus.⁶ The epicentre is located in the Proto-Pauline letters, especially Romans and 2 Corinthians. Within the confines of the article format, this study limits its scope to the Pauline corpus. The economy of grace as it unfolds in teaching to the first Christian generations can only be fully considered with reference to the fertile soil of the religion of Israel and the Greco-Roman cultural context.

It is, therefore, appropriate to start with the Old Testament (1), before examining the theology of the Pauline corpus situated within the Greco-Roman context and first-century Judaism (2).

1. The Old Testament lexicon and theology

Two Hebrew terms in the Old Testament correspond to the semantic field of grace: *hén* (חֵן), the gratuitous benevolence that a superior show to an inferior (67 occurrences), and *hèsèd* (חֶסֶד), an act of fidelity marked by generosity and affection (245 occurrences). The first term, *hén*, occurs in many biblical passages in which a person is the object of divine favour without any prior relationship: “Noah found favour in the eyes of the Lord” (Gn 6,8), or the favour of a master, “Joseph found favour in his [Potiphar’s] eyes and attended him, he made him overseer of his house” (Gn 39,4). The second term, *hèsèd*, refers to an act of salvation that manifests favour enjoyed within the framework of a pre-existing relationship, such as Lot with the two angels sent to save him from the destruction of Sodom: “Your servant found favour (*hén*) in your sight and you have shown me great kindness (*hèsèd*) in saving my life” (Gn 19,19). The word *hèsèd* has a strong relational dimension. The Old Testament, describes God’s unfailing faithfulness to his people, Israel, in the covenant which he generously granted them, both in the Sinaitic covenant and in the royal period.⁷ This kindness in action appears to the psalmist to be better than

2 Paul’s letters use the word χάρις 100 times compared to 55 occurrences in the rest of the New Testament: Rm: 23 occurrences; 2 Co: 19; Ep: 12; 1 Co: 10; Ga: 7; Col: 5; 2 Tm: 5; 1 Tm: 4; 1 Tt: 4; 2 Th: 4; Ph: 3; 1 Th: 2; Phm: 2; χάρισμα: 1 Co: 7; Rm: 6, and a single occurrence respectively for 2 Co, 1 Tt, 2 Tt; χαρίζομαι: Col: 3; 2 Co: 3; Ph: 2, and a single occurrence in Rm, 1 Co, Ga, Ep, Phm.

3 χάρις: Ac: 17 occurrences; Lk: 8; χαρίζομαι: Ac: 4; Lk: 3.

4 χάρις: Heb: 8 occurrences.

5 χάρις: 1 P: 10 occurrences; 2 P: 2; Jude: 1; χάρισμα: 1 P: 1.

6 χάρις: Jn: 4 occurrences; Rev: 2; only one occurrence for 2 Jn and 3 Jn respectively.

7 Sakenfeld (1978) states that the term refers to a concrete action, rather than to an inner disposition or psychological attitude, that this action is part of a pre-existing relationship and in response, as a last

life: “your steadfast love is better than life” (כִּי־טוֹב לְחַסְדְּךָ מִחַיִּים Ps 63,3). In the LXX, *hén* is translated by *charis* (χάρις) and *hèsèd* by *eleos* (ἔλεος).⁸

To these terms should be added a further two that supplement the registers of expression connoting the grace of which God is the source and which defines him in his being: *rahûm* (רַחוּם), designating the tender love of a powerful person for a weak person, of a superior for an inferior, and *èmèt* (אֱמֶת), expressing unshakeable fidelity. The affection expressed by *rahûm*, merciful, refers to the tenderness of maternal love that resonates even in the womb (*rahamim*); this term is often associated with *hén* in its adjectival form (*hann*), in the formula “a God merciful and gracious” (אֱלֹהֵי־רַחוּם וְחַנּוּן Ps 86,15; 103,8; 145,8). Of the thirteen occurrences of *rahûm*, eleven are combined with *hanûn*. Moreover, they also share a common root. Faithfulness, *èmèt*, connotes the solidity of a commitment; the term is often combined with *hèsèd* to reinforce the firmness of the attachment: “Now may the LORD show steadfast love and faithfulness to you” (וְאֱמֶת וְחַסְדְּךָ (2 S,2.6). In the divine apparition after the episode of the golden calf, God pronounces his Name before Moses in answer to his earnest entreaty and defines himself in these four words in one formula: “The Lord passed before him and proclaimed: ‘The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger (רַחוּם וְחַנּוּן), abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness (חַסְדְּךָ וְאֱמֶת), keeping steadfast love (חַסְדְּךָ) for thousands.’” (Ex 34,6-7a). God attributes these qualifiers to himself at this key moment of Old Testament revelation; in the solemn assurance of the faithful love granted to Moses and the people of Israel, it is the very being of the Giver that is described.⁹ The association between the salvific act (חַסְדְּךָ) and the unwavering faithfulness (אֱמֶת) found, for example, in Psalm 89 on three occasions in verses 2, 25, and 50, respectively, expresses the historical extent of God’s faithful love for his people throughout the existence of Israel. The expression of this “steadfast love of the LORD” (חַסְדְּךָ יְהוָה Ps 89,2) is accompanied, as in the theology of Deutero-Isaiah, by the mention of the creative act of the God of Israel: “the world and all that is in it, you have founded them; the north and the south, you have created them” (Ps 89,12b–13a). As Gerhard von Rad has shown, faith in creative power is born of historical experiences of liberation. God created the people as he created the world. God saves Israel from chaos in every tragic episode of its history, just as he created order from primitive chaos (von Rad 1957:

resort, to a need for vital assistance, and that it is the act of a superior who decides freely and is in no way constrained.

