Death, Darkness and the Holy Spirit in the Theology of Karl Rahner

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an attempt to hear the particularities of Rahner's theological arguments by reading Rahner both non-foundationally and non-consistently. By reading Rahner's theology of death in a non-consistent way, we are able to see the different ways in which he explores death as a moment of encounter and decision, and the ways in which the Spirit makes that encounter and decision present and real to us throughout our lives. By carefully exploring arguments Rahner makes in his explicitly theological and his more pastoral writing, and by not imposing our own hegemonic system, we can hear complexities and potential within Rahner's theological anthropology which we might otherwise miss. In Rahner's theology of death, every time of mortality can be a time for new life and growth in the life of the Spirit of God.

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Contents

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Roses can be black.
They can fall further into the night of death;
black roses of hope falling inaudibly, almost indistinguishably;
falling into your night, and mine.

Karl Rahner, *The Religious Life Today*, p.88

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Introduction

Questions about how we "die a good death" are not so popular within modern theology. This is surprising, especially given the exponential increase in interest in "embodied" theology. The growth in formal hospital chaplaincy and, in the UK at least, the longstanding history of the hospice movement, have raised the profile of issues of holistic palliative care and healing within the therapeutic context, but this does not seem to have become the care of systematic theologians, certainly not of those who concern themselves primarily with "doctrine". Almost entirely absent from the contemporary theological landscape, even in the therapeutic context, is the related question of how intentionally "dying a good death" can in itself be a useful lens for those hoping to "live a good life."

Those familiar with the work of Karl Rahner only tangentially may be aware of his work on the concept of the "anonymous Christian", or perhaps on the theology of grace, or his complex philosophical-theological anthropology. It may surprise them to discover that much of Rahner's theological work was on questions of death and sickness, and that in that work the twin questions of "dying a good death" and "living a good life" are inextricably linked. Rahner might be described as a theologian of human flourishing. He was fascinated by the question of what it meant to be fully alive. And so, when he considered death, he saw it not just as a time of desolation and despair, but also as a moment of final consummation within the arc of the human life. And he understood this moment of consummation as the high-point of the drama of our lives, which (whether we are aware of it or not) has an important role in shaping each and every day of our lives. Rahner's theology of death is rich, and rather than tainting his understanding of daily life with darkness, it seems to brighten and illumine his astonishing explorations into the vitality of ordinary things.

For Rahner, "dying a good death" means dying the death of Christ, that is to say a death which does not deny the reality of who we are and who God is, but rather in which we abandon ourselves fully into the darkness of death, which is incomprehensibly full of the brightness of the living God. This abandonment is something which we can practice every day, and Rahner was greatly influenced in this conviction by his Jesuit formation, and by St Ignatius' charge to his brothers to learn "indifference". But this abandonment is not just something we practice on our own, in our own power and our own strength. The eucharist has a particular significance for Rahner as a site of that practice, that regular rehearsal, of our encounter with death. It is in our encounter with Christ's death that we are prepared to die Christ's death. And it is by the power of the Spirit that this encounter is possible, and by the power of the Spirit that our growth into that death is enabled. But it is not only into and out of the eucharist that the Spirit drives us in our encounter with death. In each and every moment of our encounter with death in our daily lives, it is the

grace of the Spirit which opens us up to accept the consummation into which God calls us, whenever and however it comes. It could even be said that the hiddenness of the Spirit in the darkness of our encounter with death reveals to us the light of the living God in the darkness of our daily lives.

This thesis arose in part from two desires to understand. The first has its roots in a short ministry to which I was called as a lay student chaplain at the Royal Marsden Hospital in Chelsea. It was my privilege as a chaplain to meet people who were more aware than most, not so much of the impending nature of their death, but rather of the daily and regular presence of death in many different forms in their lives. I witnessed people who responded to this tangible presence of mortality in different ways. But the overriding impression which has never left me was the particular liveliness of many of the Christians I met on the wards. There was something burning brightly in them, even as they were in pain, frustrated or moved to tears, that was irrepressibly alive, profoundly joyful, and (at times) arrestingly peaceful. I wanted to understand what that was. And perhaps I was given grace to understand a little better, as in March 2020 I fell badly ill with CoViD-19. About that experience I shall write more in the conclusion to this thesis, but suffice it to say that it has increased the fruitfulness of this project immeasurably.

The second desire to understand arose in the earliest parts of my theological education. The name Rahner occasionally popped up in a seminar, or a debate, and it was usually accompanied by a groan or rolled eyes. This seemed to be the case amongst both my fellow Anglican ordinands and also my Roman Catholic and Orthodox friends and colleagues in the theology department. Why did this Rahner evoke such a strong reaction? People seemed to know what he thought (though they never could articulate any particular arguments very well) and they had strong opinions about him. This got under my skin. It has been a longstanding pastoral principle of mine never to assume that people are either idiots or fools until I have really listened to them. It seemed that people assumed too much when it came to Rahner. I set out to read as much Rahner as I could, and maybe even understand a little of what I was reading, to see if the Rahner who elicited groans in the college common room was really the Rahner who had made such theological waves in both the Catholic and Anglican worlds. As we turn to some fundamental questions about methodology, then, it will not surprise the reader to discover that really hearing some of the complexities and nuances of Rahner's thought is central to the shape of this thesis. And the fact that it has its roots in death is largely a product of two years spent before my doctoral research trawling through vast heaps of Rahner's essays and short books: I hope I have allowed myself to be led by Rahner's writing as much as by my own interests. And it is my hope that the reader will not only discover rich reflections on the theology of death, life and the Holy Spirit; but also maybe see a new glimpse of a Rahner they might admire and learn from, peeping through the questions and arguments that make up this thesis.

(i) Reading Rahner: non-foundationalism

The most important extant study involving Rahner's theology of death is Shannon Craigo-Snell's *Silence, Love and Death.*[1] Like this thesis, it is a composite study, bringing together strands of Rahner's thought in order to explore an overarching theme: in that case, the fact that Rahner's theological anthropology 'eludes easy categorisation as either modern or postmodern',[2] and so can be a useful resource for feminist theology today. Although Craigo-Snell does spend some time with Rahner's theology of death, there is actually very little overlap with the subject-matter of this thesis. The overarching theme of this thesis is very different. And in order to begin to outline the overarching theme of this thesis, we must begin to consider the challenges Rahner presents to the reader (and interpreter!). These challenges can roughly be grouped into two categories: the first is non-foundationalism, and the second is the possibility of a non-consistent approach to reading Rahner's theology.

Rahner's career bridges several complex transitions which impact the relationship between philosophy and theology in his work. First, as a 20th Century Roman Catholic he was shaped by the turbulent debates about the nature of that relationship in the Church's official theology. These debates stemmed from dissatisfaction at many levels within the Church's life at the generally conservative social and political stance which the Church adopted at the first Vatican Council (sat 1869-1870);[3] and from dissatisfaction at the neo-Thomistic theology of the schools, which had been effectively normalised throughout the catholic world since Leo XIII's encyclical *Aeterni Patris* of August 1879. Although political dissatisfaction at the conservative social and political stance would not be a particularly strong factor in shaping Rahner's career, his alignment with the growing critique of the neo-Thomistic orthodoxy would be far more significant. Not only was emerging biblical scholarship (largely in the Protestant world) calling into question many of the assumptions of the Vatican I settlement, but the *nouvelle theologie* of the Catholic world, rediscovering the Church's patristic and medieval inheritance, directly undermined the official interpretations of St Thomas Aquinas on which the official theology of the Church rested; particularly the accepted interpretation of St Thomas on the relationship between philosophy and theology. These debates would come to a head in the second Vatican Council (sat 1962-1965), at which many of the aims of the critics of the Vatican I settlement were met, and (to cut a very long story short) the absolute authority of the neo-Thomistic orthodoxy was largely overturned, including the primacy of neo-Thomistic philosophy. However, what is significant for us is that Rahner's life (1904-1984), and particularly the span from his ordination in 1932 to his death in 1984, locates him almost equally either side of the second Vatican

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[1] Shannon Craigo-Snell, *Silence, Love and Death: saying "yes" to God in the theology of Karl Rahner* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2008).

[2] ibid. p.13.

[3] For the complex political causes of that conservative stance, see John W. O'Malley, *Vatican I: the council and the making of the ultramontane church* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press: 2018).

Council. Putting it bluntly, he was formed in the atmosphere of the critique of the Vatican I neo-Thomistic orthodoxy in which he was required to be trained as a theologian, and spent the last part of his career in the atmosphere of uncertainty and excitement, of working out what the new orthodoxy after Vatican II was going to be.

Given that Rahner's career spanned this period of change, it is perhaps then unsurprising that it is difficult to read his work on the relationship between philosophy and theology. Karen Kilby points out three reasons for not taking Rahner's own writing on the subject at face value. First, 'it is not obvious that Rahner's discussion of the philosophy/theology distinction ought to be taken autobiographically'.[4] Rahner may write occasionally about the nature of the relationship between philosophy and theology, but he 'makes no claim to have himself over the course of his whole intellectual life embodied this relationship.'[5] This leads on to Kilby's second point: that Rahner does not seem to be particularly concerned with the question of whether his theological proposals must 'logically depend on the success of philosophical arguments.'[6] And the third: that Rahner is not consistent in his work in the approach he takes, such that it contains 'internal tensions'.[7]

We might categorise the approaches of theologians to the relationship between philosophy and theology in three ways. The first is "foundationalist": this is the idea that all theology should be philosophically demonstrable, that theology stands on the foundation of philosophy and that if the underpinning philosophy is called into question then the theology which rests on that philosophy will also fall. Although this sounds to modern ears a position that is incomprehensibly rationalist for a Christian theologian to adopt, it is not an unfair way to characterise some aspects of the theology of the neo-Thomistic theologians of the schools in the wake of *Aeterni Patris*. After all, if the philosophy on which theological reasoning stood was the christianised Aristotelianism of the medieval doctor St Thomas, officially sanctioned by the Church, then it was not any abstract philosophy on which theology stood but rather the received and long-established interpretation (so they thought) of the philosophy handed down for centuries in sacred and Spirit-preserved tradition. The second approach to the relationship between philosophy and theology we might characterise as "semi-foundationalist". This is an approach which values the necessary role philosophy has to play, but which recognises that 'the philosophy cannot do the whole job'.[8] There are limits to what philosophy can describe fully, and it is better to acknowledge when philosophy fails to provide a comprehensive foundation; but at the same time theologians can use the

[4] Karen Kilby, *Karl Rahner: theology and philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 71.

[5] ibid.

[6] ibid.

[7] ibid. p.72.

[8] ibid. p.75.

foundations it does provide to reason theologically. The third is a non-foundationalist approach, in which ideas from philosophy might be used in theology, particularly to elucidate theological problems, but which does not use philosophy to reason upwards to theology: the theology does not logically depend on the philosophy.

Kilby notes that only two of these are really viable as approaches to reading Rahner. One cannot read him as a foundationalist: his engagement with philosophy is simply not extensive enough to begin to claim that his theology is 'entirely based on his philosophy'.[9] However it is possible, Kilby suggests, to read Rahner in a semi-foundationalist manner, in which 'Rahner's language of philosophy [is] an inner moment of theology' which we can use to support our understanding of his theology.[10] Whilst it might be possible to read Rahner's philosophy as a stand-alone conceptual framework, the semi-foundationalist understands Rahner to have 'absorb[ed] his own philosophy into the larger vision presented by his theology.'[11] There is no 'prior starting point' in Rahner's philosophy which completely unlocks his theology, although his philosophy does inform and illuminate his theology.[12] But Kilby's preferred method of reading Rahner is the third, the non-foundationalist approach.[13] In this, since Rahner's philosophical thought does not form a logical basis for his theological reasoning, his philosophical ideas 'may function differently in different parts of Rahner's corpus.'[14] Kilby uses Rahner's philosophical concept of the *Vorgriff* as an example for this: a concept which fails to be consistently and satisfactorily described from a philosophical perspective, but which nevertheless is used by Rahner to illuminate his theological reasoning:

> the fact that... Rahner is not successful in offering a philosophical demonstration of the existence of a *Vorgriff*, for example, need not affect his theological deployment of the notion. Within his theology, this claim needs theological rather than philosophical justification.[15]

We will explore the significance of inconsistency within Rahner's thought more when we consider the possibility of a non-consistent approach to his theology. But at this stage it is sufficient to note (perhaps, by inverting the argument made by Kilby) that it is difficult, or perhaps impossible, to read Rahner's theological works in a way which hears the arguments Rahner is actually trying to make if one at the same time attempts to force him into theological positions which are consistent with his philosophical writing. In this, I am going further than Kilby's argument that Rahner sometimes goes beyond the reasoning indicated by his philosophy.

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[9] ibid.

[10] ibid.

[11] ibid.

[12] ibid. p.76.

[13] For a survey of some scholars of Rahner who have adopted this non-foundationalist approach, including Russell Reno, William Dych, Nicholas Healy, and Philip Endean, see Craigo-Snell, *Silence, Love and Death*, p.17.

[14] Kilby, *Karl Rahner, theology and philosophy, p.*76.

[15] ibid.

Kilby's argument about the value of the non-foundationalist approach for allowing a 'more modest reading of Rahner's theology', one which recognises 'the inescapability of pluralism in philosophy and theology'[16] whilst not making claims (by the individual theologian) to have totally described and systematised the truth, is attractive. Apart from being a good general and cautionary principle for the theologian, this "modesty" when it comes to absolute truth might make particular sense for a catholic theologian raised in an atmosphere of uncertainty and cautious critique; and even in an atmosphere of profound dissonance. Rahner was raised theologically in two worlds: in the official neo-Thomist theology taught in the schools; but also in the theology being written by (often the same) researchers and teachers when they were outside the official classroom. Given this, Rahner's seeming lack of concern about absolute consistency, or maybe rather his natural tendency to be modest in his claims to have solved and circumscribed philosophical and theological problems, make a lot of sense. And it makes sense too given the shape of Rahner's own career. The young Rahner was originally intended for a career in the history of philosophy, and it was only after his ordination that he was 'redestined', as he later put it, to become a dogmatic theologian.[17] In that same interview, given in 1984, Rahner made clear (and perhaps a bit too clear to be entirely credible) that 'there was nothing strange about this'; that it 'corresponded completely with my own inclinations and wishes, especially since I really wasn't interested in scholarship for the sake of scholarship'; and that 'If one becomes a Jesuit, then one doesn't want to become a professor of philosophy, but someone who ministers to people'.[18] Without wishing to over-psychologise, there is something in the 1984 interview of the maturity of hindsight in Rahner's laconic comment on the rejection of his PhD thesis (later published as *Spirit in the World*), 'My dissertation director, Martin Honecker, flunked me.'[19] In his playful recollection, one can detect something of the impish humour of the older man, who knows that that failure was only a minor setback, that in the end he is more famous a theologian than the man who failed him! But there might also be perhaps something of the need to overstate just how minor a setback it was to him as a young person.

> Because I had been reassigned from philosophy to teach theology at Innsbruck, this didn't upset me for long. And I was delighted that I didn't need to minor in Upper Rheinish art history in order to obtain my doctorate in philosophy at Freiburg. My rejected dissertation was then published without my receiving a doctorate; it went through several editions and was translated into many languages. So this failure did not appreciably affect my self-esteem.[20]

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[16] ibid. p.98.

[17] Karl Rahner, trans. Harvey Egan, *I Remember: an autobiographical interview with Meinold Krauss* (London: SCM, 1985), p.21.

[18] ibid. pp.21, 23.

[19] ibid. p.42.

[20] ibid. pp.42-43.

It is perhaps also telling that any mention of the origin of *Spirit in the World* as a failed doctoral thesis is absent from Rahner's preface to the published work.

All this to say (and my psychological-biographical comment here has served only to underline Karen Kilby's argument on the complexity of the relationship between Rahner's theology and philosophy) that Rahner's move from philosophy to theology may not have been as happy as he later made out. He certainly did not leave his philosophical studies behind with the ringing endorsement of a prize-winning doctoral thesis. And maybe it is true that Rahner's philosophy became as widely read as it has been because of his more proven proficiency as a theologian, and perhaps also on account of the prevailing assumption in many of his neo-Thomistically trained readers that all theology must have its foundations in philosophy, and so too must Rahner's. Shannon Craigo-Snell gives a helpful illustration from her own teaching experience on this point, that her students, often more used to Barth, 'assume that Rahner's anthropological starting point reveals his priorities and his limitations':[21] Rahner is methodologically deficient, merely engaged in 'reflection on personal spiritual experience',[22] and so can be discounted. But Craigo-Snell elegantly outlines the virtue of a non-foundationalist approach to Rahner:

> However, I explain to my classes that, with Rahner, the punchline comes at the end of the story. It is only in the conclusions of his narratives that one finds the driving force and centering logic of Rahner's argument.[23]

Whilst Craigo-Snell applies this non-foundationalism primarily as a means to enable useful ecumenical engagement with Rahner (especially for Barthians inoculated against the perils of anthropocentrism!),[24] it is a principle which holds for much, if not all, of Rahner's work. Particularly illustrative, for the purposes of this thesis, is the way in which Craigo-Snell describes Rahner's writing not in terms of straight-forward "argument", but rather complex "narrative". It is to this question of genre which we now turn.

(ii) Reading Rahner: a non-consistent approach

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[21] Craigo-Snell, *Silence, Love, and Death*, p.17.

[22] ibid. p.19.

[23] ibid. p.18.

[24] Craigo-Snell is particularly keen to rehabilitate Rahner's "transcendental method" in his theological anthropology. In that context, the "narrative" is a path on which Rahner leads the reader through 'the content of Christian faith, the mystery of God, and the love of Jesus Christ' to a 'vantage point', from which the reader can look on their 'original standpoint' and 'experience it in a new way' (pp.18-19). This embracing of an immersive theological method for theologically reflecting on human experience is the core of Craigo-Snell's strategy to open up Rahner as a resource for feminist theology. Whilst this "immersive" method of reading Rahner is fascinating and yields rich fruit, it is not the subject of this thesis. However, Craigo-Snell's emphasis on the significance of "narrative" in Rahner's thought will be much more important here.

Closely tied to the instinct to read Rahner in a philosophically foundationalist way is the instinct to read Rahner as if Rahner's work has a strong internal consistency. By this I mean an approach to Rahner's work which assumes, at the beginning of the reading process, that the text in front of us fits in some way into a wider structure or scheme of thought, a consistent and mutually cohesive system. The text in front of us may deviate from that system in some minor aspects, but the assumption is that discerning the coherent overarching system of Rahner's theological (and maybe philosophical) thought is the key to understanding the text in front of us. This approach is problematic. Primarily it is problematic because it is nigh-on impossible. Vast streams of academic ink have been spent attempting to discern the overall system (or systems) of Rahner's thought. What is its underlying philosophical key? If not that, what is its underlying theological key? If not that, what is its historical-political purpose which will make Rahner make sense as a unified whole? These attempts, whilst they might be convincing when proposing a "system" which unifies a small area of Rahner's writing, tend to come apart at the seams when applied to the whole. Rather than expend space here analysing attempts to engage with Rahner as an internally consistent systemic thinker,[25] for this thesis stands in part as a demonstration that it is possible to productively engage with Rahner in a non-consistent manner, it is more instructive to turn now to the question of genre. How does Rahner's theology come to us, and how does that shape our approach? Even, how has that made analytical engagement with Rahner so difficult for as long as people have been attempting it?

Rahner's theological output was simply enormous. And frustratingly for the interpreter Rahner wrote very few extensive books (and these, as we shall see shortly, were some of the most problematic of his works). Most of Rahner's theological writing was in the form of short articles, or addresses, and often published quite frequently in short book format as collections compiled around generalised themes. His multi-volume collection of essays, roughly thematised and generally chronologically grouped, published in English as *Theological Investigations*, is the nearest thing we really have to an edited core of published work. However, even then, that core is not definitive. In this thesis, we shall explore at some length Rahner's thought in a book on the theology of death, written relatively early in his career, which for this subject is the "core text", and not simply the relevant essays in *Theological Investigations* standing on their own. Attempting to understand Rahner requires some "heavy footnoting" as we leap between sources. Indeed,

[25] Those who attempt to read Rahner as if his theology fits an internally consistent system tend to be his critics. Reading Rahner as a unified system enables the critic to discount the entirety of Rahner's thought by identifying in one text, or a few texts, the weak foundation which brings down the house. For the critic along Barthian lines, it might have to do with anthropocentrism, whether in method or substance. For the contemporary neo-Thomist it might have to do with Kantianism, Hegelianism or a Heideggerian influence. For an example of an analysis of this sort of critique, cf. my MA thesis, "John Milbank's use of Karl Rahner in "Theology and Social Theory"" (University of Durham, 2018).

the disparate nature of Rahner's published work makes really listening to Rahner's arguments an onerous task. Rather than simply finding "the" relevant essay and analysing it, there may be five or ten or even twenty sources which are directly relevant to any small question, and hearing Rahner's argument, or even arguments, can become a task as much of data collection and analysis as it is one of theological discernment. In these circumstances, I suggest that several things are required to really "hear" what Rahner might be trying to tell us:

1. A willingness to listen to the particularities of any argument in any given text.
2. A deliberate refusal to assume that texts with different arguments on the same theme, or even identical arguments on the same theme, are likely to develop in the same way or reach the same conclusions.
3. A cultivation of a habit of accepting and acknowledging when Rahner is inconsistent, without allowing our desire to achieve some harmonised and overarching argument to prevent us from hearing the theological richness (or weakness) which might be within the complexities of that non-consistency. Rather than dismissing Rahner's thought as simply "inconsistent" we can look for the virtues which may be found in his being "non-consistent".

For many theologians, the decision to adopt (or maybe abandon) ourselves to such a non-consistent approach might seem like a fundamental failure of methodology. Surely a failure to discern clearly what a theologian "said" is a fundamental failure of the task of secondary theological literature? But it is itself the task of really hearing what Rahner "said" which demands this non-consistent approach. Rahner develops similar arguments at different times in very different directions, and sometimes ends up in very different places when beginning from the same point of departure. We are more able to hear Rahner's actual arguments if we resist our impulse to project a unified argument which may not be there onto Rahner's work.

A visual metaphor for this non-consistent approach to Rahner may make this all more palatable. We might want to represent Rahner's theology, in any particular area, as something like a sphere – perfect, unified, intelligible – maybe with a few bumps and minor deviations, but generally whole. This is comforting, and satisfying at first glance. But, in contrast, really listening to Rahner's arguments leads us to something which looks more like a child's mobile, hanging from the ceiling of a nursery. Arguments hang down from the thematic unifier, but they do not necessarily logically co-depend. Sometimes they hang down in a way in which they are happily entangled. But more often than not, they hang down and branch out into further adornments which move in a completely different direction to the others, connected, but not in any real sense necessarily unified with the other arguments on the mobile. And the more we read Rahner's theology, the more we realise that there are other mobiles on this nursery ceiling. Many of the arguments hanging down from them share features with one another, but the arguments in these different thematic groupings have developed in very different ways. Again, sometimes they meet and enmesh. Sometimes they mirror each other. But more often than not they do not fit perfectly or even very well together.

Perhaps by the time we have read Rahner extensively, the nursery ceiling looks more like a modern art installation, and maybe not one we would pay good money to visit.

I make no apologies for the fact that I have had some fun with this visual metaphor. I think it is a useful one. Better to acknowledge the complexity of the task we face, and also to acknowledge that setting ourselves the goal of "unravelling" it to achieve some artificial sense of comprehensiveness or unity would not only be practicably impossible but ultimately self-defeating. Rahner has constructed this complex collection of arguments. Let us hear what he has to say. But this task, of hearing what Rahner has to say, has some clear implications for the content and structure of this thesis. And it is to this which we now turn.

First, one way to achieve a sense of a unified system within Rahner's thought, whether theologians realise they are doing this or not when they write on Rahner, is to turn to a particular text within his corpus, his *Foundations of Christian Faith*. The reason I think this is so often the "core text" of choice is that it is the only text he ever wrote which in some sense appears to be an attempt at a unified systematic theology. The English title, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, seems to support this. However, its English subtitle, *an introduction to the idea of Christianity*, reflects much better the meaning of the German title, *Grundkurs des Glaubens: Einführung in den Begriff des Christentums*, which we might translate as *Foundation/Beginners-Course on Faith: an introduction/initiation into the basic-concepts/terms*[26] *of Christianity.* The book has its origins in a university course taught by Rahner, and in the preface Rahner writes:

> The author would like to address himself to readers who are educated to some extent and who are not afraid to "wrestle with an idea," and he simply has to hope that he will find readers for whom the book is neither too advanced nor too primitive.[27]

Rahner acknowledges that this book has 'a somewhat more comprehensive and more systematic character than one might be accustomed to in the other theological writings of the author',[28] but also warns us that 'If what is being offered here is an introduction, then neither should the reader expect that this book is a final summary of the previous theological work of the author.'[29] Rahner is hesitant to really say what the book is for, but the best genre categorisation which is possible for the book, in my view, is that given in its title: an introductory foundation course in some theological-philosophical concepts which can enable deeper theological reflection. Given that Rahner did not set out to provide an internally

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[26] Whilst the English "idea" conveys the singular number of "den Begriff", it fails to convey the sense of fundamental ideas and general concepts, in the sense of the basic terms which are needed to allow more complex reflection.

[27] Rahner, trans. William V. Dych, *Foundations of Christian Faith: an introduction to the idea of Christianity* (London: DLT, 1978), originally published in German as *Grundkurs des Glaubens: Einführung in den Begriff des Christentums* (Freiburg: Verlag Herder, 1976), p.xi.

[28] The bar of 'comprehensive and systematic' is not particularly high with Rahner's other work, as we have said!

[29] Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith,* p.xv.

coherent and unified systematic account of the basis for his thought, and given that the subject of this thesis is only tangentially referred to in *Foundations*, it would be improper to shoe-horn it into this thesis, and it will only be tangentially referred to if necessary. Another two options for unifying "core text" when reading Rahner are his published PhD thesis *Spirit in the World* and his application of the ideas in that thesis to the philosophy of religion in *Hearer of the Word*. These might appeal to philosophical foundationalists attempting to construct a unifying philosophical anthropology with which to read Rahner. However, since this is not our method, we shall not deal extensively with those texts either.

(iii) Théologie Totale and "Rahner Total"

In her book, *God, Sexuality, and the Self,*[30] Sarah Coakley identifies three types of resistance to systematic theology as practiced within the academy. The first resistance arises from the critique of onto-theology, on the basis that it 'falsely, and idolatrously, turns God into an object of human knowledge.' The second resistance arises 'from the moral or political critique of so-called 'hegemony'' on the grounds that systematic theology, with its emphasis on the search for a totalising system of thought, suppresses the voices of the marginalised. The third is a feminist critique on the grounds that systematic theology, with its emphasis on the male "symbolic" mode of thinking 'is thereby repressive of creative materials culturally associated with 'femininity' and the female body, which are characteristically pushed into the unconscious.'[31] In response to these grounds of resistance to systematic theology, Coakley proposes what she calls 'a contemplative *théologie totale*'[32] which complexifies systematic theology in its methodologies and sites of study, and so answers the three grounds for resistance to it:

> For the very act of contemplation - repeated, lived, embodied, suffered - is an act that, by grace, and over time, inculcates mental patterns of 'un-mastery', welcomes the dark realm of the unconscious, opens up a radical attention to the 'other', and instigates an acute awareness of the messy entanglement of sexual desires and desire for God. The vertiginous free-fall of contemplation, then, is not only the means by which a disciplined form of unknowing makes way for a new and deeper knowledge-beyond-knowledge; it is also... the necessary accompanying practice of a theology committed to ascetic transformation.[33]

A theology which is not only trying to be humble, but which is rather embarked upon as an embodied ascetic practice, recognises the sheer "otherness" of God, accepts that its own perspective might not encompass those of the "other", and is open to other forms and methods of doing theology.

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[30] Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self: an essay on the Trinity* (Cambridge: CUP, 2013).

[31] ibid. pp.42-43.

[32] ibid. p.43.

[33] ibid.

As we work through the argument of this thesis, it will become more and more apparent how the ascetic practice of theology might be something which lends itself easily to the study of Rahner. Not only will the themes of abandonment and finitude, which run through the arguments with which we engage, align with this ascetic theological method, but we shall find ourselves forced into an ascetic attitude of unknowing. That is to say that I believe that the deliberate refusal to project our own totalising systematic vision onto Rahner's writing, and our cultivation of a habit of acceptance of his inconsistencies, are in themselves elements of the theological method which Coakley proposes. However, Coakley's *théologie totale* does not just have implications in terms of approach. She also draws our attention to theological sources which are often neglected. In Rahner scholarship, there is a great deal written on his essays and books. But in recent years, Philip Endean has brought to light the impact of Rahner's Jesuit formation,[34] and I shall consider the influence of his religious life in community on his thought. Less is written on his spiritual talks, which I will treat on the same level as his more officially academic writings. Less still, if anything, is written on Rahner's preaching: and, while it might be argued that a written homiletic text is very much a classical source, we shall see how Rahner's homilies differ from his more formal academic work, and reveal something of how he thinks differently when engaged in direct pastoral ministry. At the end of this thesis, I shall make reference to Rahner's writing on prayer, particularly in his book *Encounters With Silence*, though it is difficult to argue that in any of Rahner's written works we really have a clear picture of what his prayer life was like. In this thesis I attempt not only a non-consistent reading of an aspect of Rahner's theology, but I also attempt something gesturing in the direction of Sarah Coakley's *théologie totale*, attempting to broaden my engagement with Rahner the whole person, as Coakley argues systematic theology should be able to speak to the whole human and the whole humanity (i.e. should be comprehensive both individually and collectively).

(iv) The shape of this thesis

In chapter 1, we shall begin by listening carefully to Rahner's arguments in his short book *On The Theology of Death*, getting a rich sense of what Rahner understands death to be and how it is significant for us as human persons, where it fits in the trajectory of our lives, and the different ways it can be real for us. Then, in chapter 2, I shall complexify that (relatively) straightforward theology of death by bringing it into to dialogue with arguments Rahner makes elsewhere, and also as we consider how Rahner's Jesuit formation and lived Ignatian spirituality also deepen the sense of the daily importance of death for Christians. By the time we reach chapter 3, we will have a rich and complex thematic central axis for the

[34] cf. Philip Endean, *Karl Rahner and Ignatian Spirituality* (Oxford: OUP, 2001, 2009). Endean establishes clearly the Ignatian character of many aspects of Rahner's thought. In this thesis, however, I will focus exclusively on the importance of the Jesuit concept of indifference on Rahner's thought.

construction of the "mobile" hanging on the nursery ceiling. On that mobile we will hang our first decoration, the first sub-arguments, as we begin to consider the role of the Holy Spirit in our daily encounter with death. I have chosen to locate that discussion within an exploration of Rahner's theology of the eucharist, which he conceives as a rehearsal of our encounter with death. We shall see the complexity and richness of the implications of this, as the Spirit which enables our true communion is also enabling our life-giving encounter with death. We will then, in chapter 4, consider some Trinitarian implications of our encounter with divine darkness in the Spirit-given encounter with death. Responding to criticisms of Rahner's trinitarian theology by Katherine Sonderegger and building on pneumatological reflections by Etienne Vetö will enable us to see the darkness of God and the darkness of the Spirit in a new light. We will then be ready, in chapter 5, to hang our next three decorations, our next sub-arguments, on the mobile, as we consider Rahner's writing on death and the Spirit in terms of the Christian approach to everyday life, in his pastoral preaching, and when he considers the inner life in terms of both the religious life and the life of prayer. We shall spend more time on Rahner's preaching, which has not been studied extensively, but we shall gesture to how Rahner's writing on prayer might speak to our theme. Most importantly, in this final chapter it is particularly clear how arguments Rahner makes, which are rich and useful, sometimes cohere and sometimes do not. In allowing the richness of these arguments to come through, and not imposing our own hegemonic system, I hope to demonstrate quite simply the value of applying something analogous to Coakley's method of the "contemplative *théologie totale*" to enable us to hear something like Rahner's authentic voice, some small part of the *Rahner total*.

I hope also to achieve something of a balance in this thesis between a denser, more analytical engagement with Rahner's theology of death in the first half, and a more discursive and open style afforded in the second half of the thesis by the pneumatological possibilities within Rahner's theology. Death and the Spirit run throughout, as does darkness, but a firm footing in Rahner's theology of death will afford us conceptual space to engage more creatively later on with aspects of Rahner's pneumatology. In this, the chapter on the Trinity functions as a boundary marker, in which the open exploration of possibilities within Rahner's theology will reach their limit in this thesis as I gesture towards the sorts of dialogue which might be possible between Rahner's pneumatology and movements in contemporary trinitarian and pneumatological writing. After this I will draw back a bit, returning more straightforwardly to Rahner's more pastoral and performative writing as the thesis prepares to land. This balance in no way detracts, I hope, from the model of the mobile I have outlined above, but is intended to give the argument as a whole some shape and movement, as well as variety.

(v) A note on inclusive language

Throughout this thesis, I will use gender-inclusive language whenever I am writing with my own voice. However, I have decided, after some consideration, not to edit the texts from which I quote in order to make them gender-inclusive. This is for two reasons. The weaker reason is simply that there are a huge number of references to "man" in the English translations of Rahner's writing, and the thesis would be a patchwork of square brackets if I was to edit all of them. The stronger reason is that, in Rahner's theology, "man" exists as a codeword for the whole human person, the unity of body and spirit, in a way which is analogous to many older liturgical texts. It would be very difficult to argue for the use of such gender-exclusive codewords in a new text. However, I felt it important not to cover up the fact that these texts do use gender-exclusive language, since they are of their time, and a current translator might quietly translate the gender-exclusive terminology into inclusive terms. Although this thesis does not set out to be a deliberately feminist analysis of Rahner, an area for future study might be the question of how Rahner's male-centred analysis and use of language affects the universality of his theology of human flourishing. Putting it bluntly, does Rahner's use of masculine terminology and his male-dominated social and academic world prevent him from forming a theological anthropology which works as well for people who are not men?

(vi) The limitations of this thesis

I have used the metaphor of a mobile for this thesis, and have referred to hanging arguments onto it like decorations. There is a limit to how many decorations I have space to include in this thesis. First, when I deal with terms like *Vorgriff* and *Geist*, and have the option either to treat them relatively superficially (really considering only their theological implications) or the option to delve into extensive philosophical debates about the nature of those terms and their use through the history of philosophy, I have generally chosen the former. Second, there are a great deal of other theological areas within Rahner's thought which might have been treated more extensively than they have been, or even at all, in this thesis. The wordcount as well as the particular function of a PhD thesis have limited me here. An example of an area which might have been particularly fruitful to include is Rahner's ecclesiology, particularly the role of the Holy Spirit in constituting the Church as *Grundsakrament*. As many local worshipping communities, religious communities and even larger parts of the church experience corporate mortality, frailty and even imminent death, there might be fascinating implications for the church in the sort of theology of death this thesis will explore. There is not space to include a comprehensive link between ecclesiology and this thesis, but I will gesture to it. Likewise, I have neglected Mariology, not through lack of devotion but rather because, in order to treat Rahner's Mariology properly and to give it space to be heard in its complexity, we would also have to delve much deeper into Rahner's theology of grace and sin, and that is not possible here. It could be argued that the theology of human consummation explored within this thesis sits more comfortably with Eastern theologies of the Dormition of the Mother of God than they do with (at least the popular piety surrounding) the Assumption. I also hope that someone with access to the relevant

archives and with the time and funding necessary is able to engage in a more comprehensive survey of Rahner's preaching. As I comment in the final chapter of this thesis, Rahner's preaching is not a model I would wish anyone to follow in terms of homiletic skill, but it does constitute an under-researched part of Rahner's theological output, in which (as we shall see here) Rahner was forced to think in new ways and respond to the particular challenges of scripture and the liturgical year. In the same way that a sermon is only a sermon, and cannot (and perhaps, should not) be comprehensive from a systematic standpoint, this PhD thesis is only a PhD thesis, and I hope it has achieved what it needed to for me, and offers something of use to the reader as well.

I – Rahner's Theology of Death

For Christian theologians, the moment of our death has always been a particular focus of interest in our attempts to supply a convincing theological anthropology. Death brings all the paradoxes of the Christian faith into sharp relief and loads them onto our hearts with some of the most beautiful and most painful memories and experiences of our lives. For some, it is the experience of their own and others' mortality which propels them into faith. But, for many, death and their experience of it constitute the most significant challenge to faith. Many experience death as fundamentally alien to the goodness and love which the Christian faith attributes to God and His purposes for us. And ways of thinking about death as "bad" or "good" go to the heart of ethical debates about the end of life. Fundamentally, how Christians understand death, the senses in which it is "bad" or can be "good", shape our pastoral response to the ethical, pastoral and evangelistic problems which death presents us.

In the 4th Century, Ambrose of Milan distinguished three deaths: the bad death due to sin, the good death in baptism, and then the neutral death of the end of our life's span.[35] Death according to Ambrose is a complex and ambiguous reality, and it is important to note that it is the end of our life's span (which for us moderns is often felt as the most negative, the most "real" and "present" form of death) which Ambrose considers the most ambiguous and perhaps least interesting. The perspective of St Augustine is rather simpler, for he argues that all aspects of death are always bad because they originate from sin:[36] likewise that of St Thomas, for whom death could never be a positive action since it is always a deprivation (since nothing tends to its own destruction).[37] Both Augustine and Thomas express an approach to death which has some resonances with modern tendencies to deal with our mortality by denying it. Death as having anything really to do with life seems nonsensical. How could the ending of life add anything positive towards the fullness of life? But Rahner takes a more positive approach to death. Death is significant to the living. In fact, it may be the most important aspect of our life. And Rahner can take this approach because he holds that death is complex, not merely limited to the cessation of our breathing or our brain function, not easily characterised as deprivation or destruction.

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[35] cf. Albert David Jones, *Approaching the End: a theological exploration of death and dying* (Oxford: OUP, 2007), pp.31-32.

[36] ibid. p.44. Augustine's negative portrayal of all of the three deaths – that of the body, that of the soul (sin) and the second death (the end of the wicked) – stems in part from his argument against Platonic representations of death as a positive liberation of the soul from the body (pp.41-42, 45-46).

[37] ibid. p.111.

In 1958, Rahner published his book, *On the Theology of Death*,[38] which is structured in three parts. These three parts each have a different "feel" to the way they deal with death. The first, on 'Death as an Event Concerning Man as a Whole', is self-consciously neutral, matter-of-factly describing the separation of body and soul without any sense that this is a particularly negative thing. The second part, on 'Death as the Consequence of Sin' is much more explicitly negative in its portrayal of death. Death is something which is negative for human beings, both as a penalty for original sin as a consequence of "personal mortal sin". But the third part, on 'Death as Dying with Christ', explores how death can be positive for those who die with Christ. So Rahner's portrayal of the complexity of death does not have, as its starting point, the sense that death for everyone is in some sense at the same time neutral and negative and positive. Rather, Rahner portrays death at its most basic as fundamentally neutral, which has then become negative for all due to sin, and which can then be transformed into a positive for those who die with Christ. As we delve deeper in his *On The Theology of Death,* we shall see that Rahner's complex understanding of death is interesting because it is personal, individual, and decisive. The first two parts set the roads on which all modern people live our lives, but in the third part Rahner explores how the death of Christ fundamentally alters the rules.

Neutral Death - 'Death as an Event Concerning Man as a Whole'

> The universality of death is an absolute proposition of our faith. Leaving apart the consideration of the fate of those persons who will be alive at the consummation of the world through the second coming of our Lord... faith teaches that all men are subject to the law of death and that all men will, in fact, die.[39]

At first glance, this might look like a statement about the neutrality of the fact of biological bodily death. But Rahner is not talking about that. He notes that:

> From the biological point of view, death might be looked at as meaningless or as a necessary part of the life process. ... [But] Until we can know adequately why all living things... must die, the reason offered by faith... remains the only available explanation for the uncontested universality of death.[40]

The neutrality of death is not limited to the biological, and Rahner actually doesn't think that the biological sciences have much to offer in a study on death.[41] Rather, he seeks first to establish a neutral account of

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[38] Rahner, Karl, trans. Charles H. Henkey, *On the Theology of Death* (London: Herder, 1961).

[39] ibid. pp.21-22.

[40] ibid. pp.22-23.

[41] I differ from Michael H. Barnes ("The Evolution of the Soul from Matter and the Role of Science in Karl Rahner's Theology" in *Horizons*, 21 (1994), pp.85-104) in my assessment of Rahner on this point. What Barnes refers to as Rahner's 'modest[y]' (p.86) which 'remind[s] theology to restrict itself to its proper domain, which is the realm of the infinite Mystery called God, and to leave to the natural sciences the project of discovering what is true of the patterns of the created world' (pp.86-87) is rather to miss the point of Rahner's focus on the theological and neglect

what theology suggests is happening in our death. And this is the rather odd sense in which Rahner considers 'existentially neutral' statements about death,[42] providing his own interpretation of them in a way that is almost artificially and forensically dispassionate, as he begins by exploring death as the separation of body and soul. He alludes to sin, to the tragedy of death, but he postpones a discussion of sin until later, until after he has established the basic theological-anthropological mechanics of our death.

(i) Body and Soul

The key to understanding what happens at death, according to Rahner, is to understand the separation of body and soul. He accepts the traditional Catholic doctrine of death as separation of body and soul whilst acknowledging that 'This description, as a matter of fact, is not explicitly contained in the Bible.'[43] The theological problem however, for Rahner, is not whether or not it is biblical, but rather that '[traditional catholic theology] is absolutely silent... about one very important aspect of death, namely, that it is an event for man as a whole and as a spiritual person.'[44] This is a problem which accords with Rahner's pastoral concern to provide a theological engagement with the 'contemporary historical experience [which] illustrates vividly how dark may be the shadows of death which hover over us.'[45] Simply telling people that at death their body and soul separate does very little to prepare them for that event.

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of biology in his consideration of the soul. Barnes understands 'Rahner's self-assigned theological task' to include a challenge 'not to refute science but to reinterpret traditional doctrine inasmuch as that doctrine impinges upon what seem to be reliable scientific conclusions about the created order of secondary causality, the proper realm of the natural sciences' (p.104). I think this goes too far, especially if what Barnes means is that Rahner's task is the scientific revision of doctrine. It may be that, because Barnes' primary source for his engagement with Rahner seems to be his rather later essay "Natural Science and Reasonable Faith" (in *TI* 21, pp.16-55, first published in German in 1981), Barnes is led by the particular flavour of that article, which does admittedly seem to attempt to resolve a disconnect between theology and the natural sciences which is not so prevalent throughout Rahner's wider corpus, particularly in his earlier work. Rather, Rahner's engagement in *The Theology of Death* in particular, and in his earlier work generally, seems to approach matters rather more simply: biological science has nothing much to say which is of direct import to Rahner's particular argument here, and so he simply moves past it. To Barnes' credit, however, he does provide a far more detailed engagement with the evolution in the modern era of scientific understandings of spirit, matter and form than does Rahner, who simply hops directly from Thomas to his own reflections, without attempting any sort of conceptual genealogy in the modern sense (cf. Barnes, pp.95-102).

[42] ibid. p.19

[43] ibid. p.24. Rahner points to Ecclesiastes 12.7 as being too complex to simply be used as a prooftext for the doctrine, and to the layers of meaning within the term *ἀναλύω* when attempting to read Philippians 1.23 and 2 Timothy 4.6 as proof-texts.

[44] ibid. p.25.

[45] ibid. p.17.

Particularly important for Rahner is the question of whether the soul separates itself from the body, or whether the soul is separated from it:

> In other words, is this separation a result of the soul's own deeper dynamics, as she tends to her own consummation, or is it an accident, devolving upon the soul in opposition to her innate tendency?[46]

But why is this important to Rahner? And how does it help to meet the pastoral needs of modern people? It still seems rather abstract.

At this point it might be helpful to bring in some of Rahner's other work in order to illuminate his reasoning in *On the Theology of Death*. Some of Rahner's most compelling polemic (from the perspective of the reader) is directed against moves in the academy and popular theology to divide the human being into two spheres: that of the body and that of the soul. In 1960, he wrote expansively: 'All eschatological assertions have the *one* totality of man in mind, which cannot be neatly *divided* into two parts, body and soul.'[47] Rahner argues for this unity of body and soul on several levels.

First, he argues that, from an experiential perspective, God is the ground for our understanding of all reality: God is not the 'creative cause of two completely separate realities' but rather is 'one and the same cause of matter and spirit.'[48] Rahner is not making an argument here that there is one *Creator* and so one *creation*. He is making a much more nuanced argument that because God is so integral to every act of our knowing (we will discuss this theory of knowing in more detail shortly), whether we know a spiritual reality or a material reality, we are essentially knowing it in the same way: so we can say that God has created for us one unified reality of perception and knowledge.[49] Whether or not we think we are perceiving a spiritual reality or a material reality, there is no actual difference: we are simply perceiving reality.[50]

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[46] ibid. p.26.

[47] Rahner, Karl, "The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Assertions", in TI 4.13, pp.323-346, p.341. However, in fn.16 on the same page, he does admit the Thomist division in its greater subtlety: 'Man consists of 'body and soul'. But in Thomist metaphysics, which are perfectly justifiable, one is bound to say that man consists of *materia prima*, and of *anima* as *unica forma* and *actualitas* of this *materia prima*, so that 'body' already implies the informing actuality of the 'soul' and hence is not another part of man beside the soul.'

[48] Rahner, Karl, "The Unity of Spirit and Matter in the Christian Understanding of Faith" in TI 6.12, pp.153-177, p.155.

[49] cf. 'We mean by God rather that absolute mystery which, whether we want to or not, we always associate at least implicitly in our spiritual encounter or the world with the presupposition and ground of objects and subjects. In the assertion of the Christian faith expressed above, God therefore stands as the ground and all-embracing, pre-given unity of the experience of the spirit and the material world in their unity.' ibid. p.155.

[50] Rahner also emphasises that God is not simply the unifying concept for the spiritual and material: 'He is not simply the unity of all realities brought about by the parts of the world, but the previous ground of the possibility of this

We might then ask whether this nuanced argument is too abstract really to be of any significance. But in an article on the humanity of Jesus, Rahner considers the consequences of separating the "spiritual" from the "earthly". He argues that it results in a 'false, basically unchristian, pantheistic or theophanistic conception of God'[51] in which created reality becomes devalued as 'the relative, the contingent, that which - in relation to God - is determinable in a merely negative sense, the mere limitation of being which in itself is infinite, which alone matters'.[52] The separation of body and spirit, in Rahner's view, leads us to miss the commitment of God to creation, to fail to see the world 'as something valid in the sight of God, as something eternally justified and hence as something divinely and religiously significant before God.'[53] On a cosmic level then, Rahner understands original sin to entail a fracturing of our perception of the unity of creation and spirit, so that 'the effort of holding on to this truth [of the unity of body and spirit] is the effort of overcoming our unchristian outlook and of solving the *sinful* dilemma into which original sin throws us: God or the world.'[54] What is interesting here is that Rahner casts original sin in terms of perspective: the sinful state being that which sees God and the world, spirit and creation, as fundamentally incompatible, a temptation which infects every act of our knowing.[55]

We will engage more with Rahner's understanding of original sin later in this chapter, but for the time being, let us consider that Rahner does not only engage with the problem of the unity of the body and soul on a cosmic level. He also considers it at the level of the individual person. In 1967 Rahner considered the place of the body in the order of salvation, and he began his argument with the observation that scripture tells us that God did not create *the body* out of dust but rather that God created *the human*

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unity, the ground which therefore also exists before this duality of subjectivity and objectivity which we call spirit and matter.' ibid. p.156 (my emphases). Rahner argues that God's "spirituality" is qualitatively different from the "spirituality" of the world, and so must be distinguished from it, as its a priori ground of possibility. So, although the worldly spirit may be opposed to worldly flesh, God's spirituality is the ground of being for both (ibid.).

[51] Rahner, Karl, "The Eternal Significance of the Humanity of Jesus for our Relationship with God" in TI 3.3, pp.35-46, p.40.

[52] ibid.

[53] ibid. p.41.

[54] ibid.

[55] It is worth noting that Rahner's notion of original sin, defending the compatibility of God and the world, functions in the opposite way to Barth's notion of idolatry, which defends the non-identity of God and the world. However, both of these approaches conceive of sin in terms of perspective, of the means of knowledge. For more on Barth's concept of idolatry, see William J. Brennan III, *Idolatry in the Theology of Karl Barth* (University of St Andrews, Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, 2016), available at *http://hdl.handle.net/10023/9029*.

being out of dust.[56] We can therefore say that the body 'is not merely a by-product'[57] of the life of the soul because 'man's bodily nature was created, willed, by the one, eternal, holy, just and incorporeal God.'[58] Since the human body is integral to the human person, Rahner argues, we cannot separate things bodily from things spiritual in experiential terms:

> The loftiest spiritual thought, the most sublime moral decision, the most radical act of a responsible liberty is still a bodily perception or a bodily decision.... And conversely, even the most external thing about man is still something that really belongs to the realm of his spirituality; it is still something that is not just mere body.[59]

In affirming the unity of human experience as well as the unity of human being, Rahner sets himself against neo-platonic anthropologies in which the higher spiritual realm is valued over and above the lower bodily realm. These are ways of conceiving the relationship between flesh and spirit which have resonances at times with the Pauline epistles, but which have been largely rejected in the Christian tradition.[60] Rahner uses the Pauline term for flesh (*σαρξ*/*sarx*) in a more positive way as he explores the significance of the incarnation for the body:

> [God] becomes just what we call *sarx*.... when God desires to manifest himself, it is as man that he does so. ... The *sarx*... is what comes into being, what is present, when the Logos manifests itself in the sphere in which it does not desire to be the infinite, blessed, intrinsically luminous Word of the Father, but issues from itself and speaks whither only the finite, creaturely Word can be heard. The flesh which is man is the self-utterance of God himself.[61]

If the flesh of the incarnation is the self-utterance of God's Word, then all possible sense of flesh's belonging to a lower non-spiritual realm has been overcome in the incarnation. The flesh of the incarnation is not an add-on, not a clothing of the spiritual substance, not a shell or vessel: the union is real. And the same is true for each one of us:

> Bodily existence is not, therefore, something which is added to spirituality; it is the concrete existence of the spirit itself in space and time. Physical nature or the nature of the human body is not something already existing in itself. It is the self-expression of the spirit reaching out into space and time.[62]

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[56] Rahner, Karl, "The Body in the Order of Salvation" in TI 17.7, pp.71-89, p.73.

[57] ibid. p.72.

[58] ibid. p.73.

[59] ibid. p.82.

[60] cf. e.g. Galatians 5.17.

[61] Rahner, "The Body in the Order of Salvation", pp.74-75.

[62] ibid. p.84. cf. Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 1a.75.4.co: Let us consider 'that man is a soul, but this particular man (consider Socrates!) is not a soul, but rather is made up of soul and body.' (my translation). It is worth noting how different is Rahner's perspective in the texts we are considering about the unity of the body and spirit from his starting point in *Spirit in the World*, in which he said that 'The question, What is man?, refers first of all, therefore, to the essence of the "soul".' (*Spirit in the World*, p.15). It is important not to be caught up in the specificity of *Spirit in the World* (it is,

This is a significant moment in Rahner's understanding of the unity of the body and spirit in the human person. But Rahner's sense of the body being the 'self-expression of the spirit' might be rather confusing. What does Rahner mean? Does he mean that the body is in some sense the manifestation of the spirit? Or is the body derived by some mechanism (as yet unknown) from the spirit? Rahner begins to clarify his argument by asking a question about how we know a person. He points out that "knowing" a person might have a different quality if we decide to focus on either their body or their spirit:

> If I put someone like Kant on the scales and see that he weighs ten stone, then of course I have seen less of Kant than I would have done if I had talked to him. The intensity of the spirit's bodily existence can be great or small, inwardly or outwardly.[63]

There is a sense then in which to simply focus on the nature of the body is to miss a great deal of what it means to be a person. For Rahner, we are not simply biological systems, a machine like any other which just happens to be made of organic rather than inorganic material. But what does he mean by the 'spirit's bodily existence' which can vary as 'great or small, inwardly or outwardly'? Rahner's argument proceeds to a rather startling statement about the nature of the human body:

> The body is therefore nothing other than the self-consummation of the spirit in space and time. But this self-consummation of everything except God is of such a kind that it is essentially ambiguous and takes place in a sphere of existence in which all men and women communicate with one another from the very beginning. In the narrower sense of the word, the body is that through which I fulfil myself in the one world in which all spiritual persons exist.[64]

To explore what Rahner means here, let us return to *On the Theology of Death*. Rahner says that 'the older, more strictly Thomistic metaphysics taught that the human spiritual soul has a transcendental (that is, already given with the very essence of the soul) relationship to matter, a relationship which endures even after death.'[65] The soul is not released into some sort of truer and freer existence in death (in a platonic sense), but rather the soul must achieve its fullness *in and with the body* if the whole human person is to achieve their fulness. As Paul Barratt puts it, '[Rahner] says the soul cannot be disembodied, strictly speaking, because it *exists* precisely as the *soul of a body*.'[66] Without the body, the soul cannot achieve its fulness. For:

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after all, primarily concerned with the knowledge of the soul (with *ST* 1a.84.7 as its focal point) and does not deal with the composite nature of the human person (on which Thomas focusses in *ST* 1a.75-76).

[63] ibid. pp.84-85.

[64] ibid. pp.88-89.

[65] Rahner, *On the Theology of Death,* p.28.

[66] Paul Barrett, "A Theology of Death" in *New Blackfriars*, 46 (1965), pp.266-273, p.268.

> the informing of the body by the soul [is] no mere accidental act... [but rather is] the very reality of the soul, for the soul's own substantial existence is, so to speak, grafted upon the material reality, so that the act of informing matter is not really distinct from the existence of the soul.[67]

Rahner takes this orthodox thomistic position as the starting point for something more creative, so that the reader can 'recognise that the view here proposed is already contained in the strictly Thomistic and traditional doctrine'.[68] But, by affirming a traditional position which strongly links the soul's existence to its function as the substantial form of the body, Rahner's argument must proceed to explain how the soul can be considered to have any meaningful, or purposeful, existence after death and the destruction of the physical body which it informs.

(ii) The pan-cosmic soul and openness to reality

Rahner begins to develop his thoughts by focussing more closely on what is meant by "matter", 'rather than merely as indicating the concrete, measurable shape of the body'.[69] Rather frustratingly for modern readers of this book, Rahner decides to do this by discussing the concept of "life-entelechies." This idea emerged from attempts by biologists to justify their field of study as being just as "scientific" as physics and mathematics[70] and conveys the sense that living things (unlike non-living things) have underlying structures

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[67] Rahner, *On the Theology of Death*, p.28.

