Paul and Grace in Theological Perspective: A Grateful Response

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Abstract: This response to the above seven articles engages with some of the significant ways in which each takes forward the theological discussion of grace. While some areas of of disagreement arise, the overall sense is of a conversation that is moving beyond *Paul and the Gift*, using its contribution to open fresh avenues for understanding between Catholic and Protestant theologians on this deeply controversial topic, and new possibilities for conversation between biblical exegesis and theology.

The symposium from which these remarkable articles derive was a stage for high-quality interaction between theology and Bible, and between Protestant and Catholic perspectives. If *Paul and the Gift* has helped foster this conversation, I am deeply gratified. I thank all the contributors for engaging so sympathetically with the book and so deeply with its subject matter. In some respects they have corrected and challenged what I have said; in others, they have pushed on further to enter terrain that I might have explored, but did not. Either way, they have deepened the conversation around grace. In what follows, and as space allows, I will comment on each of these essays, taking inspiration from their desire to probe our subject further.

Nathan Eubank's stimulating essay on 'grace and merit' is significant at many levels. He represents a new wave of Catholic biblical scholars whose top-class historical exegesis is deepened through the use of theological resources from the Catholic history of interpretation. In this light he considers *Paul and the Gift* to be compatible with non-

Protestant Augustinian readings of Paul (such as the *Glossa*) but also, in certain respects, with Trent. That judgment will delight some and surprise or dismay others, but before I am fully signed up with Eubank's tradition let me clarify where I think we agree and where differences remain to be further discussed.

Eubank especially warms to my emphasis on the expectations, even demands, that arise from the gift of grace; we agree that 'the demand is contained inside the gift, not as a second principle to be applied after the reception of its grace, but as its outworking' (Eubank). In this sense we can also agree that 'the life of doing good for others is not an optional extra to life in Christ; it is a *sine qua non* of the human actor recreated in Christ' (Eubank).[1] My own emphasis has been on the necessary expression of the gift in *social* terms, but I am happy to endorse this also on the level of individual believers where, as Eubank says, I have insisted on the non-contrastive relation between divine and human agency, a configuration with Catholic (but also Barthian) roots. In these respects, and in the resulting seriousness with which I take Paul's language of judgment by works, my reading of Paul is perhaps closer to the Catholic tradition than most within the Protestant tradition would allow. However, there are three areas where I think we would need to probe further to discover difference or similarity: on grace and transformation (anthropology); on future and present salvation (eschatology); and on the import of Paul's metaphors (language and practice). Let me make a few remarks on each:

Grace and Transformation: Eubank and I are at one in using the language of transformation, re-creation, and reconfiguration in relation to the human recipients of grace. But differences may emerge in what we mean by such terms, with regard to the 'ontology' of

[1] See statements to this effect in my *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), pp. 439-45.

grace and of person. I am wary of an ontology of substance, as if (for instance) grace were something 'poured into' persons, such that it is 'infused' and 'inheres' as 'habitual grace' within their 'nature'. In my view, it would be better to extrapolate from Paul a dynamic, 'relational ontology', in which grace is not a thing but a relation (of divine favour), and in which a person's being is best understood as 'being in relation'.[2] Thus the new self is not altered in 'substance' but in relation (to God and to others), just as the self is always constituted by relation. The new behaviour of the believer is not just grounded in the gift of God (as prior causation) but lived within and ever dependent on the unconditioned grace of God.[3] For this reason, the congruity in the life of the Christian is not just begun by, or practised in collaboration with, the grace of God, but only ever expresses the incongruity of the 'newness of life' in which the believer is held.

Future and Present: For this reason, I would like to tease out further what is meant by saying that 'human worthiness may be present by grace and play an instrumental role in attaining salvation' (the 'third' position in Eubank's typology, with which he associates me). If 'attaining salvation' means something different than the salvation already given in Christ (if it is a second act of grace, or of justice, distinguishable from an 'initial' salvation by grace and through faith in Christ), I would have to demur. As I read Paul, the judgment of works confirms, or disconfirms, the operational reality (in the agency of believers) of the

[2] For Paul's relational ontology, see Emmanuel L. Rehfeld, *Relationale Ontologie bei Paulus: die ontische Wirksamkeit der Christusbezogenheit im Denken des Heidenapostels* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012). For its congruence with contemporary science, see Susan G. Eastman, *Paul and the Person* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017).

