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**LA THÈSE A ÉTÉ
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KARL RAHNER'S THEORY OF REVELATION

by Ann Clare Smith

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INTRODUCTION

According to Karl Rahner, theological reflection today must pose its questions from the standpoint of philosophical anthropology. He reasons that "the question of man and its answering may not be regarded as an area of study separate from other theological areas as to its scope and subject matter but as the whole of dogmatic theology itself."¹

This thesis proposes to investigate, in the light of this principle, a key category of Rahner's own theological synthesis--his theory of revelation. It will seek to determine, by means of an internal examination of his thought, the central intuition which informs his basic understanding of the God-man-world relationship implicit within the concept of revelation.

Rahner's argument is for a theology which examines the intrinsic relationship between the experience and self-understanding of man and revelation. Only such an approach, he believes, is capable of addressing the scientifically minded world-view of "modern man" (die Menschen von heute) successfully. His purpose, therefore, is a transcendental questioning of the modality of divine revelation which inquires about the necessary conditions in man's being and life which ground its possibility.

¹"Theology and Anthropology," The Word in History, ed., T. Patrick Burke (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1966), p. 1.

In the light of Rahner's insistence, however, that the philosophical and theological functions be more closely interwoven, the question arises of how we are to understand their mutual interaction in the present instance.² Does the anthropological factor which he includes for a "correct and full understanding of the concept of revelation" serve merely a useful hermeneutical function? Or, is its significance so central as to qualify his theory in an essential way?

For the purposes of this thesis the distinction can be stated as follows: a philosophical anthropology would have the function of a useful hermeneutic in Rahner's theory if he simply used it extensively to bring greater precision and light to the question; it would have an essential function if it were found to be a constitutive, structuring element of his theology of revelation. Our argument will develop within an option for the latter position. Rahner's concept of a transcendental relation between man and God which is constituted by a communication on the part of God is not an explanatory tool in his theory but, rather, dynamically directs and unifies its internal development from the start.

²See, for example, "Philosophy and Theology," Theological Investigations, Vol. VI, trans. Karl-H. and Boniface Kruger (New York: Seabury Press, 1974), pp. 71-81. See also, "Philosophy and Philosophising in Theology," Theological Investigations, Vol. IX, trans. Graham Harrison (New York: Herder & Herder, 1972), pp. 46-63. (Hereafter, Theological Investigations will be abbreviated TI.)

Our investigation, therefore, will attempt a meaningful clarification of Rahner's theology of revelation in terms of its theoretical foundations. These manifest themselves in the dialectic which he envisions between the human transcendental experience of self-conscious, personal being and the core reality of divine revelation understood as the self-gift of God. By means of an intertwining (Verschrankung) of philosophical and theological insights, Rahner is able to say that "God in his own proper reality makes himself the innermost constitutive element of man."³ The main concern of this thesis lies in the very possibility of such an assertion.

The problematic nature of the task is best stated by Rahner himself when he asks--"How is it that revelation, despite its directly divine origin, can constitute the very core of human history? How can revelation be present everywhere at all times...without ceasing to be the free act of God which cannot be counted on in our view of history?"⁴ As this thesis concerns itself directly with that how of Rahner's question, it will begin with an examination of the hermeneutical framework required for an answer. Against what intellectual assessment of contemporary religious needs does Rahner's

³Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity, trans. William V. Dych (New York: Seabury Press, 1978), p. 116. (Italics mine.)

⁴Karl Rahner and Joseph Ratzinger, Revelation and Tradition (New York: Herder & Herder, 1966), p. 11.

thought take form? How does he initiate the question of the very possibility of the occurrence of revelation and in what sense does this starting-point determine the structuring of his basic insight? And, finally, what is in fact the guiding intuition and essence of his anthropological-theological solution to the revelation problematic? These are the general questions which the following three chapters attempt to answer. Because this area of Rahner's work has not yet been rigorously probed, a meaningfully anthropological study of his theory of revelation is not available.⁵

We hold this element as crucial to what he intends.

I am indebted to many of my fellow Christians for providing me with both the need and the time to do this work. I would particularly like to thank Father William Marreeve, S.C.J., who gave it his patient and helpful direction.

⁵In an unpublished dissertation at Yale University, Ronald R. Burke defends Rahner's orthodoxy in interpreting the Roman Catholic doctrine of revelation and offers a brief survey of the literature which deals with this area of his work. In discussing The Achievement of Karl Rahner by Louis Roberts (New York: Herder & Herder, 1967), Burke notes that although much of the book gives helpful attention to the philosophical foundations of Rahner's writings, "the result is not unsurpassable clarity regarding either the transcendental method or revelation." He notes that while Roberts sets the stage for an ontological explanation of Rahner's theory of revelation, it, nevertheless, fails to appear. (See Rahner and Revelation, n. 15, p. 9f.) In his own work, Burke sets this question aside as beyond the scope of his purpose.

CHAPTER I

REVELATION AND MODERN MAN

Introduction

Rahner recently observes that the transcendental emphasis in modern philosophy which characterizes our present historical context finds "a certain receptivity" in Catholic thought.¹ He notes that a genuinely theological reappropriation of the concept of revelation for our times must develop the positive implications of this affinity while, at the same time, taking seriously the truths of its own traditional doctrines.² This chapter will examine the foundations of his own approach to that task from two perspectives (1) that of his formal reflections on theological method and (2) that of his own assessment of the context from which he works.

For Rahner, the question of revelation is central both to the continuing post-critical demands of modern intellectual life³ and to the related problematic set for

¹"Transcendental Theology," Sacramentum Mundi, ed. Karl Rahner and others, Vol. VI (New York: Herder & Herder, 1968), p. 287.

²Revelation and Tradition, p. 13.

³Ibid., p. 11. Cf. F. P. Fiorenza's introduction to Spirit in the World, trans. William Dych (New York: Herder & Herder, 1968), pp. xix-xlvi, for a summary of the demands placed upon Rahner's revelation theology by the intellectual climate of Europe.

Catholic theology by the Modernist movement.⁴ Specifically, he draws his starting-point from the question of the necessary conditions in man which make his reception of divine revelation possible. A description of his thought concerning the method demanded by the current context will illustrate how he moves toward a theory of revelation which ultimately envisions man as the unique event of God's self-communication.

Theological Method

Rahner's formal reflections on theological methodology begin with an essay written at Innsbruck in 1938.⁵ Published in 1954, it calls for a renewal of Catholic theology which would be "an endeavor of the spirit" and which would, consequently, by responding to the currents and impulses of contemporary life, grow out of and address the needs of "its own time." In a charge that indicates the line of purpose of his

⁴Ibid., pp. 9-10. Cf. Avery Dulles, Revelation Theology (New York: Herder & Herder, 1972), p. 136. Dulles gives credit to the Modernists for correctly identifying the most pressing issue facing the Church as "how to reconcile the Catholic understanding of revelation with openness to the modern world." On modernism, see Alec R. Vidler, The Modernist Movement in the Roman Church (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1934).

⁵See Rahner's discussion of the task of dogmatic theology in TI, Vol. I, pp. 1-18. Prepared in 1938 with H. U. von Balthasar, it corresponds in a remarkable way with much later efforts by Rahner to effect a theology of service to its own time. Compare this critique, for example, with "The Need for a 'Short Formula' of the Faith," TI, Vol. IX, pp. 117-126 (1965) and "Reflections on the Problems Involved in Devising a Short Formula of the Faith," TI, Vol. XI, pp. 230-244 (1970).

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own theological program, he cites dogmatic theology with a twofold failure. On the one hand, it had immuned itself from a genuinely scientific development by preferring a sterile and "unoriginal" uniformity to the stimulus of new questions.⁶ And on the other, it had mistakenly sacrificed to a false conception of orthodoxy its own pastoral and kerygmatic vitality.⁷

It is Rahner's conviction that theology's authentic task must be one of service to the salvation of its own time. In order to achieve that service it must (1) live out of a sense of responsibility toward the context of its own historical situation and (2) by thus freeing its own innate adequacy, repossess the fruitfulness and abundance of its eschatological power.⁸

Persistently, and within a few years (1943) Rahner once again points to "our own age" as a source of theological life. The fact of turbulence and change is not to be met with uncertainty and irresponsible resistance but with the active and confident involvement of "a really living Church." In order to be effectively authentic, such involvement

⁶"The Prospects for Dogmatic Theology," TI, Vol. I, p. 6. For a general survey of Catholic theology covering the period of Rahner's situation, see T. M. Schoof, A Survey of Catholic Theology, 1800-1970, particularly pp. 22-40 and 121-130.

⁷Ibid., p. 7.

⁸Ibid., pp. 7-17.

is to be notable for its contact with "the whole modern attitude and way of thinking and living."⁹

Developing this thought further, Rahner, in 1957, examines more closely the implications of this "modern attitude" for theological method. Repeating a position taken in Spirit in the World,¹⁰ he identifies the movement of modern thought, specifically in its characteristic "turn to the subject," as not only basically Catholic in origin but capable of yielding, in conjunction with Catholic theology, a genuine theory of man.¹¹ In view of this affinity, he consequently proposes the development of a theological anthropology which would deal with man on the basis of revelation itself; that is, a science which would relate the possibility of revelation to the center of man's experience of himself as personal subject.

The Shaping of a Theological Anthropology

While at present still an "unfulfilled task" in the Church, Rahner nevertheless believes that its features can

⁹ From an unpublished 'Viennese memorandum' written for the Cardinal of Vienna in response to a pastoral letter issued by the Archbishop of Freiburg on January 18, 1943. Quoted in Herbert Vorgrimler's Karl Rahner, His Life, Thought and Works (Glen Rock: Paulist Press, 1966), p. 35 and 37.

¹⁰ See Fiorenza's "Introduction," pp. xix-xlv as well as p. 57f. of the text.

¹¹ "Man," Sacramentum Mundi, Vol. IV, pp. 365-370.

already be discerned. He identifies these as threefold. As a first step he proposes that there is an underlying and comprehensive pre-supposition which must be brought forth as its primary and determining principle. It must be a theological affirmation which is made in the light of faith as "the comprehensive factor which, from the moment theology is pursued at all, 'supercedes' the light of reason while preserving this as a component of itself."¹² Such an affirmation must, in turn, reflect the understanding of himself which a Christian hears in faith. It must, therefore, affirm that man is addressed in his personal and collective history by the self-disclosure of God in grace.¹³

The second task of a theological anthropology follows upon the first and consists essentially in developing fully the primary, supportive pre-supposition or principle. In the process, a definition of man must be worked out which encompasses his concreteness as a created, spiritual subject of limitless receptivity to God. In establishing such a definition, a theological understanding of man in his absolute transcendence and freedom must be completed by a thesis of his worldly historicity and of its relationship to the historicity of the hearing of the word of God.¹⁴

¹² Ibid., p. 368.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 369.

In the final step, such a theological understanding of man must be internally related to Christology. A vision of man as the possible mode of God's self-revelation and as the potential brother of Christ must be given contemporary credibility. "On the basis of the Incarnation and the fullness of revelation which it contains, creation is drawn into the realm of a potentia obedientialis for both hypostatic union and grace. Consequently, it is Christology alone which, in its immediacy of relationship to both God and man, is the necessary and fitting culmination of a Christian anthropology. Man is, in the reality of his everyday existence, always within a situation of "partnership with the word of God."¹⁵

From this brief and necessarily adumbrated sketch, several important conclusions may be drawn which directly enlighten the scope of Rahner's thought. First, it is immediately apparent that his attention continually focuses upon the need for demonstrating to modern man that his own being is related to the fact and occurrence of divine revelation with an intimacy which can only be described as radical. Significantly, this "silent" problematic implicitly structures both Spirit in the World and Hearers of the Word.¹⁶ Within

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 370.

