

The Idea of Grace in Christianity and Hinduism

MATHEW P. JOHN

Some have seen in grace an idea that marks Christianity off from other religions.¹ The idea is, however, by no means confined to Christianity. The Amitābha sect of Mahāyāna Buddhism has a very highly developed doctrine of grace.² Grace is a central concept also in certain forms of Hinduism. The purpose of this short paper is (i) to show that the idea of grace is present as an integral part of certain religious movements in Hinduism, (ii) to discuss briefly its meaning in its context and (iii) to compare and contrast this concept with that in the New Testament.

The Presence of the Idea of Grace in Hinduism

The history of Hinduism is long. The forms of cult, thought and practice that have arisen within Hinduism in the course of its long history, and which co-exist within it even today, are bewilderingly varied. Almost any level and form of religious manifestation, ranging from forms of animism to highly complex and subtle philosophic mysticism, can be found in it. The beginnings of Hinduism are usually traced to the migration of the Aryan (Indo-European) tribes into India, probably in the earlier half of the second millennium B.C. Archaeological evidence has established the existence of a highly developed urban culture in India before the coming of the Aryans³ and it is to be expected that the religion of the pre-Aryan inhabitants played a significant part in the development of the Aryan religion into Hinduism. The place that *Śiva* occupies in later Hinduism is best explained by the importance of that deity in the religion of the non-Aryan peoples and his identification with *Rudra* of the *Rgveda*.

¹ See E. Brunner, *The Word and the World*, New York, 1931, pp. 80 f.

² See Alfred Bloom, *Shinran's Gospel of Pure Grace*, Tucson, 1965. Compare also the Jesuit missionaries' 'discovery' of the 'Lutheran Heresy' in Japan. Rudolf Otto, *India's Religion of Grace and Christianity Compared and Contrasted*, Tr. F. H. Foster, London, 1930, pp. 18-20.

³ See Stuart Piggott, *Prehistoric India*, Penguin Books, 1950.

The *R̥gveda* is the most ancient record of the religion of the Aryan settlers who came and conquered parts of north India. It is a collection of 1,028 hymns, arranged in 10 sections, and the latest date that can be ascribed to it is 1000 B.C.⁴ The religion of the *R̥gveda* has been called nature worship, henotheism and kathenotheism. Different gods are invoked in these hymns, and each is usually invoked as though he were the only, or at least the supreme, god. The only one whose name we need mention here is *Varuṇa* (cf. *Ouranos*), a relatively minor deity if we are to judge his importance by the number of hymns addressed to him. He is the guardian of *ṛta* (law and order), to which even the gods are subject. It is only in the hymns to *Varuṇa* that the confession of sins and prayer for forgiveness occur in the *R̥gveda*. According to Radhakrishnan, 'the theism of the *Vaiṣṇavas* and the *Bhāgavatas*, with its emphasis on *bhakti*, is to be traced to the Vedic worship of *Varuṇa*, with its consciousness of sin and trust in divine forgiveness'.⁵

The historical development of the central stream of Hinduism passed through a period of elaborate ritualism reflected in the books called *Brāhmanas*, and one of speculation as represented in the *Upaniṣadas*. After these stages the various schools of philosophy (*darsanas*) developed, along with theistic forms of religion centred round the worship of the deities, *Viṣṇu* and *Śiva*. This can be seen in the great epics, *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*, which are to be dated, according to Radhakrishnan, between 600 B.C. and A.D. 200.⁶

The concept of grace is clearly seen in the philosophical thought associated with the name of Rāmānuja and the southern sects of Vaisnavism and Saivism. Rāmānuja, whose dates are usually given as 1017–1127, was a Vaisnavite and on the philosophical side his great effort was to uphold the idea of a personal deity who can be worshipped as the ultimate reality in the context of *advaita* philosophy against Śaṅkara's emphasis on the sole reality of the ultimate, the quality-less *Brahman*. On the religious side Rāmānuja was a *bhakta*, a devotee who stood in the tradition of passionate and whole-hearted devotion represented on the one hand in the *Bhagavadgītā*, and on the other in the Tamil poets called Ālvārs, who lived in South India during the centuries immediately before Rāmānuja.⁷

The *Bhagavadgītā* is formally a part of the epic *Mahābhārata*, and takes the form of a reported conversation between Kṛṣṇa (the *avatār* of *Viṣṇu*) and Arjuna, one of the leaders of the Pāṇḍava side in the great Battle of Kurukṣetra. As this is a war to

⁴ G. F. Moore, *History of Religions*, 2 Vols., New York, 1937, I, p. 246. Cf. A. C. Bouquet, *Hinduism*, London, 1948, p. 24.

