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**Anselm Schubert**

**MODERN SOTERIOLOGY AND THE CONCEPT OF  
SALVATION IN EXISTENTIALIST THEOLOGY**

**M.A. THESIS**

**DURHAM  
1993**

**ABSTRACT:**

This thesis analyses the conditions for a concept of soteriology in modern secular society. And it examines the concept of salvation underlying 20th century existentialist theology in order to see whether it complies with these conditions.

The first chapter analyses philosophical concepts of salvation from Kant to Heidegger. It is shown that since Hegel salvation is mainly understood in terms of "alienation" and "overcoming of alienation" and that through the philosophical development of the 19th century two main conditions of modern soteriology have been derived from this understanding: a) the presupposition of an epistemological, existential and ontological unity of reality and b) the presupposition that individual, existential experience of salvation must basically be possible.

The second and main chapter tries to bring out the concept of salvation inherent in the theologies of Paul Tillich and Karl Rahner.

The third and concluding chapter shows how far Tillich's and Rahner's surprisingly similar concept of salvation complies with the conditions worked out in the first chapter. The author argues that both theologies fulfil the postulate of epistemological and ontological unity of reality by substituting traditional theistic doctrines of God by an ontological understanding of God as Being itself. However, the second condition is not met: in order to maintain the claim of the unity of reality, both theologies presuppose an existentialist understanding of human existence: the existential status quo, and with it alienation, is necessarily posited as absolute. Thus the possibility of experiencing the overcoming of this existential state is a priori excluded. The conclusion is that existentialist theology does not convey an understanding of salvation which complies with the conditions of secular modernity.

**ANSELM SCHUBERT**

**MODERN SOTERIOLOGY AND THE CONCEPT OF  
SALVATION IN EXISTENTIALIST THEOLOGY**

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**ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE  
DURHAM  
1993**



**10 MAY 1994**

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## 0. INTRODUCTION

### 0.1 THE QUESTION

The question with which this thesis is concerned is whether existentialist theology conveys the solution for the problem current soteriology is in. What is the problem?

In 1973 Joseph Ratzinger wrote: "Die schwerwiegendste Anfechtung des christlichen Glaubens liegt in seiner geschichtlichen Wirkungslosigkeit. Er hat die Welt nicht verändert, so scheint es wenigstens. Alle theoretischen Schwierigkeiten wiegen gering gegenüber dieser bedrückenden Erfahrung. Denn damit bleibt das Zentralwort des Christlichen, die Botschaft von der Erlösung, leer. Es bleibt ein blosses Wort. Wenn aber durch den Glauben nichts geschieht, dann ist auch alles was er sonst sagen mag, leere Theorie, ausserhalb von Verifikation und Falsifikation und damit belanglos."<sup>1</sup>

It is surprising that so little explicit theological discussion about salvation and the issue of soteriology exists nowadays. The question what salvation actually *is*, is often regarded as embarrassing, sentimental or too intimate. Indeed, this question *is* intimate as it touches at the very core of theology, at the heart of theology and theologians.

The problem is even aggravated by the remarkable fact, that for example the Lutheran confessions do not contain any explicit statement about the state of salvation itself. Throughout all my studies it struck me that just here is a certain emptiness in traditional dogmatics and a sort of theological taboo amongst theologians. It is left entirely to oneself, how one thinks salvation because either the question is condemned as prying and forward by theologians or any theological answer is considered to be impossible because of theological reasons, as for example the hiddenness of the eschata. The problem of modern soteriology is the fact that there *is* no modern soteriology which would meet the problems Ratzinger pointed out.

It is obvious that theology has to face the challenge which results from the lack of an explicit understanding of salvation for dogmatic reasons. However, also for practical and pastoral reasons theology ought to give up its noble restraint and should face the facts: it seems that exactly because

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<sup>1</sup> Ratzinger, p.141.



of a lack in this all-decisive dogmatic point the erosion of the established churches at least on the European continent has become particularly evident since the 1970s. We have to admit that the so called Grosskirchen are suffering from a severe decrease in numbers and in credibility and from a certain lack of theological orientation. Churches do often try to adopt the putative concerns of the man in the street in order to appear relevant and thus to legitimate their role in society; they try to get pally with the people who become increasingly alienated from and critical of the message of the church; this bears the danger of falling victim to every passing fashion. Or the churches cling to untouchable traditions and have to face an increasing irrelevance and become marginalized in society. The end of this trend is by no means yet in sight.

This corresponds to the fact that there is an increasing growth of very different theological and religious movements such as the charismatic movement, political and liberation theology, world-wide fundamentalism, the esoteric new age movements and depth-psychological theology. All these quite different and partly opposed opinions and world-views, however, meet in one single point: in their criticism that the traditional churches are no longer "living"; rather that they are spiritually dead or politically and psychologically irrelevant. Being disappointed with the traditional churches people turn towards apparently more attractive and promising alternatives. Especially the increase in christian fundamentalism is (because of its relatedness to more conservative but still theological approaches) a matter of concern for many theologians and churchmen, at least on the continent.

In order to be able to meet this criticism on theological grounds, one has to analyse on what presuppositions it is based. The criticism that the traditional churches are no longer living, but that they are dead and irrelevant is apparently based on a certain concept of what being "living" and being "relevant" means. This concept seems to be the principle of *individual experience*: what most people are missing in the traditional churches is the *experience of the relevance* of the christian message and preaching for their own life. Only that would make the church seem living and relevant to them. And indeed, in turn all the above-mentioned "alternatives" are determined through a considerable emphasis on the possibility (or even necessity) of individual experience. The message of fundamentalism as well as of political theology, of charismatic as well as of esoteric movements is so striking and attractive because it appears to be "evidently right", due to the fact that it conveys

(or pretends to convey) actual individual "experiences" of spiritual, social, political, psychological or charismatic character. That means that the traditional churches are not only "boring" or "unattractive". Being unattractive is no indicator of rightness or falseness. The serious accusation is "irrelevance": actually the churches are in the midst of a massive crisis necessitating that they prove the credibility and thus the legitimacy of the relevance of their beliefs and doctrines. And they do not seem to be able to *verify* the rightness of their preaching and teaching by conveying relevant and appropriate experiences. The "alternatives" seem to be "right" because the actual individual experience everyone can have seems to verify and testify to their religious or soteriological claim.

What has changed? Why are the traditional concepts of soteriology no longer valid and sufficient in the modern, secular society?

We can pinpoint the problem more precisely by referring to a famous essay of the theologian Gerhard Ebeling in which he is concerned with Das Verständnis von Heil in säkularisierter Zeit. In this very thorough study he analyses the relation between the modern secular world and its negative or positive interdependence with what he calls "christianisierte Zeit", the age "der öffentlichen Vorherrschaft des Christentums im Zeichen einer - wenn auch nicht spannungslosen - Konkordanz von Christentum und politischer Macht, christlichem Glauben und Kultur."<sup>2</sup> He first makes clear that one must not forget that the understanding of salvation which is nowadays challenged is still deeply influenced by the patterns of thought which derive from the "christianisierte Zeit". Therefore secular criticisms must not merely be rejected, but the christian's own inherited tradition of this kind of understanding of salvation must be *theologically* criticised as well, in order to see how far the inherited understanding can really be claimed to be the core of christian soteriology.

Starting with this dialectical presupposition, he asks what led to the decreasing acceptance of the christian understanding of salvation: "Das christliche Reden vom Heil gerät in der säkularisierten Zeit in eine Zersetzung. Die Spannungen, die in ihm enthalten sind, werden nun als unzumutbare Widersprüche empfunden. Das betrifft vor allem den Anspruch, mit dem die christliche Heilsbotschaft steht und fällt: vom endgültigen, eschatologischen Heil zu künden. Beides ist logisch richtig: Soll Heil wirklich Heil sein, so dass keine Unheilsbedrohung es mehr in Frage stellt, dann

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<sup>2</sup> Ebeling, p.351.

muss es eschatologisches Heil sein, unüberbietbare Vollendung. Jedoch: die Vollendung, die als definitives Ende dieser Welt zu denken ist, ist nicht als Heil vorstellbar. Konsequenterweise ist das Ende auch aller Heilsvorstellungen."<sup>3</sup> That means if salvation is really to be thought to be absolute and fulfilled it has to be thought of in eschatological terms. However, by definition any eschatological concept can not be proved or made probable. The only possibility is to make a prior decision about one's own understanding of what one would regard as eschatological event: "Entweder die Heilsfrage ganz am Individuum und seinen Nöten und Bedürfnissen zu orientieren, oder im Gegenzug dazu die Ausrichtung auf Welt und Geschichte betonen; entweder sich in eine Spiritualisierung des Heilsverständnisses zu retten oder auf dessen Konkretisierung im Leibhaften zu drängen; .... entweder eine präsentische Eschatologie zur Norm zu erheben oder gerade die futurische Eschatologie für das Entscheidende halten."<sup>4</sup>

Apparently the insistence on experience as means of verification and legitimation of the christian Heilsbotschaft stems from a perception of what eschatology is which is different from that of the traditional church. Whereas traditional dogmatics and the teaching of the churches throughout history stressed the spiritual, transcendent, ahistorical and future aspect of eschatology and salvation, its understanding changed dramatically in modern society during the last two hundred years. The understanding which is prevailing in society nowadays emphasizes the necessity of any concept of salvation to be historical, present, concrete and open to individual experience. Ebeling summarizes: "Auf jeden Fall ist der säkularisierten Zeit ausschliesslich um etwas zu tun, was wenigstens grundsätzlich in der Geschichte realisierbar sein soll - auch bei noch so bescheidener und relativer Zielsetzung - eine Besserung der Lebensbedingungen verspricht. Heil in säkularisiertem Verständnis ist ausschliesslich in die Verantwortung des Menschen gelegt als Produkt seines Wirkens.... Versprechen kann man sich nur etwas vom *Tun* des Menschen und deshalb auch nur in den damit gesetzten Grenzen. Weil säkularisiertes Heil Werk des Menschen und somit relatives geschichtliches Heil ist, bleibt es auf das beschränkt, wofür das Wirken des Menschen zuständig ist. Die Idee eines eschatologischen Heils ist deshalb eo ipso

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3 Ebeling, p.354.

4 Ebeling, p.354.

ausgeschlossen."<sup>5</sup> The background of the claim for verification is the idea that eschatological salvation must basically be *realizable in history*, i.e. within a framework which is open to experience. A fundamental change of the worldview of modern man in which the category of history and historicity is all-embracing, is the underlying ground for a different perception of the idea of eschatology and therefore different expectations regarding the content of salvation. The gap between traditional dogmatics and the actual preunderstanding in society seems to be unbridgeable.

Ebeling continues: "Denn die hermeneutische Grundbedingung des christlichen Redens vom Heil ist seine Offenheit für die Wirklichkeit. Diese soll weder durch willkürliche Behauptungen vergewaltigt noch durch illusionistische Visionen beschönigt werden."<sup>6</sup> Here we are at the heart of the problem. The claim for a present eschatology and salvation in history is dependent on a different perception of what is Wirklichkeit. For modern secular man his own existence is historical and history is the only reality that is! Therefore everything which ought to be real must be historical and thus be open to experience. Therefore for modern secular man also eschatology and salvation, if they are supposed to be true, i.e. real, must be historical and open to experience. That, however, excludes main parts of traditional christian eschatology.

The contrast between secular and traditional christian understanding lies in the fact that christianity traditionally presupposed the assumption of a second reality beyond the historical one, an assumption which is not generally shared any more. Formerly the lack of experience of salvation was explained and cancelled out through the idea of this second realm of future eschatology, in which salvation would at last actually be experienced. Since this idea for modern man with his perception of history as the only reality became more and more suspicious and in the end was assumed to be untenable, the lack of individual experience became the most influential counterargument against the traditional concept of salvation.

If the claim of christianity is to survive the criticisms of the secular world, it must take them seriously and it must be prepared to struggle with the modern philosophical question of reality and experience, a question which could possibly cut the ground from under its feet. It must, however,

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<sup>5</sup> Ebeling, p.356.

<sup>6</sup> Ebeling, p.358.

anyway respond to the challenge, as Ebeling says: "Das Heil im christlichen Verständnis ist, was immer es in sich schliessen mag, jedenfalls dies eine: das Sein in der Wahrheit. Das ist das Kriterium aller Heilsaussagen und des rechten Umgangs mit ihnen."<sup>7</sup>

Summarizing one can say: modern secular man does not any longer go by the assumption of a second reality beyond his own historical existence. The first task for any future soteriology will therefore be to take this into account and to try to make understandable the unity of the reality in which man himself, his quest for salvation and salvation itself are set.

The second main precondition for the acceptance of any religious concept by modern secular man was that its results must be open to being experienced in his own life, in order, if not to prove, at least to make probable its credibility. Any future theology of salvation will have to bear that in mind as well.

## 0.2 THE PLAN

The aim of this thesis is therefore to see whether there is any theological way for the 20th century to face the challenge of the modern secular understanding of salvation. And the assumption of this thesis is that actually there was an attempt to mediate christian understanding of man and salvation with the secular modern world in the 20th century. However, for certain reasons this attempt was soon, possibly too soon, regarded as having failed: I mean "existentialist theology" which, strange enough, turned out to be nothing more than a passing episode in the history of theology in the 20th century although it was once considered to be a new hope when it began to become famous through names like Bultmann, Tillich and Rahner. One hoped that here theology would again seek to find common ground with the self-understanding of modern man, after the dialectical theology of theologians like Barth had practically dissociated itself from the modern world. Again, as in the previous centuries an intellectually honest union of theology and philosophy, of modern thought and christian tradition seemed be possible through a theology which explicitly considered itself to be "mediating theology". The more surprising it is that apparently it was denied any long-lasting

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<sup>7</sup> Ebeling, p.358.

impact in the 20th century. My question is, whether existentialist theology possibly conveyed or conveys the means to work on the problem which the modern world left theological soteriology as a task, and if not, why.

In order to find out, whether the attempt of existentialist theology was or could have been successful in general, and whether it conveys ground on which theology can proceed and build, one must understand precisely what challenge it has to face. In a first chapter I will therefore show the historical development of the separation of philosophy from theology regarding soteriology and eschatology which led to modern secular man's so different view of what soteriology and salvation is. Only if we see the inner logic of this development, will we be able to do justice to the secular criticisms of the traditional christian points of view. I will therefore *not* give an overview of the *theological* development. First we have to understand precisely what the status quo of the *question* is which is put before theology.<sup>8</sup> It will turn out that the philosophical tradition of understanding salvation can best be understood as the continuous attempt of understanding it in terms of the *overcoming of alienation*.

Of particular importance is the transformation of the classical concept of salvation as the overcoming of alienation in the existential philosophy of Martin Heidegger. It was through his philosophy that theology felt the urge and the possibility to answer the philosophical challenge set by the 19th century. As Heidegger sought to overcome traditional metaphysics through an existential and ontological analysis of man theology here saw the means to express the christian message in the categories of modern thinking. This seemed to be even more promising because in a popularized form Heidegger's Existenzialontologie became an influential feature in modern man's self-perception and world-view. This seemed to be the chance to formulate the Anliegen of theology in the terminology of modern self-understanding itself.

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<sup>8</sup> Fortunately the history of these developments does not have to be elaborated by myself; in this I could rely on a famous study by the German theologian Peter Cornehl, which became a sort of standard work on the subject. His book is explicitly concerned with Eschatologie und Emanzipation in der Aufklärung, bei Hegel und in der Hegelschen Schule. I owe this profound study more than just the historical and philosophical material for this survey. His book was meant to clarify the problems soteriology and eschatology face today. My aim to show whether existentialist theology conveys a possible solution of these problems is thus dependent on the questions which Peter Cornehl left as task and problem for contemporary theology.

The influence of Heidegger on the theological tradition in the 20th century cannot be overestimated. However, whereas Bultmann's concept of revelation, the stress on personal decision and the idea of the "leap of faith" is mainly derived from Kierkegaard, theologians like Tillich and Rahner were much more directly influenced by Heidegger's philosophy. Here the interdependence of existentialist question and theological answer can be seen more clearly. Therefore I chose Tillich and Rahner as the representatives of existentialist theology.

In the second chapter I will expound and examine their theology separately. Here also a general critique of the approach of both theologians is necessary in order to prepare the ground for a special critique of their inherent concept of salvation.

In the third chapter I will then examine their surprisingly rather similar understanding of salvation and I will see whether it contains the solution of the problems presented for soteriology today.

## I. SALVATION AND ALIENATION

### SURVEY OF THE PHILOSOPHICAL TRADITION

Bearing the actual objective of this thesis in mind it will become evident that this survey can not be more than just a brief outline. Its aim is to mark out the mainstreams and tendencies which shaped the secular modern understanding of eschatology and salvation and to explain the origin and the status quo of the problems theology has to face with these issues.

#### I.1 From Lutheran Orthodoxy to Kant

In the beginning of the 18th century the petrified system of orthodox eschatology was more and more felt to be alienating: the orthodox doctrine had concentrated on the destiny of the individual soul only. Eschatological events such as the resurrection and the consummatio mundi were perceived as merely transitory states on the way towards the future judgement in which the individual was to be judged according to his attitude to faith and the law. Eschatology was thus part of the media salutis in so far as it liberated man *from* this earth in order to lead him to the last judgement. The idea of a new creation was excluded, heaven and hell were regarded as eternally waiting for the redeemed or the doomed. Thus eschatology was more and more perceived to be a religious automatism, in which the individual merely played the role of a passive object, subdued to eternal law and decision.

