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### The Message of Salvation: A Comparative Study of the Theology of Karl Rahner and of the Lutheran Confessions on the Relationship of Faith and Unbelief to the Word of God

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THE MESSAGE OF SALVATION:  
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE THEOLOGY  
OF KARL RAHNER AND OF THE LUTHERAN  
CONFESSIONS ON THE RELATIONSHIP OF  
FAITH AND UNBELIEF TO THE WORD OF GOD

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A Thesis presented to the Faculty  
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,  
Department of Systematic Theology  
in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Sacred Theology

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by

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May 1976

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THE MESSAGE OF SALVATION

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ABBREVIATIONS OF THE TITLES OF THE LUTHERAN CONFESSIONS

AC	Augsburg Confession
Ap	Apology of the Augsburg Confession
Athan	Athanasian Creed
Ep	Epitome of the Formula of Concord
FC	Formula of Concord
LC	Large Catechism
Tr	Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope
SA	Smalcald Articles
SC	Small Catechism
SD	Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord

All citations of the Lutheran Confessions in English are taken from The Book of Concord, Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959).

## CHAPTER I

### KARL RAHNER AND THE THEORY OF ANONYMOUS CHRISTIANITY

#### The Problem

"Anonymous Christianity" is a term coined by the Roman Catholic theologian Karl Rahner and refers to the theory that men can be Christians without explicitly confessing the name of Christ or bearing the name "Christian." Such nameless Christianity is said to be true faith in Christ, implicit in the moral actions of those who possess it, though they may not be conscious of it. Thus many seeming non-Christians, even some atheists, are in fact believers in Christ. This phenomenon is not salvation apart from grace, but rather a manifestation of grace apart from the church's preaching and sacraments. Rahner writes:

This can only mean . . . that when man experiences his transcendence, even without explicit consciousness of it, he also experiences the offer of grace, not necessarily as such, i.e., as a distinctly supernatural call, but in its meaningful reality . . . The explicit Christian revelation is the articulate utterance of the grace-given revelation which man always experiences, however obscurely, in the depths of his being.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Karl Rahner, "Missions," Sacramentum Mundi: An Encyclopedia of Theology, ed. K. Rahner et al (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), 4:80 (hereafter this encyclopedia will be cited as SM).

Rahner's theory was "thrown onto the theological market in the late fifties," in Father Damboriena's words.<sup>2</sup> As a matter of fact, the concept had already appeared earlier in such essays as "Theos in the New Testament" and "Concerning the Relationship between Nature and Grace."<sup>3</sup> He continued to present it in writings of the late fifties and early sixties.<sup>4</sup> He proposed it as a theologoumenon or "Catholic dogmatic interpretation," a proposition not taught directly by official dogma, but indirectly and without contradiction of it.<sup>5</sup> The Second Vatican Council (December 1963-December 1965) issued statements on the salvation of non-Christians (in Lumen Gentium, Gaudium et Spes, and Ad Gentes), and Rahner has regarded these as confirming his theory.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Prudentio Damboriena, "Aspects of the Missionary Crisis in Roman Catholicism," The Future of the Christian World Mission, ed. Wi Jo Kang and Wm. Danker (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Co., 1971), p. 80.

<sup>3</sup>Karl Rahner, Schriften zur Theologie (Einsiedeln: Benziger Verlag, 1954), 1:91-168, 323-46 (hereafter cited as S), in Theological Investigations, trans. Karl Rahner (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1961), 1:79-148, 297-318 (hereafter cited as TI).

<sup>4</sup>E.g., "Nature and Grace," TI, 4:165-88; "Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions," TI, 5:115-34; "Dogmatic Notes on 'Ecclesiological Piety,'" TI, 5:336-65.

<sup>5</sup>"Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions," TI, 5:117; "Die Anonymen Christen," S, 6:552-53; Louis Roberts, The Achievement of Karl Rahner (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967), p. 279.

<sup>6</sup>E.g., "Die Anonymen Christen," S, 6:545-54;

Rahner's view has been received with enthusiastic admiration and favor by some in the Roman Catholic Church,<sup>7</sup> and the impressive Sacramentum Mundi now teaches it to the Roman Catholic people.<sup>8</sup> His disciples R. Schlette, H. Kueng, and R. Panniker have repeated and elaborated it.<sup>9</sup> One writer calls it:

. . . a vision worthy of strong hope--hope that in the final kingdom, Jesus Christ will suddenly be familiar to us all . . . also to all those who, not knowing His name, nevertheless have had Him as a brother in their hearts.<sup>10</sup>

The theory has also met vehement opposition in Rahner's own church.<sup>11</sup> Among Protestants, the Frankfurt

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"Atheismus und Implizites Christentum," S, 8:187-212; "Kirche, Kirchen und Religionen," S, 8:355-73.

<sup>7</sup>E.g., E. Hillman, "Anonymous Christianity and the Missions," Downside Review, 84 (July 1966); 361-80; A. Raeper, The Anonymous Christian, trans. Joseph Donceel (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1966); Klaus Riesenhuber, "Rahner's Anonymous Christian," Theology Digest, 8 (Autumn 1965): 163-71; H. Vorgrimler, Karl Rahner: His Life, Thought and Works, trans. E. Quinn (Glen Rock, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1966), pp. 58-63; J. Laubach, "Karl Rahner," Theologians of Our Time, ed. Leonhard Reinisch (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1964), pp. 182-201.

<sup>8</sup>Supra, footnote 1.

<sup>9</sup>R. Schlette, Towards a Theology of Religions, trans. W. J. O'Hara (New York: Herder & Herder, 1966); H. Kueng, Christenheit als Minderheit; die Kirche unter den Weltreligionen (Einsiedeln: Benziger, c.1965); R. Panniker, The Unknown Christ of Hinduism (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1964).

<sup>10</sup>Don Maloney, "Rahner and the Anonymous Christian," America, 133 (October 31, 1970): 350.

<sup>11</sup>L. Elders, "Die Taufe der Weltreligionen. Bemerkungen zu einer Theorie Karl Rahners," Theologie und Glaube, 55 (1965): 124-31; H. Van Straelen, The Catholic Encounter with World Religions (London: Burns & Oates, 1966);

Declaration condemns the notion of an anonymous presence of Christ among the heathen, the Wheaton Declaration denounces it as "speculative universalism," and A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles, an official document of The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, rejects it as contrary to the theology of the Lutheran Confessions.<sup>12</sup>

The problem proposed for investigation in this study is the same as that raised in the last clause: Is the theory of anonymous Christianity compatible with the Lutheran Confessions? A negative answer would seem to be indicated by the statement in the Confessions that all who are outside the Christian Church:

. . . remain in eternal wrath and damnation, for they do not have the Lord Christ, and, besides, they are not illuminated and blessed by the gifts of the Holy Spirit (LC, 2:66).<sup>13</sup>

It is necessary, however, to inquire carefully whether this statement and others related to it in the Lutheran Symbols are applicable to Rahner's theory.

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Damboriena, p. 80.

<sup>12</sup>"The Frankfurt Declaration," Christianity Today, 14 (June 19, 1970): 846; The Wheaton Declaration, Subscribed by the Delegates to the Congress on the Church's Worldwide Mission, Convened at Wheaton, Illinois, April 9-16, 1966, p. 15; A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles, produced by the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod in 1972 and officially adopted July 1973, p. 1.

<sup>13</sup>All citations of the Lutheran Confessions in English are taken from The Book of Concord, ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959).

In view of the importance of dialogue today between Lutheranism and Roman Catholicism, it is crucial for Lutheran theologians to know what their Roman Catholic counterparts hold concerning the church's mission to the unbeliever. Rahner has expressed his hope that orthodox Protestants will eventually combine with Roman Catholics to "develop a theology of tomorrow for the heathen."<sup>14</sup> In order to respond to this, a Lutheran theologian must know what would be likely to be included in this ecumenical mission theology, and whether it would conform either to his own confessional position or to the official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church.

#### Organization of this Study

The primary sources for this study are the writings of Karl Rahner, both in German and in English translation, and the Lutheran Confessions in German, Latin, and English (the Augsburg Confession, the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the Smalcald Articles, the Small and Large Catechisms of Martin Luther, the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope, and the Formula of Concord, together with the three ecumenical creeds). Other writings which have had Lutheran confessional status, such as the Saxon

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<sup>14</sup>Karl Rahner, The Church After the Council, trans. Davis Herron and Rodelinde Albrecht (New York: Herder and Herder, 1966), p. 100.

Visitation Articles, have not been used. The purpose of the study is to compare the teachings of these sources on the topic of "anonymous Christianity." Since the twentieth century theory of Karl Rahner was not known or discussed by the Confessors of the sixteenth century, it has been necessary to define the point of comparison in this investigation as the relationship of faith and unbelief to the Word of God. While there is agreement between Rahner and the Lutheran Confessions that salvation through Jesus Christ is necessary for the eternal happiness of every human being, whether and in what sense this salvation must be made known to the human being in a divinely revealed message of salvation is the object of this study and has determined the organization of this thesis. The remainder of this introductory chapter contains a brief sketch of Rahner's philosophical and theological background, in order to aid the reader in understanding his approach to the problem of religious knowledge. Chapter II is concerned with man's capacity, whether natural or supernatural, to know God and His work of salvation. Chapter III is concerned with the content of the divinely revealed and ecclesiastically promulgated message of salvation, as understood respectively by Rahner and confessional Lutheranism, and with the logical possibility of this content being implicitly contained in man's consciousness apart from missionary preaching. The last two chapters

are concerned with the church's approach to non-Christians, as it is determined by the church's understanding of the non-Christian's knowledge of God. The Jew and the pagan are considered by Rahner to be pre-Christian, in the sense that each has a lawful and socially tangible form of religion, which is a positive preparation for Christianity (Chapter IV). The atheist is considered post-Christian, explicitly rejecting the Christian message and yet capable of implicit Christianity (Chapter V). Chapter VI is a summary of the findings.

Since this thesis takes the form of a comparison, the findings are presented under the headings of "thesis" and "antithesis." Such a structure already indicates the conclusion of this author that a negative answer is required to the question whether the theory of anonymous Christianity is compatible with the Lutheran Confessions. Any dialogue between the primary sources or their expositors must be a disputation. The thesis-antithesis organization does not assume a chronological priority of the thesis to the antithesis and does not refer to any particular historical confrontation between the proponents of the two positions. The author has not found any analysis of Rahner's theory from a Lutheran point of view and has seen only brief, occasional comments by Rahner on Lutheran theology.

This study does not go beyond what can be expected of a comparison. A comparison can reveal either similarity

or difference, perhaps to the point of either identity or incompatibility. The conclusion of this thesis is that Rahner's theory of anonymous Christianity is incompatible with the theology of the Lutheran Confessions. No further judgment is made in this paper on the validity of either position, although the author's professional commitment to the view presented in the "antithesis" sections will be apparent.

The discussion of the compatibility of the two positions involves an evaluation of Rahner's claim that his theory is a theologoumenon. According to his own definition,

. . . a theologoumenon [sic] is a proposition expressing a theological statement which cannot be directly regarded as official teaching of the Church, as dogma binding in faith, but which is the outcome and expression of an endeavour to understand the faith by establishing connections between binding doctrines of faith [see Analogy of Faith] and by confronting dogmatic teachings with the whole of secular experience and all that a man--or an age--knows.<sup>15</sup>

As knowledge is accumulated and evidence for or against the theologoumenon is gathered, the theologoumenon may be found to be an erroneous, dispensible presupposition or application, or else a teaching which is implicitly and necessarily contained in a truth of faith.<sup>16</sup> Rahner thinks that his theory of anonymous Christianity is not incompatible with any

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<sup>15</sup>"Theologoumenon," SM, 6:232-33.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

Christian dogma and is implicit in the dogmatic truths of God's will to save all men and Christ's redemption of all mankind. The opposite will be demonstrated in this thesis.

#### Rahner the Theologian: His Life and Influence

Karl Rahner is first and foremost a servant of the Roman Catholic Church, a priest since July 26, 1932, and a Jesuit since 1922. Everything important to be said about him is connected with his service to the church. The approach here will be that of his friend and biographer, Herbert Vorgrimler, who writes that:

. . . the reader must not expect to find here details of Karl Rahner's private life. In fact, there would be little enough to relate. He is a theologian, at the disposal of his order; he has no private property and cannot dispose of his income; he lives in a Jesuit house, in a room furnished with the utmost simplicity and which--like other members of his order--he himself keeps clean and tidy. We can say that he works unceasingly at theology, so that a list of books and articles already numbers nearly a thousand; that he has chosen to interest the public in these things and has travelled all over Europe, speaking in halls filled to overflowing; that he has addressed cardinals and bishops at the council; or that his writings have been translated into more than ten languages. What more could be said of his "private life"? He rises early after a few hours' sleep, says Mass, makes his prescribed meditation, reads his office, answers letters or applies himself to study, so that he already has a whole day's work behind him when others are just beginning. Only after this come the lectures, visits, and finally writing articles and books until late into the night.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Vorgrimler, pp. 9-10.

Karl Rahner was born on March 5, 1904, in Freiburg-im-Breisgau, Germany, the son of a Latin teacher. He was a "late bloomer," a bored, mischievous student with bad grades who suddenly became a brilliant scholar. He studied in Jesuit schools and did graduate work in philosophy at the University of Freiburg. He received the Doctor of Philosophy degree at the University of Innsbruck in 1936.

He taught at Innsbruck in the Jesuit college until 1939, when it was closed by the Nazis. During World War II he did pastoral work in Austria and Bavaria, and later he served pastorally in Munich while teaching at St. John Berchman College at Pullach. In the last four decades he has often been in demand as a lecturer and speaker. He became Professor of Dogmatic Theology at Innsbruck in 1948, then Professor of Philosophy of Religion at the University of Munich in 1963, and Professor of Dogmatic Theology at the University of Muenster in 1967.

His publications and literary projects since his first article (1924) number in the hundreds. He worked on four editions of Denzinger's Enchiridion Symbolorum, the source-book of official Roman Catholic dogmatic statements. He edited a theological dictionary for laymen (Der Glaube der Kirche in den Urkunden der Lehrverkuendigung) and also produced one with Herbert Vorgrimler (Kleines Theologisches Woerterbuch). He planned a five-volume manual of the history of dogma with Herder and Herder, edited and wrote

many articles for Lexikon fuer Theologie und Kirche, beginning in 1957, co-edited Questiones Disputatae (which included some of his own essays), and served as consultant and author for the new Roman Catholic encyclopedia, Sacramentum Mundi. In 1954 the Benziger Verlag in Einsiedeln began to publish volumes of his collected articles under the title Schriften zur Theologie.

Rahner has lectured and written on a wide range of topics, including exegesis, Christology, prayer, Mariology, religious freedom, situational ethics, Latin as a church language, and evolution (which he calls "hominization"). He has a special interest in epistemology and in the doctrine of grace. His first book (Geist im Welt, 1939) deals with Thomas Aquinas' theory of knowledge, which he applies in his second book (Hoerer des Wortes, 1941) to the philosophy of religion. The themes of these books appear again and again in his writings. Already in his first period of teaching at Innsbruck he developed a Codex de gratia and wrote articles about grace. His detailed treatment of the relationship between grace and nature is an intrinsic part of his study of man in relationship to divine creation and the incarnation of Christ, of which Jakob Laubach states:

His many essays, papers, and articles in encyclopedias all converge upon his fundamental

endeavor, to develop a theological anthropology in the true sense.<sup>18</sup>

He was a peritus at the Second Vatican Council, served on the Theological Commission for the council, and had discussions with many church leaders there. His progressive views were well-known at the council, and, as the editor of America puts it, "hundreds of bishops sat like schoolboys at his feet while he lectured at Rome during the council."<sup>19</sup> He himself, however, says modestly: "I have not exercised any great influence at the council."<sup>20</sup>

It should also be mentioned that Rahner considers it the duty of a Roman Catholic to engage in dialogue with non-Catholics, not only with Protestants in ecumenical activities, but also with atheists, logical positivists, Communists, and others. He is an active member of the Goerres Society and of the Paulus-Gesellschaft, both of which carry on such dialogue.

Much more could be said of the accomplishments of this man.<sup>21</sup> His influence upon Roman Catholicism and

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<sup>18</sup>Laubach, p. 182.

<sup>19</sup>D. R. Campion, "Of Many Things," America, 123 (October 31, 1970): 332.

<sup>20</sup>P. Granfield, Theologians at Work (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1967), p. 46.

<sup>21</sup>Biographical material on Rahner can be found in Current Biography, ed. Charles Moritz (New York: H. W. Wilson Company, 1970-71), pp. 348-50; Wer Ist Wer? (1967-68); Vorgrimler; Granfield, pp. 35-50; America, 123 (October 31, 1972) (special issue on Karl Rahner).

Christendom in general has indeed been great. He has been praised by Popes John (1962) and Paul (1963). On his sixtieth birthday he was awarded an honorary doctorate by the universities of Muenster and Strasbourg and honored with a two-volume Festschrift. Herbert Vorgrimler predicts that "the work of Karl Rahner will have a determining effect on Catholic theology even in the twenty-first century."<sup>22</sup> The Lutheran theologian George Lindbeck goes so far as to rank Rahner alongside of Barth and Tillich, as "perhaps the greatest of the three."<sup>23</sup>

#### Rahner the Philosopher

Karl Rahner is a product of the renewed interest in Thomism within the Roman Catholic Church, which began when Pope Leo XIII in Aeterni Patris (1879) recommended to the world "the precious wisdom of St. Thomas" as a cure for the evils of the time. Leading centers of Thomism since then have been the universities of Innsbruch and Freiburg, the Institute Superieur de Philosophie at Louvain (Belgium), the Institute Catholique in Paris, and Laval University at Montreal. The revival has taken two forms: Neo-Thomism and Transcendental Thomism.

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<sup>22</sup>Vorgrimler, p. 88.

<sup>23</sup>G. Lindbeck, "The Thought of Karl Rahner, S.J.," Christianity and Crisis, 25 (October 18, 1965): 211-15.

One of the evils of the time which concerned Leo XIII was skepticism deriving from the influence of Immanuel Kant. Kant had denied the possibility of attaining metaphysical knowledge of reality, on the grounds that the knowing subject is equipped for knowing the phenomenal or empirical world but not the noumenal or nonempirical world, if any such world exists, and that transcendental inquiry can discover only the necessary conditions for experience and knowledge. The ultimate skeptical conclusion from this is that being-in-itself and deity are not only unprovable but inconceivable, since concepts are dependent upon sense experience for their content. Neo-Thomists, such as M. D. Roland-Gosselin, Jacques Maritain, and Etienne Gilson, try to solve the Kantian problem by using a traditional understanding of Aquinas' epistemology to show that intellect grasps the relationality of its own acts to reality and infers the existence of external objects from their subjective influence upon itself.

Transcendentalist Thomism attempts to solve the Kantian problem by developing Kant's idea that we do not acquire metaphysical knowledge but become aware of implicit, inborn transcendentals or principles of knowledge through sense experience, and (unlike Kant) understanding this to mean that we have an a priori knowledge of being. Joseph Marechal (1878-1944), a Belgian Jesuit, argued that absolute being is affirmed in the act of judgment, which for Kant was

merely a synthesizing of empirical data. Marechal said that any affirmation presupposes that there is some being, and that to deny the possibility of being is to affirm (nonsensically) that there is no affirmation. Marechal concluded that there is an innate tending or dynamism of the intellect toward intuition of absolute being, which is objectified in judgments about finite beings.<sup>24</sup>

Marechalian Thomism follows the reasoning of German Idealism that a knowledge of being must be present in the activity of the performing spirit of man. In other words, being is always realized within consciousness. However, Marechal and his followers reject the absolute idealism of Fichte, affirming with Thomas that man's spirit must be subjected to God. They also reject the Idealist identification of the transcendentals with the Absolute.<sup>25</sup>

Transcendental Thomism has also entered into a dialogue with Martin Heidegger, the ontologist philosopher who interpreted the knowing subject's performance as its being and found an a priori knowledge of being in man's consciousness of his existence, especially in his questioning. Heidegger made being interchangeable with intelligibility, teaching that man is oriented to being in such a

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<sup>24</sup>Roberts, pp. 13-14.

<sup>25</sup>F. Fiorenza, "Karl Rahner and the Kantian Problem," Introduction to Spirit in the World, by K. Rahner, trans. Wm. Dych (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), pp. xxix-xxxiii.

way that being manifests itself in existent man in a "lighting up" process which comes to pass in consciousness.<sup>26</sup> Transcendental Thomists have found Heidegger's tenets useful and compatible with Thomistic realism, especially his rejection of existentialism on the ground that man must be open to the world's communication of its intelligibility and his view that self-affirmation is possible only on the basis of self-renunciation. All this, of course, is theologically interpreted.<sup>27</sup>

Karl Rahner was influenced early by Kant and Marechal, as his notebooks from student days at Pullach show.<sup>28</sup> His first book (Geist im Welt, 1939) is a classic of Transcendental Thomism. It has heavily influenced metaphysics along the lines of Marechal and remains one of the most widely cited works in the German Marechal-ian tradition.<sup>29</sup> Rahner's principal contribution to the attempt to deal with Kant is his concept of a faculty of preapprehension of reality, an a priori knowledge which is pre-conceptual and unthematic and is brought to objective knowledge through sense experience. This concept will be more fully explained in the next chapter.

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<sup>26</sup>Roberts, pp. 15-18.

<sup>27</sup>F. Kerr, "Heidegger among the Theologians," New Blackfriars, 46 (April 1965): 398-400.

<sup>28</sup>Vorgrimler, p. 19.

<sup>29</sup>G. McCool, "Recent Trends in German Scholasticism," International Philosophical Quarterly, 1 (December 1961): 670.

As for the influence of the ideas of Heidegger, Rahner studied under him at Freiburg, along with Max Mueller, Gustav Siewerth, and Johannes B. Lotz, all of whom also are Transcendental Thomists. Rahner himself remarks that "it is not specific doctrines that I have taken from Heidegger, but rather a style of thinking and of investigating," by which he means the search for synthetic ideas which organize the material of Christian dogma.<sup>30</sup> However, it must be said that Rahner uses Heidegger's language--for example, the luminosity of being, knowledge as the being-present-to-itself of Being, the existentials (the latent orientations of human existence) as distinguished from the existenziell (existential) condition of man in his historicity and questionability. Heideggerian themes, such as dread and fear, death and repetition, time and historicity, are prominent in Rahner's writings.<sup>31</sup> Francis Schaeffer considers Rahner a follower of the "new Heidegger," whose semantic mysticism involved the idea that Being manifests itself in human language.<sup>32</sup> Louis Roberts, however, thinks that "the influence of the later

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<sup>30</sup> Granfield, p. 38.

<sup>31</sup> Roberts, pp. 16-17.

<sup>32</sup> F. Schaeffer, The God Who Is There (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1968), p. 83.

Heidegger, so strong at present in Protestant theology, is not profound in the case of Rahner."<sup>33</sup> Fergus Kerr agrees.<sup>34</sup>

Transcendental Thomism is often accused of having illegitimately mixed the a posteriori epistemology of Thomas with the a-priorism of Idealism and Heideggerism.<sup>35</sup> Rahner's self-defense is that "the whole school of recent German philosophical thought holds this" and that:

. . . I would say with St. Thomas that while I receive individual species from things coming to me in an a posteriori way, I also have a light of the intellectus agens.<sup>36</sup>

Transcendental Thomism interprets Thomas' intellectus agens metaphysically. Because Martin Honecker, Rahner's supervisor when he was studying at Freiburg and writing Geist im Welt as a dissertation, did not grasp this point, he rejected the dissertation as leaning too much on modern philosophy.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>Roberts, p. 16.

<sup>34</sup>Kerr, p. 402.

<sup>35</sup>J. Donceel, "A Thomistic Misapprehension?" Thought, 32 (1957): 189-98; C. Ernst, Introduction to his translation of K. Rahner, Theological Investigations (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1954), 1: xiii; W. J. Hill, "Transcendental Thomism," The New Catholic Encyclopedia, ed. W. G. Most (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), 16: 449-54.

<sup>36</sup>Granfield, pp. 37, 38.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 36.

## Rahner the Roman Catholic

Karl Rahner is a loyal and devoted son of the Roman Catholic Church. He is neither a relativist nor a rebel against magisterial authority. He is not a Modernist according to the sense of that term in the encyclical Pascendi dominici gregis of Pope Pius X (1907): one who takes an agnostic, anti-intellectual approach to dogma and espouses an immanentist view of revelation.<sup>38</sup>

Johannes B. Metz, Rahner's former student and present friend, makes mention of "a trait of Rahner's theological personality--one which even the briefest portrait should not leave out," and that is "his creative affirmation of tradition."<sup>39</sup> By this Metz means Rahner's talent for asking questions in such a way that official teachings and conventional truths, so often uninteresting and forgotten, become relevant and appealing, and also his ability to integrate and synthesize the many words and sentences of theology according to certain fundamental truths. He has a deep appreciation of the riches of tradition and is appalled

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<sup>38</sup>"Modernism (Roman Catholic)," The Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Western Churches, ed. T. C. O'Brien (Washington, D.C.: Corpus Publications, 1970), pp. 504-506.

<sup>39</sup>J. Metz, "An Essay on Karl Rahner," Foreword to Spirit in the World, by K. Rahner, trans. Wm. Dych (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), p. xiv.

to see the skeptic "examining everything but retaining nothing, although the Apostle admonishes us to do the contrary."<sup>40</sup>

Rahner considers his theory of anonymous Christianity to be not a departure from tradition but a creative reaffirmation of it. He insists upon the necessity of surrender to God, faith in Christ, and membership in the Roman Catholic Church for salvation, but reinterprets it.

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<sup>40</sup>K. Rahner, "Intellectual Integrity and Christian Faith," Belief Today, trans. Ray and Rosaleen Ockendon (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1967), p. 93.

## CHAPTER II

### THE HEARER OF THE MESSAGE

The focus of this chapter is upon the nature of man as the hearer of the message of divine grace and upon the question whether this message is necessary for man's experience of grace. The incompatibility of Karl Rahner's position with that of the Lutheran Confessions can be summarized thus:

**Karl Rahner's Thesis:** Man can hear the Word of God obedientially by faith, because he has already had prior experience of God's grace.