[3] To similar effect, but for other, linguistic reasons, I would resist the translation of *dikaioō* as 'make just'.

unconditioned gift that is at work, through the Spirit, from first to last. The language of 'instrument' and 'merit' is in danger of obscuring that reality.[4]

The Import of Metaphors: Paul uses a variety of metaphors in relation to the future: sowing and reaping (Gal 6.7-8); recompense (Rom 2.6); race and crown/prize (1 Cor 9.25; Phil 3.14); reward (or pay; *misthos*; 1 Cor 3.8). These can be read in a variety of ways, some lending themselves more than others to an 'instrumental' understanding. They all indicate some form of congruity, but I take them to depict a holistic life-orientation (sowing this way or that), not a measurement of achievement (sowing more or less). And they sometimes make clear, what I take as implicit throughout, that the prize that believers will 'grasp' is imaginable only on the basis of being themselves 'grasped' (Phil 3.12) – in other words, that the unconditioned gift is the dynamic context in which this congruity is expressed. How we use these metaphors in Catholic and Protestant traditions has a lot to do, I sense, with our concern for the formation (or deformation) of Christian practice. In other words, ecclesial and pastoral concerns shape our deployment of this language quite as much as their fit within a larger theological frame. If Protestants and Catholics could understand each other better on this score (what they are afraid of in Christian practice, and what they are anxious to support), we might see better what differences remain and whether they are, or are not, significant.

Grant Macaskill presses for greater clarity on the content of 'the gift', and what it means to describe this as participation in, or union with, Christ. This rightly places Christology front

[4] My unease would be still greater if Eubank's position parallels that expressed in the *Catholic Catechism* §2027: 'No one can merit the initial grace which is at the origin of conversion. Moved by the Holy Spirit, we can merit for ourselves and for others all the graces needed to attain eternal life, as well as necessary temporal goods.'

and centre, and Macaskill himself highlights the incarnational statements in Phil 2.6-11, Gal 4.4-6, and Rom 8.3-4. (I will limit myself here to Paul, though I recognise that a canonical approach to this topic is fully justifiable in theological terms.)

As Macaskill indicates, if we speak of 'ontology' it is necessary to be clear in what philosophical and theological framework this should be understood. In this regard Macaskill uses the language of 'substance' and 'nature' (and so 'natural kinship' and 'natural solidarity'), although he hesitates to place himself fully 'in the territory of substance metaphysics'. I myself would favour his talk of 'dynamic solidarity' or 'active solidarity', since I think Paul's ontology (if we may speak of such) is *relational* and *dynamic*, not a matter of 'essence', 'qualities', or 'substance'.[5] In a relational ontology, the self is not first a bounded, individualised phenomenon which *then* comes into contact with others and is modified through relations with them, but it emerges *out of* interpersonal relations and is continually defined and redefined *in* those relations. It is also defined not by its self-subsisting qualities, but by its relations. If the matrix for the self is thus inter-subjectivity, there is no independent, self-standing subject, but the self is defined *all the way down* through engagement with others. While this may give rise to simultaneous 'multiple selves' (the self variously constituted in different social relations), Paul understands the self as radically reconstituted *in sequence*, from one self to another. 'Through the Law, I have died to the Law, that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me, and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me' (Gal 2.19-20). The relational datives ('to the Law', 'to God'), the inter-subjectivity ('with Christ'), and the reconstitution of the self ('it is

[5] See above, n. 2 for some relevant Pauline scholarship on this matter.

no longer I who live' … 'the life I now live') all indicate a profound and comprehensive alteration of identity, such that the 'self after' is not the same as the 'self before' but is redefined in relation to Christ.

