

Philosophic Exchange

Volume 15
Number 1 *Volume 15-16 (1984-1985)*

Article 3

1-1-1984

Grace and Works

D.Z. Phillips
Univercity College of Swansea

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/phil_ex

 Part of the [Philosophy Commons](http://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/phil_ex)

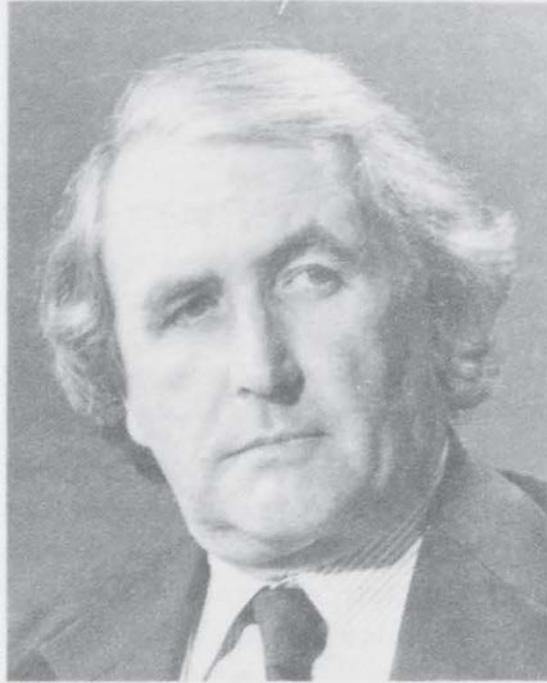
Repository Citation

Phillips, D.Z. (1984) "Grace and Works," *Philosophic Exchange*: Vol. 15 : No. 1 , Article 3.
Available at: http://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/phil_ex/vol15/iss1/3

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @Brockport. It has been accepted for inclusion in Philosophic Exchange by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @Brockport. For more information, please contact kmyers@brockport.edu.



The College at
BROCKPORT
STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK



D.Z. Phillips
University College of Swansea

Grace and Works

D.Z. Phillips

I.

In many discussions of grace and works by theologians and philosophers, it is taken for granted that the issue facing us is to give an account of the relation which holds or ought to hold between them. The senses of the two terms to be related, grace and works are, it seems, quite independent of each other. But what if this independence is an illusion? What if there are important internal relations between grace and works? In that case, to treat grace and works as having senses independent of each other, is to fail to mediate the senses of grace or works in their religious contexts; it is to ignore the surroundings in which they have their meaning.

This paper is an exploration of some of the distortions which result from the assumption that, in discussing grace and works, our problem is that of relating two terms in themselves unproblematic. Through the distortion of the reference to works, moral endeavour becomes self-interest; through the distortion of the reference to grace, the operation of grace in human life becomes a magical, self-authenticating event.

Before discussing these distortions, it is as well to remind ourselves that they may not be avoided even by those who do emphasize the need to see belief in the grace of God in a religious setting. John Whittaker, in his stimulating discussion of grace and works, reminds us of one of these religious settings:

Man, it is said, wishes to be accepted by a holy and just God. In order to be accepted, he endeavours to keep God's commandments. His justification before God depends on the merits of his works. Yet, if he is honest with himself, he has to admit that he fails in his endeavours again and again. He has to admit that he is a sinner. But how can a sinner be justified before a holy and just God? If his salvation is to depend on the merits of his works, he is without hope. Yet, he is saved from despair by good news of God's grace. God has elected to save the sinner without regard to the believer's good works. Man's salvation does not depend on what man has done for God, but on what God has done for man. Salvation is the free gift of God's grace. Man need not despair at his lack of good works. All he has to do is to believe what God has done for him and be grateful for it.

John Whittaker is well aware of what happens when belief in the grace of God is made the object of metaphysical speculation divorced from its religious context. Bravely, he illustrates this by reference to what is generally taken as the extreme form of belief in God's sovereign grace, namely, the doctrine of predestination.