⁵ S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, 2 Vols., New York, 1922, I, p. 78.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ See J. S. M. Hooper, *Hymns of the Ālvārs*, Heritage of India Series, Calcutta, 1929.

determine succession to the throne, people on both sides of the battle are relatives and friends ; and Arjuna, when faced with the prospect of fighting and killing fathers, uncles, teachers and brothers, for whose sake alone the gaining of the kingdom would be worth while, refuses to fight. Kṛṣṇā, who acts as Arjuna's charioteer for the battle, engages in discourse with him, taking him through various steps to the true life of man and in the process reveals to him (Arjuna) his (Kṛṣṇa's) own true nature as the supreme being. The *Gītā* is an irenic book that tries to reconcile and hold together many religious attitudes and philosophies current at that time, but puts devotion to God as the highest way. This is the book to which Hindus have most often turned for devotional reading, comfort and edification, and many of the leaders of modern India, like Gandhi, Vinoba Bhave, Radhakrishnan and Rajagopalachari, have written books expounding the *Gītā* as the basis of religious and practical life.

A few lines from the 18th (the last) chapter of the *Gītā* are given below as showing the emphasis on *bhakti* and grace :

To love me is to know me
 My innermost nature
 The truth that I am :
 Through this knowledge he enters
 At once to my being.

All that he does
 Is offered before me
 In utter surrender.
 My grace is upon him.
 He finds the eternal
 The place unchanging.

* * *

United with me
 You shall overcome all difficulties by my grace.

* * *

Give me your whole heart,
 Love and adore me,
 Worship me always,
 Bow to me only,
 And you shall find me :
 This is my promise
 Who loves you dearly.

Lay down all duties
 In me, your refuge.
 Fear no longer
 For I will save you
 From sin and from bondage.⁸

⁸ Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood, *Bhagavadgītā*, Mentor Religious Classic, New York, 1954, pp. 128-29.

The *Gītā* is susceptible of differing interpretations. The same passages have been expounded to provide differing results by Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja. But the most natural understanding of passages like the one quoted above would tend to be in the atmosphere of devotion to a personal God, worthy of worship. The last five lines given above, which is the last doctrinal utterance of Kṛṣṇa in the *Gītā* and, therefore, called *carama śloka*, were held by Rāmānuja in great respect. It formed one of the three great and mysterious utterances which embodied the essentials of his religion.

The dates of the Ālvārs according to some traditions are placed far back in the pre-Christian era. A dating between A.D. 650 and 1000 would be a more realistic one.⁹ There are 12 Ālvārs whose writings have become 'canonical' for southern Vaiṣṇavism, and have been collected in *Nālāyira Prabandham* (literally, the Collection of Four Thousand). These poems, of varying length, are in Tamil, the ancient language of South India, and not in Sanskrit, the language of the *Vedas*, *Upaniṣads* and the *Gītā*. They are referred to as the Tamil Veda, and in southern Vaiṣṇavism occupy a place of authority equal, if not superior, to the *Vedas*.¹⁰

The 12 Ālvārs include one woman, Āṅḍāl, and Kulaśekhara Perumā who was king of one of the western coastal kingdoms of South India. Along with the traditional forms of approach to God, some of these poems express their love and devotion in terms of a woman seeking her lover or of a mother tending and enjoying her child (the infant Kṛṣṇa). The brief extracts below do not reveal all the wealth of devotion and the richness and beauty of the Tamil poetry, but these are a few lines from the poems where the idea of grace is clearly expressed :

Surrounded by wide lands which fishes see,
Vitruvakodu's Lord, [Viṣṇu as represented in the temple at
Vitruvakodu]

E'en if Thou wilt not look
On me, I have no other hold but Thee—
Like subjects looking to the rod of the wreathed king,
Though he regards them not and works deeds harrowing.