Thus, theologically, I would prefer to speak of participation in Christ not with reference to the 'nature' or 'substance' of Christ, but with reference to Christ's person, which is a being-in-relation.[6] While Paul does not develop this in fully trinitarian terms, what it means for a believer to be a child of God is to address God, in the Spirit of the Son, as 'Abba, Father' (Gal 4.6) – that is, to share the 'being' of the Son as being-in-relation to the Father. In these terms, I am happy to follow Macaskill when he speaks of the 'correspondence' or 'affinity' between the Son and the 'sons' (cf. Barth's *analogia relationis*). This is perhaps most clearly expressed when Paul says: 'you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that because he was rich, for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich' (2 Cor 8.9; my translation). As the context makes clear (2 Cor 8.2; 9.11), the 'richness' of Christ consists in his total commitment to others (a relation, not a nature; a being-to-others, not a 'thing' he possesses); he is rich in the self-diffusing love of God. Through sharing the human condition, and through remaking the relationship of humanity to God, Christ enables humanity to share in his richness, that is, to be conformed to his pattern of life-in-relation, in love to God and to others (cf. Rom 15.2-3). Through this 'double participation' (Eastman) – Christ participating in our condition such that we participate in his – far-reaching analogies (with differences) can be traced between Christ and the reconstituted self in Christ.

[6] See John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and Church* (New York; St Vladimir's Press, 1985), sympathetically received by, for instance, Alan J. Torrance, *Persons in Communion: An Essay on Trinitarian Description and Human Participation* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996).

Macaskill is right that I might have said more about the Spirit in connection with this participation in the life of God, since the Spirit is the mode in which this new relationality (to God and to one another) is actualised. And one could and should say more about the 'oneness' or 'solidarity' that results. Since that solidarity is a dynamic relation, active in gift-exchange, there remain distinctions between the various members of the 'one body', but what it overcomes is the separation and inherently agonistic relationship between one person and another. And this solidarity, as Macaskill hints, it not just an adjunct to salvation, but its goal. Since the purpose of the Christ-event is to reconcile the world to God (Rom 5.10-11; 11.15; 2 Cor 5.18-19; cf. Col 1.19-20; Eph 2.11-21), oneness with one another and with God through Christ is not a means to another end, but is itself the *telos* of the good news.

Dorothee Bertschmann has provided a profound reflection on Romans 9-11, the text that is discussed last in *Paul and the Gift* and constitutes its climax. Since we agree on so much in our reading of this text, and since Bertschmann has taken such care to understand and represent my argument, I am especially grateful for what she here offers by way of correction. In her exposition, she rightly lays stress on God's self-invested faithfulness in love to the specific people of Israel, a 'divine self-involvement' that 'cannot lose the erstwhile object of its love without damage to itself' (Bertschmann). Hence her arresting depiction of God's mercy in Romans 9-11 as 'God's grace with a memory'. Bertschmann thus insists that the ethnically specific people of Israel is 'abidingly unique', and asks whether my reading of the incongruity of grace in these chapters has emptied Israel's covenant symbols of significance and wrongly disregarded Israelite ethnicity as a form of lasting 'symbolic capital'. She therefore wonders if Israel's irrevocably special ethnicity

constitutes a 'subtext' in Paul's argument that is 'even more fundamental than the master key or "mechanism" of incongruous grace', even if this creates a 'tension' that 'Paul cannot quite dissolve'.

Bertschmann's argument has considerable support from the text. God's faithfulness to Israel is highlighted by Paul early in the letter to the Romans (3.3), and is reflected in the climactic statement in 15.8 that *Christos* (here with Messianic meaning) became a 'servant to the circumcision for the sake of the truthfulness (i.e. fidelity) of God, to confirm the promises to the fathers' (cf. 11.28). There is a peculiar *asymmetry* between Jews and Gentiles built into the repeated stress on their *symmetry* ('to both the Jew – first – and the Greek,' Rom 1.16; 2.9-10). That 'first' seems to be more than merely chronological, since the 'olive tree' of Rom 11.17-24 to which all need to be grafted is described as Israel's *own* (*idia*, 11.24) to which Israel belongs 'naturally' (*kata physin*, 11.21, 24), as opposed to the 'unnatural' (*kata physin*) status of the Gentiles (11.24). While I made gestures in the direction of Bertschmann's case,[7] I recognise now that some of my statements not only underplayed what was crucial to Paul, but threatened to undermine it.[8]