⁸ Except in Est 2,9.17, where *charis* translates *hèsèd*.

⁹ We note the inversion of mercy and justice which is observed between Ex 20,5-6 and Ex 34,6-5; in the latter text, where God seals the forgiveness granted to the people after the transgression of the golden calf, the grace given to thousands is placed before the evocation of the consequences of the transgression, conversely to the Decalogue in Ex 20.

124–126). The Old Testament, therefore, delineates, from book to book, the cosmic and historical dimensions of the grace given to the people.

The manifestations of this generosity in the Old Testament are a *promise*, *liberation*, *election*, *Law*, *covenant*, *gift of Land*, *prophetic oracle*, and *wisdom*. The patriarchs, objects of divine favour, are granted a promise as far beyond measure as the height of the sky and the number of stars (Gn 15,5). God hears the cry of his oppressed people in Egypt in terms of the *promise* made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Ex 2,24) and takes them out of the slavery of Pharaoh by the power of his arm (Ex 14,30). This *liberation* is associated with the gift of the *Law* and the *covenant* at Sinai, in which the filial adoption of the people of Israel is consummated: “Thus says the LORD: ‘Israel is my firstborn son’” (Ex 4,22; cf. Rm 9,4). God chose Israel: this *election* is the most emphatic manifestation of the gratuitousness of God’s gift. From Mount Sinai to Mount Zion, the *gift of the Promised Land* and the covenant made with the Davidic monarchy (2 S 23,5; Is 55,3; Jr 33,21; 2 Chr 13,5; 21,7; Ps 89,4) manifest the constancy of divine fidelity. The king and the people, tempted by forgetfulness and transgression, are reminded of the urgency of loyalty by the *prophet*; when circumstances require it, God takes the initiative and sends a prophet to convey a message intended to enlighten his covenant partner. As for *wisdom*, it is God’s gift par excellence and the object of a prayer of petition (1 K 3,9). Wisdom cannot be conferred on oneself, and, in the aftermath of marvels, it keeps the memory of God’s faithfulness alive for the people, especially through meditation on the Psalms and Proverbs. Already at the world’s origin, wisdom embraces all times; when it is granted to the Israelite who solicits it in the fear of God, it connects him to what grounds him in his daily existence. Through the consideration of this grace, he is associated in his activity with the active presence of the Creator (Bourguine 2020a). For does it not pass in every generation into holy souls (Ws 7,27)?

The biblical register of blessing adjoins that of grace: their respective semantic fields share common elements; they follow parallel trajectories. From God to human and from human to God, the word seals a relationship; through blessing, the Creator stirs in his creatures the power of life; through blessing, man pays God the homage of his gratitude. The Hebrew root, used in the sense of “blessing”, is found more than 400 times in the Jewish Bible, most often in Genesis (88 occurrences) and Psalms (83 occurrences). The lexicon consists of the noun blessing, *berakha* (בְּרָכָה), the verb to bless, *barekh* (בָּרַךְ) and the adjective blessed, *barûkh* (בָּרוּךְ). In the LXX, the terms εὐλογία, εὐλογέω, εὐλογητός are most frequently used as equivalents. The original blessing (Gn 1,22.28) is addressed to living beings as an injunction to be fruitful and multiply; it is intended to maintain vital energy between God and his human creation: “May God be gracious to us and bless us, and make his face shine upon us” (Ps 67,2). Promises are transmitted in the blessing of Abraham and his descendants (Gen 12,3). The covenant includes blessings that are conditional on the fulfilment of obligations (Ex 23,25; Dt 28,1-14). Blessing is the song of gratitude

to God for the paternal benevolence granted to those who fear him and the benefits he provides for them (Ps 103). In the New Testament, the verb is found 41 times, the adjective occurs eight times, and the noun is used 16 times. God is blessed for the Blessed One who comes in His Name (Mt 21,9) in whom we are “blessed with every spiritual blessing” (Ep 1,3). The ultimate blessing is the gift of the Holy Spirit, comprising the highest benefits destined by God for the chosen. The mother of Jesus, who is “favoured” (Lk 1,28), is also “blessed among women” (Lk 1,42). The cup of blessing (1 Co 10,16) in the Eucharist is God’s gift to the Church, through which the Church gives thanks to him for his Son, who has reconciled it and placed it in his Kingdom.

But what about God’s gift in the Old Testament? At its core, the election of Israel and the faithfulness of his attachment to this people reflect a love without rationale: the God of Israel loves because he loves. Deuteronomy is astonished by this excessive grace and probes the reasons that prompt God to grant it. This favour is not justified by anything associated with the recipient. Neither the number of the Israelites (Dt 7,7), nor their good works (Dt 9,4) constitute merit. God is moved by an incomprehensible love (*’ahabah*, אָהַבָה). By way of explanation, God simply declares: “It is because the Lord loves you and is keeping the oath he swore to your fathers” (Dt 7,8).

God is in love with Israel, whom he makes his special people. The verb “to be attached” (*hashaq*, חָשַׁק), expresses an overwhelming love,¹⁰ and this attachment is associated with election, designated by the act of choosing, *bhr* (בָּחַר), which is a unilateral divine initiative: “the LORD set his love on you and chose you ...” (Dt 7,7a).¹¹ A privileged expression of this love is found in the theophany to Moses, mentioned above, in response to his request to see the glory of God: “And God said, ‘I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name the LORD; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy’” (Ex 33,18-19). This solemn declaration highlights the *freedom of God* as the sovereign agent of the principle of grace (*hnn*, חֲנּוּן) and mercy (*rh̄m*, רַחֲמִים). The Name of God revealed to Moses at the burning bush (“I AM WHO I AM” אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה Ex 3,14) is amplified here, in a formula that echoes it in an *idem per idem* construction, thus lifting the veil on the mystery of the person of God: God is love for his people (Sonnet 2010).¹² Between the first and second

10 In Gn 34,8, the verb describes the uncontrollable love passion that Shechem feels for Dinah. In Ps 91,14 the verb is applied to the faithful whose attachment to God earns them the promise of salvation.