Though by illusion from Thee woe I have
Without a remedy,
Vitruvakodu's Lord,
At Thy grace only will I look, Thy slave,
Like a sick man, who, though physician cut with knife
And brand, yet loves him with a love as long as life.

Slayer of elephant great and fierce of eye
Vitruvakodu's Lord,
Where shall I go and live ?

⁹ Hooper, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

Save for Thy feet, like a great bird am I
Which goes round and sees no shore and comes at last
Back o'er the tossing sea and perches on ship's mast!

* * *

With gathered waters all the streams ashine
Must spread abroad and run
And enter the deep sea
And cannot stand outside. So refuge mine,
Save in the shining bliss of entering Thee, is none,
Vitruvakodu's Lord, thick-hued, virtuous one!¹¹

The author of the above lines is Kulaśekhara Perumā. A characteristic of Ālvār piety is that it is often directed towards the form of Viṣṇu represented in the image in a particular temple.

The following selection is from Āṇḍal, the only woman among the Ālvārs, and consists of only three stanzas from a poem of 30, in which she speaks as a milkmaid seeking to rouse Kṛṣṇa from his sleep and to gain the gift of a drum from him. The significance of the drum is obscure. J. S. M. Hooper has offered a likely interpretation: 'Possibly the drum is intended to suggest the triumph of acknowledged love; if he gives her a drum, it is so far a sign that he has commissioned her to proclaim his praises.'¹²

After the cows we to jungle go
And eat there—cowherds knowing nought are we,
And yet how great the boon we have, that thou
Wast born among us! Thou who lackest nought,
Govinda, kinship that we have with thee
Here in this place can never cease!—If through
Our love we call thee baby names, in grace
Do not be wroth, for we—like children—we
Know nought—O Lord, wilt thou not grant to us
The drum we ask? Ah, Elorembavay!¹³

Dost ask the boon for which at earliest dawn
We come to give obeisance and to praise
Thy golden lotus feet? It is not fit that thou
—Born in the tribe that lives by herding cows—
Withdraw, rejecting us who fain would serve.
To gain the drum, not for today alone
Have we become thy slaves; but Govinda
For aye, for sevenfold births! Only to thee
We'll service give; for us do thou remove
All other loves. Ah, Elorembavay!

To Mathavan who churned the navied deep,
To Keśavan, the moon-faced jewelled maids

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 47–48 (Stanzas 3, 5, 8).

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 49.

¹³ *Elorembavay* is an expression used as a repeated response common in songs of this kind, of uncertain meaning, and left untranslated.

Went and obeisance did, and gained their drum!
 This wreath, these thirty (sung in classic verse
 By Godāi, Pudevai Pattarpīran's
 With cool fresh lotus garlands) they who say
 Unfailing everywhere shall gain from Mal
 (His arms like mountains four, his face kind-eyed,
 And wealthy Lakshmi by him) sacred grace,
 And bliss enjoy! Ah, Elorembavay!¹⁴

The lines refer to the tradition that Kṛṣṇa was brought up among cowherds and that in his youth was a great favourite among the girls of the cowherd tribe. Mathavan and Keśavan are Kṛṣṇa's names and Mal is a name for Viṣṇu. Godāi is another name for Aṅgāl herself and Pudevai Pattarpīran is her father, one of the 12 Ālvārs, also known as Periyālvār.

Nammālvār was the greatest of the Ālvārs and the most prolific writer among those whose poems are included in the *Nālāyira Prabandham*. *Tiruviruttam* (a message to God) is a poem of one hundred stanzas in which the poet assumes the part of a woman temporarily separated from her lover, and gives expression to her love for the absent lord:

Be gracious, Lord of all the heavenly ones,
 Born in all births to save all lives, and hear
 Thy servant's plea. Grant, not again may I
 Such nature win as this—my body foul,
 Wisdom unsound, and character defiled.

* * *

By grace of him who swallowed the broad worlds
 Safety and bliss we've won! Friend, no more fear!
 A cool south wind has come and secretly,
 With honey sweet of *tulasī's* fair bloom,
 Rain-like caressed my limbs and ornaments.

* * *

When shall I join my lord, who poison is
 For evil deeds, and nectar for the good?
 Husband of her who haunts the lotus bloom,
 Cowherd who thought no scorn to graze the cows:
 Who over-paced the world in his two strides!