Paul insists that God has not rejected 'his people' (Rom 11.1-2). That he offers himself as an example, as an 'Israelite of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin' (11.1) indicates that there is something unique and distinctive about this ethnic particularity, and that Paul is right to grieve, and hope, on behalf of his 'kinsmen according to the flesh' (9.3). There are, indeed, promises of God specific to this people, promises to which God is irrevocably bound (11.29). But what constitutes Israel as 'God's people'? Why

[7] E.g. on Gentiles being drawn into a 'distinctively Israelite privilege' (*Paul and the Gift*, 557).
[8] Statements concerning the 'discounting' of every form of pre-existing symbolic capital (*Paul and the Gift*, 539, 541) clearly need to be nuanced in relation to Israel, as does the bold statement that Israel is 'no longer unique' (521, 553-4).

are they not just 'children of the flesh' but 'children of promise', indeed 'children of God' (9.8)? Is their specialness *grounded* in their ethnicity, which God then chooses to love? Or is their ethnic distinction itself the *product* of God's unconditioned love? In the latter case (which I prefer), God's 'self-involving' love for Israel is *self-grounded*, founded not on something inherent in Israel as an ethnic group, but on God's own love alone.

As I see it, there are three options for a reading of Romans 9-11 that takes in both its beginning and its end. One is to conclude that there is an irreconcilable tension between Paul's statements about Abraham's seed ('not the children of the flesh but the children of the promise', 9.8) and where he ends up, with ethnic particularity, in 11.1-32. A second is to say that Israel is not constituted by ethnicity *alone*, but also by the elective grace of God, so that ethnicity for Israel (but not for Gentiles) is co-constitutive of its special status. But a third (to which I incline) is to regard Israel's ethnic particularity as the *product* of God's unconditioned grace: the specialness of ethnic descent within Israel is not more foundational than that grace, nor on the same level with it, but is the unique form that God's incongruous mercy took *for that particular people*. In this sense, there remains an asymmetry between Israel and the Gentiles, but not a fundamental tension in Paul's thought, because the particularity of Israel is *generated* by God's incongruous grace. Hence, the salvation of 'all Israel' (in its specific, ethnic sense) will be ultimately *on the same ground* as the salvation of all the world. If Gentiles also can become 'my people', as Paul uses Hosea to suggest (Rom 9.24-26), this is on the basis of the love of God. And that, as Bertschmann notes (with reference to Deut 8.17-18 and 9.4-6), was the only reason for the election of the patriarchs and of the resulting (ethnically particular) people of Israel.

God did not create Israel and then fall in love with it: he loved Israel into being. Israel, for Paul, has no independent, self-standing position outside of that elective love.

Space-constraints forbid exploring whether or to what degree the same might apply to the body, humanity, and the creation, to which Bertschmann refers at the end of her article. But perhaps one may say something similar there (without losing the specificity of Israel). Is all creation loved into being, loved not because it was created, but created because it was loved? And is it because it is God's world in this special sense, grounded in the love that gave it existence, that it awaits its reconstitution 'in hope' (Rom 8.20)?

Jonathan Linebaugh also asks penetrating questions about the incongruity of grace, from a Lutheran angle. (I shall comment below on the Catholic-Protestant dimensions of the dialogue represented in these articles.) His questions focus on two related issues, the role of the law and the 'rhyme' between creation and new creation. I shall respond to each in turn.

As Linebaugh indicates, 'it is one thing to say that a gift ignores or is given irrespective of worth; it is quite another to say that a gift is given precisely to the unworthy'. In my reading of Galatians, I take 'the works of the Law' as the practice of Torah-observance that might be considered Jewish, differential worth, and I thus focused mainly on the gift given irrespective of worth. Galatians notably discounts circumcision as a matter of genuine worth (Gal 5.6; 6.15), and I took (and still take) the thrust of the letter as undercutting pre-existing criteria of worth. But I recognise that even in this letter it is suggested that no criteria of worth other than the worth given in Christ could possibly stand, because the human condition in general is vitiated by sin. That seems to be implied at the end of Gal 2.16 ('because no-one will be justified by works of the Law'), by the implied premise of Gal 3.10 (that no-one keeps to everything written in the book of the Law) and, most explicitly, in Gal 3.22 ('Scripture has confined all things under sin'). In Romans, 'Scripture' in this sense is