**The Lutheran Antithesis:** Man by nature does not experience grace or hear the Word of God obedientially.

#### The Position of Karl Rahner

As a spiritual, self-transcendent being created for dialogue with God, man has a capacity for receiving God's self-communication in grace. This is his obediential potency for hearing the Word of God. It is termed "obediential" because the message of grace is addressed to both the intellect and the will, and obediential hearing is knowledge perfected in love and moral decision.

Man's hearing of the Word of grace is meaningful and successful because he can experience the grace of God

prior to and apart from the explicit hearing of the Word, either accepting it or refusing it. Verbal revelation, when he encounters it, is the interpretation to him of the grace which he is already experiencing. Accordingly, there can be an implicit (or anonymous) hearing of an implicit Word, or implicit revelation, about an implicit grace, accepted in implicit faith.

Man is so constituted as a spiritual being that he can know God rationally and can find theological truth meaningful. The modern world, however, presents many problems of apologetics and of epistemology, in which Rahner is deeply interested. There is today a widespread unbelief in the world, which denies the possibility of a transcendent deity. It may positively "prove" that God cannot or ought not exist, or--more often--it may ignore Him as irrelevant in a scientific age in which man is empowered to master his world and create his own future.<sup>1</sup> To many contemporary unbelievers, God appears incomprehensible, a non-reality about which no meaningful, verifiable statement can be made. Christianity, with its multitude of rules, customs, and doctrines, strikes them as "a highly complicated collection of arbitrarily linked assertions."<sup>2</sup> There

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<sup>1</sup>Karl Rahner, "Atheism," Sacramentum Mundi: An Encyclopedia of Theology, edited by K. Rahner et al (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), 1:116-22. Hereafter this encyclopedia will be referred to as SM.

<sup>2</sup>Karl Rahner, "The Concept of Mystery in Catholic Theology," Theological Investigations, translated by Kevin

is an atheism found in both communist and Western countries which attempts to understand itself as a-religious, without any need to be anti-religious, and to present itself in public as the normal attitude which is to be taken for granted in modern man. Faith is of interest only as a psychological phenomenon but is no longer a serious question about which any choice needs to be made. God is absent from life.<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, modern unbelief is pervaded with historical scepticism. It is assumed a priori that there can be no revelation of a God, even if such exists, in some particular chosen place in human history which is intended to be a unique, necessary communication for the salvation of all mankind. In the study of the history of religions the possibility of a common denominator for such history, one religion supernaturally superior to the others, is denied. The parallels between religions are used to discredit Christianity's claim to be unique.<sup>4</sup> The most historical features of Christianity, the incarnation and the resurrection of Christ, are dismissed as myths resembling those of the Greeks and other peoples.<sup>5</sup>

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Smyth (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1966), 4:37. Hereafter this collection will be referred to as TI.

<sup>3</sup>"Unbelief," SM, 1:321-23.

<sup>4</sup>K. Rahner, Hearers of the Word, translated from Hoerer des Wortes by Michael Richards (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), p. 178.

<sup>5</sup>"Thoughts on the Possibility of Belief Today,"

As a result of trying to deal with these problems, an ill-considered subjectivism has arisen in the church which is indifferent to questions about religious truth. It contends that not the cognoscitive content of an opinion, but rather its sincerity, is important for salvation.<sup>6</sup> Also, some think that they must appeal to modern man by demythologizing the New Testament, thus looking away from history and toward ideas which are supposed to be significant.<sup>7</sup>

Rahner's solutions to these problems may be briefly summarized in the following points:

1. Man is a spiritual being who is capable of knowing transcendent reality. He is transcendent with regard to being in general, for his consciousness and actions are not referred only to a particular and limited environment. He knows the absolute good, or infinite being, as a necessary presupposition in his ability to form universal concepts and apply them to finite objects of his knowledge. It is only by his conception--or rather preconception--of the infinite that he is able to have any knowledge of finite objects. It should not be claimed that a transcendent God is unknowable to man, for

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TI, 5:11-12.

<sup>6</sup>"What Is Heresy?" TI, 5:473-74.

<sup>7</sup>"On the Theology of the Incarnation," TI, 4:118.

he is equipped to know the transcendent. It may also be said that in every act of knowledge there is an implicit knowledge of the transcendent, infinite God.<sup>8</sup>

2. The incomprehensibility of God need not be an obstacle to faith today. On the one hand, the extreme claims of nineteenth-century scientific rationalism are at an end. Modern man is beginning to discern the necessary limitations of human thought and scientific method and to recognize the existence of metaphysical presuppositions at the basis of all scientific reflections. It is to be hoped that these developments will improve communication between Christians and non-Christians.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, there is a growing appreciation for mystery today. Twentieth-century man is more willing to speak of mystery and the incomprehensible than his recent predecessors. The church may be able to turn this to good account by speaking of God as the Mystery which wants to come near in grace, the incomprehensible which is implicitly known in every act of comprehension. Mystery is not an obstacle to but an integral part of human knowledge of God. The affirmation of mystery is what unifies the seemingly disconnected and meaningless propositions of theology.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> K. Rahner, Spirit in the World, trans. Wm. Dych from Geist in Welt (New York: Herder & Herder, 1967), passim.

<sup>9</sup> "Science as a 'Confession'?" TI, 3:385.

<sup>10</sup> "The Concept of Mystery in Catholic Theology," TI, 4:51-102, passim.

3. There is a bond between the propositions of Christian faith and the ultimate existentiell decisions which every man must make. Even if he is not a Christian, his implicit knowledge of God is affirmed in such moral decisions, which are inspired by grace. Therefore a completely and successfully a-religious unbelief is impossible. Man must choose with regard to God and grace, whether he is aware of it or not.<sup>11</sup>

4. Man is an embodied spirit and therefore an historical spirit. As an embodied spirit, he is involved with the world about him through sense perceptions. In his abstraction from sense perceptions he achieves self-possession as a knower set over against other beings and also over against the absolute, the preapprehension of which is the necessary condition for all knowledge. He must turn to the world of sensible appearances in order to achieve consciousness and knowledge of himself, other beings, and God. Therefore, if he is to receive a revelation, he must look for it in the world of appearance, especially in human history, in which he is involved with other spirits incarnated in matter and with God, who relates Himself to man in history. Thus there is a firm basis in epistemology for a defense of the Christian faith against historical scepticism.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, the

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<sup>11</sup>"Unbelief," SM, 6:323.

<sup>12</sup>Rahner, Hearers of the Word, pp. 130-63.

recognition that man meets God in history furnishes a solution to problems raised by comparative study of religions: Christianity is the supreme expression and homecoming of all the experiences of grace to be found in other religions, the perfection of what is imperfect in them.<sup>13</sup>

5. The demand for demythologizing the New Testament would disappear if men had a better understanding of anthropology and Christology. Man is a self-transcendent being because it is his nature to be the possible self-expression of God. Both man's possibility and God's wish to communicate Himself fully and irrevocably to man were simultaneously fulfilled in the Incarnation of Christ, in Whom the divinization of all mankind is made possible. If this is understood, the incarnation of Christ will appear as the highest actualization of man's possibility, not as a mythical aberration which needs to be explained away.<sup>14</sup> The resurrection of Christ can be seen as the beginning of the divinization of mankind, which in turn must be understood as God's total acceptance of the God-man's surrender to the mystery of the loving God.<sup>15</sup>

6. Truth is important for salvation. False doctrine is a threat to one's spiritual existence. Truth

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<sup>13</sup>"Thoughts on the Possibility of Belief Today," TI, 5:9-11.

<sup>14</sup>"On the Theology of the Incarnation," TI, 4:137-56.

<sup>15</sup>"Dogmatic Questions on Easter," TI, 4:157-72.

produces an essential contact with reality. Rahner is concerned to oppose scepticism, logical positivism, indifferentism, and subjectivism both within and without the church.<sup>16</sup>

Francis Schaeffer, the Calvinist apologist, appears to misunderstand Rahner's position when he accuses him of a neo-orthodox semantic mysticism, which denies the rationality of religious language and does not operate with the presupposition of absolute truth, clearly definable in terms of thesis and antithesis. Schaeffer writes that while the orthodox Roman Catholic would tell him that he was bound for hell because he rejects the true church and so deals with a concept of absolute truth, the progressive Roman Catholic thinkers like Rahner will say, "You are all right, Dr. Schaeffer, because you are so sincere."<sup>17</sup>

It is true that some aspects of Rahner's theology, such as his attitude toward the theology of evolution, his acceptance of historical criticism of the Bible, or his theory of anonymous Christianity resemble neo-orthodox thought and are compatible with it. The question of how his insistence on the historicity of revelation can be

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<sup>16</sup>"What Is Heresy?" TI, 5:468-512.

<sup>17</sup>Francis A. Schaeffer, The God Who Is There (Downer's Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1968), p. 83.

harmonized with his defence of historical criticism and his claim that there are errors in the Bible, cannot be discussed in this paper. But he does defend propositional truth and, from his own point of view, is as ready as Schaeffer to do battle against heresy. For example, he recently defended the infallibility of papal pronouncements against Hans Kueng's attack on it.<sup>18</sup> Like Schaeffer, he believes in absolute truth: "truth means a relation of knowing to a reality existing in itself."<sup>19</sup> He thinks it necessary to guard against the conception of an irrational, purely emotive experience of God.<sup>20</sup> He has no sympathy with subjectivistic theology but insists on coming to terms with the propositional teaching of Scripture and the magisterium, although critics may disagree with his interpretations. His proof of the monogenic origin of the human race--which Langdon Gilkey calls "one of the few illiberal, and unwise, elements in Karl Rahner's thought"<sup>21</sup>--is nothing other than his characteristically careful analysis of scriptural and

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<sup>18</sup>K. Rahner, Zum Problem Unfehlbarkeit: Antworten auf die Anfrage von Hans Kueng (Freiburg: Herder, 1971). Cf. also "Infallibility Fight," Newsweek, January 25, 1971, pp. 57-58.

<sup>19</sup>Rahner, Spirit in the World, p. 125.

<sup>20</sup>"Theos in the New Testament," TI, 1:82.

<sup>21</sup>Langdon Gilkey, Naming the Whirlwind: The Renewal of God-Language (Indianapolis and New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1969), p. 423.

conciliar statements.<sup>22</sup> Even in his tolerance of the theory of biological evolution, he had to satisfy himself that it was not a "shameful compromise."<sup>23</sup>

Rahner would not speak to Schaeffer about his soteriological status in precisely the way imagined by the latter. What he wishes to say to a Protestant is rather this:

Dr. Schaeffer, I assume that you are a man of good will. Therefore I cannot believe that you could really understand the Roman Catholic Church and still reject it. I think that you do not understand it and so are not in the position of having rejected it.

This is not an abandonment of the ancient dictum that there is no salvation outside the Roman Catholic Church, but rather an application of the long-standing Roman proviso of inculpable "invincible ignorance."<sup>24</sup> Schaeffer's fundamental disagreement with Rahner will be found to be not on whether faith has a truth-content, but on how explicit that truth-content need be. The latter is also the central question posed in this paper.

The most detailed presentation of Rahner's philosophy of human knowledge is found in Spirit in the World and its sequel, Hearers of the Word. A useful starting point for a survey of Spirit in the World is the

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<sup>22</sup>"Theological Reflexions on Monergism," TI, 1:229-96.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 1:296.

<sup>24</sup>"Some Remarks on the Question of Conversions," TI, 5:315-35.

problem of analogical knowledge of God, since Rahner there makes use of some of Thomas Aquinas' remarks on the subject to develop his view that man's analogical knowledge of God is made possible by his equipment for preapprehension of being.

The problem is how, if all existent things are fundamentally definable in terms of appearances, anything can be known or predicated of incorporeal substances, especially God. Rahner follows Aquinas in asserting that the mind can know nothing without turning to sensible appearances (nihil sine phantasmate intelligit anima--De Anima, III, c.7). But what of non-appearing things? And what of a non-appearing thing which is said to be Deus semper maior, always greater than any particular appearing thing because He is perfect and infinite? Can the same concept be applied to both God and finite things in the same sense (univocally), or must it be taken in different senses according to the application to different beings (equivocally)?

The answer is that language about God is necessarily analogical, rather than univocal or equivocal. An analogical concept is one which undergoes an essential change when applied to different beings or realms of being and yet preserves the unity of its connotation. In other words, it is possible for the same word or concept to apply to both the Creator and the creatures, but in different

manners or degrees.<sup>25</sup> Aquinas observed that analogy between absolute being and finite beings and between predications about them underlies all univocal predication about individual objects: "Everything univocal is reduced to a first one which is not univocal but analogous, and this is being" (Summa Theologica, I. q. 13, a. 5, ad 1). Univocal predication is achieved only in turning to phantasms and recognizing them as concretions of the universal.<sup>26</sup>

Aquinas analyzed analogical comparison in terms of the psychological act of excessus:

We know the incorporeal (non-worldly), of which there are no phantasms, through a comparison with the sensible, corporeal world of which there are phantasms. Thus we know what truth is by considering the thing about which we perceive a truth. But according to Dionysius, we know God as cause both by way of eminence (excessum) and by way of negation (remotionem). And in our present state of life we can also know the other incorporeal (non-worldly) substances only by way of (such) a negation or by some such comparison with the corporeal world.--Summa Theologica, I, q. 84, a. 7.<sup>27</sup>

The act of excessus is the condition not only for knowledge of God but all knowledge of the world. All knowledge involves an application of concepts and a comparison between the metaphysical and the sensibly intuited object. There is a close

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<sup>25</sup>Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimler, Theological Dictionary, trans. Richard Strachan (New York: Herder and Herder, 1965), pp. 17-19.

<sup>26</sup>Rahner, Spirit in the World, p. 402.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., pp. 10-11.

relationship between remotio or negatio and excessus as acts of knowledge. Limits and ends are known only by reaching out to a being more comprehensive than that whose limits are known, so that as the knowledge of the finite is removed (removeri), the knowledge of the infinite remains. As Aquinas puts it, "the knowledge of a negation is always founded in some affirmation" (De Potentia, q. 7, a. 5).<sup>28</sup>

Man's faculty of excessus is his preapprehension of being, by which he is able to know the world, himself, and God. Rahner interprets excessus, knowledge exceeding the sensible intuition, as Vorgriff (preapprehension), which he defines as "this transcending apprehension of further possibilities, through which the form possessed in a concretion in sensibility is apprehended as limited and so is abstracted."<sup>29</sup> Abstraction, and therefore knowledge of the world, is impossible without this preapprehension. Furthermore, in abstraction the knowing subject, who is given over to matter in his sense perceptions, "returns to himself" in his realization of himself as one set over against all concrete sensibly intuited objects and transcending them.<sup>30</sup> Finally, man is able to know God through his preapprehension of absolute esse, which he affirms in every

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 395.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 142.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., pp. 117-123.

act of knowledge. Aquinas was aware of this when he wrote: "All knowing beings know God implicitly in everything they know" (De Veritate, q. 22, a. 2, ad 1). Man's nature as spirit is his openness to the Absolute Being, his participation in and dependence on the light of Absolute Spirit through his preapprehension.<sup>31</sup>

A knowledge of God, then, is implicit in man's self-consciousness. Being becomes present to itself in the consciousness of the spirit through the intellect. Being able to know and knowability are intrinsic characteristics of being. In this "luminosity of being" man is aware of himself as a knower of objects with which he shares being. In the act of knowledge the subject posits within himself an object distinct from himself and so achieves self-possession. All his self-consciousness is dependent upon his preapprehension of absolute being.<sup>32</sup>

There is a preapprehension of absolute good as well as of absolute being. The affirmation of absolute being as good is implicit love of God. Absolute value is the formal object of all love of finite objects. Absolute good is implicitly affirmed in every act of the will, for the preapprehension of it is the condition of the possibility of comprehending and choosing finite goods. This is true even

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 225.

<sup>32</sup>Rahner, Hearers of the Word, pp. 31-44.

when one takes a negative attitude toward goodness and being and one's own existence (as in suicide), since the preapprehension and implicit affirmation are the necessary condition for the possibility of a negative attitude. Love, as openness and a positive attitude toward being, is always a factor of knowledge. Knowledge is perfected in love, as the action of the will is directed toward the objects of the intellect, both finite and infinite.<sup>33</sup>

In Hearers of the Word Rahner develops a metaphysical anthropology to show man's capability to receive a revelation. It is concerned with man's understanding of himself as spirit, which must be presupposed by theology and is explicated in theology. Such metaphysical study of the possibility of revelation cannot, however, prejudge the content of revelation or impose laws upon theology. It relates the findings of ontology to revealed truths such as grace, incarnation, and beatific vision. It is philosophy which loses itself in theology and insists that theology depends upon listening to the Word of God.<sup>34</sup>

Rahner sets forth the following propositions of metaphysical anthropology:

1. Man is absolute openness to being in general.

This is his basic constitution as spirit, aware and capable

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., pp. 94-108.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., pp. 167-80.

of knowledge. All human existence must be a listening for any message which may come from absolute being (or for His silence, as the case may be).<sup>35</sup>

2. Man is that existent thing which stands in free love before the God of a possible revelation. Revelation must be possible, because God is free, and revelation can be accepted or rejected, because man is free. Since absolute being has been disclosed to him in his preapprehension, he must face the possibility of further disclosure. In his experience of his own existence as contingent and yet absolute he experiences the divine will which delimits him to be so. Since man is contingent and therefore changeable, further delimitation of him through further disclosure is possible. He will hear such a message of the free God only if he has not restricted the horizon of his openness to being in general by a perverted love, only if he has not removed in advance the possibility of the Word of God addressing him as He pleases.<sup>36</sup>

3. Man is that existent thing who must listen for an historical revelation of God, given in his history and possibly in human speech. Because mind must turn to the phantasms to achieve knowledge, and because man is a social being immersed in history, a message from God to and for men

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid., pp. 53-68.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., pp. 71-108.

must be expected to be mediated by history. This has happened in the incarnation of Christ and has been extended historically in the Roman Catholic Church, which is the only adequate place of revelation. Furthermore, an historical revelation must be contained in human words, which bear reference to worldly appearances. A supramundane existent thing is not a worldly appearance but can be presented to the spirit through the word.<sup>37</sup>

4. The liminal experience in human consciousness of an historically arriving revelation is objectivized and articulated in religion. This is in fact a liminal experience of grace, which is the self-revelation of God and illumines all human consciousness, even before revelation arrives historically to articulate it. The objectivization can come about in an imperfect form in the non-Christian sphere but has found its unique, unsurpassable, and lasting presence in the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>38</sup>

Man is a potential recipient of revelation because grace transforms his nature, enabling him to hear and obey the God of grace. The discussion thus far has presented man as an embodied spirit equipped for knowledge of God. But the question arises whether and how he can know Him as a God of grace. In order to answer this question, Rahner's

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid., pp. 130-63.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., pp. 167-80.

distinction between "the power of hearing as nature" and "the power of hearing as effect of grace" must be made clear.<sup>39</sup>

Rahner understands human nature as:

that essential content of an entity both spiritual and sensitive called man, which inamissibly persists through sin and righteousness, grace and alienation from God, and in regard to which the possession of the Holy Spirit, adoptive sonship, justification, etc., are to be characterized as an unexacted gift, as "supernatural" grace, even prior to any question of the forgiveness of sin.<sup>40</sup>

Nature is anything which "belongs to the constitution of man even in independence of Revelation and the vocation which raises him by grace to a participation in the life of God in Trinity."<sup>41</sup> Man's natural openness to divine reality is the capacity to know God as the Origin of all things and as a free, transcendent Person. Grace, on the other hand, is God's communication of Himself to man, so that man participates in the divine nature and life of God. It is intimacy with God, culminating in the Beatific Vision and depending upon the incarnation of Christ for mediation of the participation of divine nature. God's communication of Himself to man as a spiritual being will include the bestowal of the capacity to receive the gift consciously, that is, to know God's grace. This capacity exceeds all natural powers, for

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<sup>39</sup>"A Scheme for a Treatise of Dogmatic Theology," II, 1:21.

<sup>40</sup>"The Theological Concept of Concupiscentia," II, 1:375.

<sup>41</sup>"Theos in the New Testament," II, 1:82.

grace is unexacted, not a necessary consequence of anything essentially belonging to human nature.<sup>42</sup>

Man is supernaturally open to divine reality because of his creation by God in view of grace and for the sake of grace. Because God desired to communicate Himself in grace through Christ, He created man to be His partner in the dialogue of mutual knowledge and love. He provided him with several existentials (relationships or situations within each of which he can realize certain possibilities). There is first of all a corporeal existential in which man must take up a position with regard to the material world in his knowledge. Man also has a spiritual-social existential in which he enters relationships with other spirits embodied in matter. He lives in a transcendent or religious existential, by which he is oriented to the supreme spiritual being, God. If he possessed only these existentials, he could achieve a finite beatitude in his orientation toward God and man.<sup>43</sup>

Man, however, does not exist in a state of pure nature but is given a supernatural existential ordering him to the life of grace in a universe created for Christ. This existential enters his consciousness, interiorly ordering him to communion with God and orienting him toward Christ. It is within this existential that he makes moral decisions, moved

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<sup>42</sup>"Nature and Grace," TI, 4:166-87.

<sup>43</sup>"The Dignity and Freedom of Man," TI, 2:238-42.

by the good will given by grace.<sup>44</sup> This existential, in which grace is offered to man and affects him, is not dependent upon historical contact with Christianity.

Rahner writes:

There are stirrings of grace which precede the act of accepting justification in a free act of faith and love. There is also grace outside the Church and its sacraments.<sup>45</sup>

Though nature and grace and their respective powers of hearing are distinct, they penetrate each other. The natural existentials are necessary presuppositions for the supernatural knowledge of God. Man's preapprehension of absolute being is the point at which man's spirit is enlightened to grasp the offer of absolute being to communicate itself in grace. The horizon of natural knowledge of God is widened to include grace as an intelligible object.<sup>46</sup>

Man's openness to the order of grace is an obediential potency for supernatural life by free acceptance of grace. When Rahner says that man has a capacity for grace and for revelation of grace, he means more than that grace does not contradict nature and can be received by it. He means that man has a positive openness for grace, an ability to receive God's love and to return it, a power to hear and obey. In order to receive Love and the beatific vision, he

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<sup>44</sup>"Concerning the Relationship between Nature and Grace," TI, 1:297-318.

<sup>45</sup>"Nature and Grace," TI, 4:179.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 4:178-80.

must be able to accept them as one who has room and scope, understanding and desire for them. He always has the potency for grace (even in Hell), though he has the freedom to scorn it.<sup>47</sup> (But Rahner is not a universalist. The unbeliever in Hell has assumed a definitive attitude toward grace and made a free and total disposal of himself in death.)<sup>48</sup> The obediential potency is made possible by the dynamism of grace which works in the supernatural existential, impelling the human spirit toward its absolute fulfilment.<sup>49</sup>

Man always exists in a concrete order of grace, in spite of original sin. The concrete existence of a person who has not undergone explicit conversion to the Christian Church is not to be described as his "nature," but rather as his "quiddity," that is, his nature overlaid with the existential of supernatural grace.<sup>50</sup>

In his original state man did not exist in "pure nature" but lived in the supernatural order. He possessed sanctifying grace, which justified him and made him a sharer in the divine nature, destined for transcendent glorification in the Beatific Vision. The consequences of sanctifying grace were conditional immortality and integrity, by

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<sup>47</sup>"Concerning the Relationship between Nature and Grace," TI, 1:311-12.

<sup>48</sup>K. Rahner, Zur Theologie des Todes (Freiburg: Herder, 1958), pp. 34-48.

<sup>49</sup>"Nature and Grace," TI, 4:186-87.

<sup>50</sup>"Concerning the Relationship between Nature and Grace," TI, 1:313-15.

which he was able to exhaustively engage his being in personal decision.<sup>51</sup>

Original sin is mankind's situation of damnation resulting from the sin of the first man. It is the loss of sanctifying grace, placing men in a state of inward alienation from God and under the dominion of the devil. Its consequences are death in guilt and rebellious concupiscence. It is an existential of guilt which all men have by nature, because they are born into it. This situation is ratified through personal sin (Rom. 5:12).<sup>52</sup>

Man's nature as a free spirit with an obediencial potency for supernatural life remains unchanged after the fall of Adam. He lost his elevation to the supernatural order, but not the obediencial potency for elevation, and this potency is often actualized in his moral decisions. In his freedom, which is an inamissible part of his spiritual personality, he is able to take up a position toward grace and perform salutary acts. His freedom is the condition for the existence of guilt and can be exercised either in unbelief or in acceptance of justification by faith and love.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup>Rahner and Vorgrimler, pp. 328-29.

<sup>52</sup>"Original Sin," SM, 4:328-34.

<sup>53</sup>Rahner and Vorgrimler, pp. 329-33.

In its infralapsarian condition man's supernatural existential is not lost but is transmuted by Christ's work into the existential of objective redemption, in which grace is always offered to man. Even if man had not sinned, Christ would have become incarnate and His exaltation would have divinized man. The unification and glorification of fallen humanity through Christ, however, required an atonement.<sup>54</sup> All men, even those who lived before Christ, were redeemed intuitu meritorum Christi. Objective redemption is more than a juridical removal of guilt. It is an interior transmutation of man. In other words, the supernatural existential of objective redemption makes itself felt in consciousness in the awareness of the ability to perform a salutary act. Such prevenient grace is offered to all, although the proximate possibility of a salutary act through elevation by grace is limited by terrestrial circumstances.<sup>55</sup>

The existential of objective redemption annuls the logical consequences of original sin (wrath, enmity, dominion of the devil, damnation, etc.). These can only be acquired by personal guilt as the result of a free act

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<sup>54</sup>Ibid.; also K. Rahner, "Abstiegen ins Totenreich," Schriften zur Theologie (Cologne: Benziger Verlag, 1966), 7:145-49.

