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EMMANUEL DANSO ABEAM

**THE ‘SUPERNATURAL EXISTENTIAL’
IN THE FOUNDATIONS OF CHRISTIAN
FAITH OF KARL RAHNER**

Final Dissertation

Under the supervision of:

Prof. Dr. Alexandre Coutinho Lopes de Brito Palma

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DEDICATION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I dedicate this work to my family and to all my conferees in the Congregation of the Divine Word Missionaries especially to the Portuguese Province who contributed to my theological studies and basic formation in Portugal. May the Triune God live in our hearts and in the hearts of all People. According to Rahner, in the only order, which is real, the emptiness of the transcendental creature exists because the fullness of God creates this emptiness in order to communicate Himself to it. (*Foundations*, 123). May the absolute mystery continue to communicate Himself to us in the grace of justification till we reach our beatific vision. I want to acknowledge the patience and guidance of my supervisor Prof. Dr. Alexandre Palma. I say thank you. Moreover, I want to thank Jacqueline Page and all those who helped me in the grammatical edition of this work. I say God bless you.

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THE CRYPT OF K. RAHNER



ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this dissertation is to study the concept of the ‘supernatural existential’ in Karl Rahner’s *Foundations of the Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*. In order to study this concept we first study the meaning of ‘existential’, and secondly of ‘supernatural’ as self-communication of God. Thus, when Rahner speaks of ‘existential’, he is talking about the fundamental elements of human existence. The ‘one’ who can hear the self-communication of God. Secondly, when Rahner speaks of ‘supernatural’ he means that «God in his own most proper reality makes himself the innermost constitutive element of man». In other words, God communicates His very life to the human being. Thus the technical term ‘supernatural existential’ in Rahner means the communication of the very being of God to the human being. The aim of this dissertation is to clarify how important it is for a human being to accept God’s free and forgiving self-communication in his life. It also brings to mind the pastoral sense of this concept. By this we mean the seriousness of Christian responsibility and evangelization.

KEY-WORDS: Karl Rahner, Existential, Supernatural, ‘Supernatural Existential’, Evangelization.

RESUMO

O objetivo desta dissertação é estudar o conceito de ‘existencial sobrenatural’, segundo a obra de Karl Rahner, *Curso Fundamental da fé: Introdução ao Conceito de Cristianismo*. Para estudar este conceito, dedicamo-nos ao estudo do significado de ‘existencial’, em primeiro lugar e, seguidamente, ao de ‘sobrenatural’ como auto-comunicação de Deus. Quando Rahner se refere a ‘existencial’, ele refere-se aos elementos fundamentais da existência humana. Quando diz ‘sobrenatural’, o autor afirma que «Deus, na sua própria realidade mais adequada, torna-se o elemento constitutivo mais interior do ser humano». Por outras palavras, Deus comunica a Sua própria Vida ao ser humano. Isto indica que o termo técnico ‘existencial sobrenatural’, em Rahner, significa a comunicação do próprio ser de Deus ao ser humano.

Esta dissertação procura, assim, mostrar a importância para o ser humano de aceitar a auto-comunicação de Deus, livre e misericordiosa. Isto também remete para o sentido pastoral deste conceito em Rahner. Trata-se de sublinhar a seriedade da responsabilidade cristã e da evangelização como ouvintes da comunicação divina.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Karl Rahner, Existencial, Sobrenatural, 'Existencial Sobrenatural', Evangelização.

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

1. Sources

1.1. The Work of Karl Rahner

Foundations - Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith of Karl Rahner: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*

1.2. Other Sources

Ac - Acts of the Apostles

2 Cor - Second Letter of Paul to the Church at Corinth

DV - Vatican II, *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation Dei Verbum*

EN - Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi- Evangelization in the Modern World*

Ep - Ephesians

Gn - Genesis

GS - Vatican II, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World Gaudium et Spes*

Jn - St John's Gospel

LG - Vatican II, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church Lumen Gentium*

Ps - Psalms

Rm - Romans

SC – Vatican II, *The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy Sacrosanctum Concilium*

2Tm - Second Letter from Paul to Timothy

2. Other Abbreviations

Ed - Editor

Cf - Confer

Trans - Translation

Vol - Volume

INTRODUCTION

Karl Josef Erich Rahner was born on 5th of March in 1904. He was born into what he describes as a normal, middle-class, Christian family. He did not shine at school and seemed only to stand out from his contemporaries because of his early-developed interest in Christian spirituality.¹ He entered the society of Jesus (Jesuits) on 20th of April 1922² and on 26th of July 1932 was ordained a Priest.

Rahner pursued his philosophical studies in Feldkirch (Austria) and Pullach (Munich) from 1924-1927. However, he failed his Doctoral thesis of philosophy.³ His rejected Doctoral thesis of philosophy was published under the title, *Spirit in the World* in 1939.⁴ He continued his theological studies in Valkenburg (Holland) from 1929-1933.⁵ Rahner did not give up after his failed thesis but completed his Doctoral studies in theology from 1936-1937.⁶ He later became a Professor of Dogma and in History of Dogma at Innsbruck from 1949-1964.⁷ In 1961 Cardinal F. König, Archbishop of Vienna, took Rahner with him as his personal theologian to the Second Vatican Council⁸ and in 1962 he was appointed by Pope Paul VI as an expert (*peritus*).⁹ Thus traces of his theology can be found in the Council's teaching on the Church, on papal primacy and the episcopate, on revelation and the relationship between Scripture and Tradition, on the inspiration of the Bible, on the sacraments and the diaconate, on the relationship of the Church to the modern world, on the possibility of salvation outside the Church even for non-believers, and in and in many other areas.¹⁰

¹ Cf. Herbert Vorgrimler, *Karl Rahner: experiencia de Dios en su vida y en su pensamiento*, Panorama 7 (Santander: Sal Terrae, 2004), 47.

² Cf. William V. Dych, *Karl Rahner* (London & New York, Continuum, 2000), 4.

³ The theme of Rahner's failed philosophical dissertation is "Thomas Aquinas's metaphysics of finite knowledge". The Jesuit theologian wanted to interpret the thomistic notion of the *excessus* or *plus factor* in human knowledge of the finite in the light of subsequent transcendental philosophy and its insights into the nature of the human knowledge. Thomas Aquinas did not know the transcendental philosophy and did not have its insights in mind when he used the term *excessus*. Hence his orientator Martin Honecker did not agree with this new interpretation so the dissertation was rejected (Cf. William Dych: *Karl Rahner: Outstanding Christian Thinkers*, New York, 1992, 6-7.)

⁴ Cf. Pedro Rubens F. De Oliveira and Francisco Tabora, *Karl Rahner: 100 Anos Teologia Filosofia e Experiência Espiritual*, *Theologica* 15 (São Paulo: Ed. Loyola, 2005), 119.

⁵ Cf. Mary E. Hines, *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, ed. Declan Marmion (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), xii.

⁶ He completed his doctoral thesis in theology with a theme: "From the side of Christ. The origin of the Church as the second Eve from the side of Christ as the second Adam. A research on the typological meaning of Jn 19,34" (Cf. Ignazio Sanna: *Karl Rahner, Teólogos del Siglo XXI*, Madrid, Editorial San Pablo, 2000, 23.)

⁷ Cf. Hines, *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, xii.

⁸ Cf. Ignazio Sanna, *Karl Rahner, Teólogos del Siglo XX I* (Madrid: Editorial San Pablo, 2000), 23.

⁹ Cf. Morwenna Ludlow, *Universal Salvation: Eschatology in the Thought of Gregory of Nyssa and Karl Rahner* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 118.

¹⁰ Cf. Dych, *Karl Rahner*, 13.

He published the *Foundations*, which is the source of the present dissertation, in 1976.¹¹ In the *Foundations* he writes an introduction to the “concept of Christianity”, expressing the foundations of the Christian faith. This work does not represent the summary of his theology, but it is an exhibition of the essential contents of the Christian faith, expounded in a critical way to present the Christian message in a reasonable way.¹² Thus the Christian message needs to be understood by the hearer in order for him to accept it in his existentiality. It must be noted that it is his last publication before his death on March 30th, 1984.¹³

The theme of the present dissertation is the ‘supernatural existential’. This theme is relevant because it presents the concept of transcendental theology and its possible contribution to evangelization. Therefore the theological question that this dissertation seeks to answer is to find out whether the concept of the ‘supernatural existential’ could contribute to a new way of evangelization. The German theologian states in the preface of the *Foundations* that the motive of the work is «to express the whole of Christianity and to give an honest account of it on a “first level of reflection”». ¹⁴ This “first level of reflection” is what Rahner calls a responsibility of the human being before his intellectual conscience in the totality of his existence.¹⁵ The “totality of existence” means the questions that arise before the human being in his day-to-day activities. This affirmation introduces us to the first chapter, namely the “concept of existential”. Here, we shall analyse how Rahner perceives the existence of the human being. We shall delve further in our understanding by analysing the human being as “person and subject”, thereby unlocking the meaning of existence in Rahner’s theological reflections. The meaning of the “first level of reflection,” as discussed above, might raise the following question: what then is the “second level of reflection”?

This interrogation will lead us to the second chapter, namely the ‘supernatural’ as God’s free and forgiving self-communication. Thus the “second level of reflection” is what Rahner calls the self-communication of the very life of God to the human being.¹⁶ The ‘supernatural’ as the self-communication of God, is explained further by E. Schillebeeckx, who affirms that «the experience of God is communicated through histories of experiences that involve their listeners to such an extent that it becomes possible for them to have their human experiences with other similar experiences, that is, the Christian experience». ¹⁷ In other words, the human

¹¹ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, xv.

¹² Cf. Sanna, *Karl Rahner, teólogos del siglo XXI*, 43.

¹³ Cf. Hines, *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, xii.

¹⁴ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, xii.

¹⁵ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, xii.

¹⁶ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 116.

¹⁷ Edward Schillebeeckx and D. Pezzetta, *Esperienza umana e fede in Gesù Cristo. Un breve bilancio* (Bréscia: Queriniana, 1985), 18.

being is created in such a way that his experiences in the everyday life leads him to experience God.¹⁸ The focus of this second chapter is thus to analyse the notion of the ‘supernatural’ as the self-communication of God.

In the third chapter, we shall focus on the theme of the dissertation: the ‘supernatural existential’ and how it can help in Christian evangelization. In short, we shall investigate what Rahner means by the theological term the ‘supernatural existential’. Then, we shall also study its efficacy as an offer by God and its contribution to the concept of Christian evangelization.

Before we move on to the main topic, we will proceed to find out how we can read Rahner and understand his method of theology. According to many scholars, there are two ways that one can read him: thus a semi-foundationalist and nonfoundationalist way.¹⁹ In relation to the semi-foundationalist, we can define it as a strategy that he uses in his theology because of his early work in philosophy, in the sense that his theology rests on his philosophy. And what this means, is that if the philosophy is unsuccessful, then the theology too must fail. According to Kilby,

semi-foundationalist, then, does not suppose Rahner to deduce or derive the whole of his theology from his philosophy: it is rather that at certain key points Rahner’s theology requires the support of philosophically established claims. The Philosophy cannot do the whole job, but it does nevertheless do a necessary job.²⁰

On the other hand, the nonfoundationalist approach is not based however on the ideas developed in his philosophical writings, thus his theology is not logically dependent on the arguments he offers for the ideas in his philosophical writings.²¹ What we mean here is that it will be unfair to the author for any reader to consider him to be a rationalist who thinks that Christianity as a whole can be philosophically demonstrated, in sum, the theology stands on its own.²² In conclusion, Kilby, states that the best way we can read and to be fair to him is through the nonfoundationalist way.²³ As a result, she affirms this by stating that,

a nonfoundationalist reading allows not only for a more modest, but also for a more theological interpretation of Rahner’s theology. His theology, on this account, is not driven and shaped by an independently given framework, by a prior commitment to a philosophical model of God, the human being, and the relationship between the two. To

¹⁸ Rahner states that in the only order, which is real, the emptiness of the transcendental creature exists because the fullness of God creates this emptiness in order to communicate himself to it. (Cf. Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, New York, 2016, 121.)

¹⁹ Cf. Karen Kilby, *Karl Rahner: Theology and Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 75.

²⁰ Kilby, *Karl Rahner: Theology and Philosophy* 75.

²¹ Cf. Kilby, *Karl Rahner: Theology and Philosophy*, 76.

²² Cf. Kilby, *Karl Rahner: Theology and Philosophy*, 76.

²³ Cf. Kilby, *Karl Rahner: Theology and Philosophy*, 98.

read nonfoundationally, then, Rahner's christology and his theology of grace are not shaped and underpinned by a prior anthropology, but rather they lead to and themselves shape the anthropology that Rahner offers.²⁴

Hence in order to be coherent with the theological reflection of the author in the course of the dissertation, in his *Foundations of Christian Faith*, we will adopt to both strategies. Thus the semi-foundationalist and nonfoundationalist.

²⁴ Kilby, *Karl Rahner: Theology and Philosophy*, 98.

CHAPTER 1: THE CONCEPT OF EXISTENTIAL IN K. RAHNER

The central theme of this chapter is the human being, the one who can hear God's message. People do not hear this message merely as information about God, unrelated to their lives, they hear it explicitly or in every experience. Rahner states that we have been created with the ability to encounter the transcendent God in the experiences of daily life.²⁵ Therefore he recommends that the philosophical and theological analyses of the human experience will enable us to understand this 'encounter'. This is because for the German theologian «when the reality of the human being is understood correctly, there exists an inescapable circle between his horizons of understanding and what is said, heard and understood».²⁶ Hence we need philosophy and theology to unlock the human being's concrete experience. Firstly, we need philosophy to grasp the 'Christian message as grace' because it is revealed in human history. A typical example is the "mystery of the Incarnation" of the Word of God.²⁷ Hence when the human being reflects on such revelations, he does that with the 'eyes' of philosophy. This is Rahner's perception of 'existential philosophy'.²⁸ What is then the role of theology in apprehending the Christian message? According to the author, theology presents the Christian message to the human being in such a way that the message is not hidden from him.²⁹ Here we see the importance of theology in our human existentiality. It explains the mysteries of existence.

We can agree with the Jesuit priest because some of the difficult Christian revealed mysteries and questions of existence like the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, Immaculate Conception of the blessed Virgin Mary, death and many more others are explained in the domain of theology and philosophy to help the human being in the understanding of the mystery of his own existentiality. He shows that the philosophical analysis of the human nature is interwoven with theological reflection. If this is so, then logically we can say that the human being is capable of a relationship with the absolute mystery, God. Thus for the theologian, «to ask about human nature, its capacity, and its proper end, is ultimately a theological question».³⁰ Definitely theological and philosophical questions about the human existence lead to the

²⁵ Cf. Mark F. Fischer, *The Foundations of Karl Rahner: A Paraphrase of the Foundations of Christian Faith, with Introduction and Indices* (New York: Herder & Herder, 2005), 7.

²⁶ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 24.

²⁷ We can see this in the Prologue of the Forth Gospel: (Cf. The Word was made flesh, he lived among us, and we saw his glory, the glory that is his as the only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth. Jo 1,14).

²⁸ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 25.

²⁹ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 25.

³⁰ Fischer, *The Foundations of Karl Rahner: A Paraphrase of the Foundations of Christian Faith, with Introduction and Indices*, 7.

experience of the “incomprehensible mystery, God”. This importance of existentiality in Rahner can be best portrayed by the philosophical reflection of the German theologian Paul Tillich. He writes that:

...the Existential philosophers were trying to discover an ultimate meaning of life beyond the reach of interpretation, revived theologies, positivism. In their search they passionately rejected the “estranged” objective world with its religious radicals, reactionaries, and mediators. They turned toward man’s immediate experience, toward “subjectivity,” not as something opposed to “objectivity” but as that living experience in which both objectivity and subjectivity are rooted.³¹

From what we have studied, we can intuit that Rahner is an “existential philosopher and a theologian”. We make this statement because he himself says that theology implies a philosophical anthropology which enables the message of grace to be accepted and which gives an account of it in a humble responsible way³² as Tillich referred above concerning existential philosophers. With this explanation, we can infer that the German theologian wants to stipulate that philosophy and theology enables us to understand how to accept and analyse the Christian message in our existentiality.

1.1 Personhood as Presupposition of the Christian Faith

Once we know the concept of existentiality of the author, we shall proceed to the main topic. For the Jesuit theologian, the most essential part of the Christian message is addressing the human being. What constitutes the human being then? He states that the first thing to be said about the human being is the fact that he is a “person and subject”.³³ The definition that he gives to the human being as “person and subject” and as a presupposition of the Christian faith is «when he establishes a personal relationship to God, a genuinely dialogical history of salvation between God and himself, the acceptance of one’s own, unique, eternal salvation, the notion of responsibility before God and his judgement». ³⁴ This means that when one comprehends the notion of his ‘personhood’ it is likely for him to embrace the Christian message genuinely. The theological question we can raise here, is how do we know that human being is created to establish a relationship with God?

³¹ Paul Tillich and Gunther Wenz, *Philosophical writings, Main works 1* (Berlin, New York: De Gruyter Evangelisches Verlagswerk, 1989), 372.

³² Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 25.

³³ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 26.

³⁴ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 26.

The French theologian Sesboüé, an expert, in reading Rahner argues that the human being is inhabited by the question of the absolute mystery in his existentiality.³⁵ He underlines that we could prove this by the mere fact that we can find this “question of the absolute mystery” in all the languages and cultures of the world.³⁶ We can also verify this idea of the question of the absolute mystery in relation to the human being in the theological and philosophical reflection of St. Justin Martyr of the second century.³⁷ The Martyr of the Church affirms that the seed of the Word of God can be found in all human beings in time and in space.³⁸ Therefore we can agree with Rahner when he says that the human being as a “person and subject” implies a relationship with the absolute mystery, God. In the course of the dissertation we will explicitly explain in detail what the modern theologian means specifically when he emphasizes that the human being is a “person and a subject”.

The anthropological problem Rahner detected about the human being who is capable of having a relationship with God is the “hiddenness and risk of personal experience”. What he means here is that both as an individual and in humanity as a whole, the human being can run a risk in experiencing himself in a great variety of ways as the product of that which is not himself.³⁹ This risk that the human being as a preposition of the Christian faith is likely to encounter is caused by the analysis of the various empirical sciences. This is because for the theologian:

all the empirical sciences about the human being are aimed methodologically at explaining him and deriving him. They are aimed at seeing him as a result of and as the point of intersection between realities which on the other hand exist within the realm of empirical experience, but which on the other hand are not the human being himself.⁴⁰

When we look at the contemporary and the secular world, we can agree with Rahner on how the anthropological sciences have shaped the mentality of the modern human being. We can make mention of the concept of anti-humanism where biological reductionism is one of the

³⁵ Cf. Bernard Sesboüé, *Pensar e viver a fé no terceiro milénio: convite aos homens e mulheres do nosso tempo* (Coimbra: Gráfica de Coimbra, 1999), 40.

³⁶ Cf. Sesboüé, *Pensar e viver a fé no terceiro milénio: convite aos homens e mulheres do nosso tempo*, 40.