[68] ibid., p.29.

[69] ibid. p.28.

[70] As the field of embryology emerged in the 19th Century, Wilhelm Roux and Hans Driesch formulated a system of developmental mechanics to describe the processes of embryogenesis, reducing biological principles to mathematical principles. Driesch however found that developmental mechanics alone could not account for the "purposefulness" (*Zweckmäßigkeit*) in the direction of embryogenesis towards a specific form. In the development of biological forms, one reaches a point where purely mechanical explanations fail and one must take a 'teleological view' that it 'could only be a mechanics grounded on structure.' (Driesch, quoted in Waisse-Priven, Silvia, and Alfonso-Goldfarb, Ana M., "Mathematics Ab Ovo: Hans Dreisch and 'Entwicklungsmechanic'" in *History and Philosophy of the Life Sciences*, 31 (2009), pp.35-54, p.48). Dreisch was not proposing a neo-vitalism (i.e. that living things are governed by fundamentally different principles to non-living things) but rather that there is an underlying mechanical structure to living things, to which they tend in their development - this makes them "entelechical". (Dariusz A. Szkutnik clarifies this point by emphasising that Driesch's work should not be characterised by a "metaphysical vitalism" but rather by a "methodological vitalism", an openness to biological systems doing strange things in order to conform to their entelechical structure ("Methodological vs. Metaphysical Vitalism in Hans Dreisch's Research" in *Biocosmology - neo-Aristotelianism*, 4 (2014), pp123-137. This is significant when we read Rahner, for we should be careful about characterising his theology as "vitalistic" (Peter Phan comes very close to doing so in *Eternity in Time: a study of Karl Rahner's eschatology* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 1988), p.86). Is Rahner expressing a sort of neo-vitalism, or is he using the term "entelechy" to point to God's self-gift as the unifying moment, climax and consummation of cosmic history? We will explore later the implications of this question for this thesis, but David

into which they grow and develop in order to reach their potential. The "life-entelechy" is that structure, which can be studied and described in much the same way as can the laws of mathematics or physics. This concept is interesting, because it places the individual life into the context of an overall structure of flourishing and development, and so provides Rahner with an overriding framework onto which he can hang the continuing existence of the soul after the destruction of the body. Rahner can say that death cannot be 'the simple cessation of an entelechy' for the overall structure of flourishing and development is not what dies.[71] Instead:

> Death will rather appear, even in the sub-human realm, as the surrender of the entelechical relation at a certain space-time conformation of the world, while the entelechical powers remain solidly implanted in the universe. Since the spiritual soul is a real life-entelechy... it becomes permissible to suppose, on the analogy of those sub-human entelechies, that the human spiritual soul will, in some way or other, maintain her relationship to the world. The human spiritual soul will become not a-cosmic but, if such a term may be used, "all-cosmic" [or "pan-cosmic"].[72]

Rahner is attempting more than a clarification or redefinition of the metaphysics of the human person. He is attempting to shift our approach to describing the human person away from a *mechanistic approach*, which seeks to lift the bonnet to see how the merely material human person works in a mechanical sense, an approach which is not dissimilar to the attempts to describe a "merely biological" death which he gives such short shrift. Instead, he seeks to describe the constitution of the human person in *relational terms*.

We can see this in the way Rahner treats the idea of the "pan-cosmic" soul. If one were to take a mechanistic approach, one might say that the soul which substantially informed the body during life would (if it continued existing) have to continue substantially informing something after death, so would in some way substantially inform the world into which it had been released. But Rahner dismisses this. Similarly, he rejects another mechanistic solution: that the soul which substantially informed the body in life is released into a purposeless 'omnipresence of the soul in the universe',[73] as a sort of waste or by-product, its work being done.[74] Rather, Rahner grounds his reasoning in the soul's *relationship* to the world during the life of the body:

Coffey has explored Rahner's later theological treatment of evolution alongside that of Teilhard de Chardin and comes down very much on the side of the latter option, that Rahner is using terminology associated with vitalism to express a complex theology of human and cosmic history (David Coffey, "The Spirit of Christ as Entelechy" in *Philosophy & Theology*, 13 (2001), pp.363-393).

[71] Rahner, *On the Theology of Death*, p.29.

[72] ibid. p.29.

[73] ibid. p.30.

[74] Although this way of thinking of the omnipresent soul might seem strange, we must remind ourselves that it is not as rare as Christian theologians might think. Those involved in pastoral ministry may be more aware of the prevalence

> It should rather be born in mind that, even in her life-time, as informing the body, the spiritual soul is an open system towards the world. It might also be remembered with profit that natural philosophy finds it almost impossible to restrict the idea of the human "body" to what is covered by the skin. The spiritual soul, moreover, through her essential relationship to the body, is basically open to the world in such a manner that she is never a monad without windows, but always in communication with the whole of the world.[75]

Let us focus on this idea of the spiritual soul as 'an open system towards the world'. In "Nature and Grace", Rahner argued that a person is not merely an *animal rationе* (an animal with reason) because we cannot be 'defined' or 'confined' in the way one might define 'sub-human beings'.[76] This is because Rahner understands a person to be *Geist*, or "spirit". Any creature is open to the finite reality in which it is placed, but a human as *Geist* is 'open to reality *as such*, infinite reality.'[77] What does this mean? It is all to do with how we know things. Humans are able to grasp a sense object 'under the concept': we can abstract an individual object into a universal concept by which we might determine other individual objects.[78] I see a wooden thing with four legs and can translate this sense-data into a concept of tableness, enabling me to identify other tables I might encounter. In this process (called in Thomist theology "abstraction") we are confronted with two limitations: first, that the individual object I have abstracted is not me (I am not the table – this is an element of our self-knowing by which we reach our knowing self-subsistence); and second, that what we experience in the individual sense-object is limited 'in and through the single sense-object.'

Rahner is most interested in this second limitation. 'The fact that we are aware of this limitation reveals to us the limitlessness which belongs to the quiddity as such'. Put bluntly, as our knowing advances and we hit the limit of what we experience through the individual sense-object, what is revealed to us is that there is an infinity beyond that limit which we do not know:[79] I will never truly know the full extent of tableness. And what does this reveal about ourselves? That we have a 'reaching for more' [*auf mehr*

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of such ways of thinking in folk-theology: that after I die my soul will be released and I will be in everything. Rahner also seeks to exclude an implication of the traditional body-soul model that death does not really affect the soul, merely releasing it while death takes effect on the body (on the limitations of Josef Pieper's theology of death in this respect, and as a contrast to Rahner's approach, see Bartholomew J. Collopy, "Theology and the Darkness of Death" in *Theological Studies*, 39 (1978), pp.22-54, esp. pp.25-26).

[75] ibid. p.30.

[76] Karl Rahner, trans. Dinah Wharton, "Nature and Grace" in *Nature and Grace and other essays* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1963), cited hereafter as "Nature and Grace" (1958), p.36.

[77] ibid.

[78] Karl Rahner, *Hearer of the Word*, trans. Joseph Donceel (New York: Continuum, 1994), p.45.

[79] ibid. pp.46-47.

ausgreifenden Vorgang] which Rahner calls *Vorgriff*.[80] I wonder what is more than the tableness I know, and have some sense that there is more than tableness. What lies beyond that boundary at which knowing is just out of our reach which Rahner terms the "horizon",[81] our reaching-out for which (*Vorgriff*) is the a priori condition for all our knowing? Rahner distinguishes his concept of the *Vorgriff* of the horizon from both Plato at one extreme (the *Vorgriff* extends to being as such, and so includes a grasp even of the absolute being of God) and Kant at the other (the horizon is the functional limitation of my sense intuition within space and time). But he also distinguishes the *Vorgriff* of the horizon from a Heideggerian perspective, in which the reaching out ultimately 'goes towards nothingness.'[82] For Rahner, the very act of knowing which reveals the infinite horizon of being is not an encounter with our own limitations alone, but rather is an "*encounter*" *with the infinite reality* beyond which and in which and under which is the being of God. In every moment of human knowing, God is intimately present and foundational to our very knowing. Without this 'reaching for more' which is the *Vorgriff*, we would not know anything.

It is our openness to infinite reality in our "reaching out for more" (this openness which is implicit in every act and moment of our knowing anything) which in Rahner's thought makes us particular as human beings, as *Geist*. Rahner does not say that 'as informing the body, the spiritual soul is an open system towards the world'[83] just because it suits his purposes at this stage of his argument about death. Rather, he makes this claim about the soul, informing the body, because he believes that this is what makes us human. This is what enables him to make the claim that the soul is not in the body as a 'monad without windows' but is always 'in communication with the whole of the world.'[84] In life, the soul's openness is not diminished or caged in a platonic sense, in a sense that the soul is yearning to be free of the body in order to be able to be as open as it truly needs or desires or tends to be. But Rahner does portray the soul's openness when united with the body as historically focussed by the soul's 'limited bodily structure'.[85] And yet, this bodily structure does not disable the soul. Rather, it provides a historical-temporal locus in which the whole human person, body and soul, can live relationally with other people and relationally within the world:

> ... the soul, in death, is thought to give up her determined space-time location within the world and within the mutual interrelationships of individual beings.[86]

Any notion of "omnipresence" of this pan-cosmic soul would miss the point, Rahner argues, for *giving up* a 'determined space-time location' must mean something other and more fundamental than *occupying* all

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[80] ibid. p.47.

[81] ibid. pp.48-49

[82] ibid. p.49. This is Rahner's characterisation of the view of Plato, Kant and Heidegger, not mine, and whether or not it is correct it does helpfully delineate Rahner's own position.

[83] Rahner, *On the Theology of Death,* p.30.

[84] ibid.

[85] ibid. p.31.

[86] ibid. p.30.

space-time locations! That is the sort of concept of the freedom of the soul which Rahner might have dismissed as essentially platonic. And Rahner ends the substance of his argument here by affirming the value of 'the moral quality of each individual human life':[87] the particularity of the bodily life lived is no less precious and important because the body is destroyed.

Rahner acknowledges that 'within the framework of our obsolescent ontological terminology'[88] it is very hard to pin down exactly how the particularity of the soul might be manifested in its pan-cosmic existence – one cannot see it in quite the same way as when the soul is expressed in the unity of the body and soul. But Rahner does suggest that perhaps the soul 'might come to have, through the actions performed in the world, a real ontological influence on the whole of the universe.'[89] Is this ludicrous? No, Rahner answers, because if we confess that our living as moral agents can have a fundamental impact on our relationship with God and God's relationship with us, then why should the soul's having a continuing impact on things be ludicrous after the separation of the soul and body?

To ground this discussion in something at least partially tangible, he calls us to consider three related theological problems. First, the nature of angels and their impact on the world. As principles (or, more commonly in English, powers), '[angels] exercise their activity and influence, not causally, sporadically (as though these originated in some sporadic decisions of their own)',[90] but rather they 'are the ultimate foundations of the natural order of things, determining the right order of events in this world because of their essential relationship to the universe.'[91] Angels do not act in the same way as living humans, making decisions to act and speak like us, only in spectral form! Rather, if we confess as Christians that the angels are incorporeal yet active and of consequence, that a 'natural, all-cosmic relationship between the angels, as spiritual-personal beings, and the world'[92] is possible, then we cannot deny that such a continuing relationship is possible too for the human soul, a relationship not of individual autonomy in the way we currently experience it but neither one that is inconsequential nor without purpose.

Rahner's second theological problem: purgatory. If we imagine that, in death, the soul severs the entirety of its relationship with the world, then purgatory makes no sense.[93] But if the soul does have a continuing relationship with the world, then:

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[87] ibid. p.31.

[88] ibid.

[89] ibid.

[90] ibid. pp.31-32.

[91] ibid. p.32.

[92] ibid.

[93] As an Anglican, I leave aside any question of whether it makes sense in the first place.

> In the light of this supposition, purgatory comes to mean, plausibly, that the soul, after surrendering her concrete bodily structure and, indeed, through that act of surrender, comes in her free, active and morally self-determining state, to experience acutely her own harmony or disharmony with the objectively right order of the world and even, by this fresh appreciation, to contribute positively to the establishment of that right order.[94]

Rahner also drops in a Thomistic argument about the neo-scholastic treatment of venial sins, but his strongest point is that, for purgatory to make any sense, the soul must be in some sort of continuing relationship with the world, if the soul is to meaningfully "work through" the sins committed in the world.[95]

And the third theological problem: understanding the resurrection of the body and the nature of the glorified body. If the soul, Rahner reasons, is released from the body in a platonic sense, into a better freedom without the shackles of flesh and the limitations of the world, why would we look forward in any way to the resurrection of the body and the transformation of the world?[96] But, if we see the pan-cosmic life of the spirit within the world after the death of the body as a possibility, then not only might death be seen in a positive light, 'as the consummation of a goal towards which man positively tends',[97] but also a further consummation in the new bodily form of the resurrection might be hoped for.[98] But having gained this pan-cosmic life, would the soul simply revert at the resurrection of the body to the historical and spatio-temporally limited existence of the first body? No, says Rahner, and this may help us better understand the biblical witness to the nature of the glorified body of the resurrection. He does not explicitly refer to the biblical accounts of Christ's resurrection appearances, but the resonances are clear.

> This [biblical - 1 Cor. 15] description seems to indicate that, in its glorified state, the body not only obtains a perfect suppleness and pliability in its relationship to the spirit of man as perfected and divinized by the supernatural action of grace, but also that bodily structure does not necessarily coincide with man's present restriction to definite spatio-temporal determinations.[99]

Rather than becoming the platonic prison which prevents the soul from achieving its fulness, '[t]he glorified body seems to become the perfect expression of the enduring relation of the glorified person to the world as a whole.'[100] The body, reunited with the glorified soul, is informed by its glorified and divinised nature and is glorified and divinised together with it, as a unity, as one human person in glory.

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[94] Rahner, *Theology of Death*, pp.32-33.

[95] We will come back to Rahner's understanding of purgatory later in this chapter when we engage with it far more critically.

[96] ibid. pp.33-34.

[97] ibid. p.33.

[98] ibid. p.34.

[99] ibid. p.34.

[100] ibid. p.34. cf. "The Body in the Order of Salvation", p.86.

Rahner's concept of the pan-cosmic or all-cosmic soul is not worked through to the level of clarity which we might like – he expresses his frustration that he neither has the time, nor the metaphysical tools, to do so.[101] But I have tried to bring out several key aspects of his reasoning. First, that when Rahner explores the concept of the pan-cosmic soul, it is with the glory and value of the body in mind that he does so. Second, the reason he argues in this way is that the human person is fundamentally a unity of body and soul, and so the state of the pan-cosmic soul after death but before the resurrection is only a partial consummation, awaiting the full consummation of the reunification of the glorified body and soul at the resurrection. And third, that the pan-cosmic soul is not "omnipresent" in the sense that it *takes possession of* all time and space. Rather, there is a radical *giving up* or *abandonment* of time and space in the soul's pan-cosmic life.[102] This will be immensely important as we pursue further Rahner's theology of death. And fourth, that there is a dynamism to Rahner's outlining the possibility of the pan-cosmic soul which defies simple description. Rahner makes his point here by opening up what is possible and then qualifying the realms of possibility with analogous theological questions. This phase of his argument is itself dynamic and inquiring as Rahner seeks to explore the possible within theology.

(iii) The conclusion of the state of pilgrimage: dynamic and categorical eschatology

But what does it mean to be dynamic in the context of a theology of death? Our instinct, if we are formed by a particular sort of traditional theology, might be to think of eschatology in static terms, as an end-point or destination. Rahner picks up this theme when he considers death as the conclusion of our state of pilgrimage, as 'bring[ing] man, as a moral-spiritual person, a kind of finality and consummation which renders his decision for or against God, reached during the time of his bodily life, final and unalterable.'[103] Yet Rahner wishes to interpret that finality in a way which leaves room for our 'further development', which does not suggest 'a lifeless concept of the future life with God', along the lines he has outlined when considering purgatory and resurrection, as well as 'the future consummation of the whole universe'.[104] Just as before, Rahner seeks to affirm the importance of the human life lived in history, to instil in his readers 'a radical seriousness towards this life' which is 'truly historical, that is, unique,

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[101] Craigo-Snell notes that at the end of his career Rahner seemed to give up or go beyond the idea of the pan-cosmic soul, struggling to reconcile a sense in which 'a person completes her free history, yet remains temporarlly bound as she awaits bodily resurrection.' (*Silence, Love and Death*, p.147).

[102] Rahner elsewhere emphasises the 'necessity of avoiding clearly... the impression that when we affirm that in death man does not perish but is transformed into a new manner of existence, we are not speaking of a rectilinear continuation of man's empirical reality beyond death.' Karl Rahner, "The Life of the Dead" in TI 4.14, pp.347-356, p.347.

[103] *On the Theology of Death*. p.35.

[104] ibid.

irrepeatable, of irrevocable significance.'[105] The development of which Rahner speaks is not a second bite at the decision 'for or against God'[106] but rather an attempt to reaffirm the essential dynamism of the finite person moving ever into something infinite, of moving towards God:

> Even after the total consummation, it would be impossible to conceive eternal life of the blessed spirits as an immediate companionship with the Infinite God; it must be conceived rather as a never-ending movement of the finite spirit into the life of God. But the statement concerning the definitive end through death of the state of pilgrimage means that the basic moral decision made by man in the finiteness of his bodily existence is rendered definite and final by death.[107]

We cannot say what it really means to 'participate in the eternity of God', says Rahner, but he is willing to say that it cannot be something 'poor and empty' but rather 'the plenitude of reality, a unity and wholeness that is not to be destroyed in mere succession', that is, not to be swept away by time as all experience must be in the first bodily life.[108] What is particularly elegant here is the way Rahner unites the passing of human beings through this process of decision and development with the 'immanent maturing of the world towards its consummation'[109]:

> The total, created reality of the world grows in and through persons having body and spirit, and the world is, in a certain sense, the body of those persons. Their death slowly brings the universe to its final stage.[110]

Where Rahner earlier argued that it was possible that the pan-cosmic soul could continue to have an impact on things after the death of the body,[111] now Rahner offers a larger context for this idea: that every stage of every human's decision and development is somehow a small part of the decision and development of the whole universe. As humans are unique in creation in being *Geist*, it is in us (collectively) that the whole cosmos makes its decision for or against God, and makes its movement into the infinite divine life, towards the categorical historical end-point set for it.

Rahner describes this ending of the world as 'a mysterious dialectical unity',[112] mysteriously the product both of the action of humans and also 'through some unpredictable intervention of God, that is, through

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[105] ibid. King and Whitney emphasise the fact that Rahner's theology of death does not "deindividualise" the human person, but rather preserves their individuality in the God who is 'the source and goal of that uniqueness' (J. Norman King & Barry L. Whitney, "Rahner and Hartshorne on Death and Eternal Life" in *Horizons*, 15 (1988), pp.239-261, p.255).

[106] Rahner, *On the Theology of Death*. p.35.

[107] ibid.

[108] ibid. p.36.

[109] ibid. p.37.

[110] ibid.

[111] ibid. p.31.

[112] ibid p.37.

his coming in judgement, an event of which no one knows the day.'[113] Judgment becomes for Rahner a focus for his working out just what he means by dialectic in the context of eschatology. Having affirmed the dialectic of human action and God's action in the coming of the end of the world, Rahner establishes another dialectic, a 'real-ontological dialectic'[114] between death as a passive moment experienced by us and death as an active self-disposition by us. What does he mean here? To make sense of Rahner's argument, we must expand it somewhat, and go beyond the arguments he explicitly makes. First, Rahner implies that if we were not *Geist*, if we were inanimate creatures, like a table, our death or destruction could be understood entirely passively. When the table ends because I put too many books on it and it collapses, simple matter that it is, there is no sense in which the table achieved any sort of self-disposition. However, since we are *Geist*, something more complex goes on when we die. Human beings as *Geist* are 'both spirit and matter, liberty and necessity, person and nature'[115] and so, at death, our personal capacity for judgment "for or against God", which Rahner calls in a thomistic sense the 'spiritual-personal act of man',[116] is confronted with the finality of God's judgment. To put it another way, if 'at death the whole man arrives at the end of his temporal existence',[117] then this must be true of the soul as well. Just as the soul did not become omnipresent in space in Rahner's understanding of the pan-cosmic soul, so it does not become omnipresent in time, but ceases to be temporally / categorically defined. [118] Rather, Rahner argues:

> ... in death the soul achieves the consummation of her own personal self-affirmation. The soul will do this, not by passively suffering something which happens to her biologically, but through her own personal deed.[119]

Rahner understands the human person, body and soul, as a unity. But in death the human soul is not in any sense passively released from the body by the many biological factors which lead to our deaths. So Rahner argues that death for the soul is in a sense an active moment. What does he mean?

What is remarkable here is how the significance of death understood as an action of the soul bleeds into the exercise of a person's freedom throughout their life, before death. This reflects Rahner's focus on the personal decision which is made throughout life "for or against God". The language Rahner uses is interesting, because it is not the language of palliative care, but rather of the school or university, of adolescence and blossoming potential:

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[113] ibid.

[114] ibid. p.38.

[115] ibid.

[116] ibid. Rahner states that this 'personal life-decision' is for Thomas intrinsic to death, but he does not provide any references to or analysis of Thomas to support this.

[117] ibid. p.39.

[118] cf. ibid.

[119] ibid.

> As the end of man, who is a spiritual person, [death] is an active consummation from within brought about by the person himself. It is a growing up, the result of what man has made of himself during this life, the achievement of total self-possession. It is the real self-creation, the fullness of his freely exercised personal reality.[120]

As Rahner develops his theology of death, and particularly as he applies it to the experience of old age, he will return again and again to reflection on death as an action of the free person, achieving self-possession. All these concepts will become clearer, but at this stage it suffices to note how strongly Rahner's language establishes a dialectic between 'death as the end of biological life'[121] and an active self-disposition of the person which is not confined to the moment of biological death in our personal life-history. And, lest we are tempted to cleanly divide the passive death of the body from the active death of the soul, Rahner recapitulates this argument on "death as an event concerning man as a whole" (i.e. neutral death), reminding us that 'if the substantial unity of man is taken in its full significance, it will be impossible to parcel out these two dimensions of human death, one to the body and one to the soul, thereby dissolving its very essence.'[122] Even the unity of the body and soul, a unity with metaphysical differentiation but without distinction, exists as a dialectic, and Rahner leaves us in an unstable conceptual space as we try to understand our experience and life-histories in these dynamic terms. Neutral death is not the whole story.

Negative Death – 'Death as the Consequence of Sin'

After such a conceptually challenging experiment in describing death as "existentially neutral", Rahner's treatment of death as the consequence of sin begins in a rather dull restatement of official church doctrine. For readers more used to thinking of Rahner's eschatology as being controversial, particularly when we consider his concept of "anonymous Christianity", this may come as a surprise. But we must bear two possibilities in mind. The first, and less charitable possibility, is that Rahner publicly bases his argument in official church doctrine but this does not mean that he wholeheartedly subscribes to it. Is his self-conscious grounding of his reasoning in official church doctrine nothing more than a smokescreen? This is improbable, particularly because it has been so ineffective at shielding Rahner from criticism. A second possibility, which is much more probable, assumes good faith on Rahner's part. This is that Rahner often uses the doctrine of the church as a ground on which to build his reasoning, faithful to his vows and ecclesial inheritance, whilst also going beyond a simple restatement of doctrine, exploring its implications and possibilities. This seems to me much more reasonable and probable, and enables us to say that, simply because Rahner's

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[120] ibid. p.39.

[121] ibid.

[122] ibid.

argument begins in restatements of church doctrine does not mean that is where it will end. Rahner will explore creatively the possibilities opened up by official church doctrine. Just because it is where he begins does not mean it is where he will end.

(i) Original Justice

Rahner begins with a restatement of catholic orthodoxy, that 'Original justice consisted in a union with God through grace which transformed man's whole spiritual being, penetrating even his bodily life.'[123] That union with God sustained the whole human person, body and soul, but after the fall things change and death becomes a reality for us:

> Because man has lost the divine life, rooted in union with God by grace, his earthly existence also disintegrated. Man's death is the demonstration of the fact that he has fallen away from God.[124]

So far, so good, for a traditional thomist. But then Rahner considers how this would have worked out if the original humans had not fallen, had not fallen away from God. He hypothesises[125] for Adam 'a death without dying'.[126] For although (for Rahner) it is a proposition of faith that the sinless Adam would not have been subject to death:

> It is not legitimate, however, to infer from this proposition of faith that the first man in Paradise, had he not sinned, would have lived on endlessly in this life. Rather can it be said with certainty that he would surely have experienced an end to his life, but in another manner; maintaining the integrity of his bodily constitution, he would have conducted this life immanently to its perfect and full maturity. ... This end of man in Paradise, a death without dying, would have been a pure, apparent and active consummation of the whole man by an inward movement, free of death in the proper sense, that is, without suffering any violent dissolution of his actual bodily constitution through a power from without.[127]

Already, Rahner is running into problems, or perhaps his argument is running before it can walk.[128] Why can it be said 'with certainty' that Adam would have come to an end (other than perhaps an unspoken horror at the prospect of an eternal temporal, historical life)? And could there be a consummation of the whole person without a death of the body, in terms of decay and destruction? Is Rahner saying that Adam was already, in the pre-lapsarian state, in the post-resurrection eschatological glorified and transformed

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[123] ibid p.41.

[124] ibid. p.42.

[125] Wherever Rahner uses the phrase "with certainty" the reader must beware.

[126] ibid.

[127] ibid.

[128] Craigo-Snell also points out the strangeness of Adam and Eve's sinless consummation in Rahner's theology of death, though merely in passing as she explores what it means for Rahner to say that death is a human act (*Silence, Love and Death*, p.124, fn.1).

state? But, if so, why experience any end? And what would such an end be looking for or dynamically moving into? Where is the real-ontological dialectic here? And where is the dialectic of our action and God's action in our end? This "end" is purely active, purely human action, whether divinely ordained or not! If the real ontological dialectic is so helpful for Rahner's reasoning earlier on, why does it not seem to appear here? Or is it functioning in his reasoning, but in a way that is not at first obvious to us?

First, he rejects notions of death as merely arising from human guilt.[129] Then, he begins to re-establish continuity with his reasoning on the neutrality of death when he affirms death as 'a natural event,... that is, it is a necessary consequence of the constitution of man as a body and spirit.'[130] Rahner enlists the weight of the tradition to his argument, against 'the Protestant reformers and Jansenists', to argue that death is a natural event, 'or, to state it more cautiously, that the death which we actually do experience has also a natural essence.'[131] I am not sure that Jansenism is as clear an opponent for Rahner to cite as would be its predecessor, Baianism. Michael Baius taught that the primitive innocence of the pre-lapsarian (pre-fall) state was an aspect of the normal condition of human nature, and so implied that the Beatific Vision was in a sense owed, or did accrue, to pre-lapsarian human beings on account of their nature.[132] This was one of the potential implications I noted above of Rahner's idea of Adam's "death without dying": that as Rahner presents it the state of the life in glory seemed already to be enjoyed by Adam on account of his "nature".[133] The Council of Trent did not condemn Baius' teaching directly, but did so by implication in declaring that the pre-lapsarian justice was an entirely gratuitous gift, that it is not owed to human nature, that it does not accrue to human nature.[134] It was not until 1567 that the bull *Ex Omnibus Afflictionibus* more explicitly condemned Baius' teaching. What is elegant about Rahner's citation of a Jansenist heretical position (even if citing it as a Baianist heretical position might have been more accurate) is that Rahner anticipates his readers' discomfort with his suggestion of Adam's natural end and limits it. His citation of Jansenism is really just a restatement of his original summary of official church doctrine on original justice: that it consisted in 'a union with God through grace'.[135] So Rahner implies that any glory pertaining to Adam before the fall did not in fact relate to the natural and neutral "death without dying" which would

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[129] Rahner, *Theology of Death*, p.43. Later, guilt becomes much more important in Rahner's thought. cf. *FCF*, pp.106-115.

[130] ibid.

[131] ibid. p.44.

[132] Peter F. Ryan, "How can the beatific vision both fulfil human nature and be utterly gratuitous?" in *Gregorianum*, 83 (2002), pp.717-755, p.718.

[133] I put "nature" here in double inverted commas because we will discuss below the complex (and perhaps inconsistent) manner in which Rahner uses the term 'nature' with respect to Adam.

[134] Charles Stinson, "The Finite Supernatural: theological perspectives" in *Religious Studies*, 9 (1973), pp.325-337, p.327.

[135] Rahner, *Theology of Death*, p.41.

have been an active self-disposition on the part of Adam. The glory experienced by Adam would have been grace, a free gift of God. And so the real-ontological dialectic in its many aspects (human action – divine action; activity – passivity; etc.) is restored. But at this stage Rahner's reasoning is a very complex and oblique argument. It will resolve itself when Rahner works his reasoning through more fully as he considers the supernatural existential in the context of Adam's "nature".

Rahner proceeds to ground his reasoning in something more straightforward. He argues that death is a composite moment or locus within the categorical human life, that the neutral aspect of death is only the foundation of what it means to die, and that this 'contains the potentiality of dying in both directions'.[136] Those two directions are the death of the post-fall sinful Adam or the death of Christ, the death with the decision against God or the death with the decision for God. Suddenly, Rahner's argument about the neutrality of death and the graced nature of the original innocence begin to resolve themselves. These two deaths are not ambivalent in the order of things. The death of sinful Adam and the death of Christ are not equivalent.

> In the concrete order, man, whether in the state of grace or not, lives in an order in which death should not exist. In his tending towards grace and the supernatural end of the sharing the life of God, there is given to man a real-ontological element of life which contradicts death.[137]

We are meant to die with the decision "for God", to die the death of Christ, for our end to be union with God, for our end to be our full enjoyment and the ultimate consummation of the 'union with God through grace which transformed man's whole spiritual being, penetrating even his bodily life'[138] which Adam had enjoyed before the fall. Although the neutrality of death, the natural element of the function of the ending of the spatio-temporal historical person, is natural to us, death cannot be neutralised in a sense that it is 'rendered irrelevant to man's spiritual, supernatural existence in the order of grace.'[139] For the neutral account of death offered in the first section of Rahner's *Theology of Death* is *never* the reality of death for human beings within the order of grace. The merely natural and neutral death is always modified either by a death in sin, which is a death that 'ought not to be, because the sinner still retains his real, ontological and existential reference towards grace and eternal life', or is modified by a death in Christ, 'into an assimilation of the glorious grace of Christ.'[140] By grounding his argument in the questions posed by the narrative of the fall, Rahner affirms that what he earlier called 'the moral quality of each individual human

[136] ibid. p.44

[137] ibid. p.45.

[138] ibid. p.41.

[139] ibid. p.45.

[140] ibid. p.46.

life'[141] does in fact have a 'real ontological influence',[142] constituting death as an 'event [either] of salvation or damnation'.[143]

Rahner has shown how death is never merely the neutral, natural element of death which he first outlined, but the either negative or positive quality of death in his portrayal is still a little simple at this stage: as either the bad death of sinful Adam or the good death in Christ. However, Rahner goes on to develop the negative aspects of the real-ontological dialectic of death by considering it from various angles.

(ii) Death as Event of Salvation and Event of Damnation

First, Rahner argues that just because death has a neutral quality does not mean that this neutrality is without content. Rather, this neutrality is possible because of the 'darkness, the hidden character of death.'[144] Although death is not the total destruction of the whole person, since it entails dissolution of the whole person, the separation of "mortal" body from "immortal" soul which endures, 'it is experienced as the death of this particular man and not merely of his flesh.'[145] The "end" we actually experience is 'a varying, highly analogous concept' which varies 'according to the specific existential constitution and the diverse potentialities of different levels of beings.'[146] What is interesting here is that Rahner continues to personalise, to individualise his theology of death, enabling him to provide something more pastorally useful than a blanket, mechanistic, theology of death. We know as pastors and carers that "end" can mean very different things for different people, and our theology must enable us to understand and respond to this, and "end" has the same neutral, positive and negative aspects as does "death".[147] All must be included in a meaningful theology of death. But this complexity does not allow easy answers. And more than this, Rahner argues that the complexity of the neutral, positive and negative aspects of death does not arise from our inability to resolve them, simply as a result of a lack of sufficient intellectual computing power amongst theologians and philosophers. Rather, '[a]t this point we come face to face with the irreducible dialectical oneness of death.'[148]

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[141] ibid. p.31.

[142] ibid.

[143] ibid. p.46.

[144] ibid.

[145] ibid. p.47.

[146] ibid.

[147] ibid. p.48.

[148] ibid. pp.48-49.

Simply to leave these aspects of death unresolved in his account would leave Rahner's theology of death weak and unsatisfying. But he sees in this problem a reassuring consistency with the personal experience of death:

> If death is the simultaneity of act and fate, of end and fulfilment, of being willed and being suffered, a fullness which is, at the same time, an emptiness; if it unites in itself, on the one hand, the hollow shadowiness, the ghostliness, in a certain sense, the de-personalization and loss of self for man and, on the other hand, the fullness of the achieved, total self-possession of the person, the arrival at the complete, ontological perfection of personal existence, and if both properly belong to the phenomenon of death, then it will never be possible to determine with existential clarity whether this imminent self-realization (which is part of death as the end of the spiritual person) will or will not be an experience of ultimate nothingness.'[149]

The darkness of death is a natural result of two things. First, the inability of the living to know now how existence is experienced after the dissolution of the unity of the body and soul. And, second, the fact that the dialectical nature of death consists both of de-personalisation and self-possession. But death's darkness is what, for Rahner, allows it to be historically realised in two different ways: either as the death of Adam or the death in Christ.

Rahner applies this reasoning to the hypothetical Adam who never fell. Having committed so strongly to the idea of the darkness of death, he rather strikingly argues that:

> Adam's death would not have been hidden in darkness. His end would have been the perfection and preservation of the personal reality effected in life, an end undisguisedly and tangibly experienced. The fact that the achievement of death done is enacted by man into the empty end of death suffered, and the resulting fact that death as a human act is covered with the veil of death as suffering, visibly manifests the absence of divine grace. Death, therefore, is the penalty of sin.[150]

At this stage, it is not entirely clear why Adam's death, even if experienced as 'conduct[ing his] life immanently to its perfect and full maturity[151] would not still be characterised by darkness. Rahner is not simply rehashing his earlier arguments on death and sin, but makes a subtly different argument. First, the darkness of death means that 'the concrete and final interpretation of this hidden situation can come to man only from God.'[152] The 'concrete existential situation'[153] in which we find ourselves because of the darkness of death is a matter of our 'anticipatory attitude'[154] to our death, an attitude which might be 'an initial form of faith':

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[149] ibid. p.49.

[150] ibid. p.50.

[151] ibid. p.42.

[152] ibid. p.51.

[153] ibid.

[154] ibid.

> in which man surrenders himself, in unconditional openness, to the incomprehensible God, without presuming to know of himself what that sovereign liberty of God may, in this dark and therefore incomprehensible death, decide concerning him.[155]

The darkness of death can be met in us by an anticipatory attitude of abandonment to God's grace. In this context, Rahner's idea of Adam's death as 'preservation of the personal reality effected in life' makes more sense: for Adam without sin (Adam "full of grace") total abandonment to God's grace in death would have been a perfection and completion of his total abandonment to God's grace in life. But, this vision of perfect death in grace, and death with an anticipatory attitude of abandonment in grace, also entails an alternative, which would not be a reality for the sinless Adam, but which is a possible reality for all of fallen humanity. For Rahner, it is possible for one to die without an anticipatory attitude of abandonment and even actively rejecting it:

> Conversely, we might also say that mortal sin consists in the will to die autonomously, when death's opening towards God (which is contained in its darkness) is denied and the divine disposal of our supernatural destiny rejected, according to which death is both penalty for original sin and participation in the redeeming death of Christ.[156]

This denial need not be explicit, argues Rahner, for we can also deny 'existentially the radical problem and the questionability of death as a mystery.'[157] However, what does Rahner mean by this? How can one deny the mystery of death in any way other than explicitly?

Rahner suggests that the denial of death's mystery may be embodied in different ways. It could be that a person, 'relying on himself',[158] despairs that the dark mystery of death can ever be "unveiled" and 'is unwilling to seek help in doing so from any other source'.[159] Or else a person might deny that death is mysterious at all by reducing the human person to either body or spirit, with no concept of the unity of both and denying the fundamental dialectic of death. To conceive of the person as only body would imply that death is 'an obvious, natural process' in which death 'would be an artful trick of nature, by which it increases the store of life, opening a way into the universal life of nature.'[160]

> [Death] is undergone in bitterness only when man's pseudo-spiritual egotistic concern for his own biological structure opposes it, instead of surrendering to it and allowing himself to be carried off by the eternal cycles of biological life. Death [in this naturalist way of understanding it] is thus a return

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[155] ibid.

[156] ibid. p.52.

[157] ibid.

[158] ibid.

[159] ibid. Rahner does not say that Christian theology is the preferred source, but the implication is relatively clear.

[160] ibid. p.54.

> home, back to the world of the material, eternally abiding nature. The intention of maintaining at any price the individual's own structure in nature would mean only petrifaction, a true death.[161]

The way Rahner describes the pastoral comfort offered by this naturalist denial of death's dialectical darkness should stop and make us think, for it captures exactly the prevailing discourse in the funeral industry, and some of the underlying rationale for the development of eco-memorials.[162] Acceptance that death is natural in the circle of life is prescribed, rather than abandonment into death's darkness and the grace of God, as Rahner suggests. But, in contrast, the pastoral outcome Rahner draws from the alternative error, to conceive of the person as only spirit is far more disturbing. In this 'spiritualist aberration', in which death is 'transformation to the state of free spirit',[163] a state which Rahner imagines in a variety of ways:

> The notion of death, in this sense of dematerialization, would necessarily embrace the idea of a redemption, compared to which bodily existence is actually death. Death, thus, would but afford the spiritual person the opportunity of demonstrating its own intangibility, for through death it would be neither touched nor denied.[164]

The suicides of some of the great existential philosophers come to mind when one reads this passage. A concept of the person in which death is viewed primarily as a positive event, as *inherently a liberation*, leads to an undervaluing of life and the body.[165]

However, I have omitted one vital part of Rahner's reasoning here. One could be forgiven for reading this section on death as event of salvation and event of damnation and thinking that the "death" referred to was that which happens at the same time as the biological death of the body. But that is not Rahner's argument. If that was his argument, he could not say that "death" was an act of the human person, for it would only be brought about by the death of the body over which we (should) not have total control.[166] Rather, Rahner argues that:

> Death has to be understood as an act of consummation... which is achieved through the acts of the whole life in such a manner that death is axiologically present all through human life.[167]

Rahner's concept of death is not limited to the moment of bodily death, but consists of a continual self-possession and self-disposition throughout our lives in which every free (self-posessing) act is a self-disposition in abandonment (into death's darkness and God's grace) or denial (of death's darkness and

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[161] ibid.

[162] cf. Douglas Davies & Hannah Rumble, *Natural Burial: traditional-secular spiritualities and funeral innovation* (London: Continuum, 2012), pp.57-96.

[163] Rahner, *Theology of Death*, p.53.

[164] ibid.

[165] This is a charge of which Rahner's own theology is not entirely innocent, as we consider below.

[166] ibid. p.51.

[167] ibid.

God's grace). Mortal sin is not therefore a state which can be enacted only at the moment of death, but rather a person can 'enact his death as sin all through his life, and not merely at its end.'[168] Rahner's treatment of death as event of salvation and event of damnation, his commitment to the axiological unity of body and soul in the human person, and his unflinching commitment to the darkness of death in God's graceful order, enable him to honour the moral character of our lives as we live them. For Rahner, the attitude of abandonment does not mean giving up. Quite the reverse.[169] Death, judgment, salvation and damnation go with us through our lives, and are rendered absolute in the moment of our bodily death.

(iii) Death as Penalty for Original Sin - the curse of the supernatural existential

Rahner has already used the case of Adam to argue that death is the penalty for sin, but now he expands this idea. He suggests that for us to experience death as 'an actual loss and as a penalty'[170] death must be 'something against [our] concrete nature and [ourselves] as in fact existing in this concrete nature.'[171] If death was merely 'contrary to [our] nature, taken in the abstract',[172] but not really contrary to our very selves, then we would only experience death as 'a mere loss of something supernatural', a loss of something for which 'there is no desire or demand... in nature'.[173] Put more simply, if death was either natural to us, or if death was merely incidental to us, like a scratch or a bruise only worse, we would not experience in it such a fundamental darkness. Rather, Rahner argues, death strikes at the core of what it means to be human: it robs us of something which our humanity fundamentally (on account of its humanity) desires or demands.

Rahner recapitulates his earlier narration of the consequences of Adam's fall from a state of grace and union with God:

> Death is the expression of the fact that the earthly reality of man is no longer permeated and transformed by grace, of the fact that grace must begin anew the activity by which it transforms that earthly reality and, finally, of the fact that grace could not completely eliminate death from human life, nor overcome it by a pure, glorifying consummation of man's reality.[174]

But alongside this he provides a theological explanation for the same problem in very different terms:

> Since Adam's fall, man is no longer a pure nature, which, after the loss of its supernatural destiny as a sharer in the life of God, might again become whole and comprehensible in itself. He still retains

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[168] ibid. p.52.

[169] We will see later the duty Rahner places on the elderly to want to live.

[170] ibid. p.55.

[171] ibid.

[172] ibid.

[173] ibid.

[174] ibid. p.56.

> that supernatural destiny as an obligation and a task, as a real determinant of his nature, as a supernatural existential element. In this supernatural existential element there is still (because the gift of immortality in Paradise was a connatural consequence of supernatural grace) a tendency toward that consummation of man which would have been his end towards a pure, apparent and clearly experienced maturing of man from within. When man, endowed with this supernatural existential quality suffers death in darkness, a death which is a destruction from without and an absolute unmastering, then he dies a death which even now ought not to be. He also experiences a death (even though he cannot interpret it as such clearly) whose darkness is an expression, a consequence and a punishment of the loss which is his due for the sin of Adam.[175]

According to Rahner, though fallen humanity has lost its 'supernatural destiny' we still have some sort of remnant of this destiny, a 'supernatural existential element' which is unfulfilled, or rather *cannot be brought to full consummation in the way it should have been*, in the 'pure, apparent and clearly experienced maturing of man from within.' Rahner is using very technical theological language here, and some careful exegesis is required to comprehend the very large argument he is making in a very short space.

To start with, Rahner sets up Adam as a model of the human person constituted as a "pure nature" or *natura pura*. Henri de Lubac had reignited debates about the relationship between nature and grace in theological anthropology with his 1946 book *Surnaturel*, critiquing and complexifying the scholastic "two storey" model of nature and grace, 'in which grace constitutes an extrinsic addition to human nature rather than the fulfilment of an intrinsic desire'.[176] Rahner was formed as a theologian and wrote his early work as that debate was very much raging. This is particularly clear in Rahner's 1958 essay, "Nature and Grace". First, Rahner complexifies the term "natural" by pointing out a pastoral-theological problem. He argues that the church's theology of nature and grace had led people to assume that what we experience in our spiritual and moral life is entirely natural, by which he means that people did not look to any sort of "supernatural" for their personal fulfilment.[177] To people on the street, there was no useful distinction between nature and grace: all that mattered in daily life was really "nature". This was in part, according to Rahner, because the Church had instilled in people a sense that grace was a "thing", almost an "object" dispensed from certain mechanisms by the Church. You could go to mass and get this thing called "grace", but if you didn't want to, you could still be perfectly happy praying at home with your family, even if you weren't getting that thing the Church called "grace". Grace was an extra, something to help you in your natural fulfilment of your entirely self-contained natural person, as you sought to lead a good moral life in your own strength. Rahner's answer to this deficient "materialistic" understanding of grace was a relational (my term, not Rahner's) understanding of grace:

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[175] ibid. pp.55-56.

[176] Daniel Arthur Rober, *Recognising the Gift: towards a renewed theology of Nature and Grace* (Ann Arbor, MI: ProQuest, 2013), pp.2-3.

[177] Rahner, "Nature and Grace" (1958), pp.4-6.

> From the very first this grace cannot be conceived as separable from God's personal love and man's answer to it. This grace must not be thought of "materialistically"; it is only put "at man's disposal" by letting itself be used as is the way with the freest grace of all, the miracle of love.[178]

Rahner argued that a better understanding of grace must emphasise the importance of uncreated grace, grace as God's self-communication: that 'God communicates himself to man in his only reality. That is the mystery and the fullness of grace.'[179] And we are fundamentally created to be open to this gift of Godself in uncreated grace, in a way which we shall explore further as this chapter progresses.

In "Nature and Grace", however, Rahner makes a rather stark point about the change in mindset for theologians that is required to work with this relational understanding of grace:

> The nature of a spiritual being and its supernatural elevation are not like two things laid one beside the other, or one against the other, which must either be kept separate or the one exchanged for the other. The supernatural elevation of man is the absolute (though unmerited) fulfilment of a being which, because of its spirituality and transcendence towards infinite being, cannot be "defined", i.e., "confined", like sub-human beings. ... The "definition" of the created spirit is its openness to infinite being; it is a creature because of its openness to the fullness of reality; it is a spirit because it is open to reality *as such*, infinite reality. ... Because these beginnings are brought to absolute fulfilment by the power of God's grace, this means that in them we experience *both* grace *and* nature.

Rahner accepts the theological usefulness of traditional theological categories of nature and grace. However, he follows de Lubac in rejecting the way that theology had presented grace, in which grace is an abstract concept, entirely alien to nature, two abstract concepts side-by-side. But the particular contribution of Rahner to that debate was that he called theologians to translate their categories of nature and grace into the paradigm of "everyday" grace,[180] in which grace could be presented as supernatural, yes, but also entirely normal. And so we might say that grace is, in the common rather than the technical sense of the word, therefore, normal or "natural" for us:

> Man's whole spiritual life is permanently penetrated by grace. Just because grace is free and unmerited this does not mean that it is rare (theology has been led astray for too long already by the tacit assumption that grace would no longer be grace if God became too free with it).[181]

What, then, does Rahner mean by positing Adam as "pure nature"? First, we can exclude the possibility that Rahner means "Adam without grace". It is true that Adam has not yet fallen and so does not need the "top-up" grace which is the medicine for sin. But to go so far as to say that "pure nature" means "without grace" in an absolute sense would be to set nature and grace in opposition to one another, to

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[178] ibid. p.25.

[179] ibid. p.21.

[180] I will explore "everyday" grace at some length in the final chapter of this thesis.

[181] ibid. p.31.

separate them in a mutually exclusive manner, in just the way which we have just seen Rahner criticise. Rahner is not saying that, before the fall, Adam would have been without grace, without the relationship with God constituted by God's gift of Godself. If anything, the opposite is the case! Rather, there is something fundamental to the human person which is intimately connected with that God-human relationship which changes in the fall of Adam. There is something which constitutes Adam's "supernatural destiny" which is as true before the fall as it is after it, but which has changed in its operation, in how we experience it. It seems, to use Rahner's relational paradigm from "Nature and Grace" to be entirely "normal" and "ordinary" for Adam, yet it has to do with the gift of Godself to Adam. Before the fall, that relationship would somehow have reached its "ordinary/natural" conclusion in Adam's death-without-dying. But after the fall it is experienced as 'an obligation and a task'. It has become "extraordinary/unnatural/supernatural" in the everyday sense of the words.

I have laboured the point somewhat, but it is important that we remember the distinction between Rahner's following de Lubac in his critique of the traditional theology of nature and grace and his own contribution to the debate in the *everyday language* he uses to normalise grace in his approach to human life. Rahner can affirm that grace is technically supernatural but not entirely alien to us, and he can do so whilst also making his own argument that *we experience grace most commonly as ordinary, everyday, and indistinguishable from what either laypeople or theologians would think of as natural*.

Now we can move on to consider how Rahner understands this 'supernatural destiny as an obligation and a task, as a real determinant of [our] nature', this 'supernatural existential element' in our humanity.[182] It has to do with our potential for union with God, our ability as human creatures to be recipients of grace, which was perfect in Adam before the fall. When Rahner dealt with the problem of our potential to receive grace in his essay "Nature and Grace", he began with a related concept, the *potentia obedientialis*, or "obediential potency". This is a concept with a long historical pedigree.[183] Rahner rejects the neo-

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[182] Rahner, *Theology of Death*, p.55.

[183] Cicero uses similar language to express the concept of nature's obedience to God: *de Legibus*, 3.1.3: 'Nam et hic deo paret, et huic oboediunt maria terraeque, et hominum vita iussis supremae legis obtemperat.' (Niall Rudd's translation (Cicero, *The Republic and The Laws* (Oxford: OUP, 1998), p.150) perhaps gives more significance to the term obedience than the several Latin terms 'parere', 'oboedire' and 'obtemperare' permit). Augustine considers God, by working in creatures, to have given them a 'certain power of serving him': Augustine, *The Literal Interpretation of Genesis* 4.17, in *Saint Augustine on Genesis*, trans. Roland J. Teske (Washington DC: CUA Press, 1991), p.155. Albert the Great uses the term *potentia obedientiae* to convey the same sense (*In 2 Sent.* 18.7.ad.ob.) and Thomas uses both *potentia obedientiae* (*De Veritate* 29.3.ad.3) and *obedientialis potentia* (*De Virtutibus* 1.10.ad.13) to the same effect. Lawrence Feingold has traced the development of the term after the Council of Trent in Cajetan's Thomist critique of Scotus' position that we have a "natural inclination" for the Beatific Vision. Cajetan criticised Scotus' definition of the supernatural and redefined it as 'that which surpasses what is *due to nature*' (Feingold, *The Natural*

Thomist position that the *potentia obedientialis* in us is 'simply an absence of contradiction in a purely negative way',[184] a 'purely formal non-repugnance'[185] to the receipt of grace because this entirely passive orientation (or perhaps more accurately, ambivalent non-orientation) of humanity to the receipt of grace permits grace to remain entirely external to the human person, entirely extrinsic to our constitution, and entirely external to an account of our nature.[186] How then does Rahner conceive of the *potentia obedientialis*? Rahner argues that 'man's concrete end is the first object of God's will and that it is with this in view that he first devises the concrete quiddity of man.'[187] God has made our nature with our end, our ultimate union with God in the fullness of grace, in mind. So, Rahner argues, 'this 'potency' is what is inmost and most authentic in [us], the centre and root of what [we are] absolutely. [We] must have it always...'.[188] We begin to see Rahner's concept of the *potentia obedientialis* coming alongside his concept of *Geist*, as an ability to receive grace which is fundamentally constitutive to the human person. In Rahner's language, it is "existential" for us. And here, he attempts to resolve his circling around the *potentia obedientialis* by turning to the "supernatural existential".

Desire to See God according to St Thomas and his interpreters (Ave Maria: Sapientia Press, 2010), p.82). Cajetan argues that, since we only naturally desire those perfections which are proportionate to our nature (i.e. the natural), we cannot naturally desire those perfections which are disproportionate to our nature (i.e. the supernatural) (ibid. p.84). There then arises the question of whether there could be what Feingold calls 'a natural passive potency to receive supernatural gifts', and whether that should be called a 'natural passive potency' or 'obediential potency' (*potentia obedientialis*) (ibid. p.101). Feingold notes Cajetan's definition of *potentia obedientialis* as 'the aptitude for there to be realized in a thing whatever God has decreed to work in it', to which Feingold adds, conveying the sense of Cajetan, 'above its nature' (ibid.). It is interesting that Feingold, like Rahner, sees in his argument an expression of God's sovereignty: 'Because of God's sovereign power over created being, all creation has the innate capacity to *obey* the will of the Creator and to be caused to do whatever He wills.' But this does not 'bind the hands of the Creator' to 'make Him incapable of intervening in His work beyond the limits of the natural order that He has established' (ibid. p.105). All creation has the '*natural passive potency*' to receive perfection through natural agents, but only humans have the '*obediential potency*' to receive perfection from God himself, the divine agent (p.106-108). The significant thing to note is that both of these potencies, the natural passive and obediential, are (for Feingold's reading of Cajetan reading Thomas) passive (ibid. p.106). The distinction which Feingold makes between Cajetan and Scotus, that Cajetan distinguishes the two potencies by the agent of fulfilment and proportion to nature whereas Scotus does not distinguish them on either account (ibid. p.165), will also be significant.

[184] "Concerning the relationship between nature and grace", p.303.

[185] Karl Rahner, "Current Problems in Christology" in TI 1, pp.149-214, p.170, fn.34

[186] He also dismisses Malavez's attempt to get around the problem with the idea of a "natural desire"; and interestingly he affirms the condemnation in *Humani Generis* of the idea attributed to the *Nouvelle Theologie* that God could not have created intelligent creatures without a supernatural end. Rahner retains his commitment to God's sovereignty and absolute freedom in creation. "Concerning the relationship between nature and grace", p.303.

[187] ibid. p.308.

[188] ibid. p.311.

Rahner introduced his new and controversial concept of the "supernatural existential" early his 1950 article, "Concerning the Relationship between Nature and Grace",[189] but when it first appears it is rather obscure.[190] However, at the end of the article Rahner attempts to lay it out in more detail. First, he repeats his argument that if God wishes to fulfil us by communicating himself to us, 'Man should be *able* to receive this Love which is God himself; he must have [been created with] a congeniality for it.'[191] Then, he turns a rather beautiful theological dance on a very tight point. To receive God who is love, we must receive God 'as what it necessarily is: as free gift.'[192] Rahner does not deploy arguments around proportionality here – he gives short shrift to the argument which derives conclusions 'obviously' (Rahner emphasises this word with quotation marks!) from the disproportion between God and us.[193] Rather, he argues:

> ... the longing for, the ordination to, God's Love, this existential for supernatural grace, only allows grace to be unexacted grace when it is itself unexacted, and at the moment when, fulfilled by grace, it becomes conscious of itself *as* supernatural, i.e. shines forth as unexacted by the real man, not owed to him.[194]

We have a potential to receive grace which is our 'inmost centre',[195] yet which is not the entirety of our person.[196] Whilst it is unfulfilled, we are free to experience our supernatural existential without fulfilment, just as our *Vorgriff* and all our knowing seem to be purely human processes. We can exist without being fulfilled by God's grace. But when the supernatural existential is fulfilled (in part or wholly) by grace, then our yearning and desire, our orientation, is revealed to be more than a human curiosity, and is revealed to be itself a free gift from God.

Rahner puts it another, more playful, way when he suggests that 'man can experiment with himself only in the region of God's supernatural loving will' so 'can never find the nature he wants in a 'chemically

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[189] Originally published as "Eine Antwort" in *Orientierung* 14 (1950), pp.141-145, it was only slightly amended before republication in 1954 as "Uber das Verhältnis von Natur und Gnade" in the first volume of *Schriften zur Theologie*. This is the form the essay appears in English in the first volume of *Theological Investigations* as "Concerning the relationship between nature and grace". cf. David Coffey, "The Whole Rahner on the Supernatural Existential" in *Theological Studies* 65 (2001), pp.95-118, p.95, fn.1.