glossed as 'Law', and its role includes bringing knowledge of sin (Rom 3.20) and even exacerbating sin (Rom 5.20), while being powerless to counter it (Rom 7.7-25). In other words, Romans is clear on what Linebaugh underlines, that, besides Christ, other forms of worth not only *do not* count but *cannot count*, because at best they only paper over the problem of human weakness and sin.

Paul's use of the term *nomos* is, as we know, extremely complex. LInebaugh's acute observations might suggest (in my terms, not his) that Paul uses this word sometimes to mean what we might call a cultural product (the ancestral traditions that require one to live 'Jewishly' in such matters as circumcision), and sometimes to refer to the divine law, the standard of righteousness by which all humanity is judged. (This hardly solves all the problems in Paul's use of *nomos*, but it would run parallel to the distinction in antiquity between civic laws and natural law.[9]) Because of this distinction Paul can say that circumcision and uncircumcision count for nothing, but 'keeping the commandments of God' (1 Cor 7.19). He can also declare himself able to live without the Law (*anomos*, in the sense of un-Jewishly), but not without law in relation to God (1 Cor 9.20-21). As an absolute standard, the law shows up all as without worth. As a relative, cultural marker of distinction, even if one has worth by its standard (e.g., 'blameless in regard to the Law', Phil 3.6), this does not count before God, because the only true worth is given in the gift of Christ (Phil 3.9-10). In both respects the gift of Christ is incongruous, unfitting, and therefore radically liberating; but it is incongruous, as Linebaugh indicates, in different ways.

Concerning creation and new creation, there are good grounds for finding what Linebaugh labels a 'rhyme' between creation *ex nihilo*, the resurrection of the dead, and the

[9] See, for recent discussion, Christine Hayes, *What's Divine about Divine Law?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017).

justification of the ungodly. As well as the texts in Romans 4 to which he points (Rom 4.5, 17), one could add the description of the Corinthians' calling as the 'calling into being' of what does not exist (1 Cor 1.26-28) and the parallel (or is it more?) between the creation of light and the shining 'in our hearts of the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ' (2 Cor 4.6). Paul never has occasion to develop a theology of creation, but what he does say about it suggests that he would interpret it as a divine gift (for the textual evidence, see my response to Kilby, below). But if creation (including ourselves) is a gift, indeed a gift *ex nihilo*, why does it have to be created again? Linebaugh indicates a significant part of the reason. Sin and death have alienated us (and creation) from God, although they have not wholly cut us off from the purposes of God (who subjected creation to futility *in hope*, Rom 8.20). Thus the old selves that were constituted by turning in on themselves are now recreated (reconstituted) by living for Christ (2 Cor 5.15). This is 'new creation' not as new 'nature' or 'substance', but as a new relation (of receipt, dependence, and being loved) which defines and reconstitutes the self.[10] But the *life-giving* act that joins believers to Christ (Gal 2.20; 3.21; 1 Cor 15.45) is also not just a restoration of the former creation, but constitutes its fulfilment in a new form and at a new 'level', even if that is only partially realised this side of the eschaton.[11] And as Linebaugh rightly insists, because this new relational self is received from God through the Spirit, it does not take effect except in the existential reality of human lives, where it is continually reaffirmed through the medium of word and sacrament.

[10] For this reason, I am disinclined to bring to Pauline anthropology the language of 'nature', either nature perfected or nature destroyed.