<sup>55</sup>"The Theological Concept of Concupiscentia," TI, 1:376-77.

which ratifies the situation of original sin. Original sin is sin only by analogy and must be ratified if its consequences are to be realized. Objective redemption creates a "supratemporal region of existence" before reason is awakened to freedom and the possibility of voluntary sin in a person's life. The reign of God's purpose of grace over every human being from birth is most perfectly manifested in the Virgin Mary's sinlessness from her conception, while for ordinary Christians there is a temporal interval between the beginning of existence and the realization of God's purpose of grace in the commencement of justification.<sup>56</sup> Rahner abstains from relating all this to the question of the Limbo of the Infants, which he asserts is an open question today.<sup>57</sup>

Original sin hinders personal freedom because of concupiscence. Original sin is called sin only by analogy, since only voluntary acts can be sin. It seeks to reveal itself in the personal sins of the individual (Rom. 5:12; 6:6,17,20; 7:14,20,23; 8:2). Concupiscence is an element in the concrete concept of original sin, but it also is called sin by analogy, since, as explained by the Council of Trent (Session V, Canon V), it arises out of transgression and can give occasion to fresh transgression. Paul never calls concupiscence sin in the precise sense. He distinguishes concupiscence from the primal sin (Rom. 7:8) and

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<sup>56</sup>"The Immaculate Conception," TI, 1:207-208.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., 1:212.

recognizes it for something still remaining in the justified man (Rom. 13:14; Gal. 5:16; Eph. 4:22; Col. 3:5), who is no longer under the condemnation of sin (Rom. 5:16; 8:1).<sup>58</sup>

Concupiscence may be defined as spontaneous desire which precedes free decision about objects bringing forth desire and which resists free decision. Concupiscence implies a tension between the person (the being who must freely dispose of himself in self-determination) and his nature (everything within him which must be disposed of, including his desires). The person never wholly absorbs his whole nature into his free decisions, for his desires resist them. These resisting desires are not only bodily but also involve man's spiritual life. Nor are they immoral or biased toward evil. They are premoral and bivalent and can resist a bad decision as well as a good one. Only free decisions are good or evil. Man is never totally corrupt in his desires, for some part of him will always resist an evil decision.<sup>59</sup>

Even though concupiscence hinders freedom, the grace which transforms the nature of all men enables them to freely make moral decisions and perform salutary acts.

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<sup>58</sup>"The Theological Concept of Concupiscentia," II, 1:346-48.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., 1:358-77.

Enabling grace is a presupposition of moral decision and therefore exists in man's preapprehension of reality. God offers grace freely even before verbal revelation of it. Verbal revelation is intelligible to the hearer because it explicates what is always being offered to man. Man is available to God for revelation because he lives in the concrete order of grace.<sup>60</sup>

Man's hearing of God's revelation is possible because grace transforms his consciousness. The transformation of nature by causing it to be penetrated by grace will necessarily be a transformation of consciousness. Man is a spiritual being, and grace within him is never pre-conscious, but makes itself felt and affects his actions.<sup>61</sup> Grace is God's communication of Himself, which includes communication of knowledge about Himself. Rahner makes much of uncreated grace, upon which the created grace which produces sanctification depends. Uncreated grace is the presence of God Himself in man, making Himself known to the human intellect and causing man's direct knowledge of God, which reaches its perfection in the Beatific Vision. God's inner presence is necessary for the hearing of revelation and for justification by faith and love.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup>Rahner and Vorgrimler, pp. 308-309.

<sup>61</sup>Rahner, Hearers of the Word, pp. 22, 178.

<sup>62</sup>"Some Implications of the Scholastic Concept of Uncreated Grace," TI, 1:319-46.

Grace is not merely extrinsic to man's spiritual life but interior. Extrinsicism was the view of nineteenth-century neo-scholastic Thomists who taught that grace is proclaimed in objective revelation and known by faith but gives no sign of its presence in the conscious personal life of man. The opposite is modernistic intrinsicism, which taught that a man can be saved by his soul's natural experience of God. Rahner rejects both, affirming that man has a supernatural (and often implicit) knowledge of God's grace, which he experiences in all his moral and spiritual acts, and that therefore grace is not beyond human consciousness.<sup>63</sup>

Revelation is the changing of the formal object of man's consciousness of infinite reality, so that grace is offered to him. The formal object of any conscious act is not a particular object of knowledge but an horizon of knowledge which is grasped by man's faculty of preapprehension and by which all individual objects are intelligible. In religious knowledge the formal object, the horizon, is God Himself and is objectified in religious themes and concepts. Revelation raises the level of objectification. The formal object of man's natural spiritual openness to God differs from the formal object of his supernatural openness to God, though the difference might not be clear to man as

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<sup>63</sup>"Nature and Grace," TI, 4:165-85.

he reflects about God. Sometimes no new conceptual object will be presented to the mind as it encounters revelation.<sup>64</sup>

Natural revelation is man's recognition of infinite reality by his natural powers. It is what can be known about God at all times and in all places by deduction from the necessary reference of all earthly things to God. The necessary orientation of all men toward God through their preapprehension of being must be taken into account in the proofs of His existence. The content of natural revelation is the transcendence and personality of God as One Whose attributes are not finite, One Who is the cause of all reality, and One Who is free either to reveal Himself further or to conceal Himself. Natural revelation can ultimately present God only as an ambiguous mystery, whose relationship with His creatures, whether one of damnation or of forgiveness, is unknown.<sup>65</sup>

God's further revelation of Himself is both non-reflexive and reflexive. Non-reflexive revelation is universal and enters the consciousness of all men. It is unthematic and non-propositional, affecting man at the deepest level of his spiritual person and affirming itself in his moral actions. It advances beyond natural revelation

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 4:178-79; K. Rahner, The Christian of the Future (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967), pp. 84-85.

<sup>65</sup> Rahner and Vorgrimler, pp. 409-410; "Theos in the New Testament," TI, 1:79-86.

by affirming that the divine mystery has come near to us and desires intimacy with us; in this affirmation all Christian teaching is implicitly contained. When men attempt to thematize their implicit knowledge in the form of religions and philosophies, the result is a faulty objectivization of their knowledge.<sup>66</sup>

Special revelation is that thematization of universal revelation which is given through prophets and apostles, confirmed by miracles, and guaranteed by God through the church and its magisterium. This official, public revelation is reflexive and propositional. It confirms and explicates the grace which is already present in man's consciousness.<sup>67</sup>

The acceptance of revelation can be either non-reflexive or reflexive. One who has had no contact with explicit preaching may accept universal revelation by unconsciously making it the principle of his behavior. One who explicitly rejects verbal revelation may accept grace at a deeper level of his being. A convinced Christian, of course, accepts verbal revelation reflexively. Grace is needed for any acceptance. But this poses no problem, for the grace preveniently present and offered in all human

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<sup>66</sup>Rahner and Vorgrimler, pp. 410-11.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., pp. 411-13.

consciousness is sufficient grace, both revealing itself and empowering man to accept.<sup>68</sup>

#### The Position of the Lutheran Confessions

According to Karl Rahner, the quiddity or actual existence of man is always his nature plus the influence of grace. For him, nature apart from grace is merely a theological abstraction. When, however, the Lutheran Confessions speak of man's ability "by nature," the quiddity to which they refer is an actually existing graceless human nature, which does not know or accept grace or hear the Word of grace obedientially. Whereas Rahner could only accept the statement that "man by nature does not experience grace" as a mere tautology, Lutheran theology understands it as a realistic description of man before his conversion.

The Confessions are in agreement with Rahner in viewing nature as that content of man which inamissibly persists through sin and grace, original righteousness and original sin, sanctification and resurrection (Ep. I, 2-7).<sup>69</sup> It is a spiritual and sensitive entity, man's essence as body and soul, as the creation and handiwork of God (SD I, 2, 30-41). Man's nature is his creatureliness, and his quiddity after

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<sup>68</sup>"Nature and Grace," TI, 4:179-84.

<sup>69</sup>All citations of the Lutheran Confessions in English are taken from The Book of Concord, ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959).

the Fall of Adam is a nature corrupted by the devil, although the distinction between creatureliness and total corruption cannot be empirically observed.<sup>70</sup> But the Confessions differ from Rahner in distinguishing man's quiddity before conversion through the means of grace from his quiddity afterward. While the man who comes to faith receives the blessings of grace (AC, IV, V, IX: SC, II, 5-6), the same cannot be said of the man without the means of grace. The natural man of 1 Cor. 2:14 is "without the grace, help, and activity of the Spirit" (AC, XVII, 2). He is not penetrated by grace but "uses only his natural powers" (Ap. XVIII). His is a natura non renovata (Ap II, 30).<sup>71</sup> He does not have the knowledge of God because he has not heard the Gospel and received its consolation (Ap XVIII, 8). Such is his quiddity before his regeneration (Ep II, 1), until his enlightenment (S D II, 9; Ep II, 2).

The word "nature" can mean the essence of a being, or it can mean a determinative quality which inheres in the essence (Ep I, 22). The latter sense, which connotes the

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<sup>70</sup> Edmund Schlink, Theology of the Lutheran Confessions, trans. Paul F. Koehneke and Herbert J. A. Bouman (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1961), pp. 44-48.

<sup>71</sup> German and Latin citations from the Lutheran Confessions are taken from Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche, 5th ed. edited by H. Lietzmann (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1963).

quiddity of the being, is intended in the statement that "all men are full of evil lust and inclinations from their mothers' wombs and are unable by nature (von Natur) to have true fear of God and true faith in God" (A C II, 1).

"Nature" here refers to what man can do by his own powers, by his own strength and reason (A C II, 3). The same is true of the phrase "by nature the children of wrath," where "nature" is used in the New Testament sense of a "determination of being" by reason of origin<sup>72</sup> (SD I, 6). All the confessional passages so far cited to describe a "pure" (graceless) nature refer not to man as he might have been in a differently created universe (as Rahner thinks) but to the concretely existing natural man.

Christ's redemption of mankind does not result in an immediate interior transmutation of man's existential situation, apart from the means of grace (the Word of God and the sacraments). The Lutheran Confessions teach the necessity of faith in a regenerate heart which knows and trusts in Christ through the message about Him. The simplest and clearest exposition of this fact is probably the progression of thought in Luther's explanation of the Apostles' Creed: I am a lost creature; but Christ has redeemed me with His

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<sup>72</sup>Helmut Koester, "φύσις," Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey Bromily (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964-74), 9:251-77.

holy precious blood and His innocent suffering and death, that I might live under Him; yet I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Him or come to Him; but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel and sanctified me in true faith (SC II, 3-6). God has liberated us through His Son, but it is further necessary that He regenerate and illuminate us through Baptism and the Holy Spirit (SD, II, 15). Christ is the Savior of man's corrupted nature, but this is "for righteousness to 'every one who has faith' (Rom. 10:4)" (Ap IV, 30). A quotation of John 8:36 on liberation by Christ is immediately followed by a quotation of John 3:5 on rebirth (Ap IV, 31). Salvation is in Christ, but it is not an anonymous (nameless) salvation: "There is no other name under heaven whereby we must be saved (Acts 4:12) . . . To cite the name of Christ is to trust in the name of Christ as the cause or price on account of which we are saved" (Ap IV, 98).

In the Smalcald Articles, III, viii, Luther puts forward his pre-well-known argument that "God will not deal with us except through His external Word and sacrament" (10). The antonym of "external" means is interior "enthusiasm" (enthusiasmus, Schwaermerei), such as is found in the spiritualists who "boast that the Spirit came upon them without the testimony of the Scriptures" (6) or in the pope who "boasts that 'all laws are in the shrine of his heart'" and "claims that whatever he decides and commands in

his churches is spirit and law, even when it is above and contrary to the Scriptures" (4). Melanchthon, teaching the necessity of the sacraments, states that the Spirit does not come through man's own preparations (Ap XIII, 13). The Holy Ghost and the power to live the new life do not even come through the revealed Law but only through the preaching of the Gospel, Gal. 3:2, 14 (SD, VI, 11).

The confessional writers use an exegetical rule which may be stated thus: Any passage which attributes the bestowal of grace to means excludes the possibility of any other way of receiving grace. In offering proof for the statement: "We obtain the forgiveness of sins only by faith in Christ," Melanchthon uses passages which call Christ the mediator (Rom. 5:2) and the propitiator (Rom. 3:25, Heb. 4:14-16), promise forgiveness to everyone who believes in Christ (Acts 10:43), or otherwise speak of a promise given to faith (Gal. 3:22) (Ap IV, 75-84). The same rule is applied to the statement that faith comes from hearing, Rom. 10:17 (Ep II, 4). The rationale for this rule is the fact that only that plan of salvation which is based on a sure Word of God can give us any firm hope (Ap IV, 119, 262).

God's reconciliation of man to Himself because of Christ is prior to the individual man's reception of the reconciliation through faith: "Therefore we are accounted righteous for Christ's sake when we believe that God is reconciled to us because of Him" (Ap IV, 97). The clause

following the "that" expresses what dogmaticians call "objective reconciliation," which is not, as Rahner thinks, the interior reception of justification by the individual or the immediate cause of it, but is the external, juridical reconciliation of man by God, effected through Christ's death and offered to man through the Gospel, in order that he might be justified by faith.<sup>73</sup> Therefore the ambassadors of Christ call for the subjective reconciliation through faith: "Be reconciled to God" (Ap XXIV, 80). Therefore He who saves must also be heard, for the Father says: "Listen to Him" (Matt. 17:5) and appoints messengers to preach repentance and forgiveness in His name (SD, II, 51).

Lutheran theology shares Rahner's concerns about unbelief which refuses to come to grips with questions of religious truth and is skeptical of Christianity's historical claims and also about subjectivism in the church which is indifferent about truth or wants to demythologize the Gospel. Its approach to these problems differs from Rahner's, however, because of its insistence that the cognitivity of grace does not imply or require an experience of grace prior to the use of the means of grace.

Faith has a truth-content--clear and necessary truth (Ap, Preface, 16), obvious truth (Ap, XX, 6), eternal truth

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<sup>73</sup>Francis Pieper, Christian Dogmatics (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950-53), 2:347-51.

(SD VII, 43), but also to the scriptural Word of God (SD, The Summary Formulation, 13; II, 50-51) and to the teaching of evangelical theologians (Ap XII, 3, 88-90). The Preface to the Book of Concord accordingly stresses the importance of true, pure, correct doctrine.<sup>74</sup> The Confessions everywhere assume the rational meaningfulness of religious language. God is knowable (LC II, 63-65). He is not only called God but is God (AC I, 2). Helpful and meaningful distinctions can be made in theology as in all other discourse (Ap XXIV, 16-17; Ep V, 5-7). Mysteries can be profitably discussed (SD XI, 26; VIII, 96), although reason must recognize its limits. Truth is accessible to Christian intelligence (SD, Preface, 10). The clear meaning of Scripture is to be derived from the text of Scripture through grammatical exegesis.<sup>75</sup> Clear words do not need an acute understanding but only attentive listening (Ap IV, 33). Faith is knowledge, although it is not only knowledge but also trust (Ap IV, 304).

The confessional writers do not present an epistemology to justify their use of religious language, as Rahner does, and therefore no comparison can be made. In the various editions of his Loci, Melanchthon discussed the

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<sup>74</sup>The Book of Concord, pp. 3-16.

<sup>75</sup>Ralph Bohlmann, Principles of Biblical Interpretation in the Lutheran Confessions (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1968), pp. 83-97.

importance of the rational faculty in its relationship to the will, using a version of Aristotelian psychology (compare Ap IV, 304).<sup>76</sup> A book entitled Luthers Philosophie, by a certain "Theophilus," informs us that Luther developed an epistemological philosophy of language in defending his view of the means of grace, defending the importance of the external word in all knowledge, over against Zwingli's distinction between the "outer word" of the ear and the "inner word" of the heart, and also over against interpretations which do not hold firm to the words of the biblical text. The materials of knowledge are given in words, and "mancherlei Deutung und keinen rechten, gewissen Verstand eines Dings oder Spruchs oder Worts haben, ist eine Mutter, Ursprung, und Wurzel aller Irrthuerer." An unambiguous understanding based on Worterkennntnis is necessary to combat the errors of speculation (the arbitrary use of imagination, due to original sin). God made man a speaking creature and provided for the meaningfulness of language, including religious language. Truth is given in the word "God," and speculative substitutes should not be made for it.<sup>77</sup>

The historicity of the Gospel must be maintained. The confessional writers are appalled at the skepticism of

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<sup>76</sup>Holsten Fagerberg, A New Look at the Lutheran Confessions, trans. Gene Lund (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1972), pp. 126-29.

<sup>77</sup>Theophilus, Luthers Philosophie (Hannover: Carl Meyer, 1870), 1, passim.

some popes and others who treat Bible stories as fables (Ap VII/VIII, 27; SD II, 9). Luther could well agree with Rahner that conversio ad phantasmata in history is necessary for knowledge of God, for he recognizes that God is knowable because of His acts among and upon men (LC II, 63-65). The incarnation of Christ is indispensable and must be taught (SD III, VIII); however, the Confessions defend it not with anthropological reasons, as Rahner does, but with soteriological reasons, stressing the relationship of Christ's incarnation to His vicarious satisfaction (SD III, 55-58) and His threefold office (SD VIII, 76-96). The Gospel is a sacred history, although it must also be remembered that it also includes the promise of forgiveness and salvation which is attached to the history as its purpose (Ap IV, 48-52; Ep III, 6).

The divergence of Lutheran theology from Rahner's apologetics arises from the Lutheran denial that man's availability to God for revelation requires a prior experience of grace. Man is distinguished from the beasts by his reason, which the Holy Spirit uses in his conversion by bringing about new activities in the intellect by means of the Gospel (SD II, 53, 55-59, 70). Even natural man can hear the Word of God externally (SD II, 53) and can talk about God (Ap XVIII, 4). Lutheran theology has no quarrel with the view that God can be known and described analogically.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>78</sup>Heinrich Schmid, The Doctrinal Theology of the

But natural man's moral decisions are not an obediential hearing of God, and his reason has no salvific knowledge of God (SA III, 1, 1-11). He cannot meet God historically in false, pagan religions (LC II, 66). However Rahner may wish to distinguish the Gospel from Greek myths by relating the former to man's destiny of union with God and expression of God, that destiny is not known or believed by natural man but needs to be uncovered by the Holy Spirit. The prior assumptions which one Lutheran writer lists as necessary prerequisites for meaningful hearing of the Gospel (that is, awareness of the existence of a moral God who makes moral demands upon man and conviction of the objective existence of the world and of oneself)<sup>79</sup> can be known without any experience of grace prior to conversion through the means of grace.

The reason for the spiritual inability of man apart from the means of grace is original sin, which has so corrupted man's nature that he does not have the power to hear God obedientially. The Apology of the Augsburg Confession offers the following definition of original sin:

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Evangelical Lutheran Church, 3d ed. rev., trans. Charles Hay and Henry E. Jacobs (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1899), pp. 111-17.

<sup>79</sup>David Scaer, "Theses on the Law and Gospel," The Springfielder, 37 (June 1973): 53-55.

Our churches also teach that since the fall of Adam all men who are propagated according to nature are born in sin. That is to say, they are without fear of God, are without trust in God, and are concupiscent. And this disease or vice of origin is truly sin, which even now damns and brings eternal death on those who are not born again through Baptism and the Holy Spirit (II, 1-2, Latin).

The Roman Catholic authors of the Confutatio Pontificii rejected the inclusion of these elements in the definition of original sin (Ap II, 1, 38, 42). Like Karl Rahner, they maintained that the absence of fear and love of God is actual, voluntary sin and is not inevitable for man after the fall, who has power and freedom to produce fear, love and trust in God, and that concupiscence, or the loss of integrity, is a neutral penalty of original sin, hindering but not destroying spiritual freedom. The reply of the second article of the Apology of the Augsburg Confession (which is summarized in the following paragraphs) is that there is a serious contradiction between the opponents' acknowledgement that original sin is the loss of original righteousness and their attribution of power and freedom to human nature after the fall (8). The first point minimizes the force of the second (7).

The lack of original righteousness means that man does not fear and love God. The loss of the image of God (Eph. 5:9; Col. 3:10) is the loss of knowledge of God, and it must be restored. There is a lack of righteousness in all man's powers (Ap II, 9-23). Rahner is aware that original sin affects the higher powers of human nature as

well as the lower. Nevertheless, he thinks that man's spirit or person can dispose of itself freely in choosing good or evil.

Concupiscence (evil desire) must follow when righteousness is lost. Ignorance of God includes distrust, contempt, and hatred of God (Ap II, 24-31). Whether or not Fagerberg is right in arguing that Melanchthon in the Apology misquotes Augustine's Against Julian to show that original sin remains after baptism, it is true (as Fagerberg acknowledges) that Melanchthon follows the Augustinian tradition that original sin is concupiscence.<sup>80</sup>

Concupiscence is the loss of integrity in the sense of inordinatam dispositionem partium animae (eine unordentliche Begierde oder Lust in der Seele) or concupiscentia immoderata (boese Lust im Fleisch) (Ap II, 27-28), but not in Rahner's sense of premoral or neutral desire which resists personal freedom. It is called sin by Paul because it is contrary to God's Law, Rom. 7:7,23 (Ap II, 39-41). This argument is incompatible with Rahner's claim, following the Council of Trent (Session V), that concupiscence is called sin only by analogy, because it arises from sin and leads to sin. The fact that inclinations or emotions are not actual sin (voluntary acts) does not mean that they are premoral or ambivalent. This would be to deny the evil of

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<sup>80</sup>Fagerberg, pp. 133-43.

such attitudes as doubt about God's wrath and Word and anger at His judgments and to follow pagan jurisprudence, which ignores God's judgments. Most important, evil inclination needs the grace of Christ to be forgiven (Ap II, 42-45). The Lutheran Confessions contain no commentary on Rom. 7:8, which Rahner cites to prove that concupiscence is merely a consequence of sin but not sin itself.<sup>81</sup> However, Melanchthon argues that the fact that concupiscence is a penalty for sin does not mean that it cannot be a sin itself (Ap II, 46-50).

Lutheran theology is incompatible with Rahner's view that original sin has weakened freedom by making it possible for nature (spontaneous desires) to resist man's person (man as a free agent). Man's whole essence, both person and nature, has been corrupted by original sin; otherwise Christ would not have had to die for the whole man (SD I, 6; SA III, 1). Rahner thinks that the grace of atonement by Christ has transmuted man's nature apart from the means of grace, but the completeness of man's corruption makes this impossible. Rahner argues that if man were totally depraved, his repentance would be impossible, since an exhaustible impression of evil upon his being would leave no starting point for a new decision or a fresh reposition

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<sup>81</sup>Supra, p. 36.

of the elements of his nature.<sup>82</sup> Luther would call this an argument of reason, which does not understand the depth of original sin (SA III, 1, 3). The possibility for man's repentance and conversion remains in total depravity, since original sin is not identical with human nature in a deterministic, Manichaeian sense. However, this possibility does not depend upon any virtue or resistance in man (SD I-II).

Man by nature does have power and freedom for a natural knowledge of God and for civil righteousness. He can choose good and evil in external matters not involving fear and faith toward God, can talk about God, and can make (but rarely obey) sound judgments (Ap XVIII). This freedom produces the righteousness of reason, which is honorable and even rewarded by God (Ap IV, 9-16, 22-24). But none of the above includes Rahner's notion of freedom as a capacity for a God-pleasing life.

Natural man does not possess an obediential potency for spiritual life by free acceptance of grace. Lutheran theology can be said to accept the negative aspect of Rahner's theory of the supernatural existential of man, but not the positive. The negative aspect is the simple fact that grace does not absolutely contradict nature but

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<sup>82</sup>"The Theological Concept of Concupiscentia," TI, 1:367-68.

may be received by it. Man is always ordered to grace insofar as God created him in such a way that it is possible for him to be converted to Him after falling into sin:

When the Fathers defend free will, they affirm a capacity for this freedom in such a way that by divine grace it can be converted to God and become truly free, a condition for which it was originally created (SD II, 23).

Since man is not a block or a beast, it is possible for him to be converted by hearing the Word of God (SD II, 19-23; LC II, 64).

But the positive aspect of Rahner's theory does not apply: man by nature has no openness to grace in the sense of a positive dynamism toward the fulfilment of his being. A "capacity for freedom" of this kind is impossible for him, because he is turned against God and toward evil through the lust of the flesh, Gal. 5:17; Gen. 8:21 (SD II, 17-24). According to the Lutheran dogmatician Abraham Calov, this "obediential power" must be produced in the unregenerate by the Holy Ghost.<sup>83</sup>

The theory of a universal, unthematic revelation of God in His grace in the consciousness of man apart from the means of grace is incompatible with the Lutheran Confessions. Man's consciousness of God apart from the means of grace is a distorted consciousness of His judgment on sin. Lutheran

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<sup>83</sup>Schmid, p. 475.

confessional theology cannot accept Rahner's view that universal revelation and special revelation have the same formal object: the God of grace. Man by nature has "to some extent" (aliquo modo) a knowledge of God's Law (Ap IV, 7), and from this he has "to some extent" (aliquam) a knowledge of God (SD V, 22). But this natural knowledge cannot be called true or right knowledge of God (Ap IV, 351; II, 34; SD II, 9, 16) or a right understanding of Him (SD V, 22). The right knowledge of God is to receive His blessings because of His grace rather than our own merits and works (Ap IV, 60). While natural reason can know God's judgment upon its sin from the natural law, Rom. 1:32 (SD II, 9; LC II, 65-67), to know God's existence and judgments (as, for example, King Saul did) is not at all the same thing as to trust in His mercy for forgiveness (Ap XII, 8, 36). Natural reason commonly ignores or doubts God's wrath and judgment (Ap II, 42; IV, 270), lives in carnal security (Ap XII, 32), and is under the delusion that one can be righteous and escape divine wrath by good works (Ap IV, 9-11; 229-230). The more that natural man comes to realize the seriousness of God's wrath over his sin, however, the more he will flee His judgment (Ap IV, 270) and is angry at Him (Ap IV, 301).<sup>84</sup> Whether Werner Elert is right in writing that Luther taught that natural man, even before he encounters

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<sup>84</sup>Schlink, pp. 48-52.

the revealed Law, hates God explicitly because He demands of him the impossible,<sup>85</sup> may be debatable, since Luther maintained that the total inability of man to please God can be fully known only from revelation (SA III, i, 3; II, 4). Nevertheless, it is certain that natural man does hate God (Ap II, 8, 29) and doubt His mercy (Ap II, 8; IV, 17) and will find nothing in the Law, either natural or revealed, to move him to know God as He wants to be known in His mercy (LC II, 65-67; III, 10).