11 See also Dt 10,15 which combines the three terms love (*’ahabah*), attachment (*hashaq*), and choice (*bhr*).

12 For Beauchamp (1976: 158), this name revealed to Moses puts the whole Bible under the agency of a first person, God as subject.

revelation of the divine Name is the solemn conclusion of the covenant, the gift of the Law, the sin of the people, and the request for forgiveness presented by Moses. In the becoming of the covenant, God reveals himself as he is. The turbulent course of their relations with his rebellious and ungrateful people puts the fidelity of his attachment to the test. God is backed into a corner. Will he renounce his choice? The suspense of the book of Exodus culminates in a firm answer: his elective love becomes active mercy in forgiveness. Prophets, wisdom, and apocalyptic announce the extension to all creatures of God's gift, first granted to the people of Israel, by stating the promise of a new covenant and a new creation.

2. The Pauline corpus in its Jewish and Greco-Roman context

In the epistle to the Romans, where the recurrence of the use of *charis* (χάρις) appears to structure the text, Paul is writing to converted Gentiles residing in the seat of imperial power. The official ideology of the Roman Empire imposes a symbolic universe that is challenged by the Christian proclamation. Caesar Augustus is chosen by the gods as regent of Jupiter on earth, according to Ovid, abundantly bestowing grace on his subjects. In the calendar inscription of Priene (ca. 9 BC), he is the proclaimer of the good news (εὐαγγέλιον) of the reign of Caesar, the saviour of the citizens of the Empire, the providential legislator, and the *telos* of universal history (Harrison 2006: 85). The imperial claim is in direct opposition to the Pauline preaching that Christ is “the end of the Law” (Rm 10,4). Conflict is therefore inevitable between the divine protection of the Emperor and inclusion in the posterity of Abraham, “the father of us all” (Rm 4,16). Paul's theology opposes imperial worship and its realised eschatology with messianic salvation from Zion (Rm 11,26) and filial adoption in the Spirit (Rm 8,15).

Whereas in the LXX, *charis* translates *hén* and *eleos* translates *hèsèd*, Paul clearly favours *charis* over *eleos*, which only occurs four times in the Proto-Pauline epistles. According to Dunn, this preference signals the fact that *charis* takes on the unilateral character of *hén* and the perennial nature of the commitment inferred by *hèsèd* (Dunn 1998: 321).

The semantic fields covered by the Pauline use of grace that will be analysed are: election (1), calling (2), reconciliation (3), solidarity (4), thanksgiving (5), and communication (6).

2.1 Election

Paul positions himself in relation to the different conceptions of election prevailing in first-century Judaism. Grace is omnipresent in the Dead Sea Scrolls, where, from all eternity, it depends on divine predestination relating to the sons of light and

sons of darkness. The Pharisees, for their part, place themselves in the hands of God while emphasizing the role of human cooperation in good works. In some sectors of Judaism, a theology of merit was emerging in support of a spirituality based on works, which Paul tackles directly. Paul sets himself apart by challenging the ethnic privilege that reserves election for the nation of Israel alone: descent is not purely generational, it depends on the sovereign grace of God (Rm 9,7).¹³ From the very start of his missionary career, Paul champions the extension of the reign of grace and divine election to the Gentiles (Ga 2,11-14). To support this idea, Paul puts forward an exegetical argument. His interpretation of the birth of Jacob (Gn 15,19-26) highlights the freedom of divine election (Rm 9,10-13; in particular, the “purpose of election” ἡ κατ’ κατ’ ἐκλογὴν πρόθεσις, Rm 9,11) (Jewett 2006: 578): God chooses Jacob in preference to his elder brother, Esau. Although Paul acknowledges the priority of proclaiming the Gospel to the children of Israel (Rm 1,16), he opposes any ethnocentric exclusivism, invoking the prophets: “Those who are not my people I will call ‘my people,’ and her who was not beloved I will call ‘beloved’” (Ho 2,23, quoted in Rm 9,25). Circumcision of the heart in fulfilment of the prophecies (Jr 31,31-34; Ezk 36,26; Jl 2,28) is not just reserved for the Jews because “a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man, but from God.” (Rm 2,29).

In the epistle to the Romans, Paul develops a theodicy to counter suspicions of arbitrariness in the administration of God’s righteousness (Rm 3,5-9) and accusations of unfaithfulness to his promises (3,3-4). The disobedience of the people does not preclude the fidelity of God (11,29), who calls a Remnant (9,25-26) and announces the restoration of Israel (11,23-24). Ultimately, the Pauline doctrine of God’s sovereign election inspires praise prompted by the wonder of his wisdom and the immensity of his gift (11,33-36), which includes Jews and Gentiles in a goodness that is simultaneously gratuitous, just, and merciful. The social and ecclesial significance of this theology of grace is underlined by J.R. Harrison, who places it in the Roman context of official anti-Judaism in the late 40s to the late 50s. Paul addresses the converted Gentiles to deter them from animosity toward Jewish believers (Harrison 2006: 100; Harrison’s position is now being challenged). It can be hypothesized that the Pauline election doctrine also developed to leave no trace of anti-Judaism within the Christian community.