³⁷ St Justin Martyr speaks of the name of God and the Word. He says that there is no suitable name for the Father of the universe who is inborn. He justifies that everyone has a name imposed on him by an elderly person. Therefore names for the absolute mystery like: “Father”, “God”, “Creator”, “Lord”, and “Sovereign” are not the appropriate name of the absolute mystery but represents his attributes due to his goodness and works... (Cf. Isidro Pereira Lamelas, *Justino: filósofo e mártir do século II, em defesa dos cristãos*, Lisboa, 2019, 158-159.)

³⁸ Cf. Isidro Pereira Lamelas, *Justino, filósofo e mártir do século II: em defesa dos cristãos* (apologias) (Lisboa: Paulus, 2019), 161.

³⁹ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 27.

⁴⁰ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 27.

major causes⁴¹. In relation to the biological reductionism, the question is raised as follows: is it possible to treat a dog as a human being? In fact, the Spanish theologian Juan Luis Ruiz de la Peña, points out that, after all, there are already clinics, hairdressers, restaurants and even cemeteries for dogs, and it is known that domestic animals in rich countries eat better than humans in poor countries.⁴² Rahner underlines the danger of the human being allowing himself to be interpreted by the empirical sciences. The danger is that these sciences are motivated by the secret desire not only to understand the human being, and not only to analyse and construct him but also control him as the example we referred above concerning the exaggerated relationship between the human being and the dog.⁴³ The theological question we can ask Rahner is this: what then is the importance of the various empirical anthropological sciences in the existentiality of the human being?

The Jesuit priest does not negate the importance of the various empirical anthropological sciences. He affirms that its function is the quest of unveiling the human being's experiences. He then adds that this quest should not in any way be limited by Christianity but rather it should be reconciled with it. This is because, like the Christian message that speaks directly to the human being, «the empirical sciences also seek to explain the human being from a particular data by reducing him to his elements and then reconstructing him back together again from his particular data».⁴⁴ Therefore we can affirm that what Rahner is trying to communicate is the fact that the Christian message is not an enemy to the various empirical sciences, nevertheless it can manipulate the experience of the human being, so the way out of this problem is to reconcile both the results of the empirical sciences and the personal experience of the human being for the purpose of a genuine relationship with the absolute mystery, God.⁴⁵ This is what Rahner means when he speaks of the “hiddenness and risk of personal experience”.

Having explained the “hiddenness and risk of personal experience” and its implications for a genuine acceptance of the Christian message, our theological task is to study what Rahner

⁴¹ Cf. Juan Luis Ruíz de la Peña, *Las nuevas antropologías: un reto à la Teología*, 2a ed, Punto limite 17 (Santander: Sal Terrae, 1983), 205.

⁴² Cf. Ruíz de la Peña, *Las nuevas antropologías: un reto à la Teología*, 205.

⁴³ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 28.

⁴⁴ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 28.

⁴⁵ In 1984, shortly before his death, Rahner gave a brief history of his life as a theologian. He said that as a theologian he does not inquire about an abstract concept of God, but wish to approach God directly, then absolutely nothing of what God has revealed as Creator of the world, as Lord of history, should be uninteresting to me. Naturally, it could be piously claimed that everything that is necessary for my salvation is contained in Holy Scripture, and that one needs to know nothing beyond this. But if I wish to love God for God's own sake and not only for the sake of my personal salvation, then in order to find God I cannot restrict my interest to Scripture alone. Rather, everything through which God permits God's very self to be perceived in this creaturely world will be of interest to me. (Cf Karl Rahner and Karl Lehmann, *Sobre la inefabilidad de Dios: experiencias de un teólogo católico* (Barcelona: Herder, 2005), 41–42.)

means by the term “the specific character of personal experience”. According to him, the “specific character of personal experience” is when the human being experiences himself as “person and subject”.⁴⁶ The theological question we can raise from this statement is that: what does it mean to experience oneself as a “person and subject”? Rahner intuitively feels that the human being experiences himself as a “person and subject” in the midst of theological, philosophical, and anthropological origins into which he seems to dissolve. This seems to make everything about him a product of the world and from which nothing about him must be excepted a priori.⁴⁷ So we can infer from the intuition of Rahner that the “specific character of personal experiences” is when the human being experiences himself precisely as “subject and person”, insofar as he becomes conscious of himself as the product of what is radically foreign to him. But what is the theological advantage of being conscious of the analysis that the various empirical sciences make of the human being? Rahner states that the consciousness that the human being has of the product that the empirical sciences make of him show him to be more than the sum of his factors.⁴⁸ The reason is that the «finite system of individual, distinguishable elements cannot have a kind of relationship to itself which the human being has to himself in the experience of his multiple conditioning and his reducibility». ⁴⁹ This is because it does not ask questions about itself. It is not the subject. The human being is the subject who can put his existentiality into question and transcend it.

Therefore, according to Rahner, the “specific character of a personal experience” is that which is present in all that we experience in our concrete existence. He therefore goes on to say that as human beings capable of transcendence, we are more than what mechanistic anthropology says we are or in Rahner’s own words:

man’s ability to be related to himself, his having to do with himself, is not and cannot be one element in him alongside of other elements. But it is nevertheless for this reason a reality which constitutes the subjectivity of the human being as distinguishable from his objectivity, which is the other aspect of him.⁵⁰

Hence what the theologian wants to emphasize is that «once we recognise that we are products of history, psychology and many other secular empirical sciences, products of what is foreign to us, then we can put ourselves in question and ask about our true self». ⁵¹ According to Fischer, the empirical anthropological sciences tempt us to think that they can fully explain the human

⁴⁶ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 28.

⁴⁷ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 28.

⁴⁸ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 29.

⁴⁹ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 30.

⁵⁰ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 30.

⁵¹ Fischer, *The Foundations of Karl Rahner*, 9.

being. But this is illusory. This is because transcendental experience suggests that I myself encompass every effort by science to explain me. Thus, the person transcends all attempts to reduce him to a finite system.⁵² How do the 'human person' transcends all attempts to reduce him to a finite system? Here the authors concept of a 'personhood' can give a way out of this question.

Rahner mentions that «being a person, means the self-possession of a subject as such in a conscious and free relationship to the totality of itself».⁵³ What he wants to imply is the capacity of the human being to have a relationship with his empirical experience and the other empirical sciences without losing his subjectivity in this process. According to Rahner, to say that human being is "person and subject" means that he is someone who cannot be derived, who cannot be produced completely from other elements. In sum he is that being who is responsible for himself.⁵⁴ After analysing the human being as "a person and subject", the theological question we can now ask is how can we reconcile the experience of self as "a person and subject" and the experience of God and also the analysis of the various empirical sciences in the perspective of Rahner?

The possible solution to this theological question is that of a reconciliation between the experience of self and the experience of God. This means that «the anthropological dimension of the question of the human being is approached properly only when it is viewed in its necessary unity with the theological dimension of the same question».⁵⁵ According to Anton Losinger, the experience of self and the experience of God are perceived in their unity. With this affirmation, he says that we can therefore draw two significant conclusions for a theological knowledge:

I. Every experience of God is an occurrence in the subject, in which this subject at the same time is also given to itself and experiences something essential about itself. For this reason, the experience of God necessarily has its basis in the human being's experience of himself and is a substantial feature of the latter. There exists, therefore, an indissoluble unity and reciprocity between the experience of God and the experience of the self.⁵⁶

II. With this unity, however, an absolute identity is not given, since, in the first place, the subject of the human experience of the self is radically different from

⁵² Cf. Fischer, *The Foundations of Karl Rahner*, 9.

⁵³ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 30.

⁵⁴ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 31.

⁵⁵ Anton Losinger, *The Anthropological Turn: The Human Orientation of Karl Rahner*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 25.

⁵⁶ Losinger, *The Anthropological Turn: The Human Orientation of Karl Rahner*, 26.

what we experience as ‘God’. In the second place, even in the purest truth of the subjective experience of the self, the subject ultimately remains finite in contrast to the infinite absoluteness of the transcendental mystery.⁵⁷

We can therefore affirm that the concept of the “specific character of the personal experience” is an essential concept for the hearer of the Christian message since its aim is to establish a relationship between the empirical experience of the self and the various empirical sciences that seek to address the total existence of the human being for the purpose of a genuine acceptance of the Christian message. We shall therefore move on to another topic that will throw more light to this concept, namely “the human being as Transcendent Being”.

1.2 The Human Being as Transcendent Being

Rahner writes that the affirmation that the human being is constituted as a “person and a subject” is grasped well when we investigate the meaning of the human being as transcendent being.⁵⁸ So on this theme we shall investigate the origin of the term transcendence and its implications. We shall also study the transcendental experience and its theological importance for the human being who is created to hear God’s message. First, to understand the human being as ‘transcendent being’ we need to find out the motive for this affirmation in Rahner’s thought. We will do so by analysing the origin of the term ‘transcendence’ from the perspective of Immanuel Kant and Karl Rahner. In addition, we will analyse the transcendent structure of knowledge, the possibility of evading the experience of transcendence, the pre-apprehension of being and finally we will study the pre-apprehension as constitutive of person and the essence of the human transcendence.

Rahner stipulates that the ‘transcendental experience’ should be called «the subjective, unthematic, necessarily and unfailing consciousness of the knowing subject that is co-present in every spiritual act of knowledge, and the subject openness to the unlimited expanse of all possible reality».⁵⁹ What he means is that the human being as a “subject and a person” can have a transcendental experience with all that he encounters in his concrete existence. For example, a student of theology can have it through his theological studies, or any areas of his life. The question we can raise here is: what comprises this experience? The Jesuit priest affirms that the ‘experience’ of transcendence is «the knowledge, unthematic but ever-present. It is a moment

⁵⁷ Losinger, *The Anthropological Turn: The Human Orientation of Karl Rahner*, 26.

⁵⁸ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 31.

⁵⁹ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 20.

within and a condition of possibility for every concrete experience of any and every object».⁶⁰ Here too what the catholic theologian means is that the ‘experience’ in transcendental is the knowledge that one encounters in every categorical experience of the human being. For example, in the sacrament of holy matrimony, the couples might encounter this transcendental ‘experience’ in their matrimonial relationships.

Moreover, Rahner affirms that the experience is called ‘transcendental experience’ because «it belongs to the necessary and inalienable structures of the knowing subject itself, and because it consists precisely in the transcendence beyond any particular group of possible objects or of categories».⁶¹ The notion of ‘transcendental’ of Rahner signifies then that the ‘transcendental’ experience belongs to that particular ‘subject’ who makes this ‘transcendental experience’. Nevertheless he cautions us and gives us a theological clue of understanding how we can speak of the ‘transcendental experience’. Hence, he writes that:

If the specific nature of this transcendental experience is clear, an experience which as such can never be objectively represented in its own self, but only by an abstract concept of it. If it is clear that this transcendental experience is not constituted by the fact that one speaks of it; if it is clear that one must speak of it because it is always there, but for this reason it can also be overlooked; if it is clear that by its very nature it can never have the novel attraction of an object that is unexpectedly encountered, if all of this is clear then one understands the difficulty of the task we are undertaking: we can speak of the term of this transcendental experience indirectly.⁶²

Henceforth, having analysed the notion of transcendental experience and its characteristics, we can infer that the human being as a “subject and a person” can have a transcendental experience in his concrete everyday experience nevertheless he can overlook it, so there is a need to speak about it. The consciousness of this transcendental experience can lead one to understand himself and the Christian message.

To be sure of what really the transcendental experience means for Rahner we will now compare the notions of the “transcendental and transcendent” of the German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) since he was the first to distinguish between the terms: transcendental and transcendent.⁶³ The distinction between the transcendental and the transcendent of Kant may be illustrated by reference of the ideas of reason. Thus the notion of

⁶⁰ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 20.

⁶¹ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 20.

⁶² Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 21.

⁶³ Cf. Norman Kemp Smith, *A Commentary to Kant's 'Critique of Pure Reason'*, 2nd ed (New Jersey London Basingstoke: Humanities MacMillan, 1984), 73.

transcendental of Kant is the ideas that inspire the understanding in the pursuit of knowledge (regulative) whiles transcendent represents absolute realities such as time and space (constitutive).⁶⁴ According to Kilby, to be able to understand Rahner's concept of the term 'transcendental' one needs to understand the Kantian use of this term in order to comprehend how Rahner harmonized the Kantian concept to his. For according to Kant, «the central motif of the transcendental deduction is that the unity of thought is at the same time the unity of possible experience and the unity of objects».⁶⁵ What this means is that a possible experience has to do with the representation of the actual world not possible worlds.⁶⁶ With this definition we can say that Kant introduced a distinctive and influential sense of the word which in fact has very little to do with the definition of 'transcendental' in Rahner. For Kant, the term transcendental refers to a type of investigation, an investigation where one studies not the things we know, nor something which might be beyond what we know but rather the analyses of the things and object we know by pure reason.⁶⁷ So the transcendental in Kant means the use of pure reason in the understanding one's existence.

In relation to Rahner, the term 'transcendental' is used in two ways.⁶⁸ It refers to that which 'transcends' individual finite objects. This means that when the author speaks about our transcendental, about the experience of transcendence, at least part of what he means is that there is a dimension of us, of our experience, that reaches out and goes beyond all particular limited objects.⁶⁹ Therefore we can say that Rahner harmonises the Kantian use of the word 'transcendental' with his own, because for Rahner, the two kinds of transcendental both from the Kantian and from his own point of view fit together very neatly.⁷⁰ On this note we will move ahead to study in detail the notion of 'transcendent experience' in Rahner.

After having examined the term 'transcendental' of Kant and Rahner we can proceed to our main topic, namely "the human being as transcendent being". One of the themes that is going to level the ground for us to understand this is "the transcendent structure of knowledge". We can therefore say that when the theologian writes about the transcendent structure of knowledge, he is implicitly talking about the subjectivity of the human being. Thus the questioning capacity of the human being, or in Rahner's own words «in spite of the finiteness of man's system, he is always present to himself in his entirety. Thus he places everything in

⁶⁴ Cf. Immanuel Kant, *Crítica da Razão Pura*, 8ª edição (Lisboa: Calouste, 2008), 61–62.

⁶⁵ Arthur Melnick, *Space, Time, and Thought in Kant*, Synthese Library 204 (Dordrecht Boston London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989), 36.

⁶⁶ Cf. Melnick, *Space, Time, and Thought in Kant*, Synthese Library 204, 37.

⁶⁷ Cf. Kant, *Crítica da Razão Pura*, 639–46.

⁶⁸ Cf. Fischer, *The Foundations of Karl Rahner*, 18–19.

⁶⁹ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 57–58.

⁷⁰ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 52–53.

question».⁷¹ According to Rahner, as the human being questions himself and experiences his finiteness radically, «he reaches beyond this finiteness and experiences himself as a transcendent being, spirit».⁷² What happens to the infinite horizon of human questioning is that as he begins to ask questions and gets possible answers, his questioning horizons widen more and more.⁷³ On the other hand, he discovered that because of the fear of the mysterious infinity which arises before the human being in his infinite horizon of questioning, the human being can play ‘hide and seek’ with it and take flight to what is more familiar to him. However, Rahner affirms that «the infinite which he experiences himself exposed to also permeates his everyday activities».⁷⁴ In short, the human being cannot ‘play hide and seek’ with the infinite which rises before him in question.

In other words, what Rahner wants to explain is that the human being is incapable of escaping the mysterious or the infinite. This is because «every goal that man can point to in knowledge and in action is always relativized, is always a provisional step. Every answer is always the beginning of a new question».⁷⁵ This is why he affirms that the human being can ask questions, «but he is not the unquestioning and unquestioned infinite of reality. He is the question which rises up before him, empty, but really and inescapably, and which can never be settled and never adequately answered by him».⁷⁶ The analogy we can offer to explain this “infinite horizon of human questioning” can be best described by the world of science and technology. As the world keeps on developing and secularizing, science and technology keeps on improving. For example, when the pandemic disease of covid-19 started, the first approach was ‘lock down’ or human distancing, then it came to the use of masks and then it came to the use of vaccines. This shows how the human being can place everything in question and widen his scope of knowledge.

According to Fischer, on his paraphrasing of the transcendent structure of Knowledge in the *Foundations*, he affirms that the possibility that human being can question things even in a finite way, that person surpasses the finite. Thus, whenever we seek advice, guidance, or forgiveness, we are recognising our limits and the possibility of surpassing them.⁷⁷ However, Rahner affirms that if theology is to remain true to its nature and speak of God in an authentically Christian way, it must begin by questioning what knowledge has come to mean

⁷¹ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 31.

⁷² Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 32.

⁷³ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 32.

⁷⁴ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 32.

⁷⁵ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 32.

⁷⁶ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 32.

⁷⁷ Cf. Fischer, *The Foundations of Karl Rahner*, 10.

in our culture. He speaks of it as the «modern ideal of knowledge».⁷⁸ Rahner calls the “modern ideal of knowledge” a type of knowledge that seeks to see through, and thus dominate what is known. It’s knowledge that breaks down its object into what is for us unquestionable and obvious. It seeks to work only with clear ideas, and it is interested only in the functional connections of the details of the world of its experience.⁷⁹ Therefore there is a need of a dialogue between the Christian message and the knowledge of the modern culture.

For Rahner, our understanding of knowledge is more than «the power of comprehending, of gaining mastery and subjugating”, knowledge must be understood more fundamentally as that wherein we stand, before what is incomprehensible, as “the capacity to be grasped” by what lies always beyond us».⁸⁰ However, it must be noted that he is not neglecting the importance of knowledge by grasping and comprehending, gaining mastery and control over things but is drawing an attention to the fact that modern science and technology, the development of modern methods of historical investigation and the tools of exegesis must not claim to be the only kind of human knowledge and points to this larger sense of the ultimate mystery of things as a qualitatively different kind of knowing and as an abiding ingredient permeating all our knowledge and all our everyday activities.⁸¹ Hence the “transcendent structure of knowledge” means that the human being can put himself in a question in his everyday concrete experience but cautions that these questions may evoke the presence of the mysterious and it is in this process that the human being gets to know more and more about his existentiality. So there is no need to “play hide and seek” with the it.

After carefully examining the “transcendent structure of knowledge” in order to understand “the human being as transcendent being”, we will now proceed to tackle one of the theological concerns of Karl Rahner, namely the possibility of the human being evading the experience of transcendence. Since we have already defined what he means by transcendent experience, we can say that the transcendental experience consists of the fundamental reality of the human being’s existence. Therefore, one cannot, in anyway, manipulate this experience. This is because the transcendental experience is embedded in the interior existence of the human being, which can be accepted or rejected. We can therefore reject the transcendental experience with our own actions and words, but we must say that we are introducing a gravity of contradiction in our fundamental reality as a transcendent human being.⁸² According to Rahner

⁷⁸ Dych, *Karl Rahner*, 18.

⁷⁹ Cf. Karl Rahner, *God and Revelation*, trans. Edward Quinn (Baltimore: Herder & Herder, 1983), 95.

⁸⁰ Rahner, *God and Revelation*, 97.

⁸¹ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 32.