Man by nature does not have an evangelical knowledge of God. Only when we know what God has done for us through Christ in the Gospel can we recognize and believe in His goodness and grace (LC II, 64-68). Only when the Law is explained spiritually, as a preparation for the Gospel (SD V, 10), can man see how deep his sinful corruption is and how great God's wrath over it is (SA III, iii). Thus the revealed Gospel is necessary to show him how he needs Christ to quiet the wrath of God (Ap IV, 46, 80, 214).<sup>86</sup>

According to Rahner and the Marechalians Thomists, man has a "natural desire for God," which arises from a nature transformed by grace and is implicit in all of

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<sup>85</sup>Werner Elert, The Structure of Lutheranism, trans. Walter A. Hanson (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1962), 1:17-43.

<sup>86</sup>Schlink, pp. 52-59.

natural man's spiritual acts.<sup>87</sup> The Lutheran Confessions deny that a love of God can exist where there is no explicit faith in a reconciliation with God through Christ (Ap IV, 18, 36-38). Natural man basically hates God and does not seek His mercy (Ap II, 8). Luther did not believe that the heathen were longing for the Gospel.<sup>88</sup> The heathen may be said, in a sense, to be seeking grace and good (Ap IV, 207; LC I, 1). But all their seeking is done through a trust in works and creatures (Ap IV, 288; LC I, 16-21), so that their myths and worship cannot be said to be implicit faith in the true God but are "wicked belief" (Ap IV, 207) and an entrusting of themselves to "an empty nothing" (LC I, 20). The statement of a Lutheran theologian that heathen myths may be a surfacing of repressed "natural knowledge of God's redemptive plan" and of Mircea Eliade's "yearning for Paradise"<sup>89</sup> must be viewed with caution; it is Lutheran if it means that the myths express a general awareness of the sinner's need for deliverance, but not if the myths are thought to be articulations of the evangelical plan of redemption through Christ--and therefore a means of grace.

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<sup>87</sup>"Nature and Grace," TI, 4:170.

<sup>88</sup>Elert, p. 386.

<sup>89</sup>J. W. Montgomery, "The Apologists of Eucatastrophe," Myth, Allegory, and Gospel, ed. J. W. Montgomery (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, Inc., 1974), pp. 25-26.

No experience of grace is present in the consciousness of the natural man, apart from the means of grace. Rahner maintains that grace is offered within man's consciousness in his awareness of his ability to perform salutary acts. The Lutheran Confessions, however, deny to natural man the ability to keep God's Law or to please Him (SA III, 4-10). Grace is not bestowed through the Law (Ap XV, 10-12), which always accuses man of shortcomings and condemns him (Ap IV, 36-39, 166-68). God's offer of grace is His promise to forgive sins on account of Christ (Ap IV, 43-47). On the basis of the Law, to which natural consciousness is limited, there is no true knowledge of grace.

The revelation of grace comes as a disturbance to natural consciousness. The knowledge of God which comes from the Law is quite different from that which comes from the Gospel. The one shows God making demands and threats, while the other shows Him accepting men for Christ's sake (SD V, 22-26). "Blind reason" imagines that a man can and must earn his salvation by works (Ap IV, 265; SA III, iii, 18) and is repelled by the Gospel doctrine of grace apart from human love and works (Ap IV, 230). Since natural reason misunderstands both God's judgment and God's mercy, it is hostile to the Gospel (SD II, 9).

Rahner views the Gospel as an explication of the grace which is already present in the hearer before he hears the Gospel and which, as prevenient grace, prepares him for

a meaningful hearing of the Gospel. Such a view is impossible for the Lutheran Confessions, which regard the relationship between the natural consciousness (which is an imperfect knowledge of the Law) and the Gospel more as a conjunction than as an explication. While Article V of the Solid Declaration does state that the Law is explained by the Gospel (18), this explanation consists in showing the sinner that he can never find comfort and deliverance from wrath and hell in the works of the Law but must seek them in:

. . . the content of the Gospel . . . that the Son of God, Christ our Lord, Himself assumed and bore the curse of the law and expiated and paid for all our sins (10-21).

The Gospel does not correspond to anything in natural experience, or to any experience under the Law (SD VI, 17-19), and yet its truth is not contradictory to that of the Law but compossible with it (Ap IV, 185-88, 388-89). The meaningfulness of the Gospel, which gives rise to joy, strength, and praise in the Christian heart, is that it supplies what is not found in the Law. This meaningfulness is achieved by conjunction:

To this office of the Law the New Testament immediately adds the consoling promise of grace in the Gospel . . . But where the Law exercises its office alone, without the addition of the Gospel, there is only death and hell (SA III, iii, 4-7).

"The preaching of the Law is not sufficient for genuine and salutary repentance; the Gospel must also be added to it" (Ap IV, 257).

Man's consciousness is not transformed by grace prior to the means of grace. It is transformed by the Holy Spirit through divine truth. The passages to which Rahner alludes to show the interiority of grace--for example, references to the work of the Pneuma and to His testimony and co-intercession<sup>90</sup>--all refer to an affecting of the human spirit through external means. The tenth article of the Solid Declaration cites similar passages but relates them to the doctrine of the means of grace: "For the Word through which we are called is a ministry of the Spirit . . . The Spirit wills to be efficacious through the Word" (29-32). The only prevenient grace recognized by the Lutheran Confessions is that which is brought by the Gospel:

Man's natural powers cannot contribute anything or help in any way to bring it about that God in his immeasurable kindness and mercy anticipates (praevenit, zuvorkomme) us and has His holy Gospel preached to us, through which the Holy Spirit wills to work such conversion and renewal in us, and through the preaching of His Word and our meditation upon it kindles faith and other God-pleasing virtues in us, so that they are gifts and works of the Holy Spirit alone (SD II, 71).

#### Summary of Chapter II

According to Karl Rahner, the explicit message of salvation explicates the grace which the hearer is always experiencing, even prior to his hearing of the Word of God

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<sup>90</sup>"Nature and Grace," TI, 4:178-79.

or reception of the sacraments. Man's nature is always overlaid with a supernatural existential of grace, which gives him a positive openness toward grace, makes him conscious of grace as God's self-communication, and strengthens his natural freedom and ability in spiritual matters (which are hindered but not destroyed by original sin).

In contrast, the Lutheran Confessions teach that the Word of God and the sacraments are necessary for faith and the appropriation of Christ's reconciliation of man to God. The natural man is totally corrupt and has no spiritual freedom or ability, no positive openness toward grace, and no true knowledge of God as He wants to be known.

## CHAPTER III

### THE CONTENT OF THE MESSAGE

This chapter is concerned with the explicit form of the Christian message of salvation and with its implicit form in man's consciousness, if there be such a thing. The incompatibility of Karl Rahner's position with that of the Lutheran Confessions can be summarized thus:

**Karl Rahner's Thesis:** The message of salvation is implicitly affirmed in the moral decisions of every man of good will.

**The Lutheran Antithesis:** The message of salvation is not found apart from scriptural revelation.

#### The Position of Karl Rahner

Human existence, according to Karl Rahner, is "at bottom nothing other than a listening to the message of God, eternal light and eternal life, an immersion in the depths of the living God, disclosed to us in grace."<sup>1</sup> He also asserts that this message is universally contained in human consciousness and is implicitly affirmed in the moral actions of the anonymous Christian. For an understanding

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<sup>1</sup>Karl Rahner, Hearers of the Word, trans. Michael Richards (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), p. 32.

of how this can be, it is necessary to examine the Roman Catholic message of salvation and also the Roman Catholic approach to dogmas and the connections between them.

As a loyal son of the Roman Catholic Church, Rahner teaches that a man is justified by grace in Christ through faith and love. Justification, the process by which man is made righteous, is the subjective appropriation of salvation. It must be understood, especially in dialogue with Protestants, that this involves a recognition of God's objective justification or absolution of the individual before he makes any decision. This absolution from sin took place in the death and resurrection of Christ, which has changed man's supernatural existential, his possibility of receiving God's communication of grace, so that in spite of his fallen nature and concupiscence he is offered grace and capable of receiving it. This existential situation can be ratified by free decision in subjective justification.<sup>2</sup>

Subjective justification is not, as Luther thought, an extrinsic, purely forensic attribution of Christ's righteousness, which would be a legal fiction and leave man an untransformed sinner.<sup>3</sup> God's declaration of righteousness is based on fact. The reality on which justification is

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<sup>2</sup>Karl Rahner, "Questions of Contemporary Theology on Justification," Theological Investigations (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1966), 4:199-201. Henceforth this collection will be referred to as TI.

<sup>3</sup>Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimler, Theological Dictionary, trans. Richard Strachan (New York: Herder and Herder, 1965), p. 439.

based is the impartation to man of uncreated grace, God Himself, Who by sharing His divine life divinizes man and makes him righteous.<sup>4</sup> Thus the supernatural existential of objective justification is the fact that "through faith bestowed by grace and through love man can be subjectively justified before God."<sup>5</sup>

Justification takes place by grace alone. Rahner commends Hans Kueng's book Justification, the thesis of which is that the Roman Catholic doctrine of justification actually agrees well with that of the Protestant Karl Barth. A correct understanding of the Council of Trent shows that Roman Catholicism rejects every kind of Pharisaic or synergistic self-justification. Objective justification in Christ is not merited by us; neither is justifying love; neither is prevenient grace which brings about justification.<sup>6</sup>

The Roman Catholic affirmation of sola gratia does not, however, contradict the concept of meriting increased grace. For it is grace that makes possible the meriting love and works. Thus contrition can be said to cause or merit

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<sup>4</sup>"Some Implications of the Scholastic Concept of Uncreated Grace," TI, 1:195. Cf. Hans Kueng, Justification. The Doctrine of Karl Barth and a Catholic Reflection, trans. Th. Collins, E. E. Talk, and D. Granskou (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1964), p. 202.

<sup>5</sup>"Questions of Contemporary Theology on Justification," TI, 4:203.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., TI, 4:201-6.

justification. While Rahner has updated the understanding of indulgences by basing their value upon the earnest prayer of the church and the communion of saints, he can still interpret them as remission of punishment obtained by the performance of certain acts.<sup>7</sup>

Objective justification is subjectively appropriated by means of faith and love. Rahner criticizes Kueng for speaking as if love were present only in embryo or initially in faith that justifies. Love is truly and fully present in such faith, for "if man is to be justified, he must love." Faith, the acceptance of grace, is informed by love, in order that the acceptance might be complete. All this is ontologically necessary: love, as openness to the mystery underlying all knowledge, is the deeper factor in the knowledge of God and perfects it by surrender to that mystery.<sup>8</sup>

Justification may be said to take place sola fide, if this means that faith is the only beginning of justification and contains love and the whole reality of justification within it, and if it means that faith is the

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., TI, 4:207; Rahner and Vorgrimler, p. 439; "Remarks on the Theology of Indulgences," TI, 2:175-202; K. Rahner, "Contrition," Sacramentum Mundi: An Encyclopedia of Theology, ed. Karl Rahner et al (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968-70), 2:2. Hereafter the work cited last will be referred to as SM.

<sup>8</sup> "Questions of Contemporary Theology on Justification," TI, 4:199-205.

acceptance of grace acting upon and in man, so that man is not thought to be working independently of grace. Either faith or love may be experienced by individuals or ages as the most decisive factor of Christian existence, although they are different aspects of the same process.<sup>9</sup> Rahner hopes that orthodox Protestantism and Roman Catholicism will eventually be able to make a united affirmation of the doctrine of justification.<sup>10</sup>

Justification through faith and love and related doctrines can be implicitly affirmed by a faith which has not consciously taken cognizance of them or articulated them. An explicit dogmatic statement is an unfolding of the basic subjective reflection which already takes place in the mere obedient listening to the Word of God. Since faith has a rational dimension, understanding is a moment in the process of hearing even when faith is an inchoate consciousness of grace derived from universal, unthematic revelation.<sup>11</sup>

Consciousness of revelation tends to articulate itself in history. In general salvation-history, man's consciousness of universal revelation comes to self-expression

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 4:199, 202; "The Commandment of Love in Relation to the Other Commandments," TI, 5:457-58; Rahner and Vorgrimler, p. 438.

<sup>10</sup>K. Rahner, *The Church after the Council*, trans. Davis C. Herron and Rodelinde Albrecht (New York: Herder and Herder, 1966), pp. 97-102.

<sup>11</sup>"What Is a Dogmatic Statement?" TI, 5:48-51.

in his spiritual and religious activities.<sup>12</sup> In the case of special revelation, the writers of Holy Scripture developed their theology, under the inspiration of the Spirit, by reflecting upon the data of their faith already known to them and their personal experiences of faith. The process of the self-articulation of faith continues in the history of the church through the evolution of dogma, for which the church has the promise of divine guidance and protection from error. In this evolution revealed truth confronts error and changes in formulation in order to remain the same in substance.<sup>13</sup>

Dogmatic development from the original materials in the Scriptures is made possible by five constitutive elements of its dynamics. The first is the presence of the Spirit in the church, moving it to witness and molding its words. The second element is the official magisterium, which has the duty of proclaiming the truths of revelation in all ages in the name of the church, and which also must carry on a dialogue with the unofficial voices in the church. The third dynamic element is rational reflection which draws out and formulates the truth of revelation. The fourth element is the human need to hand down a tradition

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<sup>12</sup>"History of the World and Salvation-History," TI, 5:97-114.

<sup>13</sup>"Theology in the New Testament," TI, 5:23-35.

so that each generation may know the God of their fathers. The fifth element is the church's reflexive awareness of revealed dogma, which can become more insightful without involving a new revelation.<sup>14</sup>

The explication of faith in dogmatic evolution follows certain logical laws which control the development of a doctrine from implicit affirmation to explicit affirmation. An evolved proposition may be implicit in an earlier one in three different ways. A formal implicit restates the content of the original proposition in different words. For example, the statement: "One and the same Logos is God and man" formally implies that "the person of the Logos has both a divine and a human nature." The virtual implicit of a proposition is explicated with the help of another proposition. The doctrine of transubstantiation, for example, is a virtual implicit. A third type of implicit is derived from the total or global experience of the apostolic writers, which finds only partial expression in their statement. The apostles had a global experience of Christ and His grace, which implicitly contains all theological truth which shall ever be formulated and which is communicated to the whole church along with the statements through its living contact with the same Christ and the same grace. The statement: "Christ died for us"

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<sup>14</sup>"Considerations on the Development of Dogma," II, 4:11.

communicates, among other things, the whole meaning of the human experience of death. In an explication from global experience, the statements of Scripture must be studied to discover elements compresent to the writers' minds. Principles formulated from these elements can then be used to extract formal and virtual implicits. Thus it can be said that the Marian dogmas are implicit in Scripture.<sup>15</sup>

The global experience of grace possessed by the whole church is fides implicita, implicit faith in all revealed truth. The content of the global experience is greater and fuller than can ever be expressed in the asymptotical statements of explicit dogma; that is to say, the content and object of implicit faith is ultimately divine mystery. Implicit faith, loving surrender to the divine mystery, is a necessary moment in all faith, since all theological statements are meaningful only when it is realized that their referent is the infinite, incomprehensible God. Explicit faith lives by implicit faith, the overcoming of self by entering into the mystery.<sup>16</sup>

It is even possible for faith to implicitly affirm what it explicitly rejects. A heretic, some one who after baptism pertinaciously denies or doubts a truth of the church, still retains the right to use the name Christian as long as

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<sup>15</sup>"The Development of Dogma," TI, 1:39-78.

<sup>16</sup>"Dogmatic Notes on 'Ecclesiological Piety,'" TI, 5:345; "Theology in the New Testament," TI, 5:38.

he still adheres to certain truths of faith and does not become completely apostate. If he has a living, fiducial contact with saving truth, he possesses salvation in spite of his errors in describing it and all that it implies. Deep in his consciousness he believes what he is rejecting. The same may be said of "unbaptized heretics," those atheists and pagans who live in a social environment conformed by Christianity and who may be influenced more than they know by their encounters with the reality of Christianity.<sup>17</sup>

False doctrines, explicit denials of orthodox truth, endanger salvation and should be combated, and yet may be useful to a faith with a global experience of grace. A false article may be the vehicle which leads one to accept God's mystery in worship and love. His movement toward God is stronger than his explicit errors. There are no falsely objectivized articles of faith which cannot coexist with the process of ushering us into the truth of God.<sup>18</sup>

The heretic denies some Christian truths and affirms others. Therefore his situation is ambiguous, since it is very difficult for us to know whether his errors have or have not destroyed his living fiducial contact with saving truth. For the various truths or doctrines, which describe

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<sup>17</sup>"What Is Heresy?" TI, 5:481-88.

<sup>18</sup>K. Rahner, "Intellectual Integrity and Christian Faith," Belief Today (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1967), p. 118.

the reality of salvation under different aspects, have an inner unity, a dynamism in knowledge and love. The propositions refer to each other, depend on each other, explain each other, and form a unified meaningful whole. Each partial perception of God's self-communication points to another, prepares for the understanding of the meaning of another, and contributes to the understanding of the whole. So in denial of a truth the heretic surrenders himself to "an immanent logic of knowledge," an attitude which, if consistently applied, must lead to the denial of the whole. Yet his adherence to other truths draws him into the dynamism of the unity of religious knowledge, so that his erring opinions may not annihilate his grasp on salvific reality as a whole. This ambiguous state may be called "logical and existential schizophrenia."<sup>19</sup> It explains why the Roman Catholic prophecies that Protestantism must eventually lead its proponents into a complete loss of substance in theology, have not been historically fulfilled.<sup>20</sup> This schizophrenia exists whether the heresy is explicit denial or cryptogamic negation implicit in one's manner of preaching or approach to theology.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>"What Is Heresy?" TI, 5:488-92.

<sup>20</sup>"Some Remarks on the Question of Conversions," TI, 5:327.

<sup>21</sup>"What Is Heresy?" TI, 5:492-512.

Also important for the concept of implicit affirmation is the fact that the original deposit of faith, Holy Scripture, implicitly contains all later defined dogma of the church. Concerning the theory that there are two sources of doctrine, Scripture and tradition, Rahner writes:

This theory has actually been adopted because it is widely thought that the facts of the development of dogma, as it really occurred, could not be explained by the principle of material sufficiency of the Scripture, and by the total material dependence of the later church on the Scriptures. But then we get a book, composed by God Himself and still not sufficient, not even in regard to the function of this book, namely the communication of that which God has revealed.<sup>22</sup>

Nevertheless, Rahner is careful not to actually reject the two-source theory, which may at some future time become defined dogma, and puts forth his interpretation of the sufficiency of Scripture as a theologoumenon which does not contradict Roman Catholic dogma and which will be sound whether or not the two-source theory is accepted. For the sufficiency of Scripture is nothing other than the sufficiency of the authority of the teaching church. No individuals in the church can set aside an evolved dogma with the explanation that Scripture does not contain sufficient proof for it. "Sufficiency of Scripture" does not mean "independence of the church's magisterial authority." Scripture is the church's magisterial authority, since it

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<sup>22</sup>K. Rahner, Inspiration in the Bible, trans. Charles Henkey (New York: Herder and Herder, 1961), p. 73.

is the product of the early church and expresses the church's global consciousness of grace, which implicitly contains all that the teaching church ever explicates.<sup>23</sup>

For example, the dogma of the immaculate conception of Mary is implicitly contained in Luke 1:26, especially in Mary's fiat of free decision to become the mother of the Savior. The following statements of Rahner indicate how the dogma of the immaculate conception was explicated from the global consciousness of the church:

Because Mary stands at that point of saving history at which through her freedom the world's salvation takes place definitively and irrevocably as God's act, she is most perfectly redeemed . . . The Church has always been aware of this, however little explicit that knowledge may have been in itself and in its consequences.<sup>24</sup>

The redemptive preservation from original sin is the most radical and blessed mode of redemption. It must necessarily have been her lot who is the most perfectly redeemed . . .<sup>25</sup>

The church, which produced Luke 1, has always been aware in some sense of the following truths: that a person's redemption is the appropriation of objective redemption in Christ; that one who freely chooses salvation for the world in Christ must be the most perfectly redeemed; that the interval between birth and appropriation of objective redemption is due to the fact that the mere existence of a Savior does not

<sup>23</sup>K. Rahner, Ueber die Schriftinspiration (Freiburg: Herder, 1958), passim.

<sup>24</sup>"The Interpretation of the Dogma of the Assumption," TI, 1:206.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 1:211.

insure the subjective redemption of every person; that the mere existence of Christ the Savior did insure Mary's subjective redemption, since she was destined to be His mother; that God's love is stronger than human sin and can remove it altogether. This series of statements shows that there is an objective logical connection between the fact of Mary's fiat and the fact of her preservation by privilege from original sin.<sup>26</sup>

Similarly, the assumption of Mary is implicitly affirmed in the creedal statements that Christ was born of the Virgin Mary, rose on the third day, and ascended into heaven. The first predicate implies that Mary is:

. . . the type of perfect redemption and the perfect representation of what redeemed humanity, what the church can be.<sup>27</sup>

. . . if Mary is the ideal representation of exhaustive redemption because of her unique place in saving history, then she must 'even now' have achieved that perfect communion with God in the glorified totality of her real being ("body and soul") as it exists even now.<sup>28</sup>

The necessary form of "exhaustive redemption" is shown by the other predicates of the creed, which teach implicitly that the future glory of man has already begun in Christ's bodily glorification. Mary's full sharing of Christ's

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 1:206-13.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 1:218.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 1:225.

glorification is God's assurance that we, too, shall be glorified.<sup>29</sup>

Theological reflection and exegetical proof from Scripture are not necessary for faith in the doctrines of the church. All that is necessary is to surrender one's faith into the common faith of the church, trusting that all that one does not understand is implicit in the global consciousness of grace possessed by the whole communion of saints. No individual in this communion can exhaustively reflect on or prove the basic mystery in theology. The individual believer recognizes all this when he gives up his right to think independently about the Word of God and thinks with the church, acknowledging that the Word as norma normans of theology is to be found in the faith of the church.<sup>30</sup>

Implicit faith is a surrender to the mystery which has been communicated to man's spirit and which implicitly contains all Catholic doctrine. Explicit dogmatic statements refer their hearer beyond themselves into the mystery of God. Theological discourse is a kind of instruction showing us how to come into the presence of mystery. Such discourse is analogical, enabling the self-transcendent spirit

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 1:218-27.

<sup>30</sup>Rahner, "Intellectual Integrity and Christian Faith," pp. 70-71, 99-105; "Dogmatic Notes on 'Ecclesiological Piety,'" II, 4:344-48; "What Is a Dogmatic Statement?" II, 5:51-58.

of man to know the mysterious, transcendent God. Rahner cannot understand why Karl Barth opposes the theory of analogy in theological statements and calls it an invention of Antichrist; he (Barth) does not seem to understand that analogy is an essential characteristic of theological discourse not only for Roman Catholics but for everyone.<sup>31</sup>

As stated above,<sup>32</sup> all the doctrines of the Christian faith have an intrinsic unity, in which implicit faith can root itself. The church must help modern man, its members and nonmembers alike, to see the existentially foundational content of faith to which all the doctrines refer: that the transcendent and incomprehensible God is a holy mystery which has communicated itself. The three central mysteries of theology, grace (culminating in the beatific vision of God), the hypostatic union of natures in Christ, and the triune nature of God, are forms of this mystery.<sup>33</sup>

The basic mystery of theology is the incomprehensibility of God's communication of Himself to man. We do not comprehend how God can be known by our finite intellects, but we believe that He is known. This self-communication is grace, the gratuitous (unnecessary) taking up of human

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 5:42-8, 58-60.

<sup>32</sup>Supra, p. 66.

<sup>33</sup>Rahner, "Intellectual Integrity and Christian Faith," pp. 70-6.

nature into the supernatural. This communication involves (1) The impartation of God to man, so that the finite is endowed with the infinite and man is divinized; (2) The enlightenment of man, so that he has knowledge of God's presence in and union with him. Since God has willed to communicate Himself to man, man is created to have a beatific vision of God. His ultimate self-fulfilment and glorification (which was not yet given to him even in original righteousness) is to show God as He is, in immediate consciousness of His incomprehensibility, and to surrender totally to Him in love. For this purpose God created man as a personal spiritual-material entity--a self-conscious, self-transcendent spirit who comes to self-understanding within his experience of material things and who has the freedom to surrender. Man's present knowledge of God by grace is an inchoate experience of and a preparation for the beatific vision.<sup>34</sup>

The mystery of God's self-communication to man is found in its highest form in the hypostatic union. In this absolute union a unique divinization of human nature takes place, so that Christ's self-knowledge is a beatific vision of God. It is the most radical form of human self-transcendence, the highest actualization of man's possibility of receiving and surrendering to the holy mystery. God's

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<sup>34</sup>"The Concept of Mystery in Catholic Theology,"  
II, 5:60-7.

will to communicate Himself, to empty Himself out into what is not God (that is, to love fully) is perfectly expressed and fulfilled in the hypostatic union. In and through this union the glorification of human nature results from God's acceptance of the free self-surrender of Christ's human nature and is transmitted in inchoate form to all human nature and consciousness for man's ultimate acceptance or rejection. The hypostatic union is the guarantee of God's grace and man's glorification.<sup>35</sup>

The mystery of God's self-communication is also expressed in the doctrine of the Trinity. His self-communication is a manifestation of His inner life, which is a communication of Himself to Himself. Like man (who is like God), God possesses or knows Himself by distinction from another and comes to self-fulfilment by knowing and loving another. He does all this absolutely by positing His Self-Expression (which is truly Himself) and giving Himself to It in the Spirit of love. The three divine persons are not three different consciousnesses but three distinct inner elements in God's being. Rahner is not teaching the heresy of Modalism, which denies any distinction in God.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 5:67-9; "On the Theology of the Incarnation," TI, 4:106-19.