The parallel between the prayer of Moses (Ex 32–33) after the episode of the golden calf and Romans 9,11 highlights the freedom of God in his election and the constancy of his mercy for Israel. Like Moses yearning to be erased from the divine

13 According to Dunn (1998: 319–320): “It is important to grasp that for Paul, behind the whole salvation process always lay the initiative of God. No other word expresses his theology so clearly on this point as ‘grace’ (*charis*).”

book so that God would spare the people after their sin (Ex 32,32), Paul takes to heart the situation of his people who are reluctant to believe in the Messiah, to the extent of wishing to be anathema himself (Rm 9,3). More importantly, these two texts emphasise the sovereign freedom by which God chooses to show mercy to a people; grace is grace in the first election of the people of Israel and the forgiveness he grants them after the golden calf; grace is grace in the calling of the Gentiles and the calling of the Remnant among the Jews who become disciples of the Messiah: “So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace” (λεῖμμα κατ’ ἐκλογὴν χάριτος). But if it is by grace, it is no longer by works. Otherwise, grace would no longer be grace (ἐπεὶ ἡ χάρις οὐκέτι γίνεται χάρις) (Rm 11,5-6). Thus the “election by grace” of the Remnant of Judeo-Christians confirms God’s fidelity to the people of Israel and the unpredictable divine freedom which ultimately makes mercy prevail. God shows mercy to whomever he wills: he shows his freedom by choosing Israel and by calling the Gentiles; he shows his fidelity to Israel by sparing himself a Remnant in Israel through an “election of grace”. At the end of history, rising above all disobedience, he embraces the universality of men in his mercy (Rm 11,32).¹⁴

God elects in complete freedom, and this election takes on the dimensions of a destiny to which he calls “those who are called according to his purpose” (τοῖς κατὰ πρόθεσιν κλητοῖς, Rm 8,28b) and glorifies them; here the eternal purpose of God fulfilled in Christ is designated (Cranfield 1975: 430). Paul takes a traditional teaching (“we know”, Rm 8,28a), but departs from it, since the love of God, which he emphasizes comes through Christ, not obedience to the Law (Jewett 2006: 526). God’s purpose (πρόθεσις) involves foreknowledge, in the form of a prediction for all times, or rather beyond time; this is confirmed by the use of “predestine” in the following verse (προορίζω, Rm 8,29).¹⁵ In the Deutero-Pauline letters, too, the grace of election is linked to the fulfilment of God’s eternal purpose for the benefit of the faithful. This purpose finds its first realisation in the covenant with Israel and reaches its fulfilment in the Christ-event. Thus, according to the hymn in the epistle to the Ephesians (2 occurrences of *charis*, χάρις), God elects throughout eternity those whom he redeems in Jesus Christ in order to confer filial adoption on them and make them abide with him in love (Ep 1,3-14). Redemption in Christ takes place “to the praise of his glorious grace” (Ep 1,6) and “according to the riches of his grace” (Ep 1,7).

¹⁴ Theobald (2015) notes that this pre-eminence of mercy over anger in these texts concerns peoples rather than individuals.

¹⁵ In this respect, Jewett (2006: 528) and Cranfield (1975: 430). The latter notes that, for some Greek fathers, the purpose in question (πρόθεσις) is that of “those who love God” and relates to their existential choices: Origen (184–253), John Chrysostom (350–407), Theodoret of Cyrus (393–460); conversely, for Augustine (354–430), the purpose is that of God.

2.2 Calling

Paul's account of his conversion on the road to Damascus (Ac 9,1-19a; 22,3-16; 26,9-18; cf. Ga 1,15-17) has the hallmarks of a biblical theophany (Marguerat 2015²: 314–346; Lohfink 1967). The supernatural intervention follows the pattern of divine apparitions in the Old Testament: a dialogue opened through an apparition, the calling of the individual by name, a question from the person addressed, the self-designation of the apparition, and the transmission of a mandate to the person addressed. Comparison with the two theophanies to Moses in Ex 3,14 and Ex 34,6-7a is instructive if we consider their similarities and differences. As mentioned above, these two theophanies to Moses give rise, on the one hand, to the unveiling of a new divine Name which sets in motion the narration of the exodus (Ex 3,14) and, on the other hand, to the amplification of this Name in which the emphasis is on God's freedom to love, which he guarantees the people after their transgression (Ex 33,18-19; 34,6-7a). "I AM WHO I AM" (Ex 3,14) is made explicit and amplified by "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy" (Ex 33,19b). For Paul, self-designation is: "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting" (Ac 9,5b), and "Jesus of Nazareth" (specified in Ac 22,8b). Once again, God's bluff has been called by the opposition of his people to the fulfilment of his plans, and, once again, he restores the momentum by giving Moses the mandate to lead the people to the promised land and Paul the mandate to take the Gospel to the Gentiles. Constrained by his partner's refusal, God responds with an overabundance of mercy; through forgiveness, he goes a step further. Challenged by sin, God reveals the extent and power of his love: he covers the fault and sets the sinner on his way, freeing him from his blindness and hardness of heart.