¹⁶ Hearers of the Word, trans. Michael Richards (New York: Herder & Herder, 1969). Cf. Andrew Tallon's "Spirit, Freedom, History: Karl Rahner's, Hörer des Wortes," The Thomist, 38 (1974), pp. 908-936 for critical corrections of this faulty translation.

this early framework, Rahner's foundational vision of man emerges as the mediating point between God and the world. His methodological concerns thus continue to amplify and extend that thesis.

Second, the grounding insight or genesis of that particularly Rahnerian "idea" of revelation with which this thesis is concerned involves within its scope the dissolution of any suspected opposition between theocentric and anthropocentric elements in the interpretation of human existence. In developing the meaning of human creatureliness, Rahner insists that a theological aspect is already present within the situation itself. God's self-revelation to man is not something which comes upon him from "outside" but, on the contrary, is always and everywhere constitutive of his essential being.

Third, the question of man's relationship to God moves, in Rahner's thought, consistently toward a resolution which not only includes a concept of universal revelation but includes it precisely as its determining feature. In other words, it is Rahner's conviction that the central affirmation of Christianity--that man is addressed by God--is also, and necessarily, constitutive for the meaning of the human person.¹⁷ At this stage of his reflections the

¹⁷"Man," pp. 369-370.

understanding is quite distinctly present which will characterize his later, more pastoral works; namely, that there is a theological notion of life which accompanies its ordinary and apparently profane experience. In stating the depths of Christology in these terms, an existential affirmation is, at the same time, made possible which identifies as a human happening the Happening of God himself.¹⁸

Methodology for a 'New Situation'

Following the Second Vatican Council, Rahner's reflections on method enter their present and most productive phase.. With more frequency and insistence he refines his assessment of the import of the current world context upon theology and its task. He finds that the world of ideas and intellectual attitudes which ordinarily shape man's self-interpretation in any given era are today in a situation which can only be described as one of "crisis" for the possibility of belief.¹⁹ He characterizes that

¹⁸ "Current Problems in Christology," TI, Vol. I, pp. 172-174.

¹⁹ In the reference to "crisis" the presence of Heideggerian thought is clear. Cf. Being and Time (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), esp. pp. 222-223. Rahner attended Heidegger's lectures in 1934-36 at Freiburg while completing his own doctoral studies in philosophy; see Vorgrimler, pp. 20-26. For a brief survey of Heidegger's influence upon Rahner's method, see Anne Carr, The Theological Method of Karl Rahner (Missoula, Montana: University of Montana Press, 1977), pp. 17-35.

situation as one of "insurmountable intellectual pluralism" which is beyond the power of any one system of thought to integrate.²⁰

Theology must, vis-à-vis this "new situation," attempt to avoid the danger of too hastily assuming that modern man is, in his inescapable reflection of that intellectual horizon, merely a man-of-today. Despite his apparent preoccupation with the pragmatic and the profane, there is present, in the totality of his lived experience, the capacity and the opportunity for an authentic Christian existence.

Rahner feels that the hidden "more" within the contemporary reality calls for careful theological analysis. As a result, his writings of this period (1965-1970) are marked by sensitive attempts to go beyond any false oppositions which might be implied by the situation, as well as by efforts to grasp its internal meaning where it bears most concretely upon man's understanding of himself and of his world. Paradoxically, he characterizes the "todayness" of modern man, despite its plurality of thought and form, as deriving principally from an unlimited desire for and movement toward unity. He states that "the contemporary

²⁰ "Pluralism in Theology and the Unity of the Creed in the Church," TI, Vol. XI, pp. 3-23.

world-picture is characterized by a pre-decision for unity and development; it sees matter, life and spirit as held together in one single history of evolution."²¹

In terms of ideas, this thrust can be seen as directly related to (1) the world-wide recognition and acceptance of the unity between spirit and matter in its basic structuring of the world, and (2) the conviction that this unity produces not a static world but one in the process of becoming. Modern man, therefore, conceives of himself and the one reality to which he is subject after the conceptual model of a dynamic evolution.²²

This model, then, is taken by Rahner as the premise within which a Christian concept of God must find expression. And it is precisely here that he uncovers a "positive affinity" between Christian life and the basic modern interpretation of the world. This affinity displays itself by means of a theological inquiry into man's fundamental expressions of his modernity. For Rahner, it is only here that the contemporary religious situation becomes comprehensible; and this, only in reference to the still too little recognized

²¹"The Secret of Life," TI, Vol. VI, p. 148. Cf. "The Unity of Spirit and Matter in the Christian Understanding of the Faith," TI, Vol. VI, pp. 153-177; Hominisation, trans. W. J. O'Hara (New York: Herder & Herder, 1965); "Christology within an Evolutionary View of the World," TI, Vol. V, pp. 157-192.

²²"The Man of Today and Religion," TI, Vol. VI, pp. 3-20.

alteration within the consciousness of man which has accompanied the "turn to the subject" achieved by the natural sciences in our era.²³ This change affects man's image of God as deeply as it does that of his environment. The rule of God and the rule of nature, once experienced in a unified and mutually supportive frame of reference, are no longer related in the same way.

Modern Man

Today, Rahner notes, man experiences his own creativeness in an entirely new way. He stands in the realm of nature "as in a quarry or on a building site" fully prepared and able to construct the kind of world in which he wants to live. He encounters himself there as one who is responsible for himself. With a directly experienced world delivered into his hands, he sees himself as "almost like his own creator and God." As his world becomes increasingly profane, it seems increasingly godless as well and the language of religion seems to echo a "long lost world."²⁴

²³Ibid., p. 7.

²⁴Ibid., pp. 9-12.

Rahner's Interpretation of Today's 'Kairos'

Humanity's mastery over the world, however, can quite legitimately be seen as properly a moment within the historical development of Christianity itself. Man is the free partner of God and the world of nature is his to subdue, and if he wills, to transform.²⁵ Further, traditional Catholic thought has always held that the history of the world involves in some way, and by virtue of the Incarnation, the history of God himself. If the profaneness of the world, however, is in some way of Christian origin, then the task of finding its positive meaning must, unquestionably, be a religious one. The question then becomes--"what does this characteristic of the contemporary human situation mean when looked at from the point of view of its religious relevance?"²⁶

Rahner, consequently, notes four ways in which the creative situation of modern man is conducive to not only a newly conceived religious understanding of his present circumstances, but to a substantial maturation of his own spiritual potential. First, within the very possibilities which man finds for a seemingly limitless human creativity,

²⁵ "Christianity and the New Man," TI, Vol. V, pp. 135-153. Cf. "The Experiment with Man," TI, Vol. IX, pp. 205-224; idem, "The Problem of Genetic Manipulation," pp. 225-252.

²⁶ "The Man of Today and Religion," p. 11. •

he yet experiences within himself that his own orientation neither originates with him nor is, at any time, subject to his control. The unknown future as well constantly opposes and confounds his planning. In a situation of existential anguish (Angst), he experiences his freedom as itself mysteriously disposed. With the "secret" of freedom's grounding no longer mediated by nature, the possibility of a truer assessment of the nature of that freedom becomes present.

The free man experiences himself in his very freedom as someone condemned to freedom, as someone who freely inaugurates the uncontrollable. ...Yet to whom should man confide this disposed being, from whom is he to accept it, where can he know his daring freedom to be safe, this freedom which falls into obscurity? If the secret--the absolute, silent and infinite secret--no longer comes to him so clearly and directly from his natural surroundings, it now breaks out of his own being. We call this secret God. The more we become what we are...the more we look to him in whom this...mastery can be confided...and that is God.²⁷

It follows that when freedom is experienced as a serious and burdensome responsibility, therefore, it can give rise, through a "feeling for life," to human qualities of everyday greatness in which a genuine relationship to God can be quietly and unconsciously realized. When the absolute, final reason sustaining all responsibility and power--which we call God--is encountered by man, it is at that

²⁷Ibid., p. 14.

moment in which he accepts the burden and truth of his existence.²⁸

A similar situation occurs whenever modern man suffers in the self-construction of his demythologized and secular world because of his own limitations. These make it impossible for him to establish within it any lasting design. In the midst of modern life, there is realized in a new way the perpetual presence of death. In accepting the pain involved in his daily existence, man, whether consciously or not, enters into and partakes of the saving death of Christ.²⁹

Finally, Rahner observes that it is Christianity alone which truly demythologizes the world and reveals man's positive, creative relationship to it. For it is the man of Christian faith who, with his incarnational view of life, is alone able to be an absolute humanist because only he believes that the world in all its dimensions can be reflective of revelation and grace.³⁰ He realizes that as the scope of human action is radically extended, so too is that of sin. Nevertheless, he accepts the profane world as sanctified in its innermost depths and graced in its very

²⁸Ibid., pp. 15-16.

²⁹Ibid., p. 16.

³⁰"Christian Humanism," TI, Vol. IX, pp. 187-204.

constitution from the beginning. "God has given his effective 'yes' to the whole world...and hence it falls everywhere into the abyss of the secret of his love, whenever it follows its path to the very end."³¹

For Rahner, then, there clearly is no experience of God that is not mediated through an experience of the world. In continuity with his earlier, more philosophical works and in the strictest fidelity to Catholic tradition, he increasingly specifies man's relationship to God in terms of human experience. He writes:

The doctrinal tradition of Christianity has always emphasized that there is no experience of God for pilgrim man on this earth which has not been mediated through an experience of the world. Even the immediacy of man to God as constituted by God's grace...is always mediated through the experience of the world which man finds already about him, and in which, from the outset he has to act and be acted upon when he assumes his personal reference to God...³²

The Question of Revelation Today

Rahner's interpretation of the religious needs of today clearly focuses upon his firm conviction that theology must renew its account of the God-man-world relationship in terms of human experience. His desire, moreover, implies a

³¹"Man of Today and Religion," p. 19.

³²"The Church's Commission to Bring Salvation and the Humanization of the World," TI, Vol. XIV, p. 305.

great deal more than the simple assertion that man meets God in his immediate, worldly environment. It requires that the ground of man's ability to receive the self-revelation of God be primarily considered in its relation to man's ontological constitution. Essentially, it points to man's free possibility of going out of himself and of becoming. Hence, according to Rahner's position, the possibility of revelation rests intrinsically on the possibility of human self-transcendence. In other words, revelation is possible because transcendental experience is possible.³³

Transcendental experience, therefore, in Rahner's approach, constitutes a "moment" in revelation itself. Consequently, it is possible to state, even at this preliminary stage of our investigation, that Rahner clearly posits within the transcendence of man his fundamental experience of God. In this way, he addresses the question of revelation from within the claim of Christianity that it unveils the inner thrust of human existence in its most radical meaning. In terms of divine revelation, he concretely asks:

...if Christianity is nothing other than the clear expression of what man experiences indistinctly in his actual being--what reason could I then have not to be a Christian? ...if Christianity means taking possession of the mystery of man with absolute optimism?³⁴

³³ Revelation and Tradition, p. 12.

³⁴ "Thoughts on the Possibility of Belief Today," TI, Vol. V, p. 8.