⁸² Cf. Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations, Jesus, Man, and the Church*, Vol.17 (Darton Longman & Todd, 1981), 53–70.

a person can shrug his shoulders and ignore this experience of transcendence by devoting himself to his concrete world, his work, his activity in the categorical realm of time and space.⁸³ Therefore, for him, there are three ways in which the human being can evade the possibility of the transcendental experience :

I. Most people will do this in a naïve way. They live at a distance from themselves in that concrete part of their lives and of the world around them which can be manipulated and controlled. They have enough to do there, and it is very interesting and important. And if they ever reflect at all on anything goes beyond all this, they can always say that it is more sensible not to break one's head over it.⁸⁴

II. Such an evasion of this question and of accepting human transcendence can also take place along with resolve to accept categorical existence and accepting the fact that everything is encompassed by an ultimate question. This question is perhaps left as a question. One believes that it can be postponed in silence and in perhaps sensible scepticism. But when one explains that it cannot be answered, he is admitting that in the final analysis such a question cannot be evaded.⁸⁵

III. There is also a perhaps despairing involvement in the categorical realm of human existence. One goes about his business, he reads, he gets angry, he does his work, he does research, he achieves something, he earns money. And in final, perhaps unadmitted despair he says to himself that the whole as a whole makes no sense, and that one does well to suppress the question about the meaning of it all and to reject it as an unanswerable and hence meaningless question.⁸⁶

It must be noted that what the theologian wants to mean by this three examples by which we can evade the transcendental experience has to do with the mood of rejection based on the human being's freedom as a creature. Nevertheless, even when a person closes himself to the orientation of the human existence towards the immediacy of God, the historically constituted and transcendental knowledge of God is inevitably present in the depths of existence in the most ordinary human life.⁸⁷ Therefore with this analysis of the possibility of evading the transcendental experience we can conclude that the human being is indeed a transcendent being and this is to say that God manifests Himself in the fundamental interior of the human being

⁸³ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 32.

⁸⁴ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 33.

⁸⁵ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 32–33.

⁸⁶ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 33.

⁸⁷ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 57.

and his existence. And in this case the theologian calls the human being's attention to the possibility of accepting and of evading self-transcendence.

1.3 The Pre-Apprehension of Being

With Rahner's highlighting of the possibility of the human being's evading the transcendental experience, we will now proceed to study carefully what he calls the "pre-apprehension of being (*Vorgriff auf esse*)", in order to grasp the concept of "the human being as a transcendent being". The "pre-apprehension of being" means «Man is a transcendent being insofar as all of his knowledge and all of his conscious activity is grounded in a pre-apprehension (*Vorgriff*) of 'being' as such, in an unthematic but ever-present knowledge of the infinity of reality».⁸⁸ In another words, it is defined as «a capacity of the dynamic self-movement of the human spirit, whereby a particular object of knowledge in each act of cognition is grasped in its limitation and against a background of an infinite, unlimited horizon».⁸⁹ Analysing these two definitions above, we can underline that the author is describing the *a priori* structure of the human being who is created as a transcendent being. In relation to this internal structure of the human being, Rahner says that the subject who knows itself to be finite and in its knowledge is not just unknowing with regard to limited nature of possibilities of its objects, has already transcended its finiteness. This is because for the Jesuit theologian, the subject has differentiated itself as finite from a subjectively and unthematically given horizon of possible objects that is of infinite breath.⁹⁰ What then does the pre-apprehension of being stands for? Based on the affirmation of the *a priori* structure of the human being, we can intuit that the essence of the "pre-apprehension of being" is the transcendental movement of the human spirit transcending all finite realities with the background of the 'infinite horizon'.⁹¹ The theological question we can ask here is: What then is the importance of the transcendental movement caused by the pre-apprehension of being? Rahner proposes a way out,

whenever the human being in his transcendence experiences himself as questioning, as disquieted by appearance of being, as open to something ineffable, he cannot understand himself as a subject in the sense of an *absolute* subject, but only on the sense of one who receives being ...It is the "infinite horizon" of being making itself manifest...⁹²

⁸⁸ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 33.

⁸⁹ Hines, *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, XV.

⁹⁰ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 19–21.

⁹¹ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 34.

⁹² Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 34.

Thus the human spirit is in constant movement transcending all his categorical experience towards the 'Holy mystery' (God) through a reflection of every day's concrete experience.

Having carefully analysed what the "pre-apprehension of being" (*Vorgriff auf esse*) means, we shall now look at the essence of the human being as transcendent being or in Rahner's own words: «pre-apprehension as constitutive of person».⁹³ He gives a preamble in the *Foundations* stating that the pre-apprehension constitutes the human being as a "person and subject". This means that in so far as he is a transcendental being, he is confronted by himself and responsible for himself.⁹⁴ In conclusion to this preamble he states that it is only in the presence of the infinity of being, as both revealed and concealed, that an existence is in a position to, and has a standpoint from which, he can assume responsibility for himself.⁹⁵ To elaborate, Rahner emphasizes that:

a finite system as such can experience itself as finite only if in its origins it has its own existence by the fact that, as this conscious subject, it comes from something else which is not itself and which is not just an individual system but is the original unity which anticipates and is the fullness of every conceivable system and of every individual and distinct subject.⁹⁶

By this he means that the human being as a "person and subject", is created by the infinite horizon, God, and he can only experience himself in 'freedom' only when his transcendence is directed towards his finality, which is the absolute mystery.⁹⁷ We can verify this theological intuition of the author in the transcendental experience of St Augustine of Hippo when he speaks about the praises and goodness of the infinite mystery : «...for Thou hast created us unto Thyself, and our heart finds no rest until they it rests in Thee».⁹⁸ Therefore we can say that the human being experiences himself 'authentically' before the infinite mystery in his transcendental experience.

Hence in the *Foundations*, Rahner goes on to explain and define the 'real transcendence'. For him, the 'real transcendence' is the openness to being.⁹⁹ It is thus when we allow the human spirit to transcend our daily activities in those origins of human life and human knowledge over which we have no control. Nevertheless he cautions us that 'real transcendence' does not happen by deliberately trying to 'think' transcendence, but it happens

⁹³ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 34.

⁹⁴ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 34.

⁹⁵ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 34.

⁹⁶ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 34.

⁹⁷ Cf. Karl Rahner, *Concerning Vatican Council II, Theological Investigations 6* (London New York the Seabury Press: Darton Longman & Todd, 1974), 178–83.

⁹⁸ Cf. Augustine, *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*, trans. C. Bigg (London: Methuen & Co, 1951), 33.

⁹⁹ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 35.

indirectly. It may happen in a rare mystical experience, for example, or in a commonplace experience of silence, multiplicity of cares and concerns, fears and hope of the everyday world, in the experience of final loneliness in the face of death.¹⁰⁰ This is what the author calls the original experience of transcendence and not philosophical discussion about it.

1.4 The Human Being as Responsible and Free

In this section we will continue to analyse what the transcendental experience of Rahner is, but in a particular way, we will try to find out one of the characteristics of the human being as a transcendent being, thus “the human being as responsible and free”. He says that we ‘know’ freedom as the presupposition underlying our thinking and choices, when we choose to act ‘responsibly’, reflecting on our ability to make choices and deliberately choosing one course over another as more responsible, we experience freedom.¹⁰¹ Hence we can say that the «transcendence towards the absolute being which shows itself in the desire to know is also evident in human freedom which, issuing from will, perfects and completes the self-transcendence».¹⁰² This is because for Rahner, when the human spirit is open to the transcendental experience, he experiences freedom in his subjectivity brought about by what he calls in the *Foundations*, the infinite horizon (the ‘Holy mystery’, God).¹⁰³ It is before the infinite horizon that one can be authentically free in the transcendental experience.

So for Rahner, «freedom is primordially not the ability to choose a particular way of relating oneself to this or that, but is the freedom of self-understanding, the possibility of saying yes or no to oneself, the possibility of decision for or against oneself».¹⁰⁴ Thus he affirms that in freedom the subject returns again to the self. This is because to be free is «not so much the positing of another, something that is alien, a work that stands over against the act itself in otherness, but is the fulfilling of the subject’s own essence, a taking possession of itself, a taking possession of the reality of its own creative power over itself».¹⁰⁵ Another way we can describe freedom in the transcendental experience is by referring to what freedom means in the

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 35.

¹⁰¹ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 35.

¹⁰² Michael Purcell, *Mystery and Method: The Other in Rahner and Levinas* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette Univ Pr, 1998), 86.

¹⁰³ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 34.

¹⁰⁴ Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations, Vol VI: Theology of Freedom* (Darton, London, 1969), 178-96.

¹⁰⁵ Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations, Vol I: The Theological Concept of Concupiscentia*, Edición: Second Edition (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1961), 185.

compendium of the social doctrine of the church by the Pontifical Council responsible for justice and peace. The Council states that:

a man is alienated if he refuses to transcend himself and to live the experience of self-giving and of the formation of an authentic human community oriented towards his final destiny, which is God. A society is alienated if its forms of social organization, production and consumption make it more difficult to offer this gift of self and to establish this solidarity between people.¹⁰⁶

Hence we can agree with Rahner that the human being experiences freedom when he orientates his daily activities before the infinite mystery, who is his final destiny.

Another point that the author makes is the fact that the contingency of the subject stands in contrast to the autonomy and freedom of the absolute being.¹⁰⁷ In other words, he states that «as spirits who know the absolute being, we stand before the latter as before a freely self-disposing person».¹⁰⁸ God freely discloses Himself “before human transcendence” as the horizon within which human freedom exercises itself, primarily as an attitude or stance towards one’s own existence, and thereafter in relation to other objects within the world.¹⁰⁹ For this reason, Michael Purcell, in paraphrasing Rahner, states that human freedom is not strictly to be understood as autonomous other than in the acceptance or rejection of oneself as contingent, a contingency which is necessarily affirmed in such an acceptance or rejection. For him, human freedom is exercised in the context of the wider heteronomy of the other, whether the other is absolute being or the other person. This is affirmed by the understanding of the subject as the locus of a possible revelation, a revelation which cannot be commanded.¹¹⁰ Hence we can affirm that the theological meaning of the “human being as responsible and free” is, by reading Rahner from the vantage point of mystery not mastery, heteronomy not autonomy, responsibility not freedom¹¹¹. Then it follows that, a genuine freedom is born through a transcendental experience which has its goal in the absolute mystery.

To understand the concept of the human being “as responsible and free” we need also to understand from where this concept was derived. Rahner was inspired by the evangelist St. John when he states, «It is by your love for one another, that everyone will recognise you as my

¹⁰⁶ Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2004), 47.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Purcell, *Mystery and Method*, 87.

¹⁰⁸ Karl Rahner, *Hearers of the Word*, Edición: First Edition (London: Herder and Herder, 1969), 70.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Purcell, *Mystery and Method*, 87.

¹¹⁰ Cf. Purcell, *Mystery and Method*, 87.

¹¹¹ Cf. Purcell, *Mystery and Method*, 88.

disciples (Jn 13:35) ». It is in this context that he sees the fundamental meaning of human freedom. For him, «freedom in the first instance does not mean the capacity to choose this or that or to do this or that, but the capacity to do and realize oneself». ¹¹² So in summary, Rahner states that freedom never happens as a merely objective exercise, as a mere choice between individual objects, but is the self-realization of the person who chooses objectively; only within this freedom in which the human being is capable of achieving himself, is he also free with regard to the material of his self-achievement. ¹¹³ So the human being experiences his transcendental freedom in his concrete categorical experiences.

Therefore, according to Rahner, freedom «is not the capacity of always being able to do something else, of infinite revision» ¹¹⁴, but the capacity to do something final and definitive, to create a self which is eternal. «Freedom as self-realization and self-determination is the ‘fundamental option’ that is taking place in the course of all one's objective choices». ¹¹⁵ It must be noted that the ‘fundamental option’ is not a separate choice by itself but is the formal object or horizon within which all one's material choices take place. It is the basic orientation that is the motivating force of one's actions. ¹¹⁶ We can then infer that this formal object or horizon is what the Jesuit priest calls as the pre-apprehension of being as constitutive of the subject in his transcendental experience.

Having introduced Rahner’s theology of freedom, we shall now proceed to analyse this theme so as to understand better the development of his thought about “the human being as responsible and free”. He makes a distinction between the freedom that the human being experiences because of the acceptance or rejection of the transcendental experience and the empirical anthropological sciences. He states that «man’s responsibility and freedom are not a particular, empirical datum alongside of others». ¹¹⁷ Based on this, he establishes that the traditional scholastic psychology of the schools wants to discover freedom directly as an individual, concrete datum within the realm of human transcendentality and personhood, and this according to the Jesuit theologian is a good intention but is doing something which basically contradicts the essence of freedom. ¹¹⁸ Rahner makes this analysis because,

even when we say in our everyday affairs that in this and that we were free, and in something else presumably not, we are not dealing with one regional phenomenon

¹¹² Dych, *Karl Rahner*, 133.

¹¹³ Cf. Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, Vol VI, 185.

¹¹⁴ Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, Vol VI, 186.

¹¹⁵ Cf. Dych, *Karl Rahner*, 133.

¹¹⁶ Cf. Dych, *Karl Rahner*, 134.

¹¹⁷ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 35.

¹¹⁸ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 35.

alongside others that can be located unambiguously in time and space. Rather we are dealing at most with the application and concretization of transcendental experience of freedom, which is something quite different from that experience which the particular science is concerned.¹¹⁹

We can verify from this citation of the author the theological meaning of freedom. The Ignatian theologian believes that freedom is not an ‘abstract thing’, but the human being experiences it in his subjectivity through the transcendental experience but more to the point before the absolute being (the concept of the pre-apprehension of being). This transcendental freedom cannot be made possible by the various anthropological sciences.

Another point we can draw from the *Foundations* is the fact that Rahner, in making a distinction between the empirical anthropological sciences and the transcendental experience in relation to freedom, is not denying «that the notions of freedom, responsibility, accountability and unaccountability in the usual and everyday affairs of human life and also in the legal affairs of civil life have something to do with our present topic (transcendental freedom)»¹²⁰, but he argues that if there were not this transcendental experience of freedom of the human being’s subjectivity and freedom, then neither could there be any freedom within the realm of his categorical experience, nor in the civic life, nor in his personal life.¹²¹ Therefore he states that it is through the transcendental experience that I know that I am free and responsible for myself, even when I have doubts about it, raise questions about it, and cannot discover it as an individual datum of my categorical experience in time and in space.¹²² This means that for him, ‘real freedom’ comes from the openness of the human being to the ‘Holy mystery’ and the fruit of this transcendental experience in turn gives a ‘helping hand’ to the anthropological sciences.¹²³ For example, a client accept the proposal of his psychologist when the proposal has something to do with his subjective experience or what the Jesuit priest calls the transcendental experience of the subject.

We have discussed above Rahner's explanation of the theology of “freedom and responsibility” in the process of the transcendental experience, but he goes further in the *Foundations* to clarify how “freedom and responsibility” are indeed realities of the transcendental experience. The Jesuit priest, once again, makes a distinction between “the human being as “person and subject” and how scientific reflection views him. For this reason

¹¹⁹ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*,36.

¹²⁰ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*,36.

¹²¹ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*,36.

¹²² Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*,36.

¹²³ Cf. Fischer, *The Foundations of Karl Rahner*, 11.

he states that, like subjectivity and personhood, so too responsibility and freedom are realities of transcendental experience. That is, they are experienced when the subject as such experiences himself, and hence precisely not when he is objectified in a subsequent scientific reflection.¹²⁴ He shows how “responsibility and freedom” are crystallised in the transcendental experience. Rahner shows a concrete elaboration on how “responsibility and freedom” are characterized in the transcendental experience. In doing this he was very honest to himself and stated that the question of how “freedom and responsibility” is concretized in time and space in the transcendental experience is a question which we cannot decide explicitly.¹²⁵ He states further that the freedom we are discussing is,

not a neutral power which one has and possesses as something different from himself. It is rather a fundamental characteristic of a personal existence who experiences himself in what he has already done and is still to do in time as self-possession, as one who is responsible and has to give an account and includes the moment when a subjective and personal response to the infinite and the incomprehensible confronts this existence in his transcendence and is either accepted or rejected.¹²⁶

With this explanation Rahner makes clear that there is the possibility of evading the transcendental experience in relation to freedom and responsibility. For this reason, he reminds us that for us not to evade transcendental freedom we need to understand that freedom always concerns the person as such and as a whole. The object of freedom in its original sense is the subject himself, and all decisions about objects in his experience of the world around him are objects of freedom only insofar as they mediate this finite subject in time and space to himself. When freedom is really understood, it is not the power to be able to do this or that, but the power to decide about oneself and to actualize oneself.¹²⁷ Finally, Rahner affirms that “responsibility and freedom” are realities of transcendental experience. This means that the human being in the process of his transcendence to his creator encounters freedom and responsibility.¹²⁸ We can give an example of this transcendental freedom from the transcendent structure of knowledge of St Paul, the apostle, when he writes that, «now this Lord is Spirit and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom (2Cor 3,17) ». In other words it seems the apostle was insinuating that when the human being is present to himself in his concrete experience before the infinite being (the concept of the pre-apprehension of being), he

¹²⁴ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 37.

¹²⁵ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 38.

¹²⁶ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 38.

¹²⁷ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 38.

¹²⁸ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 39.

experiences what the author calls the realities of the transcendental experience. Thus responsibility and freedom.

1.5 The Question of Personal Existence as a Question of Salvation

After our efforts to understand Rahner's concept of 'existential' we want to find out whether what we have analysed so far about the question of the human being's personal existence is also a soteriological question. We wish to study this in a more cautious way because this will lead us into our second chapter. Thus, the supernatural as the self-communication of God. The Portuguese dogmatic theologian, Ferreira de Farias affirms that an existential in Rahner has, «a long history in thought and evokes what constitutes the human being as such, in its condition of being accepted, received, placed in the world, in time and in space».¹²⁹ In other words, we can say that Rahner bases his thought on a philosophical reflection on the conditions of the possibility of the human experience, fundamental anthropological constants of the 'transcendental essence', so that the human being will be able to be ascertained, existential as it were, which express that dependency upon divine salvation.¹³⁰ Therefore the questions of existential «are chiefly questions of truth, freedom, guilt, love, fidelity, and even the human being's longing for salvation».¹³¹ The task at this stage is to find out whether the question of existence has also to do with the theme of Christian salvation. In other words our theological task is to investigate whether the concept of existential in Rahner can open a space in human being's existence for the correct understanding of the Christian message.¹³² Hence when the human existence is understood by the subject, he is able to accept the Christian message of salvation in his very particular concrete experience.

In relation to the theological and starting point for an understanding of salvation, Rahner said that it is important to note that «when one does not see the original starting point for understanding salvation in the subject and rooted in the very nature of freedom, salvation can appear very strange and sound like mythology».¹³³ So with this affirmation, one may then ask, what is the real starting point of the theological and anthropological understanding of salvation? According to the Jesuit theologian,

¹²⁹ José Jacinto Ferreira de Farias, *Antropologia e graça: ser cristão hoje*, Estudos de teologia 10 (Lisboa: Universidade Católica Editora, 2011), 89.

¹³⁰ Cf. Losinger, *The Anthropological Turn*, 4–5.

¹³¹ Karl-Heinz Weger, *Karl Rahner. Eine Einführung in Sein Theologisches Denken*. (Freiburg im Breisgau ; Basel ; Wien: Herder, 1985), 27.

¹³² Cf. João Duque, «A arte e o divino: considerações teo-lógicas sobre a filosofia da arte de Martin Heidegger», *Theologica II*, Vol. XXIX, (Braga: Universidade Católica Editora, 1994) : 149–50.