The call of Paul converts this staunch follower of the traditions of his fathers (cf. Ga 1,14b): "But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace was pleased to reveal his son to me in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone ..." (Ga 1,15-16).¹⁶ Paul probably refers to the servant designated to be a prophet: "Behold my servant, in whom my soul delights" (Is 42,1), who testifies that he "called me from the womb, from the body of my mother he named my name" (Is 49,1). The parallel between Paul and Jeremiah, the "prophet of the nations" (Jr 1,5) has been convincingly drawn: the vocabulary used by Paul to describe his call and the nature of his mission as Apostle to the Gentiles suggests this (Matta 2018). This parallel shows that it is the call of the God of Israel that Jeremiah hears as he battles false prophets, "over nations and kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow,

16 Ga 1,14-15: Οτε δὲ εὐδόκησεν [ὁ θεὸς] ὁ ἀφορίσας με ἐκ κοιλίας μητρός καὶ καλέσας διὰ τῆς χάριτος ἀποκαλύψαι τὸν υἱὸν ἐν ἐμοί, ἵνα μου αὐτὸν ἐν τοῖς αὐτοῦ, αὐτοῦ προσανεθέμην σαρκὶ αἵματι.

to build and to plant” (Jr 1,10), and it is this call that seeks out the zealous Pharisee to bring the Gentiles the Good News of the Risen One, which was imprinted in his flesh at the revelation on the road to Damascus. Paul follows in the footsteps of the prophets of Israel, yet the nature of the grace received, revealed in him by the Son of God, profoundly influences the nature, inspiration, and scope of his prophetic mission.

The connection between the grace of Christ and the Pauline apostolate is clearly stated in the address of the epistle to the Romans: “Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh, and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship (χάριν καὶ ἀποστολήν) to bring about the obedience of the faith for the sake of his name among all the nations” (Rm 1,1-6a). On other occasions, Paul takes care to specify that it is by virtue of the grace he has received that he teaches, exhorts, and edifies (Rm 12,3; 15,15; Ga 2,9; 1 Co 3,10). In Romans 1,5, grace should most probably be understood as the divine gift intended to make up for Paul’s inability to carry out the task of the apostolate, in line with the accounts in which divine intervention enables Moses (Ex 4,10), Isaiah (Is 6,5) and Ezekiel (Ezk 1,28-2,2) to overcome their incapacity to carry out their mission (Sandnes 1994: 64–65 cited in Jewett 2006: 109). Grace, which gives access to God and compensates for Paul’s shortcomings, enables him to proclaim his Gospel with confidence. Through it, Paul receives from God the necessary authority to exercise his ministry (Ga 2,9; 1 Co 3,10; Rm 12,3; 15,5), as well as the power, ability, and strength to implement the Word (1 Co 15,10; 2 Co 12).

2.3 Reconciliation

The act by which Jesus Christ reconciles the world and sinners to God corresponds to a core use of *charis* in the vocabulary of Paul and the New Testament in general—it is the most frequent meaning of the word. The theological consistency of the term is total: it is nothing less than a designation of the gift of *salvation* resulting from the Christ-event, which extends to the universality of human beings, first Jews and then non-Jews. In Romans 3,24, redemption is explained in terms of justification: “[all] are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ” (δικαιούμενοι δωρεάν τῇ αὐτοῦ χάριτι διὰ τῆς ἀπολυτρώσεως ἐν Χριστῷ τῇς). This is a dynamic concept of divine action of such great power and with such lasting consequences that it brings about a change of era.

The emphasis placed on the *gratuitousness* of the gift is the first distinctive feature of the Pauline uses of *charis*. The adverb “as a gift” (δωρεάν) qualifies the nature of

this grace, just as in Romans 5,5.17, the *free gift* of grace (*charis*) is underlined by the apparently redundant use of the noun “gift”, *dōrea* (δωρεά). It is a unilateral act that takes into account neither the status of the beneficiaries, in this instance sinners deprived of the glory of God (Rm 3,23), nor the works they have accomplished and is independent of the decrees of the Law (Rm 3,28). It should be noted that the noun “gift”, *dōrea* (δωρεά), is used in direct association with *charis* in five instances (Rm 5,15.17; 2 Co 9,15; Ep 3,7; 4,7), and the adverb “as a gift” (δωρεάν) twice (Ga 2,21; Rm 3,24). The theme of a free gift is thus strongly emphasised. It is associated with faith: it is in order to be grace that righteousness comes through faith (Rm 4,16). Abraham’s faith corresponds to the gratuitousness of God’s promise (Rm 4,4). Positively associated with faith, grace is contrasted with the fulfilment of the Law (Rm 4,16; 6,14; Ga 2,21; 5,4) and works (Rm 11,6; 2 Tm 1,9).

The gift of the new righteousness acquired in Jesus Christ through the forgiveness of sins is a gift “according to the riches of his grace” (κατὰ τὸ πλοῦτος τῆς χάριτος αὐτοῦ, Ep 1,7). This is the second characteristic feature that emerges from Paul’s grace: its *superabundance* (Theobald 1982). The idea is expressed in a redundant vocabulary qualifying grace, associating it with the following terms: “to be in surplus” (περισεύω: Rm 5,15.17; 2 Co 4,15; 8,7; 9,8); “to superabound” (ὑπερπερισεύω: Rom 5,20); “to abound” (πλεονάζω: Rm 6,1; 2 Co 4,15); “to surpass” (ὑπερβάλλω: 2 Co 9,14; Ep 2,7); and “wealth, treasure” (πλοῦτος: Ep 1,7; 2,7). The unlimited generosity that is manifested in the gift of grace corresponds to a debt that its beneficiary cannot repay (Dunn 1998: 322–323).

The *universality* of its beneficiaries is another characteristic feature of grace in the Pauline corpus. This universality derives from the gratuitousness and superabundance of this grace; it refers back to the resolute opening up of the Pauline mission to non-Jews as its most specific element. The epistle to the Romans makes it one of its main themes, not only from the point of view of election, as we have seen above (cf. Rm 9–11), but also to mark the unlimited extension of the saving effects of God’s impartial righteousness (Rm 3,24; 5,15.17.20.21). The grace of salvation in Christ corresponds to the establishment of a covenant regime unlike its predecessor, in that the human partner is invited without regard for the many requirements of the Second Temple religion. “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people” (Tt 2,11).