In support of his thesis, Rahner points out that revelation has not been made intelligible to the contemporary spirit because Catholic theology of this century has failed to make man a properly theological focus. Urging the necessity of such an orientation, he notes that

as soon as man is understood as the being who is absolutely transcendent in respect of God, 'anthropocentricity' and 'theocentricity' in theology are not opposites but strictly one and the same thing, seen from two sides. Neither of the two aspects can be comprehended at all without the other.³⁵

Such an emphasis, moreover, must approach the Christian mysteries in their relationship to the fundamental a priori structures of human subjectivity. That is, it must uncover the conditions in man which make it possible for him to come to the knowledge in question with some connatural receptivity for its reality. This means neither that the content of revelation be deduced from anthropology nor that the evidence of a posteriori testimony is unimportant. But it does demand that it be viewed from the transcendental perspective.

Rahner draws further and more decisive support for his approach from the concept of a hierarchy of truths as affirmed by the Second Vatican Council. There is a "core" foundation among the realities of faith to which everything else is related.³⁶ This foundation can only be God himself.

³⁵"Theology and Anthropology," TI, Vol. IX, p. 28.

³⁶Ibid., p. 36. Cf. Unitatis Redintegratio, The Decree on Ecumenism, No. 11.

In his self-gift he is man's salvation. Hence God must, in his own triune reality, constitute that inner core. In terms of God's contact with man, a divine presence must be presupposed as itself conditioning man in his spiritual and intellectual awareness. If this relationship of God to human personality is basically conceived as an objective reality, then a full understanding of revelation necessitates a renewed theology of grace. Such a theology, if it is to be meaningful at all, must conceive of grace as the mode of relationship which refers not to a thing but to a "condition of the personal subject." If grace is considered as God in his very communication of himself to man, then it not only has a primary immediacy to the core of salvation-revelation but itself is this core.³⁷

Moreover, because this grace of God's communicated self-gift, particularly as considered in its "uncreated" aspect, is always the grace of Christ, the mysteries of the Trinity and Incarnation are given as well. If, however, these are not to remain in the realm of pre-theological imagery, an ontology of man as a receiving subject must be developed. Applying the principle that the most objective reality is at the same time necessarily the most subjective, Rahner cautions that

³⁷ Ibid.

if what grace is must not merely be expressed in a mythological sounding verbalism which communicates no experience, it can only be understood from the point of view of the subject, with his transcendental nature, experienced as a being-in-reference-to the reality of absolute truth and free-ranging, infinite, absolutely valid love. ...understood in one's innermost regions as an immediacy before the absolute mystery of God.³⁸

From the viewpoint of fundamental theology and apologetics, Rahner criticizes a naive neglect which has left the message of faith cast in terms alien to man's world-view. If the content of revelation seems incredible, modern man will the more readily justify himself in doubting even more strongly the fact of revelation. Therefore, in continuity with a fundamental principle deriving from his reflections on pluralism--that it is imperative for man to have a commonly possessed truth substructuring his individual and community life--³⁹ he renews the question of methodology and asks whether a new and indirect approach might not be a pressing need.⁴⁰

³⁸Ibid., p. 36f.

³⁹"A Small Fragment 'On the Collective Finding of Truth'," TI, Vol. VI, pp. 82-85.

⁴⁰"Reflections on the Contemporary Intellectual Formation of Future Priests," TI, Vol. VI, p. 123. See also "Reflections on Methodology in Theology," TI, Vol. XI, pp. 101-114.

Toward a Revelation Methodology

Rahner proposes that an existentially successful grounding of the faith today demands a closer synthesis between fundamental and dogmatic theology effected at a level prior to that of the traditional theologia fundamentalis. In an argument indicative of an increasing attention to the "one single mystery" given in revelation, he urges that this new fundamental theology should, as a basic discipline, treat the fact and event of revelation together with and in relation to its material content. These two moments so condition the intelligibility of each that

it can be seen that there really is revelation and that it has real existence only if one looks at what is revealed, viz., the absolute communication of God...the man of today experiences the question about the actual communication of a divine revelation as a real question...from the point of view of its content.⁴¹

Theology would then not only be more credible in its attendance to "the connections between man's experience of himself and the content of the statements of dogma," but it would facilitate a deeper penetration within man of the revelation which is his in the transcendental experience of

⁴¹Ibid., p. 126

grace.⁴² To seek out and develop such "connections by correspondence" is both the task and the method of transcendental theology.⁴³

That this task corresponds in a decisive and internal way to the nature of revelation itself is strongly implied in dialectically dual moments which lie at the heart of Rahner's theory. These are embodied in the distinction which he draws between the transcendental experience of salvation and its categorical objectification in official revelation. That is, for Rahner, transcendental reflection on the content and fact of revelation uncovers, as the condition of its possibility, the transcendental self-communicating act of God. This possibility rests in turn on an analogous duality in the structure of human consciousness. The question of revelation, consequently, may be approached as "the highest instance" of the reality of God's free relationship to his creation.

From this approach, then, we may conclude that Rahner intends a theory of revelation which offers primacy

⁴²For Rahner's general treatment of man's ability to experience grace, see "Concerning the Relationship between Nature and Grace," TI, Vol. I, p. 312ff. Cf. also "The Experience of God Today," TI, Vol. XI, pp. 149-165 and "Experience of Self and Experience of God," TI, Vol. XIII, pp. 122-132.

⁴³"Theology and Anthropology," p. 42.

neither to proof nor affirmation but to the hope that its actuality will be grasped in its very possibility. His foundational conviction that the presence of God is an inescapable reality of human existence enables him to situate divine revelation within the context of man's lived experience. Our next chapter will indicate how this insight directs the formulation of his theory.

CHAPTER II

THE PLACE OF REVELATION

Introduction

In the preceding chapter it became evident that Rahner approaches revelation within a specifically transcendental frame of reference. Correspondingly, he sees the task of theology as including the interpretation of modern man to himself. He stresses that Christianity clearly affirms what man experiences in his daily life. Because of this, the mystery of revelation can only be thoroughly grasped from within the context of a theory of man. And the question of man can, in turn, only be properly raised from within a theory of revelation. Hence the concept of revelation assumes in Rahner's thought a centrality of primary significance. It is, in effect, the normative transcendental element which governs his system. As a result, the question of the possibility and the reality of revelation is, at the same time, the question of the possibility and conditions of theology itself. It is only in thus grasping the depth of Rahner's approach at the point of its initial commitment that the nature of his theory can be fully understood.

Our attempt to reach the guiding insight of Rahner's "idea" of revelation, therefore, will begin with an examination of the identification which he gives to the topic as a quaestio disputata. From the perspective thus gained, we shall present the implications for revelation which Rahner finds in man's unlimited capacity for self-transcendence. Finally, we shall investigate the implications for the structures of a possible revelation which are contained in the "hiddenness and risk" of human, personal experience. Our aim is to arrive at a deeper understanding of how Rahner conceptualizes man's intrinsic being as primordially referred to the mystery of an Absolute Presence.

The unity in Rahner's theory rests upon the integration which he weaves between its philosophical and theological starting-points. Philosophically, he bases his analysis within the ontological structures of its receiving subject. His theological foundation rests upon the doctrine of the universal salvific will of God. Calling upon the note of optimism concerning salvation as a considerable achievement of Vatican II, he argues that revelation must "be present always and everywhere that salvation may be present always and everywhere."¹

This aspect of universality has effected a significant difference in Rahner's position. Primarily, this

¹ Revelation and Tradition, p. 11.

influence is objectified in the highly original formulation which he presents concerning a "dim and unthematic" revelation which occurs within the very being of man. The grounding insight of this theory is common both to his theological writings and to his earlier, more philosophical works.² It is the thesis that revelation is so internal a part of God's entire creative plan that it has determined man's basic constitution from the beginning. We may understand man, therefore, as that which appears when God expresses himself "into the emptiness of the non-divine" and creates a "grammar" of his own self-expression.³ Rahner's theory develops the dynamics of this founding principle.

²For a chronological index of Rahner's publications through 1974 see Elmar Klinger and Roman Beistein, Bibliographie Karl Rahner, 1924-1969, and its companion volume covering 1969-1974 (Freiburg, Herder, 1969 and 1974). Andrew Tallon and A. J. Thomas have supplied a fairly complete listing of secondary sources in "Books and Articles on Karl Rahner, 1948-1972," Theology Digest, 21 (Summer, 1973), pp. 185-192. Since the Klinger-Beistein index volumes XIII and XIV of TI have appeared as well as the long-awaited Grundkurs des Glaubens of n. 3, p. 3, Chapter I.

Besides Geist in Welt (1939) and Hörer des Wortes (1941), Rahner's specifically philosophical writings are two essays: "Introduction au concept de philosophie existentielle chez Heidegger," Recherches de sciences religieuses, Vol. 30, 1940, pp. 152-171, and "Thomas Aquinas on Truth," (1938), TI, Vol. XIII, pp. 13-31. Concerning the substance of these foundational efforts, Rahner has stated: "My fundamental conception has remained completely unchanged..." (in preface to the second German edition of Geist in Welt, 1957).

³"Thoughts on the Theology of Christmas," TI, Vol. III, p. 32.

A Quaestio Disputata

There is a certain fullness in Rahner's thought which comes from a decisive feature of his approach--his ability to preserve and to change in one unified movement. As a result, there is an underlying directive in his work which consistently asks (1) what is the reality itself which we are seeking to understand in this question, and (2) how does this reality come into the real, conditioned world of man in such a way as to demand of him both decision and deed?

The 'Reality' of Revelation

In his explicit discussion of the difficulties which the idea of revelation presents to the contemporary world-view, Rahner follows this same course.⁴ Drawing vitality from the vigor of modern thought, he concretizes the inherent "stumbling block and scandal" of revelation as found precisely in its claim to an empirical, historical manifestation. He presumes, in contrast to this, that

⁴Rahner briefly reviews his understanding of "revelation" under that title in his Theological Dictionary, prepared with H. Vorgrimler, trans. Richard Strachan (New York: Herder & Herder, 1965); and in the first fifteen pages of Revelation and Tradition. His extended treatment comprises the first five chapters of Foundations of Christian Faith.

modern man is quite able to accept the concept that there exists a Mystery at the core of reality which might be called "God." He believes further that dialogue with modern intellectual life would reveal that even today's "anti-clerical humanists," "troubled atheists" and "optimistic materialists" would not deny the existence of some Reality similar to the Deus absconditus of Christianity.⁵

In addressing the why of contemporary man's conflict, therefore, the doctrine that there is a history of God's involvement with man must be relieved of what can only be its currently erroneous interpretation. One of the symptoms of the latter Rahner finds in the nearly universal experience of the absence of God. From Christian roots a world-wide attitude has developed which seems to conflict with its source in an essential way. For Rahner, however, it is not so much the conceptual model of the world that is unchristian as is its "overhasty and illogical interpretation of itself in materialism."⁶ Any correction of that mis-judgment must rely for its success on a re-assimilation of those Christian attitudes which have missed their mark. Ultimately, it demands that the characterization of man's relationship to God be made in terms of (1) the transcendental orientation

⁵ Revelation and Tradition, p. 11.

⁶ "The Unity of Spirit and Matter...", TI, Vol. VI, p. 153.

of all creation towards its primordial ground, and (2) the categorical appearance of this immediacy in its historical objectification.

More specifically, if revelation is to be understood as both internal to man's history (the 'scandal' of incorporating God into his system) and still the free act of God, it can only be

as the historical concreteness of the transcendental self-communication of God which is already intrinsic to the concrete world. Such an "intervention" of God always takes place, first of all, from out of the fundamental openness of finite matter and of a biological system toward spirit and its history, and, secondly, from out of the openness of the spirit toward the history of the transcendental relationship between God and the created person in their mutual freedom. Consequently, every real intervention of God in his world, although it is free and cannot be deduced, is always only the becoming historical and becoming concrete of that "intervention" in which God as the transcendental ground of the world has from the outset embedded himself in this world as its self-communicating ground.⁷

The fundamental nature of the revelation question, when seen in this "widest possible horizon," becomes that of the basic difficulty which a contemporary approach to Christianity meets: "how God can really be God and not simply an element of the world, and how, nevertheless, in our religious relationship to the world we are to understand him as not remaining outside the world."⁸

⁷Foundations of Christian Faith, p. 87.

