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“AMAZING GRACE THAT SAVED
A WRETCH LIKE ME”.
CONCEPTUAL METAPHORS FOR *GRACE*
IN CHRISTIAN DISCOURSE (ON THE BASIS
OF JOHN HENRY NEWMAN’S SERMONS)

Key words: grace, conceptualization, metaphor, Christian discourse, John Henry Newman

1. Introduction

Although John Newton’s *Amazing Grace* [1779] has become a popular hymn associated with the English-speaking culture, the notion of GRACE itself remains mysterious and vague. As noted by Steve Turner [2002, 196], the hymn has become an icon of culture, especially in America: “when it is sung, particularly at times of national mourning or rejoicing, people feel that they are connecting with something that is shared not only by their contemporaries but by their ancestors”. Moreover, the importance of grace in Christian discourse can be seen, among others, in the fact that throughout ages theologians have developed a doctrine of grace, which has been subject to heated debates, numerous arguments, and various controversies [Burke, Colborn, Kenel 2002]. In fact, differences in understanding of grace were at the heart of many splits in the history of Christianity. The way this notion is conceived and explained has had strong implications for the theological teaching and beliefs of different Christian denominations. One of the problems is that being abstract, grace is difficult to understand and describe even for theologians. In order to overcome that difficulty people often resort to conceptual metaphors, which help us conceptualize and understand abstract reality [Lakoff, Johnson 2003/1980; Kövecses 2010/2002/].

The aim of the present study is to identify the source domains in metaphors for GRACE used in John Henry Newman's *Parochial and Plain Sermons* [1834-1843]. The applied method of research assumes analyzing the occurrences of the word *grace* in the source text, searching for their metaphorical uses¹. John Henry Newman (1801-1890) was an outstanding British philosopher, theologian and writer of the Victorian era. As an Anglican priest, a preacher, and an academic, he was one of the leaders of the Oxford Movement, whose goal was to renew the Church of England. However, in 1845, after years of research into theology and church history, Newman decided to convert to the Roman Catholic Church. The *Parochial and Plain Sermons* includes a collection of 191 sermons, preached mainly between 1828 and 1843 at St. Mary's Church in Oxford, where Newman was vicar at that time. Interestingly, Newman's preaching has been assessed as "legendary" as it attracted and influenced numbers of his contemporaries and the next generations alike [Ker 2009, 90]. For a linguist, the eight volumes of sermons constitute a perfect corpus of modern-English religious discourse, produced by a renowned author. Interestingly, although it is unclear whether Newman was familiar with Newton's *Amazing Grace*, such a fact cannot be denied: both clergymen were connected with the Church of England, and both of them lived and worked in Britain. What is more, although Newman was associated with High Church Anglicanism, and Newton represented Evangelical Christianity, Newman as a young man was strongly influenced by this type of spirituality, which can be noticed, among others, in the first volume of his *Parochial and Plain Sermons* [Johnson 2001, 65].

It bears emphasizing that in light of the disagreement among Christians on the proper understanding of the concept of grace, the notion of Christian discourse seems to be imprecise and misleading since a satisfactory degree of consistency across various Christian factions has not been reached. For that reason we have decided to focus on the theological discourse of one author, a representative of the 19th century Anglicanism and later Roman Catholicism in this case. Although it might be invaluable to offer a theological interpretation of the identified grace metaphors, we believe that the expected extent and significance of such an endeavor would definitely reach beyond the competence of a linguist on the one hand, and the capacity of one academic paper on the other.

¹ It is necessary to notice that the Christian concept of GRACE has been lexicalized in English also with the use of other words, such as, for instance, *favor*, *blessing*, and in some contexts *mercy*. However, the word *grace* seems to dominate in theological texts [Burke, Colborn, Kenel 2002, 383-401].

2. The tools of cognitive linguistics in studies of religious discourse

From the cognitive-semantic perspective, religious language seems to be an extension of everyday conventional language. It can be claimed that the conceptualization of religious experiences is based on the same mechanisms as the conceptualization of any other abstract reality, starting with such commonly used concepts as LIFE, LOVE, TIME, to the conceptualization of emotions, and such highly elaborated fields as art or science [Kuczok 2014, 254].