¹³³ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 39.

the theological notion of salvation does not mean a future situation which befalls a person unexpectedly like something coming from outside, and this happily or, if opposite to salvation, unhappily. Nor does it mean something bestowed on him only on the basis of moral judgement. It means instead the final and definitive validity of a person's true self-understanding and true self-realization in freedom before God by the fact that he accepts his own self as it is disclosed and offered to him in the choice of transcendence as interpreted in freedom.¹³⁴

We can intuit that Rahner's understanding of the citation above can be comprehended by his theological concept of freedom. Thus, the Jesuit priest proposes that, when the human being accepts his existence and all its implications in his categorical experience before the absolute mystery, then his existence is open for the transcendental experience. He is able to accept the Christian message in sincerity.¹³⁵ We can also verify this anthropological approach of understanding the Christian message in the Church's magisterial document, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*. The Fathers of this sacred council stated that its attention is «on the world of men, the whole human family along with the sum of those realities in the midst of which it lives; that world which is the theatre of man's history, and the heir of his energies, his tragedies, and his triumphs».¹³⁶ Thus the council believes that when the human history is perceived well then we can offer the Christian message as a message of salvation to the deepest question that he ask of his existence.¹³⁷ We can give an example of this anthropological approach of understanding the Christian message of salvation by what the German theologian Johann Baptist Metz meant of political theology.

He affirms that, for example, when we speak of political theology, «the world is not understood as a cosmos to which existence and person are opposed, but as a social reality in a historical process. The Church is neither 'with' nor 'above' this historical reality. It is within it as a social-critical institution. Hence the Church has a critical-liberating task».¹³⁸ Here we see how, the cosmos, the human being and Christian message is taking into consideration by Metz so that in understanding the reality of the world and the human being, the Christian message can be understood properly and communicated to the concrete human existence.

¹³⁴ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 39.

¹³⁵ In spite of what Christianity says about the history of salvation, what it says about man always refers to him in the deepest origins and roots of his being in his transcendental essence... in such a way that the transcendental nature of the one question which man is in his transcendence towards the all-encompassing mystery is not made categorical in a false way (Cf. Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, New York, 2016, 39-40.)

¹³⁶ 'Gaudium et Spes', 2, accessed 10 November 2020,

http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_po.html.

¹³⁷ Cf. 'Gaudium et Spes', 10.

¹³⁸ Johannes Baptist Metz, *Teologia do mundo, Teologia nova* (Lisboa: Moraes Ed, 1969), 115.

This means that the human being is destined to transcend himself. Such transcendence is invited by God and takes place in union with God.¹³⁹ Hence when the human being is honest to himself and accept his being “as a gift of God”, then we can argue that he is in the process of transcendence to the infinite being. The theological question we can ask here is how do the author combines the question of the human existence and the salvation history? Rahner, on this issue, asserts that,

man is not merely also a biological and social organism who exists in time with these characteristics. Rather his subjectivity and his free, personal self-interpretation takes place precisely in and through his being in the world, in time, and in history...The question of salvation cannot be answered by bypassing man’s historicity and social nature.¹⁴⁰

He explains that as subject, the human being has not entered accidentally into this material and temporal world as into something which is ultimately foreign to him as subject, and contradictory to his spiritual nature. Rather the subject’s self-alienation in the world is precisely the way in which the subject discovers himself in a definitive way. He affirms that time, world, and history mediate the subject to himself and to that immediate and free self-possession towards which a personal subject is oriented and towards which he is always striving.¹⁴¹ Therefore the Jesuit priest concludes the theme of the human being’s personal existence as a question of salvation with a premise and a conclusion. So starting with the premise he acknowledges that if historicity is an existential of the subject himself, then there must be a history of salvation and its opposite, because the question of salvation is addressed to his freedom.¹⁴² And ending with a conclusion he confirms that salvation history and history as such must be ultimately coexistent as Metz indicated above, whereby of course a genuine differentiation is not excluded penultimately. If the subject involved in salvation is historical, then history itself is the history of salvation, although in a hidden way and always still in progress until the final and definitive interpretation.¹⁴³ In other words, the human being’s continuous transcendental experience before the infinite being, till his final beatific vision.

¹³⁹ Cf. Fischer, *The Foundations of Karl Rahner*, 12.

¹⁴⁰ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 40.

¹⁴¹ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 41.

¹⁴² Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 41.

¹⁴³ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 41.

Summary

In this chapter we sought to analyse “the concept of existential” in the *Foundations of Christian Faith*. Thus we treated themes like: “Personhood as a presupposition of the Christian Faith”. On this theme we studied that for the Christian message to be accepted in the human being’s concrete existence, there is a need to understand this particular concrete reality. Therefore we stipulated that the human being is constitute as a “person and subject”. This means that he can put himself into a question in his categorical experience and transcend it. This led us to the second sub-theme: the human being as a transcendent being. When Rahner speaks of the human being as a transcendent being he refers to a metahistorical, a priori disposition of the human person, who asks after the question of being, and who thereby experiences him or herself as a being with an unlimited horizon, open to the mystery of God.¹⁴⁴ We also investigated how the transcendental experience is operated in the categorical experience of the human being. Rahner stated that the transcendental experience is operated by the pre-apprehension of being. Thus, the human being transcends his reality based on background of the recognition of the infinite reality, God. Last but not least, we also studied that when the human person accepts his transcendental experience, the consequence he gets is responsibility and freedom. Hence the human being is responsible and free. Finally we ended this chapter by affirming that the human being can accept or reject the Christian message in his existentiality when he is responsible and free in his transcendental categorical experience. Therefore we underlined that the question of personal existence is also the question of salvation.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. Hines, *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, XV.

CHAPTER 2: THE CONCEPT OF SUPERNATURAL AS GOD'S SELF – COMMUNICATION IN K. RAHNER

In the first chapter we explained what Rahner meant by the term 'existential'. We also tried to understand the presuppositions without which the Christian message about the human being would not be possible. According to him, the term 'existential', which we studied in the first chapter, was not yet so specifically Christian that anyone who accepts these assertions as his own self-understanding could already be called a Christian.¹⁴⁵ Rahner argued that the Christian message and existence of the human being would be understood when the concept of supernatural as the self-communication of God is studied.¹⁴⁶ Therefore, the purpose of this part of the dissertation is to investigate the concept of 'supernatural' as God's free and forgiving self-communication. In sum, we shall be explaining what the author means when he writes that «the human being is the event of a free, unmerited and forgiving, and absolute self-communication of God».¹⁴⁷ Thus we will be studying what the self-communication of God to the human being's existentiality means.

2.1 The General Concept of God's Self-Communication

In explaining the notion of the self-communication of God, Rahner uses the Trinity as a case study. Thus «the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity».¹⁴⁸ Bucey explains that Rahner uses this axiom to explain God's self-communication because traditionally theologians have distinguished between the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity. Thus the immanent Trinity pertains to God in himself and to the *hypostases*¹⁴⁹ in relation to each other, separate from any external considerations.¹⁵⁰ In relation to the economic Trinity, some theologians suggest that it pertains to God's being as it relates to creation, in which the Father, Son, and the Spirit assume particular roles in order to create and redeem. Rahner challenges this distinction.¹⁵¹ He argues that there is no distinguish between the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity. This is because it can generate into an idea that there is one God that saves

¹⁴⁵ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 116.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 116.

¹⁴⁷ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 116.

¹⁴⁸ Karl Rahner, *Trinity*, Edición: New edition (Tunbridge Wells, Kent: Continuum International Publishing, 2001), 34.

¹⁴⁹ This a Christological term used to refer to the relations that exist between the three Divine Persons (Cf. Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimler, *Diccionario teológico* (Barcelona: Herder, 1966, 300).

¹⁵⁰ Cf. Camden M. Bucey, *Karl Rahner* (Philipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2019), 11.

¹⁵¹ Cf. Bucey, *Karl Rahner*, 11.

and another that lies in abstract solitude.¹⁵² He rejects this distinction out of the fear that this would result in a division between two Godheads.

In defending his Trinitarian axiom he argues that there is not a Trinity from eternity in back of the one revealed in salvation history.¹⁵³ We can comprehend Rahner's axiom by understanding the statement made by the "Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei verbum*", where the Council fathers established the unity and yet the distinction in the Trinity, thus the Council affirmed that, «God chose to reveal Himself and to make known to us the hidden purpose of His will (cf. Eph. 1:9) by which through Christ, the Word made flesh, man might in the Holy Spirit have access to the Father and come to share in the divine nature (cf. Eph. 2:18; 2 Peter 1:4)». ¹⁵⁴ On this theological statement of the Council fathers on the revelation of the Trinity, we can agree with Rahner on his trinitarian axiom that the same God in the immanent Trinity is the same in the economic Trinity.

The German theologian states that when one takes into consideration his explanation based on this axiom as true, «states not some scholastic subtlety but simply this: each one of the three Divine Persons communicates Himself in gratuitous grace in his own personal particularity and diversity». ¹⁵⁵ On the personal particularity and diversity of the self-communication of God, Rahner cautions against the tendency of Sabellianism¹⁵⁶, when he speaks of the diversity of hypostatic subjectivities of the eternal immanent givenness of the Son and Spirit. He therefore argues that «the "Persons" are conscious of "Themselves" and of "Their" distinctions from the other "Two Persons" and rejects the idea of three subjectivities or three consciousness in God». ¹⁵⁷ For Rahner, whatever we say about human persons does not apply to God as he exists in Himself:

There exists in God only one power, one will, only one self-presence, a unique activity, a unique beatitude, and so forth. Hence, self-awareness is not a moment which distinguishes the divine "Persons" one from another, even though each Divine "Person", as concrete, possesses a self-consciousness. Whatever would mean three "subjectivities" must be carefully kept away from the concept of person in the present context. ¹⁵⁸

¹⁵² Cf. Bucey, *Karl Rahner*, 12.

¹⁵³ Cf. Bucey, *Karl Rahner*, 12.

¹⁵⁴ 'Dei Verbum', 2, accessed 17 June 2021, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html.

¹⁵⁵ Rahner, *Trinity*, 34.

¹⁵⁶ Sabellianism is a form of modalism that did not distinguish different "persons" in divinity but considered them as different manifestations of a single "divine person". Sabellius conceived divinity as a monad that expressed itself in three operations, he used the image of "projection", the Father had projected himself as Son and then as Holy Spirit. (Cf. César Vidal Manzanares, «sabelianismo», en *Diccionario historico del Cristianismo*, Navarra, 1999,306-307).

¹⁵⁷ Bucey, *Karl Rahner*, 18.

¹⁵⁸ Rahner, *Trinity*, 75–76.

The task now is to search for an explanation for the statement that Rahner asserts above in relation to the self-communication of the 'Divine Persons' in the Trinity. For him, this Trinitarian communication is the ontological ground of the human being's life of Grace and eventually of the direct vision of the Divine Persons in eternity. It is God's «'indwelling', 'uncreated grace'¹⁵⁹ understood not only as a communication of the Divine nature, but also it implies a free personal act, since it occurs from 'person' to 'person', as communication of 'persons'». ¹⁶⁰ Thus God communicates Himself by the Son and the Spirit.

As to how the self-communication between the Divine Persons occurs, Rahner intuits that «the one God communicates Himself in absolute self-utterance and as absolute donation of love». ¹⁶¹ The Jesuit priest affirms that the absolute mystery is revealed to us only by Christ. Hence, he writes that:

God's self-communication is truly a self-communication. He does not merely in directly give his creature some share of himself by creating and giving us created and finite realities through his omnipotent efficient causality. In a quasi-formal causality he really and in the strictest sense of the "Word" bestows himself. ¹⁶²

For Rahner, the testimony of revelation in Scripture tells us that this self-communication of God has a threefold aspect: It is a self-communication in which that which is given remains sovereign, incompressible, continuing, even as received, to dwell in its uncontrollable incomprehensible originality, ¹⁶³ it is a self-communication in which God, who manifests himself "is there" as self-uttered truth and as freely, historically disposing sovereignty ¹⁶⁴ and finally it is a self-communication in which the God who communicates himself causes in the one who receives him the act of loving welcome and causes it in such a way that his welcoming does not bring down to the purely created level. ¹⁶⁵ When we look critically at how the author deduced from Scripture the three-fold self-communication of God, we can infer that he is explaining the dynamics of how God communicates to the human being without losing Himself to the creature. In this case he is affirming what he meant by the quasi-formal causality. ¹⁶⁶

¹⁵⁹ The uncreated grace implies that God communicates His very Self to every human being in a free, absolute, unmerited, forgiving self-communication, which is for every human being an existential reality. (Cf. Joseph A. Komonchak, Dermot A. Lane, and Mary Collins, *The New Dictionary of Theology*, Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1993, 446).

¹⁶⁰ Rahner, *Trinity*, 35.

¹⁶¹ Cf. Rahner, *Trinity*, 36.

¹⁶² Rahner, *Trinity*, 36.

¹⁶³ Cf. Rahner, *Trinity*, 37.

¹⁶⁴ Cf. Rahner, *Trinity*, 37.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. Rahner, *Trinity*, 37.

¹⁶⁶ The quasi-formal causality can be explained as the study of the scholastic concept of uncreated grace. The expression means to say that in the state of grace God himself is the quasi-form of our souls. When Rahner uses this expression, he wants to mean that God communicates his divine life to soul. Thus he perfects the soul so that

Having now understood the threefold aspect of God's self-communication, the Ignatian priest cautions that we need to take into consideration two basic misunderstandings of God's self-communication to the human being. Therefore he writes that:

I. The three aspects of the self-communication should not, in the dimension of communication, be interpreted as a merely verbal unfolding of communication which itself contains no distinctions. In the dimension of salvation history, this distinction is 'real'. The origin of God's self-communication, its 'existence' as it radically expresses and utters itself, the self-communication's welcoming acceptance brought about by himself, are not indistinctly "the same thing" signified by different words. That is: as understood by the experience of faith, on the witness of Scripture, the Father, the Word, and the Spirit (however deficient all these words may be and must be) point to a true distinction, to a double mediation within this self-communication.¹⁶⁷

II. The history of this self-communication, as it reveals itself, has shown ever more closely and more undeniable that this double mediation by Word and Spirit is not a created kind of mediation, in which God would not really be communicated as he is in himself. The testimony of faith tells that the economic self-communication of God is truly and threefold. Economic Sabellianism is false. The mediations of God among us are no created intermediaries or word powers. Such a conception of God's communication would basically be Arian, it would do away with a true self-communication of God, it would bring down eschatological salvific work of Christ to the level of forever provisory and open mediations, after the manner of Prophetic servants, of angelic powers, or of Platonic descending emanations. It follows that this real mediation of a divine kind in the dimension of salvation history must also be a real mediation in God's inner life.¹⁶⁸

Since we have now grasped what the self-communication of God means, we can now say that indeed, the revelation of the Trinity is a novelty in Christianity.¹⁶⁹ We make this affirmation based on the assertion that the revelation of the Trinity as a mystery that the human being encounters in the historical mission of the Word and Spirit is not a knowledge acquired through the speculative or transcendental deductions of concepts as in the sense of the German

the human soul can be united to him but in a (quasi)- formal causality, this means that God communicate the divine life to the soul without losing himself in this communication (Cf. Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, New York, 2016, 121.)

¹⁶⁷ Rahner, *Trinity*, 37.

¹⁶⁸ Rahner, *Trinity*, 37–38.

¹⁶⁹ Cf. José Jacinto Ferreira, *Da Incerteza à Esperança* (Lisboa: Universidade Católica Editora, 2012), 90.

philosopher Immanuel Kant, but through the history of revelation, of the gratuitous initiative of God.¹⁷⁰ It implies that the revelation of the Trinity is not the work of the human being, but it is a free self-communication of God. Therefore it is this loving and benevolent divine self-communication of God to the human being that Rahner translates into an axiom in which he seeks to concentrate the relationship between the revelation of God in history and the deepest mysterious and ineffable Being: “The economic Trinity is immanent, and vice versa”.¹⁷¹ Thus we can say the trinitarian axiom of Rahner, depicts a loving relationship between God and the human being and his existentiality.

Furthermore, Rahner states that «we should not understand the self-communication of God in the sense that God will say something about Himself in some revelation or other». ¹⁷² It is the ultimate depths and radical dimension of all that which the spiritual person experience in all those areas in which he achieves his own fullness.¹⁷³ Thus, for example in his laughter, and his tears, in taking responsibility, whenever he keeps faith with the truth, breaks through egotism in his relationship with his neighbour, the self-communication of God is experienced in his subjectivity. According to Egan, Rahner considers the self-communication of God as the animating force in the entire evolutionary process and world history.¹⁷⁴ Hence the self-communication of God is experienced in day-to-day activities of the human history.

So with this general idea of the self-communication of God to the human being and his existence, we will now focus on the *Foundations* to find out the definition Rahner gives to the term ‘self-communication’. He affirms that «the term “self-communication” is really intended to signify that God in his own proper reality makes Himself the innermost constitutive element of man». ¹⁷⁵ Thus the self-communication of God means that God communicates, reveals himself to the human being. This implies that the creature is strictly sanctified, justified, and blessed by the reality more proper to God. Inasmuch as this self-communication is the absolutely free work, which God does not owe to any finite being, not even to the sinless, it appears in it what it means to say that God is love (Cf.1 Jn 4, 8).¹⁷⁶ Therefore we can infer from Rahner’s definition of the self-communication of God to the human person in a sense that, God in his loving self-uttering communicates the Son and the Spirit to the Human being. Here we are saying that creation is from God through Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit (cf.

¹⁷⁰ Cf. Ferreira, *Da Incerteza à Esperança*, 90.

¹⁷¹ Cf. Ferreira, *Da Incerteza à Esperança*, 90.

¹⁷² Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 116.

¹⁷³ Cf. Harvey D. Egan, Karl Rahner: *Mystic of Everyday Life, The Crossroad Spiritual Legacy Series* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing. Company, 1998), 152.

¹⁷⁴ Cf Egan, Karl Rahner: *Mystic of Everyday Life, The Crossroad Spiritual Legacy Series* ,152.

¹⁷⁵ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 116.

¹⁷⁶ Cf. Rahner and Vorgrimler, *Diccionario teológico*, 58–59.

Eph 1:3-14). Thus we see Rahner's theological preoccupation here, the sending of Son and Spirit and their presence in the economy of redemption must display what is unique to each of them.¹⁷⁷ Therefore he cautions us to avoid two misunderstandings that will prevent us from grasping the self-communication of God, namely; the «self-communication of a mere word about God, although perhaps spoken by God»¹⁷⁸ and the «self-communication which is reified and understood entirely after the manner of a thing»¹⁷⁹. In sum, what the theologian means is that God gives the Gift of His Life to the human person and his existentiality.

Hence the notion of the 'self-communication' of God does not mean however, that God is an element or a thing, the communication is a spiritual one, known to the human being through for example, the call of Conscience.¹⁸⁰ Conversely, Rahner emphasizes that «man as the event of God's free and forgiving self-communication is indeed the starting point in the Christian message».¹⁸¹ What he means here can be understood in the first chapter of the present dissertation where we focus mainly on understanding the existence of the human being. We came to comprehend that for Rahner, when the human being understands himself well, he is well placed to receive or reject the self-communication of God. This, for him, is the starting point in the Christian message.