At the same time an increasing criticism of this dogmatic drama began, the aim of which was to make eschatology again existentially and religiously relevant for the individual. The authoritarian doctrine of the *church* had to be discriminated from the *universal* truth which was supposed to be inherent in the revealed understanding of christian eschatology. In the course of protestant historical studies of the bible, which were once, relying on the infallibility of the scripture, introduced to explore the claritas externa, one made the surprising discovery that actually the idea of an apocalyptic eschatology was not at all genuinely christian, but that it was originally jewish. Firmly clinging to the then prevailing aversion to all that was jewish and being convinced of the superiority of christianity over the unredeemed jews, protestant theology of the early neologism had only two possibilities: either one identified Jesus with the *jewish* apocalyptic tradition, which would



lead to his irrelevance for christians or one could cling to the reliability of the christian claim and then one had to separate Jesus Christ and his message from the historically contingent jewish tradition. The so called "Neologen" started an extensive revision of the whole of traditional theology. The aim was to prove christianity's claim to universality by deriving its content from universally intelligible presuppositions. As one still relied on the infallibility of the bible as historical document, this universal ground necessarily was *historical reason*: the non-appearance of the parousia which until then had been one of the most powerfull arguments *against* christian religion now became a proof of the supposedly uneschatological character of christianity. The decision for or against the rightness of christianity was made dependent on the intelligibility and reasonableness of its historical grounds. The actual development of religion and church after its pure beginnings was considered to be a distortion. The purely dogmatical teaching of the church could not be true, as it was not any longer universally intelligible and therefore not binding.

Thus the historical person of Jesus and his destiny was considered to be totally unimportant; rather his message was what christian theology was all about. And this message (the days of Weiss and Schweitzer lay far ahead) was understood to be pure morality, as only morality was conceived to be universally intelligible. Apocalyptic eschatology was rejected as being jewish. The attempt to reduce christianity to morality on rational grounds had as its aim the total individualisation of its message: only by individualizing it *totally*, could a *universal* intelligibility be made evident. Thus Jesus as a historical person was reduced to a mere teacher of the universal moral law. Only thus was the importance of his message open to individual appreciation and apprehension.

Eschatology as the question for the future of the *individual* destiny had to be reinterpreted as well. Through the influence of philosophers like Wolff and Leibniz the idea of a general moral world order became common. To live according to the moral teaching of Jesus meant to live according to the moral law which was thought to be inherent in the world. Doing the moral law was perceived as man's response to God as the great creator of the moral world order. However, it is evident that the moral law is fulfilled only fragmentarily in this world; moreover, moral deeds and personal happiness do not correspond. Therefore it was assumed that there was an eternal realm in which all injustice is cancelled out in a judgement according to the individual's moral deeds. The

idea of an absolute moral world order made it reasonable to assume the reward of the righteous. Thus the reason for doing the good was the idea of a necessary correspondence to the predefined world order and the fear of damnation or the hope for eternal happiness.

Here Kant's criticisms of the neological and enlightenment theology and philosophy found their origin. He claimed that the idea of a future realm of justice can neither be proved by reason nor must it be assumed because of "revelatory" reasons only: rather is this assumption the necessary postulate of the "unbedingten sittlichen Wollen." Man finds himself in the sensory world of phenomena where moral deeds and moral consequences for the individual do not correspond. The future realm of justice must not be assumed because the individual is disappointed with the lack of happiness as reward for his moral deeds. Rather must the idea of a future "Glückseligkeit aller vernünftigen Wesen gemäss ihrer Moralität"<sup>9</sup> be assumed to be *logically* necessary; as morality has to exist in order to make human life possible, the idea of the future realm of justice must be assumed to be the necessary condition of the possibility of morality.

However, and this is Kant's main contribution to the problem of eschatology, this idea has an important implication. Man is put under the obligation to fulfill the absolute moral law of the categorical imperative. This, however, is practically impossible in this world. If therefore the categorical law is not supposed to be a merely unreasonable and arbitrary demand, one must assume the immortality of man, in order to make possible his infinite progress towards the fulfilment of the categorical imperative. Thus starting from the absoluteness of the moral law, Kant can now postulate man's immortality. However, the postulate of an *infinite* progress excludes the possibility of a final total identity of Sollen und Sein. Therefore in the end Kant has to introduce as a "second postulate" the idea of a graceful God, who regards the infinite process as fulfilled and who thus grants man his well-earned happiness.

Kant's main aim was to stress the fact that the morally good must be done for its own sake, if one's deeds are to be considered to be morally good. The idea of a future reward or punishment, which the "Neologen" assumed according to their concept of a moral world order, corrupts man's morality, by making fear or hope the motivating force for our deeds. However, at this point there is

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<sup>9</sup> Kant, Kritik der Urteilskraft, §87, footnote p.531.

a certain inconsistency in Kant's arguments, an inconsistency which Hegel was to take up later: Kant had to *postulate* the idea of the realm of absolute justice as the condition of the practical possibility of actual morality. Man *has* to suppose this realm lest morality becomes impossible. Nevertheless man *must not* hope to enter into this realm of happiness, because that would corrupt the motivation of their morality. Practically man must hope what theoretically he is forbidden to hope.

## I.2 Idealist criticisms of Kant

### A) Schleiermacher

Schleiermacher's whole theological work can be considered as pursuing the aim of separating religion from morality and metaphysics. For Schleiermacher a religious realm is not the necessary postulate of human morality. Rather is religion the immediate encounter with the infinite itself in one moment: "Religion ist Sinn und Geschmack für das Unendliche."<sup>10</sup> This experience of the universe in a revelatory moment, in which infinity becomes present, is the actual content of religion. The last and inherent aim of this encounter is the dissolution of the individual into the infinite.

Schleiermacher therefore criticises Kant's concept of immortality on psychological grounds: he suspected "die traditionellen Hoffnungen auf Unsterblichkeit als irreligiöse Versuche, der heilsamen Negation der Individualität zu entgehen."<sup>11</sup> According to Cornehl Schleiermacher claimed that "Eschatologie als Projektion menschlichen Selbsterhaltungswillens hat mit Christentum nichts zu tun."<sup>12</sup> Because religion means: "Mitten in der Endlichkeit Eins werden mit dem Unendlichen und ewig sein in einem Augenblick, das ist die Unsterblichkeit der Religion."<sup>13</sup> Whereas Kant had shifted the eschatological idea of the immortality of the soul from a practical hope to the level of a practical moral postulate, Schleiermacher separates morality and religion and therefore excludes any idea of immortality which would serve any moral purpose as condition. Eschatology is the experience of the infinite universe in man's immanent life.

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10 Schleiermacher, *Über die Religion*, p.30.

11 Cornehl, p.84.

12 Cornehl, p.84.

13 Schleiermacher, *Über die Religion*, p.74.

In his later written main work Christian Faith Schleiermacher actually based his whole theological approach on the idea of an immediate self-consciousness of dependency on the interrelation with the world. The whole Heilsgeschichte serves the purpose of awakening this self-consciousness and strengthening it. Any future eschatology is totally neglected.

## B) Fichte

Fichte repeated Schleiermacher's criticisms of Kant, however, not in order to free religion from morality, but in order to free morality from the last bits of the "neological" concept of the eschatological realm of absolute morality as the necessary condition for human morality. Fichte takes seriously Kant's postulate, that morality is an end in itself and that it therefore has to be done for its own sake. However, total morality is not practicable in human life. Therefore, like Kant, Fichte postulates the immortality of the soul. As however, any sensory note like the hope for happiness must be removed from morality, the aim of the infinite process cannot be the final achieving of individual happiness but must be the state in which the moral effort actually produces the good for its own sake. Kant's second postulate of divine intervention is also removed, as this in Kant's system only served the purpose of making possible the final coincidence of individual happiness and morality. Eschatology is thus the *infinite* progress towards the fulfillment of absolute morality. This process begins here on earth and is pursued through infinite worlds: "Wie viele endliche Leben er (der Mensch, A.S.) auch in linearer Folge durchlaufen würde: stets bleibt das wahre unendliche Leben im *Jenseits*, an dem er zwar je und je in der sittlichen Tat Anteil hat, das aber letztlich nie erfüllte Gegenwart werden kann, weil die Differenz als absolute fixiert wird."<sup>14</sup>

## I.3 Hegel

We now have to turn to Hegel's critique of the concept of eschatology and salvation in enlightenment and idealistic philosophy. His concept of eschatology was to become most influential through the mediation of his two pupils Feuerbach and Marx. Hegel overturned the whole

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<sup>14</sup> Cornehl, p.89.

enlightenment concept of a future reconciliation of morality and man and tried to prove the real presence of reconciliation in history through the Absolute Consciousness.

Cornehl has made very clear that one must understand Hegel's mature philosophical concept historically in its development in order to grasp its and his intention.

In his Frühschriften Hegel developed a deeply atheistic critique of christianity. Being strongly influenced by the French revolution he equated christian religion with its historical manifestation in the church and discovered that actually human freedom and dignity had become dissolved into a legalistic system, which formed part of a repressive society. Indeed Hegel thought that christianity had not actually freed itself from jewish obedience to the law. Now in the age of philosophy, the time has come, in which man should become conscious about how things *should* be and in which he should finally free himself from the repressive ecclesiastical system; in order to designate the state of man while unfree Hegel uses the term "alienation". Man is alienated from himself, because he is bound to a system which does not allow him to become free and self-determined. The concept of man's actual existence of alienation was to become one of the ideas which Hegel passed on to the history of philosophy and which was to influence it decisively. We will encounter the category of alienation in every other philosopher who was concerned with the question for eschatology and salvation. Hegel saw man's being bound to an ecclesiastical religion as alienation; man ought to free himself towards humanity and affirmation of life: "Ausser früheren Versuchen blieb es unseren Tagen vorzüglich aufbehalten, die Schätze, die an den Himmel verschleudert worden sind, als Eigentum des Menschen, zumindest in der Theorie, zu vindizieren, aber welches Zeitalter wird die Kraft haben, dieses Recht geltend zu machen und sich in den Besitz zu setzen?"<sup>15</sup> Hegel wants nothing less than a metaphysical revolution, the bearer of which is the absolute consciousness of man. Even the assumption of the existence of a God was considered to be the admission of human impotence and a loss of dignity. And as the absolute consciousness of man is the only authority Hegel acknowledges he agrees with Fichte in his criticism of Kant's concept of the intervention of God into the infinite process of approximating morality and humanity.

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<sup>15</sup> Hegel, Die Positivität der christlichen Religion, p.225.

However, during his time in Frankfurt, Hegel started to doubt the possibility of the reconciliation of divine and human realm by means of a metaphysical revolution, in which man would reach the divine realm by positing himself in God's place. The revolution *itself* is still subdued to the heteronomy from which it pretends to free man. The gap between "Sittlichkeit" and "Sinnlichkeit" is not *reconciled* by a revolution, but revolution *abolishes* Sinnlichkeit by sacrificing the human reality on the altar of morality. In a revolution human reality will reach its moral challenge only on the expense of its own cancellation. It therefore becomes necessary to think a real reconciliation of both.

Hegel started anew. The consciousness of man is the consciousness of the difference of self and world, morality and human reality, spirit and nature etc., but it is also the consciousness of a potential unity of these polarities. The polarities are experienced as *difference*, which would be impossible without a previous knowledge of their intrinsic unity. The hypothetical higher synthesis must be sought *beyond* the polarities, beyond either morality or human reality. Again Hegel used the concept of "alienation" to describe the tension between the polarities. Thus "alienation" is not only a characteristic of man alone, but is the decisive feature of the whole world. Alienation is the basic principle which underlies the world; alienation of everything from itself must be overcome in the synthesis beyond the polarities: the "notwendige Entzweigung ist ein Faktor des Lebens, das ewig entgegengesetzt sich bildet und die Totalität ist, in der höchsten Lebendigkeit, nur durch ihre Wiederherstellung aus der Trennung möglich."<sup>16</sup>

Hegel draws the daring conclusion: "... es (das Absolute, A.S.) ist das Ziel, das gesucht wird. Es ist schon vorhanden, wie könnte es sonst gesucht werden? Die Vernunft produciert es nur, indem sie das Bewusstseyn von Beschränkungen befreyt.... Für den Standpunkt der Entzweigung ist die absolute Synthese ein Jenseyts, das ihren Bestimmtheyten entgegengesetzte Unbestimmte und Gestaltlose. ... Die Aufgabe der Philosophie besteht aber darinn, diese Voraussetzungen zu vereinen, das Seyn in das Nicht-Seyn - als Werden, die Entzweigung in das Absolute - als seine Erscheinung, des Endliche in das Unendliche - als Leben zu setzen."<sup>17</sup> As the absolute had to be

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<sup>16</sup> Hegel, Die Differenz des Fichte' schen und Schelling' schen Systems der Philosophie, p.13-14.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, p.15-16.

thought of as inherent in man's consciousness, Hegel actually claimed that reason *produces* this absolute by thinking it and by dissolving the polarities into it.

Going by this assumption Hegel developed his criticism of subjective idealism during his time in Jena. The philosophy of enlightenment had claimed the infinite to be utterly transcendent, whereas the real world had been regarded as the realm of mere phenomena. Both ideas perpetuate the division of the world into a realm of objectivity which now becomes unintelligible (Kant) and subjectivity. An objective cognition of God is not any longer possible and religion has degenerated into sheer sentimentality (Schleiermacher), which cannot claim any objective truth anymore. Hegel's criticism is that actually the philosophy of subjective idealism split the world into unintelligible objectivity and sentimental subjectivity. Even in the concept of eschatology as the infinite process of moral perfection (the aim of which had been to criticise the primitive eudaimonism of the enlightenment) idealistic philosophy fell victim to this presupposition, as the "wahre unendliche Leben" (Fichte) remains always transcendent. Due to their absolute division between subjectivity and objectivity they have to claim that the process is *infinite*. Hegel saw this split between subjectivity and objectivity as the expression of the universal alienation which permeates the whole world. Also the alienation of subjectivity from objectivity is the alienation of something which actually is supposed to form a unity and which therefore has to be reconciled in the absolute consciousness through thinking. A real reconciliation can therefore not be achieved as long as one holds an idea of subjectivity, the only aim of which is to perpetuate itself.

Hegel suspected that in the last analysis idealistic eschatology (especially Fichte's) even denied the necessity of salvation through reconciliation, because human subjectivity is a final state and is therefore practically regarded as sufficient unto itself. A real dissolution of the self into the absolute beyond the polarity of subjectivity and objectivity is not dared. Instead Fichte demands an infinite number of lives in which the self can perpetuate itself, not willing to surrender itself to the absolute.

Hegel then goes on: if reconciliation as salvation is not supposed to be ultimately postponed in an infinite process, if thus man should be thought of as freed from the tension between "Sein" and "moralischem Sollen", then reconciliation must be thought to be present and manifest. And if it is supposed to be present, then it must be thought of as *historically real*!

Hegel now developed a particular christian philosophy in which Jesus of Nazareth is the incarnation of God in humanity. In the historical person the real reconciliation of God and man, infinite and finite, actuality and morality is historically manifest. It is, however, important to understand the degree to which this more "theological" approach does not contradict Hegel's philosophical presupposition that the absolute as the reconciliation of the polarities is *produced* in the absolute consciousness of man: at first the absolute consciousness infers the idea of an absolute and its necessary historical manifestation. And only then the historical appearance of Jesus Christ can be realized as the manifestation of this absolute, which is necessary to make the reconciliation a historical matter of fact. The act of thinking the absolute verifies itself through the coincidence of necessary philosophical postulate and historical phenomenon.

As he presupposed the assumption that reconciliation had to be historically manifest, Hegel now set out to prove the actuality of world history as the development of the present reconciliation. As, however, the reconciliation in the time after Jesus Christ is manifest only in man's consciousness of it, the course of present reconciliation is more or less identical with the "Geschichte des Geistes". Philosophy as the thinking of the absolute is in the last analysis claimed to be the manifestation of the reconciliation of infinite and finite, subjectivity and objectivity, divine and human realm.

Hegel's idea of universal self-alienation and of salvation as the identity of God and man was to become most influential in the 19th and 20th century. Equally important was Hegel's claim that this reconciliation must be thought to be historically manifest.

#### I.4 Feuerbach, Marx and Bloch

Hegel's most important legacy was that he rejected the idea of another, divine realm beyond the realm of history. Both are identical in as much as history is the history of the self-explication of the "Weltgeist".

After Hegel's death two of his pupils took over his ideas; however, they interpreted them slightly differently. The point in which Hegel differed from his pupils and the pupils amongst themselves, was the status of the christian religion in the process of reconciliation of man and God in history. Hegel had roughly identified history with the development of the Weltgeist; and as the christian



religion had as its content the historical manifestation of the reconciliation, it had a rather positive value for Hegel, although of course the final reconciliation could only be achieved in the absolute consciousness. That changed totally in Feuerbach's and Marx's approach.

#### A) Feuerbach

Feuerbach identified religion (especially christianity) in general with the old, degenerated concept of future eschatology; as for Hegel in the beginning for Feuerbach the enlightenment and idealistic dogma of the immortality of the soul was the expression of ultimate, selfish subjectivism. As Hegel had already shown, the perpetuation of subjective individualism meant the perpetuation of the *dualism* between subjective individual and objective God. Feuerbach therefore considered the christian idea of God as opposed to man to be the main obstacle on the way to real salvation: God as opposite to man is a mere projection which serves the purpose of immortalizing the individual. As salvation is the identity of God and man, this state of opposition must be considered to be a state of self-alienation. Religion is merely a projection of man in order to save his individualistic subjectivity. Real reconciliation can therefore only be gained if the absurdity and the falseness of this projection is realized. In order to think the actual identity of man and God, Feuerbach developed a pantheistic concept of God, referring to Spinoza: "Kommt daher Einer und sagt und zeigt ihnen, dass Gott wirklich ist, dass sein Sein nicht bloss ein vorgestelltes, unwirkliches, sondern dass Natur und Weltgeschichte die Existenz (freilich nicht das Wesen) Gottes sei, so gilt ihnen dann ein solcher, welcher einen wirklichen Gott glaubt, gerade deswegen, weil er behauptet, dass Gott *ist*, für ein Gottesleugner und Naturalist."<sup>18</sup>

Feuerbach clung to Hegel's idea of the self-alienation of man and of salvation as the identity of man and God. However, different from Hegel, he considered religion and religious concepts of God not as preparatory stage of the realization of this identity. Rather is religion and its concept of God the actual enemy of true salvation, because religion creates the conceptual dualism between man and God.