[190] When Rahner talks of 'an interior supernatural existential' on p.302, it sounds like he is talking about the experience of justifying grace, and he unhelpfully introduces the concept in a rhetorical question which he then resolves by dismissing!

[191] "Concerning the relationship between nature and grace". p.311.

[192] ibid. p.312.

[193] cf. Feingold, *The Natural Desire to See God,* p.84.

[194] "Concerning the relationship between nature and grace", p.313.

[195] ibid.

[196] ibid.

pure' state, separated from its supernatural existential.'[197] The theologian knows that humanity is made by God for a particular end (the receipt of grace and the fulfilment of the supernatural existential) and we cannot ever see our nature except through the filter of that knowledge. Just as we cannot know exactly what was the state of humanity before the fall, we could never know what would be our state if God had never willed for us a final union with Him, and if we did not have the supernatural existential.

There is a sense in all this in which Rahner has his cake and eats it. He retains the concept of the *potentia obedientialis*, that purely passive potential to receive grace of scholastic theology, but modifies it so that its passivity does not imply 'merely... a non-repugnance' but rather an 'inner ordination.'[198] However, he does not wish to compromise the fact that grace is given entirely freely – God gives it, we do not wrest it from him – and so he translates the passivity of the scholastic *potentia obedientialis* into the *non-unconditionality* of the supernatural existential: the supernatural existential is an inner-ordination which God is entirely free not to fulfil.[199] The 'unlimited dynamism of the spirit [*Geist*]'[200] does not actually grab hold of God: it is our reaching out for more in the *Vorgriff* which cannot fulfil itself.[201] But neither is it simply the passive condition for our receiving God. The unfulfilled *Geist*, the *Vorgriff* which has encountered the infinite horizon of unknowing, are not concepts which represent a merely passive humanity. They represent a humanity which is created for a particular end in grace and, though it is free to deny its nature by not reaching it, will be most authentically itself when it is fulfilled by the fullness of grace.

We return to Rahner's description of Adam's fall in *On the Theology of Death*. For Rahner, the supernatural existential, our inner ordination (here referred to as a 'tendency'[202]) to receive grace, was uninterrupted in Adam before the fall and would have achieved its consummation in Adam's self-disposal into the fullness of grace, in Adam's 'death without dying'.[203] Death before the fall and original sin is the locus of a process of the receipt of grace in which the supernatural existential was much more fully fulfilled. However, *the fall and its consequence for us, original sin, has limited the fulfilment of the supernatural existential but without limiting the supernatural existential itself*: sin has limited the degree of fulfilment without decreasing the ordination to grace. This is why I titled this section "the curse of the supernatural existential".[204] Without

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[197] ibid. p.315.

[198] ibid. p.315.

[199] ibid.

[200] ibid.

[201] John McDermott SJ distinguishes the *Vorgriff* from "grasp" (*Griff*), limiting the concept: "Dialectical Analogy: the oscillating center of Rahner's thought" in *Gregorianum*, 75 (1994), pp.675-703, p.687.

[202] Rahner, *Theology of Death,* p.55.

[203] ibid.

[204] Craigo-Snell expresses the same problem from the slightly different angle of human freedom: According to Rahner, 'Human beings find themselves in the middle of an already ongoing freedom that demands decision and

the supernatural existential, Rahner suggests, it would not seem strange to us to experience a 'death in darkness': without the inner ordination to the fulness of grace we would not miss our consummation in grace. But since we have the inner ordination to receive the fulness of grace, we experience death without it as a death not characterised by fulness but by the emptiness of the unfulfilled supernatural existential. This is what Rahner means by our "suffering" death in darkness, our dying 'a death which even now ought not to be.'[205] The supernatural existential protests[206] as we die unfulfilled, in the experience of darkness, and this darkness is a punishment not because it is a 'fresh, revengeful intervention on the part of God',[207] but because 'it is a consequence and a connatural expression of the situation which was brought about by original sin. Death is guilt made visible.'[208]

But, of course, death is not just one moment, according to Rahner, but a series of moments throughout our lives. He therefore briefly discusses concupiscence (or unruly desire), which is also a consequence of original sin. 'Concupiscence', Rahner argues, 'as a consequence of original sin, is nothing else than the antagonism between nature', meaning the tendency of the fallen sinful person to die a death of darkness, 'and the person endowed with grace or at least with a supernatural destiny',[209] meaning the person with the supernatural existential. If, because of original sin, the moment of our final death is marked by the darkness and protest of the unfulfilled desire that is the supernatural existential, so the many moments of death in our lives will be marked by that same darkness and protest of unfulfilled desire:

> Death is the culmination of concupiscence; concupiscence is the appearance of the continuous presence of death, which spreads its veil of darkness over the whole of life as a human consummation.[210]

If we are able to be filled with grace because of our creation as beings with the supernatural existential, then, after the fall and limited by original sin, we also experience as punishment our lack of fulfilment because of that same supernatural existential.

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action. We have been burdened with an imposed freedom that we cannot discard.' (*Silence, Love and Death*, pp.125-126).

[205] Rahner, *Theology of Death,* p.55.

[206] Rahner does not use the term "protest" directly in relation to the supernatural existential, but I think that it is fitting, especially given Rahner's comment later in *On the Theology of Death* that 'a secret protest and an inextinguishable horror before this end [death after original sin] abides in every man' (p.61) since 'he still possesses within himself, if not the reality, then the due demand, at least, for that vitality of divine life, which if it could assert itself, pure and unveiled, in this earthly life would completely eliminate death.' (p.62).

[207] ibid. p.56

[208] ibid. pp.56-57.

[209] ibid. p.57.

[210] ibid.

(iv) Death as personal mortal sin

However, Rahner's account of the significance of original sin and the depth of his thinking about the supernatural existential might leave us thinking of sin in rather passive terms. Rahner is aware of this, and notes that 'Death is not only the expression and visible mark of man's alienation from God, of his lot since Adam's fall.'[211] It is also a consequence of 'grave, personal (and as yet unforgiven) sins.'[212] Rahner picks up his brief comment on concupiscence and emphasises his point that death:

> is not a mere accident, suffered passively, striking all men, sinner and just alike, in the same manner and quality; it is also an active consummation, worked out through the whole of life, and, therefore, it is an act of man.[213]

I think it is reasonable for us to read Rahner as saying that death is *in this sense* an act of man, for he is here balancing the passive with the active, maintaining the fundamental dialectic of death. Tellingly, Rahner emphasises that 'Beneath the veil of darkness and, indeed, precisely because of its darkness, the very essence of the death-phenomenon can and will differ profoundly from case to case.'[214] If Adam had not fallen, we would all achieve our consummation in a relatively similar way, but since sin has given death this quality of darkness, since our self-disposal in life varies so significantly from person to person, we will all experience death very differently. Indeed, with our personal sins we 'make [our] own the sin of [our] first parents';[215] yet death reveals to us both the horror of sin and also the 'vision, emerging on the surface of visible existence, of the eternal, of the only proper death.'[216] Death reveals to us the reality of judgment, the truth of the two ways, the negative death of Adam or the positive death in Christ, to which Rahner then turns.

Positive Death – 'Death as a Dying with Christ'

Rahner begins this phase of his argument by establishing an important distinction. We should not assume that death in and of itself is a participation in the death of Christ. And at this stage of the argument we should also not assume that a death in faith is in an uncomplicated way a participation in the death of Christ. This theological starting point is important, because it enables Rahner to talk of dying with Christ more deeply in three aspects: first as a manifestation of sin, second as 'a revelation of our participation in the death of Christ' and third as 'culminating in the appropriation of [Christ's] redemptive death by mortal

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[211] ibid.

[212] ibid. p.58.

[213] ibid.

[214] ibid.

[215] ibid p.62.

[216] ibid. p.63.

man.'[217] That death manifests sin Rahner has dealt with already. That our death has something to do with the death of Christ he takes for granted. But his real focus here is on *how* our own death and Christ's death are really connected, on *why* we can say that our death can really be transformed by the death of Christ. This is the technical theological question of the appropriation of Christ's death. And in tackling it, Rahner's sometimes abstract reasoning in the rest of *On the Theology of Death* begins to come together into something more recognisable and pastorally useful.

(i) The death of Christ

In order to explore the means of our appropriation of Christ's death, Rahner begins by establishing that 'in a real sense, Christ died our death', that is, 'the death of the human race fallen in Adam'.[218] The descent of Christ into hell is evidence of 'the substantial identity of Christ's death with our own' and allows Rahner to emphasise that Christ's death must have exhibited 'a similar complexity of levels'[219] to our own, merely human, deaths:

> action and suffering, a surrender of the bodily form and a release of an all-cosmic relationship of spirit, an end of the biological and the consummation of the personal life from within.[220]

What is fascinating in Rahner's argument is that he does not attempt to show that our death is like Christ's. Rather, he states, as a consequence of the incarnation, that *Christ's death must be like ours*. The first element in Rahner's theology of our appropriation of Christ's death is in fact a statement of Christ's appropriation of our death. This, in itself, is not controversial. But what is interesting is that Rahner sets this up as both a corrective to the deficiencies of the prevailing scholastic soteriology and also as an opportunity to explore the nature of Christ's own death, following from Rahner's profound reflection on the nature of human death.

First, Rahner argues that the medieval concept of satisfaction, 'as it has, with but slight modifications, been taught ever since' does not fully reflect the explicit and implicit Biblical account.[221] The problem Rahner sees in the medieval concept of satisfaction is that 'it does not interiorly make clear why it was through Christ's death that we were redeemed and not through some other possible act of our Lord, which would have been of equal, infinite value.'[222] For Rahner, there is something fundamentally different about death which renders it 'absolutely different from any other event or activity of human life.'[223] Death cannot

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[217] ibid. p.64.

[218] ibid. p.65.

[219] ibid. p.66.

[220] ibid. p.65.

[221] ibid. p.66.

[222] ibid. p.67.

[223] ibid. p.68.

therefore be simply one moral act among others: Christ's death must be 'more than just any act of [Christ's] obedience and his love (chosen, as it were, by the arbitrary will of God)'.[224] Moreover, the theory of satisfaction lacks the complexity of Rahner's account of death, a complexity which he suggests also accords better with the Biblical witness.[225]

Rahner therefore sets out to explore Christ's death as a human death, a death characterised by all the complexity of his account up to this point. And this includes the darkness of death. In a moment which might appear surprising to readers accustomed to focussing on Christ's perfection, Rahner states that:

> Inasmuch as Christ became man from out of the fallen race of Adam, he assumed the "flesh of sin". He assumed human existence in a situation in which that existence could reach its consummation only by passing through death in all its darkness.[226]

In Christ, God 'in absolute liberty'[227] has condescended to take on human flesh in order to render human life divine, and so God has taken on human flesh *as human flesh is in us*, with all its implications, including the darkness of death. However, this does not mean that Christ's death played out in exactly the same way as ours. There is the same starting point – flesh subject to original sin – yet Rahner affirms with the tradition that Christ did possess both the life of grace and absolute freedom which preserved Christ from concupiscence.[228] What is Rahner saying here? Is he saying that Christ is subject to original sin, but not to the concupiscence which leads to individual sins? How could a Christian theologian say that Christ was subject to original sin? And how could he be subject to original sin but not to the concupiscence which flows from it?

Rahner here is making a more subtle argument than these. First, he argues that in Christ God condescends to assume human flesh, that is human flesh which is subject to original sin. Second, Christ lives, his being fully human meaning that he exists as a substantial unity of this flesh and spirit, yet also being fully divine Christ performs his life and his death 'in virtue of a grace necessarily his due as a divine person'.[229] We must remember that, for Rahner, death is the manifestation of sin, so what he is really saying here is quite orthodox. He never explicitly makes this argument himself, but I think it is what he is getting at. Orthodoxy allows us to say that insofar as Christ is human he is subject to death but insofar as he is divine he is not. Rahner parses this using his theology of death to say that insofar as Christ is human he is subject to death, the manifestation of original sin, and therefore also the darkness, the hidden character of death.

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[224] ibid. p.68.

[225] ibid. p.69.

[226] ibid.

[227] ibid.

[228] ibid. p.70.

[229] ibid.

The question then, for Rahner, is how this coinciding of the darkness of death with the fullness of divine presence in the hypostatic union plays out in Christ's death. And his answer is the complete assumption and transformation of death itself. There is a complete assumption of human death, because Christ experiences death 'without its darkness being lifted',[230] and yet it is transformed because:

> the death of Christ becomes the expression and the incarnation of his loving obedience, the free offering of his entire created existence to God. What had been, therefore the manifestation of sin, thus becomes, without its darkness being lifted, the contradiction of sin, the manifestation of a "yes" to the will of the Father.[231]

In Christ, flesh under the spell of original sin is nevertheless brought to loving obedience, to a free self-disposition into the will of the Father. In Christ, although a human person was subject to the darkness of death, the manifestation of sin, yet it achieved the death which Adam would have known had he never fallen. Rahner's thought experiment (however unsatisfactory we may have found it) about the theoretical end of the sinless Adam and the actual death of the sinful Adam is applied to the real case of the sinless Christ. In Christ, the death of a sinless human being is allowed to happen, in the way it could not have for Adam after the fall. Rahner then affirms that, since Christ's death (like ours) is not only limited to a moment on Calvary, this assumption and transformation extends throughout Christ's life: 'the life and death of Christ in their redemptive significance also form a unity.'[232] But while Rahner has shown why Christ's death was a fitting means for our redemption from the grip of original sin, indeed 'that Christ could not have redeemed us through any other moral act than his death',[233] and has united the passion narrative with the rest of the Gospel in their salvific significance, he has not begun to show how this individual death has any wider significance, any cosmic validity.

If Rahner's concept of the pan-cosmic soul seemed rather abstract, or academic, when he considered our death, it makes a lot more pragmatic sense when he considers Christ's death. The entering through death 'into an open, unrestricted relationship to the world as a whole',[234] which causes us to have a 'real ontological influence on the whole of the universe',[235] causes Christ to be 'inserted into this world as a permanent destiny of real-ontological kind.'[236] However, Rahner has a problem. He has acknowledged

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[230] ibid.

[231] ibid.

[232] ibid.

[233] ibid. p.71.

[234] ibid.

[235] ibid. p.34.

[236] ibid. p.71. In a later essay, Rahner argues that Christ is still the crucified – Christ has not left his human history for us to invoke its moral force: 'This 'is' [of "Christ is still the crucified"] states that this very earlier life itself is completed and has found eternal reality in and before God. ...from the human subjectivity of Jesus, it has been gathered out of the mere flux of earthly time in to the Now of eternity and taken into irrevocable possession.' (Karl Rahner, "On the

that the current state of metaphysics does not allow him to describe much more precisely the nature of the pan-cosmic soul and the impact of its inclusion in the fundamental oneness of the world.[237] So metaphysics alone cannot carry the argument any further. But he does have a practical example: the descent of Christ into hell. Rather than having particular soteriological significance, Rahner argues that Christ's descent 'is conceived... as emerging from the very essence of Christ's death, because it was a human death.'[238] Rahner understands the descent of Christ into hell not in a spatio-temporal sense, for the soul gives up its space-time location in death,[239] but rather as Christ 'establishing contact with the most intrinsic, unified, ultimate and deepest level of the reality of the world.'[240] Now, Rahner is not saying that hell is where things are most intrinsic and unified. Rather, he is saying that Christ's pan-cosmic reality establishes fundamental contact with all of reality, even the deepest and darkest part of it, hell.[241] And this comprehensive contact and relationship with all of reality is what enables the death of Christ to be for us more than merely salvific in (what Rahner calls) the medieval/scholastic sense. Rahner has explored the importance of the body for grounding the moral character of human life,[242] and he now reiterates the importance of the bodily, categorical, spatio-temporal life as providing 'a pre-existing existential situation for personal action which makes possible the co-determination of behaviour among persons.'[243] When the reality of Christ becomes, by his death, open to all reality:

> thus becoming a destiny and intrinsic principle of it, and hence of the pre-existing existential ground of all personal life in the world, this indicates that the world as a whole and as the ground for personal human actions becomes very different from that which it might have been had Christ not died. It

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Spirituality of the Easter Faith" in TI 17.2, pp.8-15, p.13). Rahner argues that in the resurrection of Jesus, God is 'finally confirming as his own' this possession of Jesus' earthly history (p.15).

[237] ibid. p.31.

[238] ibid. p.72.

[239] ibid. p.30.

[240] ibid. p.72.

[241] It does seem, though Rahner does not make this argument explicitly, that Christ's establishing contact with all of reality is in some sense *more fundamental* or *more complete* than is the contact made by our own pan-cosmic soul, perhaps by virtue of Christ's divinity. Rahner later expressed the darkness of our contact with reality after death: 'Precisely in virtue of its openness to reality as such the spirit is not wholly removed from the world at death; indeed the underlying unity of reality as a whole actually opens up to it, so to say, at a new and deeper level. All things become present to it immediately and without distortion. For this reason the dead man is more closely and intimately united to the inward meaning of all that is real. But this totality of the real is still present to it in a peculiarly dim and remote manner. For the dead man this experience of the world in depth, as it were, is painful rather than joyful. He cannot really entertain it or express to himself that in it which is the object of desire to world and finite spirit alike, namely to come to themselves. Everything has become less real, has receded into remoteness, has become more alien and more lonely.' Rahner, "He Descended into Hell" in *TI* 7.12, pp.145-150, p.148.

[242] Rahner, *Theology of Death*, p.31.

[243] ibid. p.73.

> also follows that the way to a similar real-ontological relationship to the world was now opened for the personal actions of all other men. This could only be established through the death of our Lord, by which his human reality and grace, definitely ratified by the human freedom of his death, became existential determinants of the whole world.[244]

What Rahner has achieved is a means of conceiving the fundamental and existential unity of Christ's death with our own death, of Christ's humanity and ours. With a cosmic rather than an empirical perspective,[245] we can perceive this new existential situation, wrought by the death of Christ, which is that Christ 'in his humanity' is 'the heart of the world, the innermost centre of creation.'[246] And in the spiritual life, in the darkness of death faced in each moment of life, we can 'better grasp the fact that we..., willingly or unwillingly, whether we accept or deny it, are always face to face with this ultimate depth of the world which was conquered by Christ when, in death, he descended into the infernal regions.'[247]

Rahner's portrayal of the fundamental unity of the human person opened up in death to the fundamental unity of the cosmos enables him to reimagine the instrumental causality of Christ's death, not merely having a moral salvific quality, but in a way which unites Christ's humanity and so Christ's death with our humanity and our death.[248] But now Rahner turns to how this actually might be manifested in the death of the Christian. If all this theory is true, what does it mean for our death?

(ii) The death of the Christian as a dying with Christ

Rahner here has two arguments which are rather jumbled up. The first argument, which is incomplete, is that it is not clear why, as the traditional scholastic view teaches following the Council of Trent, death for Christians in a state of grace no longer bears the mark of punishment for sin but remains a consequence of sin (*poenalitas sed non poena*).[249] The distinction 'remains obscure'[250] and does not really answer questions about personal sin at all: particularly in what sense original sin can be said to have been removed

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[244] ibid.

[245] ibid. p.74.

[246] ibid.

[247] ibid.

[248] It is interesting to note the approval of the evangelical theologian John W. Williams for this aspect of Rahner's theology, on the grounds that Rahner focusses on the efficacy of the death of Christ rather than on the moral striving of Christ's life. Rahner's rather strange concept of the pan-cosmic soul thus receives approval from a conservative evangelical as useful ecumenical ammunition against the side-lining of Christ's death by 19th Century liberal Protestantism. John W. Williams, "Karl Rahner on the Death of Christ" in *Journal of the Evangelical Theology Society*, 14 (1971), pp.41-50, esp. pp.48-49.

[249] Rahner, *Theology of Death,* ibid. p.75.

[250] ibid. p.76.

or ameliorated if concupiscence remains unchanged.[251] But more significant for Rahner is his suggestion that theology has focussed on the difference between the Christian and the non-Christian in terms of 'the final outcome in the next life, which is reached through death' whilst actually failing to emphasise the fact that the actual death itself will be different for the person in a state of grace. [252] That 'dying with Christ' is a 'process' which 'penetrates our life here on earth' he considers self-evident from the New Testament.[253] But if we do not emphasise the significance of the actual moment of death and only focus on this process, then we might conceive of dying with Christ as 'an ethical-idealistic conception'[254] which has little to do with death as it really is.

The remedy which Rahner prescribes is to return to his idea of the death of the Christian as itself 'an event of salvation', an actual dying which is in Christ, not merely the conclusion of a life lived morally as dying in Christ.[255] But does this mean that the moral character of the life before has no significance? Rahner augments his earlier arguments about the moments of death throughout life by introducing the idea that the moments of death in our lives, in all our moral decisions, in our saying "yes" or "no" to God, are moments of "sacramental" partaking in what happens "really" in our death, which is 'the partaking in the death of our Lord.'[256] The moral character of the life lived and the moral character of the death died exist as a unity, which is a unity with the moral act of the death of Christ. And so it has significance. And yet this is not why the death of the Christian is peculiar:

> The truly specific note in his death, obviously, is that death, as the manifestation of sin, was changed in him [Christ] into a revelation of grace; the emptiness of man into the advent of God's fullness (which death certainly cannot be on its own accord). Death was changed into life, the visible condemnation into the visible advent of the Kingdom of God.[257]

In Christ, death becomes what it could not otherwise be, the darkness of the manifestation of sin is transformed into the revelation of God's grace:

> Through the fact of Christ's death, the justifying grace of God illustrates and confirms something which heretofore was not shown, but was hidden from us, namely, that at the very moment in which sin reaches the fullest measure of its power, the grace of God increases in its power to conquer sin.

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[251] ibid. Perhaps Rahner does not develop this argument because he has already considered the relationship between original sin and concupiscence at length in his own argument.

[252] ibid. p.75.

[253] ibid. p.76

[254] ibid. p.77.

[255] ibid. cf. pp.46-54.

[256] ibid. p.77.

[257] ibid. p.78.

> And through the death of Christ, when he surrendered himself to this innermost part of the world (hell), this grace became ours.[258]

But, markedly in Rahner's argument, this transformation does not take away the darkness which arises from death's inherent nature as the consequence of sin. The gifts of Faith, Hope and Charity are graces which transform death truly, but 'in such a way that death is still encountered as the wages of sin.'[259] The death of the believer is therefore still a moment in which the act of trust in God, the act of praying, "Into your hands I commend my spirit", is 'the highest act of believing, hoping, loving' as death remains for us 'the very death which seems to be absolute darkness, despair, coldness itself.'[260] And yet, for Rahner, "Into your hands I commend my spirit", is the fundamental reality of death restored in Christ.[261] This is the true 'act of resigning obedience' which is 'faith in darkness, hope against hope, love of God who appears only as Lord and as inexorable justice'.[262]

(iii) The sacramental visibility of unity between the death of Christ and the death of the Christian

Having identified moments of "sacramental" partaking in death in moments of decision throughout our lives, Rahner proceeds to strongly identify the sacraments of Baptism, Eucharist and Extreme Unction with Christ's death:

> Baptism, first of all, makes Christian death possible; the Holy Eucharist continuously nourishes the life of the Christian in order that, through assimilation to Christ's death, his own life, in his daily actions and sufferings, may grow from within toward that consummation which achieves its full perfection in death; Extreme Unction is the consecration of the end of this life to the death of Christ. The beginning, the middle and the end of Christian life, as it is an appropriation of Christ's death, are marked and consecrated through these three sacraments; for they all implant in the mortal life of the Christian soul not only the Lord's death, but his eternal life as well.[263]

Although the 'encounter between Christ and man' does not only happen in the ecclesial sacraments, but can happen 'whenever and wherever man, in the state of grace, freely accepts God's grace',[264] the sacraments in the context of Rahner's theology of death give this 'personal encounter'[265] 'a social visibility,

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[258] ibid. pp.78-79.

[259] ibid. p.79.

[260] ibid.

[261] ibid. p.80.

[262] ibid. pp.79-80.

[263] ibid. p.86.

[264] ibid. p.80.

[265] ibid.

an incarnation, in the Church'[266] which 'render the grace of Christ efficacious in the peculiar quality and direction that is revealed by each sacramental rite':[267] they are 'the visible form of the basic acts by which the redemption [of Christ] is appropriated.'[268]

What is striking about this sacramental theology is that it is diffuse: Rahner emphasises that the sacraments are not the only locus for this divine-human encounter. And just as his understanding of death is not temporally focussed but touches all moments of decision throughout a human life, the "sacramental" appropriation of Christ's death is, for Rahner, 'a process permeating [life's] entire course.'[269] Of Baptism, Eucharist and Extreme Unction, Rahner identifies Baptism as the most punctiliar, for it 'plunges us into Christ's death', establishing a 'real, intrinsic relationship' to Christ's death which is more than merely dying to sin in a moral sense.[270] Baptism is distinct because it constitutes a *beginning* of our dying with Christ:

> By his life in the state of grace, the Christian dies through all his life with Christ. This real death, continuing through the whole of life, begins at Baptism. ... Baptism is the beginning of Christian death, because it is the initiation of the life of grace, by virtue of which alone death becomes Christian.[271]

The most diffuse sacrament, because of its repetition, is the Eucharist, 'the sacramental re-enactment of Christ's death' which 'makes that death present in the space-time moment of our lives.'[272] The sacrament brings the mystery of Christ's death to us and also 'actually works its effect on our own lives' so that 'the participant in this sacrament must in it assume the human form of the Crucified.'[273] This assimilation through participation is, interestingly, not solely through the announcing of Christ's death, for Rahner argues that our recital of Christ's death also, necessarily, entails our 'announc[ing] this death in [our] own life, since [we] experience[] that [our] actual life is also a dying.'[274] The Eucharist is effective for us because at each Eucharist throughout our lives[275] we announce both Christ's death and our death in Christ. And the final sacrament which Rahner considers, Extreme Unction, is particular in that it is intended only to be administered once (like Baptism), but Rahner does not consider it to have the same punctiliar function as Baptism: like the Eucharist, it is food for the journey, and it might be repeated as it is not a sacramental ending and does not symbolise finality. Rather, Extreme Unction gives 'sacramental visibility' to 'the divine

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[266] ibid. p.81.

[267] ibid.

[268] ibid.

[269] ibid.

[270] ibid. p.82.

[271] ibid. pp.82-83.

[272] ibid. p.84.

[273] ibid.

[274] ibid.

[275] Rahner envisages the daily celebration of the Eucharist. However there is no reason why participation less frequently would fail to have the same effect.

grace we need to face [sickness] properly'.[276] Since Rahner understands sickness to be 'an imminent death', which 'is an expression of sin and of the threat which sin contains'[277] (i.e. death), this sacrament functions as a 'consecration to death' which enables us 'to die in the Lord'.[278] What is interesting about Extreme Unction is that it is not clear from Rahner's description whether it is the sick person's consent to receive the sacrament or the gift of the sacrament itself, which effects this consecration to death. In Baptism, the sacrament is often bestowed on a passive recipient. But in Extreme Unction, the real-ontological dialectic which was so important to Rahner in understanding death seems to be particularly visible:

> [Extreme Unction] becomes the visible manifestation of the fact that the Christian, confirmed by his anointment in the Lord, in virtue of his grace, faces the last trial of his life, performs its last act, his own death, in companionship with the Lord.[279]

Extreme Unction is perhaps the clearest sense in Rahner's theology of death of the active aspect in the process of dying itself. Whereas the active aspects of death are manifested throughout our life in our self-disposition, in Extreme Unction, in the (for Rahner it is assumed, conscious) sick person's decision to accept the sacrament or seek it out, there is an active declaration that the death they are to perform and endure will be a death in Christ. Although Rahner does not consider how this would work for a person who was not conscious or did not have presence of mind at the moment of anointing, that situation would fit even more strongly with Rahner's emphasis on the importance of the lifelong performance of the death in Christ.[280] The Christian's performance of their last act, having been prepared and enacted throughout their life, would then receive confirmation in anointing before consummation in bodily death.

The Liturgy of Life

Rahner ends *On the Theology of Death* in a strange way. He provides no formal conclusion, and the material I consider to be his conclusion really exists as a few paragraphs at the end of his last section, on the sacramental visibility of the unity between Christ's death and ours. He ends his extended and complex

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[276] ibid. p.85.

[277] ibid.

[278] ibid. p.86.

[279] ibid.

[280] David Kelsey's assessment that Rahner places too much emphasis on "private" "mental" acts in our self-disposition (David H. Kelsey, "Two Theologies of Death: anthropological gleanings", in *Modern Theology*, 13 (1997), pp.347-370, p.367) fails to take account both of the public/ecclesial sealing of our decision in the sacrament of extreme unction, and of the living out of our death throughout our life. In this I agree with Gerard Mannion's rejection of Kelsey's critique (Gerard Mannion, "The End of the Beginning - discerning fundamental themes in Rahner's theology of death" in *Louvain Studies*, 29 (2004), pp.166-186, pp.184-186).

argument not with any sort of summary, nor an evaluation of his reasoning, but rather a call to contemplation:

> Since we have received the vocation and the grace to die with [Christ], the trivial daily event called death toward which we all so reluctantly move, is raised to the level of a divine mystery. In order to understand this mystery and to perform it worthily in the liturgy of our life, we must contemplate the death of the Crucified.[281]

What does Rahner mean? Does he mean that the sacraments are really simply moments in which we contemplate Christ's death? That does not seem right. Nor does it seem to accord with the complexity of Rahner's argument throughout the book, that it should all boil down to "contemplation", something which Rahner has not defined or considered in any complexity at all!

Rahner provides as an illustration the men who were crucified beside Jesus. Both cursed death 'because they could not understand it'.[282] But one looked at Christ and:

> ...what he saw was enough to make his own death comprehensible to him. Certainly the man who spoke to Christ the words, "Lord, remember me, when thou shall come into thy kingdom", had understood and correctly perceived the meaning of death. And the Son of Man, who shared our fate in death and saved it by transforming it into his own life, spoke to him in turn: "Today thou shalt be with me in paradise."[283]

Rahner suggests that, if we do likewise, if we contemplate Christ's death, then we can truly know the 'happy death'[284] which came to that man, rather than the death in vain which came to the other thief, for 'he spoke no word to the other thief.'[285] Death's darkness makes present to us the real possibility of dying this eternal death. And Rahner ends with the contrast of the death of the Christian, expressed in three final sentences which are as riddlesome as they are beautiful:

> In fear and trembling, however, we are permitted to hearken to the gospel of death, which is life, which does not know death, in spite of the fact that it comes to us in actual death. The reality is, for the time being, veiled by the solemn lowliness of our experience of actual death. Still this is the truth about death, the truth that faith teaches us with certainty.[286]

If we contemplate our own death, and the death of Christ which is the gospel of death, Rahner seems to say, then we will come to life, even if we come to this life through dying (both Christ's death and our own). And all this is kept from us by the darkness of our experience of death. Yet, if we approach death

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[281] Rahner, *Theology of Death*, p.87.

[282] ibid.

[283] ibid.

[284] ibid.

[285] ibid. p.88.

[286] ibid.

in a manner consistent with our faith, we will be able to perceive an inkling of the unknown which lies beyond that darkness.

II – Darkness and Hope in Rahner's Theology of Death

Having worked through a basic overview of Rahner's theology of death, in this chapter I will bring out some more of the richness of that theology by placing it in the context of what it means to hope in death. And particularly by situating Rahner's arguments within his Jesuit inheritance, exploring the impact of the Ignatian concept of *indifference* on how Rahner might understand hope (and its connected concept of abandonment) to operate.

Rahner presents his *On the Theology of Death* in part as an attempt to engage with the existential reality of death as experienced by modern people, as an attempt to provide a theology of death which can offer a better foundation for the Church's engagement with people's lives.[287] But does he actually achieve this? The bulk of the text concerns what is going on in death. Rahner's focus is questions of theological anthropology rather than offering spiritual advice, per se. But his extensive reflections on what is going on in our death and the different colours our death can take have pastoral and spiritual implications which Rahner makes more explicit elsewhere.

First, Rahner's theological anthropology is particularly interesting in terms of its implications for a spirituality of death. His emphasis on the unity of body and soul in the human person, particularly emphasising the importance of human bodiliness against pseudo-platonic spiritualistic tendencies within modern spirituality, paves the way for a spirituality of death which denies the importance neither of the body nor the soul. Rahner's concept of the pan-cosmic soul offers a basis for understanding the enduring life of the spirit and the re-incorporation of the resurrection of the dead which is in continuity with twentieth century understandings of the human person. Second, his willingness to hold passivity and activity in mysterious tension in 'the real-ontological dialectic' of death has great potential to speak to modern questions about suffering and autonomy in end-of-life ethics. By creating space for individual moral acts to have significance in death itself, and also extending death's significance throughout a person's life, this dialectic underlines the importance of preparedness for death – an argument could be made that this is the real focus of *On the Theology of Death*.[288] Third, Rahner manages to affirm and locate our horror of death within a Christian theological approach which says that death should not be, and so he also provides a way to consummation for a theoretical sinless Adam. Along with his concept of the pan-cosmic soul, this line of Rahner's reasoning has potential as a resource for dealing with modern issues of life-extension and modern

[287] cf. *On the Theology of Death*, pp.17, 25, et al.

[288] Fergus Kerr emphasises this 'almost terrifying sense that Rahner has of how decisions on our part anticipate our eternal status in the mystery of God' as one of the abiding motifs of Rahner's eschatology (Fergus Kerr, "Rahner's Grundkers Revisited" in *New Blackfriars,* 61 (1980, pp.148-157), p.155; and also Fergus Kerr, "Rahner's Grundkers Revisited Once Again" in *New Blackfriars*, 61 (1980), pp.438-442).

attempts to reconceive (or misunderstand) "eternal life".[289] To have eternal life, according to Rahner, is not simply to persist. Rather, it is characterised by dying a death which has been transformed by the death of Christ, a death which is possible because Christ's death has pervaded every part of the created order, establishing a 'real-ontological' relationship with it and so with us.

However, the way in which Rahner represents our participation in Christ's death gives rise to difficulties. Rahner is careful to emphasise that the transformation of our death by our participation in Christ's death *does not take away the darkness which arises from death's inherent nature as the consequence of sin*.[290] And it is important to Rahner to hold that even Christ's death was characterised by darkness. Darkness is an inescapable fact of human death, even a death in the grace of Christ. But this leaves Rahner's theology of death with a certain bleakness. A weightiness pervades his call to joyful abandonment in the face of darkness which requires a certain spiritual maturity and, perhaps, intellectual ability. We shall now consider the question of hope, as Rahner conceives it, a question which will become much clearer when we come to consider the importance of Rahner's Jesuit formation and Ignatian heritage.

What is our hope in death?

Rather than trying straight away to provide correctives to the apparent darkness of Rahner's theology, we must first ask whether a call to resignation in the face of darkness can in itself be hopeful and pastorally useful? Nicholas Adams' work on Rahner's inheritance from his philosophy tutor, Martin Heidegger, is illuminating on this point. Adams points out that, in his essay entitled "The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Assertions", when Rahner makes broad arguments about the nature of the theological challenge of making eschatological statements and challenges overly positivistic treatments of eschatological biblical texts, he uses a largely Heideggerian philosophical lexicon.[291] Adams does not make a blunt argument that because Rahner uses Heideggerian vocabulary he must be entirely following Heidegger: he does not render Rahner's eschatology little more than an application of Heidegger's philosophy to theological eschatology.[292] Rather, Adams argues that the influence of Heidegger's emphasis on the importance of

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[289] e.g. transhumanism.

[290] cf. *On the Theology of Death*, p.79.

[291] Nicholas Adams, "The Present Made Future: Karl Rahner's eschatological debt to Heidegger" in *Faith and Philosophy*, 17 (2000), pp.191-211, p.192. Adams brings clarity to Heidegger in a way which would take a great deal of space if I were to engage with Heidegger's reasoning directly, so for the sake of brevity I embrace Adams as a useful mediator and interpreter of Heidegger's thought.

[292] Jones notes the shift in perspective from Heidegger's focus on *Angst* to Rahner's focus on *Selbstvollendung* (self-fulfilment): *Approaching the End*, p.164.

decision and on the temporality of being can be seen in Rahner's thinking of death in terms of self-disposal and in his idea that eschatology is 'futurally present (*künftiges Anwesende*)':[293]

> Such an existential framework for understanding eschatological assertions always presupposes that the "future" presented in biblical accounts exercises a practical claim. Eschatology is thus, for Rahner, speech about a future which pragmatically shapes human self-understanding.[294]

For Rahner, eschatology is important because it is significant for our present. Eschatology cannot be, for Rahner, mere "weather forecasts" about a 'distantly outstanding object',[295] a warning about events for which we simply wait, because this disempowers us. Such a theology would 'deny the subject's own roles and responsibilities in the production of the worldly future and thus "de-eschatologise" him'.[296]

We can see in greater detail why this is significant when we consider the integrity of temporality and being in Heidegger's philosophy. Adams' summary is enlightening:

> For Heidegger, in conscious opposition to Kant, temporality [*Zeitlichkeit]* is not just the condition for the subject's constitution of objects but is itself a condition for understanding that kind of subjectivity itself; it is the "horizon from which we understand being." Temporality and its role as an intrinsic aspect of *Dasein* is most clearly brought into focus in Heidegger's discussion of death and the future. Briefly, for Heidegger, *Dasein* is rightly understood as being which orients itself to its own dying in such a way as to do justice to its finiteness. This kind of orientation Heidegger names "resoluteness" [*Entschlossenheit]*. "Authentic" *Dasein* (the kind of being to which one should aspire) thus manifests – and is – a resoluteness in its anticipation of death. Crucial to this kind of statement is an acknowledgement that death is not simply a future event that occurs at the end of life but is something whose importance is constantly part of present life: "Anticipation brings *Dasein* face to face with a possibility which is constantly certain but which at any moment remains indefinite as to when that possibility will become an impossibility" (*Sein und Zeit* 308 [*Being and Time,* 356]) ... *Dasein* should thus have a particular orientation to the future which accepts that its end is coming and that an appropriate kind of living must integrate this fully into its self-understanding.[297]

Against a Kantian notion of the absolute future as the 'rationally reconstructed pool of possibilities for all determinate futures',[298] so that the subject stands located in time and constructs a conceptual future which may or may not come to pass, Heidegger represents the subject as standing in time, but affected *and constituted* by the future as well as the present. We are constituted by our future because the "futural" (*zukünftiges*) is not conceived by Heidegger as "having not happened yet", but rather as 'the "coming"

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[293] ibid. p.193.

[294] ibid.

[295] Rahner, "The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Assertions", p.329, cf. Adams, "The Present Made Future", p.192.

[296] Adams, "The Present Made Future, p.194.

[297] ibid. p.197.

[298] ibid. p.196.

(*Kunft*) in which *Dasein* [Being], in its ownmost potentiality-for-being, comes towards itself.'[299] Adams points out that in "The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Assertions", when Rahner argues that the future is an 'inner moment of man and of his actual present in his being', he uses the Heideggerian term "*Dasein*" as well as the more subjective and social "Man" (*Mensch*), which he uses more often.[300] For Rahner as well as Heidegger, if we are to live authentically we must engage meaningfully with our finitude, living in a state of Resoluteness with our death which shall come to pass, but of which the precise time and nature is hidden from us. Rahner makes explicit what was strongly implied by Heidegger's concept of Resoluteness: that to attempt to live in a manner which denies the ever-present reality of death and its significance in all our acts of self-disposal is to deny ourselves and prevent ourselves from living authentically, from living fully.

In this sense, death is not in fact as dark as it would be if the future was conceived only in the Kantian sense, as a construct of our reason. Although Rahner places great emphasis on the darkness of death, our brief engagement with Heidegger might suggest another perspective: that death is not *just* something which comes upon us unawares as a thief in the night. Death is *also ever present with us*, and our death is something which we can embrace, become familiar with *and shape by the way we live our lives*. And this can be for us a source of hope and of comfort.

Before we proceed further, it is important to exclude two senses in which having death close and continually with us might be a comfort to us, to avoid misinterpreting Rahner's "acceptance" or Heidegger's "resoluteness". We might call these the befriending of death as coping strategy of last resort, and the death without content. In the third book of Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy, the main characters Lyra and Will descend to the world of the dead to retrieve the soul of their friend Roger. There, they become stuck on the shore of the lake of the land of the dead and meet living people who are waiting to cross over, who are waiting for their death. They can see their "death" and speak with them, and wait for the day when 'Your death taps you on the shoulder, or takes your hand, and says, come along o'me, it's time.'[301] A grandmother lies in the corner of the room, and her death speaks to Lyra and Will in 'a dry-cracked-nasal tone':

> "The only way you'll cross the lake and go to the land of the dead," he said, and he was leaning up on his elbow, pointing with a skinny finger at Lyra, "is with your own deaths. You must call up your own deaths. I have heard of people like you, who keep their deaths at bay. You don't like them, and out of courtesy they stay out of sight. But they're not far off. Whenever you turn your head, your deaths dodge behind you. Wherever you look, they hide. They can hide in a teacup. Or in a dewdrop. Or in a breath of wind. Not like me and old Magda here," he said, and he pinched her withered

[299] Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, p.326, translated by Adams in "The Present Made Future", p.198.

[300] Adams, "The Present Made Future", pp.202-203.

[301] Philip Pullman, *The Amber Spyglass* (London: Scholastic, 2000), p.275.

> cheek, and she pushed his hand away. "We live together in kindness and friendship. That's the answer, that's it, that's what you've got to do, say welcome, make friends, be kind, invite your deaths to come close to you, and see what you can get them to agree to."[302]

In Pullman's portrayal, death is ever present to us and also hidden from us by our denial of its reality, but there is no sense in which we are actors in our death, no sense in which we form our own death in all our decisions throughout our life, as is so important for Heidegger and Rahner. The "abandonment" or "resoluteness" which Pullman envisages is a sort of psychologically protective detachment from the reality of what death will do to us as purely passive victims. It is neither our fault nor our personal death's fault that they exist to take us to the land of the dead: it is simply the way things are. But in fact the bleakness of the world to which Pullman's dead are sent, and the grim existence of these characters in a sort of waiting room on the shore, underlines the sheer hopelessness of this nihilistic "befriending" of death. This befriending of death is all that remains to us when we truly know that there is no hope left.

The great satirist Terry Pratchett pushed this bleak familiarity with death one step further. Death for Pratchett is also personified, but Pratchett toys with the irrationality of our hatred and fear of death. He portrays Death as morally neutral, caught in the necessity of his function as much as the rest of us. And to maintain this morally neutral stance, Death is separated from the things that actually kill us, that cause our death. When challenged by Mort, his young apprentice, that he kills people, Death replies:

> I? KILL? said Death, obviously offended. CERTAINLY NOT. PEOPLE *GET* KILLED. BUT THAT'S THEIR BUSINESS. I JUST TAKE OVER FROM THEN ON. AFTER ALL, IT'D BE A BLOODY STUPID WORLD IF PEOPLE GOT KILLED WITHOUT DYING, WOULDN'T IT?[303]

Pratchett's personified death who inhabits a morally neutral position within the cosmic order is striking because Death's existence is just as pitiable as our own. If our dying is fundamentally as hopeless and pointless as is our life, then at least Death too shares this fate:

> It struck Mort with sudden, terrible poignancy that Death must be the loneliest creature in the universe. In the great party of Creation, he was always in the kitchen.[304]

Pratchett's Death, separated from life and from moral significance, is not something to be feared or hated. But perhaps by separating death from the things that kill us, Pratchett reduces his notion of death to be almost without content. The moral ambiguity and lack of purpose in Pratchett's cosmos, and perhaps that of modern naturalist perspectives, bleeds into his concept of death, rendering it meaningless and insignificant for any understanding of human flourishing and life.

Pullman's caricature of the Christian concept of eternal life plays into all the stereotypes which Rahner portrayed in the spiritualist and naturalist denials of death's reality: notions of eternity without

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[302] ibid. pp.278-279.

[303] Terry Pratchett, *Mort* (London: Transworld Publishers, 1987, 1988, 2004, 2012), pp.25-26.

[304] ibid. p.225.

consummation and of darkness without dialectic. And Pratchett's personification of Death highlights the danger of a reductive nihilism when our concept of death is limited to what happens after we are killed. In both cases the appropriate stance of the dying (i.e. mere resignation in the sense of passively going along with a death which is simply the way of things) is not what Heidegger or Rahner mean by "resoluteness" or "abandonment".

Abandoning ourselves to hope

In 1982, two years before his death, Rahner published a striking essay on Old Age. It makes for uncomfortable reading, particularly because of the burden Rahner seems to place on the elderly, including duties to cope with pain and depression, to maintain personal hygiene and grooming and to want to live.[305] But interesting for our purposes is how Rahner portrays the freedom which old people had during their life's span to shape their lives as that freedom now comes home to roost, as memory confronts them with the life that is past and yet present to them:

> Out of countless possibilities, as though out of a dark ground, which lies behind us as something "given" and not subject to our disposal, the free history of our life, by means of our free actions, brought the concrete shape of our life forth and brought it before us. And this concrete shape of our life is something that *is* and it stands before the critical gaze of our memory and what we have stored up there. ... Old age still has a great deal of work to do on the history of its past life. The shape that we have given to our lives and that we now are is not yet complete.[306]

According to Rahner, in old age we are confronted by the moral quality of the life lived as we remember it. And this means that we are still moral actors, using our faculty of memory to continue to shape our current lives, and our future, by reflection on the past:

> We old people are not finished with our lives yet. In a true sense everything is still open; only the future will reveal the outcome of life's drama. And everything that is inexorable in the light of the past is subject to the verdict of the God of a love that can transform everything, and who can also change our past life into blessed freedom without having to wipe it out. In his eternity all our time can remain valid and yet be so transformed that our time has been preserved and can then be accepted without regret. To be sure, our hope of this has its source in a faith that is credible only in the light of Jesus Christ and his message. That faith must be proclaimed in the Church over and over again.[307]

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[305] A gentler theology of old age comes across in Margaret A. Farley's reflections on Rahner's theology of old age: "From a Faith Perspective: ageing and dying, a time of grace" in *Health Progress*, 92 (2011), pp.18-25.

[306] Karl Rahner, "A Basic Theological and Anthropological Understanding of Old Age" in TI 23.5 pp.50-60, pp.53-54.

[307] ibid. p.55.

Since 'Old people are placed on the borderline between time and eternity',[308] the moral significance of their lives does not decrease but is concentrated as death approaches, placing on them a 'sacred task'[309] and 'heavy burden'[310] to cooperate with God in the transformation of the past so that it can be accepted and embraced. This seems to Rahner to be nearly impossible in our own strength, 'But God bears it with us and takes it from us when we can really bear it no longer.'[311]

Although the essay on old age is limited in scope and the ideas it contains are challenging, they make more sense when Rahner turns to consider the state of sickness in general. He begins by clarifying the theological concept of freedom in the context of death, which is far more than autonomy or civic responsibility. Rather, freedom (or liberty) is:

> the possibility open to the free subject or person of disposing totally and finally of himself and his life, as an individual and a whole. ... We mean the freely ordered finality of the person and his earthly life before God.[312]

Sickness is in some sense 'every time a partial death, no matter what attitude a person takes toward it.'[313] And since death ends our personal freedom, thereby making possible the consummation of our personal freedom, freedom in sickness means for Rahner the confrontation with the finality of death:

> [Our liberty] is finite and materially mediated [and] exposes itself to still current time; and so it arrives at the fulfilment of its own nature only through the fact that time stops, because of an event which is not simply within the power of liberty itself [i.e. death]; although by virtue of its own nature it lays itself open to that event [i.e. death]. ... Here the liberty of the sick means quite specifically the liberty of the sick person in his confrontation with death.[314]

Just as the freedom of the elderly person becomes more, not less, significant as death approaches, the freedom of the sick person is characterised, even constituted, by a confrontation with death. Freedom imposes a duty to make an active decision, and sickness (i.e. impending death) brings this active decision into sharp focus. But even here the real-ontological dialectic persists:

> Liberty is a mystery. In its fundamental character, it is the necessity imposed on man to decide freely for or against the Incomprehensibility which we call God. It is the possibility of letting oneself fall in

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[308] ibid. p.59.

[309] ibid.

[310] ibid. p.60.

[311] ibid. p.60.

[312] Karl Rahner, "The Liberty of the Sick, Theologically Considered" in TI 17.9, pp.100-113, p.102.

[313] Karl Rahner, "Christian Dying" in TI 18.14, pp.226-256, p.231.

[314] Rahner, "The Liberty of the Sick, Theologically Considered", p.104. Rahner elsewhere describes freedom as 'the basic condition of the subject in its transcendentality, in which it disposes of *itself* for finality.' (Karl Rahner, "Christian Dying", TI 18.14, p.242).

> hope and in unconditional trust into this Incomprehensibility as goal, bliss and human fulfilment. The highest power which liberty has is consummated in the helplessness of death.[315]

Freedom as an imposed necessity, freedom to fall helplessly: Rahner maintains his dialectical approach as he considers sickness. Death, and therefore sickness, confronts us with the 'mysterious interplay' of human action and passivity as we exercise our freedom, so that we have a choice either to 'assent in faith and hope to the nameless mystery which we call God' or to 'cling to [our] own autonomy.[316] We are truly free, Rahner argues, as we fall into darkness, to decide that we are either 'falling into the abyss of nothingness' or 'into the unfathomable depths of God'.[317]

There are two senses in which Rahner suggests that this acceptance, this decision that we are falling into God rather than nothingness, can have a positive quality for us. First, Rahner argues that the decision for God gives the darkness a very different quality. Rather than experiencing ourselves in complete autonomy and isolation, if we make the decision for God then we experience ourselves as mystery. Darkness on its own is harrowing. But darkness in mystery is rather different:

> But if man experiences himself as mystery, if he accepts this mystery in silence and is submissive enough to accord its full value precisely to his experience of himself which is too much for him to question, if he accepts this question to which he can find no answer not as something which is devoid of meaning and dark, but rather as a light which is too blinding for his eyes, a light which only the eyes of another, of him whom we call God, are strong enough to look upon, then the sick man is at one with God.[318]

There is a sense in which the person who is aware of themselves as a mystery within the context of the mystery of God might experience the darkness of death as falling into a darkness not of emptiness but a darkness of fulness, of overwhelming presence and blindingly infinite life.[319] In this sense, death when seen

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[315] ibid. p.113.

[316] Karl Rahner, "On Christian Dying" in TI 7.26, pp.285-293, p.290.

[317] ibid. Although his article is no longer available, Julito Paraguya Jr. read Rahner's theology of death with freedom as his primary interpretative lens, perhaps overemphasising its significance, but serving as a useful reminder that the real-ontological dialectic is not only consistent with human freedom but dependent upon it for its conceptual usefulness. cf. Julito Paraguya Jr., "Everyday Dying: Karl Rahner's theology of death" in *Pacifica: Australasian Theological Studies*, 26 (2013), pp.72-87.

[318] Karl Rahner, "On Proving Oneself in Time of Sickness" in TI 7.25, pp.275-284, p.278.

[319] There are other ways in which Rahner elsewhere complexifies negative concepts. Craigo-Snell in *Silence, Love and Death* explores in some depth the importance for Rahner of the silence of God in the life of prayer, a silence which indicates not only 'the pain of not knowing' (p.51) but also creates the space for human freedom and for human community: cf. also pp.39-78. There is a strong parallel between my reading of Rahner's argument about falling into darkness which is filled with light and Craigo-Snell's argument about sitting in God's silence which 'communicates without dissolving mystery' (p.52. cf also pp.214-224 for a rich exploration of the importance of silence for true listening and love in feminist theology). We will explore the importance of mystery further in chapter 3.

with the sight of faith, is revealed not to be the same darkness that we feared without the sight of faith. This distinction in our perspective on death, faithful or not, leads to the second sense in which acceptance might be positive for us is: it might have a redemptive quality.

> Sickness sharpens a man's awareness of both factors in his life, both that he is in control and that at the same time he is subject to control from without. .... And if he does this, if he accepts his sickness as a single reality involving both action and passion but ultimately a mystery beyond our own personal control, then both the sick man himself and his sickness are in God's hands. Then the sickness acquires a redemptive value.[320]

Sickness and death, as moments of our confrontation with the darkness, are moments when we are prompted to make the decision for God or for nothingness. And if we make the decision for God, if we place ourselves in God's hands, then that acceptance of the mystery of darkness in death is also for us a moment in which we accept our redemption at God's hands. In these senses, acceptance of the darkness of death might be for us an occasion for hope.[321] But there is a problem.

Cultivating life-long virtues

If death is a not merely a one-off event but a fundamental aspect of our lives, manifested in every moment of decision for or against God, how does this sort of hope operate not just in the moment of our bodily death but throughout our lives? And at this stage we haven't got entirely beyond the sort of befriending of a contentless death envisaged by Pullman and Pratchett. We need a rich account of abandonment to the darkness of hope, one which does indeed have content.

Rahner himself acknowledges that it is often unclear, when Christians refer to hope, whether we mean it as an analgesic for despair or in some deeper sense.[322] But for Rahner, true hope is characterised by the resolution of the real-ontological dialectic of activity and passivity:

> It commits itself to the unification of that which has been divided, a unification which cannot be achieved by ourselves in some higher unity which we ourselves perceive and possess as something

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[320] Karl Rahner, "On Proving Oneself in Time of Sickness", p.279. Sickness therefore prefigures the encounter with God after the death of the body which Rahner portrayed more dynamically in "Theological Considerations on the Moment of Death" in TI 11.14, pp.309-321, p.319: 'Death, then, is the consummation of a man's history as a free person, that in which this history breaks through into the absolute future which is its goal, and in which God as the ultimate, original, and infinite all, by whom all reality is upheld, is encountered either as judgement or as man's blessed consummation.'

[321] As Craigo-Snell puts it in *Silence, Love and Death*: 'It is the situation of acknowledging powerlessness that creates the possibility of Christian hope.' (p.133).

[322] Karl Rahner, "Ideas for a Theology of Death" in TI 13.11, pp.169-186, p.176.