When people have speculated in the abstract about the doctrine they have spoken like this: "On the face of it, the doctrine seems . . . frightening . . . since it is terrifying to think that one might be arbitrarily excluded from salvation by divine fiat . . . Such a God makes all of us the victims of an arbitrary destiny, a destiny which seems unspeakably cruel to those who through no fault of their own are left to misery and damnation. Unless, of course, God somehow foreknows the virtues of his elect; but in that case God's foreknowledge seems to close our futures in the stifling grip of determinism. How can God know what people are going to do in order to reward or punish them in advance of their deeds, if it lies within their power to do as they please? Or if it does not lie within their power, how can they be said to be worthy or unworthy of his grace? And how can God be said to be just in dispensing this grace?"¹

According to Whittaker, this is a metaphysical caricature of the doctrine, one which it is fatal to entertain on its own terms. What is needed is a change of direction which shows the irrelevance of the metaphysical arguments. This is what Luther tried to achieve. Whittaker tells us that Luther tried to bring out the religious point of the doctrine in terms of the fears the doctrine was meant to allay. These fears had to do with the question of how a man's soul can be saved if he has to rely on his good works. Only by taking this into account can we come to see what reliance on God's grace can mean in a believer's life.

In elucidating the development of belief in God's grace in Luther, Whittaker reminds us that Luther had been taught "that God's grace was freely available, but only to those who were properly repentant. Only those who sincerely and completely confessed their failings, and who sincerely willed to live according to the law of God, would be forgiven and strengthened. For them the sacraments would be the over-available means of grace, but for those who lacked or lost a properly receptive heart, the sacraments would become ineffectual" (pp. 71-72). When he reflected on his own life, this became a doctrine for despair for Luther, because he had to recognize that he failed repeatedly in good works and even in wanting to have a pure heart, and the more he tried to have a pure intention, the more artificial the very trying made his endeavour seem. On the view with which he was presented, what 'grace' came to was a belief that "God makes up the difference between what we intend and what we actually accomplish

in the way of doing his will, so that we can actually *achieve* the righteousness needed for salvation" (p. 73).

The doctrine of predestination came as a liberating force to Luther, one which rescued him from his despair. What he came to realize is that salvation comes from *election*, that God offers his grace prior to anything a man does, "so that it remains only for one to believe in it and be grateful for it" (p. 73). In this way, Whittaker argues, a harsh doctrine was transformed, "for as long as God offers His grace in *consequence* of the believer's merit, the acutely conscious sinner is left without hope. If God grants His grace *prior* to the sinner's hopeless attempts to rectify his impure will, however, then the happiness which he could not possess through his own effort becomes possible through God" (p. 73). Whittaker would claim, I think, that, in this way, the doctrine of grace ceases to be a doctrine of fairness and becomes a doctrine of love.

Yet, despite the fact that Whittaker wants to show how belief in grace enters religious life, he still assumes that we are confronted by two separate categories, grace and works, our task being to show how they are related. He does not pay enough attention to the need to mediate the sense of grace and works by stressing the internal relation between them. When this need and emphasis are ignored, the notions of grace and works becomes distorted.

II

How does the notion of moral endeavour become distorted? This question can be answered by examining accounts which are given of the transition from reliance on good works for the salvation of one's soul to reliance on divine grace. How does Whittaker characterize this transition? He says that prior to his recognition of what God has done, the believer performed deeds "for his own self-acceptance", whereas after he has recognized what God has done, the believer performs these deeds "out of gratitude" for what God has done for him (p. 80). Already we are faced with far-reaching difficulties concerning this depiction of good works. Does a man do good works in *order* to save his soul? What if a man says that he jumped into a river to save a child from drowning in order to save his soul? Wouldn't it make sense to reply: "We thought you jumped in for the sake of the child"? Purity of soul is not achieved by making purity of heart an aim. Purity or otherwise is shown in the character of one's actions. Decency does not depend on one's actions leading to some further end, salvation, contingently related to them. Any goal we have and any means used in the pursuit of it must be answerable to the claims of decency.