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<sup>18</sup> Feuerbach, Gedanken über Tod und Unsterblichkeit, p.195.

## B) Marx

Marx had a slightly different but equally negative attitude towards religion; he also set out from Hegel's idea that salvation is the reconciliation of man and God in history. However, he rejected Hegel's idea that this reconciliation was manifest in absolute consciousness and in philosophical thinking. Clinging to Hegel's concept of reconciliation as real and historical, he did not confine himself to an abstract "idea of history", but turned to actual economy and politics as the forming powers of history. He rejected Hegel's intellectual optimism and became a critic of actual society, in which nothing of the reconciliation Hegel had presupposed was visible yet.

He became especially critical of the role of christian religion in society: like Feuerbach he equated traditional eschatology and actual church and christianity in general and came to the conclusion that religion was nothing but the exploiters' attempt to put the people off with the idea of a future better world, in order not to have to change the socially unjust status of society. Like the early Hegel Marx saw religion as part of a repressive society, which prevented man from becoming free and self-determined. Alienation must not be understood metaphysically but practically: man is alienated from himself because he is alienated from the product of his work and from the process of his work. In the capitalist class system both are no longer the expression of his own personality but a function of his exploitation. Man is alienated from himself due to the exploiting conditions of the process of production and is therefore in danger of falling victim to the religious concept of a transcendent better world, what prevents him from seeing the actual ground of his alienation, which is economic exploitation. Therefore society has to be changed until a state can be reached in which religion and its idea of a future salvation would not any longer be necessary: "Die Aufhebung der Religion als des illusorischen Glückes des Menschen ist die Forderung seines wirklichen Glückes. Die Forderung, die Illusionen über seinen Zustand aufzugeben, ist die Forderung, einen Zustand aufzugeben, der der Illusionen bedarf."<sup>19</sup>

Marx kept Hegel's ideal of salvation as reconciliation. However, one important change is noticeable: he replaces the term "reconciliation" with the term "Glück" i.e. happiness; Marx's turn to the empirical world of the working classes made experience the criterion for the reality of salvation.

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<sup>19</sup> Marx, Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie, p.171.

Not any longer is an eternal, transcendent "rapture" the aim of eschatology. Linked to man's actual existence, the content of salvation becomes a happiness to be experienced practically. The necessity of grounding any concept of salvation in man's empirical experience was to become the decisive feature of philosophical criticisms of religious concepts of salvation in the 20th century. Any concept of salvation that does not contribute to the happiness of man's actual experience is open to the suspicion of being merely deliberate ideological betrayal of the working classes.

It is not the task of this thesis to describe how far Marx saw religion not only as means for the perpetuation of the exploiting class system but also as the inherent *result* of the alienation of man from himself and his work through the introduction of the division of labour and the class system.

The main point is that Marx still held to the idea of a salvation and reconciliation in history, which originally had been derived from theology and religion. Religion itself however is to be abolished. According to Hegel's own presuppositions salvation must necessarily be thought to be realizable *in history*. Otherwise it seems to be nothing more than wishful thinking. Marx, however, differed from Hegel in thinking the realization *practicable* through revolution: he therefore claimed that he had "Hegel vom Kopf auf die Füße gestellt".

Marx himself, however, did not develop a precise concept of the happiness of a state in which man would finally overcome his self-alienation in being reconciled with himself and the products of his labour in a classless society.<sup>20</sup>

### C) Bloch

Marx's critique found a worthy successor in the marxist philosopher Bloch, who in his main work Das Prinzip Hoffnung is explicitly concerned with the christian concept of salvation and eschatology.

Bloch considers "hope" to be the main underlying principle of all human existence. The transcending of the actual social injustice and society towards an eschatological future (which is made by man himself) is unthinkable without man's ability to transcend the facticity of things due to

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20 Möller, p.112: "Über die konkreten Bedingungen der Zukunftsgesellschaft gibt es bei Marx nur spärliche Angaben."

his hope for a better status. Hope is therefore a sort of proleptic thinking which is per se inherent in man.

Every religion is just the temporary formulation of this eternal desire and hope for a better world. Bloch is therefore very critical of the claim of christianity, that salvation is already present in Jesus Christ: "Und keine anthropologische Kritik der Religion raubt die Hoffnung, auf die das Christentum aufgetragen ist; sie entzieht dieser Hoffnung einzig das, was sie als Hoffnung aufhob und zur abergläubischen Zuversicht machte: die ausgemalte, ausgemachte, die unsinnig irrealen, aber als real hypostasierte Mythologie ihrer Erfüllung."<sup>21</sup>

This is the climax of the development of a change in understanding of eschatology, which started with the attempt of neologism, to make christianity's soteriological claim universally intelligible. Bloch draws the final conclusion from this development: there is no universally intelligible salvation in religion. Bloch accuses the christian religion of spreading the mere "Mythologie ihrer Erfüllung", instead of nourishing practical hope for an actual change of mankind and society.

Religion's claim for salvation in a *transcendent* eschatology is not provable and falls victim to Marx's suspicion. Religion's claim for salvation in a *present* eschatology (e.g. in the style of Hegel) is a merely apodictic statement, to which no actual experiences correspond. It is "irrational", mere "mythology", and has therefore to be rejected.

## I.5 HEIDEGGER

### A) Introduction

The concept of salvation as the overcoming of alienation underwent one final alteration. Although the marxist transformation of Hegelian dialectics into actual history became most influential through the rise of communism, surprisingly enough it was not before the 1960s that theology felt the urge to respond to Marx's critique of religion and to his own interpretation of salvation. And even now one cannot say that a marxist attitude towards religion and salvation is prevailing in western society. The alteration which the philosophical concept of salvation underwent in the 20th

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<sup>21</sup> Bloch, Das Prinzip Hoffnung, p.1523.

century and which gave to it the form with which it was to become part of common self-understanding of modern man was the *existential philosophy* of Martin Heidegger.

Of course, Heidegger had precursors: main features of his understanding of existence had been developed by Kierkegaard already; however, we will see that a basic feature of Heidegger's philosophy is the classical idea of salvation as the overcoming of alienation which he seemingly he adopted from Marx and Hegel. However, he put this concept in the form in which it presents itself today by shifting it onto an individualistic and ontological level: "Die Heimatlosigkeit wird ein Weltchicksal. Darum ist es nötig, dieses Geschick seinsgeschichtlich zu denken. Was Marx in einem wesentlichen und bedeutenden Sinne von Hegel her als die Entfremdung des Menschen erkannt hat, reicht mit seinen Wurzeln in die Heimatlosigkeit des neuzeitlichen Menschen. Diese wird, und zwar aus dem Geschick des Seins in der Gestalt der Metaphysik hervorgerufen, durch sie verfestigt und zugleich von ihr als Heimatlosigkeit verdeckt."<sup>22</sup>

This is comprehensible only in the framework of the whole of his Existenzialanthropologie. We will therefore now turn to Sein und Zeit.

## B) Heidegger's transcendental-ontological anthropology

In Sein und Zeit Heidegger tried to give an entirely new view on philosophy and the human condition by turning away from traditional metaphysical philosophy. "Heidegger steht in dieser Hinsicht in der philosophischen Bewegung, die mit Feuerbach, Marx und Kierkegaard beginnend, die metaphysische Deutung des Menschen als eine Selbstentfremdung deklariert."<sup>23</sup> Heidegger does not develop an idealist philosophy but starts to examine the existential everyday life of man. However, his aim is not to examine the culture and the habits of man. Rather is he interested in the question "nach dem Sinn von Sein"<sup>24</sup>. However, he is conscious of the fact that any question for "Sein" remains unanswerable as long as one asks in the traditional categorical way. According to Heidegger there is only one way to ask the question for being, namely to analyse *man*. The peculiar characteristic that makes man apt for this purpose is that he himself *is* being and therefore takes

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<sup>22</sup> Heidegger, Brief über den Humanismus, p.339-340.

<sup>23</sup> Schulz, Philosophie, p.292.

<sup>24</sup> Heidegger, Sein und Zeit, p.1.

part in the process of being-there. Therefore Heidegger calls man the Da-Sein and continues: "Das Dasein ist ein Seiendes, das nicht nur unter anderem Seienden vorkommt, es ist vielmehr dadurch ontisch ausgezeichnet, dass es diesem Seienden in seinem Sein *um* dieses Sein selbst geht. Zu dieser Seinsverfassung des Daseins gehört aber dann, dass es in seinem Sein zu diesem Sein ein Seinsverhältnis hat. Und dies wiederum besagt: Dasein versteht sich in irgendeiner Weise und Ausdrücklichkeit in seinem Sein."<sup>25</sup> However, this "irgendwie" which is naive and obscure must be unfolded and made intelligible: "Daher muss die Fundamentalontologie ... in der existenzialen Analytik des Daseins gesucht werden."<sup>26</sup> From a detailed analysis of the human condition, of the condition of Da-sein, he infers the structure of "Sein-selbst" as the necessary condition of the possibility of Da-Sein. As far as these structures concern human beings Heidegger calls them "Existenzialien"(existentials). As far as they concern only things or animals they are "categories".

Due to his presupposition of an ontological-transcendental interdependence between Dasein and Being itself he defines Being itself through its manifestations in Dasein.

According to Heidegger the basic and most important existential is Zeitlichkeit: "Als der Sinn des Seins des Seienden, das wir Dasein nennen, wird die Zeitlichkeit aufgewiesen. Dieser Nachweis muss sich bewähren in der wiederholten Interpretation der vorläufig aufgezeigten Daseinsstruktur als Modi der Zeitlichkeit."<sup>27</sup> With the term Zeitlichkeit the main feature of Heidegger's anthropology is mentioned. Roughly speaking, one can say that the aim of Sein und Zeit can be summarized with the title of the first part of it: "Die Interpretation des Daseins auf die Zeitlichkeit und die Explikation der Zeit als des transzendentalen Horizontes der Frage nach dem Sein."<sup>28</sup>

Heidegger offers evidence for his assumption that Zeitlichkeit is the "Sinn des Seins" by introducing the two terms which in the course of time became infamous and significant for his work: Eigentlichkeit and Uneigentlichkeit. These terms have often been misinterpreted. However, they are supposed to be the adequate expression of the modi of the exclusively individual relation between the Sein and its bearer, the individual subject: "Das Sein, darum es diesem Seienden in

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25 ibid. p.12.

26 ibid. p.13.

27 ibid. p.17.

28 ibid. p.41.

seinem Sein geht, ist je meines. Dasein ist daher nie ontologisch zu fassen als Fall und Exemplar einer Gattung von Seiendem als vorhandenem. ... Und Dasein ist meines wiederum, je in dieser oder jener Weise zu sein."<sup>29</sup> That means that every Dasein, as it is conscious of itself, has a relation to itself as being. However, the actual being is by no means dependent on the subject. Rather it is the transcendental condition of subjectivity. Therefore: "Es hat sich schon immer irgendwie entschieden, in welcher Weise Dasein je meines ist."<sup>30</sup> According to Heidegger the self-relation of Dasein has to be characterized as Möglichkeit (potentiality, possibility): due to its being-in-time the individual Dasein is never entirely actualized, i.e. its potentialities are never all fulfilled. There is always something else to come in the course of time and thus the relation of Dasein to its own being must be characterized as "potentiality". However, that bears a danger: "Das Seiende, dem es in seinem Sein um dieses selbst geht, verhält sich zu seinem Sein als seiner eigensten Möglichkeit. Dasein *ist* je seine Möglichkeit und es *hat* sie nicht nur noch eigenschaftlich als ein Vorhandenes. Und weil Dasein je wesenhaft seine Möglichkeit *ist*, kann dieses Seiende in seinem Sein sich 'wählen', gewinnen, es kann sich verlieren, bzw. nie und nur 'scheinbar' gewinnen. Verloren haben kann es sich nur und noch nicht sich gewonnen haben kann es nur, sofern es seinem Wesen nach mögliches *eigentlich*, d.h. sich zueigenes ist. Die beiden Seinsmodi der Eigentlichkeit und der Uneigentlichkeit - diese Ausdrücke sind im strengsten Wortsinn terminologisch gewählt - gründen darin, dass Dasein überhaupt durch Jemeinigkeit bestimmt ist."<sup>31</sup> Eigentlichkeit and Uneigentlichkeit are modes of how Dasein is related to its own being as potentiality. Eigentlichkeit thus means a behaviour in which the individual is conscious of and serious about the fact that its own being is ultimately a matter of its own and that it is supposed to fulfil those potentialities which are its "own" ones. Uneigentlichkeit is therefore the behaviour in which man is not willing to take over the responsibility for its own Dasein and its Je-meinigkeit. In a later chapter Heidegger takes this up again and states more precisely: instead of being concerned with the actuality of being as the utmost individual task to fulfil the inherent potentialities of Dasein, man flees this responsibility by adopting the manners and structures of that which is ultimately *not* individual, namely the

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29 *ibid.* p.42.

30 *ibid.*

31 *ibid.*

"Öffentlichkeit des Man"<sup>32</sup>: "Das Dasein ist von ihm selbst als eigentlichem Selbstseinkönnen zunächst immer schon abgefallen und an die 'Welt' verfallen. Die Verfallenheit an die Welt meint das Aufgehen im Miteinandersein. ... Was wir die Uneigentlichkeit des Daseins nannten, erfährt jetzt durch die Interpretation des Verfallenseins eine schärfere Bestimmung."<sup>33</sup> According to Heidegger the dialectic of Eigentlichkeit and Uneigentlichkeit must be considered to be the fundamental structure of existence<sup>34</sup>: "Mit der ontologischen Verdeutlichung der in diesen Phänomenen durchblickenden Seinsart des alltäglichen In-der-Welt-seins gewinnen wir erst die existenzial zureichende Bestimmung der Grundverfassung des Daseins."<sup>35</sup>

Heidegger does not weary stressing that Uneigentlichkeit is not meant in a pejorative sense. Rather must it be understood as a Seinsmodus which is of the same ontological value as Eigentlichkeit. In an ontological sense Heidegger is right: as both modi are actuality, one must transcendently conclude that both are founded and grounded in the structure of Being itself. "Das Nicht-es-selbst-sein fungiert als positive Möglichkeit des Seienden, das wesenhaft besorgend in einer Welt aufgeht. Dieses *Nicht-sein* muss als die nächste Seinsart des Daseins begriffen werden, in der es sich zumeist hält."<sup>36</sup> However, it soon becomes evident that Uneigentlichkeit in Heidegger is not perceived neutrally as ontological potentiality of the same *existential* value as Eigentlichkeit. Rather it is described as *deficient* mode of Eigentlichkeit: "Wenn aber das Dasein selbst im Gerede und der öffentlichen Ausgelegtheit ihm selbst die Möglichkeit vorgibt, sich im Man zu verlieren, der Bodenlosigkeit zu verfallen, dann sagt das: das Dasein bereitet ihm selbst die ständige Versuchung zum Verfallen. Das In-der-Welt-sein ist an ihm selbst versucherisch. ...Gerede und Zweideutigkeit, das Alles-gesehen- und Alles-verstanden-haben bildet die Vermeintlichkeit aus, die so verfügbare und herrschende Erschlossenheit des Daseins vermöchte ihm die Sicherheit, Echtheit und Fülle aller Möglichkeiten seines Seins zu verbürgen. ... Das verfallende In-der-Welt-sein ist sich selbst versuchend zugleich beruhigend."<sup>37</sup>

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32 *ibid.* p.175.

33 *ibid.*

34 Not of Dasein the fundamental structure of which is Zeitlichkeit.

35 Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, p.177.

36 *ibid.* p.176.

37 *ibid.* p.177.



And now it suddenly becomes clear what Heidegger's link with the traditional philosophy is: "In diesem beruhigten, alles verstehenden Sichvergleichen mit allem treibt das Dasein einer *Entfremdung* zu, in der sich ihm das eigenste Seinkönnen verbirgt."<sup>38</sup> Heidegger introduces the term Entfremdung in order to describe the actuality of existence. Alienation as Uneigentlichkeit is the mode of being "in der es sich zumeist hält."<sup>39</sup> However, there remains an uncertainty about what alienation means ontologically: on the one hand Heidegger stresses that alienation hides the "eigenste Seinkönnen", which thus alienates man from his authentic relation to Being itself. On the other hand he claims that also Uneigentlichkeit is an actual ontological mode of Dasein as being: it seems that neither does Uneigentlichkeit alienate man from himself nor from Being itself! "Diese Entfremdung, die dem Dasein seine Eigentlichkeit und Möglichkeit, wenn auch nur als solche eines echten Scheiterns, verschliesst, liefert es jedoch nicht an Seiendes aus, das es nicht selbst ist, sondern drängt es in seine Uneigentlichkeit, in eine mögliche Seinsart seiner selbst."<sup>40</sup> Thus Heidegger can produce the apparently paradoxical sentence: "Das Dasein stürzt aus ihm selbst in es selbst, in die Bodenlosigkeit und Nichtigkeit der uneigentlichen Alltäglichkeit."<sup>41</sup>

Heidegger's terminology implies a moral assessment, although he wants to deal with the "existentials" as purely ontological phenomena. His introduction of the term Entfremdung finally makes clear that Uneigentlichkeit is the negative, deficient mode of Eigentlichkeit because by using the traditional concept of man's existence as endangered of becoming alienated, he indicates the ontological possibility of a "better" state, the state of non-alienation.

And in fact Heidegger assumes that this state exists and that it is basically possible to gain it. If Eigentlichkeit is the positive alternative to alienation, then alienation can be overcome through the contemplation of what is je-meinig. As mentioned above, for Heidegger the basic existential of Dasein was Zeitlichkeit. Due to its temporality the being of Dasein had to be perceived mainly as "jemeinige Möglichkeit". If Dasein therefore is supposed to become "eigentlich", it must become conscious of the temporal and finite character of its own being. According to Heidegger *death*

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38 *ibid.* p.178. Italics by A.S.