* * *

Who scan these hundred flowers, the wreath of words,
 The prayer of Maran of famed Kurukur
 Whose wreath's the feet of saints who name Mal's names—
 They in deceptive matter shall not sink
 Thick with the mire of deeds that lead to birth!¹⁵

¹⁴ Hooper, *op. cit.*, pp. 57–58 (Stanzas 28–30).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 61–88 (Stanzas 1, 56, 89, 100).

The first of these stanzas is the opening invocation of the poem, which shares in the desire characteristic of Hinduism in all its forms for escape from the bondage of *saṃsāra*. The reference in 'swallowing the worlds' is to the first of the 10 incarnations of Viṣṇu, the giant fish which swallowed the worlds and kept them safe from the deluge. Viṣṇu's consort Lakshmi was born a lotus and that is the allusion in the next stanza. In the last one, Maran is one of the names of Nammālvār himself, and Kurukur is his birthplace.

Rāmānuja tried to make devotional religion with the idea of a personal god intellectually respectable. Śaṅkara, who lived three centuries earlier, was a devotee, but held that the devotional approach to God and the idea of a god who was approached in worship both belonged to the realm of imperfect knowledge. Perfect knowledge was of the essential oneness of reality and when that was achieved or realized there was no place for the sense of the otherness of God or for worship. Rāmānuja based his philosophical system on the same three authorities as Śaṅkara: *the Upaniṣads*, the *Gītā* and the *Vedānta Sūtrās* of Bādarāyana.

Supreme reality for Rāmānuja is personal; Īśvara and Brahman are not separate as they are in Śaṅkara's thought. The souls and the world are distinct from but not independent of God and are related to him as the body to the soul, the controlled to the controller. The supreme reality indwells everything as the *antaryāmin*.

Traditional Hinduism speaks of three ways to *mokṣa* (release or salvation): the way of works, the way of knowledge and the way of devotion. In Śaṅkara, the way of knowledge is supreme and the other two become preliminaries. For Rāmānuja, *bhakti* (devotion) is supreme and the others become preliminaries. By *bhakti* he means the 'steady remembrance' of God.¹⁶

Bhakti, as Rāmānuja understands it, with its preliminaries of *karma* (action or works) and *jñāna* (knowledge) which involve the fulfilment of the obligations according to the scriptures and the disciplined study of the scriptures which is open only to the higher castes, is a difficult and arduous path. It is possible only for the select. But he thinks of *prapatti* (the way of self-surrender) as being open to all:

Over and above the ways of *jñāna*, *karma* and *bhakti*, Rāmānuja envisages a very simple way of reaching the Lord, the way of unqualified and absolute self-surrender known as *prapatti*. It is also called *śaraṅāgati*.¹⁷

¹⁶ M. Yamunacharya, *Rāmānuja's Teachings in His Own Words*, Bhavan's Book University, Bombay, 1963, p. 114.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

The way of *śaraṇāgati* is that of resignation :

It is an attitude which enables the individual soul to discover that God is the ultimate end of realization and that the means to that realization also lies through God.¹⁸

The idea of God as redeemer or saviour, *rakṣaka*, is important in Rāmānuja's thought :

(He) is the redeemer of souls, who descends to the earth for the purpose of redemption . . . The faith in the redemptive character of the redeemer (*rakṣiṣyati viśvāsaḥ*) is considered to be an important element in the context of surrender of the self to God (*prapatti*). This kind of relationship between God and the individual souls is known as *rakṣya-rakṣaka sambandha*. The Lord is the *rakṣaka* and the individual soul is the *rakṣya*. According to this concept God is the guardian or the redeemer or saviour of souls. In the very first prayer-poem with which Rāmānuja commences his commentary on the *Brahma Sūtras*, he refers to God's promise of redemption of souls (*rakṣaika dīkṣe*). Soul-making or moulding of souls is thus looked upon as the very purpose of the world process.¹⁹

As redeemer, God is accessible and gracious. Rāmānuja uses the words *saulahya* and *sauṣilya* for these qualities of God.²⁰