> that we recognize within ourselves. Hope is itself a unique and underived mode of knowledge in which the creative element and the element which accepts from without in an ultimate passivity constitute a paradoxical unity, because that which is hoped for is present to us only within the hope itself, and is otherwise not even present as really conceivable. At the same time it is also that which constitutes pure gift, and which is received as such.[323]

Rahner does not mean here that hope is a rationally constructed future in the Kantian sense (Rahner calls that "foresight" since it has the elements of planning and controlling).[324] Rather, there is a sense in which hope is only truly hope when we are at the point of finality, of decision and encounter. Hope:

> ...is possible from the outset only in a situation in which we really are radically at the end; where the possibility of acting for ourselves is really and finally closed to us; where we can find absolutely no further resources whatever within ourselves by which to achieve a higher synthesis between a state of radical powerlessness and the supreme exercise of freedom in death;... where even the possibility of a heroic attitude of faith or a stoic *apatheia*, or even a wild protest against the absurdity of existence, is withdrawn from us; where we are deprived of even the innermost and ultimate subjectivity of our existence in its absolute depths. This is the situation of Christian hope.[325]

Christian hope, Rahner argues, is only possible really in the encounter with darkness. It is only then that we can truly hope, only then that we can truly make our decision, because all our faculties which enable us to avoid that decision are taken away from us. We are in that moment unable either to befriend death or to laugh at its meaninglessness. But does this mean that we can only really be said to hope after the moment of our bodily death? Rahner implies that this is not the case when he explores what we hope *for*:

> ...a unity, a reconciliation of the contradictory elements, a meaning for existence, an eternal validity for love as freely entered into, an assent to absolute truth, so that all this that is hoped for is truly *hoped* for, i.e. is neither to be manipulated by one's own autonomous thinking, nor controlled by one's own autonomous power.[326]

Hope as a 'unique and underived mode of knowledge',[327] in which we encounter the ultimate reconciliation and unity of the real-ontological dialectic, can only be possible when we do not attempt to achieve it ourselves by virtue of our own faculties. In this sense, it could be said that the darkness of death enables us to begin to "truly hope" by unmasking our inability to construct our future for ourselves by the power of our reason. The darkness of death enables us to abandon any positive eschatologies we have rationally constructed and frees us to wait on God:

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[323] ibid. p.178.

[324] ibid. p.181.

[325] ibid.

[326] ibid. p.182.

[327] ibid. p.178.

> All is hope, even the act of thinking in one who can still only think about the meaning of death, and is no longer in a position to think 'through' it comprehensively.[328]

But, as we have already seen, Rahner argues that we encounter the darkness of death throughout our lives, and that we should perhaps contemplate our death more during our lives. Rahner is not, therefore, arguing that hope is only possible after our bodily death, but that hope is only possible when (at any point of our lives) we truly allow ourselves to encounter the darkness of death, when we do not attempt to avoid it. This *active* decision to *abandon ourselves* to the darkness of death is brought into sharp focus when we consider the distinction Rahner makes between eschatology and apocalyptic. As Peter Joseph Fritz comments, for Rahner, 'Eschatology, then, functions as *letting* the future appear, where initiative is on the future's side. Apocalyptic works as noetic determination, where initiative is on the side of the apocalypticist.'[329] Although hope will only attain its consummation in death, we can truly be said to hope when we surrender ourselves to God's grace in the moments of the darkness of death which we encounter throughout our lives.

Rahner locates hope within death. Without encountering death, we can never truly be said to hope. And it is when Rahner considers what we might call the spirituality of death that something approaching a spirituality or life-long virtue of abandonment begins to emerge in his thought.

In a Good Friday address broadcast on Bavarian radio in 1966, Rahner considered how odd it is that we "celebrate" Good Friday in the way we do:

> How strange all this is! For today the whole of Christendom has a death to celebrate in the most solemn manner. What is the real reason for this? Certainly it was a particularly agonising and unjust death. But death is every bit as terrifying as it occurs in the gas-chambers of Buchenwald or the mud-holes of Vietnam. What then is this celebration of Good Friday meant to signify?[330]

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[328] ibid. p.182.

[329] Peter Joseph Fritz, ""I am, of course, no prophet": Rahner's modest eschatological remark" in *Philosophy and Theology*, 23 (2011), pp.317-332, p.321, commenting on Rahner's "The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Assertions". Fritz also comments that Rahner's concept of eschatology could be useful for countering the 'American apocalyptic *gnosis* of the future' (p.326) associated with the 'pathological reading of prophecy concurrent with pathological apocalyptic.' (p.327). What I have emphasised in Rahner's thought as abandonment in the face of darkness stands in sharp contrast to modern prophetic attempts to predict our future. Rahner argued that Christian faith 'means that we are forbidden to make any attempt at constructing our ultimate goal in this present dimension of space and time. We shall be able to perceive the reconciliation of the finite and the infinite only when everything is at an end - not in the present.' (Karl Rahner, "He Will Come Again" in TI 7.16, pp.177-180, pp.177-178).

[330] Rahner, Karl, "The Scandal of Death" in TI 7.11, pp.140-145, p.140.

The liturgical rehearsal and contemplation of death must have some particular significance (other than the simple fact that this death is Jesus' death), and for Rahner this is that it is a 'sobering reminder to us of our own deaths.'[331] Rahner includes a gloss on Jesus' cry of desolation from the cross ("My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"[332]) in which Jesus' forsakenness becomes a prototype for the unmasking of our own false gods as we encounter the darkness of death ourselves:

> It may be the true God, or it may be money, or success, or science, or social progress, or his children, or carnal lust, or any other of the idols which he sets up upon the altar of his heart. These collapse into ruins, and even the true, the ineffable God seems to have given in and to have disappeared from the temple of the heart, leaving it silent.[333].... It is... not until we have reached this point, at which our lives and our experience have been reduced absolutely to nil that the true life begins for us.[334]

Even the true knowledge of God is held from us in Rahner's concept of death, in order to allow us to decide and in order to allow hope to reach its consummation, such is the freedom of the human person as moral actor in Rahner's theological anthropology, and such is the absoluteness of the darkness of death. But by contemplating the death of Jesus and our own death we can encounter the darkness of death and also abandon ourselves to the judgment with which that darkness confronts us. The abandonment of hope in the darkness of death is not, for Rahner, solely or even primarily for the moment of our bodily death. It is perhaps the defining aspect of the Christian life. In death:

> the distinguishing characteristic of our lives achieves in this true life its final transcendence over the whole of time. And this quality is the freedom and faithfulness of the love which comes from God, which bears him in itself, and which must be freely accepted and put into practice in the act of living.[335]

How do we characterise this life-long virtue of abandonment? David Jones characterises it as follows:

> The act of dying-to-self is the action of renouncing one's life, that is, the action of not clinging to life when love demands clinging more obstinately to a greater good.[336]

and:

> Thus, while accepting Rahner's insight, it seems better to follow the terminology of Schillebeeckx and say that 'death is not an act but the attitude of mind in which we accept death can give it the value of an act.'[337]

Both of these statements are problematic for our purposes. In the first, Jones characterises abandonment as not clinging to our life so that we can cling to something else (perhaps, God). But that sort of clinging

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[331] ibid p.140.

[332] Matthew 27:46, Mark 15:34, cf. Psalm 22.1.

[333] Rahner, "The Scandal of Death", p.142.

[334] ibid. p.143.

[335] ibid.

[336] Jones, *Approaching the End*, p.179.

[337] ibid. p.181.

to God is what Rahner referred to as the "idol of the true God" which prevents us from really hoping the hope which is possible in darkness. And the second statement is problematic because Jones suggests that adopting the attitude of abandonment constitutes an act (or is in some way analogous to an act) such that our death can have moral value. But this resolution of the real-ontological dialectic in favour solely of activity is not what Rahner describes either.

The Jesuit virtue of indifference

Some light may be shed on Rahner's concept of abandonment if we place Rahner's thought within the context of his Jesuit inheritance and formation. In his *Spiritual Exercises*, the foundation of Jesuit spirituality, St Ignatius of Loyola defined a spiritual exercise as:

> any process which makes the soul ready and able to rid itself of all irregular attachments, so that, once rid of them, it may look for and discover how God wills it to regulate its life to secure its salvation.[338]

The exercises seek to instil in the retreatant a method for and habit of making decisions with correct discernment, with a proper relationship to all created reality:

> Therefore we need to train ourselves to be impartial in our attitude to all created reality... So that, as far as we are concerned, we do not set our hearts on good health as against bad health, prosperity as against poverty, a good reputation as against a bad one, a long life as against a short one.[339]

This impartiality is called "indifference".[340] As in David Jones' first characterisation of life-long abandonment, Helen Orchard begins by defining indifference as an acknowledgment that one thing ranks below another 'in the order of one's affections',[341] but she develops her description of indifference from a mere priority or ranking of desires into a fundamental freedom from irrelevant desires. This allows us to live for the end for which we were created: indifference is about being free to live in accordance with our end in God.[342]

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[338] Ignatius, *Spiritual Exercises*, 1 (all quotations from the *Spiritual Exercises* are taken from the translation by Thomas Corbishley (Wheathampstead: Anthony Clarke, 1973) unless stated otherwise).

[339] ibid. 23.

[340] Helen Orchard notes the difficulty found by Louis Puhl in rendering *indifferente* accurately in English: "detachment" and "impartiality" lack the negative connotations of "indifferent" (Ignatius, *The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius*, trans. Louis J. Puhl (Chicago: Loyola, 1951), p.168). She notes also the fact that *indifferente* only occurs four times in the *Exercises*, but that it underpins other sections of the text and the purpose of the *Exercises* as a whole. Helen Orchard, "Reaching Equipose: the relationship between indifference and discernment in the spiritual exercises" in *The Way*, 58 (2019), pp.33-44, pp.34-36.

[341] ibid. p.36.

[342] ibid. p.37. Orchard quotes Hugo Rahner's interpretation of Ignatius, emphasising the lightness which comes with true freedom: 'Retain in all things freedom of spirit... Keep your spirit so inwardly free that you could always be ready

How does this freedom arise? Puvalraj Michael's answer is attractive: that the meditations of the *Exercises* allow the retreatant:

> to free himself from so many pseudo-problems that only seem important, concentrating instead on the one, single problem: searching for, finding and fulfilling the will of God.[343]

In other words, indifference does not establish a hierarchy of desires, but unmasks all desires but the desire for God as irrelevant, or at least dependent for their fulfilment on the fulfilment of our desire for God. It is not a preference *over* all other attachments for the love of God, but rather is 'a preference *beyond* all natural and interior attachments'.[344] All desires other than to discern God's will and to attain our end in God are not suppressed in the person who is indifferent, but they are ordered towards it, enabling them to make decisions, to live discerningly, 'choosing only that will help him toward the end for which he was created.'[345]

What is striking as we seek to understand Rahner's concept of abandonment is the extreme neutrality of the attitude of indifference. Michael notes the sheer equilibrium to which Ignatius calls us:

> I must keep steadily before me what I was made for, namely, the praise of our Lord God and my soul's salvation. Moreover, I must maintain an attitude of impartiality, unaffected by any irregular motive, so that I am not inclined or disposed to accept rather than to give up the thing in question, or to give it up rather than to accept it. I should be like a pair of scales perfectly poised, inclined neither this way nor that. I must be entirely ready to pursue what I see to be more for God's glory and praise and for my soul's salvation.[346]

Whereas the Franciscan attitude to possession (in every sense of the word) is almost always negative – St Francis simply assumed the link between spiritual and material poverty and the love of God – the Jesuit approach makes no such assumptions. A true spiritual poverty (according to the Jesuit) does not make any assumptions as to what the will of God might be.[347] Only when we are free from those assumptions can we begin to discern.

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to do the very opposite.' (Hugo Rahner, trans. Michael Barry, *Ignatius the Theologian* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), pp.24-25 in ibid. p.39).

[343] Pavulraj Michael SJ, "*Nishkama Karma* and active indifference" in *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue,* 23 (2013), pp. 207-225, p.216, citing T. Spidlik, "Teaching them How to Pray in the Exercises" in *CIS,* 11 (1980), pp.73-75, p.73.

[344] ibid. p.216, citing Louis J. Puhl, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius: based on studies in the language of the autograph* (Chicago: Loyola, 1952), p.168. My italics.

[345] ibid. p.216.

[346] Ignatius, *Spiritual Exercises*, 179. Michael links this particularly with the attitude of the Virgin Mary at the annunciation and of John the Baptist (Michael, "*Nishkama Karma* and active indifference", pp.218-219).

[347] Michael notes the meditation on the Three Classes of Men, in which 'Ignatius does not intend that... the exercitant has actually to choose [material] poverty or whatever else it may be, for that depends on the will and call of God'

Indifference is not therefore a blanket *apatheia*, but is particularly related to obedience and may lead us where we do not want to go:[348] 'Loving God's will and trusting God's benevolence, we seek and adapt to God's will.'[349] Helen Orchard considers the significance of the *Exercises*' reflection on Jesus' agony in the garden, and the link between indifference and obedience:

> Now, at Gethsemane, we see how Christ inhabits this choice, 'to suffer so cruelly' for love of the Father and of the world. The path of costly obedience and self-sacrifice which has been set before us in our own election is one that has already been walked by Jesus.[350]

Interestingly, Orchard interprets this in kenotic terms, but I do not think that we can import the conceptual apparatus of kenosis and apply it so neatly here. [351]

Rahner applies indifference

In a short essay written late in his life, Rahner spoke directly into the Jesuit inheritance by assuming the voice of St. Ignatius himself. The essay is rambling, and its relaxed style belies the complexity of the theological concepts to which it alludes. The Ignatian narrator seems to fulfil two purposes: first, to exhort younger Jesuits to follow (Rahner's interpretation of) the Ignatian charism; and, second, to provide a sort of *apologia* for Rahner's own ministry. Much of the time these two purposes are inextricable. But when Rahner begins to discuss the purpose of the Jesuit's ministry we can see just how much Ignatian indifference had formed Rahner's sense of the importance of abandonment. Rather than making people into pious subjects of the Church, Rahner exhorts the Jesuits:

> .... if you were not to help them finally to abandon all tangible assurances and isolated insights and go with confidence towards the inconceivable, where there are no longer paths and to achieve this at the final fearful ineluctable end of life and in the immeasurableness of love and joy and then, radically and ultimately, in death (with the dying Christ, abandoned by God), if you were not to help thus,

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(Michael, "*Nishkama Karma* and active indifference", p.220, citing W.H. Longridge, *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola: translated from the Spanish with a commentary* (Oxford: A.R. Moubray, 1955), p.155).

[348] Robert E. Doud, "Ignatian Indifference and Today's Spirituality" in *The Way*, 52 (2013), pp.94-105, p.98-99.

[349] ibid. p.96.

[350] Orchard, "Reaching Equipoise", p.41, cf. Ignatius, *Spiritual Exercises,* 290.

[351] ibid. p.42: 'The language of kenotic emptying is the language of death as much as of love. It is for this reason that indifference has been linked to the ongoing laying down of one's own life.' It might be more helpful to distinguish (as does the Christ-hymn of Philippians) the kenosis of Christ in the adoption of humanity in the incarnation on the one hand and the obedience to the Father which leads Christ to that kenosis. In Ignatian terms, Christ's obedience to the Father enables Christ to discern the will of the Father in an attitude of indifference. The kenosis of the incarnation is one thing which the Word wills in obedience to the Father. But that kenosis itself is not indifference.

> then you would have either forgotten or betrayed my 'spirituality' in your so-called cure of souls and missionary task.[352]

The abandonment of "tangible assurances" and "isolated insights" includes for Rahner all constructed positive concepts of God (with perhaps a strong emphasis on the pictures of God which the Church or movements in popular piety might construct for their "pious subjects"). If we can achieve this abandonment, we can encounter 'God really and truly, the God of incomprehensibility, the ineffable mystery'.[353] Just as Rahner argues that Christian hope is only possible once the darkness of death has unmasked our false attempts to construct our future, the darkness of death unmasks our attempts to construct God ourselves. So our abandonment enables an encounter with God as God really is. Rather than attempting to control our concept of God, when we encounter the true God 'he harbours us safely' because 'we do not try to make him subject to us but rather surrender ourselves unconditionally to him.'[354] And just as Rahner argues that the darkness of death is dark because it is blindingly filled with God's light,[355] so the darkness of abandonment reveals that 'God is near and we can talk to him',[356] and reveals the darkness of the abyss into which we abandon ourselves as 'the God in whose incomprehensible fire we are not, in fact, burnt away, but become ourselves and of eternal value.'[357]

In the context of Ignatius' virtue of indifference, the intended spiritual fruit of Rahner's complex concept of abandonment begins to become clear: knowledge of the nearness of God, freedom to speak with God, seeing in the darkness the providence and love of God, and a profound hope that we will come to our consummation in our end, and not mere oblivion. But Rahner emphasises that these fruits are not the fruits of our striving: just as the indifference of the exercises is not an end in itself, it is a grace of God received through prayer, time spent with the heart open to God.

> In any case you ought not to mean to succumb today to the temptation that, in order to be itself, the silent and infinite incomprehensibility which we call God could or might not turn towards you in free love, not come to meet you, not empower you from your innermost heart where it dwells to say 'Thou' with confidence to this Nameless One. This incomprehensible miracle which breaks the bounds of all your metaphysics, whose potential is only realized when its reality is tested, is a miracle which itself is part of the ineffability of God. It would remain an empty formality still subject to your metaphysics, if and when it were not experienced as part of God's affection for us. You must be on your guard today as always against thinking that this familiarity is the preliminary step to the fall into

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[352] Karl Rahner, trans. Rosaleen Ockenden, "Ignatius of Loyola Speaks to a Modern Jesuit" in *Ignatius of Loyola* (London: Collins, 1979), pp.9-38, p.14.

[353] ibid. p.16.

[354] ibid.

[355] Rahner, "On Proving Oneself in Time of Sickness", p.278.

[356] Rahner, "Ignatius of Loyola Speaks to a Modern Jesuit", p.16.

[357] ibid. p.17.

> God's silent incomprehensibility; it is rather a consequence of that fall, it blossoms as the fulfilment of surrender to God's affection for us, it allows God to be greater than we think him, if only we understand ourselves as unceasingly dependent and worthless.[358]

Fundamentally, the silence and surrender which is our freedom is a result of God's grace to us. The darkness of God's mystery unmasks and disempowers us, our theology and our metaphysics as much as our everyday experience and perspective. God's darkness forces us to confront "reality", to "test" it by abandoning ourselves to it. Only then can we be intimately present to God, "familiar" to God. Only then can we experience God as being "greater than we think him".

The darkness of death which is the presence of God in the many moments of our decision as well as the locus of our consummation, unmasks the reality we have constructed and challenges us to abandon ourselves to God as God truly is. Then we can truly hope, then we can be truly familiar with God. And then we can truly live. In a poignant reflection on the implications of the freedom that comes with abandonment, Rahner reflects on the quite natural desire all religious have for their communities to continue:

> For you there should and can be nothing in the world and in history, within and without, in heaven and on earth, that you can unreservedly and unconditionally love and strive for, except the mystery of God which you can trust unconditionally. Your Order which you love and its future, too, belong to the things that you accept calmly when they are sent to you and that you let go with equal calm when they are taken from you. I myself said in my own time that if the Order should collapse, I would not need more than ten minutes to be near to God and at peace again.[359]

Quite clearly summarising the virtue of indifference as a freedom to focus on our end in God, Rahner reminds us that abandonment means receiving even the gifts of the Church, our communities and our families as gifts contingent on God's calling on each of us to abandon ourselves to God's mystery. Even for a priest with care for an institution, or particularly for those with care for institutions in an age of challenge and change, 'Solitariness before God, security in his silent immediate presence is man's sole possession.'[360]

For Pullman, death is ever present to us, but the "abandonment" which Pullman envisages is a befriending of a bleak and hopeless reality, a making peace with the hopelessness of things; and if there is freedom in this then it is merely the freedom from the need to worry that comes with despair. For Rahner too, developing Ignatian indifference, death is ever present to us, reaching its consummation in the moment of our bodily death. But there is no befriending of bodily death the consequence of sin, which rightly and justly horrifies us. But death confronts us, in the many moments of decision throughout our lives and in

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[358] ibid. p.19.

[359] ibid. p.35.

[360] ibid. p.37.

our bodily death, with opportunities to cultivate and engage the virtue of indifference. The darkness of death does not exist to terrify us: rather, it unmasks our constructed realities and calls us to abandon ourselves into the love of God who is more than we can conceive. If we live with this as our goal, and if in the moments of darkness we truly do abandon ourselves to God's darkness, then we truly can be said to hope.

For Pratchett, death is fundamentally meaningless, like everything in Pratchett's morally ambiguous and purposeless cosmos.[361] But for Rahner, each moment of our death through our lives has moral significance, constituting a moment of decision and so a moment of judgment.[362] For the Jesuit, to fail to be indifferent is to fail to place oneself totally at the disposal of God's will. So, for Rahner, to fail to abandon oneself to the darkness of God's mystery in death is to fail to hope. And the moment of our bodily death, which is the consummation of this life of moments of death, is the most significant moment of moral decision, for God or for our own constructed reality.

For Rahner, it is only in abandonment into the darkness of God's mystery that we can experience the presence of God, decide for reality as it actually is, and so, in Heideggerian terms, live authentically. And it is only in living authentically, in reality as it actually is with the God who actually is, that our hope can be in any sense true.

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[361] This is not a criticism of Pratchett's mastery of satire. It is the purposelessness of Discworld which enables Pratchett to expose the baseness and strangeness of ordinary human lives. His most compelling humour revels in the least significant, the cosmically unimportant and the existentially passing in order to turn our gaze on the aspects of our lives which we consider the least important.

[362] In the background of this exploration of the significance for Rahner of death throughout our lives has been the debate between Brian Linnane and David Coffey on the one hand and Jean Porter on the other. Porter's critique of Rahner was that his focus on the "fundamental option" is of little ethical use in day to day life, and Linnane and Coffey responded by emphasising that Rahner's ethic of 'complete obedient self-surrender' is ethically significant (Brian F. Linnane, "Dying with Christ: Rahner's Ethics of Discipleship" in *The Journal of Religion*, pp.228-248, p.248). Quite clearly, throughout this thesis, I side with Linnane and Coffey in agreeing that a focus on the "fundamental option" for God in death is ethically rich and significant. However, the virtue of indifference develops ideas about self-surrender, and is richer in its ethical implications than obedient self-surrender alone. See also Jean Porter, "A Response to Brian Linnane and David Coffey" in *Philosophy & Theology*, 10 (1997), pp.285-292. p.229

III – The Eucharist, the Holy Spirit and the Rehearsal of Death

Thus far we have a rich sense of what Rahner understands abandonment to be, and its importance in his theology of death. But where do we rehearse this abandonment, this experience of the presence of God in death, so that we may truly hope? We have already seen how Rahner locates this rehearsal of death in our participation in Christ's death in the Eucharist.[363] Each and every Eucharist, we announce both Christ's death and ours, making Christ's death present in our lives in such a way that we 'assume the human form of the Crucified.'[364] In this chapter I want to reframe the way that Rahner's eucharistic theology has generally been understood, to turn the focus in the literature on Rahner's Eucharistic theology away from a christological way of understanding the eucharist and towards understandings with a more integrated Pneumatology: away from questions about *Realsymbol* and primordial words and towards questions about the nature of *epiklesis*, the particular role of the Spirit, in Rahner's understanding of the Eucharist.

The christological focus to both Rahner's Eucharistic theology and the secondary literature is not surprising. The 20th Century saw a flowering of christological debate in theology across the churches, and now in the 21st Century steps are being taken to redress the perceived Trinitarian imbalance this caused.[365] But as early as 1975 Daniel Tappeiner was concerned by the overly christological focus of Rahner's theology. He traces back to Thomas a line of causality (from the Father, through the Son's humanity, to our humanity) which underpinned Catholic understandings of the sacraments ever since, and argues that Rahner's theology of the symbol does not escape that same line of causality which seems to only obliquely involve the Spirit.[366] C. Annice Callahan is also disquieted by the fact that Rahner's theology of the symbol

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[363] Rahner, *Theology of Death*, p.84.

[364] ibid.

[365] e.g. Karen O'Donnell's exploration of the eucharist not primarily through the lens of incarnation but of annunciation, and her self-conscious reinsertion of the Spirit into a unified sacramental theology: 'Baptized in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, confirmed by God in the Body of Christ through the power of the Spirit, participating in the eucharistic self-offering of Christ, through the Spirit, to the Father, our experience of these sacraments is, at its very heart, Trinitarian.' Karen O'Donnell, *Broken Bodies: the eucharist, Mary, and the body in trauma theology* (London: SCM, 2019), p.186.

[366] Daniel A. Tappeiner, "Sacramental Causality in Aquinas and Rahner: some critical thoughts" in *The Scottish Journal of Theology*, 28 (1975), pp.243-257, esp. p.247: 'Had Thomas not 'squeezed' the Holy Spirit out of the picture (he did not even have the Holy Spirit 'swimming' in the baptismal waters as Tertullian did) a new step in the structure of causality would have appeared – the Holy Spirit as the true 'efficient' cause, with the consequent reworking of the concept of the sacraments as 'instrumental causes'.' Whether it is legitimate to trace the overly christological emphasis of the 20th Century all the way to Thomas (I think it is safer to think in terms of waves of theological fashion and focus), it is interesting for our purposes that after Vatican II theologians seemed more willing to ascribe the theological problems of the day to problems with Thomas, and not simply to his interpreters. A more creative

seems to be rooted in the begetting of the Word from the Father, but does not seem then to move on to the procession of the Spirit:

> Rahner considers his ontology of symbol immediately applicable to the theology of the Trinity: the theology of the Logos is strictly a theology of the symbol and the supreme form of it. He begins with the truth that the Word is generated by the Father as the Father's image and expression. He concludes that the Logos is the "symbol" of the Father, the image who is of the Father's essence but other than the Father, whereby the Father possesses himself.[367]

As we examine Rahner's theology of the symbol we will see more clearly how this problem plays out, but at this stage it is worth noting how strange it is that a theologian who wrote essays about the dual processions of the Trinity (we shall consider Rahner's theology of the Trinity in the next chapter) has been read as if he had only taken into account the implications of one of them in his wider theological work.

An approach to critiquing Rahner's eucharistic theology which might have more in common with my own methodology can be found in an essay by Ellen Concannon, in which she argues that the primary foundation and driver for Rahner's eucharistic theology is in fact his eschatology, his notions of individual and universal human flourishing, our acceptance of death in Christ and the freedom pledged to us and the cosmos in Jesus on the cross and in the Eucharist.[368] We have already explored the link between death and hope at some length, and have noted Rahner's location of it in the rehearsal of Christ's death and ours in the Eucharist. Concannon does not attempt to uncover an implicit Pneumatology in the eschatological eucharistic theology she describes. But she does lay a foundation for the sort of reimagining of Rahner's eucharistic theology which we will now attempt: to try to hear the influences and nuances in Rahner's complex thought which might shed light on how his eucharistic theology might be more holistic and balanced than previously thought. But to begin to understand Rahner's eucharistic theology, we must

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approach may be found in Joshua Mobley, *A Brief Systematic Theology of the Symbol* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021). Mobley combines De Lubac's sacramental Pneumatology with Rahner's theology of the symbol in order to construct a trinitarian theology of the symbol which might provide a counterbalance to social trinitarianism, and also to the overly christological focus in this field. He establishes the historically problematic triads of God-Creation-Church and Symbolised-Symbol-Symbolism on the Trinity of Father-Son-Spirit, considering the Trinitarian aspect not in terms of analogy or imprint, but rather in which 'symbols ontologically participate in what they symbolize, and all things ultimately symbolize God' (p.1). Thus, for Mobley, the Spirit is the "symbolism" which enables all things to symbolise, and so ontologically participate in, God.

[367] C. Annice Callahan, "Karl Rahner's Theology of Symbol: basis for his theology of the Church and the sacraments" in *The Irish Theological Quarterly*, 49 (1982), pp.195-205, p.196.

[368] Concannon, Ellen, "The Eschatological Implications of Karl Rahner's Eucharistic Doctrine" in *The Heythrop Journal*, 51 (2010), pp.881-892.

begin with his theology of the symbol, with the christologically focussed reasoning at the beginning of his eucharistic thought.

Theology of symbol and theology of word

Rahner was deeply dissatisfied with the christological understandings of the church's life in which he had been theologically trained. He was unconvinced by the traditional arguments about the institution of the "society" of the Church by the historical Jesus in terms of Peter's anointing as the first Pope, a concept of Jesus which he thought could 'be associated only with difficulty with Jesus as Redeemer, the Crucified and Risen'.[369] He was also critical of St Thomas for failing to integrate his theology of the sacraments with his theology of the church, since Thomas seemed to have built his exploration of the sacraments primarily on the christological discussion which immediately precedes it in the *Summa*.[370] And Rahner also criticised Thomas' failure to deal with the unity of word and sacrament in the economy of grace.[371] So it is from a place of frustration that Rahner seems then to have begun his own attempts to develop approaches to the sacraments, to word and symbol. In this section, we will see how Rahner attempted to use concepts of word and symbol in order to explore the eucharist in terms which are ecclesiological and verbal. But we will also begin to see the potential problems caused by the lack of an explicit Pneumatology in much of Rahner's reasoning around word and symbol. Rahner may have offered an alternative way to understand the sacraments, but it is hardly unified or balanced.

Rahner explored ideas of Word/word and symbol in many essays.[372] The most famous, but least important for our purposes, is his essay entitled "The Theology of the Symbol", in which Rahner asked what it meant to say that the heart of Jesus is a symbol of the love of Christ. By using the term "symbol", what relationship was denoted between the physical heart of Jesus and the love of Jesus? Whilst Rahner refused to develop a general theory of the symbol, the essay hinges on two theological statements, the second of which is an inversion of the first:

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[369] Rahner, "The Church's redemptive historical provenance from the death and resurrection of Jesus" in TI 19.3, pp.24-38, p.26.

[370] Rahner, "Introductory observations on Thomas Aquinas' theology of the sacraments in general" in TI 14.9, pp.149-160, pp.151-152.

[371] ibid. p.152.

[372] e.g. Karl Rahner, "The Theology of the Symbol" in TI 4.9, pp.221-252 (originally published in 1959); "The Word and the Eucharist" in TI 4.10, pp.253-286 (originally published in 1960); "The Presence of Christ in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper" in TI 4.11, pp.287-311 (originally published in 1959).

> [1] [A]ll beings are by their nature symbolic, because they necessarily 'express' themselves in order to attain their own nature.[373]
>
> [2] The symbol strictly speaking (symbolic reality) is the self-realization of a being in the other [being], which is constitutive of its essence.[374]

To summarise (and to be selective in my engagement with the essay), Rahner argues that a true symbol makes the thing of which it is symbolic both present and known to another. In sketching some theological out-workings of this concept of "symbol", Rahner notes that:

> If a theology of symbolic realities is to be written, Christology, the doctrine of the incarnation of the Word, will obviously form the central chapter. And this chapter need almost be no more than an exegesis of the saying: 'He that sees me, sees the father' (Jn 14:9).[375]

This is Callahan's point. Rahner uses his theology of the symbol to express the Word as symbol of the Father within the Trinity (*ad intra*: the Word as self-knowledge of the Father)[376] and moves on to the incarnation and the sacraments as the means by which the Word is the symbol of the Father for the world (*ad extra*: the incarnation and sacraments are the symbol by which the Word made and makes the Father known to us). Using the language of Rahner's theology of the symbol, a sacrament is:

> precisely 'cause' of grace, *in so far as* it is its 'sign' and that the grace - seen as coming from God - is the cause of the sign, bringing it about and so alone making itself present.[377]

The sacraments are, it seems at this stage, to be understood not with reference to any Pneumatology, but rather with reference to a christological theology of the symbol: the sacrament understood by reference to the eternal Word. And, although this concern about christological focus to the exclusion of Pneumatology might seem rather abstract at this point in the argument, the problem will become more concrete as we see how Rahner uses this theology of the symbol to develop a theology of word, a theology of the power of words to make things present and known as Christ the incarnate Word makes the Father known.

In his essay, "Priest and Poet", Rahner expresses the importance of words using powerfully christological language, alluding to the incarnation and the hypostatic union. He argues that, since our body and soul 'exist in a substantial unity', a word is 'thought become incarnate', 'the corporeal state in which what we now experience and think first begins to exist by fashioning itself into this its word-body' ['word body' is one word]. Just as the hypostatic union is a real union of the Word with human nature, the human body and soul are truly united and indivisible. So when a word is formed, it is formed in the totality of the human person, body and soul. Following the analogy with the incarnation, Rahner emphasises that 'the

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[373] Rahner, "Theology of the Symbol", p.224.

[374] ibid. p.234.

[375] ibid. p.238.

[376] ibid. pp.235-236

[377] ibid. p.243.

word is the embodied thought, not the embodiment of the thought.'[378] This is reasoning which strongly aligns with Rahner's argument in "The Theology of the Symbol" that words are the means by which thought attains its true nature and also by which thought is made present to others. Words are the means by which a thought can be made incarnate, brought to consummation and communicated to another.

However, Rahner argues that not all words do this to the same extent. He distinguishes what he calls "primordial words" from the 'fabricated, technical, utility words' which we simply use to communicate and denote.[379] Although Rahner does not put it in these terms, his language suggests that the distinction between primordial words and other words is that primordial words are symbolic on a level which makes present more than the thoughts of the speaker. They make present all reality, and so make all reality present to us. Primordial words are:

> words which [in a sense] have always existed or are newly born as by a miracle,... words which by a kind of enchantment produce in the person who listens to them what they are expressing..., words which render a single thing translucent to the infinity of all reality. .... [T]hey have power over us, because they are gifts of God, not creations of men, even though perhaps they came to us through men.[380]

Primordial words have a quasi-sacramental function, rendering present to us the cosmic nature of our humanity and so making possible our knowledge of God. They are 'words on which in some way our very salvation depends'[381] because

> [They] alone can redeem that which constitutes the ultimate imprisonment of all realities which are not expressed in word: the dumbness of their reference to God.[382]

Words are the means by which a reality can communicate itself to us and can achieve its destiny of being known and loved.[383] Since primordial words do this for 'the infinite, the transcendent, the divine', they have the ability to give bodily form in us to infinite concepts, and so they communicate infinite concepts to us in bodily form. Rahner's purpose in this essay is to explore the ministry of the poet in speaking primordial words, and he goes so far as to say that:

> the primordial word, before all other expressions, is the primordial sacrament of all realities. And the poet is the minister of this sacrament.'[384]

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[378] Karl Rahner, "Priest and Poet" in TI 3.20, pp.294-317, p.295.

[379] ibid. p.296.

[380] ibid. pp.295-296.

[381] ibid. p.298.

[382] ibid. p.302

[383] ibid pp.300-301.

[384] ibid.

This way of thinking about poetry has significant implications for the development of Rahner's sacramental theology. Most importantly, how does Rahner think that primordial words redeem the dumbness of realities in their reference to God? Just as the eternal Word of God was made flesh and so 'did become the word of man',[385] Rahner argues, the word which is 'the bodiliness of [God's] grace'[386] is one of the 'constitutive elements of the presence of God in the world', and of which the priest is herald.[387] The role of the priest is particularly important because, like all other realities which must be spoken in order to reach their fulfilment in being known and loved, the God who is Love must also be spoken, accepted and answered, if the love between the believer and God is to reach its fulfilment.[388] So, as Rahner puts it, 'God's grace itself only reaches its own fulfilment when it is spoken. Then it is really *present*.'[389] Rahner argues that, although the kerygma, the speaking of the Gospel, is a means of this, the most effective means by which words make God present are in the eucharist:

> The most effective way of speaking about these mysteries, too, is by speaking effectively about the Body and Blood of the Lord. But it is the word of Consecration that speaks of this. It speaks in such a way, that what was spoken of is now present. Everything is then present: heaven and earth, Godhead and manhood, body and blood, soul and spirit, life and death, Church and individual, past and eternal future: everything is gathered together into this word. And everything that is evoked in this word really takes place: *mysterium fidei, sacrum convivium, communio.* In it God already becomes in reality, even if only under the veil of faith, all in all.[390]

The *anamnesis*, the re-membering and re-speaking the passion of Our Lord, are not just the best example of primordial words: the *anamnesis* is in a sense (though Rahner does not explicitly say it) the *primordial* primordial word. The primordial word of the *anamnesis* and the words of institution in particular, do not simply refer particular realities to God in speaking them. The primordial word of the *anamnesis* refers bread and wine, and all the faithful, ALL OF REALITY to God, by Him and with Him and in Him. And they do this in exactly the same way as was meant by Rahner in his "Theology of the Symbol". In the words of institution, the body and blood of Christ is verbally symbolised in such a way that they are expressed in order to attain their own nature in the communion of the faithful; and the body and blood of Christ are self-realised in such a way that the faithful can know Christ and partake of Him in such a way that the body of Christ is constituted in the communicant Church.

"Priest and Poet" is an odd essay, and the theology of word which it explores cannot be separated from the sometimes romantic but rather strange claims about poetry and the nature of art which perhaps might

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[385] ibid. p.303.

[386] ibid. 304.

[387] ibid. 304-305.

[388] ibid. p.305.

[389] ibid.

[390] ibid. p.306.

not stand up to scrutiny. For example, "Priest and Poet" does not consider how the notion of primordial words might be applied to non-verbal art forms, whether they are in any way able to be symbolic or redemptive in the way which Rahner suggests poetry can be. And Rahner's concept of the *anamnesis* and *kerygma* are both very mono-directional. It would be quite straightforward for any artist or preacher to make the argument that communication in art and in preaching, and perhaps in the totality of the eucharistic action, is far more collaborative than Rahner portrays.[391] Perhaps he is influenced by his and his church's particularly clerical perspective – to him as a priest a devotion to the words of institution might be particularly important. Or perhaps this devotion to the carefully uttered and transformative word arises in part from the nature of "Priest and Poet", which comes across in many ways as a sweetly naive meditation on the poet's work, considering it almost in isolation from the other lives with which the real poet interacts. I wonder how many poets beyond their teenage years really consider themselves to be solitary communicators of reality to a waiting, untransformed world.

"Priest and Poet" is problematic, but it is an important essay in that it shows us where Rahner's theology of word takes him when he attempts to apply it beyond the christologically focussed theology of the symbol. However, "Priest and Poet is not the only essay in which Rahner's theology of word seems to send his reasoning in strange directions. As he delves further into eucharistic theology, and particularly as he explores further the importance of the *anamnesis*, he runs into more problems.

Theology of word applied to the eucharist

In "The Word and the Eucharist", Rahner attempts to resolve the problem of how the preaching of the word fits together with the sacraments. He frames the problem in entirely christological terms, understanding both the power to preach and the power to administer the sacraments to be powers 'by the authority of God and of his Christ'.[392] Applying the concepts of word which we have already explored in "Priest and Poet", Rahner states that what is needed was 'a theology of the word in which its essence as word of God in the Church is clearly brought out.'[393] His solution is that, resting on the authority of Christ, the ritual speaking and sacramental speaking together constitute the speaking of the primordial word of Christ to the fullest degree, and is in fact the 'self-realisation of the Church in its primordial sacramental nature'.[394] The speaking of the word of Christ in the Eucharist constitutes the Eucharist, just

[391] cf. in particular Kate Bruce, *Igniting the Heart: preaching and imagination* (London: SCM, 2015) on preaching as an act of the whole congregation.

[392] Rahner, "The Word and the Eucharist", p.254.

[393] ibid. p.257.

[394] ibid. p.275.

as the speaking of the word of Christ in history constitutes the Church.[395] So, the Eucharist most fully effects the Church's speaking Christ into history:

> The word in the sacrament – along with the ritual action as an element of the whole speaking sign – is clearly efficacious, effects what it signifies, is uttered by the authority of Christ, is the word which undoubtedly represents the supreme exercise of the authority of the Church and hence also its supreme moment of self-realization...[396]

Although he alludes to this primordial word as '*spiritual* self-communication of God to the creature',[397] because the premise of the essay is christological Rahner does not attempt to reflect pneumatologically, and his reasoning then takes some strange turns. When attempting to explain why not everything the church says is of equal weight, Rahner makes the odd argument that the "word" varies in intensity:

> ...this word, which is in the nature of an event and an exhibition, takes place in the Church in essentially varying degrees of concentration and intensity. The concept of word of God in the Church which we have arrived at is analogous: it is subject to inner changes.[398]

It is not entirely clear at this stage how these 'inner changes' come about. It is hard to see how there could be fluctuations in the church's being primordial sacrament, or if the words and action of the eucharist are symbols of Christ, how the Eucharist can be both 'the word of the Church absolutely'[399] and also this to a varying degree. Rahner makes comments about the need for the Eucharist as God's self-communication to be accepted, and other comments about the 'degrees of how the word of God makes the reality [of Christ] present' being because finite and historical man 'attains [it] only by a gradual process through the single totality of his life.'[400] However, a brief discussion of the importance of subjective reception, coupled with some final and slightly throwaway remarks on kerygma, seems here only to exist as a caveat to the absolute power of the self-communication of word as Rahner has expressed it. Rahner's reasoning does not seem to cohere.

These are general concerns, but the problem of a pneumatologically deficient understanding of the Eucharist becomes particularly important when we directly apply Rahner's reasoning to the life of the individual Christian. In "The Passion and Asceticism", Rahner explores the link between the passion of Christ and our participation in the Eucharist. He repeats arguments about the futility of stoicism or

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[395] cf. Rahner, "What is a Sacrament" in TI 14.8, pp.135-148, p.142: the church is the basic sacrament since it 'brings to manifestation at the historical level, and thereby also 'effects', that will of God towards the world which creates salvation and unity.'

[396] Rahner, "The Word and the Eucharist", ibid. p.271.

[397] ibid. p.258 (my italics).

[398] ibid. p.263.

[399] ibid. p.282.

[400] ibid. p.264.

surrendering to a naturalistic fatalism[401] and describes a "Passion", in terms with which we are now familiar, as 'a moment in man's subjection to death', to which we can surrender ourselves or from which we can flee. [402] Here, Rahner argues that 'the dual revelation of person and word in Jesus Christ' confronts us and demands that we take a course other than that which we would have taken 'within the horizons of the world.'[403] So, Rahner argues, asceticism for the Christian is 'nothing else but the anticipating grasp of Christian death understood as the most radical act of faith', and so it is 'merely a realistic realization of... an essentially Christian flight from the world.'[404] The course of the world is to deny, fear or philosophise death: Christian asceticism is the anticipating rehearsal of our surrender to God in death, 'a 'daily dying', a '*stigma Christi*', a bearing within oneself of the '*nekrosis Christi*'.'[405] In this sense, we might argue along the lines of the arguments which Rahner made in *On the Theology of Death* that the eucharist is a ritualised rehearsal of Christ's death in anticipation of our own death, a ritualised refusal to turn away from death which is instead a deliberate moment of surrender to the reality of death. In these terms, we can say that the eucharist can be understood as a form of ritualised Christian asceticism, a flight from worldly death-denial or stoicism.

However, the relationship between Christ's death and our own in our participation in the eucharist is not a straightforward one. Whereas Rahner's theology of symbol and word as applied to the eucharist makes clear the fullness of the making Christ present to us which takes place in the eucharist, Rahner makes a great effort to distinguish Christ's passion from our own passion. Our passion is not a participation in Christ's passion in the sense that 'it cannot apply completely and in the same sense to the dying and ascesis of the Christian',[406] as if Christ's passion was 'just any, as it were indifferently objective decree of God in the form of a norm or law':[407] we cannot experience in a straightforward sense the Passion of Christ, but only imitate it. But what then does Rahner think is the relationship between Christian asceticism and Christ's passion?

> Christian asceticism, understood as an existential yes to the God of the supernatural life, is therefore a yes to Jesus Christ and in particular, of course, a yes to that mode of appearance of grace in the world which unveiled itself directly for the first time in the fate of Jesus, leading him to the Cross and to death. To this extent this also states that Christian asceticism is a filling-up of the Passion of Christ,

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[401] Rahner, "The Passion and Asceticism", in *TI* 3.5, pp.58-85, p.71.

[402] ibid. p.72.

[403] ibid. pp.77-78.

[404] ibid. p.79.

[405] ibid.

[406] ibid. p.81.

[407] ibid.

> in so far as it is an act of faith in that event which was finally achieved in the Cross for the reconciliation of the world with God.[408]

Whilst Rahner argues that the eucharist is a real symbol and true *anamnesis* of the death of Christ, enabling us to truly rehearse Christ's death, and so anticipate our own, a wall seems to have appeared between Christ's death and our own, for we are not Christ and cannot die Christ's death. But how then is the eucharist a real symbol of Christ's death? How is it in any sense a true participation in Christ's death? In *On the Theology of Death*, Rahner had described the eucharist as 'the sacramental re-enactment of Christ's death' which 'makes that death present in the space-time moment of our lives'[409] so that the sacrament brings the mystery of Christ's death to us and also 'actually works its effect on our own lives': 'the participant in this sacrament must in it assume the human form of the Crucified.'[410] Yet here our asceticism is merely 'an act of faith in' the death of Christ.

Perhaps it did not occur to Rahner that there might be implications for eucharistic theology when he was writing this essay, though that seems unlikely given his preoccupation with sacramental theology. Perhaps he was particularly keen to avoid portraying Christian asceticism as salvific suffering – hence the distinction between Christ's Passion and ours – but he does not say that this is his aim. What we are left with, then, in this essay is, on the one hand, an attractive vision for Christian asceticism which fits well with Rahner's theology of death and our encounter with it in everyday life: it seems elegant to say that the eucharist is a regular preparation and rehearsal for our decision for God enacted throughout our lives. But on the other hand it is hard to see how this fits with Rahner's theology of the eucharist or how our imitation of Christ in the eucharist is really all that different to the 'futility of stoicism'.[411] It is not entirely clear how the eucharist, understood in this way, is really an encounter with grace. Perhaps Rahner falls into the trap, which is always dangerous when writing (and especially in a short work!) about ascesis, that we focus on the task of the ascetic and write less about the work and action of God. Perhaps we can ascribe this deficiency to the limits imposed by Rahner's focus, since Rahner is elsewhere able to think of imitation and participation in much more unified terms: for example, when he considers the three days of the Easter liturgy, the *triduum*:

> Hence the sacrifice of Good Friday is only really consummated as a sacrifice when it is the sacrifice accepted in the Easter event. During the three days of Good Friday, Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday, the one, self-same, total event of salvation is accomplished in a sacred memorial (*anamnesis*), and it remains strictly one even through it continues in order to be itself.[412]

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[408] ibid. pp.81-82.

[409] *On the Theology of Death*, p.84.

[410] ibid.

[411] Rahner, "The Passion and Asceticism", p.71.

[412] Rahner, "Dogmatic Questions on Easter" in TI 4.5, pp.121-133, pp.129-130.

Here there is a much stronger sense that the task of the ascetic, here in walking the three days of the Easter event, is an *anamnesis* of Christ's walking that easter event. In the next section of this chapter we will explore more fully the significance of the use of this eucharistic language (*anamnesis* coming as it does with *epiclesis*). But for now it is sufficient to ask why, if the Easter liturgy is an *anamnesis* of the Passion of Christ in the sense that the eucharist is an *anamnesis* of Christ's death, Rahner could not have parsed our participation in the eucharist in the fuller sense of an *anamnesis* of Christ's Passion.

Rahner develops a theology of the eucharist in which the nature of the sign in the eucharist is not merely verbal, but is rather composite (though it is still very much clerical), being made up of 'the empirical perceptibility of the bread and wine and of the word... pronounced over them... by ordained representatives of the Church'.[413] Rahner traces this emphasis on the words of institution in the *anamnesis* back to the Council of Trent's affirmation of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. His argument is that, in order to refute claims that the Eucharist is not literally (but figuratively) Christ's body and blood, the council placed greater emphasis on the literal meaning of Christ's words, "This is my body" and "This is my blood."[414] He makes this point because of his frustration that transubstantiation is and always has been framed in terms that what was not the body of Christ has now become the body of Christ.[415] In a striking passage published in 1959, he argued that traditional eucharistic theology:

> automatically puts the real presence in a perspective in which the local presence of Christ... is the main centre of interest and everything else is derived from this. ... To put it another way: the first truth of the Eucharistic doctrine is, 'This is my body', not, 'Here I am present'.[416]

In contrast, he argued that:

> It is not because Christ is present that we offer him as our sacrifice and receive him in communion, but the other way round. And hence one could ask oneself whether one could not formulate and clarify the basic statements on the Eucharist in such a way that while the real presence is clearly recognisable, the character of sacrifice and of food is primarily and comprehensively stated, and at the same time, the character of event which belongs to the process.[417]

That catholic theology almost always began any consideration of the eucharist with the christological problem of how bread and wine become Christ's body and blood often caused catholic theology to fail to give due recognition to the *whole character of the eucharistic event*. And so the eucharist was reduced to the extent that:

> It has been said somewhat maliciously that the popular understanding of the Mass is that people think of it merely as the consecration of the host in the morning for 'Benediction of the Blessed

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[413] Rahner, "The Presence of Christ in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper", p.292-293.

[414] ibid. pp.292, 298.

[415] ibid. p.305.

[416] ibid. p.309.

[417] ibid.

> Sacrament' in the evening. This is an exaggeration which still contains a correct and important observation.[418]

Although in that article Rahner suggests (almost as a throwaway) exploring this whole character of the eucharistic event in terms of food or sacrifice, we shall now turn to explore some of the pneumatological issues which might make much more sense of Rahner's theology of the eucharist. We shall see how Rahner complexifies causation in a way which can make the theology of the eucharist much more dynamic and participatory than simply stating, "This is my body."

The epiklesis in Rahner's eucharistic theology

The way in which the Church prays for God to be present as part of the eucharistic prayer has been one of the major differences between the Church in the East and in the West. It is generally true to say that in the Eastern churches, explicit prayer or prayers invoking the Holy Spirit over the gifts and the congregation constituted an integral part of the Eucharistic Prayer. These are referred to using the Greek term *epiklesis*. However, the epiklesis was only restored to the eucharistic liturgy in the West in the 20th Century.

(i) The rediscovery of the epiklesis in the West

In the Liturgy of St John Chrysostom, the standard in much of the East, after the priest recalls the saving works of Christ, he prays, 'and we beseech and pray and entreat you: send down your Holy Spirit upon us and upon the gifts here presented.' The priest then blesses the bread and cup, asking God to make it the precious Body and Blood of Christ. When the Deacon then urges the priest to bless both the holy gifts, the priest prays, 'Changing them by your Holy Spirit... So that they may be for those who partake of them for vigilance of soul, remission of sins, communion of Your Holy Spirit, fullness of the Kingdom of Heaven, boldness before You, not for judgment or condemnation.'[419] I include this quotation from the liturgy at length to emphasise that it contains three petitions: first, for the Holy Spirit; second, that the Spirit will transform the eucharistic elements; and third, that the Spirit will enable the communicants to partake.[420]

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[418] ibid. pp.309-310.

[419] The Liturgy of St John Chrysostom is available in English and Greek at https://www.goarch.org/-/the-divine-liturgy-of-saint-john-chrysostom [last accessed 25th October 2020].

[420] cf. John H. McKenna, "Trinity, Holy Spirit, and Epiclesis in *Liturgical Ministry,* 19 (2010), pp.178-181, p.178.

However, we must be careful not to mistakenly understand the function of the epiklesis in a way that is analogous to the function of the words of institution as we have explored above. There is not the same sense in Orthodox theology that the epiklesis is *the moment* at which the Spirit descends on the gifts. Rather, the liturgy 'is entirely, from beginning to end, an *epiklesis*, an invocation of the Holy Spirit who transfigures everything done in it, each solemn rite, into that which manifests and reveals to us.'[421] The eastern epiklesis is one part of a holistic trinitarian invocation throughout the whole eucharistic prayer, in which scholars have seen pneumatological emphases in the anointing of the people[422] and the transformation of history by the vivifying of the present with God's eternal purpose.[423]

The distinction between the punctiliar nature of the utterance of the words of institution in the West and the diffuse nature of the epiklesis in the East was preserved when an explicit epiklesis was brought back into the liturgy of the Western Church under Pius X in the 20th Century. The epiklesis was not contained in a single liturgical moment (like the words of institution, or the epiklesis in the liturgy of St John Chrysostom) but was "split" into two parts. Such a "split" epiklesis was not without precedent in the West,[424] but the norm from the Hippolytan school (Roman, early 3rd Century) onwards, where an epiklesis was included, had been to invoke the Spirit once after the words of institution in order to seal the consecration of the eucharistic elements.[425] In many early eucharistic liturgies this was a Trinitarian invocation, and only after 375 do we have evidence of the epiklesis mentioning only the Spirit, after ideas about the appropriation of missions to various persons of the Trinity became more widely accepted.[426] So, whilst Paul de Clerck describes the reintroduction of the epiklesis into the eucharistic prayers after Vatican II a "revolution in Western eucharistic theology",[427] it could be said to be so doubly because of

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[421] Alexander Schmemann, The Eucharist: sacrament of the kingdom, trans. Paul Kachur (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1988), p.222, quoted in E. Byron Anderson, "A Body in the Spirit for the World: Eucharist, Epiclesis, and Ethics" in Liturgical Ministry, 20 (2011), pp.98-116, p.98.

[422] cf. Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Toward a Pneumatological Theology: pentecostal and ecumenical perspectives on ecclesiology, soteriology, and theology of mission* (New York: University Press of America, 2002), p.139, noted in Johnathan E. Alvarado, "Pentecostal Epiclesis: a model for teaching and learning" in Pneuma 35 (2013), pp.180-198, p.182.

[423] cf. John Zizioulas, for whom the epiclesis operates as transformative agent of history, making history present to us, vivifying the present and sanctifying the community (*Being as Communion* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2000), pp.115-116, noted in Alvarado, "Pentecostal Epiclesis", pp.182-3).

[424] cf. Alvarado, "Pentecostal Epiclesis", pp.185-186.

[425] David Pennington, "From East to West, a perfect offering" in *The Journal of Theta Alpha Kappa,* 32 (2008), pp.35-51, p.40

[426] Joseph H. Crehan, SJ, "Eucharistic Epiklesis: new evidence and a new theory" in *Theological Studies*, pp.698-712, pp.702, 705.

[427] Paul De Clerck, "The Liturgical Reform of Vatican II: why has it only been partially received?", pp.170-177, p.173.

the inclusion of a "split" epiklesis. In eucharistic prayer II, before the memorial of Christ's passion and the words of institution the priest prays:

> Make holy, therefore, these gifts, we pray, by sending down your Spirit upon them like the dewfall, so that they may become for us the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. *[Haec ergo dona, quaesumus, Spiritus tui rore sanctifica, ut nobis Corpus et Sanguis fiant Domini nostri Iesu Christi.]*[428]

And then, after the institution narrative, the priest prays:

> Humbly we pray that, partaking of the Body and Blood of Christ, we may be gathered into one by the Holy Spirit. *[Et supplices deprecamur ut Corporis et Sanguinis Christi participes a Spiritu Sancto congregemur in unum.]*[429]

Although much could be made about the minimal reception of the epiklesis in the devotional life of the faithful, and Paul de Clerck has made insightful comments about the retention of the liturgical gestures which place sole focus on the words of institution,[430] at this point it is particularly worth noting that the Roman epiklesis in prayer II frames the memorial of Christ's passion and the words of institution. Also that it contains all three elements which were in the epiklesis in the liturgy of St John Chrysostom: invocation of the Holy Spirit; to consecrate the eucharistic elements; so that there may be a true communion.