⁸Ibid.

The 'Meaning' of Revelation

Turning to this dilemma as it appears in the immediate situation confronting revelation theology, Rahner singles out modern man's increasing difficulty with the widespread Catholic understanding of revelation as "locutio Dei attestans."⁹ Relating revelation to the "all-embracing meaning of existence," he proposes that

revelation is not the communication of a definite number of propositions...., but an historical dialogue between God and man in which something happens and in which the communication is related to the continuous 'happening' and enterprise of God. The dialogue moves to a quite definite term in which first the happening and consequently the communication comes to its never to be surpassed climax... . Revelation is a saving Happening, and only then, and in relation to this, a communication of 'truths.'¹⁰

Revelation, therefore, includes two distinct aspects. It involves both the revelation-act which brings forth or uncovers (re-velare) the hiddenness of the divine presence to man and the revelation-reality which is therein directly disclosed. Any hope of a "living hold" upon the totality must treat these moments both in their unity and in their distinction. Since the act of revelation is a saving act in

⁹For historical studies of "revelation" see: Werner Bulst, Revelation (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1965); Dulles Revelation Theology; and Rene Latourelle, Theology of Revelation (Staten Island: Alba House, 1966).

¹⁰"The Development of Dogma," TI, Vol. I, p. 48.

view of man's destiny, it must enter into his human experience as its most vital and determinative element.¹¹

Properly and precisely, we know who God is, not from ourselves and the world, but only from the activity in history of the free and living God, through which he showed us who he wished to be to us. Consequently, the teaching of the New Testament in the ultimate analysis is not an ontology of God's attributes, not a theory, but an historical account of the experiences in which man has come to know God.¹²

Therefore, when Rahner asks "what is revelation?" he is asking about the intrinsic relationship between man's experience of himself and that process by which the world is assimilated to God. From this position he affirms that "the totality of the message of Christian faith is in a real sense already given in a transcendental experience."¹³

Within this perspective, the problem of revelation assumes its true dimensions. It touches immediately upon and includes within its innermost dynamic the primary mystery of Christian faith--the Trinity.

Indeed, it is essentially Rahner's incisive critique of standard Trinitarian theology which indirectly, but persistently, guides his carefully nuanced description of revelation as a quaestio disputata. He decries the presence

¹²"Theos in the New Testament," TI, Vol. I, p. 117.

¹³"Reflections on Methodology in Theology," TI, Vol. XI, p. 109. (Italics mine.)

of a "secret monotheism" within the average theology of the day which leaves man's only relation to the Trinity one of having to know something about it through historical revelation. Applying the axiom that real knowledge, in its deepest metaphysical sense, implies "the most real conceivable relation" to what is known, he states that

the revelation of the mystery of the Trinity implies and presupposes ultimately a real-ontological communication to man of the revealed mystery as such. Hence, it cannot be interpreted as a merely verbal communication, since this does not modify the real relation between him who communicates (as three-personal) and the hearer.¹⁴

In consequence, it is precisely here that the crux of the challenge lies. Modern man must be able to recognize the proclamation of this reality as the "good news" which gives ultimate meaning to his existence. It must resonate as the infinite answer to the infinite question which he finds in his own depths.¹⁵ It is on this basis, with its Trinitarian presuppositions, that Rahner hopes to re-address the question of the immanence and transcendence of God in relation to the world. In the contemporary evolutionary model which he adopts, he finds a natural affinity with

¹⁴ The Trinity, trans. Joseph Donceel (New York: Herder & Herder, 1970), pp. 14-15.

¹⁵ Cf. "Science as a Confession," TI, Vol. III, pp. 385-400; and "Thoughts on the Possibility of Belief Today," TI, Vol. V, pp. 3-22.

Christian thought which constitutes its properly religious terrain. The task, as a result, becomes one of "the bold and radical carrying through to its logical conclusion of that view of the world which essentially and in principle has been present all along in Christianity" yet submerged in a static concept of the world.¹⁶

Thus the boundaries of the revelation problematic are established by Rahner within a conceptual framework which owes a great deal both to contemporary impulses and to a revitalizing of traditional dogmatic content. He characterizes the question as one which "has been topical since the days of Modernism and which, nevertheless, appears in some way to have been evaded."¹⁷ His proposed solution begins with an anthropological interpretation of man's connaturality for the self-revelation of God.

Transcendental Experience

When viewed within the perspective of the Incarnation and of the divine self-gift in revelation-grace, man is known, as it were, "from above" as potentially the other of God. He should also be understandable "from below" with somewhat the

¹⁶"Christology in the Setting of Modern Man's Understanding of Himself and of His World," TI, Vol. XI, p. 222.

¹⁷Revelation and Tradition, p. 24.

same results. In effect, something of the same notion of man should be deducible from an examination of his dynamic finality, even though such a deduction is only possible a posteriori and in consequence of the Incarnation. Hence, Rahner seeks for the conscious human experience which is presupposed by the fact and content of special revelation. He accepts the implied faith-reference as his own horizon and analyzes its content in terms of the transcendental conditions of human subjectivity which confirm its possibility. His concern is thus with human performance, viz., with man's most determinative human activities--his acts of questioning, knowing, willing. His hermeneutic of revelation, as a result, finds its grounding principle in the dynamism of the human mind.

The Mystery of Man

The essential reality which Rahner wants to express from within the constant teaching of Christianity is that the continually encountered horizon of man's existence is revealed to him as God.¹⁸ Utilizing a methodological procedure which he calls a reductio in mysterium and by means of which

¹⁸ On the movement of Catholic thought identified with this goal see Otto Muck, The Transcendental Method, trans. Wm. D. Seidensticker (New York: Herder & Herder, 1968); for the section on Rahner, see pp. 181-204. Cf. also J. Donceel, "On Transcendental Thomis," Continuum, 7 (1969), pp. 164-168.

he intends to indicate the "indomitable dominant horizon of all understanding," he notes that in his innermost subjectivity and in his historical, social existence man is confronted by an experience of the ineffable, of mystery.¹⁹

As the horizon of his every action, this sense of the boundless permeates man and, with an urgency that is paradoxically one, both confirms and questions his being.

It is the "permanent mystery" which enters into human existence as its "innermost kernel" and "foundation."²⁰ As such, it constitutes

the ultimate depths and the radical essence of every spiritual and personal experience (of love, faithfulness, hope and so on), and thereby precisely constitutes also the ultimate unity and totality of experience, in which the person as spiritual possesses himself and is made over to himself.²¹

It is a presence, therefore, which man does not simply 'feel' after the manner of an accumulated conviction of life's impenetrability. Rather, it is an experience which he undergoes; it is his life as happening, as event.

Rahner clarifies this concept further when he relates it directly to man's spiritual faculties and to their innate tendency toward consummation. Inherently, the experience of

¹⁹"On the Theology of the Incarnation," *TI*, Vol. IV, p. 108. See also "Reflections on Methodology in Theology," pp. 101-114, and "The Concept of Mystery in Catholic Theology," pp. 48ff.

²⁰"Theology in the New Testament," p. 38.

²¹"The Concept of Mystery in Catholic Theology," p. 49.

mystery discloses dialogic possibilities in the very exertion which, in some pre-conceptual way, it brings to bear upon the basic dynamism of man's existential striving. As such, it must be both indigenous to and illuminative of the "necessary relationship intervening between the created spirit and God."²² Rahner thus proposes in effect that there exists between the mystery that is man and the mystery that is God an analogous commonality which allows for speaking of creature and Creator from a single ground. He finds this ground, and the place of revelation's initial moment, in the transcendent spirituality by which man's nature is defined.

The nature of the spiritual creature consists in the fact that that which is 'innermost' to it, that whence, to which and through which it is, is precisely not an element of this essence and this nature which belongs to it. Rather, its nature is based upon the fact that that which is supra-essential, that which transcends it, is that which gives it its support, its meaning, its future and its most basic impulse...in such a way that the nature of this spiritual creature...is not thereby taken away from it but rather obtains from this its ultimate validity and consistency and achieves growth and development because of it.²³

If man is to be understood, in terms of his capacity for the full reality of revelation, therefore, an examination of his nature must disclose, as a prior condition, an

²²"The Experience of God Today," p. 154.

²³"Immanent and Transcendent Consummation of the World," TI, Vol. X, p. 128. See also "Nature and Grace," TI, Vol. I, pp. 165-188.

immanent factor of its possibility. For Rahner, this factor can only be supported by the principle of movement which is identified with man's spirituality. (In man's absolute transcendence toward the unlimited, there must be present an unconditional, and yet natural, openness for God.²⁴

Man should be able to receive this Love which is God himself; he must have a congeniality for it. He must be able to accept it as one who has room and scope, understanding and desire for it. Thus he must have a real 'potency' for it. He must have it always. He is indeed someone always addressed and claimed by this Love. For as he is now in fact, he is created for it; he is called into being so that Love might bestow itself. To this extent this 'potency' is what is inmost and most authentic in him, the center and root of what he is absolutely.²⁵

The Experience of Mystery

When viewed against this framework, what Rahner is attempting with his analogy of mystery becomes clear. He wishes to provide an existentially realistic description of how the capacity in man for God presents itself. To that end he speaks of it as identical to a humble and conscious awareness through which man experiences his being as always

²⁴ The 'openness' of man's nature is developed fully in Rahner's metaphysics of knowledge in Spirit in the World and given further extension as a philosophy of religion in Hearers of the Word. While these works supply the guiding impulse of this thesis, a less intellectualist expression is being sought.

²⁵ "Concerning the Relationship between Nature and Grace," TI, Vol. I, p. 311.

referred beyond himself to the fullness of the absolute, incomprehensible being. Hence it involves precisely "that kind of knowledge which is present in every man as belonging to the very roots of cognition in him, and as constituting the starting-point and prior condition for all reflexive knowledge... ."26

What man is can, in consequence, best be approached by a radically serious effort to express what that reference means in terms of its dialogic and dialectic implications. As the "ultimate point of reference," the "asymptotic goal," the "inaccessible beginning," and the "transcendent beyond," mystery is at once the "ground which withdraws" and the "other" which remains ever remote and ever near.²⁷ Mystery, then, because it is a possible referent for both what is most immanent and most transcendent in man, can be approached in terms of his self-performance.

Hence, man's being presents itself to him as mysterious when, in his core-existence, he is aware of himself as one whose derivation cannot be sustained by the plurality of his origins. Beyond the anthropologies which objectify his

²⁶"Experience of Self and Experience of God," p. 123.

²⁷Ibid., pp. 124-129. See also, "Mystery," Theological Dictionary, pp. 300ff; and "Mystery," Encyclopedia of Theology (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), pp. 1000-1004.

nature, is the subjective reality of human consciousness from which they arise. In his own being, therefore, man knows a basic unity which exists prior to any of its multiple and varied manifestations. In a similar way, man knows this reality whenever he is aware that his destiny is never completely in his own hands but is always referred to an ultimacy which eludes his grasp. Rahner terms this universal awareness a "more original experience" and characterizes it as belonging to the "ultimate and primordial movement" of a created spirituality.²⁸

There is a sense of 'call' and 'summons' within these two moments which, for Rahner, makes possible the drawing together of the experience of self and the experience of God. As already implied, however, the concept of mystery does not, in Rahner's understanding, intend something only provisionally unknown but subject to future and final clarification. On the contrary, as the leitmotiv of his revelation theory--and the primary indicator of its ontological origins--it signifies a reality forever incomprehensible to man, that is, the being of God himself.²⁹ As such,

²⁸Foundations of Christian Faith, p. 32f.