<sup>36</sup>"On the Theology of the Symbol," TI, 4:235-45; "Remarks on the Dogmatic Treatise 'De Trinitate,'" TI, 4:101-2.

God's self-communication to man is an extension of His self-communication to Himself. Rahner writes:

These three self-communications are self-communications of the one God in the threefold relative way in which God subsists. Hence Father gives himself to us as Father, that is, in and by the very fact that being essentially himself he expresses himself and thus imparts the Son as his own personal self-disclosure; and also in and by the very fact that the Father, and the Son who receives all from the Father, affirming themselves in love, inclining to themselves, coming to themselves, impart themselves in loving acceptance, that is, as Holy Spirit . . . The one God imparts himself as absolute self-utterance and absolute gift of love . . . And it is a self-communication in which the God who imparts himself brings about the acceptance of his gift, in such a way that the acceptance does not reduce the communication to the level of merely created things.<sup>37</sup>

Since God willed to communicate Himself to man, it was inevitable that His divine Self-Expression (the Son) should express itself in human flesh and thereby to human flesh. In fact, only the second person of the Trinity could reveal God through a hypostatic union.<sup>38</sup>

All mysteries of the Christian faith can be seen to be related to the basic mystery of God's self-communication. Original sin is the threat to freedom which hinders man's reception of God and surrender to Him. The Roman Catholic Church is the historical, visible, self-conscious manifestation of the grace communicated in Christ, while its sacraments are further expressions of that manifestation. Eschatological doctrines are connected with the

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 4:96, 97.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 4:87-94.

glorification of man initiated in Christ's resurrection. The teachings of Mary's immaculate conception, assumption, and mediation are guarantees of God's self-communication in grace and glory. A helpful guide to the connections between the religious mysteries is Donald Gelpi's Light and Life. A Guide to the Theology of Karl Rahner, especially Chapter XI.<sup>39</sup>

The entire doctrine of Roman Catholicism is implicitly contained in the believer's global consciousness of the mystery which has come near to man by self-communication. Even those who do not explicitly acknowledge the doctrinal system are able to possess this global consciousness and to implicitly affirm all its doctrinal content in their moral decisions and actions. The non-Christian who has good will is an anonymous Christian, of whom Rahner writes:

If in every moral act he takes a positive or negative attitude to the totality of his de facto existence . . . then we must say: every morally good act of man is, in the actual order of salvation, also in fact a supernaturally salutary act.<sup>40</sup>

The anonymous Christian, however, cannot by himself rightly explicate his implicit knowledge.

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<sup>39</sup>Donald Gelpi, Light and Life. A Guide to the Theology of Karl Rahner (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1966), pp. 281-91.

<sup>40</sup>"Nature and Grace," II, 4:180.

The doctrine of justification by grace through faith and love is implicit in any man's courageous and positive acceptance of life. If grace is understood as proximate mystery which blesses life and give hope, and faith as acceptance of grace, and love as the surrender which perfects acceptance, then anyone who finds joy in life and willingly does his duty "has accepted God as he is in himself, as he wants to be in our regard in love and freedom--in other words, as the God of the eternal life of divine self-communication in which God himself is the center of man."<sup>41</sup> A non-Christian's, even an atheist's, love of the neighbor includes a non-articulated theism and an implicit love of God.<sup>42</sup> The reason for this is that the free acceptance of a particular good object is an implicit acceptance of the absolute good and of the freedom given to man to choose good.<sup>43</sup> The necessary basis of justification, the divinization of man by grace, is known and affirmed by man, though perhaps very dimly, when he is aware that the infinitely distant (the mystery of the supernatural) has become the circumference of his existence (deifying grace) and allows

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<sup>41</sup>"Thoughts on the Possibility of Belief Today," TI, 5:7.

<sup>42</sup>"Virtue," SM, 6:344.

<sup>43</sup>"The 'Commandment' of Love in Relation to the Other Commandments," TI, 5:446-52.

the possibilities of his existence (objective redemption) to be wider than his own limitation (guilt).<sup>44</sup>

There is a nonverbal message or word of God which enters man's consciousness as an awareness of one's transcendence and spiritual openness to infinite reality and possible revelation, and also of one's ability affirm the goodness of life and to choose the good. Whenever man, in his attitudes and decisions, in any way seeks the "Whither" of his spiritual knowledge and freedom, he encounters the revelation of the proximate, self-communicating mystery and is able to affirm it in his actions. Thus he experiences divinizing and enabling grace.<sup>45</sup>

At the end of his book on Thomistic epistemology, Rahner points out an objective logical connection between the axiom nihil sine phantasmate intelligit anima and the incarnation of Christ.<sup>46</sup> A revelation of the mystery of all existence must be sought in appearances, in history, since all knowledge is meaningful only by reference to appearances. The self-communication of God to man necessarily becomes a dialogue, which flows into the Word become

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<sup>44</sup>K. Rahner, "In Search of a Short Formula of the Christian Faith," trans. T. L. Westow, The Pastoral Approach to Atheism, ed. K. Rahner (New York: Paulist Press, 1967), pp. 76-79.

<sup>45</sup>"The Concept of Mystery in Catholic Theology," TI, 4:48-60.

<sup>46</sup>K. Rahner, Spirit in the World, trans. Wm. Dych (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967), p. 408.

flesh. Man's existential and epistemological need to possess God concretely implies the expectation of One which is the absolute culmination both of human self-transcendence and of divine self-communication.<sup>47</sup> As Anita Roeper, Rahner's disciple, puts it, man:

. . . dimly foresees that somewhere, at some time, a point must be reached at which God, who communicates himself, and the man who accepts this communication become united in the strictest ontological and personal sense.<sup>48</sup>

The glorification of human nature in Christ's resurrection. Therefore "anyone who accepts his own humanity in full . . . has accepted the Son of Man, because God has accepted man in him."<sup>49</sup> Self-acceptance is acceptance of Christ and His grace.

The possibility of explicating the incarnation from the contents of man's consciousness does not mean that man can perform the explication by himself without revelation. For the incarnation was contingent upon God's free action and therefore is not predictable from the dim idea which "floats before the mind of man in the pure mystery of his primordial understanding."<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>"Current Problems in Christology," TI, 1:185-88.

<sup>48</sup>A. Roeper, The Anonymous Christian, trans. J. Donceel (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1966), p. 121.

<sup>49</sup>"On the Theology of the Incarnation," TI, 4:119.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 4:110-11.

An implicit acceptance of the God-Man also involves one in the acceptance of the Trinity. If a man accepts the self-communication of God in his innermost being and life, so that his attitude toward life is affected, knowledge of the Father (the source of the communication), the Son (the absolute self-utterance of the mystery), and the Spirit (the absolute gift of love which brings about the acceptance) is implicit in his conscious experience. Man's experience of knowing and loving are vestiges (vestigia Trinitatis) of the God Who expresses Himself and realizes Himself, Who communicates His self-expression within man's knowledge and love.<sup>51</sup>

According to what has been said so far, universal revelation fills man's knowledge of absolute being with a global consciousness of salvific Christian truth, the contents of which are explicated by special and verbal revelation. The global consciousness includes a recognition of the church as the communion of those divinized by grace. This recognition arises out of the same awareness that leads to the doctrine of the incarnation, namely, that knowledge is only had by turning to the appearances. This means that religion must be historical and that God's self-communication to mankind must tend to produce an historically

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<sup>51</sup>Remarks on the Dogmatic Treatise 'De Trinitate,' II, 4:80-87.

<sup>52</sup>Rahner, Hearers of the Word, pp. 26-27.

tangible spiritual community of receivers. Man will imperfectly experience the dynamism toward social and concrete manifestation before encountering its end product, the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>52</sup> Thus Rahner can speak of a latent churchliness in all who experience God by surrendering to the mysterious ground of their existence and acknowledging the moral order rooted in it. This churchliness expresses itself in religious feeling and personal spiritual activity.<sup>53</sup>

One may wonder at this point how the above views are to be reconciled with the defined dogma that outside the church there is no salvation. The Roman Catholic Church has rejected the rigorist interpretation of the dictum and takes its exclusiveness to mean that special, explicit, and official revelation can be found only in the body instituted by Christ, the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>54</sup> While juridical membership in the Roman Catholic Church is not necessary for salvation, a real if incomplete membership is necessary. Rahner supports the 1943 encyclical of Pius XII, which identified the mystical body of Christ with the

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<sup>53</sup>K. Rahner, "Religionen und Kirche in der modernen Gesellschaft," Handbuch der Pastoraltheologie: Praktische Theologie der Kirche in ihrer Gegenwart, K. Rahner et al (Freiburg: Herder, 1964), II/1:230.

<sup>54</sup>G. C. Berkouwer, The Second Vatican Council and the New Catholicism, trans. Lewis B. Smedes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1965), pp. 187-206; cf. Rahner, Hearers of the Word, p. 179.

Roman Catholic Church and cautioned against despising juridical membership.<sup>55</sup> But there is a non-official and implicit membership, with descending degrees, which is possessed by anonymous Christians and is perceptible in their incipient spiritual and religious activity.<sup>56</sup> He also upholds the necessity of baptism for salvation by recognizing an implicit desire for baptism in all who live according to their conscience.<sup>57</sup>

#### The Position of the Lutheran Confessions

The Lutheran Confessions differ radically from Rahner's theology on the subject of the content of salvation, whether considered as explicit or implicit. Lutheranism holds that the message of salvation is that a man is justified by grace through faith alone, and that this message is to be found only in the revelation of the Scriptures.

Justification is a forensic act by which God pronounces the sinner righteous (Ep III, 7; Ap IV, 252).<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup>"Membership of the Church According to the Teaching of Pius XII's Encyclical 'Mystici Corporis Christi,'" TI, 2: 1-88.

<sup>56</sup>"Missions," SM, 4:80.

<sup>57</sup>Rahner and Vorgrimler, pp. 47-48.

<sup>58</sup>All citations of the Lutheran Confessions in English are taken from The Book of Concord, ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959).

The basis of the declaration is the righteousness of Christ imputed to the sinner (Ap IV, 305-7). The verdict cannot be based on infused love or any change in us, since salvation cannot be gained by the Law (Ap IV, 289). We cannot base justification on the indwelling of God in the believer, as Rahner does, because the indwelling is a consequence of justification (SD III, 54). Justifying righteousness is extrinsic, outside of us and our own works (SD III, 55). However, it is not extrinsic in the sense that Christ's righteousness does not belong to us, for faith makes it our own and we are truly righteous because of it (SD III, 39, 42; Ap IV, 72, 78).

As for the idea that forensic justification is a fiction and neglects the fact of sin in man, it is true that open sin cannot co-exist with justifying faith, but the reason therefor is that repentance of sins is the indispensable preparation for the believing reception of forgiveness (SA III, iii). Rahner thinks that Luther opposed the Roman teaching of attrition ("imperfect contrition") because he thought that it was insincere repentance.<sup>59</sup> Luther's principal objection, however, was that justification is not merited by any attrition or contrition at all but must be received by faith in the Gospel (SA III, iii, 15-18). Justification is not based on man's rejection of sin.

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<sup>59</sup>"Contrition," SM, 1:1.

Rahner and Kueng teach that man is justified by grace alone. Yet they differ from the Lutheran Confessions by their assertions that man is justified through love, that he merits eternal life, that Luther's extrinsic, forensic justification is a legal fiction, and that Lutheranism is too pessimistic about man's nature.<sup>60</sup> Already in the sixteenth century Martin Chemnitz (one of the authors of the Lutheran Confessions) pointed out that the agreement of Lutheranism and Roman Catholicism in affirming justification by grace alone does not mean that they mean the same thing.<sup>61</sup> Lutheranism means that man is justified by grace apart from works, while Roman Catholicism means that he is justified through works made possible by grace. Melancthon took note of the fact that his opponents wanted to affirm the necessity of grace and to avoid being Pelagians. Nevertheless, they were not free of the Pelagian errors that human strength can merit grace and that grace is given on account of works (Ap IV, 17-21; XVIII, 1-3; XX, 14).

It is true, according to Scripture, that God graciously rewards good works with blessings in time and eternity. But these blessings are earned by those who are already justified by faith. The Confessions deny that man can merit eternal life itself, which is a gift (Rom. 6:23), obtained for us by Christ (Ap IV, 356-81). The doctrine of

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<sup>60</sup> Supra, pp. 34-7, 58-61; Kueng, pp. 179, 211-17, 264-74, 195-207.

<sup>61</sup> Martin Chemnitz, The Examination of the Council of

justification by grace excludes every notion of salvation by human merit (Ap IV, 73-74, 316, 84-85). Rahner and Kueng stress that they reject the Pharisaic idea of self-justification. But every doctrine of justification on the basis of love and works is Pharisaic (Ap, IV, 16, 332; XII, 85). Such a doctrine leads to doubt of one's own worthiness and dishonors the saving work of Christ (Ap IV, 218-43). Contrition cannot merit justification (Ap XII, 8-10). No one ought to rely on indulgences for the remission of satisfaction (SA III, iii, 24-27). Rahner's term, "logical and existential schizophrenia,"<sup>62</sup> can be applied to all consistent professing Roman Catholics: they wish to affirm justification by grace alone, and yet they teach justification through works and merits.

Faith in the Gospel is the means of appropriating Christ's merits and grace (SD III, 31). It is not a meritorious work to gain grace, but is purely receptive (SD III, 13; Ap IV, 48-60). It is not the indolent or blind trust which the fathers of the Council of Trent (Session VI, Canon XIV) wrongly attributed to the Lutherans. It is rather a deliberate trust in grace, which is active and bears fruit (SD IV, 10-12; Ap IV, 115-16). But a deliberate trust in

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Trent, trans. F. Kramer (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1971), 1:465-68.

<sup>62</sup>Supra, p. 66.

grace does not, without denying itself, base its hope on its own works and fruits (Ap IV, 44). Faith is, as Rahner says, an acceptance of God's offer of grace (Ap IV, 48). But this must not be taken to mean that the acceptance includes love as an essential factor on account of which justification takes place, that is, that justifying faith is always fides formata caritate, faith fashioned by love. For faith is an acceptance of such a kind that all grounds for justification other than Christ's merits are excluded from its view (Ap IV, 49-60).

It is wrong to speak of justification by love. Love must presuppose justification, since it is impossible to love a God of wrath before forgiveness of sins has been accepted from Him (Ap IV, 36-9). Neither love of God nor love of the neighbor justify, for that would cancel the promise in Scripture that forgiveness is given freely (Ap 40-47, 109-15, 147-51). Love and its keeping of the Law cannot justify, for it is impossible to keep the Law without the Holy Spirit Who is given in justification and the Law itself always accuses us of insufficient love and good works (Ap IV, 122-29, 156-8). Therefore the Christian's keeping of the Law does not please God for its own sake, but only for the sake of faith in Christ, through Whom all impurity is covered (Ap IV, 166-82). The various texts in Scripture which stress love, including Gal. 5:6 ("faith working

through love"), refer to it as a necessary fruit of true faith, but never as a propitiation against God's wrath (Ap IV, 111-16, 218-43).

The Lutheran Confessions conflict with Rahner's suggestion that man is justified sola fide because faith is the only beginning of the process in which he is justified by love. Faith does not justify on account of love or anything in us (Ap IV, 71-72, 107-10). Whether one calls faith or love the decisive factor in justification is not, as Rahner thinks, something which varies with the experience of individuals or ages. In all ages of Bible history and church history all true saints have comforted themselves with the promise of God's mercy rather than with the merits of their own works (Ap IV, 57-60, 322-47; XII, 53-54; SD V, 23).

According to the Lutheran Confessions, saving faith is a personal reliance on God's explicit promises. While all faith must be related to the means of grace (Scripture, Baptism, the Lord's Supper) (SA III, viii, 10), the scope of the present study is limited to the conscious faith of adults, who must consciously and personally lay hold of the grace offered in the Word and sacraments.

The promises needed by faith are found only in the scriptural revelation about Christ. Explicit promises about grace in Christ were revealed to Adam and others from the beginning, and these are available to us in Scripture (Ap Xii, 53-55; SD V, 23).

Faith needs a promise because the blessings of grace are offered through the Gospel and must be appropriated by us.<sup>63</sup> They are like a treasure which is lost if it is hidden (LC III, 38-40). Furthermore, faith needs a promise because a promise is a free offer. A promise is correlated not to self-justification by works but to faith (Ap IV, 40-47). True to its nature, the promise indicates that the price of our propitiation lies outside of us in the perfect sacrifice of Christ (Ap IV, 48-60). This is Paul's chief argument, which he often repeats (compare Rom 4:16; Gal. 3:18) (Ap IV, 84).

The saving promise, which cannot be bound to works, cannot arise in the sphere of natural reason, which can only understand human righteousness and call for trust in works (Ap IV, 7-35). Only in the revelation about Christ can God's grace be known rightly. Here God reveals His love and shows us Christ, apart from Whom we see nothing but an angry divine Judge (LC II, 63-69). Rahner claims that the anonymous Christian who patiently accepts life "has accepted God as he is in himself, as he wants to be in our regard." But the "anonymous Christian" has done no such thing: "This is how God wants to be known and worshipped, that we accept his blessings and receive them because of his mercy rather than because of our own merits" (Ap IV, 60). The promise in Scripture shows the true price paid for our sins, so that we do not look for another (Ap IV, 53-57). Faith cannot be

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<sup>63</sup>Supra, pp. 42-44.

anonymous, nameless. We need to know Christ's name, for only in it is salvation found, Acts 4:11-12 (Ap IV, 98). Christ's name is necessary for confident prayer (Ap IV, 332-33). We have the peace of forgiveness only through His name, Acts 10:43 (Ap XII, 63-65).

Only a definite promise creates certainty of faith. Amid the terrors of conscience one must have a very definite Word of God to know whether He is angry over one's sin (Ap 261-62). When Rahner distinguishes between natural revelation, which does not make God's attitude toward man clear, and universal revelation, which gives a consciousness of His grace, he does not explain how one can be sure of God's mercy without a definite promise.<sup>64</sup> The groping of the "anonymous Christian" has no such promise:

Anyone therefore, no matter how remote from any revelation formulated in words, who accepts his existence, that is, his humanity--no easy thing!--in quiet patience, or better in faith, hope, and love--no matter what he calls them, and accepts it as the mystery which hides itself in the mystery of eternal love and bears life in the womb of death: such a one says yes to something which really is such as his boundless confidence hopes it to be. . . .<sup>65</sup>

But no honest confidence or certainty can come from works. Faith finds sure hope only by resting on the Word which declares that God is gracious (Ap IV, 344). The heathen and the faithless Israelites were deluding themselves when

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<sup>64</sup>Supra, pp. 38-39.

<sup>65</sup>"On the Theology of the Incarnation," TI, 4:119.

they sought grace and righteousness through their invented traditions, since "we can affirm nothing about the will of God without the Word of God" (Ap XV, 13-17). Three times the words of Paul that "whatever does not proceed from faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23) is quoted to show that no one can with any honesty or integrity have confidence in his religious inventions or works without a definite testimony in which to repose his faith (Ap XV, 17; XII, 89; XXVII, 23).

Personal faith does not merely believe what the church teaches. Submission to the organizational church without consideration for what the Word of God teaches is not shared trust but slavery, Gal. 5:1 (Ap XXVIII, 15-16). The promise of being a pillar of truth protected from error applies to the church as the association of believers in Christ, but not to the official leaders and teachers of the church (Ap VII/VIII, 27). These can err, and their teachings and commandments must be compared with the Word of God, on which faith depends (Ap XVIII, 12-14, 20-21).

Personal faith does not merely believe in a general way that God exists but accepts the promise of the forgiveness of sins as a present reality comforts the troubled conscience with it (Ap XIII, 20-21). Unlike the Council of Trent (Session VI, Canon XIII), "we require everyone to believe that his sins are forgiven him" (Ap XII, 60). Therefore an "implicit faith" is not adequate. It is God's will to draw men to Himself in no other way than through His Word

and sacraments. Those who would be saved must hear the proclamation of the Word, that they might know their sins and God's wrath through the Law and receive the comfort of gracious forgiveness in the Gospel (SD II, 50-54).

Rahner holds that surrender to the teaching authority of the church (and therefore to the global consciousness in the church) is sufficient for one who cannot prove the church's doctrines from the Word of God, since faith is not created by rational reflection.<sup>66</sup> But faith is created neither by reason (SC II, 6) nor by church authority (Ap XV; XXVIII) but by the Spirit working through the means of grace (SA III, viii). The Spirit works through a message about Christ (SD II, 46-56).

Faith is an act which grasps Christ (Ap IV, 154). This reaching out to Christ as Savior presupposes that saving righteousness is outside of us in Him (Ep III, 3-6). Objective justification is not (as for Rahner) the possibility given to man of meriting his salvation through his experience of righteousness, but rather the fact that God is already reconciled to us in Christ (Ap IV, 97). The theology which bases justification upon God's self-communication, the divinization of man, and infused grace is incompatible with the Lutheran Confessions. The theory of

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<sup>66</sup>Rahner, "Intellectual Integrity and the Christian Faith," pp. 99-106.

anonymous Christianity is derived from this theology, finding the essence of Christianity in the interior experiences of man. But merely implicit faith in the Gospel is a contradiction in terms, according to the Confession's understanding of faith.

No one who explicitly rejects and does not confess Christ is a believing Christian. While it is true that wherever there is contact with the Word of God, the possibility of faith being worked by it exists, this Word must be used (LC I, 100-2). Refusal to use the means of grace in faith results in darkness and unbelief without comfort (SD II, 57-8). Not believing in God's promise dishonors and angers Him (LC III, 18, 21). There is no basis for the assumption that those who reject God's Word and blaspheme it are the elect (SD XI, 39). In contrast to those who fight against the Word of God, Christians acknowledge God as Lord and Creator (LC II, 20-22).

Confession is the necessary fruit of faith (Rom. 10: 10). "No faith is firm which does not show itself in confession" (Ap IV, 385). Confession is a response to revelation in the Gospel, praising God and giving testimony by the power of the Spirit.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>67</sup>E. Schlink, Theology of the Lutheran Confessions, trans. P. Koehneke and H. Bouman (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1948), pp. 11-12, 15-16.

Rahner thinks that even religious error can be helpful to the anonymous Christian, especially in the heathen religions. But it is truth and not error which justifies and sanctifies (SD II, 50-51). The errors of the heathen are good for nothing (LC I, 18-21). False doctrine is the seed of the devil.<sup>68</sup>

While no true faith exists without confession, there can be a mixture of denial and confession in the same persons. What Rahner calls "logical and existential schizophrenia" corresponds to what Lutheran theologians have called "felicitous inconsistency," by which errorists do not consistently and logically apply their erroneous statements in their lives and so do not lose their faith.<sup>69</sup> On the one hand, errors can lead to the complete loss of faith (Ep VIII, 39), and on the other hand, errors may not overthrow the foundation of faith (Ap VII/VIII, 20-21) and some err ingenuously and do not follow the logic of their errors.<sup>70</sup>

The Word of God is the one source of all Christian doctrine. Rahner's doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture, which upholds the infallible authority of the church's magisterium, is not at all same as the doctrine of sufficiency

<sup>68</sup> The Book of Concord, pp. 3-4.

<sup>69</sup> F. Pieper, Christian Dogmatics (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), 1:87-89.

<sup>70</sup> The Book of Concord, pp. 11-12.

found in the Formula of Concord: "We believe, teach, and confess that the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments are the only rule and norm according to which all doctrines and teachers alike must be appraised and judged" (Ep, The Comprehensive Summary, 1). No one is to teach anything in the church without an authorizing testimony in the Word of God (Ap XV, 14, 17). Karl Barth calls the doctrine of analogy an invention of Antichrist.<sup>71</sup> If he means that the Roman Catholic Church errs in finding similarity between God and man, then he misunderstands the cognitive nature of theological discourse, as Rahner suspects. But if he is criticizing Roman Catholicism for using the theory of analogy to defend its evolution of dogma as an explication of the mystery underlying theological language, his statement harmonizes with the judgment of the Lutheran Confessions that the pope is Antichrist because of his innovations of doctrine (Tr 39-40).

Every teaching in the church must have a definite command, a definite Word of Word (Ap XXVIII, 14). Teachers must use logic and not deduce from Scripture whatever suits them (Ap XX, 12).

The question must be put whether Rahner's proposed explications of evolved dogmas, such as those concerning Mary, meet the Confessions' demand for a valid deduction

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<sup>71</sup>Supra, p. 70.

from a definite and precise Word. The answer is that these explications are valid only if their premises have been satisfactorily established.

All the premises of the different kinds of implication must be verified. A formal implication is an immediate inference, an argument with only one premise, which is restated in different words in the conclusion. A virtual implication is a mediate inference from an original premise, requiring the verification of other (mediate) premises before the conclusion can be said to be true.<sup>72</sup> As for "global" implication, a conclusion can be drawn with certainty from the experience of the author of a premise only by either immediate inference or by mediate inference conjoining the premise with related statements. If the statement: "Mary said, 'Let it be'" is to imply a conclusion about Mary's holiness, the precise meaning of the conclusion must be determined and limited by mediate statements concerning holiness, and these must be verified by divine revelation. What Rahner states in another context concerning implicit meaning in the statements of councils must also apply to explication from Scripture: not everything compresent to the mind of the authors is implicitly defined in the statements, and the implicit teaching:

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<sup>72</sup>J. W. Blythe, A Modern Introduction to Logic (Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1957), pp. 204-6.

. . . must stand in so immediately evident and indissoluble a connection with the proper and direct matter of the definition, that it is impossible in fact or thought that it too should not bear the whole weight of the affirmation given to the proper content.<sup>73</sup>

The explication of the Marian dogmas from scriptural statements requires a number of mediate premises, such as that Mary's fiat means that through her freedom the whole world's salvation takes place, and that the mere existence of the Savior insured Mary's subjective redemption.<sup>74</sup> Would the authors of the Lutheran Confessions judge that these mediate premises have been verified and that the conclusions have an evident and indissoluble connection with the content of the original statements in Scripture? One doubts it. Even some Roman Catholic scholars are uneasy about such a process of explication and:

. . . shy away from deducing one privilege given to Mary from another, as though one good thing must logically imply another. Congar, for example, complains that concluding from one privilege given to Mary that another is necessarily implied in it is bad theology. Max Thurian agrees with Congar, but points out that this is exactly how the assumption of Mary was arrived at.<sup>75</sup>

A rigorous application of the remark of A. Mueller would find approval in the Lutheran Confessions: "A metaphysical

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<sup>73</sup>"Theological Reflexions on Monogenism," TI, 1:242.