Whittaker also thinks that the transition from reliance on works to

reliance on grace does not come about "when one professes his belief in divine forgiveness without undergoing any change in his disposition . . . such a believer either does not understand what he believes or does not really believe" (p. 81). But what brings about the transformation? Whittaker's answer, in the main, is in terms of what he believes to be the self-defeating character of reliance on good works as a means of saving one's soul. Whittaker shows how Luther's attempts to possess a pure heart were self-defeating. The more he tried, the more he despaired. That this should be so is not surprising since, according to Whittaker, Luther is in a confused state: "Luther was like one who on some grievous occasion tries to feel appropriately saddened, but in trying to feel sad feels only unnatural and insincere" (p. 72). The confusion consists in thinking that one can be sad by trying to be sad. Whittaker seems to equate Luther's despair with the confusion involved in the self-defeating attempt to attain righteousness by making righteousness an end to which one's actions are supposed to be the means. A transition from a state of reliance on good works, to a state of reliance on divine grace, involves, for Whittaker, freeing oneself from a state of conceptual confusion.

The obvious difficulty with Whittaker's analysis is that the man who is in despair about his moral endeavours need not be conceptually confused in the way Whittaker describes at all. On the contrary, he may be clear-sightedly free of such confusion. Consider one of Simone Weil's examples of a pure action, that of a father absorbed in play with his children. Another father may recognize that he is not like this. But he may also see quite clearly that he can never become like this by making spontaneous absorption in play with his children an end which he can aim for. He cannot plan to be spontaneous! He appreciates the confusion involved in that. But he is dejected nevertheless, and so his dejection does not depend on the confusion. A man may be dejected simply because of what he is. This being so, there are difficulties for the way in which Whittaker wants to describe the distinctive liberation which comes to a man who comes to rely on divine grace. That distinctive liberation cannot be said to consist essentially in seeing that moral purity cannot be made the goal of moral endeavour. That recognition would make a transition from a confusion about a regard for decency to a clearer view of it. The attainment of such clarity need not lead to any sense of reliance on divine grace and so certainly cannot be equated with a transition to such reliance. Neither, as we have seen, is it a necessary condition of such a transition, since neither the man who endeavours to be decent nor the man who comes to rely on divine grace need ever have been confused in the way Whittaker describes.

Whittaker should have come to these conclusions too, for in his account of the transition from a concern with prudential considera-

tions to a concern with moral considerations, he himself is aware of the possibility of a conception of moral endeavour which does not exhibit a self-defeating character. Whittaker shows how futile it would be to attempt to demonstrate, according to some common measure of interest, that moral considerations serve men's interests more than prudential considerations. Whittaker argues, rightly, that "as long as the point of moral principles is to override . . . prudential considerations by instituting prescriptive judgments of *obligation*, the moralist cannot afford to defend his principles on his opponent's grounds. The moral believer would defeat his own purpose if he set aside the point of his principles merely to win their acceptance on prudential grounds, for the acceptance of these principles as prudent policies would not require the believer to exercise any higher ideals. Such a believer would not enter into any *new*, peculiarly *moral* domain of judgment. Without adhering to moral beliefs as the foundation for a different kind of reflection, beyond prudential reasoning, he simply would not become a dutiful person. And for all those who believe that we have moral duties, that makes no sense at all" (p. 88). Here, the recognition of moral duties, as described by Whittaker, does not exhibit a self-defeating character. Moral duties need not be thought of as the means by which the end of moral purity is achieved.