This is because «the Christian message is the result of a long development in the history of the human being and his spirit. A Christian interprets it correctly as a history of salvation and of ongoing revelation of God which has reached its climax in Christ».¹⁸² This means that when the human being knows that he is constitute as a "person and subject" the possibility of accepting the self-communication of God becomes easier. This is because for Rahner, God's self-communication means that what is communicated is really God in his own being, and in this way, it is communication for the sake of knowing and possessing God in immediate vision and love.¹⁸³ The self-communication of God to the human being can also be understood that God communicates not by sending a message, but by forming a relationship. The relationship consists of God's invitation and our response. We know God as the one who created the human being and who invited him to transcendence of his reality, thereby realizing the possibilities

¹⁷⁷ Cf. Michael J. Walsh, *Commentary on the Catechism of the Catholic Church* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994), 70.

¹⁷⁸ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 116.

¹⁷⁹ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 116.

¹⁸⁰ Cf. Fischer, *The Foundations of Karl Rahner*, 38.

¹⁸¹ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 117.

¹⁸² Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 117.

¹⁸³ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 118.

that existence offers.¹⁸⁴ So we can say that the ‘uncreated grace’ in the human being enables him to form a relationship with his maker.

As we have seen, in order to understand the self-communication of God, Rahner says we need to understand first the doctrine of grace and of the final vision of God. He affirms that these two doctrines, however, must be understood within Christian dogma in the closest possible unity.¹⁸⁵ When Rahner speaks of grace, he tries to look beyond the perspective of created grace¹⁸⁶, typical of scholasticism. Indeed, scholastic theology understood created grace as an accident,¹⁸⁷ caused by efficient causality.¹⁸⁸ In short, Rahner defines grace (Greek *charis*, lat. *gratia*) as undue favour of God that is embedded in the human being. However, grace also means the effect of that favour in which God communicates Himself to the human being.¹⁸⁹ On the other hand, the doctrine of justification in Rahner means the richness and freeness of God’s grace are manifested in such a way that there is nothing else than a free, unprompted, unsolicited expression of God’s own nature and love to mankind.¹⁹⁰ Our task now is to explain the reconciliation of the doctrine of grace and the doctrine of the final vision of God. Rahner himself states that «what the grace and a vision of God mean are two phases of one and the same event which are conditioned by the human being’s free historicity and temporality».¹⁹¹ This affirmation suggests that the self-communication from God to the human being is absolutely free and gratuitous on the part of God. That is to say, it cannot in any case be an object of a requirement on the part of the human being or anything created by God.¹⁹² If this is so, then it follows that God wants to freely establish a relationship with the human being and that is why He expresses Himself in love to him through the communication of the Son and the Spirit.

¹⁸⁴ Cf. Fischer, *The Foundations of Karl Rahner*, 39.

¹⁸⁵ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 118.

¹⁸⁶ Created grace implies something created in the soul. It is God himself who creates in the human being conditions of possibility so that he can accept Him and rise to Him. It is a transformation brought about in the soul by Divine intervention. Cf. Jacinto Farias, «the notion of created grace», in Soteriology, class lectures for private use of students at the Catholic University of Portugal, Lisbon, the relationship between nature and grace, 2020-2021. In the synthesis of Thomas Aquinas, a life freely directed toward God is the only way to fulfilment for the infinite hungers of the human spirit. This is due to the created grace (Cf. Komonchak, Lane, and Collins, *The New Dictionary of Theology*, 440).

¹⁸⁷ Accident here means something inherent to the substance and cannot exist in itself; therefore, being corresponds to it only in an analogous way. There are nine superior types of accidents, among which the most important are quantity and quality (absolute accidents), action, passion, place in space and time (relative accidents). We can also speak of the concepts passed into Eucharistic theology: after the consecration, only the accidents (eucharistic species) of the bread and wine remain, and not their substance (transubstantiation) at all (Cf. Rahner and Vorgrimler, *Diccionario teológico*, 2).

¹⁸⁸ Cf. José Antonio Sayés, *La Esencia del cristianismo: diálogo con K. Rahner y H. V. von Balthasar*, Teología sistemática (Madrid: Ediciones Cristiandad, 2005), 70.

¹⁸⁹ Cf. Rahner and Vorgrimler, *Diccionario teológico*, 227.

¹⁹⁰ Cf. James Hastings, *Dictionary of the apostolic church* (Edinburgh, New York: T. & T. Clark Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1951), 670.

¹⁹¹ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 118.

¹⁹² Cf. Bernard Sesboue, *Karl Rahner* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2001), 127.

Hence we can say that the human being is in constant divinization experience until he reaches his beatific vision.¹⁹³ Henceforth if the human being according to Rahner is the event of a free, unmerited, and forgiving, and absolute self-communication of God, it can be argued that the human being will also search for his God in love until he sees Him face to face or as Saint John the apostle will put it , «My dear friends, we are already God’s children, but what we shall be in the future has not yet been revealed. We are aware that when he appears we shall be like him because we shall see him as he really is (1Jn 3:2)». This is what the Rahner means when he speaks of the reconciliation of the doctrine of grace and the doctrine of the beatific vision.

Once we understand the self-communication of God in a general sense and in the *Foundations*, we shall move on to study how it is operated in the human transcendental experience. Thus, we shall be investigating the twofold modality of God’s self-Communication. In relation to the twofold modality, Rahner asserts that from our general anthropology, God’s self-communication to the human being as a free being who exists with the possibility of an absolute ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to God can be understood in two different ways. The first way is «in the modality of the antecedent situation of an offer and a call to man’s freedom».¹⁹⁴ Here we can agree with the author based on the narrative of the creation story where God said, “Let us make man in our own image and in the ‘likeness’¹⁹⁵ of ourselves” (Cf. Gn 1,26). From this narrative story we see that the communication of God is indeed an offer for all human beings. Some will argue that the creation story is just a myth, and we should not pay attention to it, but according to Armindo Dos Santos Vaz,

the myth of origin, relates the origins of the world, phenomena, essential aspects, problems or facts of human life and the bases of its cultural experience: existence of humanity, its male and female dimension, diseases and harmful sides of human life, relations of humankind with divinity, the role of human beings in the world, their relationship with animals and with work, benefit from agriculture and irrigation in the fields, organization of the cosmos...¹⁹⁶

¹⁹³ In technical theological language, the essential joy of heaven is called the beatific vision. This means the immediate face-to-face experience of God in which the human person finds ultimate fulfilment after death.(Cf. Komonchak, Lane, and Collins, *The New Dictionary of Theology*, 81–82).

¹⁹⁴ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 118.

¹⁹⁵ The “likeness” in this text appears to weaken the force of ‘image’ by excluding the idea of equality. ‘Image’ is a concrete term implying a physical resemblance like that between Adam and his son, Cf. Gn 5,3. This relationship with God marks off human beings from the animals; more over it involves a general similarity of nature: intellect, will, authority. It paves a way for a higher revelation. Thus the human share in the divine nature by virtue of grace (Cf. General Editor Alexander Jones, *The Jerusalem Bible*, Edition: Indexed Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966, 19).

¹⁹⁶ Armindo Dos Santos Vaz, *Criação Divina sem pecado humano: uma história com sentido: Génesis 2-3* (Lisboa: Paulinas ,2015), 44.

We can verify from the citation above that Christian mythology supports the idea that the self-communication is a free act of God to all mankind. The «second modality is the twofold modality of the response to this offer as permanent existential of the human being, that is, in the modality of an acceptance or of rejection by the human person's freedom».¹⁹⁷ Here we can verify once again from the apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans about the faithfulness of God's offer and of those who reject the self-communication of God. The apostle writes that «first of all, it was the Jews that the message of God was entrusted. What if some of them were unfaithful? Out of question! God will always be true even if no human being relied on him (Cf. Rm 3:2-4)».¹⁹⁸ This Scriptural text depicts the modality of the twofold self-communication of God in the author. First it is God who takes the initiative to communicate Himself to the human being. Secondly, the human being in his transcendent experience has the transcendental freedom to say 'yes' or 'no' to this initiative of God. Lastly, when the 'human spirit' rejects this offer of God, the offer is still present in the human being as said by the apostle Paul.¹⁹⁹ Hence we can affirm that self-communication of God is an offer and initiative of God.

As shown above when we examine the three aspects of the self-communication of God based on the testimony of the revelation of Scripture, the twofold modality of God's self-communication also has a similar aspect. The first aspect is the acceptance of God's offer, based on what God grants in the offer itself, namely the ability to hear the divine call and respond to it²⁰⁰, the second aspect is that we must not interpret it as something created, such as a set of conditions we must meet on our own initiative, even our acceptance of God's offer must be enabled and born by God²⁰¹ and the third aspect is the fact that God empowers our very freedom, although we can speak of 'our' freedom, nevertheless that freedom comes from God as a gift.²⁰² Here Rahner affirms the theological nature of the self-communication of God to the human person and his existence. It is a free gift of God. Rahner calls our attention to the fact that God communicates His Self as an offer to the human being. The human being is not manipulated by God to accept this offer. He can accept it or reject it. Nevertheless, to accept or reject the offer does not reduce who God is into a purely created object. He still remains the God who communicates to the human being in love and still waits for the human being to respond to this offer. Someone may ask, what happens to those who reject the self-communication of God? The "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World,

¹⁹⁷ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 118.

¹⁹⁸ Cf. Jones, *The Jerusalem Bible*.

¹⁹⁹ If we are faithless, he is faithful still, for he cannot disown his own self (Cf. (2Tm 2:13), *The Jerusalem Bible*).

²⁰⁰ Cf. Fischer, *The Foundations of Karl Rahner*, 40.

²⁰¹ Cf. Fischer, *The Foundations of Karl Rahner*, 40.

²⁰² Cf. Fischer, *The Foundations of Karl Rahner*, 40.

Gaudium et Spes gives a way out. Thus the council fathers states that «...Christ died for all men, and since the ultimate vocation of man is in fact one, and divine, we ought to believe that the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to every man the possibility of being associated with this paschal mystery».²⁰³ Here we can intuit in the theological reflection of the council fathers, the importance of at least the God give of Self to the human being be it the Christian or not. In sum, the self-communication of God is an offer which is present in all human beings.

We have discussed what happened to those who reject the self-communication of God. The theological question we can ask now is: what then happens to those who accept the self-communication of God? Rahner provides a possible theological solution. He argues that the nature of God as He communicates Himself to the human being is a mystery of an abiding presence.²⁰⁴ In relation to God's self-communication and abiding presence as mystery, Rahner states that «God can communicate Himself in his own reality to what is not divine without ceasing to be infinite reality and absolute mystery, and without man ceasing to be a finite existence different from God».²⁰⁵ To support this affirmation, Rahner insists that:

God remains the absolutely nameless and ineffable One who can never be comprehended, and hence not through his self-communication in grace and in the immediate vision either; who never becomes subject to the human being; who can never be incorporated into the human system of coordinates of either knowledge or freedom.²⁰⁶

In other words, we may infer that this conviction of Rahner's means a relationship between God and the Human being. In this relationship, Rahner insists that God manifests Himself to the human being and still remains closer to him in his transcendental existence and experience, but He remains absolutely mysterious, and the human being remains finite. We can also see this mysterious nature of the self-communication of God in the transcendent experience of the Psalmist in the Old Testament. Thus, he contemplates the goodness of God and praises God saying «what are human beings that you spare a thought for them, or the child of Adam you cared for? Yet you have made him little lesser than a god (Ps 8:4-5)».²⁰⁷ Here we see the dichotomy between the transcendental experience of the Psalmist and the acceptance of the

²⁰³ 'Gaudium et Spes', 22.

²⁰⁴ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 119.

²⁰⁵ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 119.

²⁰⁶ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 120.

²⁰⁷ It must be noted that the mention of *gods* in the text in no way impugns monotheistic belief; according to ancient Hebrew belief, the assembly of the *gods*, or heavenly host, were wholly subordinate to, and of entirely different nature from God, Yahweh (Ps 7:7, Ps 82:1); they were conceived of as angelic beings, thus as the messengers of God who carried out his will (Cf. W. O. E. Oesterley, *The Psalms*, London: S.P.C.K, 1953, 140).

self-communication of God as a mystery of an abiding presence on his part, that is, the ‘offer’ illuminates his existentiality to see beyond his concrete experience.

So Rahner states that the essence of the acceptance of the self-communication of God as a mystery of an abiding presence on the part of the human being is due to the fact that he has his origin permanently in God and the fact that he is radically different from God. This consciousness that he has of himself is in itself in their unity and mutually conditioning relationship of God and the human person.²⁰⁸ For example we can see that the evangelist St John got this concept when he writes that, «As a branch cannot bear fruit all by itself, unless it remains in the vine, neither can you unless you remain in me (Jo 15,4) ». ²⁰⁹ So we can intuit that the abiding presence of God as a mystery to the human being has its goal. Thus, a relationship between God and the human being. In this relationship the human being discovers who he truly is as a ‘creature’ and who his ‘Creator’ is.

The theological question we can ask the author is: How does the self-communication of God become an abiding presence as mystery in the human being and his concrete existence if God does not become a categorical and individual being? Rahner affirms that when we say God is present for us in an absolute self-communication, it means that God is present in the mode of closeness and not in the mode of distant present as the term of transcendence.²¹⁰ When Rahner speaks of the mode of closeness what he means is that God is present in the transcendental experience communicating Himself, but he does not become a categorical and individual being.²¹¹ We can make an allusion of the closeness of the abiding presence of God to the human being in an analogy to the celebration of the Sacrament of the Eucharist. During the celebration of the Eucharist, the mode of closeness of the abiding presence of God as mystery to the human being is manifested through the Son and in the Holy Spirit, by the thanksgiving the human person offers to God, through the gift of bread and wine. In a similar way, he is blessed by this abiding presence of God by the transubstantiation of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ.²¹² Therefore we can intuit that when the author speaks of the self-communication as a mystery of an abiding presence of God to the human person, he is not

²⁰⁸ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 119.

²⁰⁹ The text here means a reciprocal relationship between God and the human being, which alone makes living the Christian life possible (Cf. J. N. Sanders, *A Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint St. John*, *Black's New Testament Commentaries* London: Adam & Charles Black, 1968, 337).

²¹⁰ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 119.

²¹¹ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 119.

²¹² Here the council fathers show how the mode of closeness of the abiding presence of God as mystery to the human being is operated in the Sacrament of the Eucharist. Thus the council fathers stated that «Christ indeed always associates the Church with Himself in this great work wherein God is perfectly glorified and men are sanctified.(Cf. ‘Sacrosanctum Concilium’, 7, accessed 6 July 2021, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat_ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html).

referring to something that we grasp or observed physically but is spiritual transcendental experience of communion between the human being and the Divine. Where God continue to communicate Himself to the human being in the transcendental experience.

In sum, Rahner affirms that, the Divine self-communication means that God can communicate Himself in His reality to what is not divine without ceasing to be infinite reality and without the human being ceasing to be a finite existent different from God.²¹³ The theological question we can ask the author is that what is the essence of God being God and the finite being finite in the transcendental experience? The Jesuit theologian gives a possible way out of the question. He states that, the goal of the self-communication, the holy mystery, is that it becomes the reality of the human being.²¹⁴ This means that the goal becomes the real point of departure for the human being's fulfilment and self-realization. The human being's fulfilment and self-realization according to Rahner is that «God wants to give the human being an immediate vision of himself as the fulfilment of his spiritual existence».²¹⁵ We can agree with Rahner, based on the words of the Psalmist who intuit his longing for fulfilment and self-realization in God when he cries out, «God, you are my God, I pine for you; my heart thirst for you, my body longs for you, as a land parched, dreary and waterless (Ps 63:1)».²¹⁶ Therefore we can stipulate that the goal of the self-communication of God and the abiding presence as mystery is the self-longing of the human being to his Creator.

Rahner explains that in the self-communication of God to the Human being, God becomes the Giver and what he gives is the gift of Himself.²¹⁷ He gives Himself to the human being for their own fulfilment.²¹⁸ The fulfilment of the human being means that in the divine self-communication God makes himself a constitute principle of the created existent without thereby losing his absolute, ontological independence. This results in a 'divinizing effect' in the finite existent in whom the self-communication takes place.²¹⁹ For example we can intuit this 'divinizing effect' from the transcendent structure of knowledge of the apostle Paul on his speech before the council of the Areopagus. Thus he affirmed that, «...it is in God that we live, and move, and exist... (Cf. Act 17:28)». In other words God is the foundation of our existence.

²¹³ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 119.

²¹⁴ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 120.

²¹⁵ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 120.

²¹⁶ This is a Psalm of an exile. In words of intense earnestness the Psalmist expresses his ardent yearning for the presence of God. Thus he has learned in exile that the Divine presence is not restricted either to place or time. (Cf. Oesterley, *The Psalms*, London: S.P.C.K, 1953), 305.

²¹⁷ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 120.

²¹⁸ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 120.

²¹⁹ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 120.

This 'divinizing effect' caused by God is part of the human existence as discussed in the first chapter about 'the question of existence as also a question of salvation'.²²⁰ This is because the divine self-communication is the relationship between God and a finite existent. This must be understood as analogous to a causality in which the 'cause' become an intrinsic, constitutive principle of the effect itself.²²¹ Here Rahner continue to insist that God out of love expresses Himself to the human being (Cf. Gn 1,26), although we should not misinterpret this humble self-communication of God as reduction of God as one of his creatures but rather, we should interpret it as a divine revelation, in which God chose to show forth and communicate Himself and the eternal decisions of His will regarding the salvation of the human being. That is to say, He chose to share with them those divine treasures which totally transcend the understanding of the human mind.²²² Therefore we can intuit that the true fulfilment of the human person comes from the acceptance of divine self-communication of God.

2.2 The Model of Formal Causality

To be able to understand the affirmation about the gift of God's divine Self to the human being, we must bring forward this question: if God gives the gift of Himself to the human being, how is this explained theologically? Rahner states that we need to establish the relationship between formal causality and efficient causality in order to grasp how God gives the gift of Himself to the human person. In an attempt to distinguish between formal causality and efficient causality, Rahner states that in relation to the efficient causality²²³, one can note that within the realm of our own categorical experience.²²⁴ In the efficient causality the effect is always different from the cause but on the other hand, he affirms that we are also familiar with formal causality. Thus, a particular existent, a principle of being is a constitutive element in another subject by the fact that it communicates itself to this subject, which is then an intrinsic, constitutive principle in that which experiences this efficient causality.²²⁵ This is what Rahner means when he talks about God being the absolute mystery. We can give another analogy to clarify the concept of the formal and efficient causality. Thus, God's relation to us is an example, of formal causality. The very principle of God's being becomes constitutive of who

²²⁰ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 120.

²²¹ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 120.

²²² Cf. 'Dei Verbum', 6.

²²³ The efficient causality is the source of the first beginning of change, for example the father is the cause of the child. (Cf. Anthony Flew, *A Dictionary of Philosophy*, Updated and revised ed., reprinted, Macmillan Reference Books London Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1985, 59).

²²⁴ Cf. Rahner, *The Foundations of Karl Rahner*, 121.