The individual's liberation is due to the unmerited or uncaused grace (*nirhetuka kripā*) of God.²¹ Yamunacharya translates *nirhetuka kripā* as 'the spontaneous and irresistible grace of God',²² but 'uncaused' or 'unmerited' would be a more accurate translation of the word *nirhetuka*. In the *Śaraṇāgati Gadya*, one of the prose works of Rāmānuja, he makes this statement about the spontaneous and unmerited grace of God. God is the speaker : 'Having through my grace alone fully overcome, with its causes, the obstacles to the attainment of high devotion thou shalt become my eternal servant.'²³

On the matter of the responsibility of the human self in the attainment of *mokṣa* Rāmānuja does not give a clear and consistent answer. In the more philosophical *Śrībhāṣya* which is a commentary on the *Vedānta Sūtrās*, Rāmānuja considers that some effort is necessary on the part of the soul to evoke divine grace.

¹⁸ Krishna Datta Bharadwaj, *The Philosophy of Ramanuja*, New Delhi, 1958, p. 201.

¹⁹ Yamunacharya, *op. cit.*, pp. 89-90.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

In the more devotional works, the *Gadya Traya* and the commentary on the *Gitā*, the idea of *prapatti* is so emphasized as to make all human effort unnecessary.²⁴

This ambiguity led to a split among Rāmānuja's followers. One section with Vedānta Desika as their best-known leader asserted the need of some human effort and used the illustration of the young one of the monkey clinging to its mother while the mother carries it to safety. They are called the northern school, and Otto uses the term synergist for them.²⁵ The other school, under the leadership of Pillai Lokāchārya, asserted the unqualified superiority and the sole efficacy of divine grace. They used the example of the mother cat carrying its kitten by its mouth, without any co-operation from the young one. They pushed their doctrine even further to the idea that God is *doṣabhogya* (literally, enjoyer of evil), because in loving the sinner he loves the sin, too.²⁶

The Vaiṣṇava tradition spread in other parts of India also, producing a large number of devotional poets in the Maratha country in western India,²⁷ and a whole new revival movement under Śrī-Chaitanya in north-east India.

The origins of Śaivism are difficult to trace. There seems to be a significant mingling of pre-Aryan and Aryan religions in the worship of Śiva. What is clear is that a theistic form of religion continued in South India, worshipping the God Śiva. Even the great Śaṅkara was a devotee of Śiva. Like southern Vaiṣṇavism, southern Śaivism also has its own special scriptures in Tamil. Its philosophy is contained in *Śivajñāna Bodham*, 40 lines of Tamil poetry, elaborated in later commentaries. It asserts three realities: *Pati* (the Lord), *paśu* (the soul) and *pāśa* (the bond). Its religious spirit is seen in the songs of the Śaivite poets, the greatest of whom is Mānikka Vāchakar.²⁸

Grace and love are attributed to God, as of necessity. They belong to the definition of God's nature. *Śivajñāna Siddhiyār*, an early commentary on the *Śivajñāna Bodham*, speaks of God's grace:

His form is Grace ; His attributes are Grace ;
His action is Grace ; His limbs are Grace ;
The universe and objects of enjoyment are Grace ;
And all this only for the sake of souls, though
He Himself is beyond comprehension.²⁹

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

²⁵ Otto, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

²⁶ S. Kulandran, *Grace in Christianity and Hinduism*, London, 1964, p. 177.

²⁷ See R. D. Ranade, *Pathway to God in Marathi Literature*, Bhavan's Book University, Bombay, 1961, and Nicol Macnicol, *Psalms of Maratha Saints*, The Heritage of India Series, Calcutta, 1919.

²⁸ See John H. Piet, *Saiva Siddhanta Philosophy*, Indian Research Series—VIII, Madras, 1952, and V. A. Devasenapathy, *Of Human Bondage and Divine Grace*, Annamalai, India, 1963.

²⁹ Quoted by Devasenapathy, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

Tirumūlar, one of the Saivite poets, identifies God with love :

Love and Śiva are different, say the ignorant
Love is Śiva, no one realizes this
Love is Śiva—when they realize this
In Love they abide—as Śiva.⁵⁰

Expositions of Śaivism often have close similarities to Christian statements on the human condition and the divine action.