[11] I have outlined this pattern in the New Testament as a whole in 'Creation and New Creation in the New Testament' in Simon Oliver (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Creation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

Simeon Zahl adds a new dimension to the discussion by moving beyond the anthropological and sociological dimensions of *Paul and the Gift* towards a 'psychology of grace'. As he says, we need to ask how grace might 'generate distinctive kinds of relatively "immediate", often emotional experiences for Christians', since 'to encounter the incongruous grace of the Christ-gift was not just to discover a revolutionary new set of values. It also *felt like something*' (italics his). I welcome very much this desire to press our enquiry into the embodied, material, and affective dimensions of human experience, and to ask about the immediate and rapid changes in affect that might have accompanied the receipt of the good news.[12]

We have, of course, only literary representations of the emotional atmosphere of early Christianity, and a sceptic might ask how we know what it felt like to experience grace. But the fact that Paul frequently refers to emotions as the accompaniment of Christian belief, and recounts them to his converts as if they are recognisable, suggests that this is a neglected area of research well worth exploring.[13]

Within Galatians, Zahl refers to Paul's appeal, 'Have you experienced so much in vain? (Gal 3.4; 'experienced' is probably the best translation of *epathete*, but 'suffered' is also possible). The context speaks of the Spirit and of the working of 'miracles' (3.5), which certainly sounds both immediate and dramatic. Later, Paul talks in highly affective terms of

[12] Zahl's example of fear resonates with the old line, ''Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears removed'.

[13] This is a burgeoning field of research in scholarship on early Christianity. For emotion in 1 Peter, see Katherine M. Hockey, *The Role of Emotion in 1 Peter* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019); a Durham PhD by Ian Jew, on the emotions in Paul, is awaiting publication. Both draw on cognitive theories of emotion that refuse to compartmentalise 'thought' and 'emotion'.

his relationship with the Galatians when he first preached the good news, their happiness (or blessedness, 4.15), and the warmth of affection between them (4.10-20). Indeed, the description of his message as 'good news' (*euangelion*) implies a positive, affective response. As Zahl notes, within the 'fruit of the Spirit' stands 'joy' (Gal 5.22), and in other letters (notably Philippians) this plays a significant role in the depiction of a Christian disposition.[14] I agree that an account of these rapid and sudden changes could and should complement an analysis of long-term alterations in *habitus*.

As Zahl's work suggests, if people feared the judgment of God in the medieval and early modern period, our contemporaries fear the judgment of each other, which is pitiless. The current crises of self-worth among young people, and the alarming rates of mental ill-health, cry out for a theological 'psychology of grace'. By using the language of 'worth' (and not just of 'works') I have consciously evoked the range of ways in which value is measured and challenged. If the incongruity of grace means that our worth is founded on God's grace, whatever worth we may or may not have in the eyes of our contemporaries, that is good news for a generation riddled with anxiety and overly dependent on the opinion of others. It is clear that forms of Christianity attuned to embodied and emotional experience have enormous appeal in our culture, and we may certainly find inspiration in the New Testament for the development in the church of an 'emotional regime' that is both theologically grounded and subjectively real.[15]

[14] Cf. Paul's striking references to the *splangchna* (the seat of the emotions): Phil 1.8; 2.1; 2 Cor 6.12; 7.15; Phlm 7, 12, 20; Col 3.12.

[15] For the notion of an 'emotional regime', see Ole Riis and Linda Woodhead, *A Sociology of Religious Emotion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

I find **Karen Kilby**'s article enormously illuminating. Her broad but nuanced mapping of the difference between Protestant and Catholic discourse on grace (the two different pairings, and the two forms of resulting paradox) makes immediate sense of the differences in pattern that emerge in their respective theologies. I have certainly sensed, for instance, in reading Aquinas on grace, that the frame of the discussion seems different from Protestant treatments, even when the same Pauline texts are cited. That this arises from relating grace primarily to nature, rather than to sin, helps a lot of things to fall into place.