39 *cf.* footnote 36.

40 *ibid.* p.178.

41 *ibid.*

must be considered to be the ultimate, last and most "eigentlich" potentiality of man at all. The own death is the most individual act in human life, because in this matter no human being can stand in for another: "Der Tod als Ende des Daseins ist die eigenste, unbezügliche, gewisse und als solche unbestimmte, unüberholbare Möglichkeit des Daseins."<sup>42</sup> In the last analysis the attitude towards death makes the difference between Uneigentlichkeit and Eigentlichkeit. The "uneigentliche Dasein" does not accept the own death as its ultimately "own" but flees from it and tries to hide in the anonymity of the "Man": "Das Man lässt den Mut zur Angst vor dem Tode nicht aufkommen ... Versuchung, Beruhigung und Entfremdung kennzeichnen aber die Seinsart des Verfallens. Das alltägliche Sein zum Tode ist als verfallendes eine ständige Flucht vor ihm. Das Sein zum Ende hat den Modus des umdeutenden, uneigentlich anstehenden und verhüllenden Ausweichens vor ihm."<sup>43</sup>

The "eigentliche Dasein", however, is conscious of the fact that "der Tod ist die eigenste Möglichkeit des Daseins. Das Sein zu ihm erschliesst dem Dasein sein eigenstes Seinkönnen, darin es um das Sein des Daseins schlechthin geht. Darin kann dem Dasein offenbar werden, dass es in der ausgezeichneten Möglichkeit seiner selbst dem Man entrissen bleibt, d.h. vorlaufend sich je schon ihm entreissen kann."<sup>44</sup> The alienation as Uneigentlichkeit can be overcome through the anticipation (Vorlaufen) of death as the ultimate and most "eigentlich" possibility of Dasein. The Eigentlichkeit of Dasein reaches its consummation through the becoming conscious of its utmost ontological potentiality: "Das Sein zum Tode ist Vorlaufen in ein Seinkönnen des Seienden, dessen Seinsart das Vorlaufen selbst hat. Im vorlaufenden Enthüllen dieses Seinkönnens erschliesst sich das Dasein ihm selbst hinsichtlich seiner äussersten Möglichkeit. Auf eigenstes Seinkönnen sich entwerfen aber besagt: sich selbst verstehen können im Sein des so enthüllten Seienden: existieren. Das Vorlaufen erweist sich als Möglichkeit des Verstehens des eigensten, äussersten Seinskönnens, d.h. als Möglichkeit eigentlicher Existenz!"<sup>45</sup>

However, it is most important that the "Vorlaufen zum Tode" is not an ethical advice or a moral postulate. Eigentlichkeit and Uneigentlichkeit are not a matter of personal decision but an

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42 ibid. p.258.

43 ibid. p.254.

44 ibid. p.263.

45 ibid. p.263.

ontological and existential matter of fact, a mode of Dasein. Thus it is Heidegger's aim to show by analysing the existential everyday life of man that Eigentlichkeit and Uneigentlichkeit exist as actualized ontological potentialities of Dasein. I already pointed out above that Heidegger wants to analyse the existential structure Dasein in order to be able to postulate the transcendental structures of Being itself.

Heidegger finds the actuality of "Vorlaufen zum Tode", the actuality of the overcoming alienation in the phenomena of conscience, guilt and anxiety. Every Dasein is guilty, not in a moral sense but in the sense that the conscience of being guilty is the consciousness of the fact that Dasein is bound to the actualization of its "own" potentialities and is thus endangered of not achieving its purpose. Guilt becomes evident when conscience reveals the Uneigentlichkeit of Dasein. Conscience is thus the consciousness of Eigentlichkeit: "Das Verstehen des Gewissensrufes enthüllt die Verlorenheit in das Man. Die Entschlossenheit holt das Dasein auf sein eigenstes Selbstseinkönnen zurück. Eigentlich und ganz durchsichtig wird das eigene Seinkönnen im verstehenden Sein zum Tode als der eigensten Möglichkeit."<sup>46</sup> In existential anxiety before death, conscience reveals the "eigentlich" and primordial structure of Dasein: "Die vorlaufende Entschlossenheit ist kein Ausweg, erfunden, um den Tod zu 'überwinden', sondern das dem Gewissensruf folgende Verstehen, das dem Tod die Möglichkeit freigibt, der Existenz des Daseins mächtig zu werden und jede flüchtige Selbstverdeckung im Grunde zu zerstreuen."<sup>47</sup>

One can easily see *how much* the understanding of alienation and of salvation as overcoming the alienation has changed since Hegel and Marx. One may recall the initial quotation of Heidegger: "Die Heimatlosigkeit wird ein Weltchicksal. Darum ist es nötig, dieses Geschick seinsgeschichtlich zu denken. Was Marx in einem wesentlichen und bedeutenden Sinne von Hegel her als die Entfremdung des Menschen erkannt hat, reicht mit seinen Wurzeln in die Heimatlosigkeit des neuzeitlichen Menschen. Diese wird, und zwar aus dem Geschick des Seins in der Gestalt der Metaphysik hervorgerufen, durch sie verfestigt und zugleich von ihr als Heimatlosigkeit

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46 *ibid.* p.307.

47 *ibid.* p.310.

verdeckt."<sup>48</sup> Now it is clear that alienation as Heimatlosigkeit means *ontological* "Heimatlosigkeit", i.e. Uneigentlichkeit. That is the reason why Heidegger claims that it is necessary to think it "seinsgeschichtlich".

It is also clear *in what way* Heidegger transformed the classical concept of alienation: he connected it with *ontology* and its inherent concept of *existence*. One can say that in a dialectical way Heidegger thus both *universalized* and *individualized* the classical concept of alienation. Due to his attempt to lay bare the structures of Being itself through an analysis of Dasein he concentrated entirely on the individual. In fact he even elevated Eigentlichkeit, the utterly individualistic actualization of Dasein, to the level of a main principle of his philosophy of existence. In total distinction from Marx, Heidegger entirely leaves out actual history and society and applies alienation and salvation to the individual only. However, similar to Kant, whose transcendental method he admired and adopted, by concentrating on the transcendental condition of the Dasein, Heidegger seemingly transcends the individual towards an underlying all-embracing ontology. Alienation thus is understood as a mode of Being itself and can now be overcome only through the cognition of the temporal structure of Being itself. Alienation is now the most basic structure of all, originating from the relation of time and Being. However, the problem of this relation remains unsolved in Sein und Zeit. It should have been dealt with in the second volume, which, however, Heidegger never wrote: "Die existenzial-ontologische Verfassung der Daseinsganzheit gründet in der Zeitlichkeit. Demnach muss eine ursprüngliche Zeitigungsweise der ekstatischen Zeitlichkeit selbst den ekstatischen Entwurf von Sein überhaupt ermöglichen: Wie ist dieser Zeitigungsmodus der Zeitlichkeit zu interpretieren? Führt ein Weg von der ursprünglichen Zeit zum Sinn des Seins? Offenbart sich die Zeit selbst als Horizont des Seins?"<sup>49</sup>

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48 cf. footnote 22.

49 *ibid.* p.438.

## I.6 SUMMARY

It was the philosophy of Martin Heidegger and his concept of life as existence which shaped the modern understanding of man so much that it found its way into academic theology. Heidegger broke with the essentialist, metaphysical tradition of philosophy in the 19th century. He started anew with the existence and the *ontology of the individual*. And it was this altered understanding of man himself which led Heidegger to a different concept of man's salvation. Since Heidegger the problem of soteriology has the form with which we were concerned in the initial chapter: today soteriology presents itself as the question for salvation within the boundaries of *individual existence and its existential experience*.

Heidegger's formulation of the question as well as his attempt to answer it in his main work Sein und Zeit became the yardstick for every theological approach to the subject, because after Heidegger it is no longer possible to neglect the *existential* aspect of religion and theology. Names like Bultmann, Tillich and Rahner indicate that Heidegger's anthropology soon became most influential in philosophy and theology and it was his concept of soteriology which challenged theology most. However, it was not the *ontological* but the *individualistic* element of Heidegger's Existenzialanalyse which became famous and made his concept of Uneigentlichkeit and Eigentlichkeit the basis of the modern idea of "self-realization" which became so infamous in the 1970s.

In Heidegger's philosophy a long-lasting development in philosophy came to an end, which started with Hegel's turning eschatology into the history of the Weltgeist. He developed the philosophical concept of alienation. Marx "transcended" this concept by turning to actual political history and the actual reality of the human condition. Heidegger finally neglected even the historical, political and social circumstances of man and put the individual as such in the center of his considerations. The framework of his concept of man was no longer christian eschatology or political history, but *ontology of the individual* Dasein.

The self-understanding of modern man is shaped by the idea of both historicity and individualism. And today the individual in real history and its personal needs and Befindlichkeiten are the starting-point for every understanding of soteriology and salvation, as Gerhard Ebeling pointed out<sup>50</sup>.

We will now turn to existentialist theology in order to see whether there is a christian theology which faces and meets these preconditions and expectations of modern man's understanding.

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<sup>50</sup> cf. the introduction.

## II. THE CONCEPT OF SALVATION IN EXISTENTIALIST THEOLOGY

### II.1 INTRODUCTION

The reason for choosing existentialist theology in order to see whether there is a theology which meets the prerequisites of soteriology today is obvious. As I showed in the previous chapter the problem soteriology has to face today is the individualistic and existentialist understanding of man and his salvation as the overcoming of alienation. A theology which explicitly is considered to be "existentialist" seems to be most apt for our purpose.

However, it is important to bear in mind that out of the wide range of existentialist philosophers only two, Kierkegaard and Heidegger, had a long-lasting impact on theology, in a quite different way though. Kierkegaard's philosophy became the basis for the "new orthodoxy" of the dialectical theology like of Barth (and also Bultmann): the exclusiveness with which dialectical theology stressed the category of the paradoxical, eternal revelation (heritage of Kierkegaard's) led theology to its philosophical dissociation from the modern world. Heidegger's Existenzialanalyse, however, became the philosophical foundation for theologians, who are normally considered to be more radical and progressive or at least to be Vermittlungstheologen. His turning to Being itself, in which Dasein a priori ontologically participates seemed to open up ways for a new understanding of God, man and salvation. We will examine that in more detail in the following chapter.

Out of the wide range of theologians influenced by Martin Heidegger I chose the two most famous ones, Paul Tillich and Karl Rahner. Even though direct references to Heidegger are rare in both Rahner's and Tillich's theological works one immediately notices that their whole way of conceiving the human condition, the question of finitude and anxiety and the question of Being itself is based upon Heidegger's analysis of existence.

Surprisingly enough there is little or no material about the actual influence of Heidegger on Tillich or Rahner. However, the aim of this study is not to examine the interrelation between existentialist philosophy and existentialist theology, but to see whether existentialist theology meets the conditions of a modern soteriology as pointed out above. The expounding of the philosophical

tradition only served the purpose to clarify the intellectual background to which an existentialist soteriology has to stand up.

## II.2 PAUL TILLICH

### II.2.1 INTRODUCTION

#### A) Biographical note

Paul Tillich was born on August 20th 1886 in Starzeddel, Germany. When his father became a pastor in Berlin (1903) Paul Tillich attended the Gymnasium in Berlin. After having done his Abitur he enrolled for philosophy and theology at the University of Berlin, studied one semester in Tübingen, four semesters in Halle, returned to Berlin in 1907 and in the winter of 1909 he passed his first theological exam. In 1910 he did his doctorate writing a dissertation about "Die religionsgeschichtliche Konstruktion in Schellings positiver Philosophie, ihre Voraussetzungen und Prinzipien". In 1911 he did his Lic.theol again with a thesis on Schelling: "Mystik und Schuldbewusstsein in Schellings philosophischer Entwicklung". In 1912 he passed his second theological exam and started to prepare his Habilitation about "Der Begriff des Übernatürlichen". Due to the outbreak of the war in 1914 he was not to finish and pass his Habilitation till 1916.

He became an army chaplain on the west front and survived the siege of Verdun, an experience that turned him into an existentialist, as he said <sup>51</sup>. His later interest in socialism and the soziale Frage derive from this experience of war and the encounter with the working classes. From 1918 till 1926 he was Privatdozent in Berlin, 1924-26 Extraordinarius in Marburg, 25-29 Ordinarius in Dresden and finally in 1929 he got the chair of philosophy and sociology in Frankfurt/M. There he worked together with Adorno and Horkheimer in their then recently founded "Institut für Sozialforschung". In 1933 he was the first German professor to be dismissed by the Nazis because of his close connections with Adorno, his "unvölkische Theologie" and his sympathy for socialism and the concerns of the working classes. He emigrated to New York and became professor at the

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51 Greschat, p.312.



Union Theological Seminary where he stayed until 1955. He was offered a chair in Harvard in 1955 and later from 1962 he taught at the University of Chicago till his death in 1965.

#### B) Martin Kähler and the "protestant principle"

Apart from Heidegger's existential philosophy the second main influence on Tillich was Martin Kähler, his theological teacher in Halle, whose interpretation of the reformed doctrine of justification Tillich adopted. The peculiarity of Tillich's application of theology and the Heideggerian concept of existence remain unintelligible without appreciation of the fact that it was Kähler who shaped the theological basis of Tillich's thoughts. Kähler's aim was to separate the doctrine of justification from a merely moralistic understanding and to apply it also to the sphere of thinking and of doubt, in order to show how far this doctrine could be regarded as the centre of faith even of modern man. From this Tillich developed his "protestant principle" which was to become significant for all his theology. This so-called "protestant principle" seeks to overcome the subjectivism of liberal theology by emphasizing that "Rechtfertigung ist ein Akt Gottes, der in keiner Weise vom Menschen abhängt"<sup>52</sup>. It is "die an keine Vorbedingung geknüpfte Vergebung der Sünden, sie hat den Charakter des 'trotzdem': Gott nimmt den an, der unannehmbar ist ... Der Mensch kann Gott keinen Anlass dafür geben und gerade das muss er annehmen: er muss das 'trotzdem' annehmen.'Er muss bejahen, dass er von Gott bejaht ist; er muss die Bejahung bejahen'"<sup>53</sup>. This is in strong opposition to every kind of ethical or liberal theology of the 19th century. By emphasizing that justification is the work of the revealed God alone Tillich joined the Theologie der Krisis. This expression was the keyword of the early dialectical theology. Together with Barth, Tillich agreed that every attempt to reach God conceptually was against his absolute transcendence and was doomed to failure, as well as every attempt to reach him by "the works of the law". This implied that religion, church, piety and traditional christianity should be viewed in radically relative terms: the only reliable foundation for man was the revealed "protestant principle" of unconditional acceptance. In his later works acceptance and justification of man by God as

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52 II, 205.

53 Rolinck, p.37.

applied to modern autonomous man led Tillich to a critique of theistic concepts of God: such theistic concepts degrade man and humiliate him by positing an omnipotent supernatural being whose mere object man becomes. Thus man becomes estranged from what he should ultimately be concerned with, the *ground of his own being*, i.e. God as Being itself. Tillich hoped to make understandable the protestant message of unconditional acceptance by God by translating it into the language of existentialism and ontology: by becoming aware of himself in the ground of his own being, thus by becoming theonomous, man finally becomes actually autonomous, i.e. free and in totality what he or she really and essentially is and ever has been. This is for Tillich the state of being justified by the gracious God, who does not force man into humiliating heteronomy, but who is in fact the real ground of man's being and therefore the source of true autonomy.

This state cannot be realized or actualized by man but only by God; it is beyond any historical or human effort and thus a critique of everything which is not reliant on revelation alone. "Der Protestantismus als geschichtliche Epoche kann an sein Ende gelangen, aber das protestantische Prinzip ist ewig, weil es ein allgemein christliches Prinzip ist und dem Wesen des Menschen entspricht."<sup>54</sup> Tillich, however, saw the necessity to mediate the doctrine of the justifying God into the circumstances and into the self-understanding of 20th century man. That set him apart from Barth and the "dialectical theology" of the early years. Tillich tried to be radically "dialectical" and for him that meant to confront divine revelation with the questions of modern man and to answer the latter by the former. This is the basis for Tillich's famous concept of correlation, with which we will be concerned in more detail when considering the epistemological presuppositions of Tillich's Systematic Theology.

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54 Rolinck, p.39.

## II.2.2 METHOD OF CORRELATION AND TILLICH'S EPISTEMOLOGY

In order to give an adequate analysis of Tillich's concept of salvation it is necessary to examine his epistemological presuppositions first. Not only is it a truism that one's hermeneutics and epistemology do shape the form of one's enquiry and thus also have great impact on a possible answer; in Paul Tillich's work epistemological questions have their own dignity and are not merely an epistemological framework. In his well known method of correlation he deliberately elevated the epistemological question to the level of a theological issue. Whereas other philosophers and theologians considered the so-called hermeneutic circle to be an unavoidable reduction of the objectivity of every intellectual statement, Tillich sees it as the one and only condition of understanding which is necessary and helpful and makes possible cognition and knowledge by applying the answer to the question: "der Mensch kann Antworten auf Fragen, die er nicht gestellt hat, nicht entgegennehmen."<sup>55</sup> In his concept of correlation the dependency of question and answer is made into a method with specific theological significance.

### A) The method of correlation

The difficulty in every theology is that the questions which are inferred into theology do not only emerge from the theological context but are existential questions from man's daily life. The answer, however, is to be conveyed from the source of revelation and that means that both "language games" have to be mediated in order to make possible mutual comprehensibility: "Die Theologie steht in der Spannung zwischen zwei Polen: der ewigen Wahrheit ihres Fundamentes und der Zeitsituation."<sup>56</sup> The method of correlation, as the word indicates, is therefore understood as the unity of mutual dependency and independency of existential question and theological answer<sup>57</sup>. Mutual independency means that neither the question can be derived from a possible answer nor can the answer be derived from the question. The answer, however, can be given only within the realm which the question defined. It is important to bear in mind, that for Tillich the existential question (if it is supposed to be a really existential one) is not a sort of objective enquiry but it is

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<sup>55</sup> I,65.