The title of one of Dr. Devasenapathy's lectures, 'Of Human Bondage and Divine Grace', from which the two above quotations are taken, is evidence of this. In this lecture he summarizes the Śaivite conception of grace as follows :

The Siddhāntin (the follower of Śaiva Siddhānta) is emphatic . . . that the bondage can be overcome *only* by the grace of the Lord. Even as a mother plunges into the water to rescue her child which has fallen into it, His grace operates to provide the soul with a body and a world in which it lives, in order to help the soul to overcome bondage. Like the sun which dispels physical darkness, the Lord, by His grace, subdues spiritual darkness. The Lord and His grace are inseparable.⁵¹

Like the Vaiṣṇavites, the Śaivites also discussed the question of the place of human effort in the process of salvation. After referring to the images of the monkey and the cat, familiar in Indian discussions on this subject, Dr. Devasenapathy goes on :

To emphasize the over-all importance of the Lord's grace and the weakness of the human will, even such a renowned ascetic as Saint Pattinattār sings : 'I am not like the young one of the monkey. I cannot help my weakness. It is my Lord who must remove this evil from me and "out of compassion" treat me as a cat does its kitten.' But the soul, sooner or later, has to show willingness to receive grace. The Lord is ready to bestow grace but He does not force it on the soul. He awaits its willingness. The theistic position is neatly summed up in Saint Augustine's remark, 'Without God, we *cannot* ; and without us, God *will not*.'⁵²

When a Śaivite quotes Augustine to interpret the Śaivite position, a recognition of basic similarity in the understanding of grace may be assumed. Śaivism in South India certainly exalts grace. One of the most popular legends about Śiva is that which explains the origin of his name Nīlakaṇṭha (blue-throated). The gods were churning the sea of milk in search of the divine nectar of immortality. After various desirable things came up, a mass of poison came up threatening the whole universe including the

⁵⁰ Quoted by Devasenapathy, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 87 (author's italics).

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 87-88 (author's italics).

gods; the demons and men. The gods called upon Śiva in their peril and he came, drank the poison himself, since no other place could be found where it would be harmless, and thus delivered them all. His throat was stained blue because of the poison. As Kingsbury and Phillips point out, 'there is a link here, small but real, with the Christian teaching of God as ready to suffer for the sake of humbler beings.'³³

It can hardly be denied that the idea of grace is clearly present in the forms of Hinduism mentioned above. The recognition of the inadequacy of human efforts to gain the goal of life and the sole efficacy of the divine goodwill is clearly seen in the songs and ideas of the Vaiṣṇavites and the Śaivites.

The Meaning of Grace in Hinduism

There have been suggestions that the *bhakti* cult in India derives much of its distinctive character from Christianity and this is sometimes given as the explanation of the fact that *bhakti* movements flourished first in the South where there was a Christian Church from very early times, rather than in the North.³⁴ This has been strongly opposed by Hindu scholars. P. N. Srinivasachari, in what is the standard work on Rāmānuja's philosophy in English, argues that *prapatti* is not an alien graft on *Vedānta*.³⁵ The ideas of *bhakti* and *prapatti* as they appear in Rāmānuja and the other theistic writers are best understood as natural developments within Hinduism.

Pattinattār prays for forgiveness for sins of words and sins of thought, for sins of act and sight, and for questions against the scriptures.³⁶ Tukārām speaks of himself as a fish out of water, grasping and writhing, and as a lost child yearning for its mother and pleading for mercy.³⁷ God is seen as willing and able to forgive. For understanding the meaning of *prapatti* or *śaraṇāgati* it is best to listen to a Hindu scholar:

(*Prapatti*) is thus a direct and independent (*advāraka*) means to *mokṣa*. The only requisite for *prapatti* is the change of heart or contrition on the part of the *mumukṣu* (the one who desires *mokṣa*) and his absolute confidence in the saving grace of the *rakṣaka* (saviour). It is not the possession of merit that is the operative cause of grace or *dayā*, but the sense of one's unworthiness and the sinfulness of sin. The Lord is the only way and goal to the *mumukṣu*

³³ F. Kingsbury and G. E. Phillips, *Hymns of the Tamil Saivite Saints*, The Heritage of India Series, Calcutta, 1921, p. 8.

³⁴ See Nicol Macnicol, *Indian Theism, The Religious Quest of India*, London, 1915, Appendix C (pp. 272-81).