In Paul, as Kilby says, the gift of God in Christ is normally found in antithesis to sin and death: that is clearly so in Rom 3.21-16 and 5.12-21, but also in Paul's treatment of his own story (Gal 1.11-6; 1 Cor 15.9-10). Reconstitution by grace follows the pattern of life from death (Gal 2.20-21) or at least power from weakness (2 Cor 12.9). At the same time, Paul also describes the created world using some of the language or conceptuality of gift. In Romans he indicts humanity for failing to recognize God's power and divinity in the things God has made, and for refusing to glorify or give thanks to God (Rom 1.18-23; one gives thanks for a gift). 'From him and through him and to him are all things' (Rom 11.36). All that we have may be treated as gift: for 'what do you have that you did not receive?' (1 Cor 4.7; cf. 1 Cor 10.30). God provides seed for the sower and food for eating (2 Cor 9.10), and the diversity of forms of life with their various kinds of 'glory' are all traced to the creative agency of God (1 Cor 15.36-41). God *gives* to each kind of seed its own form of body (1 Cor 15.38), just as God has arranged the various limbs in the human body (1 Cor 12.18, 24). Paul rarely uses the term 'nature' (*physis*; e.g., Rom 1.26-28; 2.14; 11.24; Gal 2.15), and where he does his meaning is not always clear or consistent (e.g., 1 Cor 11.14). But the 'created order' has not been wholly eclipsed for Paul by the Christ-event.

In fact, there are hints in the undisputed letters that there is a close connection between salvation and creation (Rom 8.18-25) as between Christ and creation (1 Cor 8.6; 10.26), a connection developed in the Colossian 'hymn' (Col 1.15-20). But what is their relation? Creation is currently vitiated by sin, but the resurrection brings something more than merely the repetition or restoration of the *status quo ante*. Although sin made death inevitable, the creation itself, it seems, was intrinsically capable of death. But the resurrection inaugurates a form of life beyond the possibility of decay and death. In this sense, Paul envisages a trajectory for creation, something 'beyond' creation that is at the same time where creation finds fulfilment and the perfection to which it is oriented. Although Paul does not use the language of 'nature' and 'grace' in this connection, something of that 'Catholic' pattern of thought, and its associated paradox, seems to be present in Pauline reflections on creation, Christ, and eschatology.

But in the main, as Kilby suggests, Paul's language of gift and grace seems especially germane to the grace-sin pairing, and has been taken up most fully in this form within the (Augustinian and) Protestant tradition. (I am grateful for her absolution, on these grounds, for the largely Protestant roll-call of interpreters in *Paul and the Gift*!) But Paul, as she reminds us, is not the whole of the Bible. The specific, antithetical contours of his theology have their place in the tradition, and are importantly activated in certain times and contexts. But, seen in a theological and therefore canonical context, one might suggest that Protestantism has been unduly Paul-centric, and sometimes practically mono-Pauline.

Where might one go, in the New Testament, for a theology of gift/grace associated both with creation and with redemption, and where salvation is figured both as the overcoming of sin and as the fulfilment of creation? John's Gospel would be my choice for that, with its creation-based prologue, its rich vocabulary of gift (though in terms other than

charis), its incarnational Christology, and its profound reflections on 'life' in both 'natural' and resurrection forms. But that would require another book – perhaps *John and the Gift* …?!

Paul Murray offers a characteristically generous reading of my work, and in engaging the different strengths of Protestant and Catholic readings of grace exemplifies the virtues of his trademark receptive ecumenism. This journal issue, in fact, demonstrates well that form of ecumenism, with the different traditions able to draw on their respective strengths deeply but not uncritically, and open to learn what might be gained from others.

It is fascinating to watch this ecumenical dynamic at work in the reading of Paul.[16] The instinct of these theologically informed scholars is to read the Scriptural texts with the aid of the theological traditions that have emerged out of them, and this seems to me entirely justified and historically appropriate. While close attention to the literary and rhetorical features of the texts is essential, and while historical knowledge of their original social and cultural contexts is of enormous value, a good reading, to my mind, stretches beyond these desiderata, and includes both informed interaction with their history of interpretation and responsibility to our contemporary context. In the case of Paul, this last is especially apposite, since Paul's theology was born *in and for mission*. A *missionary* theology that announces and explains the good news has to make itself contextually clear in a way that is answerable both to the text of Scripture and to what can be heard as life-giving news today. For this reason, helping one another to read Paul better is not about striving

[16] Readings of Paul matter more to me than readings of *Paul and the Gift*, which is viewed by some as Lutheran (or at least Protestant), and by others as nearly Catholic (or at least not as Protestant as one might expect)! One might (correctly) deduce that I must be an Anglican!

towards some single, universal, and 'correct' interpretation, but listening intensely to the text, in openness to mutual correction, while conscious of our concern to let this text speak again, in fresh and compelling ways, in our context and time.