The *novelty* brought by Christ also characterises the Pauline uses of grace.¹⁷ This novelty is due to the being of Jesus Christ, the “Beloved”, in whom God has freely bestowed grace upon us (Ep 1,6). It is “in him” (ἐν, Ep 1,7) that the grace of filial

17 However, it cannot be said that this trait is peculiar to the Pauline corpus; the four uses of *charis* in John’s gospel, all located in the Prologue (Jn 1,14.16 [2x].17), also underline this novelty linked to the coming of Christ. This applies equally to uses in 1P.

adoption, the remission of sins, redemption, and universal reconciliation “of all things in him, things in heaven and on earth” are offered (Ep 1,10b). It is “in the grace of Christ” (ἐν, Ga 1,6) that the Galatians are called to the Gospel preached by Paul, whom himself was called to proclaim it “by the grace” of God (διὰ, Ga 1,15) in the revelation of his Son in Paul (Ga 1,16a). It is “through him” (2x διὰ, Rm 5,1.2), Christ, that peace and grace occur, through which the faithful are established in an existence marked by faith, hope, and love (Rm 5,1-5). Gratuitousness, superabundance, universality, and novelty are the characteristics of the grace that God gives in the being and work of his Son, Jesus Christ. Endowed with these traits, the grace at work in the faithful characterises their individual and collective existence: it is a marker of Christian and ecclesial identity.

The grace of God is what constitutes a Christian (Wolter 2015: 387). Paul attributes the being of the man he has become to grace: “But by the grace of God I am what I am” (χάριτι δὲ θεοῦ εἰμι ὃ εἰμι, 1 Co 15,10a), Grace is fruitful through the action it exerts in him (1 Co 15,10b) so that Paul can praise his own activity with assurance, even placing it above that of all the other apostles, while taking care, however, to refer all this activity back to grace: “not I, but the grace of God that is with me” (οὐκ ἐγὼ δὲ ἀλλ’ ἡ χάρις τοῦ θεοῦ [ἡ] σὺν ἐμοί, 1 Co 15,10c). This grace, by which God reconciles the world to himself in Christ (2 Co 5,19-21), must not be received “in vain” by its beneficiaries (2 Co 6,1b). Indeed, the grace of God, which is proclaimed in the Gospel and which determines the existence of faith, love and hope (Col 1,4-5), must, in order to bear fruit, be acknowledged “in truth” by the faithful (“you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth”, ἠκούσατε καὶ ἐπέγνωτε τὴν χάριν τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν ἀληθείᾳ; Col 1,6b). The “grace of God” determines an existence lived in “the simplicity and purity that come from God”, and is neither a matter of earthly wisdom (1 Co 1,12) nor attempts to seek to be justified by the Law (Ga 5,4). Grace is the principle of the gifts by which the faithful, members of one body, place themselves at the service of one another (Rm 12,6). This spirit of community concerns primarily the various gifts of the Spirit received by each member of the faithful (πνευματικός in the plural, 1 Co 12,1; χάρισμα; 1 Co 12,4.9.28.30.31). Through these gifts, individuals can act for the common good (τὸ συμφέρον, 1 Co 12,7) of the one body (1 Co 12,12). Spiritual gifts have the paradoxical characteristic of being diverse yet serving unity. The effect of the gifts used by the faithful is to produce unity, already present in the One from whom these gifts originate. Here again, Paul is not afraid of dialectical assertions since the identification of the one Giver is given a triple, explicitly Trinitarian designation: it is the “same Spirit” (τὸ δὲ αὐτὸ πνεῦμα, 1 Co 12,4b), the “same Lord” (ὁ αὐτὸς κύριος, 1 Co 12,5b), the “same God who empowers them all in everyone” (ὁ δὲ αὐτὸς θεὸς ἐνεργῶν τὰ πάντα πᾶσιν, 1 Co 12,6b).

2.4 Solidarity

The collection for the benefit of the community of Jerusalem mentioned in 2 Co 8–9 should be seen in relation to the Hellenistic *ethos* of friendship (Wolter 2015: 41–42), but also within the framework of the system of the benefaction of gods and individuals towards cities and institutions (Harrison 2003). With reference to Harrison's work, James Dunn argues that Paul's preference for the term *charis* over *eleos*, favoured by the LXX to translate the Hebrew *hèsèd*, is due to this benefaction system in Greco-Roman society (Dunn 1998: 321).

The focus of these two chapters (2 Co 8–9) is not soteriological, as in Romans 5: it concerns a financial gift. Yet Paul relates the collection to the grace of God in Jesus Christ. The gesture is not so much a recognition of the primacy of the Church of Jerusalem as an attempt to establish "equality" (ισότης, 2 Co 8,13-14) between donors and recipients, as befits a relationship marked by reciprocity: the gift of the Churches of Macedonia and Asia and its acceptance by the Church of Jerusalem (cf. Rm 15,31) seal the bond of unity and communion between them. The Macedonians manifest that they have received "God's grace" (2 Co 8,1) by the readiness with which they ask for "grace" (2 Co 8,4) to take part in the collection.