(ii) The Spirit prepares the way for the "word"

And so to Rahner. What we do not have from Rahner is a straightforward commentary of his thoughts on the new eucharistic liturgy, in a manner which we can simply compare to the liturgies of the East and West. What we do have is his theological writings on the eucharist, most of which were written before the epiklesis was widely used in the West. And although our engagement with Rahner's work on the eucharist thus far has highlighted the problems arising from its excessive Christocentrism, we now move to his work which engages with exactly the shift in thinking which was liturgically embodied in the reforms of the 20th Century. We will see in Rahner's eucharistic theology a re-engagement with some of the pneumatological elements of eucharistic life, and this in a way which demonstrates significant continuity with Rahner's anthropology as I have outlined it thus far.

We have already explored some problems with the focus on "word" theology in Rahner's essay, "The Word and the Eucharist", particularly concerning the subjective element in eucharistic devotion, how the "word" seems to vary. Rahner points towards a solution first by blurring the distinction between his solidly christological "word" theology and his Pneumatology of "uncreated grace". He writes:

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[428] Eucharistic prayer II is available at http://www.ibreviary.com/m2/messale.php?s=liturgia_eucaristica&id=79 (last accessed Monday 26th October 2020)

[429] ibid.

[430] De Clerck, "The Liturgical Reform of Vatican II", p.174.

> Hence it is by definition 'word', that is, spiritual self-communication of God to the creature, especially as this grace is not this or that created reality, but the real self-communication of God in 'uncreated' grace and – at least according to Thomistic doctrine – every entitavely supernatural grace creates a conscious condition of consciousness in man by means of its supernatural formal object, which cannot be brought about by any purely natural object.[431]

What Rahner means by this is that our liturgical speaking can be deemed to be "word" in the truest sense, in the sense of the primordial word functioning sacramentally, when that word constitutes a real communication of Godself, when it is a 'spiritual self-communication', by which he means 'uncreated grace', the Holy Spirit. Whenever Rahner refers to "grace" he generally means the Holy Spirit and the effects which the Spirit causes, but by "uncreated grace" he means the particular indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The move which is particularly interesting for our purposes is that Rahner argues that this communication of Godself creates in us 'a conscious condition of consciousness'. Rahner is suggesting that sacramental speaking, and so sacramental eating, can be sacramental for us as conscious beings because the gift of God's Spirit creates some 'conscious condition of consciousness' in us. But what is that? In "The Word and the Eucharist", Rahner does not get much clearer, but continues this process of fleshing out the christological concept of "word" with elements which are pneumatological only in so far as the Spirit is the Spirit of the incarnate Word: particularly that God's speaking in history is a unified declaration of Godself 'as eternal salvation in the Spirit of the incarnate Logos of God,' from which all proclamations derive their power.[432] However, the implications of grace creating in us a 'conscious condition of consciousness' begins to become clearer in Rahner's essay, "On the duration of the presence of Christ after communion".[433]

Rahner spends the bulk of the essay shifting questions about the presence of Christ away from the nature of the eucharistic elements (how long they last and their interaction with the human digestive system!) and towards a consideration of the reception of communion, the 'human act'. He does this for the significant reason that 'only a human act can also be an act of acceptance of the grace offered under this act and be a confession of faith and a personal proclamation of the death of the Lord.'[434] We might expect Rahner to explain this in terms of the gift of the Spirit giving rise to the faith which enables us to accept the grace offered to us. However, this is not how Rahner reasons, and he does not expand this idea much in that essay. But elsewhere he considers what is necessary for us to receive the saving mediatorship of Christ. First:

> ...the condition required for the possibility of the saving mediatorship of Christ and its personal realisation in faith is the intercommunication of all men right down to the ultimate depths of their

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[431] Rahner, "The Word and the Eucharist", p.258.

[432] ibid. p.278.

[433] Rahner, "On the duration of the presence of Christ after communion" in TI 4.12, pp.312-320.

[434] ibid. p.318.

> existence, to their very salvation, and the concrete and existential 'realisation' and experience of this radical intercommunication. This intercommunication is part and parcel of man's concrete being and is therefore a constant. The experience of it (whether accepted or rejected) is the precondition without which such a thing as the mediatorship of Christ could neither be understood at all nor held to be credible.[435]

Here Rahner refers to the theological anthropology we explored in chapter one, ideas about the openness of the human person. The human person is not isolated but is open to all reality, particularly to their destiny in union with God, in the most 'radical intercommunication' of all, in the life of the pan-cosmic soul transfigured in Christ, for which we have the seed in the supernatural existential. But this takes on two elements:

> ...this saving intercommunication and solidarity, as a factor in the constitution of man's concrete being, contains a 'natural' and a charismatic/pneumatic element. Both precede the individual's decision for or against salvation as its condition and perspective, contributing to making the decision possible and determining it in such a way that, in spite of its transcendental character as a condition of Christ's mediatorship, it can be understood as a condition which the Christ-event itself actively presupposes for its own actualisation. In this way it does not prejudice the majesty and independence of Christ's mediatorship.[436]

Rahner describes the supernatural existential as having two elements. By saying that it has a "natural" element, Rahner means here that the supernatural existential is an integral part of our humanity which we all have; that the supernatural existential is in a sense universal to humanity. But it also has a "charismatic/pneumatic" element which is the particular gift of God's Spirit. Together, the "natural" supernatural existential and the "charismatic" supernatural existential in the gift of the Holy Spirit 'precede the individual's decision for or against salvation'. The gift of the Holy Spirit can enable us to realise that potential to accept Christ's mediation. And this is not to diminish the christological significance of the saving work of Christ as mediator, for the need for the redeemed to receive the Holy Spirit and to fulfil the promise of the supernatural existential is the mechanism which Christ, who sends His Spirit on the Church, presupposes.

In order for the christological communication to occur, there must be a pneumatological preparation, which the christological communication presupposes. We can see this pattern of thought operating quite clearly when Rahner considers the importance of personal piety, when he engages with the fact that ecclesial devotions and sacraments aren't the only means of grace:

> *God*'s action on man occurs even in the 'subjective' way, and even the 'subjective way occurs in the Church. Here, too, there is a dialogue of grace between God and man, and effective action of God which really and truly fills and transforms the heart of man more and more with his Holy Spirit. ...

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[435] Rahner, "One Mediator and many mediations" in TI 9.11, pp.169-184, p.174.

[436] ibid.

> Even in this case there is not merely an intellectual and affective reference of man to Christ, but a true deepening of the real union with Christ in the Holy Spirit.[437]

In personal piety we are led by the Holy Spirit into deeper union with Christ, and this pneumatological action is presupposed in the ministry of Jesus:

> ... The life of Jesus, which pervades all spaces and times, has advanced another little step further. His hand has rested upon me and his own word has gone straight to my heart; the life-streams of his Church have risen out of the hidden depths of his Heart, in which the Holy Ghost is poured out, and have risen to the surface of my life where they become accessible to my everyday consciousness.[438]

After describing the preparation of the Holy Spirit presupposed in the ministry of Jesus, Rahner then makes it clear that, because of the incarnational order, because of the 'order of Christ and of our flesh', our relationship with God and the 'acts of our everyday spiritual life' come to a head, 'their proper essential climax' in the sacraments, and particularly the eucharist.[439]

This preparation in the Spirit for the reception of the sacraments is reified (to an extent) in Catholic theology by the sacrament of penance, which Rahner also considers. Rahner begins that essay by emphasising the public and ecclesial importance of the sacrament of penance, urging its wider and more frequent use, by reframing sin as an offence against the holiness of the Church, which he calls '*her* Spirit'.[440] So sin is reframed not as personal offence, but as a failure of the Christian 'to give his holiness (his life in the Spirit) to the Church', with the consequence that the Church's life in the Spirit, the Church's holiness, is diminished.[441] Rahner begins his reasoning in strangely and strongly pneumatological terms, and he continues as he frames penance now not ecclesiologically but in terms of theological anthropology:

> Indeed, consider, in the light of the simplest principles of the Faith, what must already have happened before Confession and absolution! There has been a miracle of grace. For only in that way does a man come to that repentance without which the sacrament would be a sacrilege. There is no contrition of any significance for salvation unless God's gratuitous grace has already anticipated man *so that* he may be able to repent and actually does repent, since the capacity and the actual doing are God's grace.[442]

In a pattern we will now recognise, Rahner emphasises that the sacrament of penance, the sacrament which has its form totally in "word", would be a sacrilege if the way for it was not prepared by the Holy Spirit, in a way that is 'anticipated' in the whole order of God's grace, bringing the penitent to repentance,

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[437] Rahner, "Personal and Sacramental Piety" in *TI* 2.3, pp.109-134, pp.128-129.

[438] ibid. p.129.

[439] ibid. p.134.

[440] Rahner, "Forgotten Truths Concerning the Sacrament of Penance" in *TI* 2.4, pp.135-174, p.137.

[441] ibid.

[442] ibid. p.164.

and bringing us to the confessional to enact and receive the sacrament of "word", of the speaking of contrition and the speaking of absolution.

(iii) The Word and the Spirit in increasing dynamism

But here Rahner begins to work out his reasoning in the other way. Yes, the Spirit prepares us for communion with Christ, in a way anticipated by Christ. But then it is true to say also that the ministry of "word" in Christ prepares the way for us to receive the fruits of life in the Spirit, of grace. Immediately after talking about the sacrament of penance in the terms above, Rahner emphasises the origins of the preparing grace in the ministry of the "word":

> But this miracle of grace does not simply fall from heaven. It too has an incarnational nature: it is the miracle of the grace *of Christ*. It is conditioned by the historical event of Christ and of his Cross, by the preaching of the Word of God in the Church; it may depend on the example and word of another Christian which in the last analysis does also originate again in the grace of God; it is given as a gift to man, because and in so far as he is baptized and a member of the Church. Even before the *Ego te absolvo* there has already taken place a miracle of grace in the *Church*.[443]

The 'Word of God' in its many manifestations is the origin of our life in the Spirit. It might be in preaching or in the ministry of the poet or any other Christian living or speaking "words" in a quasi-sacramental way, bringing the presence of God into our lives by living or speaking the primordial "word" of the Gospel. And even this 'does also originate again in the grace of God'. Rahner is developing a christological-pneumatological cycle, which refuses to give absolute precedence to either, which refuses to think in terms of A leading to B, and which refuses to see the ultimate end (or even "product") of the eucharistic event as either a moment of reception of the Holy Spirit or a moment of reception of the presence of Christ.

Returning to Rahner's writing explicitly on the eucharist, Rahner does not let us rest in the communion with Christ in our reception of the real presence of Christ, as if that is the end goal of eucharistic communion. He impels us on to contemplate the increasing communion in the Spirit to which reception of the eucharist leads:

> But this permanent presence, to which the reception of the body of Christ under the species leads, does not consist of the further presence of his body within the Christian for a few minutes longer. It is the continued and ever more profound presence of the Lord in the Spirit, in the truth, without which even his flesh profits nothing, as the Lord himself says. The climax of holy communion is this personal communication in the Spirit. And this event does not become greater and more magnificent

[443] ibid.

> if one maintains without any real proof that its *sign*, which is purely a means, still persists when the eating of the consecrated food is over and done with.[444]

The question of "how long Christ is present after communion" misses the point because our communion in true eucharist never ends. To fret about the christological technicalities of the presence of Christ is to miss the more important questions about the presence of God in Christ and the Spirit. The eucharist and our participation in it is not a journey from spiritual preparation to true christological communion. It is rather 'an increasing coming and going of the Lord in his Spirit and in his grace, by the eating of the true body of the Lord' which is 'not withdrawn by Christ's going away again.'[445] Whereas Rahner's consideration of ministries of "word" alone was rather unsatisfying, his understanding of "word" and Spirit in the eucharist is complex and unsettling, the metaphysics slipping through our fingers, accelerating in dynamism if we attempt to grasp *how God is present to us* in the eucharistic moments of our devotional life.

(iv) Rahner's complexification of causation

This dynamism in Rahner's eucharistic Pneumatology (and eucharistic Christology) is interesting because it defies the limitations of simple causation. By that I mean that Rahner complexifies simple notions that one thing simply leads to another, in order to complexify the Thomistic eucharistic theology on which he is building. When Rahner expands his theological horizon beyond the christological, he is also expanding his eucharistic theology beyond the Thomistic focus on transubstantiation and the mechanisms by which we can understand the presence of Christ in bread and wine.[446] William V. Dych has argued that Rahner is forced to think in terms beyond Aristotelian causation for two reasons: first, a renewed emphasis on the personal presence of God as Spirit; and second, the notion of the supernatural existential, the anthropological focus in Rahner's theology.[447] My argument thus far fits well with Dych's assessment. And Dych argues further that symbolic causality is Rahner's solution: just as love is deepened by symbols that give it expression, 'antecedent reality of God's gracious presence is deepened and enhanced for people in and through its symbolic embodiment and expression in sacramental activity.'[448] This is a 'mutual and reciprocal causality.'[449]

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[444] Rahner, "On the duration of the presence of Christ after communion", p.319.

[445] ibid. p.320.

[446] cf. De Clerck, "The Liturgical Reform of Vatican II, p.173.

[447] William V. Dych, S.J., "Karl Rahner's Theology of Eucharist" in *Philosophy and Theology*, 11 (1998), pp.125-144, pp.136-137.

[448] ibid. p.137.

[449] ibid. p.138.

To understand the significance of this idea of mutual and reciprocal causality, we must engage for a moment with the debate about the relationship between created and uncreated grace. This is Rahner at his most impenetrable, but it is illuminating. In his essay, "Some Implications of the Scholastic Concept of Uncreated Grace",[450] Rahner attempts to show that he does not detract from the Council of Trent's statement of the importance of created grace 'for justification, adoption, etc., as Trent sees them...'[451] and considers the relationship between created grace as a material cause (how God bestows himself) and uncreated grace as a formal cause (God's actual bestowal of himself).[452] The question is, essentially and to grossly oversimplify it, to understand how the graces which are *means* of God's self bestowal, like sacraments, can have any purpose if we believe that God does actually give Godself to us in the Holy Spirit. How can the graces which God creates (created grace) be significant if the uncreated God actually already has given us Godself (uncreated grace)? Rahner does not say that uncreated grace is prior to created grace. Rather, that they have a 'reciprocal priority'.[453] The sacraments are not prior to the gift of Godself, and the gift of the Holy Spirit does not render the sacraments unimportant, but they have a 'reciprocal priority' to one another.

Rahner uses the scholastic concept of *dispositio ultima* to locate his discussion in a particular type of created grace. *Dispositio ultima* is the human contribution to our justification, consisting of faith, charity and repentance.[454] Rahner argues that:

> ...as *dispositio ultima* created grace is in such a way the presupposition of the formal cause that it can itself only exist by way of the actual realisation of this formal causality.[455]

This first element of Rahner's argument is rather begging the question: the created graces of faith, charity and repentance are so much the presupposition of the uncreated indwelling of God that the created graces can only exist if the indwelling of God actually does come about. This assumes rather than proves

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[450] Karl Rahner, "Some Implications of the Scholastic Concept of Uncreated Grace" in TI 1, pp.319-346.

[451] ibid.

[452] We will explore formal causality in far more depth shortly.

[453] Rahner, "Some Implications", p.341.

[454] John F. Perry, "Juan Martínez de Ripalda and Karl Rahner's Supernatural Existential" in *Theological Studi*es, 59 (1998), pp.442-456, p.453. The scholastic use is a borrowing of its use in Roman Law: "*dispositio ultima*" referred in the late Imperial period to arrangements made by a testator in his will (cf. Adolf Berger, *Encyclopaedic Dictionary of Roman Law* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1953, 1991), p.438). It is different to the sense in which Thomas uses it in IV *Sent.* d.59, q.2, a.6 – '*et ideo dispositio ultima... ista dispositio est lumen gloriae*...' – as a term for the divine glory through which God can supernaturally dispose our intellects to see God's essence (cf. Denis J.M. Bradley, *Aquinas on the Twofold Human Good: reason and human happiness in Aquinas' moral science* (Washington: CUA Press, 2006), p.429).

[455] Rahner, "Some Implications", p.341.

the 'reciprocal priority' of the created and uncreated graces. However, the second element is more illuminative of Rahner's reasoning. He continues:

> From this objective reciprocal priority there follows further the logical justification for inferring the presence of one reality from that of the other. Because created grace as *dispositio ultima* can only exist along with the actual formal causality of the form for which it is the *dispositio*, it is correct to say: If created grace is given, so too necessarily by that very fact uncreated grace, and hence the whole grace of justification, is communicated to man.[456]

This argument in itself is interesting. Whereas it is uncontroversial to say that if God's self (uncreated grace) is present then we can infer that the created graces of faith, charity and repentance are also present in the believer, Rahner more controversially and significantly argues *vice versa* that if the created graces of faith, charity and repentance are present then we can infer also the presence of the gift of uncreated grace, God's self. We might expect Rahner to proceed on the basis of an experiential argument based on the witness of scripture – that we know God does indeed dwell in those who believe in him and live this reality out in their lives – but he does not. Frustratingly, he does not work out for us the 'logical justification' for his position, but he does claim that this logical justification is to be found in an analogy with the role of the light of glory as the *dispositio ultima* for the real communication of Godself to the person in the beatific vision. Let us work this analogy through.[457]

St Thomas argues that '[t]he beatific vision and the knowledge of God are to some extent above the nature of the rational soul, inasmuch as it cannot reach it of its own strength',[458] but he also argues that the blessed must be able to see God at the last, for otherwise the created intellect 'would either never attain to beatitude, or its beatitude would consist in something else beside God; which is opposed to faith.'[459] What is needed, according to Thomas, is a strengthening of our natural faculties of sight, in some sense a making-like of our created intellect to the divine intellect. This strengthening or elevating is called the light of glory. And this cannot happen by any created effect, for no finite created effect could enable

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[456] ibid.

[457] 'Just as there the light of glory is seen as the *dispositio ultima quae est necessitas ad formam,* so here an analogous relationship may be assumed to hold between created and uncreated grace.' ibid.

[458] ST III.9.2.ad.3. N.B. This should not be read as a prooftext against Rahner's supernatural existential. Thomas immediately references the fittingness for divine knowledge which the rational soul has on account of its creation in the likeness of God.

[459] ST 1.12.1.co.

us to know the infinite:[460] rather, '*the divine essence itself* must become the intelligible form of the glorified intellect.'[461]

Now, this requires some unpicking and translation from the Aristotelian terminology. Thomas defines intelligent beings as beings which are 'naturally adapted to have' not only their own form but 'also the form of some other thing; for the idea of the thing known is in the knower':[462] we as intelligent beings are different from unintelligent beings like rocks because we are able to see a table, conceive of "tableness" in our minds by abstracting it and possess that form/idea of "tableness". However, unlike when we see a table and abstract a form/idea of "tableness", when we see God in the beatific vision we do not abstract a form of "Godness" which we then would possess as an idea in our minds. Rather, God's essence himself dwells within us. No idea/form of "Godness" needs to be abstracted in our minds, because God Himself indwells where that abstracted idea/form would be.[463] This is the light of glory, the indwelling of God, by which God is known in the beatific vision.

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[460] ST 1.12.4.co: 'For knowledge is regulated according as the thing known is in the knower. But the thing known is in the knower according to the mode of the knower. Hence the knowledge of every knower is ruled according to its own nature.' Michael Purcell, considering Rahner's extensive footnote which effectively expands Thomas' point (Rahner, "Some Implications", pp.333-334, fn.24), sums this up satisfyingly: 'God, in his transcendence and immutability, is beyond modification, and so his self-communication to the creature cannot arise by means of any accidental modification of the creature *ab extra*, for, as finite, the creature cannot be accidentally modified as a capacity for the infinite. Further, any accidental modification of the creature *ab extra* would not found an essentially new relationship but simply re-assert an already existing transcendental reference of finite being to God as its cause understood in terms of an efficient causality...' (Michael Purcell, "Quasi-Formal Causality, or the Other-in-Me: Rahner and Lévinas" in *Gregorianum*, 78 (1997), pp.79-93, pp.82-83).

[461] Michael Waddell, paraphrasing ST 1.12.5.co in "Aquinas on the Light of Glory: in *Tópicos* 40 (2011), pp.105-132, p.115.

[462] ST 1.14.1.co.

[463] The argument of a much younger Thomas, compiled shortly after his death in the Supplement to the ST, is also illustrative: we know God in the beatific vision not by an analogy made possible by the likeness of our intellect to the divine knowledge, but rather 'the separate substance itself united to our intellect as its form, so as to be both that which is understood, and that whereby it is understood. And whatever may be the case with other separate substances, we must nevertheless allow this to be our way of seeing God in his essence, because by whatever other form our intellect were informed, it could not be led thereby to the Divine essence.' (ST Suppl.92.1.co). Thomas continues to argue that a thing is intelligible in its actuality – we abstract the intelligible form from pure matter and its properties – and since the Divine essence is pure act, pure and perfect being, it is possible for the Divine essence to be an intelligible form in the beatific vision. We shall see below how Thomas is clear that this does not mean that we know God entirely (ibid. cf. art.3.co).

The analogy Rahner is therefore trying to draw is that the light of glory, the indwelling of God, is in the beatific vision both the condition of knowledge (the *dispositio ultima* which is the raising up of the mind in the light of glory) and the thing known. In the same way, the gift of Godself in union with the recipient of uncreated grace is both the condition for the created graces and that which can be given because of the created graces. Three parallel statements might make this clearer:

The gift of X to the person...	*...is both the condition for X...*	*...and X which can be given because of that condition.*
The gift of the indwelling of God in the beatific vision...	*...is both the dispositio ultima, the raising of the mind in the light of glory which is the condition for the knowledge of God...*	*...and what is known because of this.*
The gift of uncreated grace to the person...	*...is both the condition under which the created graces are given...*	*...and is the uncreated grace which can be given because of the created graces.*

This is complex reasoning, but by anchoring reciprocal priority in a recognised concept and an accepted and thoroughly Thomistic theological mechanism (the beatific vision), Rahner does succeed in demonstrating that his reasoning is not alien to Thomistic orthodoxy: Rahner takes his language of God's self-communication and demonstrates its possibility using the Thomistic language of God's self-communication.[464] Even a theologian working from Thomas can critique attempts to understand the relationship between the created graces and the indwelling of God in uncreated grace in terms of which comes first. Reciprocal priority is a possibility with pedigree.

[464] Although Rahner's argument is frustratingly abstract, we can see the benefits of his anchoring the exploration of one mystery in the existing Thomistic reasoning about another mystery by a comparison with Paul de Letter's attempt to explain reciprocal priority in 1960 ("Divine Quasi-Formal Causality" in *The Irish Theological Quarterly*, 27 (1960), pp.221-228). Because de Letter does not deliberately bring out reciprocal priority in his presentation of Rahner's argument, he ends up characterising it as merely *reversing* the perspective of Thomas that created graces must precede uncreated grace (cf. p.222). de Letter writes: 'All the newness or change resulting from this divine quasi-formal causality lies in the soul, there is none in God. And so the self-gift of the Uncreated Grace to the soul, transforming and divinizing it, of necessity "produces" created grace, a new form inherent in the soul, uniting it to God and making it like unto him.' (p.223). Although de Letter's sense of production 'of necessity' could imply a reciprocal priority, his language more easily lends itself to a clear priority for uncreated grace.

(v) The created grace of hope

But how does this notion of the reciprocal priority of created and uncreated grace help us to understand what might be going on in Rahner's eucharistic theology, and how Rahner thinks the eucharist might be for us a source of hope? We will see that reciprocal priority as a complex means of understanding causation is useful not only to reflect on the eucharist, the Spirit and hope by means of analogy, but that it offers us a more concrete framework in which to reason.

When we try to understand the christological and pneumatological aspects of Rahner's eucharistic theology, it is tempting to think in terms of a cycle: of Spirit making possible the communion in Christ which leads to the life in the Spirit. But this is not correct, since the 'increasing coming and going of the Lord in his Spirit and in his grace, by the eating of the true body of the Lord' is not circular. At the end of the eucharist, one is not returned to the place at which one started. There is a long term trajectory, and it is directional, towards the life of God. So, although Rahner worked out his concept of reciprocal priority in terms of the relationship between uncreated grace and created grace, it is also quite useful for our purposes. Initially it seems that, in considering the eucharist, we are dealing with two uncreated graces - the presence of Christ and the presence of the Spirit. But in fact there is created grace in Rahner's eucharistic theology. It has to do with what is hidden beneath Rahner's phrase, "the life of the Spirit." For the most important created graces which the Spirit brings about in us, in catholic theology, are the three theological virtues of faith, hope and love, the foundational fruits of what it means to live in the Spirit.[465] So we have a link between the eucharist as drawing us ever further into the life of the Spirit on the one hand; and on the other the created grace of hope which the Spirit makes in us.

But before we take this thought further, we should remind ourselves of what Rahner means by hope. We have seen in the second chapter that Rahner does not mean a looking forward to the positive content of a rationally conceived future. He argues that hope is a 'unique and underived mode of knowledge'[466] characterised by the resolution of the real-ontological dialectic of activity and passivity in the absolute unmasking of any of our attempts to resolve it for ourselves, 'where even the possibility of a heroic attitude of faith or a stoic *apatheia*, or even a wild protest against the absurdity of existence, is withdrawn from us; where we are deprived of even the innermost and ultimate subjectivity of our existence in its absolute depths.'[467] And this is not something which we can only experience after our bodily death, for even now we can begin to surrender in the moments of death throughout our lives and assent to what is only possible without our autonomous power, the fulfilment of our destiny in God.

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[465] cf. ST 2a.62-63.

[466] Rahner, *On the Theology of Death*, p.178.

[467] ibid. p.181.

In a later essay, Rahner considered the theological virtues of faith, hope and love together (in Thomistic theology, faith precedes hope and love, and hope precedes love).[468] But it is interesting that Rahner's account of all three is strongly shaped by his earlier ideas about Christian hope. He begins with faith, characterising it starkly: 'Faith looks up at the Lord's cross.'[469] Despite the distinction he drew elsewhere between Christ's passion and ours,[470] here he characterises Jesus' life as being marked by the power of the cross, and argues that we in the same way 'are all on our way towards death, and that death is indwelling in life.'[471] Like Jesus, our lives are inescapably orientated towards death and marked by death. What is then interesting is how Rahner characterises "the cross", as:

> that deadly silent inconceivability which radiates loneliness and which Christians call – perhaps conventionally and pietistically – 'the cross'.[472]

In this essay, Rahner portrays faith as a stance of looking towards the cross in life. When confronted by the reality of death, instead of looking away from the inconceivability and loneliness of death, of the cross, faith orientates us towards it, even seeks it out[473] in order to allow it to more fully permeate our lives. And faith makes this cross 'blessed', makes it the 'cross of Christ' in exactly the way in which we saw Rahner talking about our death becoming the blessed death of Christ:

> That brings us to a question every man has to ask himself quietly but resolutely: Where is the cross in my life that I don't want to see, that I wouldn't willingly take up? The one that becomes the blessed cross of Christ when we do look at it unflinchingly and willingly take it up? That question is addressed to every man, and every man has to give his own answer to it.

Faith is a conditioned response to the repeated confrontation with death, the virtue habituated in us of looking towards death, rather than turning our face away from it. Faith is, in Rahner's theology of death, the acknowledging of reality, rather than denying it. But to what does this willing confrontation with death, death as it really is, lead?

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[468] cf. ST 2a.62.4

[469] Rahner, "Faith, hope and love" in *Meditations on Hope and Love*, trans. V. Green (London: Burns & Oates, 1976), pp.79-85, p.79.

[470] Rahner, "The Passion and Asceticism".

[471] Rahner, "Faith, hope and love", p.80.

[472] ibid. p.79.

[473] I (and, I suspect Rahner would) mean this in terms of actively looking to discern the signs of the cross in our lives, to spot the cross as we are confronted by it, not a masochistic self-infliction of suffering in order to experience the cross "artificially". Rahner's theology makes it clear that there is enough of the cross in everyone's lives, and certainly in human history, not to need to create more of it!

After acknowledging and turning towards the cross in faith, Rahner argues that we then contemplate it in hope. As we contemplate the cross of Jesus, knowing we are 'called and justified',[474] this does not mean that the inconceivability and loneliness of the cross is taken away (in the sense that, because we know ourselves to be redeemed, the darkness doesn't matter anymore). Rahner instead paints a picture of a 'quiet moment... in the midst of life's noise' in which 'we are overcome by the ultimate hopelessness of our hoping,'[475] a moment in which the lights of our life begin to go out. In that moment, when all our positive "hopes" are dead, when all that we have rationally constructed falls away into nothingness, Christian faith bears witness to the hope which can rise up and conquer when all the positive hopes have fallen away. This is the true hope, in which there is 'nothing individual and specific to hold onto', but in which we 'learn that you need no longer hold on in order to be held; that you need no longer fight in order to win'.[476] This is all entirely in keeping with how we have seen Rahner describe hope elsewhere. But here he manages far better to reconcile abandonment to the darkness of death with the positive content that there certainly is in the Gospel:

> There is something else in Christian hope: knowledge that Jesus in the very movement of defeat is victorious. These two aspects (letting oneself fall into the inconceivability of God, into unutterable blessedness, *and* recognition of the victory of Jesus in his mortal defeat) determine and support one another in a Christian.[477]

Whereas in his theology of sickness, Rahner characterised the darkness of death as being dark because it is blindingly filled with God's light,[478] here our turn to and surrender into the loneliness and inconceivability of death is not to allow our life 'to drop despairing into empty meaningless.'[479] It is to recognise that the experience of death for us is transformed into a moment in which we 'must confess Jesus as the one who lives with God for ever... for this crucified Man loved [us] too, right up to the end.'[480] What is important here is that Rahner is not filling the darkness of death with positive content. He is not saying that, because we confess that Jesus is risen, we hope for a positively worked out eschatology, in which we shall frolic with our loved ones in a heavenly field of flowers. No. That would be the idolatry of a rationally constructed God and future. Rather, it is to say that the context for our turn to death and our surrender to darkness is confessing that the one *into whom we surrender ourselves* is the victorious one, the one who loves us, even to the point of his own death in darkness. The loneliness of death is not empty and the incomprehensibility is not meaningless, because the darkness into which we surrender ourselves is the God whom we know in Jesus.

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[474] Rahner, "Faith, hope and love", p.81.

[475] ibid. p.82.

[476] ibid.

[477] ibid.

[478] Rahner, "On Proving Oneself in Time of Sickness", p.278.

[479] Rahner, "Faith, hope and love", p.83.

[480] ibid.

And so, finally, we turn to the third theological virtue: love. Rahner frames his discussion of love with the question, 'Did the Crucified Jesus love us and therefore me, on the cross? Can I really love him?'[481] This is interesting because Rahner uses his discussion about love as an opportunity to throw all his discussion of faith and hope onto Jesus, to remind us that if all that has been said about faith and hope is true for us, then it must also be true for Jesus the Crucified. And if this is all true about the Crucified, then it is also true that Jesus experienced all this for love of us. And if this is true then this must have implications for our dying also:

> Did Jesus love me on the cross? ... Could he know about me in the Godforsaken darkness and terrible impotence of his death? Was there room for me in this dying Jesus? Does that love reach me over all that space and time? Does it reach out to me where I have to live and die, here and now? Our answer must be a faithful Yes, even if we do not know how such love is possible in the heart of a finite man and in the darkness of death.[482]

Although Rahner goes on to explore the love of Christ for us as a basis for the love we have for each other,[483] what is interesting for our purposes is the recapitulation of the themes in Rahner's *On the Theology of Death* about the power of Christ's death to transform our own. And these are here refracted through the lenses of faith, hope and love, the theological virtues which are created in us by the Holy Spirit, which Rahner understands particularly with reference to his theology of hope. Rahner's argument in this essay is not primarily that through faith, hope and love we come to love Jesus more, as might be a pietistic understanding. Rather, it is that by turning to the cross as Jesus' death and our own (i.e. faith) we can cast off all our positive hopes and truly begin to cast ourselves into the darkness of the victorious one (i.e. hope) and grasp the reality that Jesus *loves us* on the cross and even now (i.e. love). What is striking is that this parsing of the theological virtues of faith, hope and love contains all the elements of Rahner's earlier theology of hope: confrontation with the reality of death throughout our lives (understood through the lens of the virtue of faith); abandonment in the context of the real-ontological dialectic of light/dark and activity/passivity (understood through the lens of the virtue of hope); and the light of the presence of God which we encounter in that darkness (understood through the lens of Christ's love for us making possible the virtue of love in us). This essay on faith, hope and love does not put hope in a broader context. Rather, it translates Rahner's earlier theology of hope into the standard theology of the three theological virtues, and in a way which expresses the fact that hope is not for Rahner a static virtue but is a dynamic process, of growth and encounter, which continues throughout our lives.

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[481] ibid.

[482] ibid.

[483] The interpersonal implications of this theology is a theme I will note in the conclusion of this thesis.

But this parsing of Rahner's theology of hope into the terms of faith, hope and love is particularly important for our purposes (exploring pneumatological implications of Rahner's understanding of the eucharist and hope) because the first element of hope, the encounter and confrontation with death, is framed in terms of encounter with the reality of Christ's death. Of this there is no more direct form before our own death than the encounter with Christ's death in the ritual asceticism of the eucharist. And Rahner reframes this ritualised encounter with the death of the incarnate Word as being prepared by the grace of faith which is created in us by the Holy Spirit. Then, this encounter with the death of the incarnate Word prepared by the Holy Spirit leads us on to the other aspects of hope, which are also framed as graces created in us by the Holy Spirit. What we have then is, in quite a complex way, the dynamism of Spirit and Word that we saw earlier in this chapter: the Spirit preparing the way for our encounter with the Word, and this leading us further into the life of the Spirit.

Because Rahner contextualises his exploration of his theology of hope in the theological virtues, created graces all, we can (not unreasonably) begin to deepen our understanding of the dynamism going on here in Rahner's thought, by connecting his reasoning here with his thinking about uncreated and created grace. First, as we saw in section *(iv)* above, Rahner makes a complex argument about imputing the presence of the Holy Spirit from the created graces. He shows that, whilst it is quite accepted theological practice to impute the presence of the created graces (e.g. faith, hope and love) from the presence of the Holy Spirit – since the presence of the Holy Spirit in us gives rise to these things as fruits of the Spirit – one can also make an argument that where the created graces are evidenced (like faith, hope and love) one can also impute the presence of the Holy Spirit in the believer. Where Rahner talks of hope then, we can argue from Rahner's own reasoning that *whenever Rahner talks of hope, he is talking of a grace which is created in us by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.* This is a vital leap, because it is the key to seeing the implicit Pneumatology which runs throughout Rahner's theology of death. *All the aspects of his theology of hope which he called later faith, hope and love, confrontation with death, abandonment and the real-ontological dialectic, and encounter with the light within the darkness: all these are made possible in us and for us because the Holy Spirit dwells within us.*

But this is not to say that at our beginning or at our baptism we receive the Spirit and then these things are possible for us, as if a switch has been thrown. Also in section *(iv)* we saw how Rahner argues that one cannot simply order uncreated and created grace in a hierarchy of priority in the life of the believer: one cannot simply say that A leads to B. So we cannot say that the Spirit is given to us and that therefore we are able to hope in the context of death. Rather, Rahner argues that uncreated and created grace have a reciprocal priority, a reciprocal causality: A leads to B; and A is possible because of B. Like the (false) problem of the chicken and egg (eggs evolved long before chickens!), understanding the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the created grace of hope in terms of reciprocal priority forces our thinking into dynamism: and this not simply in terms of static rotation (A leads to B which leads back to A). Reciprocal

priority represents the Spirit and hope in our lives as a dynamic movement towards that destination to which the Spirit is leading us: our end in the life of God. The Spirit creates in us hope, and because of hope we can live the life of the Spirit.

(vi) Rahner's eucharistic theology as dynamic epiklesis

Let us now draw the argument of this chapter together. In the epiklesis in the Liturgy of St John Chrysostom, and in the prayers of the Roman Rite to which the epiklesis has been restored, the epiklesis is split into two parts. Before the memorial of Christ's passion and the words of institution, the first part of the epiklesis contains two elements: the invocation of the Holy Spirit; to consecrate the eucharistic elements. These might fairly be characterised as prayers for the Spirit to make present to us the Word, so that there may be a true communion, and this in the sense of a making present of the Incarnate Word. Then, after the memorial of Christ's passion and the words of institution, there is the second part, for a true communion and sharing in the life of the Spirit, which in the liturgy of St John reads as follows:

> So that they may be for those who partake of them for vigilance of soul, remission of sins, communion of Your Holy Spirit, fullness of the Kingdom of Heaven, boldness before You, not for judgment or condemnation.[484]

One of the functions of the split epiklesis, therefore, is to include the eucharistic role of the Holy Spirit in the eucharistic prayer, and to do so in a way that is not static, but dynamic. The split epiklesis embodies a theology in which the Spirit enables communion with the word, which then enables a greater sharing in the life of the Spirit, and so the spiral into fullness of life continues.

In terms of Rahner's eucharistic theology, we have already seen that the Spirit brings us to confrontation with death by the created grace of faith, that the Spirit enables us to surrender into the incomprehensible grace of God by the created grace of hope, and that by the created grace of love the Spirit enables us to know the love of God who loves us even in death. And that all these are encapsulated in the theology of hope which is contained in Rahner's earlier theology of death. They are also all elements of the subjective reception of the Word and communion with the Word in the eucharist. In Rahner's parsing out of his theology of hope in the context of the created graces of faith, hope and love, we see flesh put on the theological bones of his ideas about the conditions for the saving mediation of Christ. In the intercommunication of the supernatural existential and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, which is dynamically presupposed by the ministry of Christ, we can come (if we accept it) to 'the concrete and

[484] The Liturgy of St John Chrysostom is available in English and Greek at https://www.goarch.org/-/the-divine-liturgy-of-saint-john-chrysostom [last accessed 25th October 2020].

existential 'realisation' and experience of this radical intercommunication'[485] throughout our lives, in a growing in the created graces of faith, hope and love. And what is true for the confrontation with death in our lives as a whole is also true for our confrontation with death in the ritual microcosm of the eucharist. By the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, which we invoke before the words of institution, we can come to the concrete and existential realisation of communion with Christ, as our confrontation with the death of Christ enables us, by the Spirit's creating in us faith, hope and love, to grow in these graces, and to experience fuller communion, just as we invoke the Spirit after the words of institution.

The image of the spiral that we used in understanding reciprocal priority also applies here. In the epiklesis, the Spirit makes possible communion with the word, which makes possible greater life in the Spirit, etc. And with Rahner's theology of hope we can say that the Spirit prepares us to be able to receive the eucharist by making in us the graces of Rahner's theology of hope, enabling a fuller confrontation with the death of Christ, enabling a growth in those graces of hope as we are able to die the death of Christ more fully, and so live the life of the Spirit more fully. The split epiklesis constitutes a spiral of dynamic reciprocal causation. And Rahner's theology of our reception of the eucharist, when his theology of hope is taken into account, also constitutes a spiral of dynamic reciprocal causation. The Spirit and Word in balance in their ministry of uniting us with the Father, and the Spirit and Word united in this ministry with a non-hierarchical model of causation.

Conclusion: the life of the Spirit & the mystery of the eucharist

At this stage of the argument, it is worth bringing in another complex Rahnerian concept: mystery. Mystery for Rahner does not simply mean things that are unknown, and he seeks to transform the way that Catholic theology understands mystery. In his theology of the eucharist Rahner had attempted to shift the discussion from the mechanics of transubstantiation to what it meant to say that God gives us Godself in the eucharist. In his writing on mystery, he transformed the concept of mystery from the prevailing scholastic concept of things that are not known about without the revelation of God (i.e. things which remain the object of faith) to being a question of the very nature of Godself. Mystery for Rahner is not a term for things we do not know about God and God's action except by revelation: mystery is itself a term for God.

(i) Encounter with mystery as encounter with God

[485] Rahner, "One Mediator and many mediations", p.174.

In his primary essay on the concept of mystery, Rahner does not explicitly deal with eucharistic theology. His focus is conceptual, and when he grounds the abstract argument it is to briefly consider the hypostatic union. However, it is striking that when he wants to describe the position we find ourselves in when we are 'the being in face of the nameless mystery which [we] adore[]',[486] his thoughts turn immediately to the eucharist, and he quotes St Thomas' eucharistic hymn, *Adoro te devote, latens Deitas*. Questions of mystery have eucharistic implications and, as Rahner conceives it, the encounter with God in the eucharist is an encounter with mystery.

Rahner critiques the scholastic concept of mystery for failing to give a thorough account of mystery in the context of the beatific vision which is both unified and which also does not reduce all senses of mystery into a pastorally unhelpful category of "things it would be best for ordinary people not to worry about". Put simply, the concept of mystery as "what we only know now by faith" works very well when we are alive. But what does it mean when we die and see God face-to-face? Is the mystery totally lifted? Are we now able to know God fully? Of course not, Rahner responds, for God's incomprehensibility 'even in the *visio beatifica*' is 'a doctrine obvious in itself and dogmatically assured.'[487] But then, what do we see in the beatific vision? And should our failure to comprehend God be considered a lack? Again, Rahner responds in the negative. What we comprehend in the beatific vision is precisely God's incomprehensibility. And this is no lack. This is to see God as God is: 'God is directly seen as the infinite and incomprehensible, and [so] the *visio beatifica* must then be the permanent presence of the inexpressible and nameless'.[488] Vision in the context of this mystery must mean both grasping the mystery and being grasped by it, so that 'the supreme act of knowledge is not the abolition or diminution of the mystery but its final assertion, its eternal and total immediacy.'[489] Rahner draws us back to his theology of death, for this is not 'a preliminary sphere of darkness which is to be gradually lit up',[490] but is rather the 'primordial and fundamental' 'truly super-luminous darkness'.[491]

And how does this fulfil us? Where is our hope in this darkness, which is dark even in the light of beatitude, which is unseeable even in the light shining from God's face? Rahner answers this by exploring the problem of how love and knowledge are connected. They are not unconnected parallel relationships to an object. Rather, we can say that knowledge and love are connected, that they interpenetrate because the person

[486] Rahner, "The Concept of Mystery in Catholic Theology", in TI 4.2, pp. 36-74, p.37.

[487] ibid. p.41.

[488] ibid.

[489] ibid.

[490] ibid, p.42.

[491] ibid.

knowing [*Geist*] is '*one* in the '*perichoresis*' (circumincession) of knowledge and love':[492] the knower and the lover are one and the same person, so knowing and loving are fundamentally linked. Rahner then argues that, though knowledge is prior to love (we must know something in order to love it), knowledge can only be truly realised when the object of our knowledge greatly exceeds our faculty of knowing. Knowledge is not the end. It is the means to love. The greatest object of our knowledge which exceeds our faculty of knowing is *the primordial mystery* which is God. And this mystery confronts us:

> It is the mystery that forces knowledge either to be more than itself or to despair. For as distinct from love it is the faculty which grasps the object to submit to its *a priori* laws, the faculty of weighing and judging, of seizing and comprehending. But in so far as the reason is more than reason, when it is understood as a potentiality only to be actuated in love, then it must indeed be the faculty which welcomes the greater sight unseen, the faculty of simple rapture, of submissive dedication, of loving ecstasy. But this it can only be if its most proper object is that sovereign and all-embracing exigence which cannot be mastered, comprehended or challenged: in a word, the mystery. And mystery is not merely a way of saying that reason has not yet completed its victory. It is the goal where reason arrives when it attains its perfection by becoming love.[493]

When confronted by the ultimate and primordial mystery that is seeing God face-to-face in the beatific vision, our faculty of knowing is surpassed by the infinity of God. And so we either accept it or reject it.[494] Rahner expresses this in terms with which we are familiar from his theology of death:

> The mystery [God's infinity], being essential to the 'object' to which the intellect is primarily ordained, forces [the intellect] either to consume itself in protest or to transform itself in the self-surrender by which it accepts the mystery as such, that is, in love, and so to attain its proper perfection. Thus the nature of spirit [the unity of the person of the knower] also shows that mystery is not just a provisional limit of thought, as it usually appears in the theology of the schools.[495]

That is all very well for the beatific vision: that there we encounter the fundamental mystery which is the infinity of God, and that this is parsed in terms of self-surrender to the darkness of that mystery in love. But how does this work for encounters with God before the beatific vision?

Rahner begins to discuss the nature of grace, as uncreated encounter with God before our death, in contrast with the beatific vision, the fulfilment of the promise of those encounters:

> Grace and the beatific vision can only be understood as the possibility and the reality respectively of the immediate presence of the holy mystery as such.[496]

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[492] ibid. p.43.

[493] ibid.

[494] cf. also Craigo-Snell's parsing of our awareness of mystery 'precisely where human knowledge fails' in Rahner's theological anthropology in *Silence, Love and Death*, p.35ff.

[495] Rahner, "The Concept of Mystery in Catholic Theology", p.44.

[496] ibid. p.55.

Does this mean that grace is somehow lesser than the direct encounter with God in the beatific vision, as merely "the possibility" of "the reality"? And if so, how? It is at first unclear whether Rahner's solution to this problem is to make a quantitative rather than a qualitative distinction between grace and the beatific vision:

> Grace is therefore the grace of the *nearness* of the *abiding* mystery: it makes God accessible in the form of the holy mystery and presents him thus as the incomprehensible. In the vision of God face to face which grace makes possible many mysteries are indeed removed. But this only means that what they express is manifested in its own being and substance, is experienced therefore in itself and must no longer rely for its manifestation on the word that does duty for it and the authority of the recognized spokesman and prophet. Nonetheless, these mysteries remain mysterious and incomprehensible.[497]

Perhaps Rahner's solution is both. In the beatific vision, there are fewer mysteries in the sense that there are fewer *unknowns* to us – there is more knowledge. But it is also significant that in sacraments and for the means of grace that rely on word (as well as matter) the sheer infinity that is revealed as mystery in the beatific vision cannot be revealed, because God's infinity is veiled under the finitude of sacrament and word. In grace we come close to seeing the mystery of God's infinity face-to-face. We glimpse it in so far as we are able through the finite things of word and sacrament. In the sacraments, God is 'the God of the aloof and distant mystery' whereas, in the beatific vision, 'as the God of the absolute proximity of self-communication he is indeed the God whose name is holy mystery.'[498] Grace (and the incarnation) 'are simply the mysteriously radical form of the mystery which we have shown to be the primordial one.'[499]

But what about the mystery of the eucharist? Rahner's fundamental distinction between the *mere unknown* of the process of transubstantiation and the *mystery* of God's presence with us begins to make more sense. The *unknown* of transubstantiation does not reveal God's infinity. But the *mystery* of God's presence with us in the sacrament does reveal something of and lead us on to the *primordial mystery* that is God's infinity. This is the mystery to which Rahner believes the *Adoro te devote* truly points: not the mechanism of transubstantiation but the infinity of God which 'is the sole peace of him who trusts himself to it, loves it humbly, and surrenders himself to it fearlessly in knowledge and love. The mystery is eternal light and eternal peace.'[500] It is to the encounter with this mystery in the eucharist which we now turn.

(ii) Encounter with God in the mystery of the eucharist

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[497] ibid. p.56.

[498] ibid. p.61.

[499] ibid. p.67.

[500] ibid. p.58.

In his essay on "The Eucharist and Suffering", Rahner considers the role of the eucharist as making present 'the bloody sacrifice offered once and for all on the Cross and to preserve the memory of this sacrifice until the end of time', as defined at the Council of Trent.[501] What is interesting for our purposes is that Rahner focusses on the 'will to sacrifice' which made Jesus' sacrifice holy.[502] Rahner identifies the 'sacrificial mind' and 'sacrificial disposition' of Jesus on the cross as the source of the grace and redemption of the cross.[503] And Rahner frames the sacrificial mind of Jesus in this context:

> It is the will for the Cross, the obedience unto death, the voluntary sacrifice of his life by the one who has power to give his life or to keep it, by the one who gave it because this was his Father's will. It was therefore a will for sorrow, for the chalice of bitterness, for destruction, because God was to be glorified precisely by such a voluntary acceptance of suffering. ... Suffering and dying are the destruction of what is human; they are a task of one's own fulfilment, one's own pleasure and honour.[504]

Rahner frames his discussion of the eucharist in which we participate by focussing on Jesus' mind on the cross, as Jesus faces his own death, and he does this in terms which relate to how he described the real-ontological dialectic of activity and passivity in the self-fulfilment of our own death. But here, he is able to connect this with his ideas about ritualised asceticism:

> No amount of suffering, death, dark night and denial of the unruly will to live could have forced God to come down to man. But such active renunciation of one's own happiness as is contained in surrender to pain and sorrow is still the clearest practical confession of the fact that man, conscious of his own powerlessness in the face of the God of forgiveness and elevating grace, expects his salvation from above and not from himself and hence can and will sacrifice his ego and its values, those values which are powerless to procure his salvation.[505]

The sacrificial intent of Christ on the cross is the decision to surrender Christself into the salvific darkness of Godself. And Rahner makes clear that the sacrificial intent of Christ on the cross is exactly the same as the sacrificial intent in the eucharist. Although the manner is different (under species of bread and wine), the same words of consecration offer the same Christ in order 'to announce the Lord's death until he comes.'[506]

But that is Christ's intention: not ours. What for us is the significance of this sacrificial intention of Christ as victim and eternal High Priest? Rahner explains:

> But this mystery of the cross which mysteriously suffuses the celebration of the Mass... takes hold of us who celebrate this mystery, it draws us into itself and subjects us to its unfathomable laws. For

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[501] Rahner, "The Eucharist and Suffering" in TI 2.11, pp.161- 170, p.161.

[502] ibid. p.162.

[503] ibid.

[504] ibid. pp.162-163.

[505] ibid. p.163.

[506] ibid. p.163-164.

> when (and this is true of all of us) we lend Christ, the eternal High Priest, our hands and voice so that he may offer the sacrifice of the New Covenant to the Father through us, then we cannot be his holy 'liturgists' other than by entering into the sacrificial outlook of Christ which alone gives value and dignity to this sacred action. When we sacrifice with Christ, then his inner mind, his resignation and readiness to suffer, his will for the cross and sorrow and death must take hold of us too, so that we do not merely take part in the external happening but also in his interior intentions, full of terror and sweetness at the same time, in the mystery of the Cross which animates this sacrifice.[507]

Rahner is talking here particularly of the actions of the priest in the eucharistic rite, but he expands this to include all who are actively participating in the eucharist, participating in soul and body through speaking and eucharistic eating. What we have here is a parsing into the eucharistic mode of what Rahner argued it meant to die the death of Christ in his *On the Theology of Death*. In the Eucharist we lend Christ our souls and bodies ('to be a living sacrifice,' as the Church of England's liturgy puts it)[508] so that we may be drawn into the sacrificial attitude of Christ on the Cross which is the sacrificial attitude of Christ the High Priest at the altar. And this (we can read into this particular essay, knowing Rahner's argument in *On the Theology of Death* and elsewhere) so that we can in fact die the death of Christ, so that we can die with that same sacrificial attitude of surrender and self-fulfilment when our time comes. The ascetic rehearsal of Christ's death exists in part in order for us to rehearse and be incorporated into that sacrificial attitude, disposition and mind ourselves. As Rahner puts it:

> If, however, this body and blood in their sacramental manner of existence still announce the death of the Lord, is it not inevitable then that this sacrament – if it effectively takes hold of us by its own power – should make us subject to the mystery it announces, which is the death of Christ.

This is the final piece of the jigsaw which enables us to see how maybe Rahner understands the life-long movement towards the fulness of God's life to operate in the eucharist. In incorporating us into Christ's death, the eucharist also incorporates us into the "attitude", the disposition of abandonment to death, the habit of acceptance and surrender of death. This is what is meant by the life of the Spirit, into which we move by the dynamic communion effected by the gift of the Spirit and the gift of the presence of Christ in the eucharist. What Rahner, therefore, achieves, is an understanding of the eucharist which is not only dynamic, including the role of the Spirit as well as the post-Tridentine christological focus on the words of institution. But Rahner also manages to give substance to the idea of life in the Spirit which is the fruit of communion with Christ, and in a way which does not simply lazily reach for the Pauline lists of the fruits of the Spirit, or simply gesture in the direction of the beatific vision. No, what this eucharistic theology achieves is a profound call to communion with Christ in the power of the Spirit and seeking the life of the

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[507] ibid. p.164.

[508] The Church of England, Post Communion Prayer in Holy Communion, Order One, available at https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/common-worship/holy-communion-service#mm7c2 (last accessed 8th December 2020).

Spirit, which is growing in habituated abandonment, acceptance and detachment, ever moving towards the abandonment of Christ to his death, the surrender of Christ to his future in the effulgent darkness of God. And this growing in habituated abandonment is not simply a matter of rote learning, by the repeated practice of the eucharistic ritual: it is a fruit of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit which leads us into the death of Christ which is our life. Since dying the death of Christ, in its anticipatory eucharistic rehearsal and final reality, is a fruit of true eucharistic communion in the body and blood of Christ, we can understand the life of the Spirit into which true communion leads us in terms of dying the death of Christ. The sacrificial disposition which is the fruit of true communion is not merely a learned or habituated disposition: it is a gift of the Holy Spirit, a sign of life in the Spirit, into which we are led more deeply with each eucharist.

Cautionary note: suffering and spiritual growth

We must add a word of caution at this point. In "The Eucharist and Suffering", Rahner begins to attempt an account of our lifelong participation in the Spirit as a context for his ideas about incorporation into the sacrificial disposition of Christ on the cross in the eucharist: we are able to participate with Christ in the eucharist because of our incorporation into his body by the Spirit in our baptism. However, Rahner's argument is limited mainly to proof-texting Pauline quotes about what it means to be united with Christ's body, and so living and dying with him. Rahner's reasoning here is not clearly thought through, and has disturbing implications: not least that, since he argues that 'suffering and death are in the proper sense manifestations and means by which the growth and perfecting of the new life in Christ are achieved', Rahner comes close to lending credence to masochistic ascetic practices which seek to join us by suffering self-inflicted to the suffering Christ, or even to the sadistic infliction of suffering on others in order for them to grow spiritually.[509] Both have been a serious problem at times during the history of Christian spirituality. Rahner is attempting to make an argument that, by power of the Holy Spirit in our baptism, 'we are drawn into the life-circle of Christ',[510] but in this essay he fails to develop that thought further without relying on ecclesiological solutions (i.e. the Spirit calls us into the Church, and as members of the Church the body of Christ we are able to share in the life and suffering of the body of Christ on the Cross).[511] However, the failure of that sort of ecclesiological / communitarian solution to individual suffering is that, within the community of the church, it is still individuals who suffer. Simply saying that, in Christ, suffering belongs to the whole church does not provide much solace to the person who is individually suffering, or perhaps much by way of real communion and sharing in suffering with the member of the church who is not actually suffering. And there is also the risk that not only do we baptise individual

[509] Rahner, "The Eucharist and Suffering", p.166.

