

DIVINE GRACE AND ZOROASTRIAN THEOLOGY

Dr. Kersey Antia, Mar 20, 2020

Long ago I had asked my Jewish friend, Hanna, a student of religion who had turned an ardent Christian, to explain how the Christian concept of “Divine Grace” differs from its Zoroastrian concept. While Hannah did not see much similarity between them in the Protestant theology, unlike Dr. Alan Williams, she readily saw it in the Catholic theology. As I had not been aware of it, and as I was quite impressed by her views, I like to quote it here.

“Catholics view Divine Grace as a gift of God which infuses virtue into human souls. It is not a gift to a helpless child, but a sharing of God's very own virtue with a friend. In the Catholic view, God gives us the grace we need to do God's work on earth, and to improve ourselves. Catholic Christian philosophers have come up with all sorts of different kinds of Grace to cover the various situations in which God helps people.

“This view of Divine Grace is much more like the Zoroastrian view of Ahura Mazda's co-operation with human beings. Whether the Catholic Christians have been influenced by the Zoroastrians at this point is impossible to tell; most likely it is just a similar development in thinking about God. But the Zoroastrian teaching of the Amesha Spentas parallels the Action of God's Grace in the world. Each Amesha Spenta, whether it is a personified Immortal or, as Dr. Jafarey has put it, an impersonal “Primal Principle,” can be thought of as a way of communication and sharing in God. Through the Immortal (or the Principle) Ahura Mazda gives us humans, his co-workers, the specific virtues needed for us to do righteous works on this earth.

“Through Vohu Manah, God gives us (or shares from his own Self) the gift of intelligence and Good Mind. Through ASHA, God shares Justice and Truth, to make us just, and truthful. Through Kshathra, God shares Right Power. Through Spenta Armaiti, God gives us Serenity and Devotion, and enables us to be serene and devoted. Through Haurvatat and Ameretat, God gives us Wholeness and Immortality. And through Spenta Mainyu, the “Holy Creative Mentality,” God empowers us to be holy and creative. All of these gifts, if accepted and worked with, bring us ever closer to God, “Nay, I would say, it will merge us with the Divine – Yasna 34.1, 44.18, 47.1, 48.1, 50.4 and 8).

“Eastern Orthodox Christians have brought this idea even further. Orthodox Christianity says that human beings are made to be

“partakers in the divine Nature.” That means that ultimately there is no separation between us and God. God, though is Grace, draws us to him with the goal not just of being good people, but of uniting with God him/herself. This, in Eastern Christian practice is called “divinization.” We are literally called to BECOME DIVINE.

“In Eastern Christianity, human beings are not viewed as miserable sinners, slaves or as pathetic, weak children (though we may feel that way sometimes). Human beings are called the “co-workers” of God, just as they are in Zoroastrianism.

As Jesus says in the long speech attributed to him in the Gospel of John (15:15), “I shall not call you servants any more...I call you friends.” Eastern Christians believe that God and human beings work together in a partnership called “*sunergeia*” which literally means “working together.” Divine Grace makes this partnership possible. So, in both Christian and Zoroastrian views, human beings are the co-workers of God, doing God's work to renew the world. An, if Jesus called us “friends,” we immediately think of the relationship between Zarathushtra and Ahura Mazda in the Gathas, also described as *frya* or loving friendship. The Indo European root for “friend” is also *frya*. So there really is much similarity between the Zoroastrian view of God's co-operation with us, and the Christian idea of the same co-operation, called by Catholics and Orthodox, Divine Grace.” This is so reminiscent of what the Gathas teach us as I have often expounded.