<sup>74</sup>Supra, pp. 68-69.

<sup>75</sup>Berkouwer, p. 241.

analysis of concepts without constant analysis of revelation is not an adequate theological method."<sup>76</sup>

It can also be said that the Marian deductions are material implications rather than strict implications. In a strict implication the apodosis is a logically necessary conclusion from the protasis, as in the statement: "If her baby is a boy, he will be her son." In a material implication, such as the statement: "If her baby is a boy, she will name him Robert," the apodosis is contingent upon circumstances and the acts of free agents, and the protasis could be true without the apodosis being true.<sup>77</sup> The arguments for the Marian dogmas are material implications. For example, "if Christ was born of the Virgin Mary, then she must now share Christ's glorification through her assumption." The connection is not logically necessary but contingent on mediate premises which must be verified. The contingency of the Marian conclusions is seen especially in the argument of suitability which is employed: It is most fitting that the most perfect representative of the church should be glorified already now, or that her predestined holiness should be shown in the elimination of the time-lag between her conception and her subjective justification.

Rahner finds the unifying center of theology in the divinization of man, on which justification is based. He

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<sup>76</sup>Ibid.

<sup>77</sup>Blythe, pp. 277-81.

understands this as the self-communication of the holy mystery and claims that it is implicitly understood in man's awareness of transcendence and incomprehensibility. In the Lutheran Confessions the unifying center of theology is the Gospel of justification by grace for Christ's sake through faith alone (SA, III, 1; SD III, 6-7; Ap IV, 2-3). It is found only in the Scriptures.

The Confessions recognize the mystery of God's being and works. But their concern is not so much with God's incomprehensibility as with the form in which the mystery has been made known. For one can speak clearly about a mystery (SD VIII, 33-34). Christ's hypostatic union of natures and the Holy Trinity are the highest mysteries, yet they are the subject of our doctrine, faith, and confession (Ep VIII, 18). It is important to accept and teach a mystery as it has been revealed (SD XI, 26; Ep. VII, 42). The form in which divine mystery has been revealed, the Gospel of extrinsic grace in Christ, can only be known from Scripture. It is not deducible from the need for a mystery to be made known, so that God's self-communication, or man's divinization, or intrinsic grace becomes the center of theology.

The message of the Gospel cannot be known aright apart from the Scriptures. Apart from the means of grace, natural man has no knowledge of the Gospel.<sup>78</sup> There is no

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<sup>78</sup>Supra, pp. 51-56

necessary logical connection (strict implication) between the content of natural man's consciousness and the Gospel of Christian faith. This may be illustrated by pointing out the following logical problems with the attempt to explicate the Christian faith from the contents of natural consciousness.

Rahner's argument for anonymous Christianity may be put in the following syllogistic form:

If a man positively accepts himself and his existence and patiently does his duty, then he is justified, is responding to a revelation of grace, accepts Christ, accepts the Trinity, and believes in the Christian Church and enjoys membership in it.

The chief mediate premise for this argument is the doctrine that a man obtains grace, justification, knowledge of God and His Son, and church membership through works. The Lutheran Confessions reject this doctrine and teach instead that these blessings are obtained through faith in Christ as the propitiator of God's wrath, which can never be appeased by setting forth our own works (Ap IV, 80-121; LC II, 35-46). Since natural reason understands only a justification through works (AP IV, 7-11, 229-30), only this doctrine can be expected to be implicit in natural consciousness.

If the basic syllogism for anonymous Christianity, which can be developed in various ways, is put into the form: "If one understands and accepts his self-transcendent nature, he accepts Christ," the mediate premise is: "Christ's

hypostatic union of natures is the most radical form of human transcendence." But these two premises do not lead to the Gospel doctrine that Christ's human nature is so united to the divine nature that His obedience and passion render the only acceptable and availing satisfaction for the sins of the whole world (SD III, 55-58), but only to the conclusion that the hypostatic union of natures in Christ is the highest form of man's union with God through divinization. While Lutheranism recognizes the fact of the believer's divinization through partaking of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4), it considers this union with God to be of a different type than that found in Christ (SD VIII, 33-34, 39-45, 67-70).

Even if the mediate premise in the last paragraph is considered to be a satisfactory christological statement, it still does not follow that the most radical form of human transcendence must be thought of as ever having actually come into existence. Therefore the syllogism is a material implication. Rahner admits the contingency of Christ's coming, incarnation, and work, which resulted from a free decision of God, so that a man cannot deduce the historical facts of Christ from his knowledge of himself.<sup>79</sup> Since in a material implication the protasis can be true without the

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<sup>79</sup>Supra, p. 76. "Current Problems in Christology," TI, 1:185-88.

apostasis being true, one cannot say that if a man accepts himself and his nature, he accepts Christ. Rahner has not proved a material connection between protasis and apostasis.

It is not enough for Rahner to point out that Christians know from revelation that Christ has redeemed humanity and then to use the syllogism: "If one accepts his own humanity, his own existence, he accepts Christ."<sup>80</sup> This argument requires the mediate premise: "To enjoy what is redeemed is to know the Redeemer." But true knowledge of Christ is much more, according to the Lutheran Confessions:

By freely accepting the forgiveness of sins, faith sets against God's wrath not our merits of love, but Christ the mediator and propitiator. This faith is the true knowledge of Christ, it uses his blessings, it regenerates our hearts, it precedes our keeping of the law (Ap. IV, 46).

In the syllogism: "If a man accepts himself and his existence in a positive way, he accepts the Trinity," the mediate premises involved may be stated thus: "The Trinity is a unified consciousness with three distinct elements: a performing self, its self-expression, and its acceptance;" "On the deepest level of man's being and conscience, he experiences these elements as the mystery of life coming near to him, the appealing meaningfulness and goodness of life, and his own acceptance of life with its mystery." These premises do not lead to the knowledge of the Holy

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<sup>80</sup>"On the Theology of the Incarnation," TI, 4:119.

Trinity called for in the Lutheran Confessions, according to which this doctrine cannot be rightly known without faith in the Gospel.<sup>81</sup>

This Gospel teaches that man is justified by grace for Christ's sake, not through his works or self-acceptance or positive attitude toward existence, but through faith in the atoning merits of Christ. Gospel faith acknowledges the unity of the persons of the Trinity by relying not upon one's own works but upon the divine merits of Christ and the divine power of the Spirit in regeneration. Only God can redeem and be our Lord (LC II, 26-33). Only God can sanctify and enlighten us (LC II, 35-46, 67-68; SD II, 25-27) and separate the corruption of our nature from the nature itself (Ep I, 10). The goodness of the one Creator is known when we learn from the Gospel that He has created us for the purpose of redeeming and sanctifying us, and His one essence, God as He really is in grace, is not known till one knows the depths of His love through the Gospel (LC II, 63-64).

Gospel faith also recognizes the distinction of the persons of the Trinity, whose activities are treated in separate articles in the Small and Large Catechisms. While it is true that the Father works through the Son and the Spirit to bring us to Himself (LC II, 64), they are distinct

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<sup>81</sup>Schlink, pp. 56-66.

persons. When Rahner defends himself against the charge of Modalism by showing that he recognizes distinct elements in God, it must be pointed out that he denies that there are three distinct divine centers of consciousness united in one essence. This theory that the persons are elements in the unified consciousness of a divine subject is incompatible with the statement in the Augsburg Confession that the term "person" is to be understood "not as a part or a property of another but as that which exists of itself" (AC I, 4) and with the condemnation of the reduction of the second person to a spoken word and of the third person to a movement induced in creatures (AC I, 6). The doctrine of the Trinity in the Confessions is unintelligible without the distinction of consciousnesses. Each of the three persons gives his testimony to Christ as the One Who is the Book of Life in Whom the Father's election of grace is to be sought (SD XI, 65-67). The Father has determined to save men through the Son Whom He loves (SD XI, 65-66). The Spirit wills to work in believers (SD XI, 40, 71). Each of the persons is a conscious ego to Whom prayer and worship can be addressed (Athan 3; SA, Preface, 15; LC I, 74).

The argument for anonymous or latent church membership may be put thus: "If one engages in moral or religious activities, one is a member of the Church of Christ." The following mediate premises are involved:

God must be sought and known in the concrete and in history.

Moral and religious activities are forms of seeking and knowing God in the concrete.

The ultimate and divinely instituted form of knowing God is the Church of Christ (which is the Roman Catholic Church).

One who engages in moral or religious activity of any kind recognizes the need for the Church of Christ, that is, has an implicit desire for it.

An implicit desire for the Church of Christ is counted as membership in it.

These premises are incompatible with the teaching of the Lutheran Confessions that the Christian Church is made up of all who believe in Christ, among whom the means of grace are found and used for the obtaining of such faith (AC V, VII). The members are the "sheep who hear the voice of their Shepherd" (SA III, xii, 2). The only kind of religious activity which constitutes membership in the church is trust in the Gospel of salvation through Christ (Ap VII/VIII, 12-16, 32-36). The Confessions distinguish between church members in name and in fact and members in name but not in fact (Ap VII/VIII, 10), but never speak of members in fact but not in name (that is, anonymous members). The Roman Catholic organization is not identical with the Church of Christ, since externals and organizational fellowship do not guarantee the presence of the Christian Church (Ap VII/VIII, 5-17; SA III, xii, 1-3) and because the papists err in teaching, especially in the doctrine of salvation through faith in Christ alone (Ap IV, 396-400; VII/VIII, 20-27).

According to the viewpoint of the Lutheran Confessions, then, there is no implicit faith, no true faith which does not rely on explicit revelation, either in the Christian Church or outside of it. Faith in the satisfaction and benefits of Christ is not implicit in Everyman's moral efforts as the rules of logic are implicit in a simple man's logical reasoning.

### Summary of Chapter III

For Karl Rahner the message of salvation is that a man is justified by grace in Christ through faith and love. This message is implicitly affirmed and believed by every man of good will when he obeys his conscience. Such implicit faith can coexist with the absence of explicit faith and even with the explicit rejection of Christian truth. All of Christian doctrine is implicitly affirmed in the moral decisions of a man of good will.

From the standpoint of the Lutheran Confessions, a man is justified by faith alone, not by love, goodwill, or submission to moral absolutes. Faith is not anonymous but confesses the name of Christ. It is not implicit but is completely dependent upon the explicit message of the Word of God for its knowledge of God, grace, and the message of salvation.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE MESSAGE TO THE JEW AND THE PAGAN

If the entire message of salvation is implicit in the spiritual experience of the non-Christian, the Church of Christ must take this fact into consideration in its missionary task of making this message explicit. This chapter and the next will deal with the implications of the theory of anonymous Christianity for the message addressed to the devotees of non-Christian religions and for the message addressed to the atheist. The incompatibility of the position of Karl Rahner and that of the Lutheran Confessions can be summarized thus:

**Karl Rahner's Thesis:** The church today should present Christianity to the devotees of a non-Christian religion as the fulfilment and explication of his present experience of grace.

**The Lutheran Antithesis:** The church must announce to the non-Christian that he is lost in sin and can be saved only by grace through faith in Christ.

#### The Position of Karl Rahner

Salvation history takes place within world history and is not co-extensive or identical with the history of biblical revelation or of the Christian Church. Man works out his salvation or damnation in everything he does, in

accordance with how he uses his freedom to do good or evil. There is a general history of salvation, in which the grace to move toward God through free and salutary acts is offered to every man. Although many accept this grace through their good will, they do not explicitly understand that it is God's grace in Christ and cannot clearly distinguish salvation history from profane history. The distinction becomes clear only in special revelation history, in which a part of history is officially interpreted through prophets, apostles, and the authorized teachers of the church. Men's attempts to reflect on and objectify the grace universally revealed in general salvation history result in the formation, with many distortions of the revelation, in non-Christian religions.<sup>1</sup>

In salvation history Christianity has a prehistory, tracing the influence of grace back to the beginning of humanity. Israel's religion was the immediate prehistory for Christianity, while the pagan religions are the prehistory for Christianity wherever it comes with its message of grace. Such a prehistory, with its implicit knowledge of grace, is a valid preparation for Christian faith and

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<sup>1</sup>Karl Rahner, "History of the World and Salvation-History," Theological Investigations, trans. Karl Kruger (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1966), 5:97-114. Hereafter this collection will be referred to as TI.

sufficient for salvation until the time when the Christian message comes.<sup>2</sup>

It must be made clear that Christianity understands itself as the absolute religion, intended for all men, which cannot recognize any other religion as of equal right. However, the prehistory to Christianity is valid and lawful for a man until the obligation to accept Christianity as absolute and necessary takes effect. This happens whenever in actual practice the Christian religion reaches man in the real urgency and rigor of his actual existence, so that he recognizes the claim of the obligation. Because Christianity must come to men in an historical way, its necessity for periods and cultures is postponed until it becomes a real historical factor in the culture.<sup>3</sup> The exact moment when the obligation begins cannot be definitely determined.<sup>4</sup>

The view that non-Christian religions have a positive significance for men's salvation is based on the recognition that there is an offer of grace in the world apart from special and biblical revelation. This recognition is in turn derived from certain dogmatic facts

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<sup>2</sup>"Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions," TI, 5:118.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 5:118-21.

<sup>4</sup>Karl Rahner, "Kirche, Kirchen, und Religionen," Schriften zur Theologie (Einsiedelin: Benziger Verlag, 1967), 8:372. Hereafter this collection will be referred to as S.

about salvation. Since God will have all men to be saved, it follows that every human being must be exposed to the offer and influence of grace in the situation in which he lives out his existence. Furthermore, God's universal grace is grace in Christ. If Christ died for the salvation of all men, salvation through love which accepts the grace offered on account of Christ must be possible for all.<sup>5</sup> Christ's death has transformed the consciousness and supernatural existential of every man, so that in some way he can perceive the possibility of purposeful existence.<sup>6</sup> These arguments are sanctioned by the Second Vatican Council of the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>7</sup> According to its "Lumen Gentium," the universal salvific will of God means that:

. . . those also can attain to everlasting salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the gospel of Christ or His Church, yet sincerely seek God and, moved by grace, strive by their deeds to do His will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>"Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions," TI, 5:123-25.

<sup>6</sup>Supra, pp. 33-35.

<sup>7</sup>"Konziliare Lehre der Kirche und kuenftige Wirklichkeit christlichen Lebens," S, 6: 492-94; "Die Anonymen Christen," S, 6:553; "Atheismus und implizites Christenthum," S, 8:192-93.

<sup>8</sup>"Lumen Gentium," section 16, The Documents of Vatican II, trans. J. Gallagher (New York: Guild Press, 1966), p. 35.

The Council applies the blessings of Christianity, in "Gaudium et Spes," to:

. . . all men of good will in whose hearts grace works in an unseen way. For, since 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.<sup>9</sup>

Rahner argues from the universal salvific will of God and the redemptive death of Christ not only that the reality of grace is certainly offered to all men in their own experiences but that it probably is accepted by most of them in their right decisions and obedience to conscience. The effect of Christ's grace upon the spiritual nature of men is that they are powerfully inclined to accept the grace offered them. Cornelius Jansen was too pessimistic, and rightly condemned by the church, when he denied that there is any influence of grace outside the church.<sup>10</sup> It is blasphemy against God's grace to suppose that it is easier for men to do evil than to do good:

It is senseless to suppose cruelly--and without any hope of acceptance by the man of today, in view of the enormous extent of the extra-Christian history of salvation and damnation--that nearly all men living outside the official and public Christianity are so evil and stubborn that the offer of supernatural grace

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<sup>9</sup>"Gaudium et Spes," section 22, Documents, pp. 221-22.

<sup>10</sup>"Dogmatic Notes on 'Ecclesiological Piety,'" TI, 5:356, 361; "Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions," TI, 5:123-25, 134.

ought not even to be made in fact in most cases, since these individuals have already rendered themselves unworthy of such an offer by previous, subjectively grace offenses against the natural moral law.<sup>11</sup>

When Rahner declares that men find God and accept grace in the experiences available to them, this includes the religious experiences of the heathen. Rahner's argument comes to completion with the elucidation that since man has a social nature and must achieve his relationship to God in a social environment and in concrete religious activity, non-Christian religions are lawful instruments of attaining salvation for the pre-Christian man.<sup>12</sup>

A lawful religion can contain many errors, which do not come from God and are not lawful, such as moral depravity, shameful rites, idolizing of the world, polytheistic worship of powers, and depersonalizing of God. There are demonic influences in paganism.<sup>13</sup> But the impurities do not make a religion unlawful, as we see from the analogy of the religion of Israel in the Old Testament, which fell into many errors and did not possess an infallible and permanent magisterium to determine a canon and distinguish right from wrong. But a non-Christian religion is a mixture of errors, natural revelation, and elements of grace which enable the anonymous Christian to follow his conscience and perform

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 5:123.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 5:125-29.

<sup>13</sup>"Theos in the New Testament," TI, 1:85, 90-95.

genuine acts of devotion to deity. These elements come into play in a heathen's concrete religious activities when he prays to a Thou, understands and rejects errors in his religion, seeks to purify his religion, sincerely seeks to know and do what is the divine will, or begins to develop an explicit monotheism. The natural and socially constituted morality of a people is the legitimate form of the divine law within which they are to work out their salvation.<sup>14</sup>

The church confronts the pious member of the extra-Christian religion as an anonymous Christian, outwardly opposed to the church and its proclamation but inwardly in agreement. The conversion of such a person to the church is not a turning of some one without God and grace into a Christian, but the achievement in him of a reflexive awareness of the full meaning of the grace which he already experiences.<sup>15</sup> Conversion is always a fundamental decision with regard to God, turning from the sinful past and freely choosing to commit the whole of life to Him. Conversion already takes place implicitly and anonymously when an evil man becomes a good one, or when one changes from one non-Christian religion to another for moral reasons. The fundamental decision also has to be made when a non-Christian recognizes from the

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 1:90-91; "Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions," TI, 5:129-30.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 5:131-32.

proclamation of the church that he is obligated to become a Christian. Conversion is thus a response to the revelation made to the individual.<sup>16</sup>

The message of salvation will be affected by these conclusions:

If, however, the message of the Church is directed to someone who is a "non-Christian" only in the sense of living by an anonymous Christianity not as yet fully conscious of itself, then her missionary work must take this into account and must draw the necessary conclusions when deciding on its missionary strategy and tactics. We may say at a guess that this is still not the case in sufficient measure.<sup>17</sup>

On the one hand, the pre-Christian must hear that the Christian religion is the absolute and necessary religion, also for him. The church must announce the Gospel in the full sense and passionately protest the errors of the heathen religion. On the other hand, it recognizes that the anonymous Christian already worships the true God and will try to explicate his present religious experiences in such a way that he will see that his deepest desires are realized in their most satisfying form in the church. It confirms his knowledge and experience of God and calls him to a higher level of religious development.<sup>18</sup> Parallels

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<sup>16</sup>Karl Rahner, "Conversion," Sacramentum Mundi: An Encyclopedia of Theology, ed. K. Rahner et al (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968-70), 2:4-5.

<sup>17</sup>"Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions," TI, 5:132.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.; "Theos in the New Testament," TI, 1:85-86.

between Christianity and other religions can be explained from the common human (implicit) expectation of an historical revelation and of the incarnation of Christ.<sup>19</sup>

#### The Position of the Lutheran Confessions

According to the Lutheran Confessions, there is no salvation outside the Christian Church. The church cannot address the Jew or the pagan as justified Christians.

Jews who reject Jesus Christ receive damnation, as was the case with unbelieving Jews at His time (SD XI, 78; Ap VII/VIII, 16).<sup>20</sup> They worship the one true God but do not have a salvific knowledge of Him, they do not know His sure grace in Christ (LC II, 66). The Jews seek righteousness and salvation in the works of the Law, apart from Christ, but works can never be a sufficient propitiation for sin (Ap IV, 21; XII, 78). The attempt of Old Testament Israelites to gain forgiveness of sins through works and ceremonies was culpable (Ap IV, 288; XXVII, 97-99), but the Israelites who trusted in God's promises of mercy and Christ were justified (Ap IV, 57-60; SD VI, 23). Even a Jew of good will is guilty if he rejects the Messiah (Ap IV, 154).

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<sup>19</sup>Karl Rahner, Hearers of the Word, trans. Michael Richards (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), p. 178.

<sup>20</sup>All citations from The Lutheran Confessions in English are taken from The Book of Concord, ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959).

The heathen are damned and without Christ and the Spirit (LC II, 66). They know God, but not rightly, for they are ignorant of the Gospel of His grace in Christ (SD VI, 22). The Spirit and the church are not among them (Ap VII/VIII, 14). They are without God (AC XX, 24-25), because they do not know and call upon Him as a gracious God. Their worship is an idolatry which does not trust in the true God (LC I, 18) and a wicked use of sacrifices and rites to attempt to placate divine wrath (Ap IV, 207, 288; XXIV, 23; XII, 114). They are utterly lost unless they repent (and here Luther quotes Paul's words to the heathen philosophers in Acts 17:30) (SA III, iii, 33-35).

Christianity is at all times the absolute and necessary religion for all men. There can be no substitute for the salvation of Christ (SD XI, 39), and none are saved without taking hold of His name in trust, Acts 4:12 (Ap IV, 98). The necessity of Christianity cannot be said to depend upon men's recognition of its necessity or upon their correct understanding of its message, since unregenerate reason can never understand the Gospel (SD II, 9; Ap IV, 265). The position of Rahner and Vatican II that ignorance of the Gospel is inculpable is incompatible with the viewpoint of the Lutheran Confessions that ignorance of God always includes unbelief, distrust, contempt, and hatred of God (Ap II, 29). From the fact that Christianity must come to men in an historical way Rahner draws the conclusion that there

are lawful, saving prehistories of Christianity. But the same fact moves Luther to pray that the Kingdom may come to men so that they can be saved through it (LC III, 53-54). The idea that Christianity is not necessary for one who has not heard it is foreign to Luther, who thinks of the Kingdom as moving through the world continually and as something which all the world needs for salvation.<sup>21</sup>

The Lutheran Confessions do not answer the question of why a man's unbelief is culpable when he does not know the Gospel. Why God gives His Word at one place and not at another is partially explained by reference to the punishment of the posterity of unbelievers, but for the most part it is God's secret (SD XI, 57-64). It can be noted that the natural man can hear the Word of God externally and decide to go to church and listen to preaching (SD II, 54). A safe conclusion would be that an unbeliever who does not search for the truth and the Word has not done what he is able to do and therefore incurs guilt, although it must also be remembered that the man unenlightened by the Spirit cannot benefit from the Word even when he encounters it (SD II, 9, 20, 31). This line of thought was developed by Lutheran dogmatists, who noted that the Word of God was present in the various parts of the world and available to the heathen who

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<sup>21</sup>Werner Elert, The Structure of Lutheranism, trans. Walter Hanson (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1962), 1:385-88.

would make the effort to look for it and held that the heathen who did not look for it was culpably ignorant.<sup>22</sup>

The subscribers of the Lutheran Confessions cannot regard non-Christian religions as positive prehistories of and preparations for Christianity, for no one can ever prepare himself for Christian faith apart from the means of grace (SD II, 78). To be sure, the Confessions affirm the universal salvific will of God (SD XI, 28-29, 34-36) and the objective redemption of the human race through Christ's death (SD XI, 15). From these facts Rahner draws a series of three conclusions:

1. God offers grace to all men in the experiences available to them.
2. God injects into human nature an impelling movement toward acceptance of offered grace, even when men are ignorant of or outwardly opposed to the Gospel of grace.
3. Non-Christian religions are lawful instruments for achieving a saving relationship with God.<sup>23</sup>

The first conclusion is contrary to the Lutheran insistence on the necessity of the means of grace for faith and salvation. God would have all men to be saved, but He wills to work salvation only through the Word of God and the sacraments (SD XI, 29-32, 37-41, 68-72). The treasure won for us

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<sup>22</sup>Heinrich Schmid, The Doctrine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, trans. Charles Hay and Henry E. Jacobs (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1899), pp. 443-44, 448-50.

<sup>23</sup>Supra, pp. 101-3.

by Christ's death is lost unless the Spirit applies it through the proclaimed Word (LC II, 38). The second conclusion is contrary to the Lutheran teaching that man, by nature and without the means of grace, is totally corrupt and spiritually incapable. Three things are impossible for human nature: the carnal mind cannot submit to God's will, Rom. 8:7-8 (Ap IV, 32; Ep II, 3); without faith it is impossible to please God, Heb. 11:6 (Ap IV, 256); the natural man cannot know the things of the Spirit, 2 Cor. 2:14 (Ep II, 2). When Rahner rejects the opinion that most non-Christians are "so evil and stubborn that the offer of supernatural grace ought not even to be made in fact in most cases,"<sup>24</sup> he is operating with the mediate premise that men prove themselves worthy of the offer of grace. But God owes grace to no one (Ap IV, 9-20, 339-43). As for the third conclusion, its mediate premise (that man must seek God and worship Him in a concrete, social context) is not sufficient to establish that any one form of human worship is in fact approved by God as an instrument of salvation. The mediate premise needed for this is a definite Word of God about a given form of worship, which Rahner never supplies (Ap XV, 13-17). Furthermore, the objection of Leo Elders that this third conclusion conflicts with the biblical truth that the influence of true grace separates a man from the follies of

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<sup>24</sup>Supra, p. 102.

the world and the flesh<sup>25</sup> agrees well with the Confessions (Ap VII/VIII, 14; SD II, 67; VIII, 68-70).