<sup>56</sup> I,3.

<sup>57</sup> Rolinck, p.50.

man himself: "Sein Sein selbst ist die Frage. Als Fragender nach seiner Existenz ist er auf sich allein gestellt. Er fragt 'aus der Tiefe' und diese Tiefe ist er selbst."<sup>58</sup> Already here the most important perspectives (and limits) of Tillich's theology are obvious: if man's own being is the question, then any possible answer can come only from the realm of Being itself; otherwise it would not be an answer to the question. As man does not ask a question about something objective but perceives his own being to be the question, the answer must be found in his very being itself. Man's being, as far as it is a secret for him, is the starting point, the reason for the question. But being, in turn, is also the thing *for* which is asked and if there is an answer then it must be Being itself. Tillich does not weary of stressing that "der Mensch ist die Frage, aber er ist nicht die Antwort"<sup>59</sup>. On the other hand he must admit, that if the answer is to meet the question, its content must be man's being itself, i.e. it must be the *realization* of this very being, because a merely conceptual answer *about* man's being would not correspond to the fact that he does not only ask the question but himself *is* the question.

Already here it is quite obvious how closely Tillich's approach is related to Heidegger's attempt to clarify the structures of Being itself transcendently by analysing the structures of human existence in its interdependence with Being itself.

## B) Epistemology

To mediate answer and question, Tillich developed in a second step a theory of knowledge which also already anticipates issues of his later theology. Epistemology tries to give a reasonable account of the relationship between subject and object, from which knowledge derives. For Tillich knowing is a form of union<sup>60</sup>, namely a conceptual union between the regarding subject and the regarded object. But there must be a sort of common ground between subject and object if cognition is supposed to be possible and successful. What does Tillich think this common share of subject and object is like?

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58 I,13.

59 *ibid.*

60 I,105.

Most important is Tillich's idealistic<sup>61</sup> starting point from which he sets out to answer the question. He presupposes that there is an identity of being and thinking. If cognition is supposed to be possible, then object and subject must participate in a common structure. Tillich finds this structure in his concept of "objective and subjective reason". Just as man's subjectivity is reasonable, so the world's objectivity must be thought to be shaped in a reasonable form. Only this identity conveys the possibility of comprehension: "Subjective reason is the rational structure of mind, while objective reason is the rational structure of reality which the mind can grasp and according to which it can shape reality"<sup>62</sup>. This "being shaped", however, points to an ontological implication of reason. The identity of thinking and being cannot be merely conceptual (then we would have a sort of inherent, necessary Anschauungsformen like Kant) but must be ontological: "Reason in both its objective and its subjective structures points to something which appears in these structures but which transcends them in power and meaning... It could be called the 'substance' which appears in the rational structure, or 'being-itself' which is manifest in the *logos* of being, or the 'ground' which is creative in every rational creation..."<sup>63</sup>. The common ground of objectivity and subjectivity which makes possible cognition and knowledge is the fact that both share in the same structure of the world; Tillich calls this structure "depth of reason" because it is beyond objective and subjective reason and because both point to this common root. Knowledge as a form of union or participation is therefore possible in principle.

Knowledge is successful if the subject is able to grasp the essential structure of its object; essential structure is equated with the greek term "ousia" and means that which makes a thing what it is in itself: "Truth therefore is the essence of things as well as the cognitive act in which their essence is grasped. The term 'truth' is, like the term 'reason', subjective-objective. A judgement is true, because it grasps and expresses true being; and the really real becomes truth if it is grasped and expressed in a true judgement"<sup>64</sup>. There are, however, very different opinions throughout the history of philosophy whether there is something like an "ousia" in things and in how far man is

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61 "I am an idealist if idealism means the assertion of the identity of thinking and being as the principle of truth." quoted according to Osborne, p.47.

62 I,86.

63 I,88.

64 I,113.

able to grasp it. Tillich states that both realism and nominalism are untenable if taken purely. Rather he develops a concept of "individualization and participation" which "solves the problem of nominalism and realism, which has shaken and almost disrupted western civilisation"<sup>65</sup>. Tillich found a common ground of subject and object in the reasonable logos-structure of the world: "And we have stated that these correspond to each other, without, however, giving any special interpretation of the correspondence. Reason makes the self a self, namely a centered structure and reason makes the world a world, namely a structured whole. Without reason, without the *logos* of being the world would be a chaos, that is it would not be being but only the possibility of it (*mé on*). But where there is reason, there is a self and a world in interdependence"<sup>66</sup>. So the logos-structure is what world and mind have in common and this common share is the precondition for cognition, as cognition is a form of union.

It is, however, doubtful whether the mere fact of a common ontological share conveys the possibility of grasping the essence of a thing and getting to know what it is in itself. This is not necessarily implied in the abstract terms of being and reason, unless one thought the essence of every being to be its utter "being-ness". This, however, would remove the possibility of cognition of the peculiarity of the single being as it is in itself different from another being. Tillich nevertheless claims that "every relation includes a kind of participation"<sup>67</sup>. Again, however he does not discriminate between essential and ontological participation and relation. According to Tillich, man is related to every being ontologically and participates in it: "Man participates in the universe through the rational structure of mind and reality. Considered environmentally he participates in a very small section of reality... Considered cosmically he participates in the universe, because the universal structures, forms, laws are open to him. And with them everything which can be grasped and shaped through them is open to him. ... The universals make man universal; language proves that he is *microcosmos*. Through the universals man participates in the remotest stars and the remotest past. This is the ontological basis for the assertion that knowledge is union"<sup>68</sup>. Here

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65 I,196.

66 I,190.

67 I,196.

68 I,195.

Tillich uses the term "universal" in order to describe the way of participation in things. However, Tillich uses the term in a nominalistic sense, namely as a conceptual abstract (of language) by which we transcend the single being towards common qualities. But a nominalistic concept does not prove the possibility of knowledge: "According to nominalism, only the individual has ontological reality; universals are verbal signs which point to similarities between individual things. Knowledge therefore is not participation."<sup>69</sup> Tillich's use of the term universal would fulfil his requirements of making possible knowledge and cognition then and only then, if one thought "universal" in realistic terms, namely as the inherent "eidos" of the thing; in order to get to know the thing as it is in itself, one would have to grasp the inherent essence of it. Tillich himself, however, excluded this possibility of a realistic approach by reducing the common ground between subject and object to the mere "being-ness". In order to get to know the inherent essence of a thing, one would have to know the essential *idea* of the thing, (which would be either anterior to or in the thing) and not only the mere being-ness or reasonable-ness of the thing. Tillich has not solved the problem of realism and nominalism. Cognition and knowledge have not been deduced consistently from ontology. At last Tillich has to plea for a "mystical realism", which "emphasizes participation over against individualisation, the participation of the individuals in the universal and the participation of the knower in the known"<sup>70</sup>.

It is, however, important to bear in mind the essentials of Tillich's line of thought: thinking and being are identical, and therefore true cognition is possible. Being (with its mutual interdependence of subject and object) makes possible cognition and cognition (as it is participation) affects our being. It is possible to mediate and to change being by noetic processes, because every cognition means the becoming aware of previous ontological participation. Without having touched upon any specifically theological consideration of Tillich it is already clear where and how the question for salvation within Tillich's system is unfolded: man *is* the existential question for his own being. This question is to be answered by Being-itself. This answer is to be mediated through a noetic process

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69 I,196.

70 I,197.

in which the primordial kinship of man and being becomes conscious and through which the participation in being can be increased.

### II.2.3 THE HUMAN CONDITION

Tillich now turns to the actual existence of man. The idea that man's being *is* the question he asks and that any possible answer can only be Being itself was a merely apodictical statement on which Tillich based his epistemological considerations. He now has to prove this presupposition of his to be an actual feature of human existence: Why must man's being be conceived as a question for being itself?

#### A) Finitude and actual existence

Tillich finds the corresponding feature to the question for Being itself in the problem of "finitude" and man's existential anxiety before nothingness and death. Man is aware of his finitude and asks for the infinite as something which could overcome his finitude. Like Heidegger Tillich stresses that "Endlichkeit" is the main quality of human existence; it is "der erste und zugleich wichtigste Begriff, der im existenzialphilosophischen Denken niemals fehlt"<sup>71</sup>. "Endlichkeit" is characterized by "Zeitlichkeit" i.e. the fact that man's existence is bound to death, limited, finite. Man's attitude towards his own finitude is "care", Sorge. Care drives man to ask about his finitude. For Tillich the question of the finitude of one's existence includes an awareness of the infinite, otherwise man would not ask: "Man knows that he is finite, that he is excluded from an infinity which nevertheless belongs to him. He is aware of his potential infinity while being aware of his actual finitude. If he were what he essentially is, if his potentiality were identical with his actuality, the question of the finitude would not arise."<sup>72</sup> For Tillich the question of finitude has to be expressed in ontological terms, because finitude is indeed nothing else than actual nothingness, the non-being in the realm of being. "As the survey shows, the dialectical problem of non-being is inescapable. It is the problem

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71 Tillich: *Wesen und Bedeutung des existenzialistischen Denkens*, p.177 (IV).

72 I,228-229.



of finitude. Finitude unites being with non-being. Man's finitude or creatureliness is unintelligible without the concept of non-being."<sup>73</sup>

Out of the question of finitude or of the question of non-being the issue of the infinite and of God arises in a twofold manner. On the one hand the infinite appears as that which is always implied in the question of finitude; on the other hand man in his anxiety (another major term of existentialism) asks for something that enables him to overcome his finitude or at least his anxiety of non-being: "The question of God *must* be asked because the threat of non-being, which man experiences as anxiety, drives him to the question of being, conquering non-being and of courage conquering anxiety."<sup>74</sup> Man "must ask about that which gives him the courage to take his anxiety upon himself. And he can ask this double question because the awareness of his potential infinity is included in his awareness of finitude."<sup>75</sup> So the existential question, which as Tillich said man *was*, is actually the question that searches for the infinity of his very existence. And as infinity means unconditional being, in distinction from non-being one expression of which is finitude, man's existential question is the question for being.

God as Being-itself, however, cannot remain in utter transcendence. Rather must there be a previous awareness of God, i.e. of Being-itself, which precedes the question of man's finitude, otherwise man would not ask for it. Therefore Tillich concludes: "Being-itself manifests itself to finite being in the infinite drive of the finite beyond itself."<sup>76</sup> The question of finitude proves that man's existence has a dialectical character. He is separated from Being itself as the ground of his being, and is nevertheless united with Being itself. But how does Tillich think this indestructible ontological connection between man and the Being itself?

The previous connection between man and Being itself can be expressed in the epistemological terms which we worked out in the chapter about Tillich's epistemology: man participates in the world through the identity of thinking and being. Man asks the ontological question because the structures of world and his existence are disclosed to him by participating in these structures

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73 I,210.

74 I,231.

75 I,229.

76 I,212.

through his objective reason. Now Tillich's thesis becomes very important on which indeed the whole of his further concept of salvation rests: not only can man *ask* the ontological question because of his participation in the world, rather he is even able to *answer* it because of the same reason: "Man occupies a pre-eminent position in ontology, not as an outstanding object among other objects, but as that being who asks the ontological question and *in whose self-awareness the ontological answer can be found*"<sup>77</sup>. The old tradition - expressed equally by mythology and mysticism, by poetry and metaphysics - that the principles which constitute the universe must be sought in man is indirectly and involuntarily confirmed even by the behaviouristic restriction. 'Philosophers of Life' and 'Existentialists' have reminded us in our time of this truth on which ontology depends. ... Man is able to answer the ontological question himself because he experiences directly and immediately the structures of being and its elements."<sup>78</sup>

Through the profound correspondence, even identity, of subjective reason and objective reason man takes part not only in being but even are the structures of being open to him. This is in fact the whole of Tillich's concept of salvation in nuce: if man is threatened by non-being; and if the only possibility for him to overcome the anxiety of non-being is his participation in Being itself; and if man already participates in Being itself through an act of his subjective reason: then the overcoming of the anxiety of non-being must mean an increase of participation in Being itself. As, however, one participates in Being itself through one's subjective, reasonable self-consciousness, an increasing participation in Being itself must be an increasing consciousness or *awareness* of one's participation in the being. Within Tillich's system this is perfectly consistent; as we saw, according to his epistemological presuppositions an act of cognition and knowledge means the ontic participation in the known. Therefore Tillich can conclude that "man is able to answer the ontological question himself, because he experiences directly and immediately the structures of being and its elements."<sup>79</sup>

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77 italics by A.S.

78 I,187.

79 I,187.

## B) Existence and Essence

Thus according to Tillich man's being must be conceived to be in a dialectical relation to Being itself. On the one hand man is united with it primordially, which can be seen by the fact that he is *able* to ask the question for Being itself, even to answer this question by himself. On the other hand he must be thought to be separated from Being itself, which can be seen by the fact that man *has* to ask for it because of his finitude. Without understanding the dialectical nature of man's existence the whole of Tillich's concept of salvation will remain unintelligible. Now Tillich introduces a concept in which he tries to describe this very dialectical structure of man's being. He introduces the terms "existence" as opposed to "essence". He splits the unity of man's being into two and applies two different terms according to the angle with which he perceives it: the idea that man is not fully united with Being itself leads Tillich to the assumption of an "essence" as the true nature of man, which is not fully embodied in his actual existence. However, there is a real tension between Tillich's usage of the terms "essence" and "existence" and also in what they are supposed to indicate: according to the above-mentioned structure of human being, it must be considered to be basically *dialectical*. Through his terms "essence" and "existence", however, Tillich gives the impression that both are totally different ontological states: essence is the true being of man, but not yet actual; existence is the actual being of man, but not his true one: "He is aware of his potential infinity while being aware of his actual finitude. If he were what he essentially is, if his potentiality were identical with his actuality, the question of the finitude would not arise."<sup>80</sup> Essence becomes mere potentiality, existence becomes mere actuality. The dialectical character of man's existence of being *both* united *and* separated from being itself has been neglected in favor of a merely *dualistic* understanding of it.

### Excursus: Schelling's influence on Tillich

In his differentiation between essence and existence Tillich takes up the classical idea of the status of man as one of alienation and estrangement<sup>81</sup>. We showed how this old concept was treated in Hegel's philosophy where it was transformed into the shape in which it became the crossroads of every modern concept of salvation. Tillich's understanding of estrangement as the gap between

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80 I,220.

81 Tillich: *Entfremdung und Versöhnung im modernen Denken*, p.183ff (IV).

essence and existence, however, is based not so much on Hegel's but on Schelling's philosophy<sup>82</sup>. But Schelling developed his concept in negative dependency on Hegel's attempt to prove the presence of the eternal, historical reconciliation of finite and infinite, world and ego, morality and humanity<sup>83</sup>. Hegel had represented a philosophy in which the difference between objective and subjective world was overcome in the thinking of the absolute by man. And a philosopher like Fichte had gone even further: he tried to *derive* the whole objective and subjective world from the absolute ego itself.

This has to be understood as a reaction against the epistemological dualism in Kant's Critiques. I already mentioned Hegel's criticism that Kant's ideas split up of the world into an unintelligible objectivity and a sheer subjectivity without any claim of objective cognition. The idea of an unintelligible "thing-in-itself" seemed to be untenable to the idealistic philosophers as it made impossible true cognition of the world.

So this duality had to be overcome by an entirely new theory of the relation of subject and object. Fichte started with the absolute ego, prior to any specific or definable thing, which posits itself as the ego. This activity of the absolute ego was the pre-eminent truth of Fichte's philosophy. The absolute ego also posits a non-ego, a field in which the ego can work and unfold its activity. By defining its own realm of activity the ego, however, has limited its possibilities; thus "the conditions of finitude and definitions have emerged out of the undefineable ultimate self-activity of the infinite ego"<sup>84</sup>.

This was Schelling's starting point for criticising Fichte. Being *the* philosopher of romanticism and individualism (before Kierkegaard), the fault he found with Fichte was that the individual personality necessarily ceases, if it is equated with an absolute ego which posits itself. Moreover, the fact that the ego posits not only itself but also the non-ego abolishes the freedom of the absolute ego, as the absolute ego is forced to posit the non-ego in order to be able to actualize the activity of itself.

For Schelling, like for Kant, actual freedom was an act of Willkür, which a priori presupposes something different from the self towards which the self turns. Schelling thought the antagonism of nature and mind to be this primordial differentiation: the mind is always mixed with the unconscious, in which nature is present. Thus the self is always confronted by something which it did not posit by itself. The being of man is a unity of ego and non-ego, i.e. mind and nature, the latter of which cannot be derived logically from the former. In man's being mind is always under the influence of something which is not itself. Through nature the self is estranged from its essential being to be purely itself. Man's being is split thus into *essence* and *existence*: "Es gibt, das sieht er nun, keine Ableitung der Existenz aus der Essenz in Form rationaler Notwendigkeit. Gäbe es sie, so würde die Existenz selbst essential sein, d.h. als Existenz aufgehoben sein, wie es bei Hegel in der Logik der Existenz der Fall ist."<sup>85</sup>

Schelling explained the coming into being of the differentiations between essence and existence with a half-mythological theory about a "fall" from essence to existence. This is, however, not meant as historic event in the remote history of mankind. The stress is on the idea of a disruption and distortion within the realm of essence which makes it impossible to derive existence from essence logically without a break. This break was necessary for Schelling, in order to maintain his understanding of the free acting will and its Willkür. Schelling's theory about the tension between essence and existence is not meant historically but is supposed to be an analysis of the actual

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82 However, Tillich explicitly admits that it was Hegel who discovered the principle of estrangement in all things. Tillich: *Versöhnung und Entfremdung im modernen Denken*, p.186 (IV).