²²⁵ Cf. Rahner, *The Foundations of Karl Rahner*, 121.

we are. For example, the generation of children by their parents is formal causality. In causing children, the 'principle' of the parents becomes part of the children. On the other hand, in efficient causality (e.g., a bat striking a baseball), the effect differs from the cause (the bat does not become a part of the ball). God 'causes' us, in that, God communicates the divine self to us. But when we receive the gift of God, God does not thereby lose the divine self. Rather, God becomes a constitutive element in the fulfilment of the creature.²²⁶ The purpose of the formal causality and the efficient causality of the self-communication of God to the human person is the offer of salvation and fulfilment in grace and in the beatific vision.

If we say that God does not lose Himself in the self-communication to the human being, we must be careful not to think that God communicates Himself and then the self-communication ceases. What we mean here is that the self-communication is an absolute prerogative of God. This is because according to Rahner, God cannot express Himself in a formal causality without becoming a subject to this difference. On the other hand, He can express Himself in the efficient causality without losing Himself in this communication.²²⁷ Therefore we can say that in this self-communication, God in his absolute being is related to created existent in the mode of formal causality. This signifies that the supernatural as self-communication of God does not originally cause and produce something different from Himself in the creature, but rather He communicates His own divine reality and makes it a constitutive element in the fulfilment of the creature.²²⁸ We can infer from what we have studied so far that the self-communication of God is that which is found in the innermost heart and centre of the human being and the entire world for the purpose of self-fulfilment.²²⁹ Rahner still insists that the intrinsic intelligibility and the ontological justification for understanding the notion of self-communication this way is found in the transcendental experience of the orientation of every finite existent to the absolute being.²³⁰ Hence Rahner makes a theological appeal to the human being to accept the offer of the self-communication of God. Thus, the grace of God in everyday life.

After journeying with Rahner to understand his explanation of the model of God's self-communication to the human being, he becomes clearer as he stipulates the essence of God's self-communication. Rahner said the meaning and the essence of God's self-communication to a spiritual subject consists in the fact that firstly, God becomes immediate to the subject as

²²⁶ Cf. Fischer, *The Foundations of Karl Rahner*, 41.

²²⁷ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 121.

²²⁸ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 121.

²²⁹ Cf. Egan, *Karl Rahner*, 152.

²³⁰ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 121.

spiritual, that is, in the fundamental unity of knowledge and love,²³¹ secondly, the ontological self-communication must be understood as the condition which makes personal and immediate knowledge and love for God possible.²³² The theological question we can ask is, how does the self-communication of God makes the personal and immediate knowledge and love for God possible? Rahner provides a way out, based on christology and creation as the efficient causality. He states that in christology the self-communication of God as personal and immediate knowledge and love for God becomes clearer.²³³ This is because the self-communication of God to what is not God implies efficient causation of something other and different from God as its condition.

What this means is that the efficient causality of God must be understood only as a deficient mood of that absolute and enormous possibility of God which consists in the fact that he who is agape in person, and fulfilled subject, can communicate himself to the other.²³⁴ Thirdly, If being is being-present-to-self, if the essence of an existent insofar as it has a being is personal self-possession and inner luminosity, if every lesser degree of existence can only be understood as a deficient, then ontological self-communication of God to a creature is by definition a communication for the sake of immediate knowledge and love.²³⁵ In short, Rahner wants to establish the fact that the self-communication of God enables us to understand and love He who gives Himself to the human being out of love. The self-communication of God can indirectly also help the human being to understand the other human being because of the knowledge of the self-communication which is common to all human beings. In this way we come into an agreement with Rahner: God's self-communication means, the immediate knowledge and love of God and neighbour (Cf. Jn 15,9-12).

Another point Rahner asserts in the *Foundations* on the nature of God self-communication as an "absolute gratuity of God's self-communication" is that «the self-communication by God to a creature must be understood as an act of God's highest personal freedom, as an act of opening Himself in ultimate intimacy and in free and absolute love»²³⁶. What this means is that the self-communication of God comes before any sinful act of the human being. We can verify this from the Scriptures. Thus, the letter of Paul to the Church at

²³¹ Cf. Rahner, *The Foundations of Karl Rahner*, 122.

²³² Here Rahner wants to affirm, the closeness of God to man and man to God. On the other hand, he said that this very closeness to God in immediate knowledge and love, to God who remains absolute mystery, is not to be understood as a strange phenomenon which is added to another reality which is understood in a reified way. It is rather the real essence of what constitutes the ontological relationship between God and creatures". (Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 122.)

²³³ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 122.

²³⁴ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 122.

²³⁵ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 122.

²³⁶ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 123.

Ephesus, where the apostle explains God's plan of salvation. He states that God, «chose us in Christ before the world was made to be holy and faultless before him in love (Cf. Ep1:4) ».²³⁷ We can now say that the concept of supernatural as God self-communication can be clearly understood here, as he states that God's self-communication as triumph over the sinful rejection of creatures must not only be understood as forgiving grace, but even prior to this it is the gratuitous miracle of God's free love which God himself makes the intrinsic principle and the 'object' of the actualization of human existence.²³⁸ At this stage, Rahner defines what he means by supernatural . He writes that, God's self-communication in grace and in fulfilment in and through the immediate vision of God is what the catholic theology calls the supernatural.²³⁹ Thus, this notion is supposed to give expression to the fact that this self-communication of God is an act of the most free love, and also with respect to the finite , spiritual existent already established in being by creation.²⁴⁰ Therefore the supernatural is that which is freely given by God to his creatures out of love for the purpose of knowing Him as the source ,subject, principle and fulfilment of all things .

In order to understand the theological nature of the absolute gratuity of God's self-communication, Rahner asserts that the gratuitous does not mean extrinsic.²⁴¹ The meaning of this theological statement is that although God communicates freely, the self-communication is not 'extrinsic' or 'accidental'. This means that God does not choose to communicate to some and to not others. The divine gift of self is more than a 'super-nature' added to a merely 'human nature' of a selected few.²⁴² The theological question that one may ask from Rahner's argument on the gratuitous self-communication of God is that, if the gratuitous is not extrinsic or accidental, then what is it? He answers this theological question implicitly by describing the nature of the gratuitous self-communication. He states that the doctrine of grace and fulfilment in the immediate vision of God are supernatural does not mean that the supernatural 'elevation' of a spiritual creature is added extrinsically and accidentally.²⁴³ In the concrete order which we encounter in our transcendental experience and as interpreted by Christian revelation; the spiritual creature is constituted to begin with as the possible addressee of such a divine self-communication.²⁴⁴ We can agree with Rahner by alluding to the Church's magisterial document

²³⁷ The meaning of this text is the call of God's chosen ones to eternal happiness, already begun in a hidden sort of way by the union of the faithful to be the glorified Christ. Thus the 'love' in the text is primarily the love God has for us and that leads him to 'choose' us, and to call us to be 'holy' (Cf. Jones, *The Jerusalem Bible*, 1933).

²³⁸ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 123.

²³⁹ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*,123.

²⁴⁰ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*,123.

²⁴¹ Cf. Fischer, *The Foundations of Karl Rahner*,42.

²⁴² Cf. Fischer, *The Foundations of Karl Rahner*, 42.

²⁴³ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 123.

²⁴⁴ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*,123.

that speaks of Divine revelation. Thus, “the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*”. The Council fathers state that the self-communication is an initiative of God to the human being. Thus, the council fathers believes that God,

after speaking in many and varied ways through the prophets, "now at last in these days God has spoken to us in His Son" (Heb. 1:1-2). For He sent His Son, the eternal Word, who enlightens all men, so that He might dwell among men and tell them of the innermost being of God (see John 1:1-18). Jesus Christ, therefore, the Word made flesh, was sent as "a man to men." ...²⁴⁵

Therefore, we can say that is God who takes the initiative to communicate to the human being and the onus lies on him to accept this offer. Thus, the spiritual essence of the human being is established by God in creation from the outset because God wants to communicate himself: God’s creation through efficient causality takes place because God wants to give himself in love.²⁴⁶ Here what the author want to bring across is the fact that, God does not communicate His very Self to the human being to dominate or control him but He gives Himself to the human being out of love in humility, so if the human being is created by God who is Love and Humble²⁴⁷, then theologically, it follows that the human soul would also search for his God who is Love and humble and try to imitate these attribute of Him . So, Rahner calls the Human being’s attention to the fact that the self-communication of God is for all human beings and not some selected people.

2.3 Remarks on the Church’s Teaching

At this point, Rahner appeals to the remarks on the church’s teaching for the basis of his theological point of view on God’s self-communication to the human being and its implications. Rahner therefore states that his theological conceptions of God’s self-communication have their basis in Holy Scriptures and the official teachings of the Church.²⁴⁸ This is because these two ‘ecclesiastical authorities’ affirm vehemently that, the justified person truly becomes a child of God.²⁴⁹ Thus in him as in a temple dwells the very spirit of God as a really divine gift; that he participates in the divine nature; that he will see God face to face as he is in himself,²⁵⁰ and that what he will one day possess and be, he already has now in all truth; although only in a hidden

²⁴⁵ Cf. ‘*Dei Verbum*’, 4.

²⁴⁶ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 123.

²⁴⁷ Cf. Romano Guardini and Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Lord* (Washington, D.C.: Lanham, MD, 1996), 378–79.

²⁴⁸ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 124.

²⁴⁹ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 124.

²⁵⁰ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 124.

way, namely, in the grace of justification as a pledge and as contained in a living kernel.²⁵¹ We can agree with Rahner on this affirmation that the human being is justified and will see the face of God one day in the fulfilment of the immediate vision of God based on the Fourth Gospel, where Jesus is believed to have said that, «Anyone who loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we shall come to make a home in him (Cf. Jn 14, 23)».²⁵² Thus here we can agree with Rahner when he affirms that the self-communication of God is given to mankind as uncreated grace. At this stage, he relies on the Holy Scriptures and the Tradition of the Church to throw more light on the self-communication. The whole theological idea on the justification of grace and the immediate vision of God is that the human being who accepts the offer of the very life of God in his transcendental experience will encounter Him in his categorical experience and will one day find his final end also in Him who is Love and Humble.

Rahner once again says the statement above is the essence of the New Testament message. He writes that «the circle of inner-worldly powers and forces has been broken by an act of the one and living God, who is God and not some numinous power, and broken open to the real immediacy of God himself».²⁵³ Here we can intuit that Rahner is indirectly quoting the apostle Paul in the letter he wrote to the Church in Ephesus about the triumph and the supremacy of Christ. Thus the apostle writes that, God, “has put all things under his feet, and made him, as he is above all things, the head of the Church. Which is his Body, the fullness of him who is filled, all in all (Ep 1:22)». We can now say that from the remarks of the Church’s teachings, the self-communication of God establishes a relationship between God and the human being.

Finally, Rahner ends his theological reflection on “God’s self-communication” by stating that, Christianity can be a relationship with God which surpasses every other religion only if it is a profession of faith in this immediacy to God.²⁵⁴ The immediacy here is referring to the ‘uncreated grace’. Thus the givenness of God’s very life to the human being. What this

²⁵¹ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 124.

²⁵² Here we can see the issue of uncreated grace at work. Thus Jesus continues the theme of realistic love. Keeping Jesus’ words is the equivalent in biblical terms of doing what he has commanded. After announcing his new commandment of love in 13:34-35, Jesus went on to speak of going to prepare rooms (monai) for his disciples in his Father’s heavenly house; the context of “going away and “preparing rooms” looked entirely to the future. But in v 23, the process is subtly changed from future to realized eschatology. Jesus says, “...we will come to him and make our home(monēn) with him...” He is speaking about the indwelling.(Cf. Peter F. Ellis, *The Genius of John: A Composition-Critical Commentary on the Fourth Gospel* Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 1984, 223).

²⁵³ Rahner states that the communication of the Son and Spirit by the Father in the economic Trinity means in biblical terms that we no longer have to do with principalities and powers, with false gods and angels, with the vast pluralism of our own origins, but rather with the one and living God who radically transcends all of these other things. We have to do with him who alone can be called by this name which is not really a name as distinguished from all the powers and forces however numinous, he is present for us in immediacy in his Holy Spirit who has been given to us and in him who is called "Son" in an absolute sense because he was with God in the beginning and is God himself (Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 124–25).

²⁵⁴ Cf. Fischer, *The Foundations of Karl Rahner*, 125.

means is that if the human being has to do with the very life of God in an absolute immediacy, then he is also called to give himself over unconditionally to nameless One.²⁵⁵ Rahner says that the surrender of the human being to the ineffable and holy mystery is not to think that the human being can establish once and for all some point around which we could organize an absolute system of coordinates which incorporates everything.²⁵⁶ Instead the Jesuit priest affirms that the self-communication of God means the surrender of the human being to God and to accept Him in his transcendental freedom.²⁵⁷ This is because for Rahner, any human being who sets out upon the infinite path shall arrive, and indeed has already arrived, and those who open themselves to absolute poverty and death and to all of their horror shall find that these are nothing but the beginning of infinite life.²⁵⁸ Here we can see that Rahner takes us to a mystical theology where the human being abandons the whole of his existentiality to his creator. This is because God offers nothing less than God's very own self to everyone, the human person is, to Rahner's way of thinking, *homo mysticus*, that is, mystical man. This relationship stamps all personal experiences with at least an implicit, yet primordial, experience of God.²⁵⁹ Thus, in our categorical experience, we experience God.

Therefore Rahner calls the human being's attention to the fact that he has to be open in faith, hope and love for the ineffable, unimaginable, and nameless absolute future of God which is coming, and bids the human person never to close himself before there is nothing more to close. This is because according to Rahner, nothing will be left outside of God, since the human person shall be wholly in God and He shall be wholly in him.²⁶⁰ Looking at this theological reflection of Rahner critically, we can therefore deduce that if God gives the gift of Himself to mankind, then it follows that he is also called to surrender to God's "Holy and ineffable mystery" to "accept it in freedom", and to allow it to become for him in "faith, hope and love".²⁶¹ This is what Rahner means by saying that Christianity can be a relationship with God.

²⁵⁵ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 125.

²⁵⁶ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 125.

²⁵⁷ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 125.

²⁵⁸ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 125.

²⁵⁹ Cf. Joseph H. Wong and Harvey D. Egan, *A Cristologia e Teologia Mística de Karl Rahner* (New York, Herder & Herder, 2020), 120.

²⁶⁰ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 126.

²⁶¹ Cf. Fischer, *The Foundations of Karl Rahner*, 42.

Summary

What we have investigated in this second chapter is the supernatural as the self-communication of God. Thus, we explained how God communicates to Himself. In relation to this, we referred to the immanent Trinity. This chapter also examined how God communicates to the human being in history. Here we referred to the economic Trinity, therefore explaining the trinitarian axiom of Rahner. We indirectly intersected the first and the second chapter. This is because for Rahner, understanding the existentiality of human being is a presupposition of accepting the Christian message, which is the self-communication of God. We did this intentionally and logically in our quest to study what Rahner means by his technical theological term, 'supernatural existential'. This will lead us to our third chapter, in which our main concern is to investigate what Rahner means by the 'supernatural existential'. We shall also find out whether this concept can contribute to Christian evangelization.

CHAPTER 3: THE CONCEPT OF ‘SUPERNATURAL EXISTENTIAL’ IN K. RAHNER

In the summary of the second chapter we stated that the aim of the first and the second chapters is to explain indirectly what Rahner’s concept of the ‘supernatural existential’ means. In these chapters we laid the foundation, by exploring the meaning of ‘existential’ and of ‘supernatural’. In this third and last chapter we will benefit from this previous exploration to understand what Rahner means by ‘supernatural existential’. We therefore now seek to come “face to face” with what Rahner’s concept of the ‘supernatural existential’ stands for. Then we shall also seek briefly to establish what contribution this concept has made to the theology of Christian evangelization. To understand the concept of the ‘supernatural existential’ we need first of all to find the inspiration for Rahner’s theology concerning this particular concept. In other words, we need to find out the inspiration of the spiritual theology of the author.²⁶² It must be noted that it seems the theology of Rahner, especially as regards to the concept of the ‘supernatural existential’, was influenced by the spirituality of St Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of his congregation, “the Society of Jesus”. This refers of the inspiration of light St. Ignatius had about the distinctive nature of the “three Divine Persons” in his retreat in Manresa.²⁶³ We do not make this affirmation in vacuum or without any reference. We can base it on a similar affirmation made by the French theologian, Sesboué, who affirmed that the inspiration of Rahner’s theology was indeed influenced by the spiritual ‘exercises’ of St. Ignatius of Loyola, as is indeed recognised by many theologians.²⁶⁴ Therefore we can infer that the ‘supernatural existential’ was influenced by the spirituality of St Ignatius of Loyola the founder of the society of Jesus.

3.1 The History of the ‘Supernatural Existential’

It must be noted that the theologian states in the “Hearer of the Word” that he is leaving aside the question of grace which might be required for the reception of revelation. Nevertheless he does not deny the role of grace. This intellectual methodology can be understood because he was writing as a philosopher of religion rather than as a theologian.²⁶⁵ Hence later, working as

²⁶² Cf. Farias, *Antropologia e graça*, 88.

²⁶³ Cf. San Ignacio de Loyola, *Obras Completas de San Ignacio de Loyola*, Tomo III: Autobiografía, Diári (Madrid, 1947), 179–180.

²⁶⁴ Cf. Sesboué, *Karl Rahner*, 35–59.

²⁶⁵ Cf. Rahner, *Hearers of the Word*, 55.

a theologian, Rahner does turn his attention to questions concerning grace. One of the proposals he makes, and the one he is most known for, is that all human beings are affected by something called a ‘supernatural existential’.²⁶⁶ To be able to discover the history of the ‘supernatural existential’ we need to acknowledge our intellectual humility before this concept, because it is important and also a difficult topic, in that its contents in fact fluctuate and because of the fluctuating nature, it is not given much attention in the secondary literature.²⁶⁷ The classic presentation of the ‘supernatural existential’ of the author appeared in an article in *Orientierung*²⁶⁸ in 1950, and we can find its revised version, published as “Concerning the relationship between nature and grace” in the initial volume of the *Theological Investigations*.²⁶⁹ This article is an intervention in a debate between neo-scholasticism and the *nouvelle théologie*²⁷⁰ in relation to grace and nature.

Neo-scholasticism²⁷¹ affirms that nature and grace exist independently from each other. Thus they are self-contained and self-sufficient.²⁷² It is this affirmation that theologians of the *nouvelle théologie* deny. The figures associated with the *nouvelle théologie*, on the other hand, argued that viewing nature as self-sufficient and whole has unacceptable consequences.²⁷³ For this reason, the theologians of the *nouvelle théologie* present two systematic arguments for denying the arguments of the neo-scholastics in the following manner; firstly they established that grace becomes something with which in our experience we have little to do with, it is something which takes place somewhere over our heads. It comes to seem not only superfluous but perhaps *de trop*—the icing on a cake that is sufficiently rich and sweet unfrosted²⁷⁴ and secondly, Henri De Lubac, one of the figures of the *nouvelle théologie* indeed linked this view of grace to the development of atheism. He affirmed that if reality has two layers and the bottom one, the one that we are able to experience, is sufficient unto itself, then why not simply abandon

²⁶⁶ Cf. Kilby, *Karl Rahner: Theology and Philosophy*, 53–54.

²⁶⁷ Cf. Kilby, *Karl Rahner: Theology and Philosophy*, 54.