The elements of grace which Rahner claims to find in non-Christian religions are possibilities of achieving a salvific relationship with God through morality and works. But the righteousness of the heathen is no substitute for trust in the works of Christ (Ap IV, 13-16). The Gospel about Christ which comforts the accused sinner, the necessity of which is asserted on page after page of the Confessions, is not proclaimed by heathenism, as Rahner also knows. The statement about Hellenistic religion in a book by Rahner's brother Hugo could be applied to all heathen religions: "The idea that God should die and rise again in order to lead his faithful to everlasting life is unrepresented."<sup>26</sup> But how then can there be any quickening, saving power in those religions?

Heathen religion is not a preparative prehistory to Christianity as the Old Testament covenant was. Old Testament religion was distinguished from heathenism by rites and promises (Ap VII/VIII, 14). More important, in the Old Testament the people of Israel possessed explicit promises

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<sup>25</sup>Leo Elders, "Die Taufe der Weltreligionen. Bemerkungen zu einer Theorie Karl Rahners," Theologie und Glaube, 55 (1965); 130-31.

<sup>26</sup>Hugo Rahner, Greek Myths and Christian Mystery, trans. Brian Battershaw (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), pp. 34-35.

of grace and Christ (Ap IV, 57-59) and so were a true church (Ap XX, 2; XXVII, 98), in spite of the absence of the Roman Catholic magisterium. The impurities of Old Testament Israelites were never authorized by the prophetic Word, which is "the pure and clear fountain of Israel" (SD, The Summary Formulation, 3) and cannot err (LC IV, 57; Ap XV, 14-17; IV, 207), and therefore these impurities are no proof of the lawfulness of heathen religion, which has no Word of God.

Heathenism is under the power of the devil (LC II, 52) and is an apostasy from Gospel truth, which has been in the world since man's origin (SD V, 23). Men wickedly invented gods (LC I, 18) and forms of worship (Ap IV, 288; XV, 15). They misused what little knowledge they had of God and sacrificial worship (SD V, 22; Ap IV, 206; XXIV, 23). No saving message can be expected to arise in the world, which does not rightly know or thank or trust God and believes in salvation by works (LC I, 42; II, 21, 63; Ap IV, 206, 212).

The Christian Church cannot address the pagan and the Jew as people who are already Christians. For there is a sharp discontinuity, rather than a continuity, between the Jews', heathen's and Moslems' worship of God (LC II, 66) and the true, proper worship of God, which is to repent of one's sins and receive what He offers and promises through the Messiah (Ap IV, 49, 154, 228).

In the Lutheran Confessions conversion is more than a change from one level of Christian religious experience to another. Conversion is a radical change from spiritual death and inability in spiritual matters to new life in the Holy Spirit. Since conversion brings about new, Christ-centered activities in the intellect and will (SD II, 61-64, 70) and brings forth the fruits of faith, including the confession of faith (Ap XII, 28, 131; XXIV, 30), the non-Christian cannot be thought to have undergone some kind of implicit, anonymous conversion. Conversion is a response to God's call through the means of grace, so that through the preaching of the Law man learns to know his sins and God's terrible wrath and through the preaching of the Gospel he is moved to accept the forgiveness of sins for Christ's sake (SD II, 54). Those who have been converted to Christ know that their pre-Christian state was unbelief over which the sentence of condemnation hung and that a new sentence of pardon and deliverance is given to all who believe in Christ (Ap XII, 48; SD V, 2).

While Rahner protests Elders' accusation that he de-emphasizes the proclamation of the Gospel,<sup>27</sup> it is nevertheless true that the style of missionary preaching which logically results from his views is defective. Such

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<sup>27</sup>"Die Anonymen Christen," S, 6:553. Cf. Elders, p. 132.

preaching will not seriously pronounce God's judgment upon heathenism and announce the absolute necessity of trusting in Christ the Savior. According to Rahner, the necessity of Christianity depends upon the non-Christian's state of knowledge, and the missionary cannot know for sure when the obligation to believe begins to come into effect. Rahner thinks that Francis Xavier was mistaken in telling the heathen that their ancestors were damned.<sup>28</sup> A missionary who believes this can hardly say to the heathen with Zeisberger:

Now we bear to you the peace of God. The time is here; the visitation of God your Creator, who as man died for you. You are not any longer to live in darkness without Him; you are to learn to know Him, Whom to know is life and peace.<sup>29</sup>

It is not surprising that the missionaries in Rahner's own church are reacting violently against his theory.<sup>30</sup>

Furthermore, Rahner's approach does not condemn the religious and moral experiences of the non-Christian but rather confirms them as the essence of Christianity and explicates Gospel faith as a continuation of these experiences.

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<sup>28</sup>"Konziliare Lehre der Kirche und kuenftige Wirklichkeit christlichen Lebens," S, 6:491.

<sup>29</sup>H. J. Schuh, David Zeisberger, The Moravian Missionary to the American Indians (Columbus, Ohio: The Book Concern, n.d.), p. 82.

<sup>30</sup>Henricus Van Straelen, The Catholic Encounter with World Religions (London: Burns and Oates, 1966), p. 71; P. Damboriena, "Aspects of the Missionary Crisis in Roman Catholicism," The Future of the Christian World Mission, ed. Wi Jo Kang and Wm. Danker (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Co., 1971), p. 84.

In other words, the converted heathen is encouraged to seek justification through moral experience. The Lutheran Confessions, on the contrary, "call men's consciences away from the law to the Gospel, away from trust in their own works to trust in the promise and in Christ" (Ap XII, 76).

Some of Rahner's fellow Roman Catholics have made a number of criticisms of his theory of the lawfulness of non-Christian religions which agree well with the stance of the Lutheran Confessions:

1. There is no biblical backing for the theory.<sup>31</sup> The Old Testament takes a negative position toward heathen religion, and the New Testament describes it as under demonic influence. The so-called "pious pagans" of Scripture, like the Queen of Sheba, all came into contact with Israel's revelation.<sup>32</sup>

2. Conversion is a more radical change than Rahner thinks. He is too pessimistic about the power of the Gospel to change the heathen. Henri De Lubac and Hans von Balthasar maintain that apostolic preaching involves more than the explication of a Christianity which is already present in the heathen.<sup>33</sup> Syncretism robs the cross of Christ of its power.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Damboriena, p. 84.

<sup>32</sup>Elders, pp. 126-28.

<sup>33</sup>Damboriena, pp. 85-86. Cf. also Van Straelen, p. 96.

<sup>34</sup>Elders, p. 132.

3. Pagan religion cannot contribute to a man's justification. Salvation history has not penetrated world history as deeply and broadly as Rahner thinks.<sup>35</sup> Van Straelen ridicules what he calls "salvationitis," by which he means "that newfangled and unbiblical desire of ascribing to non-Christian religions a great potestas salvifica."<sup>36</sup> This notion conflicts with his experience of Japanese religions.<sup>37</sup> Elders points out that the most highly developed non-Christian religions, especially Hinduism and Buddhism, are nihilistic, depersonalizing, and pantheistic in their tendencies.<sup>38</sup>

However, Rahner's Roman Catholic critics share with him the belief that God dispenses grace apart from the church's means of grace and that all men of good will can attain salvation. They accept the Roman Catholic principle: facienti quod est in se Deus non denegat gratiam,<sup>39</sup> which is rejected in the Lutheran Confessions (SA III, i, 8).

Damboriena holds that there is a continuity between non-Christian religion and Christian revelation.<sup>40</sup> Von Balthasar

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<sup>35</sup>Damboriena, pp. 84-85.

<sup>36</sup>Van Straelen, p. 97.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 96 and passim.

<sup>38</sup>Elders, pp. 128-30.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 130; Damboriena, p. 78.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

and De Lubac are willing to accept the theory of anonymous Christianity in the sense that grace works secretly in non-Christians.<sup>41</sup> Elders thinks that a non-Christian can undergo an implicit conversion.<sup>42</sup>

Rahner's Roman Catholic critics are willing to accept the first conclusion which he draws from the divine will of universal salvation and the objective redemption of mankind in Christ's death,<sup>43</sup> but consider the other two to be "Rahner's jump into the void," as Damboriena puts it.<sup>44</sup> On the other hand, Lutheranism rejects all three conclusions. (One wonders how the Lutheran theologian Schlink can criticize the theory of anonymous Christianity because it does not take seriously the self-understanding of the non-Christian religions and then commend the action of the Second Vatican Council in "not limiting the freedom of God's saving activity that is concealed from us.")<sup>45</sup> The critics are inconsistent in not accepting all three conclusions. For Rahner is ascribing lawfulness not to all elements of non-Christian religion but only to those elements which consist of extra-ecclesial grace, which enables a man to obtain salvation by right living. Since

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid., pp. 85-87. Cf. also Van Straelen, p. 11.

<sup>42</sup>Elders, p. 126.

<sup>43</sup>Supra, p. 106.

<sup>44</sup>Damboriena, p. 81.

<sup>45</sup>Edmund Schlink, After the Council, trans. H. J. A.

Rahner's Roman Catholic critics share his view that man can attain salvation outside the church through morally good acts and a right spiritual orientation, it is hard to see how they can long sustain their objection to his assertion that man can be justified through the morality which is to be found in the non-Christian religions.

#### Summary of Chapter IV

Karl Rahner asserts that non-Christian religion contains elements of grace and is a lawful instrument for attaining salvation through implicit Christianity. The conversion of a Jew or a pagan of good will is not a turning of some one without God into a Christian but the achievement of a reflexive awareness of the full meaning of the grace which he already experiences. The church should address him as an anonymous Christian.

In contrast, the Lutheran Confessions teach that the pagan and the Jew are outside the Christian Church and under the wrath of God. They must not be encouraged to rely on their own good will but must be brought through the preaching of the Law to see their guilt and damnation and called through the Gospel to trust in Christ.

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Bouman (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968), pp. 129-30.

## CHAPTER V

### THE MESSAGE TO THE ATHEIST

This chapter is a discussion of the soteriological status of the atheist and the implications thereof for the church's message to him. The incompatibility of the position of Karl Rahner and that of the Lutheran Confessions can be summarized thus:

**Karl Rahner's Thesis:** The church today must present Christianity to the good atheist as the explication of his transcendental experience of God.

**The Lutheran Antithesis:** The church must announce to the atheist that he is lost in sin and can be saved only by grace through faith in Christ.

#### The Position of Karl Rahner

If the term "atheist" is considered in a broad sense to refer to one who denies God, both the hypocritical professor of Christianity and the pagan whose religious errors or evil life cause him to turn away existentially from the mysterious ground of his being can be called atheists.<sup>1</sup> In

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<sup>1</sup>Karl Rahner, "Atheism," Sacramentum Mundi: An Encyclopedia of Theology, ed. Karl Rahner et al. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), 1:116-17. Hereafter this encyclopedia will be referred to as SM.

this paper the term refers to the post-Christian "neo-pagan," who rejects the Christian faith within an historical context that long ago became Christian.<sup>2</sup> Such a person can be an anonymous Christian if he is open to God on a transcendental level (that is deep in his heart). The Christian Church can joyfully take this fact into account when entering into dialogue with him.

According to the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, not every atheist can with certainty be considered guilty of rejecting God. In "Gaudium et Spes,"<sup>3</sup> sections 19-21, the council analyzes modern atheism and teaches that atheism is culpable if it wilfully shuts God out of the heart and tries to dodge religious questions. But not every atheism can be said to do these things. Some men may be atheists because they have a false conception of God, or are reacting against a religion which has in fact been distorted by erring Christians, or do not see a need for God in the modern age of technical progress and human power, or do not know how to harmonize the idea of God with scientific reasoning or with the presence of evil in the world. These attitudes are not self-evidently wicked, like the

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<sup>2</sup>Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimler, Theological Dictionary, trans. Richard Strachan (New York: Herder and Herder, 1965), p. 333.

<sup>3</sup>"Gaudium et Spes," sections 19-21, The Documents of Vatican II, ed. Walter M. Abbott (New York: American Press, 1966), pp. 215-20.

atheism of former ages, but are products of the modern social environment.<sup>4</sup> They do not necessarily spring from the innermost core of the atheist's being and need not be incompatible with a submission to the ground of his being through a following of the dictates of conscience. Thus a baptized man's conceptual apostasy need not be a mortal sin.<sup>5</sup>

The council furthermore teaches that an atheist can be a justified man and achieve salvation if he does not act contrary to his conscience. Since God wills that all men should be saved and makes a universal offer of grace, all those who by no fault of their own have not come to an explicit knowledge of God but try with divine grace to live a good life are not denied the necessities of salvation.<sup>6</sup> What applies to the pagan also applied to the atheist: the necessity of being a Christian does not begin until the person has sufficient knowledge to make a free choice for or against Christianity. The result of Christ's death for

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<sup>4</sup>Karl Rahner, "Atheismus und implizites Christentum," Schriften zur Theologie (Benziger Verlag: Einsiedeln, 1967), 8:187-92. Hereafter this collection will be referred to as S.

<sup>5</sup>Karl Rahner, Do You Believe in God?, trans. Rich. Strachan (New York: Newman Press, 1969), pp. 26-28.

<sup>6</sup>Documents, p. 35.

all men is that the grace of this paschal mystery works in an unseen way in the hearts of all men of good will.<sup>7</sup>

Since the good atheist receives grace (which is God's self-communication), he can be regarded to be implicitly a theist. The council, in the seventh section of its decree on missions, declared that God leads those inculpably ignorant of the Gospel to the faith needed to please Him (Heb. 11:6) in ways known to Himself. This optimism about the salvation of non-Christians, including atheists, is a new development in the Roman Catholic Church, beginning with Pope Pius IX, and diverges from the traditional teaching that atheism cannot continue in a normal adult for a longer period of time without guilt. But it has roots in traditional statements about implicita fides and the unbeliever's implicit desire for baptism.<sup>8</sup>

The new optimism is based on the insight that a man may act according to presuppositions which he does not and perhaps cannot reflect upon and may subjectively experience what he has not yet objectivized in his consciousness, or has falsely objectivized. For example, a man who has never learned the rules of logic affirms them by thinking logically. Every man has a transcendental experience of God, since he affirms or denies absolute being and absolute

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., pp. 221-22; "Atheismus und implizites Christentum, S, 8:192-93.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., pp. 187, 193-96.

good by the way he lives and the attitude which he takes toward existence. The transcendental theist accepts this experience through acts of good will, while the transcendental atheist rejects it in evil decisions, acts, and attitudes. The orthodox Christian is a transcendental theist who has and accepts a correct conception of God. The justified pagan and the justified atheist are transcendental theists who have incorrectly conceptualized their experience of God. The hypocritical churchman is a transcendental atheist who has and professes a correct conception of God. The guilty atheist is a transcendental atheist who either rejects a correct conceptualization of God or, as is common in modern times, has an incorrect conceptualization or no conceptualization at all and denies his soul's transcendental reference to God principally through infidelity to conscience or a guilty interpretation of existence as absurd.<sup>9</sup>

According to Heb. 11:6, the minimal saving knowledge of God is a belief that He exists and guarantees the moral order. This minimal knowledge can exist implicitly when a man grasps the demands of his conscience as absolute for him and so affirms the absolute being of God as the ground for his actions.<sup>10</sup> Considered as love for others, obedience to conscience is implicitly a belief in God and a love of God. Whenever one loves and serves another person in absolute

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., pp. 196-202.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., pp. 196-97.

selflessness, he implicitly affirms God through affirmation of absolute moral worth and imperative and brings about his salvation.<sup>11</sup> Marxism is always in danger of becoming transcendental atheism through a brutal denial of the worth of individual men; nevertheless, it is possible for the sacrifices of Marxists to be services of true love which affirms the value of others.<sup>12</sup> This is why Rahner, in a dialogue with a Communist, could say that the Spirit of God was at work in the Marxist movement.<sup>13</sup>

The atheist of good will is implicitly a Christian. He has received grace, which always illuminates itself with the unthematic revelation that God is gracious and wants to communicate Himself. It has been explained elsewhere in this paper how it can be said that the whole of Christian faith is implicitly contained in morally good acts and attitudes.<sup>14</sup> Rahner holds that "anyone who courageously accepts life-- even a shortsighted, primitive positivist who apparently bears patiently with the poverty of the superficial--has already accepted God."<sup>15</sup> A materialistic psychologist can

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<sup>11</sup>"Marxistische Utopie und christliche Zukunft des Menschen," S, 6:84-85.

<sup>12</sup>Karl Rahner, "Christianity and the 'New Man,'" Theological Investigations, trans. Karl Kruger (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1966), 5:143-45. Hereafter this collection will be referred to as TI.

<sup>13</sup>Karl Rahner, J. B. Metz, and Milan Machovec, Can a Christian Be A Marxist?, (Chicago: Argus Communications Co., 1969), p. 51.

<sup>14</sup>Supra, pp. 74-79.

<sup>15</sup>"Thoughts on the

affirm the existence of free spirit by his own free acts.<sup>16</sup>  
 The belief in eternal life is implicit in moral decisions.  
 In a free decision, something eternal happens, and man is  
 aware of himself as something incommensurable with passing  
 time, whether or not he reflects on this fact consistently.  
 In authentic acts of freedom one cannot think of the auth-  
 entic as perishing with time. He who calmly faces his own  
 death shows thereby that he presupposes that he is immor-  
 tal, for empty nothingness cannot be the goal of action.<sup>17</sup>

The new optimism about the salvation of atheists  
 has important apologetic implications. Christians confront  
 atheists of good will not as damned enemies of God but as  
 anonymous Christians who have experienced God and His grace  
 but have not succeeded in understanding what has happened to  
 them. For such a man conversion to the Christian Church  
 will be an improved change in his reflexive awareness of  
 his experience of God. The church's task is to interpret  
 his experience for him, pointing out his errors while at  
 the same time confirming his anonymous Christianity.<sup>18</sup>

Rahner recommends that proofs of God's existence  
 and other apologetic devices be used in conjunction with a

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Possibility of Belief Today," TI, 5:7.

<sup>16</sup>"Atheismus und implizites Christentum," S, 8:199.

<sup>17</sup>"The Life of the Dead," TI, 6:348-52.

<sup>18</sup>Karl Rahner, "Faith Today," Belief Today (New  
 York: Sheed and Ward, 1967), pp. 85-89.

"mystagogical" instruction which leads the atheist to scrutinize his transcendental experience of God through his unlimited yearnings, unconditional loyalty, unselfish commitment to serving others, and other acts in which he recognizes and bows to absolute claims. This mystagogy will reveal that his intellect and will continually act as if there were a God, an infinite, absolute being. God is co-affirmed in all man's knowing and loving, as the pre-supposed reality toward which mind and will strive. Atheism, an act of mind and will which denies that either can have an infinite object (God), contradicts itself.<sup>19</sup> Man's pursuit of the absolute affirms an implicit theism, as Joseph Donceel explains:

How do we know that the objects of our experience are finite and contingent? This is certainly not given to us in sense experience, nor do we know it from reasoning. Rahner claims that we are aware of these features because, as soon as we grasp any reality at all, our intellect surges beyond it and refers it to the infinite and necessary reality. Of everything we get to know we affirm implicitly that it is. Yet no object of our experience simply is. It is this or that. The predicate we always use [is] is too wide for all the subjects we apply it to. Our intellect keeps looking for a reality to which we may apply our basic predicate in its fullest amplitude, of which we can say in all truth: this reality is. No restrictions, no specification. This reality simply is. The reality which simply is, without being this or that, is the fullness of being, is God.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>"Atheism," SM, 1:120-22; "Atheismus und implizites Christentum," S, 8:204-7.

<sup>20</sup>J. Donceel, "Rahner's Argument for God," America, 123 (October 31, 1970); 340.

Similarly, true love is never satisfied but reaches out to love more and more, striving for the infinite object of love, which is God.<sup>21</sup>

Mystagogy reveals not only that God exists and is known but also that He is gracious. Whenever an atheist avoids pessimism and nihilism and assumes in his actions that there are absolutes, that he ought to love others, and that life is meaningful, he is implicitly affirming, though without realizing it, that God has given his life a purpose and a destiny and has willed to communicate Himself to him in loving communion. The life-affirming attitude which arises out of man's pursuit of the absolute, often in spite of bewilderment, loneliness, failure, fear of death, and other experiences which seem to contradict and negate it, is an affirmation of grace at the core of man's being. If this existential affirmation of grace is once understood, then grace, justification through faith and love, the incarnation of Christ, the trinitarian being of God, the beatific vision in glory, and the other mysteries of Christian faith are rendered credible.<sup>22</sup>

The atheist can suppress his experience of God through indifference to religious questions, or through

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<sup>21</sup>"The 'Commandment' of Love in Relation to the Other Commandments," TI, 5:445-52.

<sup>22</sup>"Thoughts on the Possibility of Belief Today," TI, 1:5-12.

cowardly fear of truth, or through a positivistic or materialistic denial of the possibility of knowing God. When, therefore, an atheist has an open mind toward possible supernatural reality and does not deny that the Christian's position can be compatible with intellectual integrity, the Christian can commend such openness and point out that it is already an implicit acceptance of man's nature as a spirit open to the reality of God and of God as the object always given to transcendent consciousness.<sup>23</sup>

Rahner writes:

Certainly, the man who in honesty and sincerity cannot go beyond a troubled atheism, who is downcast and sees only the Medusa head of life's absurdity, should quietly admit this to himself, should try to accept this very experience with equanimity . . . But he must not maintain that his position is the only one compatible with intellectual integrity. How would he know? . . . The believer will point out to the questioner that his stance is already a yes to the divinely blissful mystery of existence, and that he has not yet received the gift of courage to express to himself what his life in silent action already professes.<sup>24</sup>

Such openness and implicit knowledge of truth are sometimes manifested in the patience, good will, and loving struggle for mutual understanding which can take place in a dialogue between Christians and non-Christians.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Karl Rahner, "Intellectual Integrity and Christian Faith," Belief Today, pp. 93-96.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 96.

<sup>25</sup>"Ueber den Dialog in der pluralistischen Gesellschaft," S, 6:54-58.

This, then, is Rahner's message to the atheist:  
 "Go on, wherever you may find yourself at this particular moment, follow the light even though it is dim."<sup>26</sup> Since "Christianity is nothing other than the clear expression of what man experiences indistinctly in his actual being," the atheist should be led to discover the affirmation of God and of grace which is hidden in his own experience: "he should go on and follow the light shining in the uttermost depth of his heart."<sup>27</sup>

#### The Position of the Lutheran Confessions

From the standpoint of the Lutheran Confessions, the atheist cannot be regarded as a Christian. On the contrary, he must be called to the radical change of conversion to Christ.

Atheism is culpable resistance to God and His Word. In the one explicit reference to atheism (Gottes Verleugnung, Dei abnegationem) in the Confessions, it is called an abominable sin (LC IV, 104).<sup>28</sup> (The term Gottlose cannot be simply translated "atheists," since it is the equivalent of the Latin impii and can be applied to hypocritical professors of Christianity, Ap VII/VIII, 1-8)

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<sup>26</sup>"Thoughts on the Possibility of Belief Today," TI, 1:8.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>All citations of the Lutheran Confessions in English are taken from The Book of Concord, ed. Theodore

The flesh with which man is born is atheistic: it does not fear God but supposes that men are born and die by chance. Therefore we need to receive the Holy Ghost through hearing the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins, so that we can think rightly about God and believe in His care (Ap IV, 135). It is impossible for natural man to be anything but hostile to God (SD II, 17-24). Heb. 11:6, the passage cited by Vatican II and Karl Rahner to show the minimal saving knowledge of God which they claim an atheist can possess implicitly, is quoted four times in the Lutheran Confessions to show that man cannot be justified without faith in the Gospel, for natural man cannot please God (Ap IV, 256, 269, 372; XVIII, 6). Since the natural man is spiritually dead and cannot believe divine truth (SD II, 9-10), it would be a self-contradiction, on Lutheran premises, to say that an atheist can act on theistic or Christian presuppositions.

There can be no inculpable atheism, for all resistance to God and His Word is culpable. While Vatican II and Rahner think that atheism which is a product of social influences is not always self-evidently wicked, the Confessions regard doubt about God's wrath, His grace, and His

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G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959). German and Latin citations are from Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche, 5th ed., edited by H. Lietzmann, 1963).

Word and anger at His acts and judgments as evil (Ap II, 42). Resistance to the Word of God (that is, atheism on the conceptual level) is also resistance to the Holy Spirit (that is, atheism on the transcendental level) (SD II, 57-58, 82-83). A man's obligation to accept Christianity (and therefore the possibility of guilt in rejecting it) cannot be said to begin only when he has sufficient understanding of Christianity to make a responsible decision about it, since natural man never comes to a correct comprehension of the Gospel (SD II, 9). Unbelief of God's testimony about His Son makes God a liar and brings eternal death (Ap IV, 297). Those who fight against God's Word sin and are lost through their own fault (LC II, 22; S.D. XI, 78). God punishes those who misuse His name (LC I, 69, 77). The elect are not those who despise, blaspheme, reject, and persecute the Word of God (SD XI, 39). If the point is raised here that some atheists do not despise the Word of God through ridicule and persecution but are the openminded atheists of good will whom Rahner considered justified men. But in the Lutheran Confessions no inculpable atheists are envisioned: all who refuse to come to the wedding feast of the Gospel are despisers of the Word (SD XI, 40-41).

The atheist, who does not trust in the scriptural promises of grace, cannot be called an anonymous, transcendental Christian. For "faith in the true sense, as the Scriptures use the word, is that which accepts the promise"

(Ap IV, 113). Not to believe God's promise dishonors and angers Him (LC IV, 21). He requires the faith by which we are sure that He forgives, and not to believe the promise of forgiveness is the greatest blasphemy (Ap XII, 94). It cannot be said that a conceptual, categorical atheist can be a transcendental Christian by following his conscience. A conscience cannot honestly find peace when confronted with the accusations of the Law as long as it lacks certainty of faith in the Gospel promise that through Christ sins are forgiven. A conscience without such certainty is without God (Ap XII, 88-90). Certainty of the promise cannot be merely implicit. Luther indeed says that "to have a God properly means to have something in which the heart trusts completely" (LC I, 10). But he has no implicit trust or belief in mind, which merely engages in a fundamental existential decision or commitment of some kind. He calls for true faith in the true God (3-4), gives Him true honor (16) and recognizes Him as a personal God asking for personal allegiance (4), working in history (35) and revealing His Word (41-42). This is the God Who can be known and received only through the revealed Gospel doctrine (LC II, 63-66).