³⁵ P. N. Srinivasachari, *The Philosophy of Viśiṣṭādvaita*, Adyar, Madras, 1946, p. 382 ff.

³⁶ See A. J. Appasamy, *Temple Bells*, Calcutta, Y.M.C.A. Publishing House, no date, p. 54.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

and *prapatti* is the act of self-surrender to His grace. It is not a juristic conception of debit and credit account between the *jīva* (soul) as the doer of *karma* and *Īvara* as the giver of boons, nor is it an undeserved favour of the Lord. It implies an intimate relation between the self-gift of the *mumukṣu* and the flow of divine mercy of *dayā*. Redemption is a justification by faith or *mahāviśvāsa*, and not by works, and it is not won by merit as the result of a continuous process. It is the essence of the religion of *prapatti* that the Lord of grace seeks the *prapaṇṇa* (the one who surrenders) and draws him to Himself.³⁸

It is obvious that a devout follower of Rāmānuja can use words borrowed from the Pauline tradition without embarrassment. The ideas are not foreign to him. It is almost certain that expressions like 'justification by faith' represent a conscious borrowing from the Christian tradition; but the essence of the statement is entirely Hindu and the ideas of divine freedom and sovereignty, the total absence of merit on the human side, the sense of divine initiative, all are present in the Hindu idea of grace.

In the thought of Rāmānuja and his followers even *prapatti* came to be elaborated into various aspects and stages. *Mahāviśvāsa* (literally, great faith) defined as the absolute and firm faith in the saving grace of God as the universal *rakṣaka* (saviour) is given as one of the six parts of *prapatti*. The seriousness of sin is recognized and the *prapaṇṇa* is seen as the one who is tormented by the sense of guilt. Because 'the sinfulness of sin is too deep for expiation or recompense',³⁹ the way of *prapatti* or *śaranāgati* is given as the only way. Salvation, in the teaching of the southern school as Rāmānuja's followers, is entirely uncaused by human merit. It has its source in the grace of God alone. There is a text, taken from the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, which reads, 'Whom the Self chooses, by him is He attained.'⁴⁰ This is used along with texts from the *Gītā* to prove that salvation is entirely of divine initiative. Uncaused grace, that is grace not caused by human righteousness, is compared to *mulaipal* (mother's breast-milk) while grace that is dependent on human goodness is like *vilaipal* (purchased milk, often diluted and adulterated).⁴¹ The sense of the need of God, and also the corresponding awareness of the self-giving of God, cannot be denied in the experience of these writers.

³⁸ Srinivasachari, *op. cit.*, p. 383.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 391.

⁴⁰ *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, I, ii, 22; see Srinivasachari, *op. cit.*, p. 399. Cf. Rom. 8:29-30.

⁴¹ See Srinivasachari, *op. cit.*, p. 400.

Comparison⁴²

Otto, after writing about India's religion of grace, warned against drawing easy parallels and emphasized the need of noting the differences as well as the similarities.⁴³ With that author, we also can refrain from judging the faith of all non-Christian religious devotees to be 'the creation of human imagination'.⁴⁴ Christian theology still lacks categories for satisfactory understanding and evaluation of other religions. The usual categories of true and false, of divine gift and human effort, of revelation and human speculation are inadequate. Nor can we be entirely satisfied with an attitude of detachment which can study other religions 'scientifically'. A new level of understanding and communication is necessary if we are really to understand the reality behind the words and concepts in other religions. It is in such understanding and communication that the genuine reality of a religious experience and concern can be approached and apprehended.

Each religion exists as an organism with its own structures and assumptions. In comparing particular concepts of a religion with those of another, their setting and context have to be taken into account. Both Vaiṣṇavism and Śaivism are set within the structures of Hinduism and share in its general assumptions. Ideas of sin and forgiveness, grace and faith, *mukti* and bliss, as seen in Hinduism, are conditioned and coloured by its assumptions and outlook. Lying behind the concern for salvation is the sense that this world and life in it belong to *saṃsāra*, a word which is almost impossible to translate, since it contains the idea that the universe and history, our time-space complex, as being the embodiment of our bondage and the symbol of our distance from what we really are. The doctrine of *karma*, similarly, is a basic part of the Hindu outlook. It marks our subservience to and involvement in *saṃsāra*. Sin, in so far as it is spoken of, is more of the nature of defilement and disease than of enmity and rebellion. It is not primarily a matter of our attitude to God. The doctrine of sin is in some ways independent of the doctrine of God, and even non-theistic systems in India have their doctrines of sin. There is a sense of sin in the *bhakti* cult, but it is not seen primarily as an act of offence and rebellion against the God of love and holiness.