[510] ibid. p.165.

[511] This argument is sketched in outline at the end of the essay. pp.168-170.

suffering as somehow inherently good, but we also encourage some sort of "virtuous" suffering on behalf of the wider church. Fundamentally, the danger of spiritualised masochism is not overcome.

This is one reason why Rahner's eucharistic theology, as I have presented it, is so appealing. It does not baptise suffering, not does it call us to seek it out. Rather, growing in the life of the Spirit is related to two sorts of suffering, neither of which we are called to seek out and artificially replicate: the suffering of Christ in death which has already been done for us, and the daily suffering which we do not seek out but to which we respond (in the real-ontological dialectic of activity and passivity, as we explored in chapter 1). Indeed, it could be argued (I think convincingly) that to seek out suffering artificially in a spiritually masochistic sense would be to deny the darkness of the future which God has in hand for us. To seek out suffering artificially is not to die the death of Christ, but to die the death of Adam, seeking to forge our own future. Rather, the spiritual focus of Rahner's eucharistic theology, in as much as it really pertains to suffering at all, is limited to the lifegiving habituation by the gift of the Spirit and communion with Christ, of an attitude of abandonment, which will enable us to grow always towards the fulness of life in God, in bad times as well as good, in suffering as well as comfort. This is, I think, a profoundly important lesson of Rahner's Ignatian inheritance. As we explored in chapter 2, the Jesuit virtue of indifference, which affected Rahner's own ideas about abandonment, has at its heart the discernment of God's will whether one is rich or poor, in good times or in bad. To seek out suffering, or to suggest to others that they should be suffering more, in order to obtain the benefits of Christ's passion or be good members of the body of Christ, is to fundamentally miss the point.

IV – The Darkness of God and the Darkness of the Spirit in Rahner's Trinity

In this chapter, we shall begin to consider the darkness of death and the Holy Spirit in a more trinitarian dimension. To do this, I will first explore some of the criticism's made of Rahner / Rahnerian models of the Trinity by Katherine Sonderegger, bringing out her emphasis on the absolute Aseity / Holiness of God. I shall then briefly outline Rahner's arguments in his composite essay, *The Trinity*, emphasising the complexities and limitations of those arguments, as well as exploring how the notions we have already discussed of divine darkness may alter the way we interpret *The Trinity*. Finally, I shall engage with some of the Pneumatology of Etienne Vetö to bring to bear the potential I believe exists within Rahner's trinitarian Pneumatology for a rich understanding of the darkness of the Holy Spirit and its impact on our lives (and deaths!). In this chapter I also give a little space to gesture towards some of the creative dialogues which might be possible between Rahner and other theologians' work on the Trinity and the Spirit. Although there was not the space to carry out that sort of dialogue throughout the thesis, this chapter offers a sample of the possibilities within Rahner's theology for wider theological exploration.

Katherine Sonderegger: the aseity of God and divine darkness

The first two volumes of Katherine Sonderegger's *Systematic Theology* do not contain much by way of explicit engagement with Rahner's theology. However, Rahner does appear in Sonderegger's argument from time to time. Her purpose (particularly in the first volume) is to establish a notion of the absolute otherness of God, without leaving theology nothing more to go on than the experiential and the concrete.

> The doctrine of God in Christian dogmatics has often been stymied and cut short by this pious conviction that we should confess our ignorance of the Divine Mystery, forswear all empty speculation, and turn to those things we can know, the earthly and concrete.[512]

To lapse into 'reverent silence' without 'press[ing] on to know the Lord'[513] is, in Sonderegger's view, an idolatrous failure into which Anglo-American theology has fallen in moving away from the 'naked doctrine of God'.[514] Although her primary targets are narrative theology in all its forms, and although she identifies the roots of the problem with theological moves made long before Rahner, Sonderegger does however identify 'the more famous maxim of some Rahnerians, [that] *the Economic Trinity is the Immanent, and vice*

[512] Katherine Sonderegger, *Systematic Theology*: *volume 1, the doctrine of God* (Minneapolis, Fortress Press: 2015), p.392.

[513] ibid.

[514] ibid. p.7.

versa', as the rallying cry for this modern turn to the human narrative and away from the divine reality.[515] This maxim is of course a direct quote (though usually taken without context) from Rahner's *Trinity*. Some careful framing is therefore required before we begin this engagement with Sonderegger's reading of Rahner. Most importantly, we must note that Sonderegger's critical readings of Rahner are (here, often) heavily affected by their context, and exist as proxy skirmishes in her wider argument. I will not therefore mount a systematic evaluation of her representation of Rahner's thought in these first two volumes, or a wider evaluation of Sonderegger's argument. Rather, I will explore issues she raises which have implications for this thesis. First, I hope to provide a worked example of the usefulness of the sort of careful listening to the layers and nuance in Rahner's arguments which I have attempted in this thesis. But second, and more importantly, I hope to show how Rahner's Trinitarian approach, far from being the spectre which Sonderegger portrays, may actually assist her argument for a more positive engagement with the "naked" doctrine of God, especially in the context of divine aseity. The complexity we have seen in Rahner's thinking about the darkness of death may in fact assist Sonderegger's argument for a living doctrine of God rooted in the witness of Holy Scripture as interpreted by the tradition.

Early in the first volume of her *Systematic Theology,* Sonderegger lays the groundwork for the terms on which she is going to engage with Rahner throughout the first two volumes. In relatively straightforward terms, she portrays Rahner's theology of God as Mystery as fundamentally anti-propositionalist, as inherently contrary to a "naked" doctrine of God:

> We are not told *truths* about God in His revelation; rather, we are brought into the Truth of God Himself. Just this is Rahner's antipropositionalism in theology. Rahner calls this divine self-donation to creatures *Permanent Mystery*: our knowledge of God, given to us by God's own nearness, brings about in us an inexhaustible mystery that can never be mastered or dissolved. Even in eternal life... He remains mystery... God's Hiddenness, then, arises not from an epistemic failure but rather from an epistemic success.[516]

Sonderegger approves the fact that Rahner attempts to describe the mystery of God in a way which establishes the compatibility of humanity and grace and 'underscores the Divine Freedom over our knowledge of God', and in a way that 'allows God's own metaphysical dignity to ground and open up creaturely knowledge and self-knowledge.'[517] However, she rejects the mechanisms she considers Rahner to have used to establish that theology of God as Mystery.

> Too much is said about the structure and movements of human subjectivity; too much about the coordination of creaturely and Creator transcendence; too much about the means and conditions

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[515] ibid. Sonderegger is not alone in this. Matthew Levering seems to treat Rahner's "maxim" in the same way, in that it risks 'conflating the economy of salvation with the intratrinitarian life' (Matthew Levering, *Engaging the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit: love and gift in the Trinity and the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), pp.169-170, incl. fn.3).

[516] ibid. p.89.

[517] ibid. p.90.

> for possible religious experience. It may well be that some - perhaps even all! - of Rahner's presuppositions are correct; but we cannot have such confidence that they, they alone, are the true and proper form of divine-human compatibilism.[518]

Rahner's theology is, for Sonderegger, too confident, too bold. As she puts it laconically: it is 'too much, too neat.'[519]

But what is 'too much, too neat'? Is it Rahner's theology of God as mystery? Is it the theological picture he paints, the theological anthropology which we have explored throughout this thesis, the trajectory of the human person in our entirety into the splendid mystery of God's infinity? I do not think so. What we have here is, fundamentally, not an argument against Rahner's theology. Rather, it is an argument against a foundationalist reading of Rahner's theology. Interestingly, Sonderegger's primary sources of Rahner throughout her *Systematic Theology* are *Hearers of the Word* and *Spirit in the World*, and she often block quotes (and often at length) from *Foundations of Christian Faith* what purport to be summaries of the philosophical concepts in these works.[520] For example, Sonderegger excludes the possibility of a reading of Rahner (which we have attempted throughout this thesis) in which the concept of Mystery is understood as an epistemic claim, as a claim about what we can know as individuals about God, a claim made against the backdrop of the whole arc of human existence from birth to the beatific vision. Sonderegger writes:

> We might summarize our whole development in this way: the doctrine of negative Attributes does not refer to or principally concern itself first of all with *creatures*. This is not a form of world denial. Rather, the doctrine of negative Attributes - as does the doctrine of positive Attributes - refers to, concerns itself with, and points to *God*, to His Aseity and Being. This, I take it, is the force of Rahner's claim that God is "Permanent Mystery." These negations are thus fully realist in character, metaphysical and substantial, neither bare epistemic limits nor denials of creaturely traits.[521]

We have already discussed in the introduction to this thesis the dangers of attempting a foundationalist reading of Rahner, and of relying on the student's conceptual introduction that is *Foundations of Christian Faith* or Rahner's early writings when he aspired to be a philosopher. Perhaps these are revealed when Sonderegger writes that 'a vast domain stretches between Rahner's complex and fully articulated system and the mystagogery of an undisciplined theologian [the mystic].'[522] For Sonderegger, reading Rahner in a more foundationalist manner, Rahner's complex philosophical system not only gives rise to matters of

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[518] ibid. p.91.

[519] ibid. p.92.

[520] Particularly notable is Sonderegger's use of these sources on p.196 to compare Rahner's philosophy of mind with Schleiermacher's argument that 'absolute piety ... must always emerge in the midst of our knowledge of and action in the world.'

[521] ibid. pp.114-115.

[522] ibid. p.92.

concern: it doesn't seem to fit well with life or with the everyday mystical life of Christians. In contrast, what we have seen throughout this thesis is the value which can be gained in reading Rahner in a non-foundationalist way, in accepting that *he does not have* a fully articulated philosophical structure behind many of the theological moves he makes.

At the end of volume 1, however, Sonderegger gives a tantalising glimpse, with a weighty "perhaps", into the more substantive (in theological terms) engagement with Rahner which will follow in the second volume, on the Trinity, and it is in the context of her affirmation of the hiddenness of God:

> In addition to all the other modes in which God can dwell with His creatures, the Almighty is hidden in this unique mode as well: He is the silent and invisible Presence in all our inwardness, the Reality in all our creaturely experience, the Love in all our little loves. (Perhaps just this conviction stands behind Rahner's elusive doctrine of God as Horizon and *Vorgriff*.)[523]

It is significant that it is when Sonderegger moves into the realms of God's hiddenness that she notes the theological moves which can be discerned in Rahner's philosophy, an awareness of the pregnancy of darkness and silence with the presence of God, as well as love. And I do not think it is at all surprising that a writer formed in the study of Barth should characterise this as 'the Love in all our little loves', whereas we, following the reasoning of this thesis, might say, "the infinite darkness of death in all our little deaths." It is when Sonderegger begins to explore the respect for darkness and silence in Rahner's thought that it resonates with her desire for a theology which speaks of God boldly, but with a strong negative element to check its boldness:

> We do not err by saying that we know God or that we find disclosed in Holy Writ the attributes, positive predicates, and character of God; just this is what the Holy God permits and commands when we take up Holy Scripture. We err rather in our stubborn refusal to cauterize each moment of positivity by the annihilating Invisibility and Formlessness of Almighty God.[524]

In volume 2, this more positive engagement with Rahner continues, though it is not by any means uncritical. Sonderegger sets out the ground of her critical approach to Rahner by briefly examining Rahner's section in *The Trinity* on the unity of the economic and immanent Trinity, concluding that: '[Rahner argues that] Nothing is revealed which is not for our benefit – I believe Rahner would go this far.'[525] Whether or not this is true is not relevant to our purposes. Rather, it leads Sonderegger to read Rahner as arguing that, as the Trinity is a doctrine with soteriological implications, just so when we examine soteriological questions in theology, there must be Trinitarian implications. And, even further: 'When we understand and receive the benefit of the Incarnation and the outpouring of the Spirit, we understand Trinity: that, I believe is

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[523] ibid. p.527.

[524] ibid. p.528.

[525] Katherine Sonderegger, *Systematic Theology: volume 2, the doctrine of the Holy Trinity: processions and persons* (Minneapolis, Fortress Press: 2020), p.29.

Rahner's fundamental conviction.'[526] In existential terms, encounter with Christ or the Spirit is an encounter with the Trinity. In theological terms, "understanding" in Christology and Pneumatology must also constitute an "understanding" of the Trinity. So Sonderegger frames her engagement with Rahner in volume 2 of her *Systematic Theology* entirely in terms of epistemology, questions of how we know the Trinity, what it means to know the Trinity, and where we encounter the Trinity. For Sonderegger, 'the cure of a pallid Trinitarianism... should not lie in a vigorous soteriology', and so she sets herself against Rahner's trinitarianism (as she reads it), with its strong affirmation that God's offer of Godself to us in truth and love is the mystery which is our salvation.[527] As she puts it rather bluntly, human experience should not be at the heart of dogmatics:

> Rather, we sinners must be moved, quietly but firmly, out of the living center of the Christian religion. Only God stands there.[528]

This line of argument works very well when (ironically) it is pursued in abstract, and in isolation from Rahner's thinking about darkness. Here is Sonderegger's reading of Rahner's Christology:

> The Aseity of the Son would be revealed, truly disclosed and *known*, in the economy, narrated in Holy Scripture. ... We know the Son; better, we know the Eternal Son. He alone is, but truly is, as He appears. The "is of identity" makes its way forward right here, in the Christological joinery between Immanence and economy, heaven and earth. In just this way, the economic and Immanent Trinity are unified, identified and revelation secured.[529]

Sonderegger reads Rahner as suggesting that we can solve the "unknowableness" (Aseity)[530] of the Trinity by focusing on the "knowableness" of the incarnate Son. Sonderegger's main criticism of this line of

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[526] ibid. p.30.

[527] ibid. p.32.

[528] ibid. p.34. Although this is a strongly Barthian turn in the role of dogmatic theology, Sonderegger does note (p.33) that Barth does turn to Christology (so, also soteriology) in order to anchor his trinitarian reasoning.

[529] ibid. p.73.

[530] I suggest that Aseity functions in a very particular way in Sonderegger's *Systematic Theology*. When she introduces the concept of *Aseity*, Sonderegger initially does so with its common meaning, God's being *in Himself*, which she elsewhere develops alongside Barthian transcendent otherness. However, Sonderegger develops the meaning of Aseity in two ways. First, she takes an ontological term and uses it forcefully as an epistemological term, just as she did with the Old Testament concept of Holiness in the first volume to argue that the nature of God had epistemological implications. Second, she complexifies Aseity not immediately with sovereignty or otherness, but with Mystery. The richness of Sonderegger's prose lies in part in her ability to complexify concepts by linking them to extended lists of related concepts, even waterfalls of related concepts (in a manner which, frustratingly, does not make for easy quotation in a thesis!), and she uses these juxtapositions to make real moves in her argument.

> The doctrine of the Holy Trinity, that is, is a dogma about the *inner Life of God*. It is not first and principally a teaching about God's ways with us - not a dogma concerned primarily with what has become known as the

argument is in terms of divine freedom, since 'It seems that revelation demands making the economy *necessary* to God'.[531] However, more problematic for our purposes is Sonderegger's move to read Rahner as saying that 'the Aseity of the Son would be revealed, truly disclosed and *known*'. What does this mean? It does not mean that the Son is revealed in the incarnation *as unknowable*. Rather, that in the incarnation of the Son the unknowableness of the Son is dissolved, and the Son is truly *rendered knowable*. Sonderegger does not provide references or detailed engagement with Rahner's work as she claims that this is what Rahner argues. And in part they are accusations which can be made against most theologians who have worked extensively in Christology, making claims to know something about God based on the revelation of the incarnate Son. But I think that the reason the "is of identity" sticks out so much for Sonderegger here is that Rahnerian Christology *without Rahnerian darkness* does indeed seem to disclose too much. To read Rahner's work *without the cloud of darkness and divine absolute mystery* is to risk dissolving the aseity of God in Christ.

This is particularly apparent when, in volume 2, Sonderegger does begin to approve more of Rahner's argument, since that approval comes in the context of more complex thinking about darkness. Sonderegger finds a convincing approach to divine darkness not in Rahner but in Calvin, who 'knew the will of God as Abyss, as Fathomless Decree and Command', an "abyss" that arises from the difference between the creator and the creature, the potter and the pot.[532] For Calvin, the encounter with the divine "Abyss" is expressed in terms of 'the profound moral struggle that is creaturely life before the Holy Life of God.'[533] The encounter with the divine "Abyss" for Calvin has its existential in terms of ethics.[534] But Sonderegger translates this "Abyss" into terms of "holiness". In a complex passage, Sonderegger writes:

> Nothing in the Divine Life, we must say again, is *simply* or *merely* Conceptual, a Concept of Origin or Mutual Relation. ... [E]ven here we must ward off the quiet assumption that the highest terms of analysis and speculation in the dogma of the Trinity can be weighed and considered apart from Holiness. There is nothing in God, in His Majestic Inwardness, that is not an expression of His Sublime Righteousness, His Singular Wisdom and Goodness. Deity is saturated Goodness, Substantial Living Holiness; there is no other. The Processions must be understood as a Living Stream welling up into

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> economy or, in modern times, as the economic Trinity. No, Trinity teaches us, first and principally, what God is *in Himself*, in His Holy Aseity and Mystery, in His own Transcendent and inner Life. (ibid. p.13)

As we progress through this chapter we shall see how Aseity is modified further by Mystery in Sonderegger's thought. But, in order to reflect in this chapter this epistemological sense of Aseity, and its complexification with Mystery, I will elide Sonderegger's Aseity with "unknowableness".

[531] ibid.

[532] ibid. p.346.

[533] ibid.

[534] Sonderegger does not attempt an evaluation of Calvin here in the way she has of Rahner. At this stage in her argument, Sonderegger is gesturing towards different ways of understanding the Aseity-unknowableness of God.

> righteousness, an ethical Reality, or they cannot be understood at all. In this sense, and with a significant reserve, we can follow Rahner's lead in Trinity: not a Mystery of our salvation, but rather a Mystery of Living and Free Goodness; that is the doctrine of Triune Processions.[535]

We can leave aside the question of what the Trinity as "ethical reality" might mean. What is important here is that there are considerable parallels between what Sonderegger calls divine "Holiness" and what Rahner calls divine "Mystery". First, we must note that both are realities of "otherness": both Holiness and Mystery are concepts which express God's otherness to us. Second, they have epistemological consequences, since this Holiness and Mystery is an "Abyss" into which our positive knowledge falls. Third, they have existential/ethical consequences, since our encounter with that Holiness and Mystery is, in some sense, what transforms us as Christians and brings us to life. Most significantly, and most tellingly, this parallelism between Sonderegger's divine "Holiness" and Rahner's divine "Mystery" only comes into alignment when Sonderegger reads Rahner's[536] Trinitarian theology as 'not a Mystery of our Salvation, but rather a Mystery of Living and Free Goodness'. And this raises the question for us, whether it is possible that a rich engagement with Rahner's theology of divine darkness and divine Mystery may exist as a corrective to oversimplistic interpretations of Rahner's argument in the Trinity about the relationship between the immanent and economic Trinity. Sonderegger is able to see significant value in the Rahnerian way of thinking *when her concept of Holiness is added into the mix*. If Sonderegger's concept of Holiness seems to operate in some of the same ways as Rahner's concept of darkness, what happens if we read Rahner's *The Trinity* with Rahner's concept of darkness firmly in mind? Does Rahner's *Trinity* gain a new depth in darkness and divine mystery?

Re-reading Rahner's *Trinity* in darkness

As we move into an engagement with Rahner's *The Trinity*, it is important to note from the outset that it is a messy text. By this I mean that it is difficult to discern the main threads within Rahner's argument. It is rushed, and Rahner deals with complex issues without giving himself the space to tease them out in that way which makes his best writing so compelling. The task of interpreting this text can feel like interpreting poetry in its subjectivity, and several hermeneutical strands have been discerned as being the dominant in this text in its reception history. The most common recent reading of *The Trinity* frames it as a correction of a historical problem to do with the foundational scholastic treatises *On the One God* and *On the Trinitarian God*. These engage with Rahner to correct his historiography, and they do make important points within those specific debates, but they seem to miss something of the wider purpose of the work

[535] ibid. pp.346-7.

[536] Or, perhaps Sonderegger would be more comfortable to say that she is constructively and creatively developing Rahner's theology.

as a whole.[537] More interesting for our purposes is Travis Ables' attempt to read *The Trinity* more holistically, placing the text in the context of the debates surrounding uncreated grace and proper missions, opening up a more deep-searching engagement with Rahner by placing greater weight on his fundamental purpose (as Ables understands it): that 'Rahner sought the strict correlation of a doctrine of grace and a theology of divine self-giving.'[538] Early on in this project I wrote a short paper for my supervisor in which I argued that *The Trinity* is not really a unified text, but rather a collection of three short essays which are themselves composite. I based this argument on the rather meandering structure of the text, and Rahner's at times infuriating (and significantly out-of-character) repetition of already rehearsed arguments. But after spending an extended time with the text, I no longer believe that this repetition is the product of a lack of connection between the three sections of *The Trinity*. Rather it is a result of the succinctness of Rahner's treatment of complex concepts: he has to constantly signpost the relevance of different sections of the text to wider doctrinal themes because he is not giving them enough space for that relevance to be apparent on its own. In this section I will attempt to give voice to a holistic reading of Rahner's *The Trinity* which is sensitive to the question of *why Rahner is making the arguments he does*, and not only the systematic implications of those arguments. And as that reading unfolds we shall see that this connects issues of darkness and mystery with the sort of pneumatological approach this thesis has taken as a whole.

If we were to read *The Trinity* as does Sonderegger, focussing on questions of epistemology, we might characterise the first two sections of the book as complementary, as chiastic: the first moving from "pure doctrine" to mystery, and the second moving from mystery to "pure doctrine". However it is hard then to see what the third section adds, how it might fit into that scheme, as it does very little to resolve the sort of chiastic dialectic which the first two sections have set up. Rather, I think it better to interpret the relation of the three sections (how ironic that this should be the starting point for reading an essay on the Trinity!) in a thematic way, by way of characterising the general feel of the overall argument of each section. Then we can see what shape emerges in the work as a whole. The first section makes an argument that it is to miss the point to ask questions about whether the threeness or the oneness in Trinitarian theology come first. What is significant for all Trinitarian theology as a starting point is that God is revealed as fundamental

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[537] e.g. David Rohrer Budiash, "Fundamental Theology for the Trinity: Karl Rahner's Contribution" in *The Heythrop Journal*, 57 (2016), pp.917-934; Philip Cary, "On Behalf of Classical Trinitarianism: A Critique of Rahner on the Trinity" in *The Thomist*, 56 (1992), p.367; Derrick Peterson notes how badly Rahner treats his sources in making this historical correction, "A Sacred Monster: on the secret fears of some recent trinitarianism" in *Cultural Encounters*, 12 (2016), pp.3-36, p.22, 24-25, noting Philip Gabriel Renczes, "The Scope of Rahner's Fundamental Axiom in the Patristic Perspective: A Dialogue of Systematic and Historical Theology" in *Rethinking Trinitarian Theology: Disputed Questions and Contemporary Issues in Trinitarian Theology*, ed. Giulio Maspeo and Robert J. Wozniak (NY: T&T Clark, 2012).

[538] Travis E. Ables, "The Decline and Fall of the West? Debates about the Trinity in Contemporary Christian Theology" in *Religion Compass*, 6 (2012), pp.163-173, p.171, cf. p.164.

Mystery. In the second section, Rahner explores the complexity of official church doctrine. Perhaps Sonderegger would refer to this as "pure doctrine". But Rahner's argument here is essentially made by laying out a bewildering array of brief summaries of Trinitarian concepts. But, importantly, in the third section, he emphasises again that this "pure doctrine" is confusing and messy in its development (particularly in relation to the concept of "person/hypostasis"), but that it is still relevant to Christians, and even would be with new interpretations and applications of Trinitarian doctrine (he uses a worked example of a psychological model of the Trinity). An overall sweeping argument within *The Trinity*, therefore, is that one can affirm that God is fundamental mystery and still use the official doctrine of the Church, and all this in a way that is certainly relevant to the lives of Christians. Already, this general sweeping survey of *The Trinity* looks very different to the way Sonderegger characterised it in volume 1 of her *Systematic Theology*, and closer to the ideas nearer the end of her second volume: that the sheer otherness of God (which Sonderegger calls the Holiness of God) and the "pure doctrine" of the Trinity are still important for Christians.

Let us now illustrate the significance of this reading of *The Trinity* by focussing on three "hinge moments" in the text, moments when Rahner actually gives himself enough space at least to gesture towards the sort of deeply worked-through arguments which are the norm in most of his work. The first "hinge moment" comes at the end of the first section of the book – it is where the meandering of the first section lands – and is subtitled, "The Reality and the Doctrine of the Trinity as Mysteries". Here, Rahner might come across as rudely disparaging the value of "pure doctrine" of the Trinity. He writes:

> [The Mystery both of the Trinity and human nature] is why it is meaningless to deny this mysteriousness, trying to hide it by an accumulation of subtle concepts and distinctions which only seem to shed more light upon the mystery, while in fact they feed man with verbalisms which operate as tranquilisers for *naïvely* shrewd minds, and dull the pain they feel when they have to worship the mystery without understanding it.[539]

He immediately cites arguments about the meaning of "person" (in terms of relation or procession) as an example of this theological waste of time, which fails to actually help Christians. But this is rhetoric, and perhaps we miss the humour of the weighty 'On the other hand' which follows, having been lulled into sobriety by the arguments which precede this section. In this 'On the other hand', Rahner (also rather rudely) lampoons the 'premature impatience of the rationalist and of the "kerygmatist" which leads them to dismiss Trinitarian theology as 'mere verbalisms'.[540] Overreliance on abstract doctrine simply stated (in its complexity!) is just as dangerous as is enthusiastic deconstruction and critique of our doctrinal inheritance. Interestingly, Rahner then makes an important move which, he suggests, might act as a useful "test" (though Rahner does not use that word) for Trinitarian theology:

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[539] Rahner, *The Trinity*, p.47.

[540] ibid. p.48.

> When a true statement about the Trinity is correctly understood and translated into our life, the correctly understood theory points quite naturally towards real life, as lived in faith and in grace, in which the mystery of the triune God himself holds sway and which is not simply constituted by its conceptual objectification.[541]

At first glance, it might seem that all of Sonderegger's worst fears have come true. The "pure doctrine" of the tradition is to be subjected to a test in which any doctrine which is not relevant to our daily lives is jettisoned on account of its irrelevance. But this is not at all what Rahner is saying. What he urges us to test is whether "pure doctrine" about the Trinity has been 'correctly understood and translated'.

This test for correct understanding and translation Rahner defends on a very pragmatic basis. It is all very well, he implies, now that we sit at some remove from the first period of the evolution of Trinitarian understanding, for us to make arguments that start from the received tradition. However, we should acknowledge that Trinitarian theology was first done from the economic Trinity, from the doctrine of the "missions" of the Trinity in Christ and the Holy Spirit:

> What we have said above shows that the doctrine of the "missions" is from its very nature the starting point for the doctrine of the Trinity. No theology can in principle deny this, because it is in fact of salvation history that we know about the Trinity because the Father's Word has entered our history and has given us his Spirit.[542]

And this is not simply a historical pragmatic issue of placing ourselves faithfully within the context of the early Trinitarian theologians. Rather, Rahner seeks to encourage us to adopt this method of anchoring ourselves in the firm rock of the economy which anchored the early theologians of the tradition, and this in order to keep us more firmly within the tradition which has in a sense "come to know" (again, Rahner does not use this word) the "pure doctrine" which we now cherish:

> But this starting point should not only be tacitly *pre*supposed; the treatise should really start by positing it as such. Otherwise the meaning and the limits of *all* statements of this doctrine become unclear, and there is no way of avoiding the danger of wild and empty conceptual acrobatics.[543]

This is not the same as the overly simplistic argument made by Vladimir Lossky in 1944 that the Eastern Churches have a trinitarian theology which can be relied on as being more dependable because it remains closer to the patristic emphasis on the economy of the persons.[544] But Rahner's argument does share a scepticism of the ability of theologians to distinguish their own imaginings about God the Trinity from what they have received from the tradition. We see this immediately in Rahner's statement of intention as he moves into the second section of *The Trinity*, as he embarks on a survey of "official doctrine" about

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[541] ibid.

[542] ibid.

[543] ibid.

[544] Vladimir Lossky, trans. Fellowship of St Alban & St Sergius, "God in Trinity" in *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1957, 1968, 1973, 1991), p.44-66, particularly 64-65.

the Trinity 'to find out what is being said in these official utterances, what remains unsaid or obscure,' as a 'reflection [which] is not intended as critique, but as a first orientation'.[545] In this scepticism about the tendency of theologians to replace Trinitarian doctrine with their own imaginings, Rahner and Sonderegger are very much allies.

The second "hinge moment" comes in the middle of the third section of *The Trinity*, and it develops the argument we have seen from the first "hinge moment". A further test is added, that of whether ideas developed about the economic Trinity are consistent with the magisterial teaching of the Church:

> But now the question arises whether the concept we have developed of the "economic" Trinity allows us to postulate not only some kind of "immanent" Trinity, but the Trinity acknowledged in the official declarations of the Church.[546]

What we see here is, I believe, more complex than a Catholic theologian under vows paying lip service to the authority of the magisterium. As the Eastern Orthodox Lossky is bound to be obedient to the Fathers, inherent to the way Rahner does theology is a respect for the historic teaching of the magisterium (this is why he extensively rehearses it in section two of *The Trinity*). Any Trinitarian theology must, according to Rahner, have its basis in the economy to prevent its spinning off into 'empty conceptual acrobatics', but it must also be consistent with the teaching of the Church on the Trinity. What Rahner is clearly *not* proposing here is a re-evaluation of the teachings of the Church by the metrics of the economy and experience. But what then is to be re-evaluated? What aspect of Trinitarian theology is this test meant for, if not the received teaching of the tradition?

Rahner shifts the focus to the fields of Christology and the doctrine of grace (he does not distinguish Christology and Pneumatology in the way a modern theologian might). In a complex passage, he makes the argument that, however one decides to describe christological realities (like Christ's human nature or the hypostatic union) or pneumatological realities (like created or uncreated grace), what is important is that the communication of Godself which they describe is real, and not merely some mediation by substitute.

> Of course, the real self-communication of God too has its effect in the creature (the creaturely reality of Christ and "created" grace); and the relation between self-communication as such (divine hypostasis as hypostatically united; uncreated grace) and the effect in the creatures may ontologically be explained as one prefers, according to the different theories which exist about this point in Christology and the doctrine of grace. But if there is to be a real self-communication and not more creation, this creaturely reality is, at any rate, not mediating in the sense of some substitute, but as a consequence of the self-communication (and as a previous condition brought about by itself).[547]

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[545] Rahner, *The Trinity*, p.50.

[546] ibid. p.99.

[547] ibid. pp.100-101.

Rahner references ideas about reciprocal causality at the end of this quote to anchor his argument that, whatever question we consider in either christological or pneumatological terms, what is most important is that christological or pneumatological effects are ultimately caused by God's gift of Godself. Travis Ables is correct to place particular weight on Rahner's insistence on the reality of the gift of Godself in all discussions about Christology and grace. As Rahner continues:

> God's self-communication, as concretely *experienced* by us, may always already imply this creaturely consequence and condition. But if this created reality were the real mediation of the self-communication by way of substitute, in the difference between creator and creature, there would no longer be any *self*-communication. God would be the "giver", not the *gift itself*, he would "give himself" only to the extent that he communicates a gift distinct from himself.[548]

Rahner then goes on to discuss the implications of this statement for our understanding of the relationship between the economic and the immanent Trinity. He does this in terms which refer back to the doctrinal issues he has already discussed. Since they are not our focus, we can pass over them and consider the implications which are relevant to this thesis. In particular, these are that whenever we consider questions of Christology or Pneumatology, we must remember that we are always discussing the actions of the economic Trinity, and so also the reality of the immanent Trinity. For all questions of Christology or Pneumatology must be referred to the self-gift of the immanent Trinity in the economic Trinitarian action of the Son or the Spirit. Rahner is not, in the first instance, making an epistemological point, but rather a doctrinal point: that the incarnate Son is the incarnation of the Trinitarian Word, and the Holy Spirit in our hearts is the Trinitarian *pneuma* that is being sent. This, at least, should be uncontroversial.

We have noted Rahner's call to test Trinitarian theology against the doctrine of the Church. Let us now also recall the other aspect of Rahner's test, which seeks to ensure that our reasoning about the Trinity treats of doctrine in way that it is 'correctly understood' by ensuring that it 'points quite naturally towards real life, as lived in faith and in grace'.[549] What we have here is another classic example of Rahnerian reciprocity. Whereas Sonderegger seeks to establish the validity of "pure doctrine" driving towards the holiness of God, Rahner has made a complex argument to suggest that such "pure doctrine" is never as pure as all that. Trinitarian reasoning is always grounded in the economy because the Trinity has been revealed to us in Christ and the Spirit. And yet, that Trinitarian reasoning must always be tested against the doctrine of the Church about the immanent Trinity to ensure consistency. But then, having tested the economic against the immanent, Rahner suggests this is thrown back to the economic, as any statement about the immanent Trinity will have implications for our understanding of the life lived in faith and grace, since the immanent Trinity is the Trinity who gives Trinityself that is Godself to us in Christ and the Spirit. This is the heart of what Rahner means when he says that there is an axiomatic unity of the immanent

[548] ibid. p.101.

[549] ibid. p.48.

Trinity and the economic Trinity (or, as his famous axiom goes, that '*The* "*economic*" *Trinity is the* "*immanent*" *Trinity and the* "*immanent*" *Trinity is the* "*economic*" *Trinity*.')[550] If the God who gives Godself to us is the Immanent Trinity, then what we say about either will have implications for our understanding of both ways of talking about the one God.

But is this, as Sonderegger fears, a green light for a "theology from below"? No it is not, or at least it is not according to Rahner. We have seen that Rahner sees in the way we talk about the Trinity a complex reciprocal theological process, bouncing back and forth between the economic and immanent, partly for pragmatic reasons and partly for theological. But this is important for us, first because it acknowledges that talk of "pure doctrine" about the immanent Trinity alone is nothing less than fantasy. As we probe the sheer holiness of God, we are always standing on the economy. But, more importantly for our purposes, to talk about either Christology or Pneumatology is to speak about the Trinity, because it is to speak of God's gift of Godself. Indeed, at the end of *The Trinity*, in the third and final of our three "hinge points", Rahner describes, in writing *The Trinity*, that he 'intends [it] to be nothing more than a certain formal anticipation of Christology and Pneumatology (doctrine of grace) which are to follow.'[551] Is *The Trinity* a treatise about the practice of Trinitarian theology, and the possibility of a Trinitarian theology from below? Not really. It is about the importance of a Christology and Pneumatology which is consistent with Trinitarian theology, and that in terms of what the tradition teaches about both the economic and the immanent Trinity.[552] I must reemphasise what I have already said, that Sonderegger is really critiquing the "Rahnerians" who take Rahner's famous maxim as a basis for engaging in quite bold Trinitarian theologies from below. But I think it worth emphasising how much Rahner's own purposes in *The Trinity* are not in contradiction to Sonderegger's fundamental premise, that "pure doctrine" is of value even if it cannot directly and immediately be applied in a social sense. Rahner would agree that we must press on to know the Lord who resides in infinite Holiness. But Rahner's point here is that this is that same God who gives Godself to us in the economy.

The Trinity and the darkness of the Spirit

[550] ibid. p.22.

[551] ibid. p.120.

[552] In this sense David Budiash is correct to suggest that Rahner's contribution to Trinitarian theology is not really substantive, but rather 'consists in raising the issue to a level of explicit reflection', though I have read *The Trinity* in a manner inconsistent with his suggestion that Rahner develops 'his own fundamental theology as a foundation for Trinitarian theology.' (Budiash, "Fundamental Theology for the Trinity", p.918.)

I wish now to draw Sonderegger and Rahner's reasoning further together by very briefly reflecting further on an important pneumatological implication of what we have discussed. What might it mean to say that the Trinity who is absolute Holiness, who is Aseity, is the same Trinity whom we encounter in darkness, even in the darkness of death? It is one thing to argue that the "knowableness" of the incarnate Son in christologically focussed theology might constitute a danger to our appreciation of the absolute Aseity and Holiness of the Trinity. Might there be an opportunity here to emphasise the Holiness and Aseity of the Trinity by shifting our focus to the God whom we encounter in the invisible Spirit that is sent to us?

In her book, *Image and Presence*,[553] Natalie Carnes considers the life of Christ as a series of revelations of the divine image which are complexified by negations of that same divine image (or, rather, negations of our receptions of the divine image). This she charts through movements of iconophilia and iconoclasm, successive affirmations and negations of the importance of the divine image in Christian theology and spirituality. What makes the book so powerful as an extended reflection on events in the life of Christ is the way that Carnes portrays those events as shifting between divine disclosure and divine confounding, the revelation of knowledge given with the revelation of unknowing; and this mirrored in our love of divine images, complexified by our sometimes violent reaction against divine images, which in turn affirms our love, our regard for, divine images. What Carnes' christological reflection helps to do, then (although this is not her purpose in writing the book), is confound a popular means of distinguishing the "different sorts of revelation" that are given in Christ and the Holy Spirit: that is, the idea that in Christ the face of God is simply revealed, whereas in the Spirit the face of God is invisible.[554] This same tool of complexifying well-known christological narratives is employed to great effect by Eugene F. Rogers in his book *After the Spirit*, which again reads events in the life of Christ, but this time explicitly bringing out their pneumatological significance.[555] In this sense, Rogers meets the challenge of Rahner in *The Trinity*, to attempt a Christology and a Pneumatology that is explicitly and self-consciously Trinitarian. In Rogers' pneumatological reading of the life of Christ, the Spirit is intimately involved in every aspect of Christ's

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[553] Natalie Carnes, *Image and Presence: a christological reflection on iconoclasm and iconophilia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018).

[554] Carnes' reflection on the prosoponic likeness of Christ in the poor in a sermon of St Gregory Nazianzus is particularly helpful at complexifying notions of Christ as the simple and straightforward revelation of the divine likeness. ibid. pp.132-137. The onomatodoxy controversy at the beginning of the 20th Century in the Russian Church over the nature of the holiness of the divine name, and even its divinity itself, shows the layers of complexity within the affirmation and negation of Christ's revelation of the image of God to us (cf. Bulgakov's contribution to that debate, with a brief summary in the introduction, in Sergius Bulgakov, trans. Boris Jakim, "The Name of God" in *Icons and The Name of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012)).

[555] Eugene F. Rogers, *After the Spirit: a constructive pneumatology from resources outside the modern west* (London: SCM, 2006).

revelation of the divinity which has the Father as its eternal source.[556] What we say now about the Spirit, then, not only might provide a balance to some of the problems in Christology, but might also serve to complexify Christology in a manner which is, on account of treating the Son and the Spirit together and not separately, actually more Trinitarian.

The Evangelical Lutheran theologian Bernd Oberdorfer attempts to bring the unknowableness of the Spirit into play when he argues that the Spirit is not defined by "self" but by relationship to Christ, so that the Spirit's revelation is characterised by two properties: *Selbstlosigkeit* (selflessness) and *Selbstzurücknahme* (self-withdrawal).[557] However, Oberdorfer does not consider this selfless and self-withdrawing mission of the Spirit in terms of darkness. The Spirit is not withdrawing and leaving a vacuum, an empty space. This withdrawal and self-effacement, even we might go so far as to say self "de-personalisation"[558] by the Spirit, is essential for the Spirit's ministry of what the Cappadocians called ekphanesis (*ἐκφανησις*), the Spirit's shining light on the other two persons of the Trinity. We have fruitful material here for reflection on the idea that the hiddenness of the Spirit (we might even say the "darkness" of the Spirit) is essential for the Spirit's light to shine in a way that we can know the fullness of the life of the Father and the Son. In the darkness there is effulgent light and life.

Rather than simply push the parallel with Rahner's theology of death here, I want to move to reflections on the personhood of the Spirit by the French Catholic theologian Etienne Vetö, which emerge from his contemplation of what it means to "pray in the Spirit".[559] Seeking to explore the Spirit's personhood in a manner which is more than merely "parasitic" on the personhood of the Father the Son, Vetö emphasises the divine names of *Ruah* and *pneuma*, the Spirit's personhood 'as the most intimate Breath which the Father breathes (spires) into the depths of the Son.'[560] He then thinks about the Spirit as the agent of prayer and means of ingress into the divine relationship. In this sense, Vetö starts with the revealed name, moves to the traditional doctrine of the Church, and then considers the implications in the economy.

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[556] Admittedly, in Rogers the role of the Father in the theophany of Christ is not so explicitly stated, but Rogers rather takes it for granted that his audience are comfortable with the idea that the Son reveals the Father, for the Father and the Son are one. He now adds with particular weight the Spirit to the Son in revealing the Father.

[557] Bernd Oberdorfer, "The Holy Spirit – A Person? Reflection on the Spirit's Trinitarian Identity" in Michael Welker (Ed.) *The Work of the Spirit: pneumatology and pentecostalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2006), pp.27-46, p.38.

[558] Oberdorfer doesn't go that far, though he does suggest some plasticity in the term person when he emphasises that, in the most fruitful pre-medieval period of Trinitarian theology, the notion of person was not absolute. ibid.

[559] Etienne Vetö, "Praying in the Holy Spirit: Spirituality and Pneumatology" in *New Blackfriars*, 97 (2016), pp.157-172.

[560] ibid. p.157.

However, in a manner which sits well with Rahner's challenge to Christology and Pneumatology in *The Trinity*, his argument then begins to consider economic and immanent Trinitarian implications in reciprocity.

The argument is complex. First, he locates the particularity of the Spirit's personhood in the Spirit's facelessness:

> ...the Holy Spirit is a person in a totally unique way, in a way that is different from the Father and the Son – or, to put it another way, the notion of divine person is analogous. ... The Holy Spirit is the less "personal" of the three divine hypostases, it is "anonymous", a "personal being" or an *Überperson*, rather than a person as such. This comes from the fact that while the Son has a human face and the Father will be seen "face-to-face" in eternal life (1 Cor 13.12), the Spirit is "faceless". Indeed I have chosen to speak about the Spirit as an "it" from the beginning of this paper. The names and metaphors for it are not taken from the human world but of nature: breath, wind, water, fire, a dove or a force (*dunamis*). Interestingly enough, most of these elements are capable of penetrating other realities and becoming interior to them. The Spirit is considered a person because it speaks and it is quite active and dynamic.[561]

I do not think that, in saying that the 'notion of divine person is analogous', Vetö is discounting the theological usefulness or validity of the term *hypostasis*.[562] Rather, he makes the argument that, in the Spirit, the human metaphorical idiom of "person" breaks down, and the facelessness of the Spirit leads scripture and theologians to use elemental idioms for it. The Spirit in this sense is unnerving. And, whilst it communicates, it does not enter dialogue. Strikingly, Vetö writes:

> There is, however, no true dialogue with it: the Father and the Son never address themselves to it, while human beings only listen to its inspiration or invoke it. The Spirit speaks and acts only through and in others – as we have seen above with the immanent, intertwined activity of the Spirit in prayer – and it has no personal words and deeds, since it always refers to what the Father and Son have said and done. Of course, Christ also shows the Father, but he makes the Father appear by *appearing*; the Spirit makes Christ appear by *disappearing*. There is no "face-to-face" relation with the Spirit, whether for us or for the Father and the Son. By way of consequence, the personal self of the Holy Spirit is not a substantial, solid self, an *ad se* with a clear-cut form, but it is, so to say airy, atmospheric, liquid. The Spirit finds its identity by being out of itself in others. In an ecstatic, almost erotic way, it can be in another and the others in it.[563]

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[561] ibid. p.167.

[562] A criticism might be levied at this particular article that Vetö focusses on distinguishing the Spirit's personhood in a non-traditional doctrinal way (i.e. by differentiation of character rather than by procession and spiration), but it is a short article for such big ideas. And Vetö does gesture to the fact that this manner of differentiation is not in conflict or competition with the traditional doctrinal understanding of the generation of the persons, but rather this character differentiation may be considered a *result* of the real difference in generation of the persons of the Trinity. It is because the Spirit is spirated that the Spirit has this particular personhood. ibid. p.170.

[563] ibid. p.167.

What Oberdorfer began to explore from a doctrinal standpoint, Vetö evokes richly in the economic as well. Not only us, but the Father and the Son also, know the Spirit as person, yes, but as *faceless*. The personhood of the Spirit, we might say, appears as infinite darkness, which yet is effulgent with the blinding totality of the Spirit's personhood. This is hugely helpful for complexifying Sonderegger's notion of Aseity, which is not merely "unknowing" to be contrasted with doctrinal "understanding". Aseity as the absolute otherness of God, the absolute Holiness of God, is different to the particular facelessness, the particular darkness, of the Spirit's personhood. Vetö's reflection on the particularity of the facelessness of the Spirit might then enable us to think more meaningfully about the darkness which we encounter in death, and the way in which the Spirit makes Christ's death present to us. And to do this whilst building on the argument of the previous chapter, in which we explored what it meant to say that, in the Eucharist, the Spirit makes Christ's death present to us. It is important to emphasise that we are now departing from, or building upon, Rahner. But, we can complexify our thinking by distinguishing, on the one hand, the general darkness of what Sonderegger would call the absolute Holiness of God, which Rahner argues we encounter in death in the form of the absolute Mystery that is God; and on the other the particular darkness which is the facelessness of the person of the Spirit, in both the economy and the immanent Trinity. If an aspect of the Spirit's leading of the human person into the fullness of God's life is the cultivation in us of the virtue or habit of abandonment, the practice and embodiment of abandonment in the face of darkness, then the gift of the Spirit to us can be said to do two things. First, the gift of the faceless one, with whom there is no dialogue, living in our very depths in the supernatural existential, is not just a curse. It is itself the establishing of a liminal point at which we encounter the darkness of God in the personhood of the Spirit. Not only then might we understand the supernatural existential as a "mechanism" for "potential" encounter with the Living God, to be activated in those moments of life when we encounter the darkness of death and decision. Rather, *the supernatural existential is itself the darkness of God within us in the particular darkness of the Holy Spirit's person*. The supernatural existential is the fundamental and consistent encounter with the divine darkness which is our life, constantly calling us to abandon ourselves to it. And second, this is then the preparation for our final abandonment of ourselves into the fullness of the divine Trinitarian darkness at the moment of our final self-disposition in death.

Vetö does not seem to be deliberately engaging with Rahner's concept of the supernatural existential, but his language is remarkable in its appropriateness for Rahner's thinking:

> [Some authors] set themselves on an economical level, while I believe it is necessary to understand the Spirit's specific personhood on an intra-Trinitarian level, because the economy manifests the *theologia*, which in turns founds the *oikonomia*. What does it mean *for the inner life of God* that one divine person is "faceless" and "airy"? What does it mean that the Spirit is deeply "inside" and

> "intertwined", not only in human beings, but *in the Father and the Son*; that it is "itself" through and in them?[564]

The direct citation of the sort of pragmatic approach to the development of doctrine which we found in Rahner's *Trinity* (of economic revelation, theological reflection and refining into doctrine, and then the living out of that doctrine) is one thing. But what is particularly interesting for our purposes is that Vetö sees two particular implications of the facelessness of the person of the Spirit. First, the "intertwining" of that faceless one with the depths of our being, in such a way that the mystery of the Spirit intertwines with the mystery of our own being. And, second, there are also implications for the life of the Trinity into which we are ultimately called, a life in which "facelessness" complexifies our seeing God face-to-face in the beatific vision.

Conclusion

In the introduction to this thesis, I wrote that

> It could even be said that the hiddenness of the Spirit in the darkness of our encounter with death reveals to us the light of the living God in the darkness of our daily lives.

But there is potential in Rahner's theology to understand the Spirit itself as that darkness, living within us, constantly drawing us to know the Absolute Holiness of God, constantly negating all idolatrous knowledge, revealing it as idolatrous in the darkness of the Spirit's face; each and every moment of our lives drawing us on to abandon ourselves to the darkness of the Trinity, and ultimately to abandon ourselves to that absolute light and absolute darkness which is the Mystery of God in death.

[564] ibid. p.168.

V – The Holy Spirit and Death in the Pastoral and Performative Theology of Karl Rahner

Rahner has a reputation as a fiendishly complex theologian, and perhaps the previous chapters of this thesis bear that out. However, he wrote during his ministry a significant body of works which have a deliberately pastoral or performative focus. By this I mean that they are intended for the reader who is spiritually interested in what Rahner might have to say, but who is not necessarily interested in a critical theological engagement. They are interactive texts and they invite, as their primary response, a new movement in the hearer's life in God. But these different texts were written with a variety of purposes in mind and differ greatly in their effects. They are far from being simple spiritual manuals. And they do in fact, also invite a rich theological-critical secondary response.

In this chapter, I shall first sketch the theology found in Rahner's short pamphlet, *Everyday Thing*s, in order to demonstrate the significant theological continuity that exists between his more complex theological works and these more straightforward pieces. Second, I shall explore the theological themes which emerge in a collection of Rahner's homilies, particularly noting how, in this performed theology, the shape of the liturgical year and biblical readings bring the Pneumatology in Rahner's thought into starker focus. Third, I shall present some of Rahner's writing on the religious life, a vocation which is a microcosm of the ascetic element of the Christian life, which Rahner explores through the idea of the "life of the Spirit". And, finally, I will explore the fascinating and complex text, *Encounters with Silence*, rereading it as a performed soliloquy, seeing in it a powerful presentation of ideas about death, abandonment and the supernatural existential, as well as a performative exploration of Rahner's more abstract ideas. Quite apart from being, in many ways, pastorally useful, these texts are vital theological resources for understanding the complexity and non-consistent richness of Rahner's thought.

Rahner applies his theology to everyday life

Rahner's *Everyday Things* is a tiny theological pamphlet, originally published in 1964. In a series of chapters only a few hundred words long, Rahner sets out to strip back 'high-flown verbiage and bogus ideals' for 'the chance to see things as they really are.'[565] This stripping back operates at several levels. At the first, it is the stripping back of what Rahner sees (perhaps ironically, from our perspective) as the artificial

[565] Rahner, "Everyday Things", trans. M. H. Heelan (London: Sheed & Ward, 1965), p.2.

complexity of catholic theology and spiritual teaching, in order to make it useful for ordinary people in everyday life. But at a second level, we shall see that Rahner calls for a stripping back in the sense of abandonment, exactly in the sense that we have come to know in his theology of death. A call to abandonment in the encounter with everyday death is at the core of Rahner's pastoral vision in this pamphlet, and we shall see how easily and simply Rahner manages to translate his complex ideas into very practical and even sensible stances to take in everyday life.

Everyday Things begins by conceiving of the Christian life in terms of conflict, of potentially destructive and disruptive encounter. Ordinary life, Rahner argues, can annoy us, can get in the way of the holy things in life, like our Sunday observance. But Rahner calls us to learn a 'lesson hard to learn', that these ordinary things which have the potential to disrupt the holy things can also make us 'humble, quiet and resigned.'[566] The ordinary things might in fact be the true path to the holy things. And this is not initially because of some great theological concept, or great analytical overthinking which Rahner has constructed around our ordinary lives. For example, he does not begin by making an argument that the things which frustrate us in our lives, that we loathe or begrudge, that seem to prevent us from doing what really matters to us, are inherently spiritual, good or beautiful. He does not attempt to sell a theological scheme which excuses drudgery, which makes the rough things in life "alright". Rather, he argues that ordinary things require attention simply because we cannot escape them, because they are a reality for all of us before whatever is to come after, our death: 'It is a necessary prelude to our presence at the eternal banquet to be prepared for us not by human hands but by the grace of God.'[567] There is a sense here in which Rahner's argument might feel a bit like the Jesuit master self-consciously stepping down from his ivory tower in order to speak to the common person on the street, perhaps holding his nose while he does so. But I don't think that is the case. As Rahner develops his reflections on aspects of daily life, the intensity of his theological vision does shine through. But so too does his respect for the necessity, the inescapable reality of the daily lives which we do as a matter of fact mostly live. This is a theology of everyday things for everyday people which has integrity.

Rahner's refusal to dodge the difficult reality of everyday life is nowhere more apparent than in his engagement with the reality of work. His opening gambit may not sound encouraging, but it does at least capture something of the reality of earning one's daily bread:

> As time goes on work may become more and more productive as the result of new ideas and inventions, but, so far as man is concerned, its limits are fixed by biological factors which impel him steadily and inexorably towards the grave.[568]

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[566] ibid. p.4.

[567] ibid.

[568] ibid. pp.6-7.

From our perspective, it is interesting that Rahner's rather grim acknowledgment of the reality of labour exchange has at its heart a sense of the inevitable progression towards death. And this progression is not presented in a merely fatalistic sense, the nihilistic march towards the grave of Pratchett and Pullman. Rather, the labour of work is just as much a part of our lives as anything else, as much as (or even perhaps more than) our Sunday observances. Rahner locates our daily labour firmly in the context of the fall, alluding to the curse of Genesis 3,[569] in which work and death constitute one unified curse visited on humanity:

> And so work is likely to remain work, and to continue to be as holy writ described it - a sign of the fallen state of mankind, a sign of the disharmony between what is within us and what is outside, between freedom and necessity, flesh and spirit, the individual and society; and this disharmony can be overcome only by God's grace.[570]

Just as death is something that *should not be* if humanity is fully alive in God, so work (certainly in the often exploitative and extractive form we all experience it) is something that also *should not be*. But work, like death, then confronts us with a moment of decision. Just as Rahner portrayed death as essentially neutral, though with two possible outcomes, one negative and the other positive, here he does exactly the same for work.

> Through the grace of Jesus Christ, therefore, and not through any merit inherent in itself, work, when "done in the Lord", helps to form in us the attitude and disposition which God desires in those he invites to his eternal feast: that patience by which we can bear everyday witness to our faith, that faithfulness and detachment which spring from the Christian sense of responsibility, and that unselfishness which is the very food of love.[571]

Since Christ delivers us from sin, including the disharmony it causes; and since it is possible to die the death of Christ rather than the death of Adam; it must also be possible to be delivered by grace from the disharmony of sinful, deadly labour, and to work the work of Christ. Work "done in the Lord" is work done with a particular disposition, marked by patience, witness, faithfulness and (significantly for our purposes, and recalling Rahner's parsing of the Ignatian concept of "indifference") detachment. We will see how Rahner translates these ideas further in *Everyday Things*, but already what is remarkable is that, in this first substantive chapter, it would be possible to replace every reference to "work" with a reference to "death". What we would then be left with is an exact replication of the theology of death we explored in the first chapter of this thesis. Death and work map onto each other precisely in this pastoral text. And as we continue through *Everyday Things*, everyday death is going to play a significant role.