Murray draws out expertly the differences in tenor between Protestant and Catholic discourse on grace and his deeply informed reading of Aquinas adds significantly to the discussion. To my mind, the 'Catholic' emphasis on transformation, on settled dispositions, and on the remoulding of the will, desires, and affections into patterns of action captures something significant in Paul – something sometimes lost in Lutheran concern lest we forget we are sinners and our righteousness never properly our own. But, as Murray indicates, this element of Paul's theology is better grasped through his discourse on Spirit than his discourse on grace, and while the two are related they are not entirely the same.[17] Although some Pauline texts (e.g., 1 Cor 15.10; 2 Cor 12.9-10) might seem to justify the notion of grace as a substance operative in a believer, what Paul typically means by grace is not a substance but a relation – a relation of divine favour into which believers are brought to stand (or from which they may fall). Once grace is taken to be 'infused', it threatens to become a property, and a property of ours, even if originating from God. But if transformation or renewal are a function of the Spirit (as in Gal 5.22-25), it is evident that this cannot be something handed over to us, even though it is effective in our own acts, desires, and habits. For this reason, while I draw (from Bourdieu) on the anthropological concept of the *habitus*, I am uneasy with the language of 'habitual grace', despite Murray's lucid analysis of what Aquinas did – and did not- mean by the term. What should become habitual are settled patterns of relationship, and first and foremost a settled habit of

[17] See further my essay, 'A Thomist Reading of Paul? Response and Reflections', *Nova et Vetera* 17 (2019), pp. 235-44.

absolute dependence on God. This alters our state of 'being' in a relational sense (adopting here again a relational ontology). Where this transformation takes effect in the long-term formation of virtue and character, that is because these are shaped within the ongoing and never-ceasing immediacy of dependence on the presence and power of the Spirit. In this sense, the priority of God is not only temporal, causal, and transcendent; it is also immanent, such that the very self of the believer is constituted only *in relation* to God in the Spirit. As in a marriage (to use a Pauline analogy; see Rom 7.1-6), who we are and how we behave is formed through relationship: it is because we belong to another (a relational dative) in the 'newness of the Spirit' that we bear fruit for God (Rom 7.4-6).

As Murray indicates with great clarity and moving prose, prayer is a key practice in this dynamic relationality (in Murray's words, an 'exercise in attunement'). It is in prayer (addressing God as 'Abba') that believers recognise and repeat, in the Spirit, who they are – children of God, whose identity and existence in Christ depends on God's gracious adoption (Gal 4.4-6). It is also in prayer that we recognise our frailties, and our dependence on the Spirit to intercede at the limits of our knowledge (Rom 8.26). Paul's prayers and thanksgivings, which he describes in his letters, express this sense of immediate dependence on the active involvement of God, both in his own life and in the moral development of his converts. Time and again, in commending the agency of his converts he draws attention, gratefully, to the agency of God (e.g., 2 Cor 8.1, 16). The two agencies are not, of course, played off against each other (here I have indeed learned much from Tanner and Aquinas), but God is involved in every decision, desire, and act of the believer, whose existence is in this sense 'ex-centric', relationally determined in every respect and in every moment by its life in Christ.

Perhaps one of the key contributions of the church is to reinforce and make habitual these patterns of speech, particularly but not only in prayer. In doing so, it creates an openness to see, and to receive, on a dynamic, every-moment basis, the agency of God in the world, in the church, and in the lives of each believer. In *Paul and the Gift* I explored the socially creative effects of grace in the Pauline mission and in the church. Perhaps it is at such at time as ours – a time of rapid change and acute crisis – that we need to trace again the freedom of God's grace to act in our present in newly transformative ways.

Let me close by reiterating my profound gratitude to all these contributors and especially to Paul Murray, who suggested and organised the symposium, from which these articles derive. I have the sense of doors opened rather than closed, of theological conversations around grace that promise more for the future. If *Paul and the Gift* has been a stimulus for that beginning, I am glad. But now the subject itself should take its rightful, central place.