²⁹On the theology of God as 'incomprehensible,' cf. "The Concept of Mystery in Catholic Theology," pp. 36-48.

it points to God as the realistic term of man's transcendence, the horizon of his being which makes personal, free experience possible. It is at once the ground and content of that unity which draws the experience of self and the experience of God into one moment in such a way that "without this experience of God no experience of self is possible."³⁰

The Structure of Man's Spirituality

That man is a being whose self-performance lies open to Mystery is the initial proposition of Rahner's metaphysical anthropology. It is not, however, an assumed truism but rests on a prior and more fundamental insight. For although the necessity of man's encounter with material, sensible things--and his resulting drive to understand them--leads to the place where Rahner finds the possibility of a theological solution to the contemporary dilemma, it is only intelligible in consequence of the how which it demands. Since this is the question within our question, it is the decisive factor in Rahner's approach and demonstrates the integrating power within the cyclic movement of his hermeneutic.³¹

³⁰"Experience of Self and the Experience of God," p. 125.

³¹Cf. O. Muck, The Transcendental Method, pp. 196-198.

Man as Question

In setting the pattern of his thought, Rahner turns first to man and to man, not as a pre-defined nature, but as "the universal question" which he is to himself. Applying the axiom that in the unity of the one subject every bit of knowledge is also the function of every other part of knowledge, man's understanding is brought forth as the condition which makes theology, as a saving knowledge, possible.³² In other words, "revelation presupposes a clearly distinguished free philosophy as the space of its own possibility."³³

From this point of mediation between philosophy and theology, with its 'memory' of both man's transcendental orientation to mystery and the "distinctive stamp" which his contemporary situation imposes upon his self-expression, a Christian assertion may be proclaimed. Thus the question itself prepares the conditions for the full reality of 'hearing' and the theological answer brings that prior understanding to its finally reflexive self-presence. Hence, theology, in this sense, is not a "primary quantity" but

³²"Philosophy and Theology," pp. 73-75; "Philosophy and Philosophising in Theology," p. 47f; "The Current Relationship between Philosophy and Theology," TI, Vol. XIII, pp. 61-79; Foundations of Christian Faith, p. 24f.

³³Ibid., p. 76.

follows upon the more original experience both of self and of God.³⁴

The "question which man is to himself" is the conceptual vehicle which initiates the cycle by pointing to that concrete experience of existence which is basically inescapable and which every man must recognize as his own. Further, an understanding of man's orientation to mystery intimates, as implied above, that there is a dialectical and expressive relationship present at the heart of being. In the comprehensive order of Rahner's theory, that reality is first disclosed as the fundamental thesis of his transcendental system: there is a metaphysics (and, hence, a theology) radically actuated in the being of man. In the elaboration of this thesis in Spirit in the World, an interpretation of the theory of knowledge developed by Aquinas yields for him two far-reaching principles: the unity of human knowing and the unity of knowing and being.³⁵

In the development of his thesis, Rahner accepts, with Heidegger, that the starting-point for metaphysical inquiry lies within the questioning process of man. "Man questions necessarily," therefore, being is accessible to

³⁴For this distinction, see "Theology in the New Testament," pp. 23-41; also, Revelation and Tradition.

³⁵Spirit in the World, pp. 57-70. For possible sources of this insight, see Fiorenza's "Introduction," *ibid.*

him only as something questionable (Fragbarkeit); he is insofar as he asks about being; he himself exists as the "question" about being.³⁶ It is, consequently, in the performance of the question that man's existence as there-with-being (Dasein) reveals its ontological dimensions, for

...the metaphysical question is that question which in a final and radical sharpening of man's questioning turns upon itself as such and thereby turns upon the presuppositions which are operative in itself... It is the transcendental question, which does not merely place something asked about in question, but the one questioning and his question itself, and thereby absolutely everything.³⁷

By placing the existence-question within the being of man, Rahner believes that he is able to deduce both the meaning of man and the meaning of being in general. His answer, as a result, begins with the power and the thrust of the question itself. For every question has a direction, a principium, or it could not be raised. In the "from whence" of the question about being in general, being is already being-as-known.³⁸ This further implies that every being,

³⁶Ibid., p. 57. For Rahner's personal comment on the influence of Heidegger upon his "style of thinking and of investigating," with its emphasis on the "synthetic idea," see Patrick Granfield's interview of Rahner in "Karl Rahner," Theologians at Work (London, Macmillan, 1967), pp. 37f. Cf. also, R. Schnieder, "A Transcendental Philosophy of the Question," 4 (Spring, 1966), pp. 150-153.

³⁷Ibid., p. 58. For an indication of responses to this thesis, see D. J. Shine, "The Being-Present-to-Itself-of-Being," Continuum, 6 (Summer, 1968), pp. 221-224.

³⁸Hearers of the Word, p. 34; 38.

as the possible object of knowledge, has essentially an inner reference to knowledge, and thus to some knower. If this relatedness is seen as an a priori and necessary proposition, it can only be because being and knowing constitute a basic unity. In effect, being and knowing are one because in their grounding within the performance of the question, viz, in the act by which being performs itself as knowing (and as not knowing), their identity as the "primordial knowledge" is disclosed.³⁹

The 'Reach' of Man's Intent

The starting-point in the metaphysical question provides Rahner with the propositions which undergird his theory of revelation. The first grounds the second and relates to a general ontology: the nature of being is the original unity of being and knowing. The second extends the first and relates to a metaphysical anthropology: the nature of man is spirit; man is absolute openness to being.⁴⁰

Man is capable of self-enactment because the dynamism of his fundamental intentionality is a pre-reflexive reaching

³⁹Ibid., p. 46. Cf. Nikolaus Lobkowitz, "Zu K. Rahner's Geist in Welt," Philosophisches Jahrbuch, 67 (1958), p. 406. Lobkowitz considers this to be Rahner's fundamental philosophical contribution. Cited in Barrie A. Wilson, "The Possibility of Theology after Kant: An Examination of Karl Rahner's Geist in Welt," Canadian Journal of Theology, 12 (1966), p. 255.

⁴⁰Cf. Rahner's summary statement of the grounding of metaphysics in man's cognition, Spirit in the World, pp. 387ff.

(Vorgriff)⁴¹ toward the totality of all possible reality.⁴² Through this reaching or pre-apprehension toward the unlimited, man attains, in one unified motion of knowledge and love, to both the sensible reality of his material world and its non-objective, universal and sustaining source.⁴³ In the surge of his movement beyond the quiddity of each this or that which he encounters, man "anticipates" the reality which simply is. Rahner, with Thomas, terms that reality the God of revelation.⁴⁴

It is, consequently, this a priority and essential openness^o which, as the ontological structure of human subjectivity--and not just an "accompanying phenomenon"--forms the antecedent law governing how revelation occurs. Rahner calls this subjective, unthematic, necessary and \ un failing consciousness of man's self-presence in knowing a transcendental experience. As an 'experience' it is a moment

⁴¹On Rahner's use of this term, cf. Andrew Tallon, "Spirit, Freedom, History," The Thomist, 38 (October, 1974), pp. 908-936; note particularly, p. 914f.

⁴²Hearers of the Word, p. 53; cf. Spirit in the World, pp. 387-400.

⁴³Cf. Spirit in the World., pp. 237ff.

⁴⁴For a discussion of Rahner's Maréchal Thomism at this, its most controversial point, see, for example, Denis Bradley, "Rahner's Spirit in the World Aquinas or Hegel?" The Thomist, 41 (April, 1977), pp. 167-199; Roger LaPointe, "L'ontologie de Karl Rahner," Canadian Philosophical Review, 8 (1970), pp. 592-611; Edward MacKinnon, "Transcendental Turn: Necessary but Insufficient," Continuum, 6 (Summer, 1968), pp. 225-232.

within every experience as a condition of its possibility; its 'transcendence' derives from its belonging to the necessary, inalienable structures of the knowing subject and indicates its spirituality in act. Man is thus directed to God from within the centrality of his own coming-to-be and finds, whether consciously or not, in the 'stuff' (Stoff) of his world the validation of its meaning and purpose.

There is, however, a further and equally significant presupposition which Rahner draws from his fundamental ontology of the question and mystery which is man. A second aspect of being--beyond its luminosity as self-presence--is its variable or non-constant quantity. In his affirmation of an infinite horizon of being, man experiences his finiteness and referred contingency as "carried" by the free power of pure being.⁴⁵ Hence, man is aware that there are degrees of being. In his on-going awareness that he is "gift" in relation to the ground of his transcendence, he experiences a sense of creatureliness. Yet, at the same time, in his daily actualization of his being, he knows that he possesses the power of his own freedom. Between the genuine reality of his radical dependence on the one hand, and the experience of freedom on the other, his transcendentalism is lived as an orientation grounded in "the abyss of ineffable mystery."⁴⁶

⁴⁵ A Rahner Reader, p. 34.

⁴⁶ Foundations of Christian Faith, p. 42.

In an evolutionary view of the world, man is understood in much the same way. He is "the being in whom the tendency of matter to find itself in the spirit by self-transcendence arrives at that point where it definitely breaks through."⁴⁷ Man is spirit-in-world because he is that being in whom self-transcendence has become conscious of itself. In the hiddenness and risk of his disposed and referred existence, he knows himself to be that creature who alone bears an open reference to the Absolute. He knows himself, therefore, to be the incarnate possibility of transcendence into the life of God. As such he embodies a capacity for what Christian theology calls 'grace' and 'glory.'⁴⁸

Rahner has envisioned that 'potency' of man for God as constitutive of the structure and operation of human consciousness. If, as Rahner asserts, the free, luminous act of creation is a continuous act of love--as the deepest factor of knowledge, since it is its condition and cause--man's creatureliness so modifies his spirituality as to prepare in him an empathy to receive and return that love.

⁴⁷"Christology within an Evolutionary View of the World," p. 106. Cf. n. 21 above.

⁴⁸Ibid., pp. 160; 179.

Insofar as God, in his love of himself, freely loves as the creator of the finite, he understands the finite itself in this love. In this light the contingent, too, is raised to the light of being. ... there is for it no other way of sharing this light. Only in the logic of love does logic reach the understanding of free being.⁴⁹

Thus Rahner arrives at the second proposition of his metaphysical anthropology: "Man is the being who stands in free love before the God of a possible revelation."⁵⁰ From within this perspective, and in fidelity to the unity of man's cognitive process, he envisions love not as something separate from knowledge but as its deepest factor, its condition and cause. He is able, as a result, to interpret man's relation to the transcendent "Whither" of his horizon as a summons to acknowledge, by the "yes" or "no" of his option fondamentale, the free gift of his being.⁵¹ In other words, because an act of interpersonal knowledge is, by identity, an act of love, true knowledge possesses, in the concrete totality of man's existence, an inherent relationship to freedom and decision.⁵²

⁴⁹ A Rahner Reader, p. 40.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 45.

⁵¹ On the theological content which Rahner gives to the term Whither, see "The Concept of Mystery in Catholic Theology," p. 50. For a comprehensive treatment of the difficulties involved in interpreting the word God today, see Langdon Gilkey, Naming the Whirlwind: The Renewal of God-Language (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969).