²⁶⁸ “Antwort (Ein Weg zur Bestimmung der Verhältnisse von Natur und Gnade),” *Orientierung*, 1950, vol. 14, 1415.

²⁶⁹ Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations, Vol I: God, Christ, Mary, and Grace*, 1965.

²⁷⁰ A term (generally employed pejoratively in official circles) from the 1940’s to describe an attempt by mainly French theologians to renew traditional theology, particularly in the light of new developments in science (e.g., evolution theories), biblical and patristic research. (Cf. Hines, *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, xiv).

²⁷¹ The neo-scholasticism had been the dominant theology in the church during the Counter-Reformation. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, however, it had all but disappeared. Except for a few scattered faculties in Germany and Italy, Catholic schools practically ignored it (Cf. Komonchak, Lane, and Collins, *The New Dictionary of Theology*, 713).

²⁷² Cf. Daniel T. Pekarske, *Abstracts of Karl Rahner’s Theological Investigations I-23* (Milwaukee, Wis: Marquette Univ Pr, 2003), 27.

²⁷³ “The largest component of their arguments was actually often historical, to the effect that neo-scholasticism represented a distortion of the tradition it thought of itself as upholding” (Cf. Karen Kilby, *Theology and Philosophy*, New York, 2004, 141.)

²⁷⁴ Cf. Kilby, *Karl Rahner: Theology and Philosophy*, 54.

the hypothesis of the second, supernatural layer? In other words, if nature does not need it, grace becomes irrelevant.²⁷⁵ Hence all the figures of the *nouvelle théologie* came to agreement that human beings are created so that they can only be fulfilled in a fellowship with God. According to them, the human being has an unconditional desire for the beatific vision, and consequently there is no natural end that can fulfil us.²⁷⁶ It is in this context that the Jesuit priest proposes the ‘supernatural existential’. The proposal of the ‘supernatural existential’ is that it is possible to have it both ways, be it with the suggestion of the neo-scholastics or the *nouvelle théologie*. We can verify Rahner’s position on this affirmation as he writes that the human being is created for this love which is God himself and which is given in grace and the beatific vision; he is called into being so that Love might bestow itself. This “potency” is what is inmost and most authentic in him, the centre and root of what he is absolutely.²⁷⁷ The explanation Rahner gives for his theological reflection above is the fact that human nature, in the technical sense, however, does not require grace and cannot demand it: the desire for the beatific vision, the ordination to grace that is part of the way we actually are not to be ascribed to the theological concept of nature.²⁷⁸ So this means that if only we could subtract this ‘supernatural existential’, something would be left over, a pure nature, and about this the neo-scholastics in their turn would be right. It would have no claim on grace and would be capable of some sort of natural fulfilment.²⁷⁹ It is on this note that we can affirm that when it comes to the “relationship between nature and grace”, most theologians look for the definition of the ‘supernatural existential’ in the contribution that Rahner offers during the debate “concerning the relationship between nature and grace” between the neo-scholastics and the *nouvelle théologie*. This definition of the ‘supernatural existential’ is indeed a modest version of this concept. We can find considerably stronger claims about the ‘supernatural existential’ in a number of other places, but most easily perhaps in the *Foundations*.

It must be made clear here that what we discussed in the second chapter was the stronger version of the ‘supernatural existential’. In our second chapter we made it clear that in Rahner’s theological reflection about God’s self-communication, God communicates Himself to human beings. This is a communication not of something about God, but of God himself, and what it means for the recipient is not a new piece of knowledge, nor that something new is possessed,

²⁷⁵ Cf. Henri de Lubac, “*Duplex Hominis Beatitudo* (Saint Thomas, Ia 2ae, q. 62, a. I)” *Recherches de science religieuse* 35 (1948): 290–99.

²⁷⁶ Cf. Kilby, *Karl Rahner: Theology and Philosophy*, 55.

²⁷⁷ Cf. Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, Vol I, 1965, 313.

²⁷⁸ Cf. Kilby, *Karl Rahner: Theology and Philosophy*, 55.

²⁷⁹ Kilby, *Karl Rahner: Theology and Philosophy*, 55.

but that the human being is something new.²⁸⁰ We can verify from this statement above once again from the transcendent knowledge of the apostle Paul when he writes to the Church of Corinth that: «So for anyone who is in Christ, there is a new creation: the old order is gone and a new being is there to see. It is all God's as work; he reconciled us to himself through Christ and he gave us the ministry of reconciliation (2Co 5,17)». That is why the Jesuit priest writes that God in his own most proper reality makes himself the innermost constitutive element of the human being.²⁸¹ Thus God gives the gift of Himself to the human being to make him a new creation.

In addition to what we have studied so far about the stronger version of the 'supernatural existential', we can affirm that what is described from God's side as God's self-communication, when looked at critically can be referred to as 'supernatural' and what is viewed from the human side as God's self-communication can be referred to as 'supernatural existential'.²⁸² Hence, to be more concrete and precise in making an analysis of what we have studied so far in the second chapter about the gift of God of Himself to the human being, we can say that the 'supernatural existential' in its stronger version is here identified as God's self-communication in the mode of offer.²⁸³ In Rahner's view, the self-communication (the 'supernatural existential') may be accepted or rejected, but in either case it is genuinely present as an offer, as we asserted in the second chapter.

Looking at the nature of the 'supernatural existential' (the self-communication of God), we can therefore analyse the characteristics of it in a logical syllogism; the 'supernatural existential' is still supernatural. It follows, then, that it is the result of an act of the freest love of God,²⁸⁴ the "supernatural existential" is still existential. This is because it is not a particular experience but a feature of all our experiences.²⁸⁵ So in a conclusion to this theological syllogism of explaining what the 'supernatural existential', we can see below Rahner's own words in the *Foundations*:

Such an element in Man's transcendental constitution is not the object of an individual, a posteriori and categorical experience of man *alongside of* other objects of his experience. Basically and originally man does not encounter this supernatural constitution as an object.

²⁸⁰ What we want to mean here is that there is of course nothing new chronologically speaking: the human being is different from how she would have been.

²⁸¹ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 116.

²⁸² Cf. Kilby, *Karl Rahner: Theology and Philosophy*, 55.

²⁸³ Cf. Kilby, *Karl Rahner: Theology and Philosophy*, 55.

²⁸⁴ Cf. Kilby, *Karl Rahner: Theology and Philosophy*, 56.

²⁸⁵ Cf. Kilby, *Karl Rahner: Theology and Philosophy*, 56.

The supernatural constitution of man's transcendental due to God's offer of self-communication is a modality of his original and unthematic subjectivity.²⁸⁶

Therefore the 'supernatural existential' is not described in its stronger version as a potency, thus as a desire for and ordination to grace but, on the contrary, it is described as grace itself.²⁸⁷ Here Rahner makes himself clear. The 'supernatural existential' is the gift of God's life to the human being. In this stronger version of the 'supernatural existential', Rahner is not offering a proposal to explain how grace can be received, but instead a suggestion about what grace is.²⁸⁸ In addition to the strong version of the 'supernatural existential' is the fact that its significance in the *Foundations* goes beyond the analysis of what grace is. It is identified with what Rahner calls 'transcendental revelation'.²⁸⁹ We argue that the 'supernatural existential' is identified with the "transcendental revelation" because we learn that from revelation in the more ordinary sense of the word, from Christianity as a historical religion, from the Old and New Testaments, is not something simply new and previously unknown, not something that comes from outside and is unconnected with our experience. What is given is rather a thematization of that which is already experienced in our innermost depths.²⁹⁰ Rahner argued that the Old and the New Testaments can and must be understood as the valid self-interpretation of God's transcendental self-communication to the human being.²⁹¹ He then gives an example of the prophets in the Old Testament to explain the affirmation above.

He said that those persons who were original bearers of such revealed communication from God and whom we characterize as prophets in the traditional terminology are to be understood as persons in whom the self-interpretation of this supernatural, transcendental experience and its history takes place in word and in deed.²⁹² He said that what the human being can learn from the prophets is that there is something that comes to the expression in them which fundamentally is present everywhere and in everyone, including ourselves who are not prophets.²⁹³ Here we can understand what Rahner wants to mean when he wrote about the

²⁸⁶ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 129.

²⁸⁷ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 311.

²⁸⁸ Cf. Kilby, *Karl Rahner: Theology and Philosophy*, 56.

²⁸⁹ The transcendental revelation in Rahner means the self-interpretation of the communication of God in history. Thus we are talking about what the human being experiences in his freedom, risk, hope, reaching out to the future and possibility of failure. Thus according to the Jesuit priest, in the transcendental revelation God communicates himself to the human being his own most proper reality as spiritual luminosity and gives the human being in his transcendence the possibility this personal self-communication and self-disclosure, to listen and to accept it in faith, hope and love in such a way that it is not brought down to the 'level' of finite creatures. Rather the self-disclosure of God in his very self. Thus the self-communication can really come into the midst of the human being (Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 154-71).

²⁹⁰ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 158.

²⁹¹ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 158.

²⁹² Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 158.

²⁹³ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 158.

‘supernatural existential’ being identified with transcendental revelation by the Old and the New Testament. Thus, it is the interpretation of the self-communication of God to the human being. What Rahner means is that the human structure has been designed by God in such a way that there is a compatibility of the openness of the human being to the acceptance of the Christian message. For example, the transcendental revelation of the Old and the New Testament and the people who had a transcendental experience with it shows how compatible the human being is capable of a relationship with the absolute mystery. This affirmation is valid for all human beings and not some selected few taking into consideration what we have studied from the first and the second chapter. Hence for Rahner, revelation then is not primarily a set of truths, a God-given extension of our ordinary knowledge, but God’s giving of Himself, the divine self-communication to the human being in the ‘supernatural existential’.

There is a need to establish two points about the relationship between the two versions of the ‘supernatural existential’. The first is that there really is a difference and the second is that there is a consistency and the unity of his corpus. But we have also stated in the first chapter that it is not correct to read Rahner’s theological reflections with lenses of overly unified work for the fear that it may encounter ambiguities. The second point that needs to be made is that the difference should not be construed simply as one of chronological development, so that an idea Rahner first dreamt up in order to contribute to the nature and grace debate he then subsequently radicalized.²⁹⁴ There is a difference in the two versions of the ‘supernatural existential’. This is because the reconciliation of the two versions cannot however be made to work. Consider for instance the following passage from “Concerning the relationship between nature and grace”, the human being 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 (and hence grace, the beatific vision) as one who has room and scope, understanding and desire for it. Thus he must have a real potency for it».²⁹⁵ We can argue from the citation above that, “Love” is what is given in grace as well as the beatific vision. If that is so, then it follows that, the potency for it, the room, scope, understanding, and the desire is what Rahner is calling the ‘supernatural existential’. Therefore, the reconciliation of the two versions is not grammatically possible.

Thus the very grammar of these sentences works then against a reconciling interpretation. Rahner does not write “he must be able to accept the room and scope, the understanding and desire,” but that “he must be able to accept it [...] as one who has room and scope ... for it”. What is to be accepted is not the potency itself but the thing ‘for’ which the

²⁹⁴ Cf. Kilby, Karl Rahner: *Theology and Philosophy*, 56.

²⁹⁵ Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, Vol I, 1965, 311.

human being has the potency; the potency is a potency for the love, not for the acceptance.²⁹⁶ Hence what we have argued, is that the Jesuit priest mean different things at different times by ‘supernatural existential’. It is intellectually and logically reasonable from what we have argued so far to understand the ‘supernatural existential’ as a radicalized strong version in the *Foundations*, thus having its origin in the debate of grace and nature between the neo-scholastics and the *nouvelle théologie* in 1950’s. Nevertheless it is important to note that even before this debate, Rahner had alluded to the ‘supernatural existential’ in its strongest version. We can see this, for instance, in the essay ‘Priestly existence’, first published in 1942, where Rahner affirms that the revealed word aids us towards a kind of self-understanding, ‘that is towards a knowledge concerning the depths of our actual existence created by grace²⁹⁷ and also he writes that the preaching of the word in point of fact reaches the human being who by his ontological status already inhabits that order of reality which is announced by the message. The Christian message of faith is really an awakening, even though an absolutely necessary one, of that Christian self-consciousness which has already been in principle established in us with the ‘anointing’ which is in us.²⁹⁸ We see the strong version of the ‘supernatural existential’ identified with the ‘anointing’ that is in the human being,²⁹⁹ the uncreated grace.

Looking critically at the argument presented by Rahner in the ‘Priestly existence’, we can infer that while the full technicalities of the *Foundations* version of the ‘supernatural existential’ are not present here, much of the substance of the position is anticipated. Both the idea of grace as already present in the depths of human experience, and of something quite like a transcendental revelation, are clearly suggested.³⁰⁰ Therefore we can insist that: one cannot, then, explain the variance in Rahner’s use of the term ‘supernatural existential’ primarily in terms of the evolution of his thought.³⁰¹ In conclusion to the relationship between the modest and the strong version of the ‘supernatural existential’ is the fact that the proposal that Rahner made in the contribution to the debate of grace and nature between the *nouvelle théologie* and

²⁹⁶ Cf. Kilby, *Karl Rahner: Theology and Philosophy*, 57.

²⁹⁷ Cf. Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations, Vol III; ‘Priestly existence’* (London; New York, 1967), 245.

²⁹⁸ Cf. Rahner, *Theological Investigations, Vol III; ‘Priestly existence’*, 252.

²⁹⁹ «But as for you, the anointing which you received from Him remains in you; and you do not need anyone to teach you; since the anointing he gave you teaches you everything, and since it is true, not false, remain in him just as it has thought you. (1 Jn 2,27) » What this means is that Christians are thought by the Christian message for a better interpretation of their transcendental nature but without the ‘anointing’ or if we like the ‘supernatural existential’ the human being will find it difficult to accept the Christian message.

³⁰⁰ Cf. Kilby, *Karl Rahner: Theology and Philosophy*, 58.

³⁰¹ “The fact that in 1942 the idea of the ‘supernatural existential’ is already present, in germ at least (the term itself is used in “Priestly existence,” although only in adjectival form), also means that the ‘supernatural existential’ ought not be presented, as it so often is, as an idea originating in the nature/grace debate. Its origin is rather in Christological considerations. (Cf. Philip Endean, “Rahner, Christology and grace,” *Heythrop Journal*, 1996, vol. 37, 284–97,) for this argument, and Nikolaus Schwedter, (*Gnade und Welt: zum Grundgefüge von Karl Rahners Theorie der “anonymen Christen,”* Freiburg: Herder, 1982), on whom Endean bases his argument (Cf. Karen Kilby, *Theology and Philosophy*, New York, 2004, 141)

the neo-scholastics was much weaker when compared to the strong version of the ‘supernatural existential’. This is so, because his purpose was not to develop a full account of his own understanding of grace, but to offer a resolution to a particular debate, a particular way out of a particular impasse.

In addition to the conclusion of the relationship between the modest and the strong version of the ‘supernatural existential’ which we have analysed so far, we can also verify this relationship inexplicitly in the words of Schwerdtfeger:

I. Every Man lives “forever since” in a realm of concrete existence (*Daseinsraum*) to which the reality of Jesus Christ belongs (here the unifying thought of Rahner can be strongly observed again).³⁰²

II. Every man is integrated in an unavoidable way in the realm of history (*Raum der Geschichte*) to which Jesus Christ belongs and for this reason the gift of the Holy Spirit is communicated to him. In this way, man is constituted as a possible listener of the Word (*Hörer des Wortes*) of God.³⁰³

III. The gift of the Holy Spirit is offered to man as an existential determination (*existenziale Bestimmung*) that affects his own being. This does not imply that man has already received this gift in a personal way (*existentiell*) (in his concrete existence).³⁰⁴

IV. Although there is always a difference between them (namely the supernatural existential and the preaching of the word), there is also a unity between that supernatural existential sphere of man and the message or preaching of faith, which comes ‘from outside’.³⁰⁵

Thus the Word of God that come ‘from outside’, the ‘Christian message’ is the interpretation of the self-communication of God to the human being. It follows that when the human being is open to the Christian message, he becomes aware of the notion of the ‘supernatural existential’ in his existentiality. Therefore the ‘supernatural existential’ means that the human being, is under the dynamism of God’s saving grace and is destined in an absolute way to a supernatural end.³⁰⁶ Therefore we can argue that the strong version is the original sense of the ‘supernatural existential’. After arguing for the strong version of the

³⁰² Vorgrimler, *Karl Rahner*, 221.

³⁰³ Vorgrimler, *Karl Rahner*, 221.

³⁰⁴ Vorgrimler, *Karl Rahner*, 221.

³⁰⁵ Nikolaus Schwerdtfeger, *Gnade und Welt* (Freiburg: Herder, Freiburg, 1982), 167.

³⁰⁶ Cf. Schwerdtfeger, *Gnade und Welt*, 169.

‘supernatural existential’ as the original meaning, we can therefore proceed to the next topic looks at the concept of the ‘supernatural existential’ and its compatibility with Christian Evangelization.

3.2 The Concept of the ‘Supernatural Existential’ and the Christian Evangelization

When we explained the meaning of the ‘supernatural existential’ in its strong version, we asserted that the human person is ordained to communion with God.³⁰⁷ This means that the ‘supernatural existential’ is supernatural and existential. This is because to have a communion with God would be impossible if God did not give us the capacity.³⁰⁸ Thus, in Rahner, the capacity refers to our choice to transcend ourselves by responding to the offer that God makes of Himself to the human being. This capacity that God gives to respond to the offer of Himself is the ‘supernatural existential’ as we tried to explain in the first and the second chapters.

The statement “the human being is the event of God’s absolute self-communication” does not refer to some reified objectivity in him, nor is it a categorical statement in the philosophical sense. Rather the statement is ontological, thus, it has to do with the very being of the human persons.³⁰⁹ Hence, we can argue that the event of God’s absolute self-communication, which is an ontological statement, defines who the human being is. Thus in the depths of his subjectivity and hence in the depths of his ‘transcendental experience’.³¹⁰ To be more precise, Rahner makes it clear in the *Foundations* that the ‘ontological statement’ above is not valid only for this group or that group of people as distinguished from others (for example, only for the baptized or the justified as distinguished from pagans or sinners). The reason Rahner gives in his defence for the non-distinction of this ‘ontological truth’ between groups of people as indicated above, is the fact that the ‘supernatural existential’ speaks of a free and unmerited grace, of a miracle of God’s free love for spiritual creatures.

Indeed Rahner emphasized again that the statement that “the human being is the event of God’s absolute self-communication” is a statement which refers to absolutely ‘all men’, and which expresses an existence of every person.³¹¹ When we look critically at Rahner’s understanding of the self-communication of God as a ‘supernatural existential’ (strong version) and as an ‘ontological statement’ that refers to ‘all men’, it rings a bell of a pastoral sense in his

³⁰⁷ Cf. Fischer, *The Foundations of Karl Rahner*, 42.

³⁰⁸ Cf. Fischer, *The Foundations of Karl Rahner*, 42–43.

³⁰⁹ Cf. Fischer, *The Foundations of Karl Rahner*, 43.

³¹⁰ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 126.