83 Margoshes, p.306.

84 Tsanoff, p.194.

85 Tillich: *Schelling und die Anfänge des existenzialistischen Protestes*, p.140 (IV).

powers that form life. We have already seen that the primordial distinction for Schelling was the tension of nature and mind: "Es ist die Spannung zwischen dem unbestimmten, formlosen Lebensdrange und dem bestimmten, geformten Element alles Lebendigen, die in der Potenzenlehre durchgeführt wird. Reiner Essentialismus kennt nur die zweite und nicht die erste Potenz, reiner Existentialismus kennt nur die erste und nicht die zweite Potenz."<sup>86</sup> The essence is the formed and determined element which makes a thing what it is in itself. Existence is the Lebensdrang of nature which leads to the actualization and the coming into being of the essential element. So both belong together in order to constitute a being. Schelling did not think that the gap between both was absolute: "Er hätte den Satz Sartres, dass seine Existenz des Menschen Essenz ist, niemals annehmen können. Der Sprung zur Existenz bleibt im Rahmen der Identität. Er ist kein Abbruch. Denn ein solcher würde konsequenterweise Denken und Handeln der totalen Willkür überliefern..."<sup>87</sup>. Existence is formed according to the essence of man and essence becomes real through the Lebensdrang. Both are united and separated in man at the same time.

Tillich adopted large parts of Schelling's distinction between essence and existence. However, in a detailed study of Tillich's ontology A. Thatcher has shown that Paul Tillich uses three different definitions to describe the nature of "essence". Firstly Tillich uses "essence" as the antecedent condition of existence. We came across this usage in Tillich's discussion of finitude. This is a mainly Aristotelian understanding of essence. Secondly Tillich uses "essence" in order to describe a sort of general property, i.e. as a nomen post rem, which is a phenomenon of human abstraction and language. We discussed its function already in Tillich's epistemology. This is a mainly nominalistic understanding of essence.

Thirdly Tillich uses "essence" as the ideal of what a thing essentially ought to be. This is a mainly platonic understanding of essence. Thatcher showed that this understanding is by far the most common one in Paul Tillich's works<sup>88</sup>: "... Tillich's essences transcend the empirical world, they constitute a higher level of being which is realized only imperfectly within the realm of existence."<sup>89</sup> "Everything that is is the manifestation of an Essence. Essences actualize themselves in existence and in doing so they do not remain what they essentially are. They become distorted within existence and what emerges is the ambiguous actuality..."<sup>90</sup>.

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86 *ibid.*

87 *ibid.*

88 Thatcher, p.109.

89 Thatcher, p.100.

90 Thatcher, p.101.

It is important to bear in mind the above-mentioned fact, that Tillich changed his dialectic understanding of the nature of man's existence into a more dualistic one. Man's existence now is perceived as *opposed* to his true nature, his being united with being itself.

### C) Essence and Estrangement

To illustrate the ontological relation between essence and existence Tillich now uses Schelling's idea of the fall into estrangement: "Der Fall des Menschen sowohl in christlicher wie auch in nichtchristlicher mythologischer Darstellung, ist die Voraussetzung der Existenz. Es gibt keine Existenz vor der Existenz und keine aktuelle Wirklichkeit vor dem Fall. Wir dürfen nicht die der Zeit verhafteten Symbole des Mythos mit der ontologischen Beziehung von Essenz und Existenz verwechseln."<sup>91</sup> Existence is the unavoidable actualized form of the being of human beings. Essence is mere potentiality, the (onto-)logically necessary prior to our naked existence. Whenever this potentiality becomes actual it becomes existence. Tillich calls this theoretical status of man "dreaming innocence" and compares its transition to existence with an awakening: "At the moment when man becomes conscious of his freedom the awareness of his dangerous situation gets hold of him. ... Man experiences the anxiety of losing himself by not actualizing himself and his potentialities, and the anxiety of losing himself by actualizing himself and his potentialities. He stands between the preservation of his dreaming innocence without experiencing the actuality of being and the loss of his innocence through knowledge, power and guilt... Man decides for self-actualization, thus producing the end of dreaming innocence"<sup>92</sup>. However, it is important to bear in mind that this is merely an illustration, which again uses half-mythological metaphors. Tillich thinks the whole world to be fallen, which is understandable because everything that is, is actual and therefore existing, while merely potentially being things are not really things. However, the fall is caused by the coming into being of the self-consciousness of man, his "awakening". Within Tillich's system therefore there remains a certain ambiguity about whether the fall concerns only human nature (as it is the actualization of its freedom) or whether it is a universal destiny.

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91 Tillich: Die Lehre von der Inkarnation in neuer Deutung, p.213 (VIII).

92 II,41.

As man's essential nature can be found only in being itself, i.e. God, Tillich's concept of self-alienation and alienation from God converge. This resembles very much Hegel's concept of alienation which designates the split between man and God and means therefore both self-alienation and alienation from God. The importance of Tillich's concept of estrangement from God is understood only if it is understood as self-estrangement. Estrangement from an object which is not I myself "hat keine zerstörerischen Konsequenzen; aber eine unerträgliche Situation entsteht, wenn Subjekt und Objekt der Entfremdung identisch sind; die Entfremdung wird zur Selbstentfremdung."<sup>93</sup> The conditio humana is the condition of self-estrangement, the estrangement from essence. And as this also means the estrangement from God, Tillich uses the classical terminology of theology and calls this state the state of "sin".

By his introducing the dualistic concept of essence as opposed to existence Tillich could claim that the essence of man cannot be found within the realm of his existence. Tillich seems therefore perfectly consistent when he now concludes that only *revelation* can answer the question of man's essential being, the ontological question. However, we must see at what expense Tillich has achieved his aim of proving the necessity of revelation. Having started with a *dialectical* understanding of human nature Tillich could claim that "Man (!) is able to answer the ontological question himself because he experiences directly and immediately the structures of being and its elements."<sup>94</sup> By introducing the dualist principle of existence as opposed to essence Tillich now pretends that there might be a state in which man's alienation cannot any longer be overcome by an increasing self-awareness and awareness of Being itself but only by an exterior intervention from beyond the realm of existence, by a revelation. One has to keep this change, even contradiction in mind, because it becomes one of the main weak points of Tillich's whole system.

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93 Tillich: *Versöhnung und Entfremdung im modernen Denken*, p.184 (IV).

94 I,187.

## II.2.4 THE NEW BEING

Thus Tillich has supposedly prepared the ground for his all-decisive doctrine of Jesus Christ as the revelation of the New Being. This New Being must appear as a revelation, because man's essential being cannot come from within the realm of existence. Moreover only a revelation conveys the possibility of everyone's participation in it by cognition, which is participation in the new Being itself. More precisely Tillich can say that this revelation must appear in a personal life: "for humanity it could not have appeared in any other way. ... Only where existence is most radically existence ... can existence be conquered."<sup>95</sup> In order to be recognizable as the true essence of *man* this true essence (as it is totally new and therefore unknown) must appear in the *form* of a human being. As it is, however, the new *being* which is to be revealed all other more humane aspects of this human being have to be totally neglected: "It is his being that makes him the Christ because his being has the quality of the New Being beyond the split of essential and existential being. From this follows that neither his words, deeds, or suffering nor what is called his 'inner life' make him the Christ."<sup>96</sup> However, Tillich's idea of the revelation of essential human nature in a person under the conditions of existence contains a contradiction. How can something be essential but nevertheless be actualized within existence, i.e. be existential? This contradicts Tillich's basic assumption that whatever is existent and actual cannot be essential and potential. To solve the problem, Tillich has to introduce his concept of the "paradox".

### A) Tillich's concepts of the "paradox"

Tillich's concept of the paradoxical character of the New Being is not merely the attempt to come to terms with the unthinkable. Rather is it rooted in his whole concept of what religion is.

According to Tillich the term "religion" contains a paradox in itself because it is the term for something which is destroyed exactly through this term. The "content" of religion is the unconditional and ultimate. The term "religion" however degrades the unconditional to a conditional because it deals with the ultimate as if it was an actual object. Nevertheless man must

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95 II, 138-139.

96 II, 139.



use terms like "religion" if he wants to speak about it: "Die Aussage über das Unbedingte geschieht notwendig in den Formen des Bedingten, d.h. im Subjekt-Objekt-Schema und macht das Unbedingte damit zum Objekt. Sie muss diese ihre Unzulänglichkeit offenbar machen, d.h. sie muss die Form der Paradoxie haben."<sup>97</sup> Every revelation of the ultimate and unconditional therefore necessarily transcends its own conditional limited form. It does not only transcend its form, but must even negate it. This is for Tillich one criterion of revelation: "A revelation is final if it has the power of negating itself without losing itself. This paradox is based on the fact that every revelation is conditioned by the medium in and through which it appears."<sup>98</sup> Tillich, however has to admit that "such criteria cannot be derived from anything outside the revelatory situation. But it is possible to discover them within this situation."<sup>99</sup> Therefore for Tillich the revelation of the New Being in a single human being is not an annoying contradiction which would better have been avoided. On the contrary, it is a characteristic mark of the revelation's rightness. "Die letztgültige Offenbarung erscheint in der Form eines konkreten Absoluten."<sup>100</sup>

## B) Christ as the New Being

The paradoxical character of Jesus Christ as the New Being "consists in the fact, that although he has only finite freedom under the conditions of time and space, he is not estranged from the ground of his being."<sup>101</sup> The fact "that there is no passage in the gospels - or for this matter in the epistles - which takes away the power ... of the New Being in the biblical picture of Jesus as the Christ"<sup>102</sup> seems to be Tillich's proof that Christ is the manifestation of the essential being. But how can we think of him as not being "estranged from the ground of his being"?

As we saw, in order to reveal the ultimate and the unconditional, the *form* of the revelation has paradoxically to be transcended and to be negated. Indeed, for Tillich, this criterion is fulfilled as far as Jesus is concerned. Jesus' unselfish life and his death on the cross according to the will of the

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97 Rolinck, p.48.

98 I,148.

99 I,148.

100 Rolinck, p.44.

101 I,145.

102 I,159.

Father "is his decisive test of his unity with God, of his complete transparency to the ground of the being."<sup>103</sup> In order to be the bearer of the New Being Jesus has to sacrifice himself totally and neglect everything which "is merely 'Jesus' in him"<sup>104</sup>. "Jesus of Nazareth is the medium of the final revelation, because he sacrifices himself completely to Jesus as the Christ. He not only sacrifices his life, as many martyrs and many ordinary people have done, but he also sacrifices everything in him and of him which could bring people to him as an 'overwhelming personality' instead of bringing them to that in him which is greater than he and they."<sup>105</sup> In order to become transparent for the ground of the being he has to give up himself completely.

However, one might doubt whether one still can call Jesus Christ the paradoxical essentielle Gott-Mensch-Einheit when everything that is human has to be neglected totally. In what way does Jesus reveal the essential being of *man*, when he has to sacrifice everything that is particularly human in him? According to Tillich's dualistic concept of existence and essence (which is presupposed if he assumes a "paradoxical unity" of God and man in Jesus) it becomes impossible to say that *by* revealing true godhood Jesus reveals essential manhood: godhood and essential manhood are not identical, otherwise it would make no sense to speak of a paradoxical unity. Tillich's idea of the paradoxical character of revelation in Jesus becomes senseless, if he does not assume a really *paradoxical* unity of godhood and manhood in Jesus. Nevertheless Tillich insists that in Jesus the essential god-manhood as ontological unity is revealed: "Das neue Sein, das eine Schöpfung der Inkarnation ist, steht über dem essentiellen Sein, weil es aktuell und nicht bloss potentiell ist und gleichzeitig steht es über dem existentiellen Sein weil es essentielles Sein oder essentielle Gott-Mensch-Einheit in die Existenz bringt."<sup>106</sup>

At least here Tillich has left the dialectical concept of man's being as the ontological share of man and God: the idea of a paradoxical unity of Godhood and manhood makes sense only if they are not ontologically identical. This, however, was the necessary implication of Tillich's idea that man's estrangement from himself simultaneously meant his estrangement from God. Only if one

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103 I,151.

104 I,156.

105 I,151.

106 Tillich: Die Lehre von der Inkarnation in Neuer Deutung, p.214 (VIII).

presupposes the dualistic concept of essence and existence can one say that it is a *paradox* that the essence of man appears under the conditions of existence. Then, however, it becomes incomprehensible why Tillich thinks Jesus to be sacrificing everything that is human in him: exactly this abolishes the paradoxical character of his essential "God-man" unity.

The idea of becoming transparent towards God through a continuous self-sacrifice makes sense only if one endorses the assumption of a dialectical character to human existence: if human beings are ontologically united with being itself and if it can therefore basically be found in man himself he must tend to sacrifice the *more* existential characteristics in him in order to become transparent for the *more* essential features which must, however, be supposed to be inherent in him. If one presupposes the dialectical approach it also becomes understandable (and not only paradoxical) how Jesus can become the bearer of the New Being: according to Tillich's epistemological concept of cognition as ontological participation, Jesus could be considered as the bearer and revealer of the New Being in so far as one can assume that he is fully *conscious* and *aware* of his primordial essential unity with being itself.

But by introducing the concept of Jesus Christ as sacrificing everything human in him Tillich excludes this way of understanding the person of Christ. Going by the dualistic concept of existence as opposed to essence he has to claim that the unity of essential manhood and essential godhood is paradoxical. However, a paradox is, due to its very character, not open to reasonable understanding: the revelation and with it the ontological character of the person of Christ remains theologically unclear in Tillich's system.

Either Tillich thinks self-sacrifice to be the means of revelation: then he would presuppose the dialectical approach towards human life and essential man-hood would be true godhood and vice versa. This would be compatible with Tillich's epistemological ideas.

In his christological considerations, however, he introduces the category of the paradox and thus apparently thinks the paradoxical unity of manhood and godhood to be the main characteristic of revelation: then he would presuppose the dualistic approach towards human life and the idea of what essential man-hood actually is remains entirely empty and meaningless.

## II.2.5 THE PROCESS OF SALVATION

### A) Historicity

Though presupposing the idea of the "paradox" Tillich pursues the idea of Jesus' total self-sacrifice through which Jesus becomes entirely transparent towards Being itself and by which he abolished everything which was merely human in him.

A significant mark of the Christian religion and theology is that it is traced back to Jesus of Nazareth as a historical figure. There were attempts to reduce Christianity to a myth (gnosticism, D.F.Strauss) but they were not successful. Christianity claims to have historical roots and foundations. However, within Tillich's system this is quite impossible because if Jesus sacrificed everything which is human in him he also sacrificed the only thing which was historical in him. The historicity of christianity is in danger of being dissolved into a sheer myth. However, only this total evaluation of every particularly historical and specifically individual meaning makes possible Jesus' universal effectiveness: "For us this means that in following him we are liberated from the authority of every finite in him, from his special traditions, from his individual piety, from his rather conditioned world view, from any legalistic understanding of his ethics."<sup>107</sup> How can this general, universal revelation be connected with the historical person of Jesus Christ? Tillich finds the answer in his understanding of cross and resurrection: cross and resurrection became symbol for what Jesus himself was, an essential human being under the conditions of estrangement (death on the cross) but who nevertheless conquered them through the power of his essential being (resurrection). This implies that also the resurrection must have some historical truth in it: "The disciples had been convinced that the power of his being was that of the New Being; and on the other hand, they felt that Jesus' disappearance was inconsistent with the character of the bearer of the New Being. 'In this tension something unique happened. In an ecstatic experience the concrete picture of Jesus of Nazareth became indissolubly united with the reality of the New Being'. He is present wherever the New Being is present."<sup>108</sup> However, here Tillich wants to found the

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<sup>107</sup> I,149.

<sup>108</sup> Thomas, p.101.

historicity of christianity on an "ecstatic experience" which on top of everything is also described as universal.

Tillich has major problems in defending the historicity of Jesus Christ in his concept of christology, according to which Jesus is actually only the sheer God-hood under the conditions of existence. As according to Tillich's dualistic approach man's "essence" is totally un-existential, it seems to be also totally un-historical. Its only connection to reality seems to be its being experienced by individuals. However, as we saw above, Tillich uses "essence" in a platonic sense, which implies that it is an entity of its own, which really *is* though not under existential conditions. The nature of the New Being is therefore a platonic one: it is not *un*historic but *a*historic; its reality is a universal one but can be experienced only in the individual.

Therefore Tillich now turns to the doctrine of atonement as: "The doctrine of atonement is the description of the effect of the New Being in Jesus as the Christ on those who are grasped by it in their state of estrangement."<sup>109</sup>

#### B) The doctrine of atonement

He firstly turns to the so called objective side of the doctrine, i.e. the doctrine in so far as God as the giver of justification is concerned. He therefore does not yet describe the actual effects of the New Being on the individual but their prerequisites and conditions. This however, carries some difficulties. Untill now Tillich had treated the classical theological loci in a highly philosophical and ontological way. In his "principles" he now tries to combine the results of his previous considerations with the classical phraseology of theology. However, he gets involved in this terminology so deeply that it often seems as if he takes up problems again which seemed to had been already solved. In his second and third principle, for instance, Tillich is concerned with the interrelation of justice and love in God, a problem which can arise only in a "theistic" theological framework but which has certainly no foundations in Tillich's ontological concept of God.<sup>110</sup>

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109 II,196

110 cf. The Courage to Be and Tillich's attempt to overcome theistic concepts of God.

The more important principles are the last three ones. The fourth principle is according to Tillich the heart of a future doctrine of atonement: "The fourth principle for a doctrine of atonement is that God's atoning activity must be understood as his participation in existential estrangement and its self-destructive consequences. He cannot remove these consequences, they are implied in his justice. But he can take them upon himself in participating in them and transforming them for those who participate in his participation."<sup>111</sup> This again raises some problems because of the terminology. Tillich admits that it is a "highly symbolic kind of speaking". To understand this one must "refer to what has been said in the section on God as the living, namely, the element of non-being, which is eternally conquered in the divine life. This element of non-being, seen from inside, is the suffering that God takes upon himself by participating in existential estrangement or the state of unconquered negativity."<sup>112</sup>

This is explained in the fifth principle: "The fifth principle of a doctrine of atonement is that in the Cross of the Christ the divine participation in existential estrangement becomes manifest. Once more it must be stressed that it is a basic distortion of the doctrine of atonement if, instead of saying 'becomes manifest', one says 'becomes possible'. On the other hand 'becomes manifest' does not only mean 'becomes known'. Manifestations are effective expressions not only communications. Something happens through a manifestation which has effects and consequences. The Cross of the Christ is a manifestation in this sense. It is manifestation by actualisation."<sup>113</sup>

In his sixth principle Tillich goes even further: It says that man participates in the atoning act of God by participating in the New Being, which means participating in the suffering of God. The suffering of God however is the power which overcomes creaturely self-destruction by participation and transformation. Participation in the divine participation, accepting it and being transformed by it, is the state of salvation. This is a quasi-mystical concept of a unity with God in suffering, which has nothing to do with Tillich's ontological concept of essence and existence.