George Lakoff and Mark Johnson [2003/1980/, 40] in their seminal work on conceptual metaphor state that "the conceptual systems of cultures and religions are metaphorical in nature". Similar observations have been made by philosophers and linguists who study the specific character of religious language and have claimed that using metaphor, symbol, imagery, or analogy lies in the nature of religious discourse [Krzyszowski 1997, 261-262; Kołakowski 2001, 160-162; Termińska 1991, 132]. Metaphor in cognitive linguistics can be defined as a mapping between two different conceptual domains: one experiential domain may be partially mapped or projected onto a different experiential domain, so that the second domain is partially understood in terms of the first one. The domain that is mapped is called the source or donor domain, and the domain onto which the source is mapped is called the target or recipient domain [Barcelona 2000, 3-4]. Such metaphors are used by people to conceptualize and describe abstract concepts in various areas of life, for instance, art, emotions, time, as well as the religious. As Lakoff and Johnson put it, conceptual metaphor is "understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another" [Lakoff, Johnson 2003/1980/, 5].

As suggested by Zoltán Kövecses [2011, 353], a cognitive-linguistic analysis of religious discourse shows that we rely on the ordinary to make sense of our experience outside the ordinary with the hope to meet the divine. Hence, there is no need for an independent conceptual apparatus that would be "unique to the interpretation of the sacred" [ibidem, 327]. It is worth noting that the findings of cognitive semantics provide specific tools for conducting research into religious discourse, identifying its conceptual intricacies and explaining the sense of its apparently uncommon character. For that reason Lieven Boeve, who is a theologian interested in using cognitive linguistics in religious studies, paraphrases the traditional saying: "*philosophia ancilla theologiae*" (philosophy is a servant of theology), and instead he says: "*linguistica ancilla theologiae*" (linguistics is a servant of theology) [Boeve 2003, 16].

3. The concept of grace in Christianity

From the linguistic point of view, the notion of GRACE belongs to the so-called “fuzzy concepts”, which are abstract and difficult to define precisely [O’Grady 1997, 276]. According to dictionaries of the English language, in the context of Christian belief grace can be defined as “the free and unmerited favor of God, as manifested in the salvation of sinners and the bestowal of blessings” [Oxford Dictionaries online]. Additionally, it may be also understood and used as “a divinely given talent or blessing” [ibidem].

When consulting theological literature, we notice that the sources offer a number of different definitions of grace. Greg Johnson [2003, 89] notices that the notion of GRACE present in Christian discourse is deeply entrenched in the Bible, where the words *grace* and *favor* are often used to signify that God is present among people. For instance, in Luke 1, 28, we read that when an angel visited Mary to announce her that she would give birth to Jesus, he said to her: “Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!”. In this way, God’s presence with Mary in the birth of Jesus is described as being favored, or in other words, having grace [Johnson 2003, 94]. In another example from Scriptures, apostles are said to preach with great power after they had received the Holy Spirit, and as a result grace is on them: “And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all” [Acts 4, 33]. As Johnson [2003, 95] comments on that verse, grace here is nothing else but the presence of God in the Holy Spirit. Actually, it should be noted once again that nearly all references to grace in Newman’s texts, as well as those found in Christian discourse in general, echo the language of the English translations of Scriptures, which have permeated the culture of the English-speaking Christians.

When it comes to more systematic views on grace in theology, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* [1993] for instance says that “Grace is favor, the free and undeserved help that God gives us to respond to his call to become children of God, adoptive sons, partakers of the divine nature and of eternal life” [point 1996]. However, in another place we read that “Grace is a participation in the life of God” [point 1997]. Then, later on in the same source, grace is described as “the gratuitous gift that God makes to us of his own life, infused by the Holy Spirit into our soul to heal it of sin and to sanctify it” [point 1999], and as “the gift of the Spirit who justifies and sanctifies us [point 2003].

Actually, from the perspective of cognitive linguistics, describing grace as a gift, God’s help, or participation in God’s life can be treated as conceptual metaphors. According to Johnson [2003, 88-90] the metaphor of A GIFT is central to the conceptualization of GRACE in Christian discourse. The metaphor is based on a set of mappings, where THE GIFT is GOD’S PRESENCE, THE GIVER is GOD HIMSELF, and THE RECEIVER is HUMANITY. That gift is unexpected and

undeserved, and it can be interpreted as justification offered to people in spite of their sins, for which in fact they deserve to be punished by God.

Moreover, also the hymn *Amazing Grace*, chosen as a motto for this paper, uses conceptual metaphors extensively. In Newton's song, grace acts as if it were a human being: saves a wretch, teaches a person's heart to fear, relieves that fear, brings the narrator "safe thus far", and leads him home "through many dangers, toils and snares".

The following sections of the paper focus on the various metaphors for GRACE that can be identified in John Henry Newman's *Parochial and Plain Sermons*. They are classified and presented according to various types, suggested in the literature on cognitive semantics.