On the other hand, given this realization by Whittaker with regard to a concern for decency, his further characterization of the transition from reliance on moral endeavour to reliance on grace becomes problematic: "*Rather than thinking that his ultimate happiness and fulfilment might be secured as the end-product of moral achievement, the believer foregoes the whole range of mean/ends judgments in connection with his happiness*" (p. 82). But in his account of the transition from a concern with prudence to a moral concern, Whittaker's whole point was that morality, unlike prudence, should not be construed in terms of conduct determined by the relation of means to ends. The difficulty is that Whittaker characterizes coming to rely on divine grace as the giving up of a conception of morality which, elsewhere, he says is a confused conception of morality.

What remains true is that when these confusions are put aside, a man may be said to express concern about his moral failings. It also remains true that for many people reliance on divine grace has something to say to such a concern. What it has to say must remain unresolved for Whittaker, for, as we have seen, his own answer relies on attributing a self-defeating character to moral endeavour which it need not possess, and which he, at times, seems to realize it does not possess. Whittaker's analysis of reliance on good works suffers precisely because he has severed the notion of good works from that of grace. Ironically, though stressing the need to see the transition from reliance on works to reliance on grace in its religious context,

Whittaker's analysis of the first stage of the transition suffers precisely because he presents it in isolation from the sense of reliance on grace. If their senses are inter-dependent, ignoring the fact, unsurprisingly, leads to confusion.

III

We cannot see what is said to be religiously suspect in relying on good works for one's salvation without reference to the notion of grace. But neither can we understand the notion of grace by ignoring its internal relation to good works. Flannery O'Connor has said, ". . . you cannot show the operation of grace when grace is cut off from nature".²

At times, Whittaker is aware of the danger involved. He points out that Luther called the doctrine of predestination "strong meat", not to be given to those not ready for it. One way of not being ready for the doctrine would be to divorce it from everything in Luther's life which led up to his embracing of the doctrine. If we take away the consciousness of sin, if we take away the heavy conscience and the threat of despair, then, when we are told that God has already prescribed for man's salvation "so that it remains only for one to believe in it and to be grateful for it" (p. 73), those words may take on a very different meaning. We may find people saying that they can do what they like, since God has made salvation secure for them anyway. Here, the sense of the notion of grace is unmediated. Whittaker uses the example not simply to illustrate religious and theological foolishness, but to show, philosophically what speaking of the sense of a doctrine amounts to. When the surroundings of a doctrine are mutilated, the sense of the doctrine is mutilated at the same time.

Whittaker realizes that the insistence on grace as a free gift from God is meant to take us away from a self-calculating religion of desert. In an attempt to put the matter beyond all such dangers, the doctrine of predestination says that God's election was made "before the foundations of the world were laid". Yet, as Whittaker realizes, this theological assertion, in practice, so far from ridding men from prudential considerations, served to reinforce them. If prudential considerations are coupled with the thought that divine rewards and punishments have already been determined, people may well grow anxious over whether they are included among the beneficiaries. Despite the fact that God's election is said to be done "before the foundations of the world were laid", believers begin to search frantically for signs of their election. A great deal of time and energy is then spent in determining who is in and who is out in the sight of God. In fact, some have said that they are in by the grace of God. Others have

denied that such talk has anything to do with God's grace. In Flannery O'Connor's story "Revelation", a character who thanks Jesus for making everything just the way it is, giving herself and her husband a little of everything and the good sense to use it right, is told by another character, "Go back to where you came from, you old wart hog from hell". So there are religious disputes and judgements concerning what is due to the grace of God.³ The result of talk of reliance on divine grace, then, may have the exact opposite of the liberating effect it is supposed to have.

In wanting to get away from a calculating religion of desert, theologians often stress that God's free gift of grace has nothing to do with men's endeavours. All men have to do is to recognize what God has done and be grateful for it. But what does this amount to? This is one of the issues which bothered Pelagius. If there is only a contingent connection between the recognition and the gratitude, the door is opened to highly embarrassing conclusions. If a man is in prison, normally, he will be glad to hear that someone has secured his release. But this need not lead to any change in his behaviour or any sense of gratitude to the person who releases him. On the contrary, the released person may take up the life which led to his imprisonment and regard the one who set him free as a soft-hearted fool.