³¹¹ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 127.

theological reflection. Thus we are arguing that the concept of the “supernatural existential” is compatible with the concept of evangelization. So our task now is precisely this: to show how the ‘supernatural existential’ is compatible with Christian evangelization. In other words, from the definition of the strong version of the ‘supernatural existential’, we are simply saying that our task now is to show how the concept of grace in Rahner can contribute to Christian evangelization. First, we shall study Rahner’s understanding of Christian Evangelization and with that understanding we shall proceed to demonstrate how the ‘supernatural existential’ is compatible with it.

On the concept of Christian evangelization, Rahner affirms that a mature Christian is the one who takes his missionary responsibility seriously.³¹² Thus, Rahner argues that it is not enough for Christians to simply have dialogue with and collaborate with unbelievers in the secular world. They must also help others to become Christians.³¹³ With this affirmation, we can intuit Rahner’s understanding of evangelization. Namely, Christians helping unbelievers to become Christians. So Rahner writes that:

Christians have to get used to the fact that their belonging to the church, their baptism, creedal confession, and cult is not finally the affirmation of something in contradiction to unbelievers but is rather a bringing to historical and social visibility of the inner reality of their being. This is certainly offered to their freedom and may well have already been freely accepted. What we are talking about is the yes of God to unbelievers and their possible but secret yes to God.³¹⁴

The reason Rahner understands Christian evangelization as helping unbelievers to become Christians has its base on the concept of the ‘supernatural existential’. We make this argument because for Rahner «all human beings have a sense of the grace that God offers to them. This grace is a fundamental aspect, even a constituent element, of human existence».³¹⁵ Rahner calls this aspect of human existence the ‘supernatural existential’ since an ‘existential’, as understood by Rahner, is something common to all human experience, not simply one particular experience.³¹⁶ Hence for Rahner, genuine Christianity is the full flowing of God’s grace already at work in unbelievers in the seriousness and responsibility of their moral life and in their efforts to deal with the ultimate and unavoidable questions of existence.³¹⁷ So he draws the attention of Christians not to reject any different world view , because for him «mature

³¹² Cf. Egan, *Karl Rahner*, 178–79.

³¹³ Cf. Egan, *Karl Rahner*, 178.

³¹⁴ Karl Rahner, *The Content of Faith: The Best of Karl Rahner’s Theological Writings*, trans. Harvey D. Egan S.J., (New York, NY: Herder & Herder, 2013), 593.

³¹⁵ Gareth Jones, ed., *Karen Kilby, ‘Rahner’ in The Blackwell Companion to Modern Theology*, New Ed edition (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2004), 348.

³¹⁶ Jones, *‘Rahner’ in The Blackwell Companion to Modern Theology*, 345.

³¹⁷ Cf. Egan, *Karl Rahner*, 178.

Christians also know that Christians are not just Christians and non-Christians are by no means non-Christians». ³¹⁸ In other words, Christians too are sinners and non-Christians also live by the grace of Christ. ³¹⁹ Therefore our theological quest is to search for an arguments to prove that the ‘supernatural existential’ of Rahner can help in Christian evangelization.

3.3 Arguments for the Compatibility of the ‘Supernatural Existential’ With the Christian Evangelization

The concept of the ‘supernatural existential’ (strong version) and its compatibility with Christian evangelization can also be confirmed by some of the church’s magisterial documents. We make a specific reference here to, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, apostolic exhortation of his Holiness Saint Pope Paul VI, whose concept of evangelization knits neatly with that of Rahner. We can verify this affirmation in EN 21 of how Christian evangelization has to be:

1. Above all the Gospel must be proclaimed by witness. Take a Christian or a handful of Christians who, in the midst of their own community, show their capacity for understanding and acceptance, their sharing of life and destiny with other people, their solidarity with the efforts of all for whatever is noble and good. Let us suppose that, in addition, they radiate in an altogether simple and unaffected way their faith in values that go beyond current values, and their hope in something that is not seen and that one would not dare to imagine. Through this wordless witness these Christians stir up irresistible questions in the hearts of those who see how they live: Why are they like this? Why do they live in this way? What or who is it that inspires them? Why are they in our midst? Such a witness is already a silent proclamation of the Good News and a very powerful and effective one. Here we have an initial act of evangelization. ³²⁰

We can also see, the similarities of EN 21 of an initial act of evangelization with Rahner’s book on the *content of faith*:

2. The witness of their Christian lives is perhaps the most important requirement for the missionary dimension of their work in secular society. Their practice, their constantly renewed hope, their objectivity and selflessness, their unconditional and unrewarded fidelity to conscience, and so on, can provoke unbelievers to wonder about the ultimate

³¹⁸ Weger & Rahner, *Our Christian Faith: Answers for the Future* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Co.,1980, n.d.), 118.

³¹⁹ Cf. Egan, *Karl Rahner*, 179.

³²⁰ ‘Evangelii Nuntiandi (8 de Dezembro de 1975) | Paulo VI’, no.21, accessed 28 October 2020, http://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/pt/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi.html.

motives and attitudes out of which the actions Christians flow. Thus, their secular life itself becomes a witness for Christ and for his grace.³²¹

Hence relating the theological reflection of Rahner's concept of Christian evangelization and that of EN 21, we can argue that the concept of the 'supernatural existential' is compatible with the Christian evangelization. This is because for Rahner when «a Christian understands the Church as the historical tangibility of the presence of God in his self-communication, he experiences the Church as a place for the love of both God and neighbour».³²² We can understand this statement of the theologian in two ways. The first way is the consciousness and importance of the 'supernatural existential' in the Christian. We can verify this statement intuitively in GS 16 where the Council fathers indirectly describes how the human being can be aware of the 'supernatural existential' in their transcendental structure. Thus the Council fathers affirms that:

In the depths of his conscience, man detects a law which he does not impose upon himself, but which holds him to obedience. Always summoning him to love good and avoid evil, the voice of conscience, when necessary, speaks to his heart: do this, shun that. For man has in his heart a law written by God; to obey it is the very dignity of man; according to it he will be judged. Conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of a man. There he is alone with God, Whose voice echoes in his depths. In a wonderful manner conscience reveals that law which is fulfilled by love of God and neighbour. In fidelity to conscience, Christians are joined with the rest of men in the search for truth, and for the genuine solution to the numerous problems which arise in the life of individuals from social relationships.³²³

The reader of this dissertation might ask a question like this: what does GS 16 has to do with the 'supernatural existential' of Rahner and evangelization in EN 21?

The possible argument we can give to this question is the fact that, 'the law written by God' (GS 16) can be identified in some way with the 'supernatural existential', the uncreated grace which God communicates to the human being. The mission of the Son and the Spirit we discussed in the second chapter. In effect, if the Christian is aware of this self-communication of God in his existentiality, then naturally, he might by his acceptance of this offer invites those who reject it for various reasons by the example of how he lives his Cristian life (Cf. EN 21). This will bring us to the second way of Rahner's statement above. The need for the Christian to awaken the 'supernatural existential' in his neighbour. But the theological question we can ask Rahner is: how do a Christian invite other people who refuse and reject the self-

³²¹ Rahner, *The Content of Faith*, 595.

³²² Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 389.

³²³ 'Gaudium et Spes', 16.

communication of God since we live in a secular world? Rahner provides a way out of this question. He says that a Christian recognizes every person in the ultimate depths of his conscience (Cf. GS 16), of his person and of his existence as someone to whom the infinite, nameless and indefinable God, who is the true content of every spiritual life, has offered himself as salvation to the freedom of this person.³²⁴ This statement of Rahner can find its echo in the recent document of the Bishop of Rome and the Pastor of the universal Church, Pope Francis in his third encyclical letter *Fratelli Tutti* on 'Fraternity and Social Friendship'. The pope shows how we can awaken the 'supernatural existential' both in Christians and non-Christians. Thus the Pope writes that:

Love is more than just a series of benevolent actions. Those actions have their source in a union increasingly directed towards others, considering them of value, worthy, pleasing, and beautiful apart from their physical or moral appearances. Our love for others, for who they are, moves us to seek the best for their lives. Only by cultivating this way of relating to one another will we make possible a social friendship that excludes no one and a fraternity that is open to all.³²⁵

So with this background of the proposal of Pope Francis, the Christian in his day-to-day activities and with an awareness of this offer of the 'supernatural existential' (the pre-apprehension of being) can provoke in others the importance and the implication of the life of God to the human being. This is what the sacred council meant when it stipulated that the Church is *Lumen Gentium*. Thus the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church affirms that «the Church has to bring the light of Christ to all men [...] Since the Church is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race».³²⁶ Therefore the awareness of the life of God in the Christian is the light of Christ that can also light up or awaken the consciousness of the 'supernatural existential' of the non-Christian.

Furthermore, according to Farias, the 'supernatural existential' can play a major role in evangelization, such as in homilies and in the teaching of catechism. He states that, this is because the content of the 'kerygma' is ultimately not alien to what is at the bottom of what the human being himself already expects, because not only is he metaphysically capable of listening to the message, the Word, but the Word is already thematically present in him, due to the act

³²⁴ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 400–401.

³²⁵ 'Fratelli Tutti (3 de Outubro de 2020) | Francisco', 94, accessed 5 November 2020, http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/pt/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html.

³²⁶ 'Lumen Gentium', 1, accessed 20 May 2021, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_po.html.

of creation and the incarnation of the Word, which affects all reality.³²⁷ Here we can see, from the analysis of Farias, an intuition of Rahner's idea of Christian evangelization, thus "helping unbelievers to become Christians". This is because for Rahner, the 'supernatural existential' shows the metaphysical unsustainability of atheism, which thus appears as a violence on the most profound and transcendental dynamics of the finite spirit. The 'supernatural existential', transcending the created condition transcendently, means that in an athetic way the whole reality is not only enabled (the model version of the supernatural existential), in the sense of the '*potentia oboedientialis*'³²⁸, but already in an act marked by the supernatural (the strong version) which is in all human beings.³²⁹ If this is the case of the 'supernatural existential' then we can agree with Palma, who argues that from Rahner's perspective, divine revelation can also be considered as an experience.³³⁰ It must be noted that the experience we are referring to, argued by Palma, is the experience of God of the second level of experience.³³¹ If we look critically at how the theme of our dissertation has been structured, we can definitely agree with Palma with this particular explanation he gives of the experience of God, thus first, we look at the existential nature of the human being (the first level of experience) and secondly, we look at the supernatural in the human being's existence and thus what Palma calls the second level of the experience of God. In sum, we can say that the experience of God is an experience with the experience. Thus I experience God within everything else that I am given to experience.³³² Thus the human being can have his transcendental experience in his various categorical experience.

Having established that the divine revelation or the self-communication of God from the perspective of Rahner can also be termed as an experience of God, then we can argue that the 'supernatural existential' is the self-communication of God's very Self to the human being in his first level experience. Thus it is an experience of God in a very special and unique way. Therefore we can make an argument for the compatibility of the 'supernatural existential' with the Christian evangelization. Thus, we know that many Christians and non-Christians are involved in various work in the secular world and sometimes the notion of the 'sacred' escaped them in their field of work. The consciousness of the 'supernatural existential' can help both

³²⁷ Cf. Farias, *Antropologia e graça*, 91.

³²⁸ The term *Potentia Oboedientialis* refers to the disposition of a person to receive and accept the gift of God's self-communication, which leads to the fulfilment of his or her spiritual nature.(Cf. Hines, *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*) xiv.

³²⁹ Cf. Farias, *Antropologia e graça*, 91.

³³⁰ Cf. Alexandre Palma, *A Trindade é um Mistério* (Lisboa: Paulinas Editora, 2014), 104.

³³¹ Palma, *A Trindade é um Mistério*, 97.

³³² Cf. Palma, *A Trindade é um Mistério*, 97.

Christians and non-Christians to discover God in all that they do and experience in their day-to-day activities.

Moreover the Portuguese theologian Jacinto Farias affirms that «the supernatural is introduced into the natural, which is elevated to the sacramental category, in the very broad sense of a sign that includes in itself a certain degree of operativeness and efficiency, so then we can talk of ‘supernatural existential’, because “the Word became Flesh, he lived among us” (Cf. Jo 1,14) ». ³³³ Here also we can intuit the pastoral sense of the ‘supernatural existential’. There is a need for Christians to provoke in non-Christians the awareness of the offer of God by their way of life as Christians. Nevertheless, the responsibility of the Christian becomes greater because of the identification of the ‘supernatural existential’ with the sacraments of the Church as indicated by the Portuguese dogmatic theologian, Jacinto Farias.

According to Rahner, the Church is the continuation of God's self-offer in Jesus Christ in whom he has the final, victorious, and salvific word in the dialogue between God and the world, the Church is an efficacious sign. ³³⁴ Thus it is called ‘*opus operatum*’ ³³⁵ as applied to the individual sacraments. Therefore it follows that in Jesus Christ and in his Presence, that is, in the Church, God offers Himself to the human being in such a way that by God's act of grace this offer continues to be definitively bound up with the acceptance of this offer by the history of the world's freedom. From this perspective the Church is the sign and the historical manifestation of the victorious success of God's self-communication. It is not just the sign of an offer which is still open. It is rather the sign of a question which itself, looked at from the totality of human history, effects and brings with it a positive answer without prejudice to the human being's freedom. ³³⁶ And to this extent the Church is a sign, but it is the sign of an efficacious and successful grace for the world, and it's the basic sacrament in this radical sense. ³³⁷ With this statement above, we can argue that the Christian has a responsibility as part of the Church. The Christian then has the duty not only to provoke in others the awareness of the offer of God but to invite also non-Christians to participate in the Church's sacramental life. Since it is in the Church that the nature of the Divine self-communication is explained and lived to its fullest in grace. Therefore the Christian with the consciousness of the ‘supernatural

³³³ Farias, *Antropologia e graça*, 90.

³³⁴ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 412.

³³⁵ When we say that a sacrament is *opus operatum* what we mean is that the sacrament causes itself because of the unambiguous and efficacious word of God but insofar as this sacrament is offered to a person in his individual and still open salvation history, he cannot say with absolute, theoretical certainty that he accepts with the same absolute certainty the word and the offer which comes to him from God with absolute certainty (Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 414).

³³⁶ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 412.

³³⁷ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 414.

existential' in their lives and also in the life of the Church will definitely by their metaphysical spiritual nature invite others to participate in the supernatural and existential life of the Church.

If the 'supernatural existential' is also viewed as an experience of God, then we can make an argument for Christian evangelization. Thus we can refer from the theological reflection of Palma on the notion of the experience of God for an intuition for Christian evangelization based on Rahner's perspective of Christian evangelization. Thus the Christians' relationship with unbelievers and its non-contradiction to the Christian faith as explained above. In the same manner, but in a different direction, Palma instead makes an argument for unbelievers, arguing that it is enough that unbelievers admit such an experience of God (supernatural existential) as a possibility for others and, who knows, even for themselves. Or at least, it is enough for unbelievers to accept to think what it would be like if such an experience existed.³³⁸ This is indeed an indirectly and an initial step for helping unbelievers to become Christians or at least in the level of a dialogue, based on the arguments we are making for Rahner's theological reflection of the concept of the 'supernatural existential' and its compatibility with Christian evangelization.

Summary

In this chapter, we came "face to face" with what Rahner means by the 'supernatural existential'. First of all, we argued that this concept has two versions: the modest version and the strong version. Secondly, we affirmed that the strong version might be the original version of this concept. Finally, relying on the arguments of the strong version, we intuit a pastoral sense of the concept of the 'supernatural existential'. Here we are saying that we argued for the compatibility of this concept to the concept of Christian evangelization.

³³⁸ Cf. Palma, *A Trindade é um Mistério*, 104–5.

CONCLUSION

We have endeavoured to offer a comprehensive study of Rahner's theological notion of the 'supernatural existential' in the *Foundations*. Therefore having traced this thread through his understanding of the human being's existence, the supernatural as God's free and forgiving self-communication to the human being, we have been able to penetrate into the structure of his thought and of the technical meaning of the 'supernatural existential'.

With humility we must concede that to read Rahner is a difficult task. This is because his theological reflections are always around these three questions: Who is the human being? How is God communicating Himself to the human being? What is the future relationship between God and the human being? So to be able grasp the theological meaning of the 'supernatural existential' we did not base ourselves solely on the *Foundations* but referred to experts in the study of his theology in order to read and understand him. Rahner himself, stated, in the preface of the *Foundations*, that the reader should not expect to find in it a final summary of his previous theological work.³³⁹ In the first place, we studied 'existential' in Rahner. The reader of this dissertation may question: Why does Rahner study the human existence first, before the study of God's self-communication to the human being? This is because, for the author, one can understand the Christian message by considering the being that was created to welcome it and made capable of hearing it.³⁴⁰ This theological approach led us to treat some basic human concepts in the *Foundations*.

Firstly, the human being as "person and subject". The comprehension of the relationship between the human being's concrete existence and God is what Rahner means by "person and subject".³⁴¹ Among the chief characteristics of the human 'person', is that he can put its very being in question, so that he can transcend it. Secondly, we also considered the human being as a transcendent being. We must state that this sub-theme was cautiously investigated because of its importance to grasp the concept of the 'supernatural existential'. The capacity of the human being to be present to himself and place everything in question before the absolute being, God, is what Rahner calls: the human being as a transcendent being.³⁴² So in relation to the questioning capacity of the human being, Rahner explains that the openness of the human being to everything and anything can be at least a question for him.³⁴³ This, in short, means, that when

³³⁹ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, xv.

³⁴⁰ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 24.

³⁴¹ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 26.

³⁴² Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 31–32.

³⁴³ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 32.

the human being put himself in a question in his concrete everyday activities, he transcends that question. This is what we mean by transcendental experience. We also investigated the argument that it is in the transcendental experience that the human being encounters true freedom and responsibility. We ended the first chapter stating that the question of personal existence is also a question of salvation. This is because for Rahner, when the human being comprehends his concrete existence, the question of salvation is freely embraced and welcomed.³⁴⁴ According to the *Foundations*, the concept of ‘existential’ of the human being is not yet so specifically Christian that it is an explicit and reflexive profession of faith.³⁴⁵ Therefore in the second chapter, we investigated the theme of the supernatural as God’s free and forgiving self-communication. Thus, it shows how God communicates to the human being. Here we argued that when we say that God communicates with us, we do not mean that God says something ‘about’ the divine self. We mean that God communicates his very life to the human being.

Finally we logically combined the first and the second chapters, dealing with the ‘supernatural existential’. Therefore the ‘supernatural existential’ in the *Foundations* was logically established. It is the communication of the divine life of God to the human being as an offer.³⁴⁶ In this chapter, we also scrutinized whether this concept could contribute to the Christian Evangelization. We said yes. This is because for Rahner, «God’s very self in self-communication is really poured out on all humanity and not merely on the few who have been sealed by the sacraments».³⁴⁷ This means that the Christian message is to be directed to all human beings and not only to Christians. Therefore we constructed a series of arguments for the compatibility of the ‘supernatural existential’ with Christian evangelization.

Therefore the goal of this dissertation becomes clear. It is to present the concept of the ‘supernatural existential’ according to the German Jesuit theologian, Karl Rahner. God communicates himself to all human beings and, hence, there is a need for the human being to accept this offer. If the Christian can boldly say he has really accepted the offer, then logically he should help others too to accept this God’s free and forgiving self-communication. This is what Rahner calls the Christian evangelization.

³⁴⁴ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 39–40.

³⁴⁵ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 116.

³⁴⁶ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 116–17.

³⁴⁷ Hines, *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, 302.

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