4. Reifications of grace in the *Parochial and Plain Sermons*

Reifications, along with vegetalizations, animalizations, personifications, and deifications constitute instances of the so-called ontological metaphors, listed by Tomasz P. Krzeszowski [1997, 74] in his work dedicated to axiolinguistics. The general rule behind ontological metaphors is that they make a non-entity into an entity: these are ways of viewing events, activities, and ideas as entities or substances [Lakoff, Johnson 2003/1980/, 25-32]. In the case of reifications, the source domain of the metaphor is an inorganic thing or substance, in vegetalizations it is a plant, in animalizations an animal, in personification it is a human being, and in deifications a deity.

In Newman's sermons, grace is sometimes described as having certain physical properties of an object, such as, for example, size: "They are times when we may humbly expect **a larger grace**, because they invite us especially to the means of grace" [PPS 5, 11-12]². In another place, Newman writes about portions of grace, as if it could be cut or divided like a physical substance: "We do not even approve or love the character itself, till we have **some portion of the grace of God**" [PPS 7, 108]. Moreover, some expressions used by Newman may suggest that grace is conceptualized more specifically as A CONTAINER. For instance, in his sermons, people "stand in grace" [PPS 4, 146], "grow in grace" [PPS 7, 207], "are under grace" [PPS 4, 16], while sinners "fall from grace" [PPS 4, 57], and "are thrown out of grace" [PPS 5, 190-191]. All these prepositional expressions may be said to assume that grace is perceived as A CONTAINER.

Next, grace is reified in the *Parochial and Plain Sermons* as AN INSTRUMENT or MEANS for achieving something. Newman writes about people "overcoming

² Hereafter, the *Parochial and Plain Sermons* will be abbreviated as PPS in references, and the number that follows will correspond to one of the eight volumes of the analyzed work.

the sin of their nature **by His heavenly grace** (...) [PPS 2, 136-137], and about words of faith, which “are efficacious in changing our wills and characters, which, **through God’s grace**, they certainly do” [PPS 3, 269]. Also, God is said by Newman to “**raise up instruments of His grace**, “not ignorant of the devices” of the Evil One (...)” [PPS 2, 116].

Another reification of grace present in the studied sermons is based on the source domain of A GARMENT. Thus, when, for instance, talking about the biblical Adam, Newman writes that “**the grace and glory of God were to him for a robe**, and rendered earthly garments needless” [PPS 5, 208], and: “Unless it be presumptuous to say it, grace was to him instead of a habit; **grace was his clothing** within and without” [PPS 5, 108]. Then, sinners are described as those who “**put off from them the garment of divine grace**, and deserted to the ranks of the enemy” [PPS 5, 341-342].

In a number of identified examples with the word *grace*, the source domain for metaphorical conceptualization is A GIFT or TREASURE. Thus, grace is a gift given by God to people: “All of us have **the gifts of grace pledged to us** from our youth up. We know this well; but we do not use our privilege” [PPS 1, 14]. Also, Newman writes about “**the treasures of grace**, which are hid in Christ, which are great beyond words or thought” [PPS 6, 51], and about “**the overflowing riches of His grace** both here and hereafter” [PPS 7, 23], which are promised by God to us. The Church is called “**the true treasure-house of grace** and home of refuge to all believers” [PPS 6, 171], while followers of Christ are “**heirs of grace**”, led by the Holy Ghost [PPS 8, 58].

Next, sometimes grace is reified in Newman’s work as A LIQUID. This conceptualization can be seen when the author of the sermons writes that “Jesus Christ is **a Fount of grace**” [PPS 3, 139], that “grace is **poured out**” [PPS 2, 91], that grace is “**infused** into obedience and righteousness” [PPS 5, 158], that “the Church is **filled with grace**” [PPS 5, 208], and that “everything made by God is **full of grace**” [PPS 5, 175]. Then, in some places we read about “the **channels of grace**” [PPS 2, 42], and about “the **inflowings of grace** upon the soul” [PPS 4, 176].

Furthermore, grace can be reified in the *Parochial and Plain Sermons* as FOOD AND DRINK, for example, when Newman writes about “souls **filled and nurtured by God’s secret grace**” [PPS 5, 77], and about people being inconsistent and variable when they do not seek “**daily sustenances of grace**” offered to them by God [PPS 6, 189]. In another reification, grace is conceptualized as A COMMODITY, possibly even A TRADED COMMODITY when Newman writes about “**that state of grace and glory which Christ has purchased for us**” [PPS 5, 195], and about sins which “cannot interfere with **His grace stored up for all** who come to Him for it” [PPS 4, 199]. Additionally, in the analyzed texts, grace is described as ruined as if it were A BUILDING: “Love of the world’s good things, for instance, may be sufficient **to ruin many graces**” [PPS 4, 48].