Pelagius did not think that talk of God's grace is intelligible without reference to good works. He did not think such works should be despised. As Flannery O'Connor observes, Manichean-type theologies see "the natural world as unworthy of penetration".⁴ But this is tantamount to refusing to mediate the sense which the notion of grace may have. In saying, mistakenly, that a man's soul could be saved by his good works, Pelagius was wanting to avoid confusions not dissimilar to those to which Whittaker calls our attention. He wanted to avoid a magical conception of grace or religious experience which is quite cut off from moral conduct. It is for the same reason that Flannery O'Connor says "Today's reader, if he believes in grace at all, sees it as something which can be separated from nature and served to him raw as Instant Uplift."⁵ So although their doctrines are diametrically opposed to each other, Luther and Pelagius want to avoid magical conceptions of grace unmediated in the detail of the believer's life. In its most extreme form a believer could be said to recognize what God has done for him but be completely indifferent to it, or even to live a life contrary to God's commands. Perhaps he could even say with impunity, "If God has done all that is necessary already why should I bother?"

Clearly, Whittaker wants to avoid these unhappy conclusions. He sees the dangers involved in trying to speak of reliance on works or reliance on grace while ignoring the internal relations between them. He tries to move in this direction when he says that the doctrine of divine grace is expressed less misleadingly if we say "that the grace by

chronologically, prior to our efforts to attain it" (p. 85). In other words, instead of thinking of the relation between grace and works in terms of temporal priorities, we should endeavour to see how a notion of grace may inform a conception of moral endeavour from the outset. Unfortunately, Whittaker's analysis stands in the way of doing this; it prevents him from bringing out the internal relation which may exist between grace and works.

IV

To do justice to the internal relation between grace and works we must give up the assumption that we begin with two unproblematic categories, grace and works, and are only faced *subsequently* with the task of establishing a relation between them. The same assumptions may mislead us in connection with the belief in the inscrutable will of God. In this context, too, a certain picture holds us captive. We think we begin with two unrelated terms, God and the world, and then, via some kind of cosmological argument, attempt to establish a relation between them. What needs to be recognized is how, in certain reactions to the world, a conception of the world may be informed from the outset by a notion of the will of God; the world will be seen, from the outset, as God's world.

Similar lessons need to be learned in discussions of the relations between grace and works. Again we need to explore the possibility of a conception of human endeavour being informed, from the outset, by a conception of God's grace. In the case of someone who comes to a reliance on God's grace, what he comes to is a conception of human endeavour so informed. The conception of God's grace gets its sense in certain reactions to human endeavour. In taking account of these reactions we are noting the importance of concept-formation where the notion of grace is concerned.

One way of bringing out a natural context for the notion of divine grace is to show its close connection with the notion of the inscrutable will of God. In moments of extreme peril, such as being in a storm at sea, a person may say that his life is in God's hands. God's will will be made manifest in his survival or destruction as it is in the raging storm. The notion of God's will gets its sense in the context of such reactions. Contrast this with the view that primitive man responds in this way because of a *prior* conclusion he has reached, namely, that because he is not responsible for the storm, someone else, greater than himself, must be responsible.⁶ On this view, the reactions in the storm are a *consequence* of previously held beliefs. Such a view ignores concept-formation in religious belief. I am arguing that the sense of belief in God is itself rooted in reactions such as reactions to the

storm. It is in such contexts that belief in God has its sense.

The sense of such reactions is held fast by all that surrounds them. That is what separates them from other reactions in the storm which may amount to no more than a cry in the dark, a desperate need for comfort. On the other hand, we could imagine rites developing around such reactions of terror which, so far from seeking comforting reassurances, seek to celebrate the contingency of human life through its expression in what is terrible. Imagine a rite in which children dance around a pit of fire. The wizard points at one of the children and immediately the child is thrown into the pit. One minute dancing, the next consumed in the flames: life is in the hands of a terrible God.