Untill now man's estrangement had been considered as an estrangement from his true essence which was to be overcome either through the increasing self-awareness of man or through the

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111 II,201.

112 II,202.

113 *ibid.*

paradoxical revelation of man's essence through Jesus Christ. The idea that Christ is the "effective manifestation" of an eternal ontological process is totally unexpected and not derived from Tillich's above-mentioned approach. Also the idea of God's suffering is quite inappropriate in the framework of Tillich's theology of essence and existence: it seems (as he gives no explanations but only sets up compulsory principles for future doctrines of atonement) as if he wanted to think the process of the paradoxical revelation of man's true essence from the point of view of God himself. In a very mythological way one then could say that the revelation of essential God-man-hood might mean for God the participation in man's estrangement. However, Tillich does not give any hermeneutical explanations of how to understand this "highly symbolic speaking". Therefore the connection with his more philosophical and ontological doctrine of God remains unclear.

It also remains unclear in what sense Tillich here uses the concept of estrangement: if Jesus as the Christ really is the "effective" manifestation of God's participation, which implies the revelation of man's true essence, then why should man's estrangement not be overcome, as this estrangement was supposed to be the estrangement from his true essence? And if the estrangement itself is overcome, then why can the "self-destructive consequences" of it not be overcome? Tillich does not give any explanations; his principles are merely said affirmations of the fact.

Having expounded the "objective" side of the future doctrine of atonement, he now turns to the subjective side, which deals with the appropriation of the beneficia Christi, the effects of the New Being on the individual. These considerations, however, likewise remain mysterious as Tillich again uses half-mythological language to expound his basic idea of a participation of God in man's estrangement.

From man's point of view salvation is said to have a threefold character: participation in the New Being, acceptance by the New Being and transformation through the New Being. These terms are equated with the classical theological triad "regeneration-justification-sanctification". Tillich claims that: "The saving power of the New Being in Jesus as the Christ is dependent on man's participation in it. The power of the New Being must lay hold of him..."<sup>114</sup>. It is important for Tillich to stress

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114 II,204.

that "the objective reality of the New Being precedes the subjective participation in it"<sup>115</sup>. However, it seemd as if Tillich wanted to stress that this "objective reality" is by no means so objective as the term seemingly indicates. The objectivity is evident only for him who "enters it, and in doing so he participates"<sup>116</sup>. This refers to Tillich's statement about the nature of Christ's work: "But he can take them (i.e.: the consequences of estrangement. A.S.) upon himself by participating in them and transforming them *for those who participate in his participation.*"<sup>117</sup> He obviously does *not* transform the consequences of estrangement themselves.

Tillich discusses the "regeneration" as far as it is the presupposition of justification, in order to exclude any meritorious interpretation: "Justification in the objective sense is the eternal act of God, by which he accepts as not estranged those who are indeed estranged from him by guilt and the act by which he takes them into unity with him is manifest in the New Being in Christ."<sup>118</sup> This is the act of divine acceptance to which corresponds the human act of "accepting that one is accepted."<sup>119</sup> Tillich never wearies of stressing that this is not possible for human beings but that it presupposes the being grasped by the New Being.

At least the idea that the objectivity of the reality of the New Being precedes the subject's participation in it, turns out to accord with the main features of Tillich's theology in general: it goes well together with Tillich's above-mentioned concept that Christ himself is the actual paradoxical revelation of the New Being, not just a human being who gains his true essence by absolute self-awareness. The New Being as man's true essence is supposed to be a platonic entity of its own. It is not a merely nominalistic term the reality of which is dependent on its being realized by the individuals. This is also presupposed in Tillich's considerations about the historicity of Jesus Christ. The reality of the New Being must be considered to be preceding the subjective participation in it.

Another basic feature of Tillich's theology becomes relevant when he says: "Teilnahme am Neuen Sein ist nur möglich, indem man vom Neuen Sein aufgenommen wird, aber nicht indem man sich

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115 *ibid.*

116 *ibid.*

117 italics by A.S.

118 II,205.

119 *ibid.*



bemüht es selbst herzustellen."<sup>120</sup> The individual can only be *grasped* by the New Being; it is not up to the individual's deliberate decision or its free will. This is related to Tillich's basic assumption of the revealed protestant principle "that in relation to God everything is by God"<sup>121</sup>. Due to God's utter transcendence justification and salvation can by no means be achieved by man but are exclusively an act of God. Any meritorious misunderstanding is excluded from the beginning.

However, one must again bear in mind that all this still goes by the assumption of the *dualistic* principle of essence and existence. In a dialectical understanding of man's being where his true essence, i.e. being itself, can be found in his increasing self-awareness, where cognition is ontological participation, the assumption of the protestant principle would be senseless.

### C) The effects of the New Being

Tillich deals with the effects and the experience of the New being within the chapter "The Divine Spirit and the Ambiguities of life". As he presumes the dualistic understanding of man's being Tillich calls human existence "ambiguous life", as far as individual *experience* is concerned because it is torn apart between its being existence and its true essential nature. The quest for essence in this context becomes the quest for "unambiguous life."<sup>122</sup> This "unambiguous life" is made possible through the "Spiritual Presence", which means the divine Spirit, or the "actuality of the New Being". Tillich consistently uses the term "Spiritual Presence" to designate the presence of "unambiguous life". However, this term is a bit misleading as it is the description of a status only and does not pinpoint its connection to the New Being in Jesus Christ and the manner in which it proceeds from it. The fact that the relation between the symbolic manifestation of the New Being in Jesus and its actual presence in the human life is not clarified is a weak point within Tillich's system.

For Tillich unambiguous life reunites the separated realms of essence and existence; it is a "transcendent union" in which "ambiguous life is raised above itself to a transcendence which it would not achieve by its own power."<sup>123</sup> Again it is stressed that the New Being cannot be gained

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120 Tillich: Die Lehre von der Inkarnation in neuer Deutung, p.218(VIII).

121 III,141.

122 III,114.

123 III,137.

by man himself, but that it must be bestowed on him. According to Tillich the New Being is even "above the gap between essence and existence and consequently above the ambiguities of life."<sup>124</sup>

The characteristic mark of this "transcendent union" in which the ambiguities of life are united is that "it appears within the human spirit as the ecstatic moment which from one point of view is called 'faith', from an other 'love'".<sup>125</sup> Faith and love now are defined with circular arguments. Faith is the "state of being grasped by the transcendent unity of unambiguous life - it embodies love as the state of being taken into that transcendent unity."<sup>126</sup> A single page later "faith is the state of being grasped by an ultimate concern"<sup>127</sup> and love is "the drive towards the reunion of the separate; this is ontologically and therefore universally true."<sup>128</sup> It is difficult to understand what Tillich means by these merely analytical statements. However, he becomes more precise when he states that the divine spirit's invasion of the human spirit (and with it its manifestations in love and faith) "does not occur in isolated individuals but in social groups, since all the functions of the human spirit - moral self-integration, cultural self-creation, and religious self-transcendence - are conditioned by the social context of the ego-thou-encounter."<sup>129</sup> But how do love and faith come into this "Spiritual Community"? Tillich answers vaguely: "Christ's self-sacrificing love is the centre of the Gospels as well as their apostolic interpretation. This centre is the principle of *agape* embodied in his being and radiating from him into the world in which *agape* was and is known only in ambiguous expressions"<sup>130</sup>. An actual description of how the "radiating" is to be thought of is lacking<sup>131</sup>: "Latent or manifest the Spiritual Community is the community of the New Being. It is created by the divine Spirit as manifest in the New Being in Jesus as the Christ. This origin determines its character: it is the community of faith and love."<sup>132</sup> The relation between the New Being as Jesus Christ and the New Being in the community of faith, however, remains entirely

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124 III,148.

125 III,137.

126 III,137.

127 III,138.

128 III,143.

129 III,148. On page 165 however Tillich presupposes that also (and especially) individuals outside the church can be grasped by the "Spiritual Presence".

130 III,154-155.

131 However, the similarity to Schleiermacher's *Glaubenslehre* is so striking, that one can assume that in both theologies it is the continuity of the community which spreads love and faith.

132 III,165.

unclear because Tillich does not develop an explicit doctrine of the procession of the Holy Spirit. The only connection seems to be a sort of structural similarity between Christ's (self-sacrificing) love and the love which can be experienced in the community of faith.

Now Tillich does something, which allows him to overcome this gap between the revealed justification and revelation, a problem which had derived from the assumption of a basically dualistic understanding of man's being as existence as opposed to essence: Tillich implicitly reintroduces the principle of a dialectical understanding of man's being in order to show the possible connection of New Being and man's existence!

Tillich asks what are the actual characteristics of the experience of the New Being for the individual as far as the New Being is present in the Spiritual Community in faith and love. He presupposes: "'Experience' here simply means the awareness of something that happens to somebody, namely the state of being grasped by the Spiritual Presence."<sup>133</sup> It is indicative for Tillich that he uses the opaque term "awareness" designating both the different grades of self-consciousness and the experience of empirical things. This gives him the possibility to combine both meanings. For Tillich a further question follows: "If the Spiritual Presence must grasp me and create faith in me, what can I do in order to reach such faith? ... No answer can be given to him who asks in this way, because every answer would tell him something he should do or be; it would contradict the faith for which he asks."<sup>134</sup> Tillich's purpose is obvious: according to the protestant principle "that in relation to God everything is by God"<sup>135</sup> he again claims the impossibility to reach God by one's own means. Faith and experience of the Spiritual Presence can be actualised only by an act of the grace of God and not by a self-preparation of man. Now Tillich continues: "If, however, the question - what can I do in order to to experience the New Being - is asked with existential seriousness, the answer is implied in the question, for existential seriousness is evidence of the impact of the Spiritual Presence upon an individual."<sup>(!)</sup><sup>136</sup> Here Tillich's change from the dualistic back to the dialectic understanding of man's being finally becomes evident. The question

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133 III,235.

134 III,237.

135 III,141.

136 III,237.

implies the answer. The awareness of one's own existential situation is already the evidence for the Spiritual Presence. These are ideas which Tillich developed within the framework of his epistemology. Tillich explicitly says: "He who is ultimately concerned about his state of estrangement and about the ground and the aim of his being is already in the grip of the Spiritual Presence."<sup>137</sup> The necessary conclusion was and now is again: as due to his finitude every human being is conscious of his existential state, every human being must be thought to be in the Spiritual Presence already. In the last analysis that means that everyone who is concerned about his existence ultimately is already in the New Being, and thus must be considered to be in the state of salvation. The awareness of the necessity of being saved (Erlösungsbedürftigkeit) is salvation!

The concept itself is just the consistent expounding of what Tillich had said in his epistemology already: "Man occupies a pre-eminent position in ontology ... as the being who asks the ontological question and in whose self-awareness the ontological answer can be found."<sup>138</sup> Tillich's U-turn from his christology based on the concept of revelatory theology back to his epistemology based on a sort of natural theology is complete.

Consistently he continues with the "Experience of the New Being as a process" according to the idea that salvation as awareness is never a stable state but the process of "increasing awareness". He gives "four principles determining the New Being as a process", the first of which is: self-awareness. "One may give the following principles: first, increasing awareness; second, increasing freedom; third, increasing relatedness; fourth, increasing transcendence. How these principles will unite in a new type of life under the Spiritual Presence cannot be described before it happens, but elements of such a life can be seen in individuals and groups who anticipated what may possibly lie in the future. The principles themselves unite religious as well as secular traditions and can, in their totality, create an indefinite but distinguishable image of the 'Christian life'".<sup>139</sup>

The second principle does not help very much either: increasing freedom means liberation "from particular compulsions which are an impediment to growth in spiritual freedom."<sup>140</sup> This again is a

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137 III,237.

138 I,187.

139 III,246.

140 III,247.

circular argument. Tillich combines this idea with the Lutheran discrimination between "law" and "gospel": "Freedom from the law is the power to judge the given situation in the light of the Spiritual Presence..."<sup>141</sup>. If, however, the light of the Spiritual Presence reveals nothing but "increasing freedom" then freedom becomes an end in itself. It seems as if Tillich wanted to stress the aspect of autonomy in man's life. But in his four principles it is just an "autonomy from" not an "autonomy for" something.

The third principle is the principle of "increasing relatedness" which balances the principle of "increasing freedom". Relatedness for Tillich means the ability to sustain relationships to others and to oneself in a mature balance of ego and thou. It also implies "self-relatedness" which is equated with "search for identity" and reaches its fulfilment in a mature self-acceptance, the state of "reconciliation between the self as subject and the self as object."<sup>142</sup> Identity as the overcoming of alienation is thus an aim of the process of salvation.

The fourth principle is self-transcendence. Again Tillich argues circularly: "The self-transcendence which belongs to the principles of sanctification is actual in every act in which the impact of the Spiritual Presence is experienced."<sup>143</sup> Self-transcendence is the underlying principle for the three previous ones. It is the drive beyond the merely actually given into the depth of everything which is the Being itself. Therefore Tillich can say: "self-transcendence is identical with the attitude of devotion towards that which is ultimate."<sup>144</sup>

Tillich concludes: "The Christian life never reaches the state of perfection - it always remains an up-and-down-course - but in spite of its mutable character it contains a movement towards maturity, however fragmentary the mature state may be."<sup>145</sup> If one wants to reconcile Tillich's christology and his epistemological preconditions one can possibly summarize his system as follows: Increasing awareness of the New Being (being itself) overcomes the ambiguities of life and the gap between essence and distorted existence. In short, the effect of the New Being is an increasing expectation of the New Being itself. This is a circular argument which becomes

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141 *ibid.*

142 III,250.

143 III,251.

144 III,250.

145 III,250.

meaningful only when applied to Tillich's idea that awareness *is* ontological participation. Nevertheless, however, a concrete description of what the content of the New Being and the essence of man really is, is still lacking. The terms "identity" and "maturity" only indicate the direction of Tillich's ideas about the state of salvation.

## II.2.6 CRITIQUE

The main objection against Tillich's theology as a theological system has already become evident in the course of the discussion: before any substantial anthropological or theological issue it is the question of Tillich's epistemology which should concern us here. One can ask, whether Tillich's method of correlation is an appropriate hermeneutical means. Its presuppositions, which are not questioned by Tillich, are numerous and far-reaching: the main presupposition is that any answer can only be given within the realm which the question defined. Tillich's second apodictical presupposition is his idea that man *asks* for Being itself, even that his own existence is in itself the quest for being. According to his first principle any possible answer to this question *must* be Being itself. By correlating the answer to the question, Tillich necessarily predefines every answer through it: if man asks for being the answer *must* be being. Every other answer which might for example question the legitimacy of man's question itself is instantly excluded (Karl Barth is an excellent example of a theology which is based on this hermeneutical principle). The whole theological problem is immediately reduced to the quaestio facti, whereas the quaestio iuris remains totally neglected. Even the answer for the quaestio facti, however, is already predefined by Tillich when he says that man asks for being itself.

This implies a further difficult problem: through his method of correlation Tillich implicitly presupposes that for every question there is also actually an answer! By correlating answer and question Tillich not only predefines the content of the answer, he also presupposes the actual existence of this answer and the possibility to apply it to the question. So in Tillich's system from the very beginning the die is cast: man *is* the question for being, therefore the answer *is* Being itself and this being can be applied to man: otherwise Tillich's whole theological enterprise becomes

totally senseless. The only remaining question is *how* being can be mediated. Its possibility had been postulated by necessity.

Without any actual reference to particularly theological concepts, Tillich now develops the answer to the question in his epistemology. Tillich presupposes the idea of the "depth of reason", which is the common root of subjective reason and objective world order. Again the concept of correlation has simply been applied: Tillich does not *derive* the idea of the depth of reason. He *presupposes* it, otherwise the possibility of any true knowledge could be questioned and his whole epistemology would break down. He presupposes the idea because he needs it. Only this idea conveys the possibility that true cognition as the real cognition of the essence of a thing is possible. Tillich now describes this epistemological process in ontological terms: true cognition becomes *participation in* the essence of its object. Tillich reverses the line of arguments and says that participation in the object is possible through true cognition. Applied to man's question for Being itself that means that man only has to understand Being itself and he will then participate in it. Thus the question of "how" man can participate in Being itself is half answered. The only question remaining is: where can man find Being itself, in order to get a true cognition of it, in order to participate in it?

One can ask whether Tillich's way of proceeding so far is very convincing: in the course of his considerations Tillich "introduces presuppositions" whenever they are convenient. And his only implicit argument is that unless one agreed also on this point the whole attempt of his theology would become pointless. From an epistemological point of view one has to say that indeed this proceeding is methodologically untenable.

Tillich now turns to the analysis of human existence and here the kinship to Heidegger's existential analysis becomes obvious: like Heidegger Tillich states that man's quest for Being itself becomes evident in his anxiety before death and nothingness. Tillich points out that the anxiety of nothingness is the main feature of human existence. Man asks for Being itself in order to be able to overcome his finitude. Even this resembles Heidegger's considerations about the relation of Dasein and Being itself: by anticipating its own finitude as its ultimate possibility Dasein becomes aware of its own ontological structure. It becomes "eigentlich" and thus its own being is truly revealed to it. However, Heidegger stressed that Eigentlichkeit did not serve the purpose of overcoming the

anxiety before death. Rather he said: "Das Man lässt den Mut zur Angst vor dem Tode nicht aufkommen ... Versuchung, Beruhigung und Entfremdung kennzeichnen aber die Seinsart des Verfallens"<sup>146</sup>. Being "eigentlich" means to admit the anxiety before death and to recognize in it the ultimate potentiality of one's own being.