⁵² Cf. "Theology of Freedom," TI, Vol. VI, pp. 178-196.

The Radical Content of Man's Freedom

In thus defining man's freedom within the inescapable experience of self-transcendence, Rahner prepares for the possibility of conceiving of revelation as a personal "intersubjectivity" between man and God.⁵³ As such, it necessarily involves an ontological dialectic between what is imposed by the essential orientation of man's being and what he experiences as imposed in the existential task which marks his daily life. Rahner identifies the tension which thus structures man's self-actualization as its temporality, viz., as the medium of that historicity in which man's nature as "a free and intellectual being" is realized.⁵⁴

It is precisely this aspect which allows Rahner to extend the potential of the man-God relationship--which constitutes the basis of man's self-possession in knowledge--to a more primordial and encompassing relation of each to the world. He notes, consequently, that the degree of being proper to a spiritual person is only fully realized in the

⁵³For the agreement of Rahner's position with that of E. Schillebeeckx, cf. Revelation and Theology, Vol. II, trans. N. D. Smith (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1968).

⁵⁴"Intellectual Honesty and Christian Faith," TI, Vol. VII, p. 69. Cf. also, "The Dignity and Freedom of Man," TI, Vol. II, pp. 235-264.

deliberate attitude which he takes toward himself in the in Welt enactment of his freedom. Hence, it is the performance of his existence in both knowing and willing which alone displays the intentional self-affirmation (or self-denial) by which man attains himself.

In the free decisions by which he fashions his "now" (out of the lingering past and the not-yet, open future) there is present to man a "self-perfecting of freedom" which is definitive in its final 'moment' as "its self-realisation before God."⁵⁵ For, in Rahner's thought,

freedom, if it is to be able to effect salvation or damnation and hence the determination of the whole man, of itself brings into play the whole man with his mutually interactive relations to his origin and future. Freedom is always self-realisation of the objectively choosing man seen in view of his total realisation before God. In this way, considered as the capacity of the 'heart,' it is the capacity of love.⁵⁶

A unity reveals itself in man's choices, therefore, which clarifies further the inner-relatedness present between the love which he has constituted, whether falsely

⁵⁵"Theology of Freedom," p. 186. On the treatment of death, see On the Theology of Death, trans. Charles Henkey (New York: Herder & Herder, 1961).

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 187. On the ontological significance of Rahner's concept of heart, see "Some Theses for a Theology of Devotion to the Sacred Heart," TI, Vol. III, pp. 331-352; "The Theology of the Symbol," TI, Vol. IV, pp. 221-252; "The Theological Meaning of the Veneration of the Sacred Heart," TI, Vol. VIII, pp. 217-229; and, in the same volume, "Unity-Love-Mystery," pp. 229-249.

or correctly, by his free responses to a finite world and the love which informs his fundamental attitude toward himself. If man is oriented towards Absolute Love, his individual, concrete knowledge of that mystery "is always determined from the start by the way he loves and treasures the things presented to him."⁵⁷ Thus knowing possesses a fully human significance only when integrated into freedom, and the proper function of each is "loving communication with the Thou."⁵⁸ Rahner is thus able to bring knowing and loving together in such a way that to be is, for man, as much to love and be loved as it is to know and be known. The complete illumination of being must then necessarily relate to the summons of Absolute Presence that love by which man is ultimately borne.

We may note in conclusion that Rahner's understanding of man as self-actualizing in transcendental experience brings the cycle of his task beyond its mid-point and to the threshold of theology. Once man is established as consciously in possession of a responsibly free and personal subjectivity a moment of mediation between philosophy and theology has been brought to completion. In the common light of a

⁵⁷Hearers of the Word, p. 106.

⁵⁸"Unity of the Love of Neighbor and Love of God," TI, Vol. VI, p. 241.

theologically oriented anthropology and its metaphysical "inner moment," the question of man has been brought to its possible formulation as the question of his existential salvation.

There is, moreover, in Rahner's approach the clear intention that that question be, at the same time, concretized within the "new situation" of man's striving. The final and most radically realistic affinity possible between the bringing forth of a new society and the "one single mystery" of Christianity must be unveiled as the radicality of Love.⁵⁹ The act of personal love for another human being is "the basic act of man" which gives meaning to everything else. In our next chapter the properly theological content of that act, in its elevation by the offer of Love's Self-gift, will be investigated as constituting the heart of Rahner's revelation theory.

⁵⁹"The Church's Commission to Bring Salvation and the Humanization of the World," TI, Vol. XIV, pp. 304-308.

CHAPTER III

THE EVENT OF SELF-GIFT

Introduction

Rahner's theory of revelation, although highly metaphysical, is sustained by a realism that repeatedly returns to the goal of his pastoral intent. The irrelevancy of revelation for modern man is persistently measured against the general lack of understanding of God's three-personal relationship to the unified totality of all created reality. As a result, his critical attitude toward the isolation of the Trinity from the current theology of revelation directs his effort to reappropriate its saving authenticity for contemporary life. It guides his proposal that the task of theology be grasped as a reductio in unum mysterium and that man be understood from the content of his experience of transcendence.

From this foundational concentration, Rahner moves to the explicitly theological realm in his well-known and somewhat controversial doctrine of the supernatural existential. Since it is the key concept which gives Rahner's theory of revelation its cohesion and intelligibility, this chapter will be primarily concerned with clarifying its content from the transcendental basis of his approach. We

shall examine the way in which Rahner develops his position from within the universal call and offer of salvation extended to all men everywhere. The implications of this reality as the self-communication of God in his immediacy to man and to his history will be considered within the ambit of Rahner's extensive theology of grace. In our final step, a summary notion of the basic elements of Rahner's theory will be presented in their transcendental and categorical aspects.

Rahner believes that a proper penetration of the inner thrust of God's saving purpose for man entails far more than an external possibility for him. In keeping with his philosophical affirmation of the human situation as intrinsically oriented to the Absolute of Personal Mystery, he proposes that man is further specified--in the totality of his being and in an essential way--by the universal extension of the divine favor.

Therefore, in his completion of his doctrine of man with the thesis of an existential which ordains him toward grace, Rahner fulfills the logical movement initiated when he grounded man's nature in his capacity to be the 'other' of God's personal approach. With his conception of God's real presence as an offer to man's freedom and a modification of his transcendental experience, he intends

Rahner insists that the message to modern man must be one which clarifies the penetrating power of the Gospel. It must announce to him that his "whole spiritual and intellectual existence is oriented towards a holy mystery" which communicates its own reality, at least as an offer, with an immediate proximity.³ This "holy mystery" and "immediate proximity" is Rahner's concrete expression of man's supernatural orientation to God.

The Supernatural Existential

In contrast to the extrinsicism of the average teaching on grace and revelation which has characterized the last few centuries and to which he strenuously objects, Rahner describes God's presence to man in terms of his subjectivity and personhood. Avoiding any objectification of the event of revelation-grace as an entity inhering in the soul,⁴ he wants to give conceptual realism and credibility to the implications contained in the traditional doctrine of God's saving will for man.

For if God wills the salvation of mankind--and Scripture and the constant teaching of the Church confirm

³Cf. "Man," p. 368f; and "Theology and Anthropology," pp. 4; 11.

⁴"Grace: II. Theological: B. Systematic," Sacramentum Mundi, Vol. II, p. 415.

this--then his love must make itself known to man as operative within the act by which his mode of existence is expectant of meaning.⁵ For Rahner, man's confrontation by mystery challenges him to an attitude of hope. For hope, understood as "the basic modality of human existence," gives expression to that fundamental sense of wonder and expectation with which an orientation to Personal Presence is filled.⁶

Hope, therefore, is an internal reality of man's will as he reacts to the promise of his created possibilities. As such it is related to that "more original experience" which is prior to reflexive representation or conceptualization in word. Nor is hope to be dissolved in the final reality of death. As with mystery, the fulfillment of man's nature "outwards from the self" in the radical trust of "letting go" gives expression to

a process of constantly eliminating the provisional in order to make room for the radical and pure uncontrollability of God. It is the continuous process of destroying that which appears, in order that the absolute and ultimate truth may be the intelligible as comprehended, and love may be that which is brought about by our love.⁷

⁵On the theology of God's saving will, see "Salvation," I, Encyclopedia of Theology, p. 1499.

⁶"On the Theology of Hope," TI, Vol. X, pp. 242-259.

⁷Ibid., p. 250.

From the consideration of hope as the corresponding reality in man to the fact of his finality and goal, Rahner argues that the natural potential of man for a receptive encounter with the Divine is, in fact, already a supernaturally determined reality. Man is not only a listening spirit who turns toward the possibility of revelation. In the actual order of his existential situation as ontologically affected by the universal salvific will of God, he is redeemed. As such he is permanently "the object of God's saving care and offer of grace."⁸

Rahner calls this reality objective justification and distinguishes it from the subjective fruit of its application in the sanctification of the individual. By it, however, he intends a true and essential determination of man's being. Adopting the Heideggerian meaning of "existential" as an "ontological structure of existence," he intends to indicate the objective consequence of God's will.⁹ Hence he is able to assert that

there can be no serious doubt that all men stand permanently under the offer of grace really operative in them. This permanent and ever-ready offer is always accepted in their moral activity, unless they shut themselves to it by their own moral guilt.¹⁰

⁸"Existence," II. "The Existential." B. Theological, Encyclopedia of Theology, p. 494.

⁹Ibid., A. Philosophical, p. 492.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 494.

Rahner thus gives a properly theological specification to man's orientation which he derives from the light of historical revelation. Following from his metaphysical proposition that states that with each higher intensification of being there is also an intensification of knowing, he affirms that the "situation" of redemption or justification under which man lives enters into his self-awareness as an inescapable, constitutive element of his being. He further proposes that the new formal object which is involved in grace constitutes "the primary feature of revelation."¹¹

That man is really affected by the permanent offer of grace is not something which happens only now and again. ...This state of affairs can be briefly labeled, "supernatural existential," to prevent its being overlooked. It means that man as he really exists is always and ineluctably more than mere "nature" in the theological sense.¹²

There is, therefore, present within man something beyond a mere passive receptivity for revelation and grace; prior to God's gift there already exists a reality which is related to it in an essential way and present to man's being as 'natural' to him. That is, because God has freely elected to love man, he has willed to bring to consummation

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid.

the mutually related orders of creation and redemption.¹³ By a principle of "hierarchically ordered reality" through which he intends to complete the evolutionary model implicit within the reference of transcendentalism, Rahner confirms man's potential as the 'grammar' of God's self-expression by basing that love in the Incarnation of his Word.¹⁴ Consequently, his concept of man's graced existence can only be brought to satisfaction in relationship to a theology of grace.

The Self-communication of God

When Rahner implies that the supernatural existential is in effect the objectification of the divine salvific will he infers a universal elevation of man's nature by grace; indeed, an elevation effected by the very offer of grace whether as accepted or rejected. He interprets man's spirituality as realizing its activity within an awareness of itself which includes in some way, an awareness of God's own reality.¹⁵ Therefore, that inner moment which he seeks

¹³Cf. "The Order of Redemption within the Order of Creation," The Christian Commitment, trans. Cecily Hastings (London: Sheed & Ward, 1963), pp. 59-113.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 75.

¹⁵This is the constant theme of Rahner's pastoral theology and is given recent and typical expression in, for example, "Observations on the Problem of the 'Anonymous Christian'," TI, Vol. XIV, pp. 280-294.

to grasp and which informs his basic intuition of revelation's occurrence has its initial 'lighting' here. The reality of revelation is, in Rahner's thought, expressive of man's real situation as graced and redeemed prior even to the free decision by which he claims and affirms (or disowns and rejects) his own being. Consequently, it is man's horizon of a priority which, in its ontologically grace-determined reality, is itself revelation.