Good will in an atheist is no sign of justification and the quickening of faith. For good will is not incompatible with rejection of God and His truth. There are degrees of goodness and good will among the unregenerate (Ap IV, 14, 24; LC I, 130), because the will of the natural man can

enable him to live honorably and wisely (AC XVIII, 1: Ap XVIII, 4). Fair judgment, intellectual integrity, and friendly dialogue are always to be highly esteemed and desired (SA II, ii, 2; II, iv, 16; LC I, 37; IV, 58-59; Ap VII/VIII, 25). In Luther's Torgau sermon the second article of the Apostles' Creed, which is recommended in the Formula of Concord (SD, IX, 1), the Reformer complains that some ridicule the faith of Christians, even though they have misinterpreted it rationalistically.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, the will of natural man, however good it might be by the standards of this world, cannot attain the spiritual righteousness God requires (AC XVIII) and is totally turned away from God and His Gospel (SD II, 17-24). Therefore one can never, as Rahner does, interpret a man's attitude before his conversion as real faith in the Gospel. The faith which is incompatible with mortal sin is a penitent trust in the deliverance through Christ which is freely offered in the means of grace (Ap IV, 64-68; 142-44); this faith the atheist does not have.

God's will that all men should be saved and Christ's redemption of all men do not imply that atheists can be anonymous Christians any more than they imply that pagans

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<sup>29</sup>Martin Luther, "Predigt ueber den zweiten Artikel von Jesu Christo," Saemmtliche Schriften, ed. Joh. G. Walch (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1885), 10: cols. 1127-28.

can be anonymous Christians.<sup>30</sup> From God's will of universal salvation in Christ one can certainly derive the authorization of the church's missionary proclamation to individuals (Ap IV, 262), but not the conclusion that God wills that men should be saved without the means of grace.

Rahner sees an implicit theism and an implicit Christianity in the absoluteness with which a good atheist bows to the claims of morality. But submission to absolute moral claims is not the same thing as accepting the Gospel of grace. The righteousness of Christ offered to us in the Gospel is quite different from the righteousness of works of morality (Ap IV, 43). The atheist who obeys the dictates of his conscience still does not have that obedience which consists in the desire to receive the offered promise of Christ's merits (Ap IV, 227-28). L. H. Yearly remarks that Rahner's reductionistic analysis of what it means to believe in God leaves the mystery of God almost without analogical content.<sup>31</sup> Conspicuously missing in the notion of the implicit faith of the atheist is any sure hope that God has sent His Son into the world that it might be saved through Him. This hope makes the difference between those who are saved and those who are not (Ap IV, 345-47). This

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<sup>30</sup>Supra, pp. 108-9.

<sup>31</sup>L. H. Yearly, "Karl Rahner on the Relation of Nature and Grace," *Canadian Journal of Theology*, 16 (1970); 223.

hope is not implicit in an atheist's good actions as a knowledge of the rules of logic is implicit in the thought of a man who reasons logically. For an ignorant man might be seen to be using the rules of logic by an a posteriori analysis of his reasoning. But no analysis of an atheist's thinking can show that specific doctrines of Christian faith play a part in his decisions to do good.

The atheist, even if he is a man of good will, should be brought through the preaching of the Law to see his guilt and damnation and called through the preaching of the Gospel to trust in Christ. He needs conversion, not merely in Rahner's sense of an improved change in his consciousness of grace, but in the more radical sense of a change from unbelief to faith.<sup>32</sup> For "the conversion of our corrupted will . . . is nothing else but a resurrection of the will from spiritual death" (SD II, 87).

The Christian Church must pronounce God's judgement on the atheist's sin, including his rejection of truth, in order to show him his need for a Savior. It must use the Law to rebuke unbelief of the Word of God (SD V, 17-9) and to show man to what utter depths his nature has fallen and how corrupt it has become (SA III, ii, 4), for the Savior is not known or magnified unless man recognizes his evil and miserable condition (Ap II, 50; SD I, 3). The strategy of

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<sup>32</sup>Supra, pp. 111-12.

Rahner and Vatican II does not make much provision for rebuking the atheist's unbelief, for it is finally impossible to judge whether a given form of atheism is culpable or not.<sup>33</sup> Nor does it show the atheist the depth of his corruption, for it urges him to think that his submission to moral absolutes is an implicit Christianity. But this is a delusion, because the natural man does not truly succeed in submitting to God's Law (Ep II, 3). The Lutheran Confessions do not present proofs of God's existence but do assert that natural man can know that there is a God (SD II, 9; V, 22) and indicate how such proofs should be used. The records of history and daily experience teach that God is to be feared and not despised (LC I, 34-35). Men ought to learn from God's gifts to thank and acknowledge Him as Lord and Creator, although the world does not do it (LC II, 20). While Lutheranism cannot agree with that part of Rahner's "mystagogical instruction" which "uncovers" anonymous Christianity in the atheist, it can endorse his mystagogical use of the proofs of God to scrutinize the workings of conscience as it recognizes the absolute demands of morality. Such self-examination can assist the function of the Law in terrifying the conscience and convicting it of sin in preparation for the reception of grace (SA III, iii, 1-6; Ap XII, 29-34). The church must warn against indifference to religious questions (LC I, 98-99; SA III, i, 2).

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<sup>33</sup>"Atheism," SM, 1:121.

The unbeliever must be directed to turn far away from all notions of pleasing God through works of the Law and to turn to the Gospel of justification by grace on account of Christ through faith in His righteousness alone (Ap IV, 288-96). Man's reason can produce only the doctrine of justification by works and obedience to conscience, but the Gospel is "a good and joyful message that God wills not to punish sins but to forgive them for Christ's sake" (SD VI, 22), which comforts and strengthens the terrified and despairing heart (SD VI, 9, 23-26). In contrast, Rahner tells the atheist to look for the light inside himself, for the implicit Gospel in his submission to the moral law. He tells him to regard his good will and love as a true basis for his justification and to consider explicit Christianity an extension of the justification through love which has already taken place in him.

The natural man cannot have any true knowledge of God. To keep looking for the reality which is fulness of being is not the same as to know the God who graciously forgives sin on account of Jesus Christ. Here Lutheran confessionalism can make use of the criticism of Rahner's Transcendental Thomism<sup>34</sup> by his fellow Thomists, although it may not agree with them in all points or even accept the Thomistic system of thought. The gist of this criticism is

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<sup>34</sup>Supra, pp. 11-15.

that while man is mentally equipped to know God as a transcendent, absolute, infinite being, he does not have a pre-conceptual knowledge of God or affirm Him prior to empirical experience. Neo Thomists reject the Transcendental Thomist thesis that a dynamism of intellect and will strives for absolute being through man's unrestricted, primordial desire to know and thereby continually affirms God and His grace in acts of will and mind. The object of a desire to know, that for which man keeps looking cannot be known as more than potential being. Knowledge of actual being must derive from sense experience through abstraction. Therefore there is no necessary affirmation of God and grace implicit in acts of knowing and willing.<sup>35</sup>

Dominic De Petter and Edward Schillebeeckx have worked out a mediating Thomist position, which also rejects the Transcendental Thomist idea of a subjective dynamism affirming absolute being in primordial consciousness. It does postulate an objective dynamism arising from the cognitive, conceptual elements of consciousness and making the intuition of being possible. Schillebeeckx accordingly thinks that Rahner is wrong in teaching an intrinsic call to grace, which comes to man within his consciousness through

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<sup>35</sup>W. J. Hill, "Transcendental Thomism," The New Catholic Encyclopedia (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), 16:449-54.

the subjective dynamism of a supernatural existential. God's call is extrinsic.<sup>36</sup>

In one essay Rahner compares his message to the atheist with Luther's Small Catechism. Here he expresses his concern that the church should be searching for a brief, relevant, readily understandable formula which will relate the essence of Christianity to the reality of man's life as he undergoes it. "Such a formula is, for instance, also Luther's pungent paraphrase of the Apostles' Creed in his Small Catechism." The formula which Rahner suggests for use with modern man is the explanation that the grace of God is the self-communication of the sacred incomprehensible mystery in men's existence and that all Christian doctrines are unfoldings of the grace which fundamentally good men experience in their lives before they hear the Gospel.<sup>37</sup> But Luther does not find grace in man's moral experience apart from faith in the Gospel. On the contrary, he points to man's unworthiness (SC II, 2) and complete spiritual inability (6) and to the necessity of the Spirit's call through the Gospel and enlightenment (6). Furthermore, the Small Catechism presents the specific facts of the Gospel, not merely reductionistic theses about sacred mystery found in consciousness. It is true that Luther can explain the

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid., pp. 454; W. G. Most, "Grace," The New Catholic Encyclopedia (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), 6:667-68; supra, pp. 32-35, 51.

<sup>37</sup>Karl Rahner, "A Short Formula of the Christian Faith," A Pastoral Approach to Atheism, ed. K. Rahner, trans.

Gospel as God's self-communication to us; but this explanation is meaningless apart from the divinely taught facts of the Creed (LC II, 69).

Perhaps the incompatibility between Rahner's message of salvation and that of the Lutheran Confessions can be best shown by placing two quotations side by side.

Rahner writes:

Christianity's real message is this: the Incomprehensible Element in our existence, encompassing us, causing us to suffer the limits of our finitude, although itself beyond this finitude, does not want to be merely our horizon.<sup>38</sup>

This reductionistic statement of the Gospel allows for the possibility of anonymous, implicit Christianity. On the contrary, the message of salvation in the Confessions is explicitly Christian and biblical:

The content of the Gospel is this, that the Son of God, Christ our Lord, himself assumed and bore the curse of the law and expiated and paid for all our sins, that through him alone we re-enter the good graces of God, obtain forgiveness of sins through faith, are freed from death and all the punishments of sin, and are saved eternally (SD V, 20).

#### Summary of Chapter V

According to Karl Rahner, the atheist of good will is justified when he accepts grace through submission to moral demands which his conscience grasps as absolute. The church should address him as an anonymous Christian.

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Theodore Westow (New York: Paulist Press, 1967), pp. 70-82.

<sup>38</sup>Rahner, "Intellectual Integrity and Christian Faith," p. 113.

According to the Lutheran Confessions, atheism is culpable resistance to God and His Word. The atheist must not be encouraged to rely upon his own good will or submission to moral absolutes, but must be brought through the preaching of the Law to see his guilt and damnation and called through the Gospel to trust in Christ.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE INCOMPATIBILITY OF THE THEORY OF ANONYMOUS CHRISTIANITY WITH THE LUTHERAN CONFESSIONS

The theory of anonymous Christianity is attractive to many Christians because it offers the hope of salvation to pagans and atheists, that is, to all who do not have an explicit Christian faith. Furthermore, it seems, according to its chief proponent, Karl Rahner, to be based on profound insights into the nature of faith and grace and to make possible an enlightened approach to the non-Christian which both Roman Catholics and Protestants can find useful. These claims have not been fully tested in the foregoing investigation. The investigation has shown, however, that one major Protestant position, the theology of the Lutheran Confessions, is incompatible with the theory.

#### Method of Comparison and Use of Sources

The two primary sources of data in this study have been the writings of Karl Rahner and the Confessions of the Lutheran Church. These have been compared with regard to the relationship of faith and unbelief to the Word of God. A dialogue between them may seem impossible, since the

writers of the Lutheran Confessions did not know or discuss Rahner's hypotheses that the Christian faith is implicit in every good man's experience of life, that pagan religions can be lawful instruments of salvation, that Christianity is not absolutely necessary for a man until it becomes possible for him to make a free choice about it, and that transcendental philosophy provides a validation of the theory of anonymous Christianity. In this study, however, Rahner's position and the Lutheran position have been compared on these points by working out the logical implications of the assertions of the Lutheran Confessions concerning the necessity of the means of grace, faith's dependence upon the Word of God for knowledge of grace, the corruption of human nature, the doctrine of justification, the nature of non-Christian religion, and the nature of conversion. These implications and their relation to Rahner's theory have sometimes been clarified in terms of propositional logic. The result is a determination of how the writers of the Lutheran Confessions would have judged the theory of anonymous Christianity if they were living today and if they applied their principles consistently.

Bringing Rahner and the Lutheran Confessions into dialogue with each other has not been a simple task, since there are differences in the use of terms. Therefore the method of comparison has involved close attention to usage and context. One example is the matter of the relationship

between nature and grace. Rahner's view is that every human being has a nature which has been influenced by grace. He can say, with the Lutheran Confessions, that man by nature cannot be saved, have faith, and experience grace. But here "nature" is understood abstractly, that is, as "man considered without reference to the influence of grace upon him." In order to show the difference between Rahner's view and the Confessions' view, it has been necessary to establish that the latter use the term "nature" in a concrete sense, referring to the graceless state of men before rebirth through the means of grace.

Similarly, some assertions by Rahner and by the Lutheran Confessions about original sin and concupiscence may seem to be expressing identical thoughts until it is realized that for Rahner these are sin only by analogy, while in the Confessions they are sin in the literal sense. The same sort of problem exists with regard to Rahner's claim that he teaches both justification by grace alone through faith alone and the sufficiency of Scripture for Christian teaching. Careful analysis has revealed that he does not mean by these expressions what Lutheran confessional theology means. For him "grace" involves the bestowal of the ability to merit justification, and by sola fide he means that only by beginning with faith as the free acceptance of grace can one be justified by love. He can approve of the term "sufficiency of Scripture" only because

he views Scripture as the product of the Roman Catholic Church and regards its sufficiency as the sufficiency of that church's magisterial authority.

Secondary sources have been used, not for proof or corroboration of the views of the primary sources, but for illustration and elaboration of those views. Official statements of the Roman Catholic Church, commentaries on the Lutheran Confessions and on the Second Vatican Council, Lutheran theological writings, and other sources have been cited or quoted to clarify either Rahner's Roman Catholic position or the confessional Lutheran viewpoint.

#### Summary of the Reasons for Incompatibility

Karl Rahner proposes that his theory of anonymous Christianity is a theologoumenon. A theologoumenon is a concept which is only indirectly taught by the church's dogma but does not contradict it. This definition suggests how the theory must be tested if it is to be respected and tolerated in the church: it must be shown to be indirectly taught in official dogma but not contradictory to it.

Rahner claims that the concept of anonymous Christianity is indirectly taught in the doctrines of the universal salvific will of God and the objective redemption of the whole human race through Christ's atonement. While these doctrines are affirmed both in the dogmatic statements of the Roman Catholic Church and in the Lutheran Confessions,

Rahner draws conclusions from them which the Confessions do not and cannot. From them he argues that God dispenses grace apart from Scripture and sacraments, that He transforms all human nature by injecting a dynamism toward grace, and that non-Christian religions are lawful instruments of salvation. The Lutheran Confessions, on the contrary, teach the necessity of the means of grace for salvation, the total depravity and gracelessness of human nature before regeneration through the means of grace, and the demonic, apostate, and soteriologically powerless nature of heathen religion.

The theory of anonymous Christianity is contradictory to Lutheran confessional teaching about the total corruption of human nature, the necessity of revelation and of the means of grace, the justification of the sinner by grace alone through faith alone, the necessity of membership in the Christian Church for salvation, and the nature of conversion. The incompatibility is presented in the following series of antitheses, in which "K.R." stands for "Karl Rahner," and "L.C." stands for "the Lutheran Confessions."

K.R.: Man has an experience of grace prior to the use of Word and sacrament.

L.C.: The means of grace are necessary for faith and salvation.

K.R.: The Gospel is meaningful to man because he is already always experiencing grace.

L.C.: Natural man does not know or hear the God of grace but can be brought to saving knowledge by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel.

K.R.: Every man lives in a supernatural existential, which enables and inclines him to enter into communion with God.

L.C.: Natural man is graceless and inclined only to evil.

K.R.: In its infralapsarian condition man's supernatural existential is transmuted by Christ's work into the existential of objective redemption, which interiorly transforms man's nature and inclines him toward grace.

L.C.: Christ's redemption of mankind is not appropriated by the individual apart from the means of grace.

K.R.: Although man's freedom is hindered by original sin because of concupiscence (neutral desire), it is able to choose the good and accept grace.

L.C.: Original sin results in concupiscence (evil desire) and the loss of all freedom and ability in spiritual matters (though not in civil righteousness).

K.R.: Man's obediential potency includes not only the absence of an absolute contradiction of nature and grace but also a positive openness toward grace.

L.C.: Man by nature is capable of receiving grace and conversion but has no positive openness toward grace.

K.R.: Grace transforms man's consciousness, so that even apart from the means of grace he can have a "natural desire for God" and affirm grace.

L.C.: Man's consciousness of God apart from the means of grace is a distorted, unevangelical consciousness of His Law and judgment on sin.

K.R.: Grace transforms man's consciousness, so that grace is revealed and offered to him even apart from the means of grace.

L.C.: No experience of grace is present in the consciousness of the natural man.

K.R.: Verbal revelation of the Gospel explicates the grace which man is always experiencing.

L.C.: The message of the Gospel does not correspond to the content of natural consciousness but conjoins this content with an opposite but compossible truth which transforms consciousness by the Holy Ghost.

K.R.: Man always possesses an implicit knowledge of God, which is presupposed in his mental judgments and moral decisions.

L.C.: Natural man is rationally equipped to know God, but he has no true knowledge of God as He wants to be known.

K.R.: The message of salvation is that a man is justified by grace in Christ through faith and love.

L.C.: The message of salvation is that a man is justified by grace in Christ through faith alone.

K.R.: Saving doctrine can be implicitly affirmed by a faith which has not consciously taken cognizance of it or articulated it.

L.C.: Faith is a personal reliance on God's explicit promises, which are found only in the scriptural revelation about Christ.

K.R.: Faith can implicitly affirm what it explicitly rejects.

L.C.: No one who explicitly rejects and does not confess Christ is a believing Christian.

K.R.: Scripture is sufficient for Christian doctrine because the authority of the church's magisterium, which produced Scripture, is sufficient.

L.C.: The church has no authority to teach anything without a testimony in the Word of God.

K.R.: The unifying center of Christian doctrine is the divinization of man by the self-communication of the divine mystery of grace to man, i.e., an interior experience of man.

L.C.: The center of Christian doctrine is the Gospel of (forensic) justification by grace alone through faith alone on the basis of the imputed righteousness of Christ.

K.R.: Scripture implicitly contains all later defined dogma.

L.C.: The explication of dogmas from the original data of Scripture is valid only if it meets the demand for a valid deduction from a definite and precise Word of God.

K.R.: All of Christian doctrine is implicitly contained in a person's global consciousness of the self-communicated mystery of grace and implicitly affirmed in the moral decisions and actions of every man of good will.

L.C.: The message of salvation cannot be known aright apart from scriptural revelation about Christ and is not affirmed in natural man's consciousness.

K.R.: Men can be saved apart from the Christian Church's means of grace.

L.C.: Heathen and Jews who reject Christ are Christless and damned.

K.R.: Non-Christian religion is a lawful instrument of salvation until the obligation to freely accept Christianity as absolute and necessary is recognized.

L.C.: Christianity is at all times the absolute and necessary religion for all men.

K.R.: Heathen religions contain elements of saving grace.

L.C.: Heathen religion is nothing but degenerate unbelief.

K.R.: The lawfulness of pagan religion is implicit in the teachings of God's will of universal salvation and Christ's objective redemption of all men.

L.C.: Natural man is totally corrupt and cannot be saved apart from the means of grace, which work justification by faith alone.

K.R.: The good pagan and the good Jew already worship the true God.

L.C.: There is a sharp discontinuity between the false worship of the non-Christian and the worship of the true God by the Christian.

K.R.: Atheism is culpable only if it wilfully shuts God out of the heart and tries to dodge religious questions.

L.C.: The resistance of natural man to God and His Word is fleshly and culpable.

K.R.: An atheist of good will is justified if he does not act contrary to his conscience.

L.C.: Justifying faith is trust in God's promises.

K.R.: The atheist of good will affirms faith in God and acceptance of his grace when he grasps the demands of his conscience as absolute and obeys them.

L.C.: Submission to moral absolutes is not the same thing as accepting the Gospel of grace.

K.R.: The possibility of the atheist's justification through good will is implicit in the doctrines of God's will of universal salvation and Christ's objective redemption of all mankind.

L.C.: Man is not justified apart from the means of grace.

K.R.: Apologetic for Christian truth must lead the atheist to scrutinize his transcendental experience of grace.

L.C.: The church's proclamation must rebuke unbelief and show the need for Christ and grace.

K.R.: The conversion of a pagan, a Jew, or an atheist is not a turning of some one without God and grace into a Christian but the achievement in him of a reflexive

awareness of the full meaning of the grace he already experiences.

L.C.: The pagan, Jew, or atheist must be directed to rely not on his own good will but on the Gospel of Christ.

The theory of anonymous Christianity does not qualify as a theologoumenon in the context of Lutheran theology. Whether the theory is indirectly taught by and is compatible with official Roman Catholic dogma has not been determined in this paper. It is supported, if not demanded, by the Roman Catholic doctrine of justification through love and also by the traditional Roman Catholic understanding of fides implicita. The statements of the Second Vatican Council cited in this paper appear to teach at least some aspects of the theory (grace outside the church, justification through obedience to conscience, non-culpability of ignorance of God). The discussion of anonymous Christianity among Roman Catholics, especially the interchange between Rahner and his critics, deserves further study, as does the question of what roots Rahner's optimism has in patristic tradition.

#### Questions for Further Investigation

The purpose of the present investigation has been fulfilled in establishing the relationship between the theory of anonymous Christianity and the Lutheran Confessions. However, not all questions have been answered.

A Bible-oriented theologian will ultimately want to know which of the two views studied in this paper is supported by the assertions of Scripture. To arrive at a judgment, he would have to thoroughly examine the many pertinent Bible passages, such as Luke 12:47-48; John 14:6; Acts 4:12; Rom. 1-2; Gal. 4:8-9; Eph. 2:12; Phil. 3:4-10; Col. 1:5-7; and 2 Thess. 1:8. Such a study would provide an excellent opportunity to test Karl Rahner's fidelity to a hermeneutical principle which he lays down in his essay on nature and grace:

Let us take the doctrine of the Scripture as it is, honestly and without prejudice, and without correcting it in the light of the silent presupposition that it cannot have said something, because this something is supposed to be impossible.<sup>1</sup>

An important unfinished task is a study of the implications of Rahner's theory and of the Lutheran confessional view for the church's understanding of itself and its mission. Prudentio Damboriena, Rahner's coreligionist, charges that the result of Rahner's influence is that:

. . . the "missionary obligation of the Church" loses its main appeal for men and women who, driven by the noble ideal of the Christianization of mankind, volunteered for missions.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Karl Rahner, "Concerning the Relationship between Nature and Grace," Theological Investigations (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1961), 1:179.

<sup>2</sup>P. Damboriena, "Aspects of the Missionary Crisis in Roman Catholicism," The Future of the Christian World Mission, ed. Wi Jo Kang and Wm. Danker (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1971), p. 83.

Rahner himself thinks that accusations of this sort are unfair.<sup>3</sup> Who is right? In an essay on the church Rahner makes much of the church's need for serenity and patience and of the attainment of these through the conviction that good people outside the church are anonymous Christians.<sup>4</sup> Here one must ask: has this serenity been secured at the expense of missionary zeal and urgency? At the same time, what is to be said of the charges of Gustav Warneck and others that the early adherents of the Lutheran Confessions were not interested in missionary endeavors?<sup>5</sup> These questions deserve attention.

Another problem is the controversy between neo-Thomists and Transcendental Thomists. What does the neo-Thomist denial of any a priori knowledge of God have in common with the confessional Lutheran teaching that natural man has no true knowledge of God? Is the a priori theism of the Transcendental Thomists really the same thing as the innate natural knowledge of God taught by John Quenstedt

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<sup>3</sup>Karl Rahner, "Missions," Sacramentum Mundi: An Encyclopedia of Theology, ed. K. Rahner and others (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968-70), 4:81; K. Rahner, "Die Anonymen Christen," Schriften zur Theologie (Einsiedeln: Benziger Verlag, 1965), 6:552-53.

<sup>4</sup>"Dogmatic Notes on 'Ecclesiological Piety,'" II, 5:359-60.

<sup>5</sup>W. Elert, The Structure of Lutheranism, trans. Walter A. Hansen (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1962), 1:385-402.

and John Gerhard?<sup>6</sup> Does the latter have any true roots in Scripture (especially Rom. 1:19 and 2:14-15) and the Lutheran Confessions? Can confessional Lutheranism affirm an implicit natural theism while denying an implicit natural Christianity? Which is philosophically more sound: to say that the good atheist presupposes and affirms the existence of God in his good acts, or to say that his good acts are merely illogical and inconsistent with his unbelief? Is there a difference between acting on the presupposition that God exists and acting "as if" God existed? These questions have not been treated explicitly in this paper.

One should also ask whether there are Protestant forms of the theory of anonymous Christianity, either derived from Rahner's teachings or arising independently. If so, are these compatible with the theology of the Lutheran Confessions? This writer has not surveyed Protestantism in search of answers to these questions. It is difficult to see how any theory of anonymous Christianity could be anything other than a doctrine of salvation by works and a denial of sola fide.

In this paper the Lutheran position has been defined as the position of the Lutheran Confessions. Some Lutherans,

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<sup>6</sup>H. Schmid, Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, rev. and trans. C. A. Hay and H. E. Jacobs (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1899), 104-9.

however, take a much more optimistic view of the status of unbelievers than the Lutheran Confessions do.<sup>7</sup> A dialogue between modern Lutheranism and the theory of anonymous Christianity would probably be quite different from the dialogue set up in this investigation between the Lutheran Confessions and Rahner's doctrine.

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<sup>7</sup>E. g., Carl Braaten, The Future of God (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), pp. 133-40; H. Thielicke, Between Heaven and Earth (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965); John Reumann, "Death," Encyclopedia of the Lutheran Church (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1965), 1:670; Merton Strommen, Milo Brekke, Ralph Unterwager, and Arthur Johnson, A Study of Generations (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1972), pp. 169-73.

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