5. Vegetalizations and personifications of grace in the *Parochial and Plain Sermons*

In vegetalizations, the source domain is A PLANT. Newman writes about planting "the **flowers of grace**" in the heart, where they can take root [PPS 2, 269], and about "the **fruits of grace**", thanks to which "God is one with every believer" [PPS 2, 35]. Moreover, Newman interprets the biblical *Parable of the Sower* [Mark 4, 3-9], which is based on the vegetation of a plant, as a description of the way people treat God's grace: "In that parable one man is said not to **admit the good seed**; a second admits it, but **its root withers**; a third goes further, **the seed strikes root**, and **shoots upwards**, but its **leaves and blossoms** get entangled and overlaid with thorns. The fourth **takes root, shoots upwards**, and does more, **bears fruit** to perfection. This then is the Christian's great aim, viz. **not to come short after grace given him**" [PPS 5, 185].

Interestingly, when it comes to the list of ontological metaphors provided by Krzeszowski [1997], in the studied sermons there are no animalizations of grace. Instead, there are various personifications, in which the source domain is A HUMAN BEING. In Newman's sermons, grace appears as the subject for a number of verbs, typically requiring the human agent. Thus, grace takes all the toil [PPS 1, 233], assists people [PPS 1, 243], revisits people [PPS 4, 101], acts [PPS 4, 230], blots out and puts away sin [PPS 5, 217-218], calls people on [PPS 6, 33], whispers [PPS 6, 176-177], works [PPS 2, 147], touches people's hearts [PPS 8, 138], and gives ordinances [PPS 4, 17]. Furthermore, people can "grow together with God's grace" like siblings or friends [PPS 4, 47], "co-operate with grace" [PPS 4, 156], and they "will never be deserted by God's grace" [PPS 2, 344] as if grace were a partner, friend, or co-worker.

In some cases, grace is conceptualized in the *Parochial and Plain Sermons* as a person performing a particular role or function. For example, grace is A KING who has a throne: "It is the Christian's unspeakable privilege, and his alone, that he has at all times free access to **the throne of grace** through the mediation of his Lord and Saviour" [PPS 1, 245]. In another place, Newman writes about the kingdom of grace: "it is not an uncommon notion at this time, that a man may be an habitual sinner, and yet be in a state of salvation, and in **the kingdom of grace**" [PPS 5, 172].

Next, grace in Newman's sermons is personified as AN INHABITANT, dwelling in a human being: "when **a man, in whom dwells His grace**, is lying on the bed of suffering, or when he has been stripped of his friends and is solitary, he has, in a peculiar way, tasted of the powers of the world to come, and exhorts and consoles with authority" [PPS 5, 307]. Alternatively, grace may be the inhabitant living in the Church, which is called by Newman "the house of grace" [PPS 7, 143].

Furthermore, grace is described by Newman as AN OPPONENT or ENEMY. First, it can be the opponent of the corrupt nature in the soul: “And there are others, men of mistaken religious views, who think that religion consists in dwelling on and describing **the struggle between grace and corrupt nature in the soul**” [PPS 8, 263]. Second, people are said to resist God’s grace: “**To resist Divine grace** is to grieve, to tempt, to resist, to quench, to do despite to the Spirit” [PPS 6, 359].

Additionally, grace in the studied sermons is conceptualized as A GUIDE in a journey, who goes before us and aids us [PPS 7, 248], and whose guidings we are expected to follow from our youth [PPS 4, 185], or as A PARENT: “We who are children of wrath, are made through Him **children of grace**” [PPS 3, 155].

6. Other metaphors for grace in the *Parochial and Plain Sermons*

Apart from the ontological metaphors for GRACE discussed in the above sections, in Newman’s sermons, grace is also metaphorically conceptualized for instance as POWER, as A WAY IN A JOURNEY, and as LIGHT. Newman writes about the “power of grace” [PPS 8, 99-100], and about grace being “overpowering” to people [PPS 8, 252]. When it comes to the metaphor of THE WAY, Newman writes: “I answer, we stand in God’s presence, we are in his Church, in his favour, in **the way of his grace**, in the way to be pardoned” [PPS 4, 130]. He calls forgiveness “the first **step in grace**” [PPS 4, 105], and writes about making advancements in grace: “I suppose, any man of tolerably correct life, whatever his positive **advancement in grace**, will seldom read accounts of notoriously bad men, in which their ways and feelings are described” [PPS 5, 125].