This a priori awareness of man (called revelation) is always accepted in faith wherever and whenever an individual in unreserved faithfulness to his own moral conscience accepts himself in freedom as he is, and so too in the as yet unrecognizable implications of the dynamism underlying the movement of his own spirit.¹⁶

The offer of grace, therefore, is already a moment of revelation in Rahner's understanding. Furthermore, this moment within transcendental experience is the primary feature of revelation.¹⁷ In the new finality given man through God's gracious will to love, a corresponding reality is present which already and always touches his horizon of self-presence in a revelatory way. Within a theology of grace that possibility is seen as what God presupposes for himself as the ultimate goal of his creative design. Hence a real self-communication of God is what is basically

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 290f.

¹⁷ Cf. n. 5 of this chapter.

intended from the first constitution of man's nature as a necessary means for this happening.

The central thesis of Rahner's theory is thus an assertion of man's condition or situation as so affected by the reality of its supernatural vocation that it is possible to state that man is "the event of God's free and forgiving self-communication."¹⁸ As the reality of the divine self-gift to man,

the countenance of God which turns toward us in this self-communication is, in the trinitarian nature of this encounter, the very being of God as he is in himself, and must be if indeed the divine communication in grace and glory really is the communication of God in his own self to us.¹⁹

The creation of man to know and possess God in love receives its actuality as graced in virtue of its finality. From this perspective the question of man's destiny strengthens Rahner's conviction that an ordination to grace and vision cannot be external to his center of being.

Rahner thus asks how an ontology which rightly comprehends man's essence as dependent upon God can grasp his basic disposition in relationship to God as having its actuality in an external decree. Is there not a basic contradiction in such a position? If the supernatural

¹⁸ Foundations of Christian Faith, p. 116.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 135.

goal of creation is first in the divine intention, then, Rahner believes, man and his world are intrinsically different than they might otherwise have been. "Man's concrete end is the first object of God's will...and it is with this in view that he first devises the concrete quiddity of man."²⁰

Rahner insists, therefore, that rational thinking demands that the divine decrees for man have intrinsic effects. At the heart of his theory, this argument stands as the crucial proof which he offers for understanding man's existential orientation as supernaturally informed by a transcendental experience of God. Consequently, he asks

must not what God decrees for man be eo ipso an interior ontological constituent of his concrete quiddity 'terminative', even if it is not a constituent of his 'nature'? For an ontology which grasps the truth that man's concrete quiddity depends utterly on God, is not his binding disposition eo ipso not just a juridical decree of God but precisely what man is, hence not just an imperative proceeding from God but man's inward depths?²¹

What God decrees, therefore, as a finality of man must have a corresponding effect on his existential nature which ordains him toward that end. By attempting a closer unity between the finality of man as destined for the immediate presence of vision in glory and the originating ontology

²⁰"Concerning the Relationship between Nature and Grace," TI, Vol. I, p. 308. For a history of the nature-grace problematic in which this question arises, see p. 297, n. 1.

²¹Ibid., p. 302.

of that possibility--as an inner illuminatedness of man's being--Rahner envisions God's self-communication as the fullness of "uncreated" grace.²²

The Self-bestowal of God

In order to achieve a fuller comprehension of Rahner's thesis that the silent mystery which surrounds and beckons all men everywhere is a true self-communication of God in his own triune reality, it is necessary to grasp the dialectic at work. The conceptual framework which he proposes uncovers a singular potential for unity within two seemingly disparate realities. One consists, on the part of man, in the implicit demand for mutuality present in the intentional thrust of human consciousness. The other arises from the all-embracing, universal gesture of love on the part of God.

On the basis of a transcendental approach, a principle of unity is obtained which derives from (1) a metaphysical anthropology performed under the aegis of faith and (2) an "ultimate and irreducible" experience of grace. That principle consists in the sustaining act of benevolent and gracious love present to the core of man's transcending

²²"Some Implications of the Scholastic Concept of Uncreated Grace," TI, Vol. I, pp. 319-346.

freedom. An explication of that "mediated immediacy" as a communication of the personal Spirit of God²³--the "uncreated grace" of scholastic theology--leads to the recognition of a threefold presence of God in the plan and deed of salvation.²⁴

The Modes of God's Gift

Rahner carefully prepares for the three-personal aspect of revelation by a reductio of God's ~~self~~-communication to a single mystery. Taking the conception of the world as an evolutionary, dynamic process as his premise, he proposes an immediate relationship of God to the ultimate unity which this model displays. He finds this in the one basic act of self-bestowal by which God both created the world and entered even more directly into its reality in the presence of his continuous self-offering.²⁵

Creation can and should be conceived of as an element in, and prior setting for, the self-bestowal of God, that act in which he does not create something different from himself and set it over against himself, but rather communicates his own reality to the other. If and to the extent that we have understood that the created world is the subject to whom the divine self-bestowal is addressed, and is the condition and prior setting posited by this self-bestowal of God in itself, and enabling it to take

²³Ibid., p. 322. Note also the Scriptural basis of Rahner's position, *ibid.*, pp. 320-324.

²⁴"Reflections on Methodology in Theology," p. 94.

²⁵"Christology in the Setting of Modern Man's Understanding of Himself and of His World," p. 216ff.

place, then it naturally follows that there is an immanence of God in the world.²⁶

It is, as a result, properly the task of a theology of grace to develop internally the historical manifestation and actuation of that mysterious reality so conceived. Its direction must, as a result, account for the involvement of man-and-God at the same time, because 'man' is related fundamentally and in his destiny to the transcending process of the world. Furthermore, the autonomy of creation must be preserved as a genuine possibility. Therefore, it can only be conceived as effected by a causality which enters into a real relation to man while not in any way being considered as constitutive of his nature. Rahner develops such a concept as a quasi-formal determination of man's graced and justified existence. Thus he retrieves and reappropriates the traditional theology of grace as the causa formalis of justification but alters its more static, "instrumental" content and extends it universally as the "taking up into the ground" of God's abiding immediacy and proximity to man.²⁷

The one single mystery, therefore, can only be God considered as he is in himself.²⁸ However, as we have already

²⁶ Ibid., p. 225.

²⁷ Cf. "Some Implications of the Scholastic Concept of Uncreated Grace," for Rahner's fundamental development of the concept of "quasi-formal causality."

²⁸ On Rahner's theology of the identity of the Trinity ad intra and ad extra, see The Trinity, p. 21ff.

seen, Rahner intends within this one self-gift of God an understanding of Incarnation and grace as its mutually conditioning aspects. Consequently, the radically significant content of the self-communication of God as grace-revelation emerges and Rahner's rather striking proposal that the "totality" of the Christian message is contained within a transcendental experience becomes clear.²⁹

There is only one single mystery in the strict sense, that of God's self-bestowal by which he extends himself into the dimension of that which is most interior to existence (Spirit) and into the dimension of the history of man (Incarnation).³⁰

Rahner summarily clarifies his approach to this crucial conclusion in a progressive series of finely honed steps. His consistent starting-point is provided by the founding thesis of his anthropology--that man's freely enacted subjectivity constitutes an absolute, and unlimited transcendentality. He next situates that openness within its historicity as always dimmed by the opacity of matter and only fully discernible in its final enactment at death. This transcendence of man is then further disclosed as radically oriented to the abiding, incomprehensible mystery which we call "God" as to both its ground and its term. Finally,

²⁹Cf. n. 13, p. 34, Chapter II.

³⁰"Christology in the Setting of Modern Man's Understanding of Himself and of His World," p. 109.

the history of God's self-communication within man's experience is understood as the material of that history of the divine activity which is called saving, revelation history. In this one history of the man-world-God relationship, the "offering of salvation" (the transcendental moment of revelation effected in the supernatural existential: grace) and "the revealing of the word" (the objective, categorical moment of its manifestation in history: Incarnation) constitute a profound and original unity.³¹

It is from this carefully constructed base that Rahner affirms a Trinitarian economy of salvation in terms of its immanent, in-itself reality.³² For God never ceases to be the one, incomprehensible mystery even in his radical act of self-bestowal. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that God's self-communication to his creation follows the pattern of that which occurs within the Trinity. In Rahner's words:

It is because God 'must' 'express' himself inwardly that he can also express himself outwardly; the finite, created utterance ad extra is a continuation of the immanent constitution of 'image and likeness'-- a free continuation, because its object is finite-- and takes place in fact 'through' the Logos (Jn. 1:3).³³

³¹"Reflections on Methodology in Theology," p. 94.

³²The Trinity, p. 31.

³³"The Theology of the Symbol," *TI*, Vol. IV, p. 236.

The Revelatory 'Situation' of Man

The concrete and practical significance of Rahner's theory includes man's in Welt situation in its tangible historicity. It is the place where man necessarily actuates his self-performance as a will-to-love in reciprocal relatedness. It must be possible, therefore, to understand in a less theoretical way the originating impulse of Rahner's "idea" of revelation and grace. Hence a further perspective is sought among the varied but systematically related aspects of Rahner's thought. Such a reflection is found both in his development of an ontology of hope³⁴ and in the creedal statements which give expression, confirmation and direction to that power in man's spirit.³⁵

In terms of transcendental theology, Rahner seeks a "something more" within the concept 'hope' which will relate it fundamentally to the ultimate structure of man as person, viz., to his basic and unlimited power of love. It must, moreover, relate to all aspects of that power; and so must

³⁴Cf. "On the Theology of Hope," pp. 242-259; and "A Fragmentary Aspect of a Theological Evaluation of the Concept of the Future," TI, Vol. X, pp. 235-241.

³⁵"The Need for a 'Short Formula' of Christian Faith," TI, Vol. IX, pp. 117-126; "Reflections on the Problems Involved in Devising a Short Formula of the Faith," TI, Vol. XI, pp. 230-244; and Foundations of Christian Faith, pp. 448-460.

confront that creaturely freedom precisely as it is conditioned by its actual situation. In virtue of the "hiddenness and risk" of creatureliness, however, that situation is universally characterized by the resistance which it raises against trust. The failure of trust signals the failure and limiting of the reach of love; and sin is most intelligible as that same refusal to entrust one's meaning to "the adventure of one's measurelessness."

Man cannot estimate beforehand what is demanded of him; for he himself is demanded, he is risked in his innermost heart and life which are still only before him as the unknown future and which reveals only afterwards what this heart is that had to be risked and spent in this life.³⁶

It is in this light, therefore, that Rahner finds a situation in man that is radically related to hope. Delving more deeply still, he unfolds the meaning of human truth and love as paralleling that of the two powers of the mind. In man's experience of transcendence these are disclosed as a "reaching out for truth into the unfathomable mystery" and the "radical self-surrender and self-transcendence of love."³⁷ He further draws these together under the light of the Trinity and therein identifies the 'imaging' reality of man's being.

³⁶ Grace in Freedom (New York: Herder & Herder, 1969), p. 216.

³⁷ "On the Theology of Hope," p. 249.

From the two modes of procession in God--the mediations through which God (Father) utters himself (Son) and possesses himself in love (Spirit)--Christian anthropology knows of two basic modes of human self-realization: knowledge and love. It is for this reason that hope emerges as the mode or attitude which informs both of these powers, in their distinction and in their unity. The latter is primarily manifested in "the original relation to God" which, for Rahner, must, if it is to conform with the one commandment³⁸ be the love of man for man.