The examples I have given of reactions in situations of great peril are quite consistent with the general description of man bowed in subjection before the inscrutable and arbitrariness of God's omnipotent will. If any outcome, good or evil, is an expression of God's will, is not the only rational reaction one of resigned acceptance of whatever happens? How is it possible for notions of divine grace to be born of such contexts? "All things come from God" seems to mean no more than "What happens, happens". Surely, the only justifiable response is an undifferentiating resignation.⁷

May I say at once that my aim is not to deny the possibility of such a reaction. What I would object to is its claim to be a rationalistic thesis which denies the possibility of reactions other than its own. What is needed is attention to the ways in which concepts are formed in fact in reactions of other kinds. A sense of being at the mercy of God's will can, as I have shown, lead to terror. It is also true, however, that it can give rise to a certain kind of wonder; wonder at the miracle of existence, at the fact that anything exists at all. In such a reaction, the very contingency of the events takes on the aspect of a gift — a gift of grace one might say. But this does not come about by a rational argument from the contingency of things to the notion of the grace of God. The impression of such argument is created by Whittaker when he says, "Sheer existence, with all its mysterious givens and disturbing contingencies, must have some higher rationale, some end that renders individual existence worthwhile and capable of fulfilment. This is the theme on which the world's religions play their different variations. The point of postulating a higher order in the cosmos is to legitimate the individual's search for a worthwhile end in his own existence" (p. 60). Here we are back with the view that religious reactions are legitimated by the beliefs which precede them. The man in awe before the majesty of God's will in the circumstances I have described can hardly be characterized as someone who postulates a higher order in the cosmos in order to legitimate his own worthwhileness. His reactions are not based on prior beliefs; rather, his beliefs get their sense in the context of these reactions. Furthermore, his awe at the majesty of

God's will, so far from establishing his own worthwhileness, shows him that he is as nothing before God. He may well remember the man who planned a vast expansion in barn building, not knowing that God required his soul that very night.

The vulnerability of human beings is an important element in the formation of the notion of divine grace. Like the elements of the storm, human beings too are seen as in the hands of God. To see people in this way, as themselves creatures dependent on grace, is to see them as beings who should not be subject to plans for appropriation and exploitation. To see men as God's creatures is to deny at the same time that others should play at being God with respect to them. In this way, coming to see people as God's creatures is inextricably bound up with one's own conduct. It is no accident that wondering at God's creation, seeing others as God's creatures is closely linked to dying to the self, since making the self central would be a denial of the religious sense I have been trying to elucidate. Of course, faith is not an all-or-nothing affair. The self continues to intrude in countless ways, so that the struggle to believe is a common feature of religious belief. That is why there is constant need for confession and repentance. What would be problematic, however, would be to say that someone recognized life as a gift of God's grace in the absence of any of these religious states or attitudes I have referred to, ranging from faithful acceptance to sorrowful repentance.

The picture of an acknowledgement of God's grace, completely divorced from any showing forth of works of any kind is therefore a confused picture. It is important to realize, however, why it is confused. It is not confused because the possession of divine grace causally brings about the good works. It is not confused because the good works are a natural consequence of the acknowledgement of divine grace. Rather, I have been arguing, that the sense of acknowledgement of divine grace is bound up with the dispositional changes I have talked about. There is an internal conceptual relation between them. In this matter, Kierkegaard shows a commendable religious realism:

'Forgive, and you will also be forgiven.' Meanwhile one might nevertheless manage to understand these words in such a way that he imagined it possible to receive forgiveness without his forgiving. Truly this is a misunderstanding. Christianity's view is: forgiveness is forgiveness: your forgiveness is your forgiveness; your forgiveness of another is your own forgiveness: the forgiveness which you give your receive, not contrariwise that you give the forgiveness which you receive. It is as if Christianity would say: pray to God humbly and believing in your forgiveness, for he really is compassionate in such a way as no human being is; but if you will test how it is with

respect to forgiveness, then observe yourself. If honestly before God you wholeheartedly forgive your enemy (but remember that if you do, God sees it), then you dare hope also for your forgiveness, for it is one and the same. God forgives you neither more nor less nor otherwise than as you forgive your trespassers. It is only an illusion to imagine that one himself has forgiveness, although one is slack in forgiving others.⁸

Kierkegaard must not be read as saying that God forgives as a consequence of moral conduct, since it is essential to remember that, for Kierkegaard, the act of forgiveness itself is a produce of grace; a forgiveness before God. Thus we are brought full circle to the central contention concerning the internal relation between grace and works.

V

Hopefully, we are not in a position to see what was wrong with the picture of the philosophical search for clarity as the attempt to establish a relation between two independently intelligible categories: grace and works. We see the confusions which come into Whittaker's analysis if we are in the grip of this picture. The sense of 'reliance on good works' and 'reliance on grace' remains unmediated in the analysis. On Whittaker's view, in the transition from one form of reliance to the other, works cease to be the means of attaining salvation ('Look at what I have done') and become the means by which gratitude to God is shown ('Look at what he has done'). On this view, there is no change in the conception of good works, and grace seems something magical, quite independent of them. In the religious possibility I have elucidated, grace transforms the very conception of a person's endeavours, not by making them the means of achieving something different from what was achieved before, *but by seeing the possibility of the works themselves as the gift of grace*. This is what I take Paul to be emphasizing to the Ephesians in those words so often victim of incomplete quotation: "By grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God. Nor of works, lest any man should boast." (Here, those who want to separate grace from works usually end their quotation, but Paul continues) "For we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus unto good works which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them". Here there is no issue of bridging a gap *between* grace and works, since grace informs one's very conception of human endeavour. Such a perspective indeed changes one's whole attitude to works, attainment, failure, praise, blame, judgement, pity, compassion and forgiveness. Simone Weil

shows us what is involved when she illuminatingly locates Peter's denial of Jesus, not in the breaking of his promise, but in the making of it. "Denial of Saint Peter. To say to Christ: 'I will never deny Thee' was to deny him already, for it was supposing the source of faithfulness to be in himself and not in grace."⁹ Peter thought that his loyalty, his allegiance, his faith, were entirely within his control, the product of his purposeful endeavours. What Jesus reveals to him is that even his ability to make the promise is in the hands of God, dependent on grace, on factors over which he has little control. Hence, when someone is guilty of denial, as Peter was, the believer's response is, "But for the grace of God, there go I". The opposite response is the sin of pride: "God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are", which is what Peter was saying in effect in his confident prediction that no matter who deserted Jesus, he never would. In this way, his promise to be faithful was already an act of unfaithfulness, a denial of grace.

All I have said about an internal relation between grace and works can be spoken of in the way in which Whittaker speaks of Luther's faith. He says that it "ultimately rested on the new vista of understanding which opened up when he grasped the point of this belief and took it to his heart. Any other way of 'grounding' this belief by detaching its credibility from the role it plays as a principle would have been completely illogical" (p. 82). This insight is not regarded as an achievement or another form of salvation by desert. The insight itself is regarded by the believer as a work of grace, the work of God in him. That is why such a believer would say, with Paul, "Not I, but Christ who dwelleth in me".