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[569] 'cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. ... By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust and to dust you shall return.' (Genesis 3.17,18b-19).

[570] Rahner, "Everyday Things", p.7.

[571] ibid. pp.7-8.

Rahner argues that work can be transformed by grace when "done in the Lord", a disposition marked by patience, faithfulness and detachment. In two chapters "On Sitting Down" and "On Sleep" he explores this disposition in a bit more depth. It is worth noting the strangeness of theologising the act of sitting down. Then again, perhaps the stillness of life in lockdown has taught us once again the virtue of "sitting down" as a way to pass the time. However, for Rahner, sitting down is far from a passive state: it is not something which we find ourselves doing when all other meaningful pastimes are taken away from us. Rather:

> sitting down somehow suggests tranquillity, the inward joy that comes from possessing, without fear of loss, the things that endure, the things of the spirit. It also implies the absence of aimless activity.[572]

For Rahner, the act of sitting down is a decision to stop 'running about in an effort to run away from ourselves'.[573] He argues that much of human activity is 'futile and self-escaping'[574] distraction from having to live life as 'a steady movement towards one's goal', as a 'steady, deliberate advance towards our objective.'[575] Just as in Rahner's theology of death moments of real decision are required during our lives to die the death of Christ, here he argues that moments of deliberate decision require something we might call a "habit of deliberateness": it requires 'strength of mind, integrity and independence of spirit'[576] to truly sit down. And so, if one is to be deliberate in deciding to live life with a goal in mind (i.e. union with God and dying the death of Christ), 'rest and reflection'[577] are absolutely necessary. But they are not just means to an end. In a theological move which is delightful, Rahner argues that all our deliberate "sitting down" in this life is a *symbol* of our eternal rest and enthronement:

> There he will hear the words for which all sitting and resting are only symbols and promises: "He who conquers, I will grant it to him to sit with me on my throne." (Rev. iii.21)[578]

The decision to sit down, to reflect, to collect oneself, and to rest with the intention of living purposefully for Christ *is a symbol* uniting us to the heavenly throne, *making present for us* the enthronement in divine light toward which we are called. Each time we choose to sit down in this deliberate manner, we are symbolically seated on the throne of glory which is our eternal rest, and which is both our objective in life and our calling in dying the death of Christ.

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[572] ibid. p.14.

[573] ibid.

[574] ibid. p.15.

[575] ibid.

[576] ibid. p.14.

[577] ibid. It should be noted that Rahner has a rather elitist, (or perhaps German academic, or German romantic) view of what "rest and reflection" means: i.e. engagement with art, nourishment of the intellect and human love. We might want to emphasise the fact that the qualities of strength of mind, integrity and independence of spirit can be gained in many ways, and that people reflect and grow in different ways, sometimes individually and sometimes with others; and that class and culture might add further degrees of variety in what constitutes true "rest and reflection".

[578] ibid. p.16.

In a beautiful and rather touching way, Rahner has used "sitting down" as a way to explore the activity (as opposed to passivity) of our resting in Christ, of our decision to die the death of Christ, in each of the moments of decision in our lives. And he goes on, in his chapter "On Sleep" to complexify this active aspect of our decision with the passive. He begins with the way in which sleep is a representation of the negative aspect of death: 'it is an image of death, of the deadly gloom of despair, of that degradation which is the effect of sin.'[579] The closing of our eyes in sleep is a foretaste of the closing of our eyes in death; a reminder of our need for healing from the wounds of the day caused by the weakness of the fall; of our need for unconscious respite from the grinding labour which is our curse. My language here is a bit much, but it reflects the hyperbole of Rahner's 'deadly gloom of despair', evoking the wearing down of our soul by the tedium of daily routine. And out of this exaggerated darkness, Rahner begins to draw light: out of a lament for humanity poured out in waste, humanity raised up and renewed.

> Sleep is also represented in the Bible as a time when man's inner being is relaxed and he is susceptible to God's prompting (for the Lord reveals himself in sleep) and to significant dreams that, on the one hand, may spring from the memory of experiences buried deep in his subconscious, but, on the other hand, may embody the promptings and behests of God.[580]

Sleep is a moment of great potential in our unconscious development, even a moment of encounter and divine revelation. As with death, then, the negative reality may be shot through with light. But Rahner's reasoning here is interesting.

> Man, a free person and his own master and guide, lets go of himself in sleep, loses control of himself, commits himself to the powers of his own unconscious self which he has not brought into existence and does not understand. Sleep is an act of confidence in the inherent rightness, security and goodness of man's world, an act of faith and acquiescence in what is beyond one's control. So we realise that sleep is not at all a dull stupor induced by physiological causes; it is an act of our whole being entered into consciously and confidently. .... As we glide into the dark depths of our own being...[581]

Sleep, and particularly our surrender to the unconscious mind in sleep, becomes for Rahner a microcosm of the real-ontological dialectic of activity and passivity which was so important for his understanding of self-surrender and abandonment in death. For Rahner it is true to say both that sleep is something which takes hold of us, which we are powerless to avoid, and also that sleep is an act which we willingly undertake. It is the former in a physiological sense - eventually our eyes will close in sleep, however much we try to avoid it - but this is not the true meaning of sleep, just as falling into an armchair is not the true meaning of sitting down. The latter meaning is much more significant for Rahner. At one level, sleep requires a degree of confidence in the rightness of things. Humans like all creatures need a sense of security, of trust, of established comfort, to set our heads down in the vulnerability of sleep, an idea with

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[579] ibid. p.29.

[580] ibid. pp.29-30.

[581] ibid. pp.30-31.

which Matthew's gospel plays to contrast the disciples' insecurity with Jesus' otherworldly peacefulness.[582] But in committing ourselves to sleep, we commit ourselves to a temporary lack of control, we yield to the power of our unconscious as much as we yield to our environment. And here, according to Rahner, is where the real-ontological dialectic comes into play. Sleep, in its truest sense, is an active decision to yield to the passivity of subjection to the unconscious mind. It is done 'consciously' because the sleeper is 'a free person': our freedom means we are able to commit ourselves to sleep. But sleep is done 'confidently' in two different senses. In the first, it expresses confidence in 'man's world' to protect us until we awake. But in the second sense, it is a confident surrender to 'the dark depths of our own being', a surrender which is bold and almost shocking given that this 'unconscious self' is something 'which [we] have not brought into existence and do... not understand.' Activity and passivity here are held in a dialectic of being and surrender in exactly the same way as in the surrender to death. The physiological inescapability of sleep/death; the surrender into a dynamic unknown which is not of our making, nor in our control; and this made possible by a disposition which enables us to step confidently into that surrender, not simply to endure it when pushed. And it is not for nothing that Rahner describes it as 'an act of faith and acquiescence.' He implies that, as in any leap of faith, this is not something which we can achieve in our own strength alone. There is more going on in our decision to abandon ourselves to the depths of our own being than merely a sense of security or reckless daring.

In his chapter "On Getting About", Rahner tempers his call in "On Sitting Down" to deliberate stasis and reflection with a call to keep "getting about" in order to seek our goal, which is our end in Christ.[583] The way in which he describes this "getting about" is initially obscure, though delivered in everyday language. However, it resonates with Rahner's concept of the supernatural existential, the inner ordination to receive grace, to achieve union with God, which is unfulfilled as a result of the fall, and which we experience as longing for God.

> So we have to keep on getting about, to keep on seeking our goal. The Holy One, for his part, will come and look for us if we only go towards him, walk in his way. When we have found him - or rather when he has found us - we shall learn that our meeting had already been determined by the power that bore us on towards God, and that the stirring of that power within us was the sign that God had come to meet us. And that power is what we call God's grace.[584]

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[582] Matthew 8.20: 'And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."' Matthew sets Jesus apart uniquely in all creation as *not* having that security, that sense of home, because Jesus' security and home lie elsewhere. In the following cameo of the gospel (Matthew 8.23-27), Jesus' setting down his head to sleep is peculiar precisely because he sleeps in the security that is not of this world, whilst the disciples have to wake him up to save their boat from the storm that rages around them.

[583] Rahner, *Everyday Things*, p.11.

[584] Rahner, *Everyday Things*, p.11.

The "goal" of our lives is precisely our "goal" because it is a life-long movement towards the fulfilment of a lack that is within us, a lack of union with God, a lack of the fulness of grace. The 'stirring of that power', 'the power that bore us on towards God' is itself 'the sign that God had come to meet us', because it was God calling us from within ourselves in the power of grace, through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. As such, the experience of "finding" God is an encounter with the reality that God was always with us, that God had already found us. In part, this encounter with the reality of God's abiding with us, God's searching us out, and the realisation of the supernatural existential, is a stripping away of the unreality of the belief that we were searching for God in our own power. It is a stripping away of the non-reality and untruth of any positive notions of the God we had constructed and for which we were searching, which pales into insignificance when we encounter the God who actually *is*, and who always *was* calling us from within our very selves. The complex philosophical theology of Rahner's essays about grace and the supernatural existential comes into sharp focus in these elegant terms. We must get up and find God, because we desire fulfilment in God's fulness. But when we do find God, we shall find that God has already found us, and that it was God within us calling us in the stirring up of our desire for God. And all this is God's grace.

But what does Rahner mean by grace? Often it is hard to get Rahner to pin his colours to the mast, to say plainly what he means by grace, but that is not the case in the final chapter in *Everyday Things,* "On Grace in Everyday Life". It begins:

> Has any of us ever really felt that God's grace was working within him? By grace we do not mean pious sentiments of one kind or another, or that sort of religious uplift occasionally experienced on Sundays and holy-days, or that faint feeling of consolation which steals over us now and then in time of trouble. We mean the real, genuine experience of a visitation of the Holy Spirit, third person of the Blessed Trinity, who was manifested to us through Christ's incarnation and sacrifice on the cross.[585]

Grace in this sense is not any created sense of holiness, but is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and from the beginning of this chapter Rahner is making linked statements about the experience of the Holy Spirit, and the integral connection between Pneumatology and Christology, between the Spirit, the incarnation and the cross. Rahner continues his argument by excluding from this sense of experience of grace the mere insights of philosophy, or the "spiritual" elevation of culture and art, which can only be derived experiences of grace. Experiencing the Spirit does not mean finding things of "spiritual" significance and external sanctity, but means experiencing God working in the depths of our being and seeing the effects in our lives, 'for the Spirit only manifests itself as an *inner* impulse in our lives.'[586] This is the fulfilment of the supernatural existential, or at least the first-fruits of the beginnings of fulfilment that we can know

[585] ibid. p.33.

[586] ibid. p.35.

before our final union with God in our death. And we can see those first-fruits in a very tangible way, in our living lives that go beyond ourselves, lives which exceed our own capacity for love, for mercy and sacrifice.[587] For Rahner, the 'secret longing for the spirit' which the supernatural existential entails, and its fulfilment in grace, is not just the domain of 'the saints in particular' but is 'felt by truly spiritual persons' in all states of life:[588] 'They know well that God's grace can also bless the dull round of daily tasks well done, and bring the doers a step nearer to God.'[589]

This is life 'transformed by grace', as Rahner put it in the chapter on work. But in this final chapter, Rahner also has something striking to say about why the disposition which we called the "habit of deliberateness" is important, why it matters to rest and reflect, to prepare ourselves in the manner he described in the chapter "On Sitting Down". After listing examples of what it might mean to "live in the Spirit", he explains:

> When, therefore, we no longer cling to self or even pay attention to it; when we deny ourselves in serving others; when we view our own selves and everything else as objects far away in the infinite distance - then we are at last beginning to live in the world of God, the God of grace and of life everlasting.[590]

This is Ignatian detachment worked through with Rahner's ideas about abandonment. Just as in death Christians are called to yield everything, even our very selves and our concept of God into the blinding light of the mystery of God, so during our lives we must cultivate a "habit of deliberateness" in order to be able to view the world and ourselves with detachment. And, ultimately, we are then to be able to abandon ourselves and the world to God's grace in the small ways of our everyday lives, before doing so finally in death.

But Rahner's reasoning has one final flowering before the close of *Everyday Things*. Even translating his theological concepts into the mode of experience, how the movement of God's grace seems to us in our everyday lives, Rahner seems aware that talk of "grace" has the potential to appear abstract. The great irony of *Everyday Things* is that the Spirit who truly is the "everyday" thing *par excellence* is also the invisible, the unseen God moving in our hearts. And so at the end of the pamphlet, Rahner anchors all the more abstract and psychological language of *Everyday Things* in a familiar and embodied narrative: the person of Jesus:

> In this life the chalice of the Holy Spirit is identical with the chalice of Jesus Christ. It is drunk only by those who have slowly and with difficulty learnt to discern the fullness that is in emptiness, the sunrise

[587] Rahner gives a long list. ibid. pp.35-36.

[588] ibid. p.37.

[589] ibid. p.38.

[590] ibid. p.39.

> in sunset, the life in death, the self-discovery in self-renunciation. They who learn to do this experience the working of the spirit, the real spirit, the Holy Spirit of grace.[591]

Rahner has not stripped back the 'high-flown verbiage and bogus ideals' for 'the chance to see things as they really are'[592] in a way that is intended to be competitive or conflict with the faith which his readers hold. To say that everyday life is just as holy and important as the Sunday observance does not mean that the Sunday observance does not matter. And so Rahner invokes christological and eucharistic imagery to unite church devotion and daily spirituality in the mind of the reader. We do not need a different 'chalice of the Holy Spirit', because to drink of the chalice of Jesus Christ is to drink of the chalice of the Spirit as well. But more than that, whether or not we bear the fruits of living the life of the Spirit, as Rahner has described it, is a way to determine whether or not we are truly drinking the chalice of Jesus Christ. And the way to determine whether or not we are living the life of the Spirit strongly recalls Rahner's theology of death, his notions of abandonment and mystery: but it might also sound a bit like imitating the life (and perhaps more specifically the passion) of Christ. This is not a straightforward ascetic spirituality in the mode of bluntly calling us to imitate the suffering Christ.[593] Rather, Rahner intertwines the importance of both Christ and the Holy Spirit for the fulfilment of the human person. Although the chalice of the Spirit and the chalice of Christ are one chalice, their unity is not one in which one is wholly subsumed into the other, but both are united in common purpose: for our fulfilment.

> For this freeing of the [human] spirit from its earthly fetters can be fully and finally accomplished only through the grace of Christ working upon faith. And when the [human] spirit is freed by supernatural grace it is freed in order that it may enter into the life of God himself.[594]

Christology is mixed up with grace, and Christ's action is located in the grace of faith. Rahner I think deliberately here blurs the distinction between Holy Spirit (*Heilige Geist*) and human spirit (*Geist*). I say deliberately because he has not talked much about the human spirit up to this point in the rest of the pamphlet, so it seems strange that he does so now, and only immediately after a paragraph in which "*Geist*" is used repeatedly to refer to the Holy Spirit. *From our perspective in everyday life*, then, Rahner seems to be urging us *not to distinguish* the ministry of Christ from the ministry of the Holy Spirit, and the flourishing of our inner life from the flourishing of our human spirit in the Holy Spirit: as much as we are not to distinguish our Sunday life from our weekday life. Rahner seems to be inviting us at the end of *Everyday Things* to take inspiration from the abandonment and daily dying of Christ, as we live the life of the Spirit, in the power of the Spirit and of Christ, working within us and calling us from without.

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[591] ibid. p.40.

[592] ibid. p.2.

[593] Brian Linnane notes Rahner's antipathy to "Jesus-ism" or "Jesuanity", the imitation of Christ as supreme exemplar of pre-existing values (Linnane, "Dying with Christ", p.238).

[594] Rahner, *Everyday Things,* p.2.

Death and the Spirit in Rahner's preaching

The selected collection of *Biblical Homilies* preached by Rahner in the University Church at Innsbruck between 1953 and 1958 are a fascinating and under-studied theological resource.[595] Whilst it must be admitted that the homilies do not show particular rhetorical or exegetical flare, they are interesting for our purposes because they give us a sample of what happens when Rahner reflects on biblical texts in public with his theology very much in mind. And, *vice versa*, they give us a glimpse of what his theology might look like when it is forced through the lenses of the liturgical year and a more pastoral context than the university faculty. In this next section we shall explore how two themes come across in these homilies: first, death and abandonment; and then the connection between the Spirit and the death of Christ. At times we will simply note that Rahner is replicating in a straightforward way the theological ideas we have come to know. At others, we will see how biblical texts or the particular emphases of the liturgical year lead Rahner to express his theology in ways that are particularly illuminating, strange or elegant.

(i) Death and abandonment

In a sermon for the first Sunday of Lent, Rahner reflects on the suffering of Christ in the wilderness.

> Therefore through this cruelly hard act, this denial of all comfort, this refusal of food and drink, through the solitude and abandonment of the desert, through everything else that involves a rejection, a self-denial of the world and all earthly company, through all these he proclaims this fact: one thing only is necessary, that I be with God, that I find God, and everything else, no matter how great or beautiful, is secondary and subordinate and must be sacrificed, if needs be, to this ultimate movement of heart and spirit.[596]

It is striking for our purposes that concepts to do with abandonment, which have generally in Rahner's theological work been constructed in a more abstract spiritual manner, are now not only firmly identified with the example of Christ, but located in a particular moment and space: in the wilderness. There is no reflection on the fact that, according to the Gospel text, it is the Spirit who drives Jesus into the wilderness.[597] Rather, the experience of Christ in the wilderness is imagined in terms of Ignatian indifference, the focus on union with God and discerning God's will which is only possible when all other things, even our selves, are abandoned to a subordinate place in our lives. It is striking that Rahner identifies

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[595] This is only a small sample of Rahner's homiletic output, but I include an engagement with these homilies by way of illustration of a particular mode of Rahner's grappling with ideas to do with death and the Holy Spirit. I cannot in this thesis aspire to any comprehensive survey of the theological emphases of Rahner's preaching.

[596] Karl Rahner, trans. Desmond Forristal & Richard Strachan, *Biblical Homilies* (London: Burns & Oates, 1966, 1967), p.14.

[597] Matthew 4.1: 'Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.'

Christ in the wilderness not in order explicitly to make the case that we should imitate Christ, that we need to do something to somehow share in Christ's suffering or extended passion in the desert. Rather, his purpose is to illustrate that we are all of us already there. Christ is in the wilderness because that is where all humanity finds itself throughout our lives. This is not a homily about asceticism, but rather about the state of fallen nature, and the focus which we must have as Christians given that human nature. The 'ultimate movement of heart and [human] spirit' towards God should be our focus, and the concept of abandonment is important here only to the extent that we must abandon all other things and subordinate them to the desire for union with God.

In a homily on Matthew's apocalypse (Matthew 24.15-35), with the ominous title, "The Christian and the Inevitable", Rahner makes a rather clearer link to the idea of the abandonment of self in our daily encounter with death. Rahner parses "trust in God" in these terms:

> If we saw our situation clearly, we would not fear catastrophe but we would be patient and resigned in doing and suffering whatever each day might bring us. We could do what has to be done in spite of the future: we could do our duty and whatever the present demands of us without heeding the threats of the future.[598]

There is a danger here that Rahner falls into the sort of nihilistic abandonment to the future that we saw in Pratchett and Pullman, in the sense that the future (and death) is going to be whatever it is going to be, so we might as well get on with living. But this is not what Rahner means by 'patient and resigned'. Rather, he calls us to pray. An appropriate response to the uncertainty of the future is not negative resignation (resignation into nothing): it is abandonment into the positive will of God. For just as we do not know what the future will bring, 'we do not know what earthly results this prayer may achieve and what is denied to it by God's will.'[599] Prayer does not mean that we are positively acting in the sense that we are attempting to realise our own projections and desires for the future through the will of God. That would be impossible. Rather, prayer here is conceived as a positive decision to abandon oneself into living life *with* God and *with* God's future, rather than *despite* that future. And so, it makes perfect sense to say, 'It is for us to trust in God and to pray also for an earthly future.'[600] The conversation with God in prayer is an aspect of the abandonment to God's will, a fundamental part of trusting in God. But Rahner wishes to drive home the point that prayer is not about willing our intended future on God. Helped by the gospel text, he does this by helping us to see the future, our prayer and our abandonment through an apocalyptic worldview:

> When they [i.e. 'the blessed of the Father in Heaven'] come, they must find us believing and loving, men who know that every trial is a pathway to God. God's word and God's power have laid on us the duty of becoming freely and willingly the elect for this our time. ... If we are persevering in faith,

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[598] Rahner *Biblical Homilies*, p.28.

[599] ibid.

[600] ibid.

> if we are the children of God and hence the children of his eternal election, then we should always pray with the hope that the days of darkness will be shortened.[601]

This is a new mode of communicating the real-ontological dialectic of activity and passivity: freedom and election. Whilst the supernatural existential and language of the Spirit within and the Spirit without might come across as rather abstract, freedom and election render the same reality concrete in our social reality. Just as we actively pray about our earthly future, we are free to respond to God's grace or not: just as we abandon ourselves into the future God is calling us to, we dutifully accept the calling to be God's elect. And for the elect, our own frustrations about the future are always to be experienced against an apocalyptic backdrop: the 'days of darkness' in our daily lives are always an aspect of the greater 'days of darkness' before the final day of glory and the consummation of all things. This has, for Rahner, a very simple pastoral outworking. That, though 'days of darkness' may lead us to a place of feeling powerless, of feeling tossed about and frustrated, our response is to be collected, calm and resolute: 'in sobriety and resolution, in prayer and in the awareness that we are the elect for whose sake the blessing and the promise have been given.'[602] Ultimately, Rahner deploys the real-ontological dialectic of activity and passivity, and its associated call to abandonment, not to call God's people to passive resignation. Rather, he uses it to create a sense of holy security, and a call to active participation with God in 'the blessing and the promise' which is God's will. What might have been a negative sermon about resigned abandonment ends up being a sermon about commitment to prayer and steadfast hope in the face of 'days of darkness', trusting in God's good promises even in the darkest times.

And this is a theme which Rahner picks up again from an unlikely scriptural text. Psalm 23 is almost universally known (and perhaps a little overused) as a text offering pastoral comfort in difficult times, especially at the time of death and at funerals. It is often used as a pastoral encouragement to abandon oneself to God's good will, the promise of pasture beside still waters with the benevolent shepherd. But Rahner complexifies the psalm by reflecting on the phrase, "I shall not want."

> Do we really feel that about God, the eternal and incomprehensible? Can we confidently say: "He is my shepherd whom I can trust. I belong to him. I feel his hand governing all my life. His providence watches over me. He is close to me. He feeds and guides me. I lack for nothing"? ... He [the psalmist] says it almost in defiance of the lessons of his life simply because it is true, though it is a truth that transcends our own experience: God is our shepherd and so we lack for nothing.[603]

Rahner makes a sensible point. For us to say "I shall not want" is manifestly unreasonable, given our life experience. If there are times when we truly want for nothing on a material, social or spiritual level, these are moments that stand out for us in our experience. And perhaps as we remember them warmly we also mourn their brevity. But Rahner does not just portray it as an unreasonable statement: it is 'in defiance'

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[601] ibid. p.29.

[602] ibid. p.30.

[603] ibid. p.173.

of reality as we experience it. And to claim it as true is manifestly unreasonable. In making these arguments, Rahner takes a homiletic risk: he takes his audience to a place which is pastorally unstable. He has spoken the truth that, for most of humanity, it probably does not feel like we want for nothing under God's shepherding, and that the faithful statement we make of God's good providence is one which is unsupportable, unreasonable and even naïf. This is not the sort of preaching of "reasonable" faith which one would experience from a 20th Century European preacher.

However, Rahner does resolve this homiletic crisis, and he does so not by dismissing the conflict between "I shall not want" and our lived experience, but by complexifying it yet further. He says that the psalmist is not a 'foolish optimist'[604] because:

> this path that he has just called the right one, onto which the divine shepherd has led him, is the valley of the shadow of death, and it seems to get darker and darker.[605]

Rahner has taken a daring pastoral risk, but one which comes from the deepest parts of his Jesuit formation as well as his own theology of death (we are all inevitably, Rahner might argue if this was a lecture and not a sermon, walking the way towards our death). Rahner is preaching nothing less here than Ignatian indifference: if we are led along the path that leads through the valley of the shadow of death, then we must say, we are called to say, that it is God who leads us along that path. In one pastoral sense this is brutal. Does it provide comfort for someone in the depths of despair, someone who is trapped and feels alone, to be told that the God of love has led them there? In this sense there is something abusive about the sort of relationship with God Rahner describes. But at the same time, it must be said that this rather blunt and brutal statement is entirely faithful to the Ignatian ideal, and Rahner's reception of it as we explored in chapter 2. However, Rahner does provide solace, and again in total fidelity to the Ignatian concept of indifference:

> But he [the psalmist] goes on: "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for thou art with me." The good shepherd accompanies us along the paths that seem dark. He is with us even where we seem to lie in darkness and the shadow of death and not in green pastures.[606]

Even in the darkest places of the valley of the shadow of death, when we feel alone and abandoned, we are not alone, because the Good Shepherd has not abandoned us. The Good Shepherd accompanies us on that path of darkness, the Good Shepherd who knows how we feel and has stood in our shoes, 'for he has accompanied us through the darkness of this life on the way of the cross even unto Golgotha.'[607] And Rahner even softens the absolute darkness of the valley of the shadow of death. Maybe sometimes

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[604] ibid. p.174.

[605] ibid.

[606] ibid.

[607] ibid. p.175.

when things 'seem dark', it is truly because they only "seem" dark to us, but are in fact full of God's light, and the promise of fulfilment in the end.

The homily on Matthew's apocalypse placed our darkness into apocalyptic perspective, the final darkness which is necessary before the eternal light. The homily on Psalm 23 placed our darkness into christological perspective, emphasising Christ's walking with us the way of the cross, the valley of the shadow of death, always with us, even as we learn to accept this as God's will. But in a homily on the feast of the Nativity of John the Baptist entitled, "A Man is Born", Rahner takes this approach to comprehending the times of darkness in our lives and broadens his perspective. He attempts not just to focus on the moments of darkness in our lives, but to help us understand the same ideas in the great arc of the whole of our life's story, from cradle to grave. He begins with the optimism of birth, with our destination to receive grace and to be fulfilled in all goodness in union with God:

> He has called us into existence, an existence that is everlasting. He has called us into his grace and this grace is he himself and his own eternal life.[608]

However, Rahner contrasts this optimism and confidence with the fear at a birth, not the fear of the vulnerability and pain of pregnancy and childbirth itself (though that could also have served Rahner's purposes), but the fear about what this new human person might become, and what God's call on their life might entail.

> There is a mystery about this life. He who conferred this favour is the infinite God with all his unfathomable decrees and ordinances. He calls this man into being and no one can tell at the outset all that may be bound up with this call. Behind these lesser events they see the infinite mystery of God himself beginning to work through this incipient life, mysterious and inscrutable - and they are afraid.[609]

Our fear is rooted in the mystery of what this new life might entail, a "mystery" which Rahner allows us to believe is a mystery in the straightforward sense, simply something that we cannot yet know. And Rahner then suggests to his audience that the danger for us, when we are faced with that mystery and experience that fear, is that we squander our lives attempting to avoid, rather than locate and resolve, that fear of the mystery of life. Indeed, it is a danger to which we all succumb, more or less often in our lives:

> We are forever frantically trying to run away from this fear and find somewhere calmer, quieter and more comfortable, where this fear of God can no longer touch our lives.[610]

However, he calls his audience to locate that fear of mystery in the fear of the mystery of God: the fear of *the God who is the mystery of our lives*.

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[608] ibid. p.35.

[609] ibid. p.36

[610] ibid.

> There is a God, he has called us into existence without asking our leave, because he wished to confer this favour upon us. Ever since then the fearful and yet blessed mystery of God has ruled over the soul whom he has so called and thereby made himself to be the mystery of our lives. ... so that we could follow him and go before him to prepare his way, until the favour of God reveals itself as the ultimate meaning of the mystery of our life, until we can sing that eternal hymn of thanksgiving that shall not cease for ever.[611]

Finally from our perspective, everything in Rahner's theology of death comes together. The God who is mystery gives us birth in order to reveal Godself to us as mystery. And more than that, in order to be the mystery of our lives. This is perhaps as accessible as the supernatural existential and Rahner's theology of mystery is ever going to get: that God creates us so that God can be the longing, the unknowing, the desire, within us. And that therefore, that mystery and unknowing is not something to lead us to despair, but to hope. And even hope in death, for death no longer promises oblivious freedom from fear, but fulfilled and enlightened freedom from the fear of unknowing, even to the extent that our response to our own death is an 'eternal hymn of thanksgiving.'

Rahner attempts to communicate in his homilies a theology of abandonment to the mystery of God in death which is rich and complex, and yet in his homilies he almost always manages to ground this theology in the experiential, in the emotive and psychological realities of his audience. But before we move on from abandonment and death in Rahner's homilies, it is valuable to note some of the very practical homilies he gives which have this theology as their foundation. We have already discussed at some length the intention in Rahner's preaching and theology to cultivate life-long virtue, to encourage his audience to develop habits which enable the living-out of faith as Rahner understands it. But scriptural texts cause him to develop these themes in two new directions: first, how preparedness for death impels us to know true prayer and love; and second, how death shapes our perception of the world around us.

Texts about preparedness lead Rahner to preach about the suddenness of death. Although we live 'in a world where there is no such thing as black and white, only various shades of grey', we are always 'approaching a situation... where we shall either have loved God with all our heart and all our strength or be lost.'[612] We have already seen how Rahner writes about our propensity to deny the reality of the world, and the reality of our finitude and mortality, but here he addresses individual hearts and he addresses them directly.

> And yet in the midst of our lives, of our freedom and our struggles, we have to take a radical, absolute decision. And we never know when lightning will strike us out of the blue. ... Let us keep praying:

[611] ibid. p.37.

[612] ibid. p.119.

> God, give us the inner strength and steadfastness to keep our hearts awake, ready to say yes without reserve when the time comes to say it.[613]

This homily is rare in that its pastoral focus is not just helping us to cope with the reality of living in the valley of the shadow of death, but its focus is to make sure that we do in fact make the right decision when the time comes, by making the right decision every moment of our lives. The mystery is love and the one who is mystery walks with us on the path, but the mystery is still very much feared by the wise. The call to be sober and vigilant in 1 Peter 4 leads Rahner to make a very similar point, though in terms that are slightly less pastorally stark, for he translates "sobriety" to mean an awareness of our finiteness, an attitude of being awake:

> ... to the ultimacy of our existence. Then one is sober; for he who contemplates and weighs things as they are, as the Imitation says, is both sober and watchful and, as St Peter goes on, knows how to pray. For when can one pray? When contemplating God, when grasping the reality and earnestness of life, realising that all we are and have and experience is ordered with deadly certainty to God's judgment. ... anyone who knows the span of his life in God and faces it in God is free of himself and able to love his neighbour.[614]

The fear of the mystery of God which entails an awareness of our own mortality is ultimately liberating. It is not something which supresses our day-to-day flourishing, but rather releases us from the fantasies of our own power and the supremacy of our own will which prevent us from loving ourselves and loving others. Rahner's rather histrionic juxtaposition of the 'deadly certainty [of] God's judgment' with love and freedom creates rhetorical tension and then releases it, almost to comic effect. But it communicates powerfully and emotively the idea that if we possess this sobriety, living in the daily knowledge of our own finitude and mortality, we will be able truly to pray and to love. Finally, Rahner works this out in a very practical way in a homily on the call to have 'unity of spirit' in 1 Peter 3.5. After acknowledging that unity of spirit amongst diverse people is only possible in God 'in whom we live and move and have our being',[615] he suggests that we pray for people who trouble us, from whom we feel we are alienated. At one level, we should ask for the strength to endure people from whom we are separated by disagreement:

> Here is the man I cannot manage to get on with. He belongs to you. You made him. If you do not will him to be the way he is, at least you allow him to be that way. Dear God, I want to put up with him the way you put up with me.[616]

But actually Rahner is making a deeper point. The diversity of God's kingdom is 'eternally diverse and eternally at one in the love of one God.'[617] If what Rahner said about sobriety, love and prayer is true, then here he urges us to use prayer as an opportunity to abandon our divisions into the unity of the

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[613] ibid. p.120.

[614] ibid. p.180-181.

[615] ibid. p.178.

[616] ibid.

[617] ibid.

mystery of God. If God is the mystery of my finite life, then God is also the mystery of the finite life of the person from whom I am separated. In praying for that person, I acknowledge the one mystery which is our common life, and I claim God's life and love as the bridge between us, even if I cannot express that immediately in any other way than prayer, even prayer that is begrudging. Once again, Rahner has led us by an unexpected route to a positive decision to abandon ourselves into the positive mystery of God in our mortality.

This absolute sense of the unity of the finite world in the mystery of the infinite God leads Rahner to a rather odd exegetical engagement with Luke 5.1-11, in which Jesus tells Peter to cast his nets so that he draws a miraculous catch. He makes the argument that the loving person sees the world as a parable, and uses a fishing scene, of hard work and long hours as well as miraculous bounty, to make this point:

> But in this relaxed, almost serene unity of the world, our lives, and our callings, only the man who is loving and patient can see and recognise the likeness of his own life.[618]

The scene on the lake, of fishermen trying to earn their daily bread despite the meagre pickings, is not what many of us would describe as 'relaxed, almost serene', unless the scene is viewed from the romantic serenity of a deck-chair on the shore. But Rahner is making the point that this can be our perspective if we see our daily work within the context of the action by grace of the infinite God on our finite mortal lives. In this passage, Peter encounters God in Jesus in his daily work, and so we are able to see his daily labour as what it - and the whole world - really could be to us: a parable of God's work in the world. This is an idea which Rahner makes more bluntly in a homily on Romans 12.6-12, a text which far more clearly resonates with Rahner's ideas about abandonment.

> So these first three verses say to us: Do your job, accept it, do not look for anything else, do not dream of something you have not got and can never have. Do what you are called to by the reality of your life, perhaps even by the sheer force of your circumstances... Whatever we have to do is a vocation from God.[619]

The three verses about which Rahner is speaking (Romans 12.6-8) are not really, at first glance, about daily work. They tend to be interpreted as emphasising the different ministries to which we are called in the life of the church: the prophet, the minister, the teacher, the exhorter, the giver, the leader and the compassionate. But Rahner, perhaps because of his commitment to all of human activity as potential ministries of the church if done by Christians, reads this as a text about our secular vocations as well. What is striking is the parallel with ideas of abandonment and acceptance in his theology of death. 'Do your job, accept it, do not look for anything else' could be translated as, "Live your life as the finite being you are, abandon yourself into the positive future of God, and do not live in a life-destroying and sinful denial." I am struck by the call to do whatever is the reality of our lives, even if the call we discern is only

[618] ibid. p.39.

[619] ibid. p.97.

'the sheer force of your circumstances.' We must ask whether this call to endure difficult circumstances needs to be tempered in the light of the experience of those who are trapped in difficult circumstances, in systemic oppression and abusive relationships and working practices. The 'sheer force of your circumstances' should not be uncritically equated with a vocation from God. However, Rahner's next statement may go some way to rehabilitating this more problematic sense of uncritical abandonment.

> It is the chance of a lifetime; our one chance to be Christian.[620]

The 'sheer force of your circumstances' is not necessarily a vocation in the sense that we must accept it as God's positive calling in our lives and abandon ourselves to it being acceptable and inescapable for us. What Rahner means by vocation here is that it is the context in which *right now* we find ourselves working out our Christian vocation. Whether or not the situation in which we find ourselves is right and good and acceptable *does in fact matter*, but this question is secondary to *how we are living out our calling to grace, to union with God, and to fulfilment in dying the death of Christ*. This is profoundly Ignatian. That one's primary focus is on discerning the will of God *does not mean* that what is done to us or our circumstances are acceptable and good. Taking 'our one chance to be Christian' may well mean escaping our circumstances or changing our work. But the purpose of changing and escaping is the human flourishing in grace, the abandonment to grace and acceptance of the blinding light of God in the darkness, which is the 'chance of a lifetime.'

I cannot pretend in this reading of Rahner that he makes it as clear as I have done that our Christian vocation may mean escaping harmful and abusive circumstances. Rahner does not. But he commits a sin of omission in this respect, rather than proclaiming a theology which is opposed and inconsistent with the way I have read it. For example, in the next week's homily, which takes the immediately following passage from Romans (12.16-21), Rahner revisits abandonment and acceptance in our daily lives. Perhaps taking his cue from the challenge in v.14 to 'Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them', Rahner argues that we do not overcome evil with our own goodness, but with abandonment. However, he does not argue this simply from the text. He argues it on the basis that this is how God overcomes evil, and so we overcome evil by imitating God:

> by this ampler, purer, selfless, silent goodness a man as it were causes evil to sink back into its own nothingness; he snuffs out evil, he turns it into good. Now this is a proper attribute of God... whose goodness, forbearance and magnanimity let man follow evil, as it were, to the point of absurdity...[621]
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> Many a time in our daily lives we have an opportunity to be patient with others, to be kind though they are not, to refrain from giving tit for tat, to be considerate and helpful to people who are unlikely to do the same for us.[622]

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[620] ibid.

[621] ibid. p.100.

[622] ibid. p.101.

What is most striking here is how Rahner contrasts the act of overcoming evil with goodness. In so much preaching, overcoming evil with good is represented as a heroic vocation, a great work which Christians are called to do, a task which may expend a great part of our life's energy. But not here. Rahner represents evil as the thing that takes great effort. Snuffing out evil by doing good, on the other hand, is relatively easy. Rather than fighting it, we merely need to abandon it into the goodness of God, to let it fall under the weight of its own exertion. Abandonment works in two directions, abandoning evil to its finite futility and ourselves to God's infinite fulness. Or, rather, abandoning ourselves to God's infinite fulness of life means accepting the finite end of the things that lead to the death of Adam. It is not that we overcome evil by heroically refraining 'from giving tit-for-tat' or by 'helping people who are unlikely to do the same for us' and so earn the right to die the death of Christ. It is that each time we choose not to worry so much about the daily finite battles, such that we are freed to show love even when it is not reciprocated, we are in our daily lives dying the death of Christ, again and again, abandoning ourselves to the fulness of God's infinite light in the darkness of the finite deaths of Adam, the shadows of our daily encounters with the futility of evil.

(ii) Acceptance and the Holy Spirit

In a homily on Matthew 20.1-16 on the parable of the workers in the vineyard, Rahner shifts his preaching from concepts of abandonment to a more significant engagement with ideas about grace. He begins with a quite standard interpretation of the text, suggesting that 'this truth, that everything depends on the free mercy of God, is also a truth which comforts us and raises us up and frees us from a burden.'[623] The burden from which the mercy of God frees us is the burden of disposing of ourselves in our own power, of negotiating our own reality by ourselves, for: 'The thing which God freely disposes of, the thing we cannot negotiate or calculate about with him, is ultimately our own selves.'[624] The only appropriate response to this reality is to abandon ourselves to it, to abandon ourselves into the way God disposes of our life, for the reality into which we are abandoning ourselves is the love and mercy of God. And this extends beyond ourselves to accepting God's disposal of others as well: 'And whenever we grumble and complain about others with whom God has dealt differently, we are really refusing to accept our own selves from the hands of God.'[625] Abandonment of ourselves into God's future entails abandoning others into God's future also, and it is only when we abandon others into God's future that we can truly abandon ourselves: that is, when we measure ourselves only by God's metric, God's mercy, and not in relation to others.

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[623] ibid. p.24.

[624] ibid. pp.24-25.

[625] ibid. p.25.

This is all straightforward, and I could have put our engagement with this homily in the previous section on death and abandonment. However, this homily develops these ideas in a more interesting way, to explore the reciprocity of the abandonment to which God calls us. Rahner restates that we are called to receive ourselves as free gifts from God, to accept ourselves as God has gifted us, and so to abandon ourselves to the selfhood God has given:

> ... but ultimately what we receive is ourselves. This we must accept, not just without grumbling, without inward protest, but with a good will, because it is given to us by the God who asks: "Do you begrudge my generosity?" This, then, is our great life's work: to accept ourselves as the mysterious and gradually revealed gift of the eternal generosity of God.[626]

But the move Rahner then makes is to anchor this acceptance of ourselves as God's gift with a reminder that, when we do this, God is in fact also giving Godself to us. The acceptance is double, and the gift is reciprocal.

> For everything that we are and have, even the painful and mysterious, is God's generous gift; we must not grumble at it but must accept it in the knowledge that when we do so God gives himself with his gift - .... And yet God is willing to give us everything if we will only accept it - ourselves and himself and life without end.[627]

Rahner's preaching here is drawing on two levels of his understanding of grace. At the first, what is alluded to might be the supernatural existential: along with the gift of ourselves is God the Spirit's calling us into fulfilment of all that we are created to be. However, we might also parse Rahner's preaching here as making a point about the graceful gift of faith. For we can only accept the knowledge of God's gift of ourselves and Godself by the grace of faith working within us by the power of the Spirit. What is particularly interesting here is the phrase, 'but must accept [God's gift of all we are and have] in the knowledge that *when we do so* God gives himself with his gift' [my italics]. 'When we do so' implies more than a mere coincidental relationship between our acceptance of God's gift and the gift of God's gift. What, I suggest, we have here is reciprocal priority operating within Rahner's preaching. We accept God's gift because we are already to some extent in receipt of God's gift, and that acceptance itself constitutes a reception of God's gift. Rahner blurs the lines between the grace of faith on the one hand, and what is beginning to look more like a grace of acceptance on the other. Both of these seem to operate as created graces in a causal relationship characterised by reciprocal priority with the uncreated grace of the gift of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. To put it bluntly, Rahner is making the homiletic point that we accept the reality of God's gifts because we have received them, and receiving them is to accept the reality of God's gifts. This is a point which Rahner also seems to make in a homily on prayer:

> No, asking in Jesus' name means entering into him, living in him, being one with him in love and faith. If he is in us in faith, in love, in grace, in his Spirit, and then our petition arises from the centre of our

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[626] ibid.

[627] ibid.

> being, which is himself, and if all our petition and desire is gathered up and fused in him and his Spirit, then the Father hears us.[628]

We will discuss later in the section on the Passion and Pentecost the way in which Rahner blends here our dwelling in Christ and the Spirit's dwelling in us. But here what is interesting is the way Rahner concentrates technical terms of Jesus' dwelling in us 'in faith, in love, in grace, in his Spirit', unleashing on his audience an extended tricolon of theological ideas about God's grace and our acceptance of God's grace. They are blended in a way which is not theologically precise, but undeniably rhetorically powerful. In the things of faith and grace, God is in us and we are in God, and when we accept that so that 'all our petition and desire is gathered up and fused in him and his Spirit', then that is true prayer. Rahner is able to take the preacher's shortcut of ignoring *how it works* theologically, but emphasising *that it works* theologically.

He makes similar links elsewhere. In a homily on the Parable of the Shrewd Manager (Luke 16.1-9), he calls his audience to an imitation of Christ's bearing with us. He explains this in christological terms:

> He was patient and long-suffering, a sober realist - which is why he puts up with us. Must we not imitate him a little and bear with his world - our environment, our fellowmen, our Church - so that God may also bear with us? For if he does not, what is to become of us?[629]

But then he switches to the mode of acceptance to explain this call to patience.

> ... to see in the most contrasting fortunes of our lives a chance to bring forth fruit for eternity, to prove our love for God, to be patient and courageous, unassuming and devoted; or do we insist on having our own way in the service that we offer God, are we prepared to find him only in the particular situation we have chosen? ... pray instead of complaining.[630]

We are to understand patience and suffering in terms of acceptance that reflects the complexity of the real-ontological dialectic of activity and passivity: by seizing the 'chance' to live our Christian life, which Rahner outlines in perhaps overly heroic language. And we are to embody all this in prayer. But then Rahner switches theological mode a third time in this homily, as he moves to talk about how this prayerful acceptance comes about. It comes about in grace:

> ... if we are prudent enough by God's grace to acknowledge with a heavenly prudence: This too is a word of God's eternal love; I must be loving and courageous and answer yes.[631]

Only grace can enable us to accept difficult things as 'word[s] of God's eternal love', and so only grace can enable us to come to true acceptance and abandonment, the place at which we are able to answer 'yes'. Because this is a homily, we do not have from Rahner here a clear system in which the relationships are all worked out between the imitation of Christ's abandonment and acceptance, our own acceptance

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[628] ibid. p.85.

[629] ibid. p.59.

[630] ibid. p.60.

[631] ibid. p.61.

embodied in prayer, and the grace which enables us to do this. We do not even have clear statements about the relationships between the supernatural existential, faith, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. But we do have in this homily a clear *narrative link* between our acceptance understood christologically and the pneumatological gift of grace. In this homily, Rahner clearly is attempting to make that link in his audience's minds, even if he doesn't lay out his theological reasoning.

Although Rahner makes these links in his homilies in more of a narrative mode than a theological analytical mode, this is not to say that he does not ever make the theological complexities of grace and acceptance explicit within his preaching. In a homily on Paul's concept of love in 1 Corinthians 13.1-13, Rahner begins by describing the beatific vision, in terms that will be familiar to us from his theology of mystery, as abandoning knowledge in love, a consummation of knowledge which 'is perfected only when it is done away with'[632] so that even our seeing face-to-face shall be to 'gaze on the incomprehensible God.'[633] How, then, Rahner asks, does Paul's concept of the love which never ends come into it?

> What is love anyhow? And the answer must be: Everything, the all-embracing, that which comprehends all things and is not comprehended, God who is love, man who has attained to God in love, the unutterable.[634]

In the concept of the love which never ends is unified the knower and the known in the beatific vision, the fully realised Christian person and the unknowable mystery on which they gaze. But Rahner does not leave his audience hanging in such a conceptually abstract space. He continues to explore how we can understand what this means:

> If we did not already know from experience what it means, no one could explain to us this saying: "Make love your aim." It would be Greek to us. But since God has already poured forth the Holy Spirit of his love into our hearts, these words mean something to the man who is sick with longing, who grieves over darkness, who rejoices in the truth, who struggles towards mystery and light inaccessible, so that it may one day be accessible and he may look upon it.[635]

The beatific vision, the fulfilment of love in our gazing on the mystery of the unknowable God makes sense to us, according to Rahner, because we are endowed with the supernatural existential. Because we are partially fulfilled by the Holy Spirit now, and because we are 'sick with longing' for our consummation, our complete fulfilment, in the beatific vision, we *experientially* can grasp what Paul means in 1 Corinthians 13.1-13. As before, Rahner uses the homiletic narrative to collapse complex concepts into one another, and to complexify the relationships between concepts (here, particularly in using love to unite us with the mystery of God). But here he also adds theological complexity: in the Spirit dwelling in us, we both know

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[632] ibid. p.122.

[633] ibid.

[634] ibid. pp.123-124.

[635] ibid. p124.

our union with God (i.e. we know love) but also our lack of total fulfilment in and gazing on the mystery of God (i.e. the desire and longing for love).

Rahner ties these ideas together rather neatly for our purposes in a homily on the law of liberty in James 1.22-27. He describes us as 'prisoners of [our] finitude', evoking his discussion of the fall in his theology of death, emphasising that not only are we finite but that we also have the curse of *knowing* 'that we are finite and [so] we feel ourselves oppressed and trapped by finitude.'[636] However, in his solution to this entrapment and imprisonment, Rahner neatly lays out the relationship between faith and the supernatural existential for his audience:

> Yes, it [i.e. the law of liberty] is already given to us, for God's Spirit, the Spirit of infinite freedom, is already given to us - in faith, of course; in hope; and in that love which will never end. If then we feel unfree, imprisoned, distressed, and heavy laden, that is an admonition to descend deeper into our hearts, to where God already dwells in his Holy Spirit of boundless freedom.[637]

The Holy Spirit is given to us, Rahner argues, through faith, hope and love. So, first of all, he complexifies the relationship between uncreated grace (the indwelling of the Holy Spirit) and the created graces (faith, hope and love) which are both the means by which the Spirit dwells within us and effects of the Spirit's dwelling within us. Then, we are advised to respond to feelings of imprisonment (perhaps it would be better to say, "feelings of the lack of the freedom of the Spirit") not by asking relief from God, but rather descending into ourselves, where God already is. The irony, of course, in Rahner's anthropology, is that we are only aware of all these negative feelings, of feeling 'unfree, imprisoned, distressed, and heavy laden' *because we have the supernatural existential in the first place*. We only feel unfree because we have the Spirit of freedom within us, calling us to greater freedom. We only feel the effects of death upon us, because we are called through them to the fullness of life in the Spirit and to gaze upon the mystery of God in all God's fullness. We only feel the call to abandonment and acceptance as a hardship, because we already have a foretaste in the Spirit dwelling within us of the fullness into which we are called to abandon ourselves, and which we are, by the Spirit's power, to accept. But it must be said, Rahner does not own up in his homilies to this irony, that the supernatural existential is not only the gift of Godself but also the curse of our awareness of our lack of Godself. Perhaps this is, rhetorically and pastorally, a mode of acceptance too far.

(iii) Passion and Pentecost

[636] ibid. p.170.

[637] ibid.

A particular benefit of placing emphasis on Rahner's homilies as a theological source is that he is maybe directed, maybe forced, to engage with concepts which are less common in his formal theological works. The Gospel according to John, and in particular the section of the High Priestly prayer in John 16 dealing with the Holy Spirit, led Rahner to make more explicit links between the ministry of Christ and the ministry of the Spirit. Rahner preached these homilies on Easter 4 and Easter 5, when the lectionary begins to turn towards the role of the Spirit at Pentecost, so in these homilies Rahner makes clear and enlightening links between the Passion of Christ and the ministry of the Spirit in the economy of grace.

In one of two homilies on John 16.5-14 (we do not know the dates on which they were preached, or which predates the other), Rahner sets out a rather pneumatological vision which has much resonance with the theology of death, but delivers a striking link between death and the Holy Spirit. In an initially uncontroversial move, Rahner says that the departure of Jesus 'is the coming of the Father and existence in the Holy Ghost.'[638] This is the Johannine idea that Jesus must depart in order for the Spirit to be sent, encapsulated in v.7.[639] But Rahner then reinterprets this idea using his theology of death:

> We might put it this way: There is no such thing, either in the world or in the heart, as literal vacancy, as a vacuum. And wherever space is really left by parting, by death, by renunciation, by apparent emptiness, provided the emptiness that cannot remain such is not filled by the world, or activity, or chatter, or the deadly grief of the world - there God is. When he is in the heart in this way we call him the Holy Spirit, because he is revealed to us out of the fulness of the Godhead, by the mercy of the Father, and sent to us as the Spirit of the Son.[640]

This interpretation of Jesus' speech in John is potentially problematic. We must begin by limiting our reading of Rahner's text to a psychological one. Rahner is not saying that Christ was abiding in the hearts of the disciples, and then when Christ had vacated the space the Holy Spirit was able to slip in, as if by displacement. Rather, he makes the argument that, when we experience emptiness and loss, and when we resist the temptation to immediately fill that emptiness with other things (i.e. the distractions of the world), then God is with us in that emptiness. And when that emptiness is in the heart, and we endure that emptiness without avoidance or distraction, then God is with us in the Holy Spirit in our hearts. On one level we are perhaps meant to read this as an explanation of Jesus' pastoral approach to the disciples. He is not abandoning them, but rather exposing them even after his crucifixion to the further emptiness of loss, to the darkness of the encounter with death and mortality in the loss of his person, so that they can receive the Holy Spirit in their bearing with that darkness.[641] Even the disciples must pass the test, not

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[638] ibid. p.77.

[639] cf. John 16.7: '...it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.'

[640] Rahner, Biblical Homilies, pp.77-78.

[641] Rahner does not make the argument that this is what Jesus does when he tells Mary 'Do not hold on to me' (John 20.17) after the resurrection, but it would have been a good homiletic connection to have made.

clinging on to artificial certainties or even Jesus standing in front of them, but must rather abandon themselves to the darkness of what they might experience as Christ's abandonment of them:

> that man who does not abandon himself to trusting faith has already judged himself in this deadly emptiness, in this despairing darkness.[642]

As we have seen throughout Rahner's pastoral theology and his theology of death, to lean into the darkness and emptiness of finitude, mortality and loss and not to distract oneself with other things, not to artificially fill the void, is precisely what it means to die the death of Christ in everyday life. And so we come to a startling realisation: that to die the death of Christ in our everyday lives *is to receive the Holy Spirit in our hearts*. For Rahner, it is not only true that dying the death of Christ in our everyday lives is a test for the presence of the Spirit. It is also true that dying the death of Christ is precisely the reason the Spirit is given to us, to dwell in our hearts. Dying the death of Christ is the gift of the Spirit, and the death of Christ in the daily deaths of our life is what the Spirit speaks in our deepest being. Blending the voice of the risen Jesus speaking to the disciples with the voice of the preacher speaking to the congregation, Rahner says:

> For the Spirit does not speak of something or other; he speaks of me who have [*sic*] entered with your own destiny into my Father's infinity. He declares what he hears - ultimately, what he is -, the eternal wisdom of God himself which blossoms in silence, in the experience of our own crucifying finitude.[643]

This is, it must be confessed, a little bleak, especially for the jubilant Sundays after Easter. Perhaps it is the exuberance of the festal season which enables Rahner to take a homiletic turn towards the dark. But this is captivating rhetoric, and this homily does not rely on the passion of Christ to ground it in reality, but evokes all the darkness and emptiness in our lives as it anoints it with the salve of the Holy Spirit, and consecrates that darkness with the significance of Pentecost.

But we are blessed with the example of a second homily on the same text. And Rahner here takes a rather different approach, and though again the link between Passion and Pentecost shines through clearly, the pneumatological implications of Rahner's argument are not worked through nearly so convincingly. The title of the homily is, "The Spirit of Truth Accuses the World", and Rahner develops three ways in which the Holy Spirit convinces the world of themes related to Christ's Passion. The first, and least convincing in terms of the quality of the argument which Rahner advances, is that the Spirit convinces us of the scandal of the cross and Jesus' return to the Father. Rahner's usually nuanced language seems to break down here: 'And whenever we do not understand that truth [the Crucifixion and Ascension of Christ], we are sinners.'[644] However, given the homiletic context of the disciples' failure to comprehend

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[642] Rahner, *Biblical Homilies*, p.79.

[643] ibid. p.79.

[644] ibid. p.81.