In interpersonal love, however, the risk of hope is greater than in any other situation for "it is again and again an attempt which reaches a dead end...and only temporarily removes the separation and chasm which divides people."³⁹ Hence its ultimate success can only be given in the effort and promise carried by the persistence and graced actualization of the love which revelation-in-history proclaims and effects. From the full reality of the one revelation--with its transcendental and categorical aspects--the radical empowering of man's hope receives a three-personal reality.

³⁸"The Commandment of Love in Relation to the Other Commandments," TI, Vol. V, pp. 439-459.

³⁹Foundations of Christian Faith, p. 399.

As a result, there is in human life the possibility of knowing the completion of love, in decision and interpersonal deed, from three 'situations' of revelation. In each of these, moreover, there is a real communication of God as he is in himself.

First, there is a revelation-situation which exists because God is known in the abiding, sustaining Mystery as the term of man's transcendence. As the most fundamental and natural condition of man, it is as well the most hidden. In reverence and worship before the "holy mystery" man knows in a nearly inexplicable way that the deep silence of that mystery bids him approach. It unfolds to him "an ultimate and radical love which commends itself to him as his salvation."⁴⁰ In this situation a universal and absolute self-communication of God is given. Because created reality is redeemed and justified reality, that self-gift is present to every man as proffered to his being as a permanent, constitutive feature of his existence. Thus God as unoriginated term of man's tending is God as Father.

Second, there is a revelation-situation which exists because God is the ground and realm of man's radical risk. Since risk is the challenge within decision and choice and

⁴⁰"The Need for a 'Short Formula' of Christian Faith," p. 122-125. Cf. also the references listed above in n. 35 of this chapter.

hence involves a social dimension and historicity, the pledge of hope is realized in the historical mission of the Logos, its "eschatological and victorious climax."

This history of man's self-discovery as one who is (at least as far as God's offer is concerned) divinized in the ground of his existence, the history of the concrete expression in space-time of this self-discovery in God reaches its historical apogee and unsurpassable goal--which secretly sustained this whole historical movement from the beginning--in the one in the midst of divinized humanity whom we simply call the God-man.⁴¹

Third, there is a revelation-situation which exists because God is interior to the possibility of man as his absolute future. In the state of absolute proximity to man as the sustaining principle of transcendentality, God is not merely man's goal but is already given to be his justification--for self-bestowal entails "an attitude of forgiving love"--in the details of his daily risk. Thus man is borne by the love of the Spirit of God.⁴²

From the situation of man, viz., from the space within which he is called to personal decision and encounter, there first and most significantly arise the indicators of his fundamental meaning.⁴³ Even prior to his freedom,

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 123.

⁴² "Reflections on the Problems Involved in Devising a Short Formula of the Faith," p. 239.

⁴³ For Rahner's early clarification of situation, see "The Theological Concept of Concupiscentia," TI, Vol. I, p. 363.

therefore, man is specified in his potential and beckoned away from the threat of absurdity and despair.

Rahner's Idea of Revelation

In Foundations of Christian Faith, Rahner begins and ends with a reference to his own theological method in its consistently synthetic tendency. Whether it is called a reductio in mysterium or the fusion of a "theology of the spirit" and a "theology of the heart," the meaning is the same. He pursues an idea which strains to be delivered of the "pregnant insight" which it bears. This is especially the case in formulating his theory of revelation. In the Heideggerian effort of retrieval, he moves 'backwards and forwards' in shaping his thought. As a result, the reductio toward simplicity becomes deceptively expansive. However, in the process, the elusive reality is brought forth with a dynamic vitality. In summary, and in final pursuit, we shall attempt to cull his founding insight from (1) the thought-model which he addresses, (2) the structuring of his method, and (3) the reality which is its content and source.

The Modality

Rahner speaks of the "new situation" of contemporary life as characterized by an evolutionary view of reality as a single, active process. He specifically recognizes and

gives heed to the widespread influence which its element of unity has exerted in the form of a dialectical materialism. He points to its effectiveness in "influencing the situation in terms of thought" throughout the world. From its core, however, he extracts the mis-directed truth which is essentially Christian in nature: in the unity of spirit and matter the free-ordering of reality is the creative deed by which God, "in a wider and more radical decision," willed to give himself to what was not divine.⁴⁴

Creaturely spirituality, in consequence, is a receptive and intercommunicative spirituality; and matter is the condition of its actualization. Therefore, the possibility of revelation is present from the beginning and the central event of God's bestowal, which occurs in the giving of his Son, Jesus, is starkly and immediately apparent. The Son did not become man because man was there in created reality; the reverse is the truth: man is created because of the divine will to communicate itself radically.

In a theological anthropology, therefore, man must be sketched along the line of God's design for him. And this is precisely that he might be the outward expression of God's own "self-presence" and the created "image and

⁴⁴"Christology in the Setting of Modern Man's Understanding of Himself and of His World," p. 219.

likeness" of God's being. This intention takes form in an Incarnational perspective which reveals the finality of man as informing his 'situation' before the holy, incomprehensible mystery which grasps him and disposes of him by the transcendental necessity which grounds his creaturely performance. The nature-and-grace problematic, therefore, is transposed into a new frame of reference which allows its development in a more meaningful form. The being of man has an unconditional reference to God not by nature but by grace. Nor is grace the "superstructure" of nature but its internal elevation empowered by a unique causality which informs its being (not its essence as nature) with a new principle of operation. On the model of transcendence implicit within an evolutionary conception of reality, man's being is opened with a capacity for personal identity with God. This capacity has been fully realized but once. In the Incarnation and full event of Jesus' life, the paradigm of becoming is given and the revelation present "always and everywhere" identifies its source and possibility in the Son.

The Structure

The pattern of Rahner's thought is a dialectical effort to bring reality forth in the unity of its multiplicity. As a result, his concepts appear in pairs and his "idea" is brought before the constant quest of unity in distinction.

Because God is essentially simple; being is simple. Because God is the pure act of being; he is pure love. From the one activity of God, everything receives its 'situation' as a participation in being. Everything is, therefore, susceptible of analogy. In order that the essential relationship between man and God might be enlightened by that possibility, Rahner's own analogy takes the form of a metaphysics of man's basic powers of 'imaging' God--his self-performance in free and responsible love.

From the centrality of man's being as exhibiting an orientation to God, man's likeness to God is concretized in his ability to actuate his own situation freely before that Presence. Thus Rahner gives to the risk of love a primacy* reflective of that same reality in its perfected Act in God.

This self-perfecting of freedom into the eternal moment is its self-realization before God. ...What is the fundamental act of man, in which he can gather his whole nature and his whole life? The answer is not obvious, but it is true: the love of God alone is capable of embracing it all. For only his unity and infinity can create in man that oneness which unites the multiplicity of finite things without abolishing it; it alone can love even this earth together with God and thus integrate also all earthly love into the moment of eternity.⁴⁵

Revelation, too, has its unity and distinction. In the one revelation of God there are two moments which reflect the inner reality both in its happening and in its

⁴⁵ Grace in Freedom, p. 214.

objectification. Revelation--understood as the 'knowledge' factor of grace as present to man's awareness as the holy mystery--primarily addresses itself to man's interior being. In the enabling act of God which supports the "hearing" of this revelation, the primordial moment of disclosure occurs.

This revelation is God's personal gift to man in absolute, forgiving intimacy, so that God is neither absolute, chilling distance nor the Judgment--though he could be both--but gives himself to man to experience in this forgiving intimacy.⁴⁶

This transcendental revelation is not, however, the full reality. Because it is meant for man in all his dimensions, it must encompass more than a "state of consciousness." The unobjective, non-reflexive awareness of God exerts itself in the manner of a principle of man's activity. As such it has "an inherent dynamism that urges it to objectify itself."⁴⁷ What is particularly Christian about this universal factor of human life depends entirely on its objectification in the climax of God's disclosure in his Son.

In Jesus, both God's gracious communication to men and its self-declaration in the tangible, bodily, social dimension have reached their climax, have become Revelation.⁴⁸

⁴⁶Theological Dictionary, p. 410.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 411.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 412.

The Content

The content of Rahner's theory of revelation is God, as he is in himself, bringing about the being, man, who is the external expression of his divine will to love. God's being-for-us is his will-to-share. In willing man, God wills his salvation as well. Man is, as a result, the potential happening whom God can address with expectancy of responding love. God himself constitutes, in his own reality, the salvation of all creation.

It would be the height of naiveté, however, if we should so immerse our understanding of Rahner's theory in its anthropological accents as to lose his ultimate goal. This is to effect a contemporary possibility for affirming that God is. The existence and reality of God is what is always being affirmed. He has given to the renewed resonance of the fact that "the glory of God is man, fully alive" an anthropology which is consistently directed by the dialectic of love which it sustains. God does not become more when man is made less; but, rather, the fullness of man's being as it radicalizes toward God becomes ever increasingly capable of achieving a truer concept of his Mystery.

Because God's love is a successful love, man has a reason to hope. Theology, in its task of eliminating the obscurities which contemporary thought alone cannot overcome, reaches for the reality itself in the three-personal

presence of man's revelation-situation. And while its arrival at an idea of God's primary immediacy is constantly performed in the light of Revelation-fullness, its conception must bear upon man's space and situation as it varies its question of meaning.

This is what Rahner strains toward in his effort to grasp, in some enspiriting way, the mystery of God's movement toward man's own given reality. He attempts, therefore, in an immediately pastoral way, to give "an account of the hope that is in us."⁴⁹

⁴⁹Foundations of Christian Faith, p. 2.

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Karl Rahner's Theory of Revelation

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ABSTRACT

This thesis on the theory of revelation which underlies the theology of Karl Rahner investigates the central intuition which informs his thought. It does this in the light of Rahner's consistent position that theology must draw into its purpose the entire question of man which characterizes contemporary thought. It accepts his further awareness that this effort is properly the task of Christian faith in consequence of an affinity which today's situation betrays for its primary truths. Accordingly, by means of an internal examination of his thought, it uncovers the implicit relatedness present within the concept of revelation that draws the meaning of man and his world into the meaning of God.

Beyond presenting Rahner's approach to the question of revelation in its conceptual reference and significance, a demonstration is presented of how Rahner integrates within one movement the reality of man's natural and elevated moments. It consequently, addresses his hermeneutic in a process which seeks the internal unity of his philosophical

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and theological thrusts. These are found to derive their possibility from a theological position which, in turn, discloses the unity-in-distinction which arises from the very reality of revelation itself. Hence, the function of a metaphysical anthropology was seen to be dialectically balanced in tension with the always graced being of man.

Rahner's theological starting-point for arriving at the internal dynamic of God's real relation to man is the doctrine of the universal salvific will. This he unfolds in its consequences for all men everywhere by the fact of creation for possession of the vision of God in glory. He concludes that a divine decree must have a corresponding, ontological effect in the constitutive structures of man. He thus draws out the implications of those structures from this revealed finality of man. From these he affirms man's being as always addressed by the offer of grace as an elevation of his spirituality which itself is the primary moment of revelation.

Thus there are two aspects to Rahner's theory of how revelation occurs. There is a transcendental experience in the lived existence of every man which constitutes revelation in its initial realism. God communicates to man, in a self-communication which is inescapable, the offer of a dialogic relationship to which, whether consciously or not,

man is responding when he adopts the fundamental attitude toward himself by which he lives.

There is also the realization of that existentially transformed spirituality in the historicity which is man's in Welt mode of self-actualization. This objectification of the happening of God in man reaches its climax when the Logos appears and gives its universal reality a final and definitive specification.