I agree entirely with Whittaker when he says, "A doctrine like that of predestination acquires its point by virtue of the role it plays in reorienting the judgements a believer makes" (pp. 85-86). I am less happy with what Whittaker takes to be the central concern of these judgements, namely, the believer and his prospects for happiness. Theologically, I may be taken as making a plea to emphasize God's *electing to save*, rather than God *saving the elect*. If this is done, the place of the self is determined as a consequence. Thus a higher order is not postulated in order to legitimize an individual's search for what is worthwhile (Whittaker), but, rather, faced with the mediated reality of God's grace, what is worthwhile for the individual is determined thereby. Why such grace is revealed at all remains, as it must, a necessary mystery. This priority takes more seriously Whittaker's own recognition that the doctrine of predestination plays a supporting role to "the more fundamental doctrine of divine grace" (p. 84).

VI

Despite my plea to emphasize God's *electing to save*, rather than God *saving the elect*, I do not want to be taken as issuing theological

prescriptions. My main concern has been with the conceptual confusions which result from a failure to mediate the sense of the notions of grace and works; a failure which leads, as we have seen, to a distortion of moral endeavour and to a magical conception of grace and religious experience. It is in this context that a final point has to be made. Whittaker has emphasized, rightly, that we cannot see the point of a religious belief if we divorce it from the role it plays in the religious life. He goes on to claim, however, that "one can see how a faithful adherence to such a belief depends entirely on a grasp of its point" (p. 70). Here we part company.

Let us assume that I philosophically, have succeeded in showing the point of stressing an internal relation between grace and works. If this is all a faithful adherence to belief depends on, then, my exposition, if faithful, amounts to faithful adherence to the belief. But, surely, Whittaker would not be happy with this. By 'adherence to belief' he clearly means adherence to it in one's life. The equation of such faithful adherence to philosophical or even theological analysis will not do. Something is missing. Furthermore we have reason to suppose that Whittaker, on reflection, would know what is missing, for he gives us the answer elsewhere in his essay. In describing Luther's faith, Whittaker tells us that it depended, not simply on Luther grasping its point, but also on his *taking it to his heart* (p. 82). The philosopher who strives for some measure of clarity concerning the transition from reliance on works to reliance on grace, may or may not make such a transition his own; may or may not take it to his heart. To say that reliance on divine grace has a certain conceptual character is not to rely on divine grace. To receive such grace the philosopher would have to confess "I have arrived at my analysis by the grace of God". That confession is not made simply in writing his paper.

Notes

- ¹ John H. Whittaker, *Matters of Faith and Matters of Principle*, Trinity University Monograph Series in Religion, Vol. 6, Trinity University Press, San Antonio 1981, pp. 70-71.
- ² Flannery O'Connor, "Novelist and Believer" in *Mystery and Manners*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 1969, p. 166.
- ³ I have discussed this story and the attitudes it contrasts with the belief that the destiny of the soul is a mystery with God, in my paper "Mystery and Mediation" forthcoming in *Images of Belief in Literature*, ed. David Jasper, Macmillan 1984. The importance of noting the fact there are disagreements about what is due to the grace of God was emphasized by Rush Rhees in a discussion of an earlier version of this paper at the University College of Swansea Philosophical Society. The point is that this is the kind of talk about grace is - one in which there will be disagreements.

- ⁴ Flannery O'Connor, "Novelist and Believer" in *Mystery and Manners*, p. 163
- ⁵ *ibid.*, p. 165.
- ⁶ For a discussion of such contrasts see my "Primitive Reactions and the Reactions of Primitives", the 1983 Marett Lecture, Exeter College, Oxford.
- ⁷ These pertinent questions were put to me by Eric Mack at Tulane University when I read an earlier version of this paper. The questions resemble those of C.W.K. Mundle who asked why, if all prayers end with "Thy will be done", one should make any specific requests at all. See my *The Concept of Prayer*, Basil Blackwell and Seabury Press paperback ed. 1981, p. 121 f.
- ⁸ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, trans. David F. and Lillian M. Swenson, O.U.P. 1946, pp. 351-352.
- ⁹ Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, trans. Emma Craufurd, Introduction by Gustave Thibon, Routledge and Kegan Paul 1947, p. 22.