In these two chapters of 2 Corinthians 8–9, Paul has one primary concern: to make this collection, to which he refers using the word "grace" (2 Co 8,6.7), an act of generosity that participates in the goodness, gratuitousness, and sincerity of God's grace. In a seminal study, Griffith points out that the range of senses of *charis*, used ten times in these two chapters, is not unique to Paul; the Greek term is used with a wide variety of meanings in the first century AD (Griffith 2005). Paul uses the polysemy of *charis* to exhort the Corinthians to imitate, through their gesture of material solidarity, the generosity of God in the Christ-event. Paul insists that the collection of Christians in Macedonia and Asia should be inspired by a generosity that is freely given, not forced. The message is clear: "God loves a cheerful giver", according to Proverbs 22,8a LXX quoted in 2 Corinthians 9,7. Pettiness and miserliness are to be banished. Without magnanimity, God cannot accept any gift. The gesture of financial solidarity has a precise Christological meaning: donors imitate Christ who, from being rich, became poor in order to enrich us with poverty (2 Co 8,9). So, what is this poverty? Reference should be made here to the Incarnation as the stripping away of divine status, but also to the death of Jesus, which is inseparable from the resurrection, where he obeys even to the point of the humiliation of the torture of the cross (see 2 Co 5,21 in connection with 2 Co 8,9).¹⁸ Material solidarity, therefore, participates in the divine generosity which culminates in Christ's *agapè*.

18 In line with Griffith's fruitful suggestion (Griffith 2005: 144).

Chapter 9 looks at the effects of the Corinthians' generosity, hoped for by Paul. Paul foresees that God's grace will abound for both givers and recipients, knowing that their common obedience in entering into this exchange of goods signals God's love acting within them (Griffith 2005: 168). God is powerful (2 Co 9,8) and the source of all good (2 Co 9,10; cf. Is 55,10); one can therefore entrust oneself unreservedly to him and thus offer ample thanksgiving (2 Co 9,11). The term *charis* is used with three distinct meanings: material abundance (2 Co 9,8), the grace of God in Jesus Christ (2 Co 9,14.15), and Paul's gratitude for this grace (2 Co 9,15). To these uses should be added the occurrences of the 'Eucharist' (εὐχαριστία, 2 Co 9,11.12), by which God's grace is returned to him by its recipients in a manifestation of gratitude.

2.5 Thanksgiving

God's gift in Jesus Christ produces a surge of gratitude in those who receive it. From the grace received from God to the grace returned to its source – "the God of all grace" (1 Pt 5,10) – the use of the same term (*charis*) for gift and counter-gift indicates that the initial impulse of gratuitous generosity determines in its beneficiaries an active disposition of communion and gratitude commensurate with the prodigality granted to them. In his letters, Paul uses a stereotypical formula with *charis* to give thanks to God (Χάρις τῷ θεῷ),¹⁹ thus echoing a widespread usage in the Greco-Roman world and Greek literature intended to express the gratitude owed to deities for benefits received. This use is equally, and perhaps even more frequently, identified with the Jewish tradition of blessings addressed to the God of Israel for his active fidelity (Griffith 2005: 219). In Paul's letters, the formula is either inserted in a development (Rm 6,17), forms an introduction (2 Co 8,16) or concludes a section (Rm 7,25; 2 Co 9,15). Note the close relationship established between the grace received and the gratitude expressed in a formula such as: "Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift" (Χάρις τῷ θεῷ ἐπὶ τῇ ἀνεκδιηγῆτῳ αὐτοῦ δωρεᾷ, 2 Co 9,15). It can also be observed that gratitude borrows from the very mediation through which God communicated his gift, namely Jesus Christ: "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Rm 7,25). Sometimes this acknowledgement takes on particular nuances: in 1 Timothy 1,12-13b, it underlines the incomprehensible mercy of God received by Paul in an entirely undeserved manner: "I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus, our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief". In 1 Corinthians 15,57 it refers to the resurrection of Jesus, who put the power of

¹⁹ Note the variant in 2 Co 2,14: Τῷ δὲ θεῷ χάρις.

death to flight: “But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!”

2.6 Communication

One of the most frequent uses of *charis* occurs in epistolary greetings, according to a set formula repeated from letter to letter in a highly stereotypical manner: “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ, Rm 1,7; 1 Co 1,3; 2 Co 1,2; Ga 1,3; Ph 1,2; Ep 1,2; Col 1,2; 2 Th 1,2; Tt 1,4; Phm 3).²⁰ In the Hellenistic epistolary style, the greeting is a purely formal convention designating the author and addressees, respectively, and giving a greeting formula in χαίρω. Paul ‘restores meaning’ (Burnet 2003: 118) by giving it a specifically Christian slant. The communication between author and recipient is thus placed at the very heart of the Gospel and its theological message. Historians suggest that such a formula, inspired by the Jewish epistolary style (2 Bar 78,2; 2 Mac 1,1), could have a liturgical function insofar as the letters are written to be read to the congregation during worship. The choice of wording emphasises specifically Pauline themes, as Jewett notes: “In his theology, grace has priority as the essence of what Christ provides (Gal 2,21; 1 Cor 1,4; 2 Cor 6:1): unmerited access to God for those who do not deserve it and therefore honour to those whom the world holds to be shameful” (Jewett 2006: 115). Paul thus diverts his addressees from the search for respectability linked to the observance of the Torah or even from the Roman civic cult, which announces a reign of grace. He directs them towards the new way of finding honour offered by the good news of the Risen One. The peace which Paul presents in the epistle to the Romans comes from the specifically Jewish part of the greeting.²¹ But this peace, fruit of the Spirit, now comes from the cross of Christ in which God wins back the world in the very place where the world shows its enmity towards God (Rm 3,25-26). This is why, according to Paul, peace does not come without grace, i. e., the gift of God who is infinitely, immeasurably, incomprehensibly merciful, as indicated in Romans 5,1-2a: “since we have been justified by faith, we have peace (εἰρήνη) with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace (χάρις) in which we stand”.