Jesus' leaving them first in his arrest and death on the cross and then in the ascension, this makes more sense. The point which Rahner is making rather bluntly is that the disciples are sinning because they are trying to hold on to Jesus against God's will, and he develops his reasoning to include us in this, and to include the gift of the Holy Spirit:

> Now the Spirit is meant to teach us, to convince us who would not accept the scandal of the cross - not in our own lives, not in the Church, not in the world -, that the Holy Spirit of God, of truth of power, of love, comes in the cross, and that any other opinion is a sin, is a refusal to believe in the crucified and risen Lord who has returned to his Father.[645]

Leaving aside the continuing unnuanced propositional sense of belief, Rahner is picking up the Johannine theme that Christ must depart (through the cross) in order for the Spirit to be given. And so to cling to Christ, to try to believe that Christ has not departed, is to deny the reality, that Christ has departed, and that this is who Christ is, the risen and ascended Lord. That the Holy Spirit teaches us this is asserted by Rahner, but it is not clear whether this teaching is an inner whispering in the heart or a proof (i.e. that since we have the Holy Spirit, Christ must have returned to the Father). However, Rahner does successfully convey the idea that the death of Christ (i.e. the taking away of Jesus) was necessary for the sending of the Spirit.

The second theme of which the Spirit convinces the world is Christ's righteousness. And this is couched in terms of Jesus' acceptance of death, and Jesus acceptance by the Father in his death: Jesus is the one who fully abandons himself to God's future in his death. And in this full abandonment, Jesus is fully human, Jesus is being who Jesus truly is, and so Jesus is, in this sense, "right":

> The Spirit convinces the world of righteousness: because I am going to the Father, because I am the one whom the Father accepts in death, because I am the one - Jesus means - who having placed his soul in the Father's hands through this frightful death, truly reaches him in what seems to be the moment of defeat, of ruin and disaster. Wherever the folly of the cross is, there he goes to the Father, he is accepted even though we no longer see him, and there he is right. That is what the Spirit convinces the world of: of his being right, of his righteousness.[646]

Again, it is not really clear how the Spirit convinces us of Jesus' righteousness. But, as Rahner tackles the third theme of which the Spirit convinces the world, judgment, this becomes only a little clearer. Here Rahner makes the argument that our sorrow at Jesus' withdrawal 'into the shadow of death, into infinite distance' from us is what convicts us 'because you think I have gone away',[647] and that this is an action of the Holy Spirit:

> But I have gone home, and only so can the Spirit dwell with you, he who can convince you too that not believing in this truth of my going to the Father is the ultimate basis of your sins, and that my

[645] ibid.

[646] ibid. p.82.

[647] ibid. p.83.

> going, my being right pronounces judgement even in this world upon the powers of sin that would hold you captive.[648]

Once again, Rahner states the idea that Jesus goes in order that the Spirit may be sent, and that this is what it means for Jesus to be "right" - this is who Jesus is. Rahner restates the idea, though more firmly this time, that our denial of this reality of Jesus is a sin. But this time he goes further, saying that it is 'the ultimate basis of our sins'. I am not sure how to parse this in a way which is consistent with Rahner's theology as we have explored it thus far. Perhaps we can say that, since Jesus has descended to the depths of all reality and transfigured all reality with his pan-cosmic reality, to deny Jesus' crucified and ascended reality is in some way to deny *all* reality. Or perhaps we can say that, if the goal is to die the death of Christ rather than the death of Adam, to deny the reality of the death of Christ is to cut ourselves off from the possibility of ever being able to die the death of Christ - we are doomed to the death of Adam. But neither of these possible harmonisations are worked through, or even really hinted at in this homily. We are left a little confused. And as for the action of the Holy Spirit, the implication again is that the Spirit convinces us of the judgment, but the judgment belongs to Jesus - his 'being right pronounces judgment' simply perhaps by its sheer difference from our failure to "be right" in abandoning ourselves into the fullness of God's life. Apart from the fact that the Spirit fills the void left by Jesus' departure, which is a fundamental part of Jesus' 'being right', and so the judgement, it is still unclear what Rahner means by the Spirit convincing the world, or really what role the Spirit has other than gesturing in some way to our failure to die the "right" death of Christ.

The third homily on John 16 which we shall consider deals with a text which does not even mention the Holy Spirit. John 16.23-30 begins with the invitation to ask things of the Father in Jesus' name. Then, statements about the unity of the love of the Father and the Son and Jesus' leaving the world and returning to the Father, ending with the disciples' response: that they believe that Jesus came from God. The homily is entitled, "God in You Desires God For You", and it is not immediately clear from the text how Rahner comes to this title. However, we have already noted the way in these homilies in which Rahner blends concepts about faith and grace in order to link them without needing to show his theological working, and at the same time he also blends language about abiding in Jesus with language about the Spirit dwelling in us:

> No, asking in Jesus' name means entering into him, living in him, being one with him in love and faith. If he is in us in faith, in love, in grace, in his Spirit, and then our petition arises from the centre of our being, which is himself, and if all our petition and desire is gathered up and fused in him and his Spirit, then the Father hears us.[649]

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[648] ibid.

[649] ibid. p.85.

Rahner seems to make the argument that, since the Spirit dwells in 'the centre of our being', it is true to say that Christ is 'in us... in his Spirit,' so that we can say any prayer which comes from the 'centre of our being, which is himself,' is really made from Jesus. What is fascinating here is that the Spirit's internal and external abiding with us are blurred as much as is the abiding of Jesus and the Spirit in the depths of our being. By this I mean that Rahner avoids a model of prayer in which we pray in Jesus' name and the Spirit acts as an external mediator to the Father (the Holy Postal Service!). But he also avoids a model in which our prayers are entirely internally mediated: such that the prayer is made, mediated, heard and answered all in the depths of our being. No, Rahner blends both these models in a manner analogous to the reciprocal priority he uses to complexify other concepts which might too easily be reduced to causal "processes". In this homily, Christ sends the Spirit, and the Spirit dwelling within us mediates Christ's presence in our deepest being. Our prayer from our deepest being is therefore made in Jesus' name already by the power of the Spirit. But then this prayer is 'gathered up and fused in [Jesus] and his Spirit': the mediation of the prayer is an action both of Christ and the Holy Spirit, or perhaps it would be better to say that it is an action of the Spirit mediating the power of Christ. There is no clear causal order from Christ to Spirit, but the actions of Christ and the Spirit are united without blending them into indistinguishability. And it is not clear whether this "gathering" and "fusing" of the prayer happens in the depths of our being or externally to us. The Spirit is the Spirit within us as much as the free-flowing Spirit, and Christ is as much Christ within us as he is Christ at the right hand of the Father and even Christ on the cross.

This collapsing of time and space in the mediation of Christ by the Holy Spirit is a theme which Rahner develops as he considers what it means to pray in the Spirit. The choice, Rahner tells his audience, is stark:

> We have only two alternatives: either to ask the Father in Jesus's name for the good Spirit - as Jesus says in St Luke - or to be a confusion of centrifugal desires which divide our heart, rend our life asunder, and finally run down in death.[650]

What it means to ask for the Spirit is defined negatively: if we do not ask for the Spirit, we are doomed to internal disunity, in a manner which picks up directly themes from Rahner's theology of death. Disunity and anthropological division lead to the squandering of life and the negative sense of death which is not the death of Christ. In contrast:

> ...to pray in Jesus's name is to have one's prayer answered, to receive God and God's blessing; and then, even amid tears, even in pain, even in indigence, even when it seems that one has still not been heard, the heart rests in God, and that - while we are still here on pilgrimage, far from the Lord - is perfect joy.[651]

To ask for the Spirit is, as Rahner flips freely between the two, 'to pray in Jesus name'. And this is to receive a unity and wholeness which is quite distinct from any earthly suffering, which transcends our daily

[650] ibid. p.86.

[651] ibid.

encounter with death, and gifts us 'perfect joy' even as we await the consummation and fulfilment of this joy in finally dying the death of Christ. Whereas in the first homily we considered on John 16.5-14, Rahner made the startling argument that to die the death of Christ in our everyday lives is to receive the Holy Spirit in our hearts, here Rahner develops his reasoning: Christ's prayer of abandonment and sending the Spirit on us is united by the Spirit with our prayer for the Spirit and our own abandonment in death.

> Ask now in my name, as you pray with me, the prayer I said on the cross: "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit"; when I knew that I was returning home to the Father and that on my homecoming he will pour forth the Spirit in your heart, God in you to ask for God for you so that your prayer may be answered and your joy may be full.[652]

This moment of climactic emotional and spiritual tension in the homily is loaded with Rahnerian theological concepts. Rahner adopts the voice of Christ in his preaching, in order to convey the idea that when we commend ourselves into the Father's hands, we are not only imitating Christ's abandonment. We are in fact joining Christ in one unified and simultaneous act of abandonment embodied in an act of prayer. The nuance here is in the two parallel movements of Christ's prayer and ours, unified but different. Christ is already unified with the Father, and in his perfect self-abandonment does not need to pray for the Spirit to abide with him - for the Spirit already abides with him. Rather, Christ's prayer of abandonment on the cross to the Father is luminous with Christ's high-priestly prayer that the Spirit will descend on us his disciples. From our perspective, we are not already fully unified with the Father, and we do not attain perfect self-abandonment in the manner of Jesus, for we have not yet died the death of Christ. So our prayer of self-abandonment with Jesus must necessarily entail a petition for the Spirit to unite us with the divine life, and enable our dying the death of Christ. But as time and space expand again in Rahner's reasoning, and we move back from Golgotha to the present, this prayer is itself made by us in the power of the Spirit who has already been sent, who is 'God in you to ask for God for you', the Spirit abiding in the depths of our being in the unfulfilled supernatural existential. The Spirit invites us into the prayer of Christ, and enables the union of our prayer and Christ's, so that we are able to pray truly for the Spirit, who enables us to abandon ourselves to die the death of Christ, daily and into our end in union with God.

This sense in which Rahner collapses the distance which separates our prayer and death from Christ's prayer and death comes across more straightforwardly in a homily on John 18.33-37, preached on the feast of Christ the King. However, it is less straightforwardly pneumatological: Rahner does not explicitly name the Spirit. After arguing that in dying the death of Christ truth submits to falsehood, deliberately 'exposing itself' to death and 'bearing triumphant witness to itself by submitting to the ignoring which the

[652] ibid. p.87.

lying world holds in store for it',[653] Rahner considers what it means to pray that we might imitate Christ's triumphant witness of abandonment in death:

> Disperse the darkness of my heart and allow your truth - which is humility, faithfulness, hoping against hope, blessed truth - to be in me, so that your power may triumph by drawing everything to you, as you hang there, lifted up upon the cross - even my poor heart.[654]

When the Holy Spirit is not mentioned in the scriptural text for the day, Rahner is less inclined to make explicitly pneumatological moves in his preaching. Here, the prayer to collapse the distance between our hearts and Jesus is made to Christ, and it is explicitly Christ's power which draws everything to him, and Christ's truth which is needed in us to make this happen. None of this excludes a pneumatological reading of the homily: the mediation of the Spirit of the power and truth of Christ and the witness of the Spirit to Christ's death are all potentially fertile theological-homiletic matter, but Rahner does not develop these ideas. It would be entirely consistent theologically to read this homily as a homily about how the Spirit unites our hearts with Jesus on the cross, and that would follow from our reading of the other homilies on John 16. But this homily is important to note, particularly in the context of this project, because it prevents us from thinking that in Rahner's homilies we have found the clearest evidence for an as-yet-undiscovered pneumatological focus within Rahner's thought. We do not have that, and we must resist the temptation to be carried away by the themes which emerge in the select homilies in which the text forces Rahner to be more pneumatologically explicit. These homilies do make theological moves of pneumatological significance, and they are interesting, but - as has been the case throughout much of this project - we must admit that we are deliberately seeking to magnify a theme which Rahner's wider body of work, like the work of most of his contemporaries, downplays.

(iv) The Holy Spirit and the Eucharist

An excellent example of this is Rahner's homilies on the Eucharist. In chapter 3, we explored Rahner's theology of the eucharist at length and drew out pneumatological themes within it, exploring where these themes might take us if we followed them further. However, much of Rahner's preaching will disappoint us if we look for corroborating "evidence" that our development of Rahner's themes was at the forefront of his own theological mind. Some homilies, such as one on a portion of John 6 entitled "We Have Not Far to Seek", are simply a collection of statements about the real presence of Christ and the significance of the real presence of Christ for us, but without any consideration of how Christ is present for us.[655] Another, which was preached not that long after Pentecost, describes the Eucharist in terms entirely as

[653] ibid. p.90.

[654] ibid.

[655] ibid. pp.50-53.

an act of the Word. The Eucharist can make Christ present to us because 'an action performed by him who is Son of Man and Son of God has dimensions that are infinite', and it is Christ as 'the eternal High Priest' who is mediator of this sacrament to us.[656] In this homily, the christological high-priestly theology leaves aside questions of *how* Christ is in our midst, beyond alluding to ideas about Christ's eternity and infinity. Rahner certainly does not get the word "pan-cosmic" into any of his homilies (that I have found). However, he does manage to preach on the theme of primordial words in a homily on the Parable of the Sower. Rahner tells his audience that Jesus' words are powerful because he 'speaks from the source of final and definitive words', and that this is because 'he comes from above and does not speak human wisdom' but rather himself constitutes 'God's grace and salvation on the hearts of men'.[657] As a simple and relatively accessible statement of the "word" theology we explored in chapter 3, this is a good example.

However, more interesting is a homily on the call in Philippians 4 to rejoice on account of God's nearness. The homily begins with the sort of argument with which we are familiar, picking up themes of death, abandonment, and acceptance of reality:

> And he is close to us as well, in the destiny that leads our lives towards a single goal, to death and judgement, which may be nearer than we think. The Lord is near. He is close to all of us. Are we close to him? // We ought not to fear this closeness. We should feel that it is a blessed, protective closeness, the closeness of our salvation, of our strength, the closeness of promise and fulfilment, the closeness of authentic reality, the closeness of all that draws to itself the whole fabric of our history and the narrow of our being; the closeness of our whole destiny.[658]

What is striking is that this could be interpreted entirely christologically. For surely the most authentic reality in the context of death and judgment (knowing what we know of Rahner's understanding of Christ's death) should be the person and witness of Christ himself. The blessed closeness should be the closeness of the infinite self-abandoned Christ who has gone into the heart of all reality and transfigured it with his fulness and truth. But Rahner goes on immediately to say:

> If we felt the closeness of the Lord in this way and if we were close to him in this way by faith, hope and love, then his closeness would be joy and peace to us.

Christ is not close to us (according to this homily) in the christologically understood manner of Jesus' infinite presence to the finite person. Rather, *we are present to Christ* on account of the graces of faith, hope and love, which Rahner has elsewhere parsed in pneumatological terms. It is important not to overstate the point here, for I am not arguing that Rahner's audience are meant to respond with voice, "Yes, it is the Spirit about which he speaks!" Rather, we can see that, even dealing with texts which are not explicitly focussed on the Spirit, Rahner is reasoning in a way which does include pneumatological

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[656] ibid. p.33.

[657] ibid. p.42.

[658] ibid. p.139.

ideas and is consistent with a wider trinitarian theology. Christology is not Rahner's "default mode" from which he is deflected only when forced by the text. The inclusion of pneumatological themes is far more complex than that. For example, in the same homily, he moves from a discussion of God's nearness to us to a discussion of "eucharist". And this is not eucharist understood only with a capital "E", for Rahner deliberately elides (in an entirely uncontroversial move) the broader eucharist of prayer and thanksgiving with the Eucharist of the Mass:

> In all prayer and supplication - with thanksgiving. Astonishing. When Paul is speaking of prayer, supplication, prayer that arises from the troubles of life, he thinks of thanksgiving, of "eucharist" - the word used here. When we pray, are we only little beggars before God, wrapped up in our own worries? Is our heart ever enlarged in thanksgiving, as it were a great preface in the eucharist of which our life is the celebration...[659]

In christological and eschatological terms, what is referred to is the cosmic eucharist, the heavenly banquet of consummation resplendent with the glory of the Lamb, of which the Mass is the most focussed foretaste. But to this he adds 'prayer that arises from the troubles of life', prayer which is a response to our encounter with daily death, the response from the Spirit within us to the Spirit without us, uniting us with the Father, the Son and the Spirit. We might interpret the 'heart enlarged in thanksgiving' as a sign of deeper indwelling of the Spirit, and further fulfilment of the supernatural existential, but this is perhaps too far. What we do have is an elision of pneumatological and christological concepts which itself facilitates an elision of the now and not yet, the things of Sunday church services and the everyday experience of prayer in the troubles of life.

Pastoral theology and cultivating the inner life

In these homilies, we have seen Rahner using pneumatological themes alongside christological ones in order to unsettle the categories of time and space as well as human and divine agency. We have seen how at times preaching afforded him an opportunity to communicate some of his complex theological ideas in a more accessible way (though just what degree of accessibility he achieved could be a matter of debate!). But at other times the biblical texts resonated with pneumatological themes which he did not emphasise so clearly elsewhere, leading him to develop and state them perhaps more clearly than in his more straightforward theological writings. As we move now into some of Rahner's works which could be categorised as "pseudo-pastoral" (in that they seem to have a pastoral focus, yet at the same time are as theologically dense and complex as anything else he wrote) we shall see how Rahner handles pneumatological themes when his focus is more explicitly the cultivation of the inner life. I can only offer

[659] ibid. p.140.

a sketch, rather than a full analysis of the relevant material, but this should suffice to give an idea of the particular colouring given to Rahner's theology as his focus shifts to the religious life and prayer.

(i) Religious life as ascetic macrocosm

It is frustrating that Rahner did not write all that extensively on the nature of the religious life. From the perspective of the theology of death and human flourishing, the religious life would have provided a unique microcosm in which to work out his theology. However, in two works, *Servants of the Lord* and *The Religious Life Today*, some of the potential within Rahner's thought comes through, though it is not well worked out, and often only exists as gestures in the direction of potentially fruitful arguments.

In *Servants of the Lord*,[660] Rahner gives a long list of circumstances in which 'the one thing which produces and sustains' all human history can happen: 'the silent coming of God'.[661] This list is identical to the sorts of lists which Rahner uses to illustrate moments of decision, moments of encounter with death. And explicit references to encounters with death make up part of this list:

> It may occur anywhere: in a comfortable bourgeois sickroom, where the sick man, still hoping against hope, in a final act of surrender allows death to take possession of him in the last dread solitude; in the mudholes of Vietnam; in the ultimate honesty - and it does exist - of a man who thinks himself an atheist and yet keeps doggedly on along the road to the unknown, nameless God, praising him...[662]

We must note Rahner's reference here to idea of the anonymous Christian also, though it is only a passing comment. Rahner links ideas about the self-communication of God as "mystery" with ideas about Jesus Christ as the focus of world history (about which another thesis could be written!) and with the theme of decision and abandonment to the reality of God. The triumph of the self-communication of God in Christ in world-history is seen on a smaller scale in the triumph of the self-communication of God in our own lives, a triumph which leads to belief and hope, understood in the sort of terms we have come to recognise from Rahner's theology of death and acceptance.

> This mystery may occur anywhere, because everything originates in this self-communicating love of God, because it embraces even guilt, and because already it has, in Jesus Christ, brought forth the event of its triumphant historical manifestation. It is... the triumph that manifests itself in such ordinary, humble garb that anyone can find the improbable courage to believe and hope that God's tremendous love occurs even in one's own appalling humdrum life, where nothing seems to happen but birth and death, and in between, amid emptiness, and the guilt no man is spared, a little longing and a little faithfulness.[663]

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[660] Karl Rahner, trans. Richard Strachan, *Servants of the Lord* (London: Herder & Herder, 1968).

[661] ibid. p.20.

[662] ibid.

[663] ibid.

In the context of a brief discussion of the processions and witness of the Trinity, Rahner then explores in more detail this notion that the self-communication of God in our lives has an effect in our lives in the same way it does in world-history.

> [The Church's] witness points to God's *offer* of himself as historically manifest in the incarnate Logos, in whom God's unfailing truth is anchored for us, evoking faith; it attests the victory of this offer in the acceptance of the invitation through the power of the Holy Spirit of divine love, thus demanding and begetting divine love in man; it attests this offer of God's self and its acceptance, while that very event is still happening, thus demanding and begetting hope, the power of evolutive history; its object is faith, hope, and love in man, which it attests and begets through the one thing attested; God's victorious vouchsafing of himself to man.[664]

The Holy Spirit, Rahner argues, invites us to accept the offer of divine love in a self-communication which in fact "demand[s] and beget[s]' that love in us. Here we see Rahner's complexification of causation through reciprocal priority at work. This gift of Godself to us, Rahner argues very explicitly, is possible through faith, hope and love, but is also the cause of faith, hope and love. So, Rahner lays out the reciprocal priority of uncreated and created grace in a more explicit, but perhaps less clear, manner.

Rahner engages in a brief discussion of "free charismata", by which Rahner generally means lay witness and perseverance (expressed through the lens of suffering and abandonment),[665] and a few thoughts on priestly spirituality, which he locates in striking terms of decision in the face of death: 'Is the faith of the Christian not related from the first to martyrdom, which puts faith's understanding of itself to the final test.'[666] But he returns to the theme of the God who is mystery and the reciprocity of grace, and sees in all this the death of Christ in abandonment to God:

> This mystery which gives itself in grace and is accepted by the love and hope of faith... proclaims its presence in every sphere of man's life and, pardoning, takes them all unto itself. Thus it enters history, past dialectic, reaches its densest peak of historical irreversibility as God's pure Yes to us (2 Cor 1:19ff), there is Jesus Christ, the man absolutely open to God in obedience unto death, the man absolutely accepted by God in resurrection.[667]

Here, the gift of Godself to us, the gift of Mystery-self to us in the Holy Spirit, is portrayed as a breaking-in of the Spirit of acceptance in Jesus of his fate, and of God's acceptance of that acceptance in resurrection: so Christ's death is made present to us and transforms our acceptance. In a striking statement, Rahner describes this 'experience of the Spirit' as the 'centre of faith', which 'lets one loose in the mystery of love': a setting loose into acceptance which Rahner contrasts with the life of 'mere rabbinical custodians

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[664] ibid. p.26.

[665] ibid. p.34.

[666] ibid. p.49.

[667] ibid. pp.63-64.

of orthodox propositions.'[668] The implication is that the religious or priest (as well as lay person) who is truly living the life of the Spirit is one who knows the martyrdom of acceptance of the Mystery of God and is set free from the bonds of ecclesial legalism.

Whilst *Servants of the Lord* is only obliquely aimed at those in religious vows (lay or ordained), with its underlying theme of anti-clericalism and anti-dogmatism, *The Religious Life Today* is much more clearly aimed at the religious life.[669] Rahner represents the vocation of the nursing sister in terms of staying with the mystery of death, in such a way that others are able to hope in the way we explored in chapter 1:

> They must be and increasingly become people who despite all the habit of it really manage not to run away, to stay with it. By their calling they stand close to the mystery of sickness and death.[670]
> ... as persons who suffer the unspeakable mystery of sickness and death with other people and who accompany these people in a real, human way to the extent that, because another person stands at their bedside with an open, human heart, the sick retain the hope (even though they perhaps cannot reflect on it) that this dark abyss threatening to swallow them up is the abyss of the mystery of God, the abyss of grace, the abyss of eternal life.[671]

What is striking here is that the accompaniment of the sick and dying is not just "human" but Rahner describes it also as "real". There is a sense that both the nursing sister and the patient are confronting death together, and it is the nursing sister's active living of their acceptance of death which enables the patient to also accept death. How does this happen? Rahner is not clear, but it is tantalising. Does the nursing sister simply provide a good example? Or is the fellowship of the nursing sister an occasion for the self-communication of God in the Holy Spirit? Does the open human heart of the nurse burn with the light of the being-fulfilled supernatural existential, and in such a way that it ignites the heart of the patient also when they are faced with the divine darkness? We cannot say. But Rahner here hints at something more "charismatic" than simply the effect of a good example. However, he warns us not to over-spiritualise the charismatic, reminding us that 'The most ordinary things which contribute to salvation can be regarded as God's grace, and the most extraordinary charisms are still human.'[672] So the religious is called to a life of prayer, 'that is, freely surrendering to that unutterable mystery which alone... can receive such self-surrender',[673] in the power of the Spirit who enabled Christ's self-surrender:

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[668] ibid. p.67. We must note the antisemitic trope here of the rigid rabbinical custodian of the law (far as it actually is from the reality of the rabbinic tradition with its creative exegesis). Perhaps Rahner means the slightly less antisemitic trope of the "pharisee" instead.

[669] Karl Rahner, trans. V. Green, *The Religious Life Today* (London: Burns & Oates, 1976).

[670] ibid. p.17.

[671] ibid. p.18.

[672] ibid. p.74.

[673] ibid. p.49.

> In a Christian, this consciousness through grace of the nearness of the God who gives himself to us is explicitly Christian because it is aware that its strength and possibility derive from Jesus' unconditional surrender of himself in death to the Father through the Holy Spirit.[674]

So, the "ordinary" and not "over-spiritualised" vision of the nursing sister and the patient is one in which the Spirit enables each to accept the dark futurity of death, but using the life of the nurse committed as it is to this hopeful and peaceful self-abandonment in mystery.

One final, and slightly strange, essay in *The Religious Life Today* puts our tendency to over-spiritualise death in its place. It considers the "successful death of "the Little Flower" St. Theresa, and Rahner lampoons the 'pious fuss of her fellow sisters' around the dying girl as 'unutterably empty and painful'.[675] In a moment of introspection and brutal honesty, Rahner confronts us with the ordinariness of death in everyday lives, and shows healthy doubt about the theology of death which had earlier in his life seemed so solid and unforgiving:

> ...oh, I do not know, people are dying everywhere, and why should I not believe, hoping desperately against hope, that there, if you scrape away from this multifarious death everything that is bourgeois, miserable and pompous, there is still a death in which a person lets himself go, with the courage of faith, hope and love, into the incomprehensible (whom we call God) so that what is really happening is valuable enough to remain for ever? Does it always happen? I don't know. I hope so. I hope it does, although only the misery and the disillusionment of human life effectively appear in death.[676]

Rahner reflects that it is impossible to really know the result of a death:

> We know from the old catechism what *should* result in the case of death, yet in *neither* of these cases can we know what *did* result ... That is because we do not know of anyone *how* he let himself go into the incomprehensible; whether with a willing (beatifying) surrender or with a final protest - which, because of the dignity of freedom, I must also believe is possible.[677]

Even the holiest person, even with all that has been said about the reciprocal priority of the self-gift of the Spirit and the graces of faith, hope and love, Rahner has to admit that each person still possesses the freedom to go out in protest, to die the death of Adam rather than the death of Christ. The outcome of death is still uncertain. However, in the case of the official saints, Rahner 'accept[s] it confidently as the discernment of spirits (of deaths) which takes place in the Holy Spirit.'[678] So, Rahner ends either with a nod to the authority of the official hierarchy, guided by the Spirit, to declare a "successful" death in the case of the saints; or he leaves a tantalising hint at a theology in which the Spirit not only prepares and

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[674] ibid. p.75.

[675] ibid. p.85.

[676] ibid. p.86.

[677] ibid. p.87.

[678] ibid. p.87.

enables a "successful death" but also witnesses to it in some way. But, as is the case for so many of Rahner's tantalising or enfuriating hints, he does not say anything else on the matter.

(ii) Performance theology embodied as prayer

Rahner presents his book *Encounters with Silence*[679] as an extended prayer to God. The writing is in the first person, and includes many emotional moments which seem to reveal the inner workings of Rahner's soul. Several excerpts from *Encounters* were included in a collection of prayers extracted from Rahner's writings (some of the prayers of that collection really did originate as prayers given in retreats or in sermons). In his introduction to that collection, Karl Lehmann, the Bishop of Mainz, summed up the complexity of the collection's purpose:

> This collection of prayers will reveal to the reader the heart of Karl Rahner's spirituality, but it can also disclose the intimate relationship between piety and theology in his thought. The virtually endless literature on Rahner has, with few exceptions, taken little notice of this. Yet without this added dimension, the distinctive character of Rahner's theology would be severely misjudged.[680]

Just as the collection, *Prayers for a Lifetime* does not simply present a snapshot or survey of Rahner's prayer or spiritual life, but rather highlights the intertwining of his academic theological writing with living faith, it is helpful to read *Encounters with Silence* in this way also, rather like St Augustine's *Confessions* or any other ancient Christian text that purports to be an extended prayer. There may well be elements of genuine prayer, in the sense that Rahner may well have spoken those words in his heart before God (and, indeed, an argument should be made that this is what written theology is as well). But when presented to us as a book, this first-person prayer is a performative soliloquy. So, in *Encounters with Silence*, we do indeed see a devotional text. But *Encounters* is, I suggest, more interesting as a theological text embodied in the performative genre of private prayer.

The first chapter of *Encounters*, entitled "God of My Life", presents the relationship of the finite pray-er and the infinite God. Rahner does this very much in terms which we will recognise from *On the Theology of Death*. Rahner's need to speak of the "God of my life" is contrasted with the reality that God is always 'more than merely the God of my life',[681] even surpassing any notions of God which he could construct and verbalise, for 'I should never have spoken the last word about you.'[682] Another contrast is set up between the fact that God as trinity has revealed Godself to Rahner: Rahner could not name God as the

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[679] Karl Rahner, trans. James M. Demske, *Encounters with Silence* (London: Burns & Oates, 1975, 1978, 1986)

[680] Karl Rahner, ed. Albert Raffelt, *Prayers for a Lifetime: his last and most personal book* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986, 1989), pp.xii-xiii.

[681] Rahner, *Encounters with Silence*, p.3.

[682] ibid. p.4.

God of his life 'if you had not deigned to become through grace the triune God of my life'.[683] And yet, this revelation of God leads to a yearning for the fulness of God which is a torment, a curse, for Rahner:

> Why do you torment me with Your Infinity, if I can never really measure it? Why do You constrain me to walk along Your paths, if they lead only to the awful darkness of Your night, where only You can see?[684]

Rahner feels himself drawn into the fullness of God, without whom 'I should founder helplessly in my own dull and groping narrowness' but also 'I could never feel the pain of longing.'[685] God as mystery, 'the silent infinite'[686] causes Rahner to be tempted:

> to creep away from you in utter discouragement, back to the things that are more comprehensible, to things with which my heart feels so much more at home than it does with your mysteriousness.[687]

God will always remain this silent Mystery, 'the incomprehensible, even when I see you face to face',[688] and so Rahner finds himself called to surrender and abandonment: first in terms of intellectual abandonment, the desire to name God, and then the surrender of self:

> What else is there that I can tell you about yourself except that you are... the infinity who gives meaning to my finiteness? And when I tell you all this, then I have given myself my true name, the name I ever repeat when I pray in David's Psalter, "*Tuus sum ego.*" I am the one who belongs not to himself, but to you. I know no more than this about myself, nor about you, O God of my life, infinity of my finiteness.[689]

So far, this all runs along the same lines as Rahner's reasoning in the first two chapters of this thesis. Now he needs to ground this abandonment in something firmer than an intellectual call. He does this with reference to love. God is love itself, Rahner argues, and so only in loving God can we find Him.[690] This love 'wants you as you are... and it embraces you without asking for any explanation of why you are as you are.'[691] This love is able to accept God, and accept ourselves, in a way which, without love, we cannot. And this is possible because God '[has] become through love the inmost centre of my life, [so that] I can bury myself entirely in you, O mysterious God and with myself all questions.'[692] In the love of God, the images of God in our minds are dissolved, as love displaces them:

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[683] ibid.

[684] ibid. pp.4-5.

[685] ibid. p.6.

[686] ibid.

[687] ibid.

[688] ibid. p.7.

[689] ibid.

[690] ibid. pp.8-9.

[691] ibid. p.9.

[692] ibid.

> The more annihilating the incomprehensibility of your ways and judgments, the greater must be the holy defiance of my love. And my love is all the greater and more blessed, the less my poor spirit understands of you.[693]

At this stage, however, this is all rather abstract. And it is not at all clear why "loving" should simply displace the desire for "understanding". Indeed, on a psychological model, it could be argued that loving another person *increases* the desire in us to understand them, to know them more in a way which can be put into words, as well as a more ineffable sense.

But this is not the problem Rahner decides to tackle first. As he moves into a discussion of Christology, he focusses on the problem of distance. How can we love God when the infinite God is so far from us? Rahner argues that love lifts 'the burden of our finiteness',[694] and that this is made possible by the incarnation, in which God '[made] your infinite word finite'.[695] Rahner at first puts this in terms of the lifting of our terror at the infinite.[696] But he quickly moves on to darkness and light as a more fruitful conceptual framework. He argues that Jesus' heart reveals and assures us of God's love for us when we are confronted by the darkness of God's light:

> The eye of the mind is blinded whenever it looks only on your infinity, in which you are totally present in each and every aspect at once. Then I am surrounded by the darkness of your unboundedness, which is harsher than all my earthly nights. But instead I shall gaze upon his human heart, O God of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and then I shall be sure that you love me.[697]

The love of God for us is made real, made tangible, for us in Christ, is guaranteed in Christ, and so we are able to abandon ourselves to loving God when we are confronted by the darkness. Again, there is nothing here that is particularly new for us, but what is striking is that Rahner presents his complex thinking about light and darkness in the Mystery that is God in disarmingly candid terms: when I feel the fear of God's darkness, I look to Jesus' heart, and I am reassured to love.

What Rahner has presented thus far is a summary of his thinking about darkness and finitude in the context of confrontation with darkness: it reads quite well as a response to times of spiritual struggle and conflict. But, as Rahner moves into a chapter on prayer, he shifts the mood to the problem of knowing the God of Mystery in the daily grind of ordinary life. Rahner begins by arguing that we do not have the power in our own strength to love, since love is nothing less than absolute surrender:

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[693] ibid. p.10.

[694] ibid. p.14.

[695] ibid. p.15.

[696] ibid. p.14.

[697] ibid. p.17.

> How can I pray with love, when the prayer of love is the absolute surrender of the heart..., the absolute throwing open of the inmost sanctuary of the soul? I don't have the strength even to budge the heavy gates of this sanctuary.[698]

Strikingly, Rahner uses deathly or sickly images to describe prayer, particularly when he says that 'Prayer can be like a slow interior bleeding' of the 'heart's blood' into our 'own unfathomed depths'.[699] Why is it like this? Rahner's answer is that, in the ordinariness of our lives, we are unable to find ourselves, distracted as we are, and so it is impossible for us to find God 'in the superficiality of the ordinary routine into which my life is cast'.[700] Rahner uses the image of the inner-sanctuary of the self as a locus of the supernatural existential. In prayer, 'I am doomed to wander in the barren wastes of my own emptiness' because, having cast off the world, Rahner 'still cannot find my way into the true sanctuary of my inner self, the only place where you can be found and adored.'[701] Here, the supernatural existential takes on a new layer. We are now used to the idea of the supernatural existential as the gift of the Spirit, calling us to fulness of life in God, drawing us from the depths of our being. But here, the supernatural existential is united clearly with Rahner's ideas about acceptance and abandonment. In the supernatural existential, the voice of the Spirit calls us to fullness of life in God. And though Rahner can hear that voice, he describes the feeling of seeking for it, wandering in search of the inner sanctum of his being where he can truly encounter the speaker, the speaker who is really the one searching for him, and the one powering the search. But why? It is only when he enters that inner sanctum of his being, when he is in possession of the deepest part of himself, when he has accepted the fullness of the Spirit's call in his being, that it is possible for him to truly abandon himself into the darkness of God.

> I believe that you have given me the order to pray and that I can carry it out with your grace. And since that's so, the prayer that you require of me must be ultimately just a patient waiting for you, a silent standing by until you, who are ever present in the inmost centre of my being, open the gate to me from within. In this way I shall be able to enter into myself, into the hidden sanctuary of my own being, and there, at least once in my life, empty out before you the vessel of my heart's-blood. That will be the true hour of *my* love.[702]

In the consummation of this performance of the longing for fulfilment of the supernatural existential, Rahner adds a further image to this metaphor of the inner sanctum of his being.

> And after this moment shall have come for me, after the hour of *my* love, which is shrouded in your silence, then will come the endless day of *your* love, the eternity of the beatific vision. But for now,

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[698] ibid. p.22.

[699] ibid.

[700] ibid. p.23.

[701] ibid.

[702] ibid. p.24.

> since I don't know when my hour is coming, nor whether it has already begun to come or not, I must just wait in the courtyard before your sanctuary and mine.[703]

The eschatological dimension enables Rahner to blur the boundaries between his final death and every moment of encounter and decision in prayer, just as he did between our final death and times of sickness. These are one and the same. Likewise, a similar collapsing of distance is achieved by the phrase 'your sanctuary and mine'. Is it one sanctuary or two? If it is one sanctuary, Rahner is making the point that the 'inner sanctum' in the depths of our being, in which the Spirit dwells, (i.e. the supernatural existential) is the Holy of Holies, the dwelling place of the living God, to which we are called, and outside which we wait. But I think this makes better sense when read as referring to two sanctuaries. We wait outside the earthly Holy of Holies, the inner sanctum of our heart, in which God dwells, calling us. And only when we enter that sanctuary, by the power of the Spirit, can we then be said to really possess ourselves, can we really be said to dispose of ourselves in the manner we explored in the real-ontological dialectic of activity and passivity. God calling ourselves into the depths of ourselves, to encounter God. And only then can we really surrender ourselves to the futurity which is the Mystery of God, the darkness which is full of God's blinding light, the heavenly sanctuary in which we see the dark light of God face-to-face. And so, Rahner can end this chapter on prayer, 'Give me, O God of my prayer, the grace to continue waiting for you in prayer.'[704]

In the rest of *Encounters with Silence*, Rahner applies the thought of these initial chapters to different situations, to different problems (particularly in the spiritual life of the priest),[705] and an analysis of the remainder of the book will only end up repeating what we have said. However, what these initial chapters of *Encounters* give us is a performative demonstration of the power of the concept of the supernatural existential when understood as the inner sanctum of the human person, to which God calls us. In a sense, whilst the more technical arguments are fascinating, it is this more personal and theatrical performance of the concept which is most convincing. In the supernatural existential Rahner has found a mechanism for describing God's call to us to accept God as God really is and ourselves as we really are before we are able to abandon ourselves into the future God has for us. And this in a way which is rich, and applicable to times which are spiritually challenging as well as ordinary and even tedious.

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[703] ibid. p.25.

[704] ibid. p.25.

[705] In this respect, the latter half of *Encounters* can be a little disappointing. The chapter, "God of my brothers", includes beautiful imagery about introducing others to their own inner sanctuary, where God waits for them. But the following chapter, "God of my vocation" gets stuck on questions of institutionality and freedom in ecclesiastical ministry.

Conclusion: perfomative theology in a non-consistent corpus

I hope in this chapter to have opened up the canon of Rahnerian sources somewhat, to have heard different resonances and notes within his thought when it is modulated into a pastoral vein. This is the strength of allowing Rahner's theology to speak without attempting to fit a unifying narrative: that his homilies in particular do seem to diverge at times from his more formal theology, particularly when texts require Rahner to speak more explicitly about the Holy Spirit. And, moving from the homily as performed theology to the religious life as performed theology, as a microcosm of the ascetic aspect of the Christian life, we see how Rahner presents the Spirit as setting the religious free to love; and that living the life of the Spirit means knowing the martyrdom of acceptance of the Mystery of God, even in the context of accompanying others through death. Then, in *Encounters with Silence,* Rahner creates theology which functions as a performance. This is spiritually enlightening and convicting, yes. But it also functions as an answer to Rahner's theological critics: "You don't agree with what I say? Come along and I will show you. Just you sit there and watch as I wait for God in front of the doors of the sanctuary of my heart."

Conclusion

(i) A glimpse of "Rahner total"?

There have been several theological by-products of this thesis. For example, the way in which problematic ideas like the supernatural existential are given much more tangible substance than in some more abstract and philosophically inclined surveys of Rahner's work; or, alternatively, the way in which connections are made between Rahner's written work and his Jesuit formation. Particularly important in this thesis has been the uncovering of pneumatological themes within Rahner's work. However, these have largely been by-products of the overall argument, as I have attempted a more holistic reading of Rahner.

In the introduction, I said that I hoped to demonstrate the value of reading Rahner in a manner analogous to Coakley's method of the "contemplative *théologie totale*", to enable us to hear something like Rahner's authentic voice, some small part of the *Rahner total*. In applying this method to Rahner's theology of death, and in seeking to uncover pneumatological themes within that theology, I have sought to give space to hearing Rahner's voice, a non-foundationalist and non-consistent voice. Rahner's theology of death, darkness and the Holy Spirit is not valuable because it offers a water-tight philosophical-theological system with which to understand our experiences and diagnose theological remedies for our spiritual ills. Rather, it is valuable because it represents the profound reflections of an intense theological and spiritual thinker, seeking to grapple in varied ways with the profound problems we face as finite beings, as beings who are subject to the inevitability of death, and our encounters with death and darkness throughout our lives. Rahner's great achievement is that he manages to uncover not only meaning but also hope in this darkness. In Rahner's theology, times of darkness and death are transformed from being alien and external shocks to the integrity of our person into being fundamental, life-giving and essential times of growth, encounter and decision in our trajectory into the fullness of life in God. In the loneliness of darkness, Rahner discovers the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, even the deepest depths of the human person in the gift of the Spirit. Rahner develops tools from the Jesuit spiritual tradition for interpreting and equipping us to face times of darkness, and to come through them well, growing further into the divine life. The eucharist takes on a new dimension of a real encounter with Christ's death which is ours, by the power of the Spirit, impelling us further into the life of the Spirit. And this encounter, we discover, has been happening each and every moment of our lives, both in crisis and in the everyday. Rahner's theology of death, darkness and the Holy Spirit is not a complete and internally consistent systematic theology from which one can extrapolate a unified theological system. But it is a toolkit, a collection of linked attempts to understand for oneself, to equip others, and to grow in the life and light of the God whom we encounter in darkness.

I have already noted in the introduction to this thesis its primary limitations, particularly the lack of a significant engagement with Rahner's ecclesiology. However, now that we have worked through the material of Rahner's theology of death, darkness and the Holy Spirit, I can confess that the same problem exists with respect to Christology as well. We have seen Rahner's desire expressed in *The Trinity* for an integrated trinitarian Pneumatology and Christology, and yet because this is a PhD thesis I have had to restrict my focus almost entirely to the Pneumatology. However, this thesis could be written again with an entirely christological focus. It would explore questions of how Christ's death and ours are unified based on Rahner's idea of the pan-cosmic soul of the crucified Jesus. There would be linked questions about the resurrection. It would ask in far greater depth questions about the compassion of Jesus in death with respect to the theology of the Sacred Heart, and it would examine far more closely the link between Christ's passion and ours, with all its problematic implications for the ascetic life and human suffering. The Chapter on the Eucharist might effectively be inverted, asking how the communion of Christ is made effective in us by the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Christ. Though I suspect, given the emphasis on the life of the Spirit and reciprocal priority in Rahner's eucharistic theology, it might come to the same place in the end. It is encouraging in Trinitarian terms, in the eucharistic chapter at least, that taking a christological rather than a pneumatological tack would have made relatively little difference to the substance of the argument. However, I make no apologies for the artificial focus on Pneumatology in this thesis, for after all much has been written on Rahner's Christology. And the excavation of pneumatological themes which are more often buried under christological ones has been interesting. But it does seem frustrating that I was not here able to rise to the particular challenge of Rahner to achieve better christological-pneumatological balance.

(ii) Death, love and grief

This thesis has largely been focussed on the individual experience of death, what it means for the individual to be united with God in Christ and the Holy Spirit. But we do not experience these things alone or in isolation: and nor does Rahner think we do. Although Rahner's *The Theology of Death* is very individualistic, Rahner elsewhere considers the more social aspects of death. On p.104 we noted that, in his essay "Faith, Hope and Love", Rahner discusses Christ's love for us as the basis of the love we have for one another: he says that 'God guarantees the possibility and the blessed outcome of the venture of human love' when we love our neighbour.[706] This argument is far better worked out in Rahner's essay, "What does it mean to love Jesus?"[707] Rahner begins by arguing that to love Jesus is more than loving either the simple fact of

[706] Rahner, "Faith, Hope and Love", p.85.

[707] Karl Rahner, trans. Robert Barr, "What does it mean to love Jesus?" in *The Love of Jesus and the Love of Neighbour* (Slough: St Paul Publications, 1983), pp.12-62.

a historical person, or an abstract concept of Jesus.[708] Rather, he uses the example of marriage to parse what human love for Jesus might look like. For our purposes, the language in which he does this is striking.

> Here, unconditionally (at least in a certain sense), a human being confides himself or herself to another person. Only if one thus abandons oneself, and lovingly sinks into the other, does one succeed in finding oneself. Otherwise one languishes in the prison of his or her selfishness.[709]

Unconditional abandonment, sinking into a mysterious other, and these contrasted with the prison of selfishness. The argument Rahner is making here is very much the argument he has made about abandonment in death in contrast to the clinging on to control which causes us to really lose our life and die the death of Adam. In order to love like this, Rahner argues, we must achieve a 'reasonable, responsible self-abandonment' which 'requires grounds upon which one feels called to abandon oneself to another, and thereupon justified in doing so.'[710] This reasonable grounds for self-abandonment cannot be merely the historical fact that Jesus lived, or an ethical concept of Jesus, but must be the actual living person of Jesus. Rahner then makes an argument that the distance between us and the saints who have died, or the distance between us and Jesus, is really no different from the distance between us and any other person. This is true for two reasons. First, even when two lovers are very close, even in contact, they are still distinct, different. And their love does not collapse this distinction and difference, but rather affirms it, 'for the lover loves and affirms the other precisely *as* other'.[711] Second, the love of the God of the living guarantees our love for and with those who are far from us, for in God we are all alive and present to one another, whether we are separated by distance, difference or death.[712] If our love for others is not really so different then from our love for Jesus (because the distance between us and Jesus is not really any different from the distance between us and our neighbour) then Rahner can say, 'How can we love Jesus, whom we cannot see, if we cannot love our neighbour, who we do see?'[713] And he moves, again in language which resonates with what we have seen of the supernatural existential, to call this love (for Jesus or for neighbour) a gift of the Spirit:

> The tender interiority of this love, to which it need not be afraid to admit, is the fruit of patience, prayer, and an ever renewed immersion in Scripture. It is the gift of God's Spirit.[714]

Rahner lays the foundation for a unity between the love of Jesus and love of neighbour which he develops in much the same non-consistent and occasional manner as his theology of death. But the parallels and points of contact between this reasoning and what we have seen in Rahner's theology of death is

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[708] ibid. p.16.

[709] ibid. p.17.

[710] ibid.

[711] ibid. p.21.

[712] ibid. pp.18-20.

[713] ibid. p.23.

[714] ibid. p.24.

significant. It opens up potential for a much more social reading of Rahner's theology of death, asking questions about the nature of grief, probing Rahner's references to our communion with the saints, and asking what it means to experience the death of others in different ways. We gestured towards some of this reasoning on p.167 when we noted Rahner's consideration of the role of a nursing sister. But the unity of the love of neighbour and the love Jesus prompts us to go further.

In *Encounters with Silence*, Rahner uses the chapter entitled "God of the Living" to contemplate his relationship with the dead. Here he does not make the argument he made in "What does it mean to love Jesus" about the distance between us and the dead. Rather, although he affirms that the dead are really dead and 'awfully still',[715] Rahner sees in the darkness of his relationship with the dead a unity with the darkness of his relationship with God:

> You are as silent to me as the dead. I love you too as I love my dead, the quiet and distant ones who have entered into night. ... So how can I complain about my dead, when their silence is only the echo of yours?[716]
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> Their silence is their loudest call to me, because it is the echo of your silence. Their voice speaks in unison with yours, trying to make itself heard above the noisy tumult of our incessant activity, competing with the anxious protestations of mutual love with which we poor humans try to reassure each other. Against all this, their voice and yours strive to enwrap us and all our words in your eternal silence.[717]

The darkness of the dead and their silence is filled with the voice of the dead and the light of their love, just as the darkness of death and God's silence is filled with the voice of God and the light of God's presence. Although Rahner goes on to argue that, because God's love is infinite, it can only manifest in the finite as silence 'hidden... in my finiteness',[718] Rahner does not explore the implications of his comments on the silence and hiddenness of the dead for our understanding of grief. There is so much potential here, and so much fertile ground for a theology of grief, resourced by a profound theology of darkness. The unity of love of God and love of neighbour in Rahner's thought opens the door to explore how our love and grief for the dead, our love for our loved ones who grieve, and our love (and grief) for the dying and dead Jesus might fit together. And all this with the rich implications of Rahner's argument that this love is a gift of the Holy Spirit, and that this Spirit dwells within us. Here the supernatural existential could provide a toolkit for understanding better the richness and diversity of experiences we have around death experienced communally and individually. But all this must be explored in as much depth as was the rest of this thesis, and this short gesture to these possibilities within Rahner's thought are all that we have space for here.

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[715] Rahner, *Encounters with Silence*, p.55.

[716] ibid. p.56.

[717] ibid. p.57.

[718] ibid.

(iii) Writing this thesis during a pandemic and time of personal sickness

This thesis has been of profound use to me as a young scholar, as I have uncovered arguments within Rahner's thought of which I was unaware, and as it has illuminated older ones with which I thought I was familiar. But it has been productive in another way as well. When I began writing this thesis, I did so with relish. I had found new life in a new purpose. But then I heard news of the virus which had emerged in China. Almost all of us who have lived through the initial waves of the CoViD-19 pandemic have experienced it as a violent disruption, an unexpected and unwelcome interjection into the rhythms of our lives. Global, invisibly spreading sickness, daily disruption and unavoidable confrontation with our own mortality has been traumatic for us at an individual and societal level. And the idea that we are living in "the new normal" has singularly failed to comfort and console the population in general. The monotony of this new normal may have been for many the worst aspect of this sickness. And as we in the West begin to "open up" as rates of vaccination are increasing, the new attitude of denial that "the pandemic is over" is spreading in many circles, including the Church.

But confrontation with sickness and death is not, according to Rahner, a phase of life and period in history merely to be endured and survived. Getting through the monotony is not all that there is to CoViD from a theological perspective. We have seen how Rahner argues that times of confrontation with sickness and death should be for individual Christians among the most important phases of our lives. The experience of sickness is a foretaste of our own death, and so can be an opportunity to grow in hope, to practice abandonment, and to learn to live more fully, in accordance with our own reality as mortal human beings under the grace of God. In this sense, Rahner's theology of sickness and death can be empowering, engaging and liberating for those of us trapped in daily confrontation with our own mortality. And whilst it acknowledges the suffering and injustice that sickness brings, Rahner's theology of sickness might encourage us to grasp the opportunity offered by the pandemic: there is opportunity even in the midst of near universal fear and frustration. As odd as it may sound to those of us who still live with the fear of the virus and its effects on our bodies and our communities, in the framework which Rahner sets out, it is indeed an opportunity to anticipate our death, to rehearse surrendering to the grace of the invisible God, and to live life with a renewed hope and energy.

My own experience of CoViD has been dominated by profound disempowerment. The ways I shaped my days, understood my identity and my growth, have all been curtailed or reshaped by the pandemic. Lockdown isolated me in the narrow confines of my flat, separated me from my family who live in other places, limited me in my social life, and distracted and frustrated me in my attempts to express myself

through my work (including limiting opportunities for working with others and forcing me to work alone). At this very general level of the social experience of sickness, Rahner's theology asks the question, *Where do you decide who you really are? You say it is in Christ, but is it really in living the life you can no longer live, with the people you no longer see and being productive in the ways you no longer are? Isn't that really how you have been trying to reach the consummation of your being?*

And for me, CoViD has also "gifted" the experience of actually having the virus, of being bedridden, initially terrified and alone; now (at the time of writing, 18 months later) recovering slowly but limited in what I can do, and often in pain. So perhaps CoViD has exposed my piety, my claims to know my identity primarily in Christ. It has become for me a moment of judgment, in which my claims to put my trust in the living God might have been found to be naive and largely unfounded, or maybe based on a God I had constructed for myself. At this level, my personal sickness has been a Job moment, but one in which I have not responded as well as the saintly and defiantly faithful Job. When my life as I knew it was to an extent taken away, I did wail and weep and feel utterly dejected, and the praises of God, when I mustered the strength to proclaim that my Redeemer lives, were bitter on my tongue. But, more unnervingly, my personal experience of this sickness directly confronted me with a disconcerting and terrifying question: *If you found it hard to trust in God now, to abandon yourself in this encounter with your death, then how do you think it will be on your actual deathbed?*

That is the scary and rather brutal aspect of what we have seen in Rahner's thought throughout this thesis: that it asks us that question, "Where do you actually decide who you really are?" For Rahner, our encounter with death probes the foundations on which we think we stand. It seeks out the places where we have planted our feet and undermines them, in order to test whether these are foundations of sand or foundations of solid rock. Rahner's theology provides a rich and helpful account of the sense of disillusionment from old certainties, crises of perspective, shaking of relationships, and sudden lack of purpose which many people experience in times of sickness, old age or other moments of mortality. Rahner accounts for this darkness, and he accounts for it deeply. But Rahner does not leave us there in that place of bleakness, in our sense of inadequacy and despair, isolation and uncertainty.

I have been struck how, as well as experiencing times of undignified protest, I have also experienced extended periods of peace, of acceptance, and conscious fellowship with the Holy Spirit. As well as seeing my sickness as a thing to be endured and simply "got through" as quickly as possible, I have at times been able to accept it and even embrace it as an opportunity to grow in God's grace. I have at times flinched from looking the darkness of the possibility of my own death and disability in the face, and at other times I have been able to abandon myself to God's future and look deeply into these realities, in which I have found life and grace. The eucharist has taken on new meaning for me, and has become more integral to my experience of this sickness than it ever was to my experience of health. Most importantly, I have come

to see in all these moments a fundamental encounter with the living God, who never leaves me. In this, there is remarkable peace.

In Coakley's *théologie totale,* the lived experience of theology is vital. For Rahner, it is a fundamental aspect of ascertaining whether we are interpreting the doctrine of the Church correctly. I don't consider this personal reflection to have been inappropriate, but rather a fitting conclusion to this attempt to give voice to Rahner's complex theology, in its various genres. For Rahner, sickness and all moments in which we come up against the buffers of our finitude are not merely a blip, or a trial to be endured. They are an encounter with ourselves as we truly are, as mortal and under the grace of God. It is a chance to learn to accept this, empowering us to learn to live as we truly are. In this sense, for all that these times of encounter with our finitude can be horrifying, Rahner offers hope that even this pandemic and every time of sickness experienced individually or together can be for us a time for new life and growth in the life of the Spirit of God.

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