In the Biblical tradition, in the Old Testament as well as in the New, the grace of God is known in certain historical events. In the Old Testament, deliverance from Egypt, the covenant at Sinai and the return from Exile are especially occasions for the manifestation of the grace of God. In the New Testament, grace is inseparably related to a historical person. Grace came in and through Jesus Christ. This is the central difference between

⁴² For a comparison from the Hindu side, where the Christian view of grace is critically examined, see Srinivasachari, *op. cit.*, pp. 404-11.

⁴³ Otto, *op. cit.*, pp. 62-63.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

grace in Christianity and Hinduism. The inseparable relation of grace with a historical person gives an actuality and definiteness to the meaning of grace which cannot be found in any other situation.⁴⁵ In P. N. Srinivasachari's exposition of *prapatti*, *prasāda* and *viśvāsa* (self-surrender, grace and faith) we do hear many familiar notes. But reference to a specific historic occasion and historic person is absent. In *bhakti* cult grace is more than what Tillich means when he speaks of grace permeating everyone's life.⁴⁶ Grace is recognized as the gift of God, to be received in faith and experienced in a continuous relationship of trust and communion with God. But it is not rooted in history and in a person as in Christianity. In the present context this is not intended as a value judgement but as a factual statement.⁴⁷

It cannot be said that notions of *prapatti* and the uncaused grace of God have led to immorality or antinomianism in Hinduism any more than Pauline teaching did in Christianity. While the southern school went to the extreme of asserting that God loves even the sin in the sinner, this seems to have been the result of the attempt to be logically consistent rather than to find an excuse or justification for undisciplined life. Morality is seen as an independent system under which life has to be lived as long as it is subject to the laws of *karma* and *samsāra*. The sense of obedience and obligation as the human side of the divine movement of grace is not dominant in Hinduism.

Further, in the New Testament, grace is experienced and understood in relationship between the believer and Christ, and also between the believers. A community of faith is essential to the apprehension and actualization of grace as it is understood in Christianity. In some forms of the *bhakti* cult, the 'group' character of devotional life is evident, but the emphasis is solely on an almost intoxicated and emotional attachment to the deity. Where a group is present this is somewhat incidental.

The ideas of covenant and election from the Old Testament, and the cross in the New, give a dimension to the meaning of sin that is unintelligible apart from them. The cross exposes the sinfulness of sin in a manner that is unthinkable without it. While the quest for forgiveness in the *bhakti* writers in India is real, and their sense of guilt is often grievous, there is no sense that forgiveness on the part of God is a costly matter.⁴⁸ Forgiveness has to be sought hard by man, but it is an easy thing for God.

⁴⁵ See M. P. John, 'The Problem of History in the New Testament, A Discussion in the Indian Context', *The Indian Journal of Theology*, Vol. XVI, Nos. 1-2 (Jan.-June 1967).

⁴⁶ P. J. Tillich, *Morality and Beyond*, New York, 1963, p. 62.

⁴⁷ See S. Kulandran, *op. cit.*, pp. 223-68, and J. Deotis Roberts, 'Grace in Hindu Personal Theism as Culminating in Ramanuia', *The South-East Asia Journal of Theology*, Vol. IX, No. 1 (July 1967), for critical evaluations from the Christian side.

⁴⁸ The legend about the blue throat of Śiva contains a suggestion of this, but it is usually understood as evidence of Śiva's power.

As a concept, grace is not the monopoly of the Christian. The only distinctiveness that he can claim is the distinctiveness that belongs to the incarnation and passion, to Christ as a person and as an event in history who calls into being a community in which the grace of God is actualized and known.

OUR CONTRIBUTORS

Dr. E. Sambayya was on the staff of Bishop's College, Calcutta, for 27 years, and Principal from 1958 to 1968.

Dr. Mathew P. John is Rector of the Theological Department of Serampore College.

Mr. A. C. Dharmaraj is a member of the permanent staff of the National Christian Council of India.