This greeting has a *performative*²² dimension: it claims to effect what it says; it does what it means by the mere fact of its utterance. Through it, Paul becomes

20 In 1 Tm 1,2 and 2 Tm 1,2 the term *eleos* is inserted: χάρις ἔλεος εἰρήνη εἰρήνη ἀπὸ ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς καὶ Χριστοῦ τοῦ κυρίου.

21 See in LXX: Jg 19,20; Dn 10,19; Tb 12,7.

22 The theory of performativity, inspired by Wittgenstein’s “language games”, was established by John Langshaw Austin, and developed for religious language by Donald D. Evans. What characterises a

personally involved; he solemnly attests to the truth of the Gospel he is proclaiming; the utterance constitutes a confession. The claim of truth is supported by the authority of the apostle, who is subjectively committed. Paul's self-involvement as the author of the epistles is highlighted by the greeting; his utterance corresponds to an illocutionary act by the speaker. The utterance produces its effects on the listeners. Through the first addressees, directly challenged by this act, every reader can feel involved in the author's testimony. The speech that commits Paul remains alive through the illocutionary force with which it is charged within the ecclesial space where the greeting is a communication of grace. It is worth recalling in this respect the effectiveness of the blessings pronounced by the father of a clan or by a prophet in the world of the Old Testament.

This greeting has a *Trinitarian* dimension. Contrary to contemporary usages of *charis*, Paul uses it in the singular to refer to God, its sole source, and its focal point – salvation in Jesus Christ (Dunn 1998: 322). Despite the Greco-Roman and Jewish parallels, the designation of God as Father refers directly to the way in which Jesus commands his disciples to invoke God; it echoes the prayer of the *pater noster* which he taught them (Mt 6,9) (Jewett 2006: 115). It is the grace of adoption of the Spirit that empowers them to pray to God as their Father (Rm 8,15; 15,6; Ga 4,6). The formula is based on a high Christology: the “and” (καὶ) acts as a copula – “from God our Father *and* the Lord Jesus Christ”. God and Christ are closely associated as sources and mediators of the gift, respectively. God's grace comes through Jesus Christ, professed as Lord. The divinity of Christ is thus explicitly stated. In return, the grace of the Spirit brings about the confession of Jesus as the victorious Christ: “No one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except in the Holy Spirit” (1 Co 12,3). The greeting formula thus designates a circular logic: the greeting, pointing to the God Father and the Lord Jesus as the source of grace, communicates the same grace that allows believers to call God “Father” and to profess Jesus as Lord. The circle is virtuous since it opens up filial participation in the being of the living God to the chosen.

The significance of the closings of several epistles, which associate grace exclusively with “our Lord Jesus Christ” in a stereotypical formula, is to manifest, in the absence of any mention of God, the close link between the person of the risen Jesus and grace: “May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you” (χάρις τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ μεθ’ ὑμῶν.) (1 Th 5,28; 2 Th 3,18; 1 Co 16,23; Ga 6,18; Ph 4,23 with a variant in the final: “with your spirit,” and also in Phm 25). The closing of 2 Corinthians 13,13, which associates the “Lord Jesus Christ” with grace, God with love, and the Holy Spirit with communion, corroborates the close relationship between Christ and grace postulated by the closings. The closings of the Pastoral Ministry mention

performative utterance is that the utterance itself is a type of action indicated by its content (Ladrière 1984: 25).

grace without associating anyone with the formula: “Grace be with you” (Ἡ χάρις μεθ’ ὑμῶν, 1 Tm 6,21; 2 Tm 4,22; in Tt 3,15, variant “with you all”).

3. Conclusion

At the end of this examination, it appears that grace designates the *relational dimension* of God’s gift in Jesus Christ. God’s freedom is affirmed in the election of Israel and the calling of the chosen; in Jesus, it sets in motion the new dynamic of a free, superabundant, universal gift that commits the faithful to conform what they are and what they do to this magnanimity through the expression of gratitude to God and solidarity with their neighbour. The theme of grace emphasises the powerful work of God, who frees man from sin and death to establish him in peace and make him reign “in life through the one man Jesus Christ” (Rm 5,17b).

Absent from the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, the notion of grace is an *action noun* like the theme of the *Kingdom*, which corresponds to certain aspects of grace in the preaching of Jesus in these gospels. Like grace, the Kingdom is God’s gift par excellence, which he alone has the initiative to grant, and everything must be sacrificed in order to acquire it (parables of the treasure and the pearl; Mt 13,44-46), and like grace, the Kingdom is the divine energy that grows in those whom it penetrates in order for life to triumph (parables of the mustard seed and the leaven; Mt 13,31-33, and par.). Where the Kingdom focuses attention on the eschatological sovereignty of God and the paradoxical kingship of Jesus, grace signifies the act of liberation of man and the active work of God in him to lead him, if he consents, to final glory.

This study shows that the Pauline theology of grace embraces the scope of God’s great purpose, which the Bible presents in so many different ways. In short, God shares himself with the faithful in his Son and the Spirit in order that they may live in the freedom of love, which is his own life. By grace, God places his human partner in harmony with the Trinitarian relationship. Grace conveys from the depths of God to the depths of the human heart the pulse of unquestioning love, creator of communion, as expressed in the concluding formula of 2 Corinthians: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all!” The exercise in biblical theology conducted here calls for a supplementary systematic and practical component. Progress has already been achieved. The biblical dossier significantly shifts the focus adopted in debates on this issue in the past. The approach of Catholic theology, in which the relationship between grace and nature has been the main focal point of discussion, is ripe for reappraisal. The categories of *relationship*, *action* and *revelation* could, within this framework, offer fruitful areas for further inquiry.

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