Additionally, grace is metaphorically presented in Newman’s work as being LIGHT or A SOURCE OF LIGHT: “In those whose wills are holy, He is present for sanctification and acceptance; and, like the sun’s beams in some cave of the earth, **His grace sheds light** on every side, and consumes all mists and vapours as they rise” [PPS 5, 219]. Grace may also enlighten people: “Do we wait on **His grace to enlighten**, renew, strengthen us?” [PPS 7, 213], and illuminate them: “He whom Christ has **illuminated with His grace**, is heir of all things [PPS 1, 265]. What is more, it is possible “**to quench** the gift of grace” [PPS 4, 58], just like one quenches a fire, flames, or light.

7. Conclusions

Our analysis of grace metaphors in John Henry Newman's *Parochial and Plain Sermons* allowed us to identify a number of different source domains that appear in the metaphorical mappings. First of all, grace is reified in Newman's sermons as A CONTAINER, AN INSTRUMENT or MEANS, A GARMENT, A TREASURE and A GIFT, as A (TRADED) COMMODITY, A LIQUID, FOOD AND DRINK, and A BUILDING. In a number of vegetalizations grace is conceptualized as A PLANT. When it comes to personifications, grace is described as A KING, AN INHABITANT of a human being or the Church, as AN OPPONENT or ENEMY, as A GUIDE IN A JOURNEY, and as A PARENT. Additionally, grace is metaphorically viewed as POWER, as A WAY IN A JOURNEY, and as LIGHT.

It seems that the biggest group of conceptual metaphors for the notion of GRACE in the studied texts are reifications, with nine different source domains. Perhaps conceptualizing GRACE as AN OBJECT is easiest for the human mind since objects and physical substances are tangible and easy to perceive: they have specific physical properties, such as size or weight. Moreover, we are familiar with them and commonly use them in everyday life. As such they provide good source domains for metaphorical mappings onto the abstract domain of GRACE. When it comes to personifications, they constitute the second largest group of metaphors for GRACE in Newman's work, with five specific source domains, usually referring to particular roles or functions held by people. What is more, it bears mentioning that when describing grace as A KING, A GUIDE IN A JOURNEY, or A PARENT, we actually use the same source domains that in Christian discourse often function as personifications of GOD, as seen also in Newman's own sermons [Kuczok 2014, 42, 107-108, 189]. Hence, it might be possible to treat those metaphors alternatively as deifications rather than personifications of grace.

The variety of grace metaphors found in Newman's sermons show us that the concept of grace is so difficult to describe that we need the help of what is closer to our experiences in order to reach what is intangible and abstract. In this way we are able to understand, at least partially, what otherwise would remain only a complete mystery. As already mentioned in the Introduction to this paper, a good idea would be to continue the analysis presented in this paper and study the grace metaphors in Christian discourse in light of their theological implications and interpretations.

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Summary

AMAZING GRACE THAT SAVED A WRETCH LIKE ME. CONCEPTUAL METAPHORS FOR *GRACE* IN CHRISTIAN DISCOURSE (ON THE BASIS OF JOHN HENRY NEWMAN'S SERMONS)

Although Amazing Grace has become a popular song associated with the English-speaking culture, the notion of GRACE itself remains mysterious and vague. The problem is that being an abstract notion, grace is difficult to understand and describe even for theologians. This problem may be overcome by conceptual metaphors which help us conceptualize and understand the abstract reality [Lakoff, Johnson 2003/1980; Kövecses 2010/2002/]. John Henry Newman's *Parochial and Plain Sermons* [1834-1843] constitutes a set of eight volumes of sermons preached in the years 1828-1845 in St. Mary's Church in Oxford by an outstanding Anglican philosopher, theologian, writer, and academic of the Victorian era, who later converted to Roman Catholicism. The article focuses on the cognitive-linguistic aspects of identification and classification of the various conceptual metaphors for GRACE in Newman's sermons. The metaphors are illustrated with examples of the lexical correlates found in the analyzed material. In his sermons, Newman conceptualizes grace metaphorically either as different kinds of INANIMATE THINGS: A CONTAINER, AN INSTRUMENT or MEANS, A GARMENT, A TREASURE and A GIFT, as A TRADED COMMODITY, A LIQUID, FOOD AND DRINK, and A BUILDING, as A PLANT, or as A PERSON: A KING, AN INHABITANT of a human being or the Church, as AN OPPONENT or ENEMY, as A GUIDE IN A JOURNEY, and as A PARENT. Additionally, GRACE is metaphorically viewed in the studied work as POWER, as A WAY IN A JOURNEY, and as LIGHT.

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