Tillich applies his epistemological principle "true cognition is participation" and concludes: as man himself *is* the question for being itself one has to assume that man already participates with his being in Being itself to a certain degree, otherwise he would not be able to ask for it. This is because every question presupposes at least the cognition of the possibility of the existence of what is asked for. As, however, cognition is participation, man already participates in Being itself through his own being. Tillich therefore can finally conclude that man only has to develop an increasing self-awareness, in order to participate in Being itself; because an increase in cognition necessarily means an increase in participation and as man finds being itself in his own being, he only has to become increasingly self-aware: "Man is able to answer the ontological question himself, because he experiences directly and immediately the structures of being and its elements."<sup>147</sup>

Besides all hermeneutical and epistemological questions one may put, one must ask two questions which arise immanently in Tillich's system:

First Tillich does not develop any categories for what is "*true cognition*". Though he starts with the assumption that "true cognition" is "essential participation", in the course of his arguments he ends with the presupposition that *any* cognition is already participation, for example also the "cognition" which is inherent in a question. This is the method of correlation at its very best: the existence of everything and man's ontological participation can be presupposed as far as man asks for it!

Secondly, one must ask whether Tillich's answer meets the standards his question set up. He presupposed that man asks for being itself in order to be able to overcome the anxiety of non-being and death. One might doubt whether "increasing self-awareness" really has the desired psychological effect.

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146 cf. footnote 43.

147 I,187.



Actually Tillich's system faces an even greater problem at this point: no matter whether it is true or false, consistent or inconsistent, logical or illogical, it is complete and finished. Nothing more has basically to be added in order to fulfill the presuppositions which Tillich had set up. Without even having touched religious concepts Tillich has set up a whole ethical-ontological anthropology<sup>148</sup>. Nothing more is really necessary and therefore in his system nothing more is possible. Tillich has, roughly speaking, to introduce the necessity of a religious turn in his concept in order to be able to examine its possibilities. And he does so by the above-mentioned shift from the dialectical understanding of man's being to a dualistic understanding. Strictly speaking Tillich has to neglect the presuppositions of his epistemology in order to constitute a state of human life, in which any mediation of true being can come only from outside. This, however, is exactly contradictory to the dialectic approach, which was the necessary condition for the theory that man, though he has to ask for Being itself and thus shows his being estranged from Being itself, can nevertheless find Being itself in himself, as he dialectically must be thought to be united with it, due to that fact that he could not ask for it if he had no primordial knowledge of it. And as cognition is participation, man is dialectically both united with Being itself and estranged from it. However, Tillich now claims man to be in the state of mere estrangement, into which the overcoming of estrangement, his true essence, can come only from a realm outside man's existence.

Here Tillich finally leaves the heideggerian concept of existence: in Heidegger's philosophy a realm *outside* existence is quite impossible due to the *ontological* character of Dasein. Being cannot be transcended to anywhere because being is the most universal of all categories. Here it becomes obvious that Tillich may well be influenced by Heidegger's analysis of actual human existence, but that he was not willing to give up Schelling's "essence" as the transcendental condition of existence. However, as Tillich had presupposed a mainly existentialist view of human existence it seems as if here into Tillich's theology a new feature was introduced. The idea of a supernatural revelation only occurred in his "protestant principle" which he supposed to be unconditional. However, in his theological system, which could be considered to be a sort of natural theology, there had been no real place for the category of revelation so far. It seems as if

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148 This ethical-ontological concept might even better be expressed in Tillich's Courage to be.

this was the reason for his withdrawing this category from theological discourse by pointing to its putative "paradoxical" character. Through this characterization, however, both its nature and its possibility are disguised rather than explained. I already pointed out the inherent difficulties of Tillich's christology above.

A further point which has to be stressed is the question, what Jesus Christ as the New Being actually reveals. Man's question to which this revelation was supposed to be the correlating answer was the quest for being in order to overcome the anxiety of nothingness. If Tillich does not anymore go by the assumption of a dialectical character to man's life, he cannot claim that the content of Jesus' revelation is that which can be found in every human being, namely awareness. Rather must he set up an actual content of this revelation which differs from man's existential conditions, because the revelation is supposed to reveal essential being, which is not found in man's existence.

However, this most important point of Tillich's system remains hollow and empty. Jesus does nothing but sacrifice himself in order to become transparent for the ground of his being, Being itself. But what is revealed through this transparence of Jesus? The fact that Tillich does not and cannot give any concrete details of man's essence is connected with his existential approach: by presupposing that man's actuality is mere existence and thus not what it ought to be, he devalues the whole of actual human life. However, as there is nothing else but exactly this actuality in this world, Tillich cannot but define the essence of man only e negativo as that which is *different* from man's actual existence. The strong emphasis on the all-decisive revelation consistently implies that this actual world becomes inferior, though no one can say, what the actual content of revelation is.

Tillich has switched from his former approach of natural theology to a revelatory theology in order to combine his anthropological-ontological concept with specifically christian concepts. However, once again he is forced to switch: in order not to remain within a totally empty, apodictical claim of revelation, he has to show the actual connection of Jesus Christ as the New Being with the experience of the individual. I showed above how he does so by reintroducing the dialectical character of man's being. Finally Christ as the New Being does not reveal anything but what is always already actual in man; or the other way round, the New Being must be assumed to

be universally actual in man's existence. Consistently the question arises why man is still looking for something to overcome his anxiety which, according to Tillich, stems from his unessential, existential state of being.

As one can see: Tillich's system is founded on rather dubious and weak epistemological presuppositions, which already expressis verbis imply the outcome. From there he develops a merely anthropological system which has nothing to do with traditional christian dogmatics. He then *changes his presuppositions* and develops a traditional revelatory theology. By again changing his presuppositions he connects it with his anthropological approach. Nevertheless, even his excursion into dogmatic theology does not help to make his claim more realistic, that salvation is universally actual wherever it is being asked for.

## II.3 KARL RAHNER

### II.3.1 INTRODUCTION

#### A) Biographical note

Karl Rahner was born on March 5th 1904 in Freiburg/Breisgau where he attended the Gymnasium. After having done his Abitur in 1922 he immediately joined the Society of Jesus in Tisis near Feldkirch as a novice, as his brother Hugo had done some years before. He stayed there until September 1924 and moved then to the Philosophische Hochschule Berchmannskolleg in Pullach near München where he stayed until 1929 in order to complete his studies in philosophy. From 1929 till 1933 he was in Valkenburg (near the Dutch border) for further philosophical education and training. Returning to St. Andrä in Austria, in 1933 the final phase of his Ordensstudium began, the Terziat, the spiritual preparation for the final vows. The order now wanted Rahner to teach philosophy at the Berchmannskolleg. But in order to do so he had to hold a doctorate. Therefore Rahner was sent to the University of Freiburg in 1934 to do a doctorate in philosophy. His supervisor was Martin Honecker, a neo-thomist philosopher, but in fact Rahner studied with Martin Heidegger, by whom he was to become deeply influenced. Rahner wrote a dissertation on epistemology in Thomas Aquinas which, however, was not accepted by his supervisor in 1936. (However, this dissertation was published with the title Geist in Welt in 1939 and turned out to be one of Rahner's most famous books). Having failed his doctorate in philosophy Rahner was sent to Innsbruck in order to take a theological doctorate (E latere Christi. Eine Untersuchung über den typologischen Sinn von Jo 19,34) and was appointed Privatdozent for metaphysics.

However, due to the German invasion of Austria the faculty of theology of Innsbruck University was dissolved by the Nazis. After a short time as a professor at the Jesuit College in Innsbruck, Rahner left for Vienna in 1939 where he was to become lecturer at the Vienna Jesuit College. During this time (1941) he wrote his famous book Hörer des Wortes. He stayed in Vienna till 1944 when he became a parish priest in southern Bavaria. After the end of the war he finally became professor at the Berchmannskolleg in Pullach. He stayed there till 1948 when he was sent back to

Innsbruck to teach dogmatics and history of dogmatics as the successor of F.Mitzka. From this time stems his new edition of the Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche, Sacramentum Mundi and the Kleines theologisches Wörterbuch. In 1962 he was invited by the Archbishop of Vienna to become his theological counsellor and expert and to join him at the Vatican Council II. Soon Rahner became one of the most influential figures of the "Theological Commission" and his personal influence on the constitutions Lumen Gentium, Dei Verbum and Gaudium et spes cannot be overestimated.

In 1964 he succeeded Romano Guardini in his chair for Christliche Weltanschauung und Religionsphilosophie in Munich. In 1967 he was called to the University of Münster. This however, was to be a short episode only because in 1971 he was given emeritus status and returned to Munich where he lived in the Berchmannskolleg until 1981. Here he wrote the book which was to spread his fame beyond the borders of catholic theology and which is certainly his best known: Grundkurs des Glaubens, a systematic summary of his life's work. Finally in 1981 he moved back to Innsbruck and died there on March 30th 1984, being the most influential catholic theologian of the 20th century.

Karl Rahner's work is extraordinary in several aspects: firstly because of its volume: it covers several thousand titles; secondly because of its broad variety: Rahner was concerned with virtually every aspect of theology and society. But most astonishing is the fact, that his work did not undergo a long process of development in which his ideas would have been moulded and shaped so that one cannot speak of a mature Alterswerk in contrast to Jugendschriften as with Barth or Tillich. From the beginning in Geist in Welt the main features of Rahner's theology are already present and they changed only slightly in emphasis. Whereas from the beginning Rahner was deeply concerned with epistemology the stress shifted towards philosophical anthropology in his later years. However, both have always been connected in his works, so that one cannot really speak of a break in his line of thoughts.

In order to ease a preliminary survey of the whole of his work one could say that Rahner was the theologian who led catholic theology into the 20th century by introducing a modern concept of

human existence into dogmatic theology. He did this by developing a transcendental epistemology to which he subordinated traditional dogmatic contents: by analysing the *universal* a priori structures of human understanding and positing them as the starting-point of his understanding of human existence, he introduced and developed a theology which is both truly anthropological and existential<sup>149</sup>. Thus there is an inherent connection between Rahner's epistemology and anthropology.

In order to understand the unfolding of Rahner's theology one now has to trace back the sources of his two most influential concepts, i.e his epistemology and his anthropology. I stressed already above Rahner's being dependent on Heidegger's analysis of human existence as far as his anthropology is concerned. His epistemology, however, was originally neo-scholastic.

#### B) Joseph Maréchal and "transcendental thomism"

While Rahner was a student at the Berchmannskolleg he discovered the Belgian philosopher and Jesuit Joseph Maréchal and read his Le point de départ de la métaphysique. In 1926 Maréchal published his Cahier V which contains a system of metaphysics in critical discussion with Kant's Critique of pure Reason but based on the epistemology of Thomas Aquinas.

Thomas Aquinas stated that the intentional intellectus agens had to be thought of as the main factor in human understanding, whereas Kant had mainly pointed to the passive receptivity of the human mind in which the phenomena are subdued to categories and Anschauungsformen by Schemata. However, Kant was unable to explain how the transcendental subject can "categorize" the phenomena and assign them to the appropriate schemata in order to subordinate them to the categories which make them comprehensible: "Dieser Schematismus unseres Verstandes, in Anschauung der Erscheinungen und ihrer bloßen Form, ist eine verborgene Kunst in den Tiefen der

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149 This methodological connection of anthropology and Rahner's abstract transcendentalism is a point which is often overlooked by many of his critics as for example by P.D.Murray, who pleads for an empirical approach in order to ground theological sentences in human experience. He does not see that exactly this would dissolve theology into anthropology or psychology, whereas Rahner developed an anthropological starting point for theology, namely the ground for an understanding of revelation in *every* human being.

menschlichen Seele, deren wahre Handgriffe wir der Natur nur schwerlich jemals abraten, und sie unverdeckt vor Augen legen werden."<sup>150</sup>

With Thomas, Maréchal stressed the necessity that knowledge should in general be understood as an *act* of the subject. Maréchal's critique of Kant was, that Kant himself in examining the a priori structures of knowledge had always implicitly presupposed the dynamics or intentionality of the transcendental subject, which in itself must be prior to any merely formalistic categories in order to apply the phenomena to them. The transcendental subject must be thought of as primarily "dynamic" or "agens".

Thomas understood the process of knowledge as follows<sup>151</sup>: singular things consist in materia and the principium individuationis, that which shapes the things into the form through which they are defined to be what they are, such as a tree instead of a mouse. Through this inherent "form" matter becomes individualized. This form necessarily conveys the species impressa sensibilis, that which is received by the senses. From this species impressa sensibilis the intellectus agens abstracts a certain feature, namely the abstract quidditas or "what-ness" of the things (e.g. the "being-a-tree", or "tree-ness"). The species impressa sensibilis becomes species impressa intelligibilis. Through another act of the intellect this abstracted species impressa intelligibilis is now put into words and it is only in this form of species expressa intelligibilis that the content of sense-data can become the content of consciousness. The main difference from Kant is Thomas' idea, that, though nihil est in intellectu quod non fuerit in sensu, the intellectus agens has to go, and can go, *beyond* the mere sense data in order to abstract the species impressa intelligibilis, the what-ness of the thing, which in itself is not recognizable in the disparate phenomena of the things. Thomas thinks the categories which allow us to categorize the phenomena to be "beyond" the object and subject, instead of inside the subject like Kant did.

Maréchal thought that this transcending beyond the "phenomena" of beings is possible because human cognition stretches out for *Being* itself, which is beyond the actual, individual phenomenon of single things. Maréchal thought that the formal object of human cognition is Being itself, which

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150 Kant, Kritik der reinen Vernunft, p.200 (A141/B180).

151 According to Vass.

underlies the knower as well as the known. True cognition is possible because knower and known previously share in the same reality of being. Therefore it becomes senseless to keep on speaking of "mere phenomena" in contrast to "noumena", like Kant did. The actual content of our cognition is the thing as it really is because teleologically the intellectus agens is heading for Being itself, which underlies all beings. And as the intellectus agens is thus connected with things as they are, it is able to abstract from the species impressa intelligibilis which is as they are. Certainly, the object is not *itself* the content of the intellect but only its abstract "species" (i.e. Kant's phenomenon). However, the species is exactly like the thing (noumenon) from which it is actively taken by the intellectus agens. Thus the result of Maréchal's considerations is his claim that Being itself is both condition and goal of human cognition.

Using Thomas' concept of the intellectus agens and the idea of the Being to which the intellect stretches out, Maréchal thought he had established a metaphysics which went beyond kantian restrictions. Rahner was deeply influenced by Maréchal's epistemology and in fact Rahner's approach in the Grundkurs des Glaubens is neither thinkable nor understandable without this idea of Maréchal's.

### II.3.2 BASIC PROBLEMS AND CONSIDERATIONS

It is reasonable to examine Rahner's concept of salvation according to his book Grundkurs des Glaubens. This book has the advantage of being the only more extensive theological work of Rahner in the form of a systematic approach; for the most part Rahner's theological oeuvre consists in theological dictionaries and hundreds of scholarly essays. So Grundkurs des Glaubens can be considered to be Rahner's summa - in spite of its understating title.

#### A) "Selbstverständnis"

From the very beginning Rahner makes clear, that his book is supposed to be a Lehrbuch. Its external cause is the papal decree Optatam totius which demands that "die kirchlichen Studien mit einem ausreichend langen Einführungskurs beginnen (sollen. A.S.)"<sup>152</sup>. More precisely it is stated:

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152 p.15.



"In diesem Einführungskurs soll das Heilsmysterium ... dargelegt werden."<sup>153</sup> This is the task Rahner wants to take over, however, not in the form of a traditional catechism which only repeats the dogmatic formulae: "Theologie ist echt verkündbare Theologie nur in dem Masse, wie es ihr gelingt, mit dem gesamten profanen Selbstverständnis des Menschen, das dieser in einer bestimmten Epoche hat, Kontakt zu finden, ins Gespräch zu kommen, es aufzugreifen und sich davon in der Sprache, aber noch mehr in der Sache selbst befruchten zu lassen."<sup>154</sup> More precisely Rahner states that it is necessary for theology to make its statements in the form of philosophical anthropology "und jeder ist dann gefragt, ob er sich als der Mensch erkennen könne, der hier sein Selbstverständnis auszusprechen versucht, oder ob er verantwortlich vor sich und seinem Dasein die Überzeugung als seine Wahrheit setzen kann, dass er ein solcher Mensch nicht ist, wie ihn das Christentum ihm zusagt"<sup>155</sup>.

These two preliminary sentences open up the horizon within which the whole of Rahner's theology is placed. The implications of these few lines mark out the aspects and the limits of Rahner's approach:

Firstly Rahner knows and presupposes that there is a gap between profane self-understanding and the christian message.

Secondly his consequence is not to condemn the secular self-understanding, but to try to mediate it with the christian idea of man.

Thirdly for Rahner this implies that this mediation must have the form of a critical examination of the christian tradition: in order to be acceptable for modern man, the message with which he is to be confronted has to meet his prerequisites, i.e. it must be intellectually honest, critical and philosophical.

Fourthly Rahner's statement implies, that the theological interpretation of man can only be considered to be an *offer*, which must compete with the secular self-understanding by convincing man.

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153 *ibid.*

154 p.19.

155 p.36.

Here the hermeneutical limit of Rahner's approach comes into sight: it is the human *self*. According to Rahner's definition the task of theology is to speak about human self-understanding and to change it by offering a different and better striking interpretation of what man is. The difficulty, however, is that even this different interpretation is e negativo dependent on the self-understanding of secular man. As it must be possible for secular man to identify himself with the different interpretation of himself this interpretation must describe him as he himself might conceive himself. If it were totally different from his own secular self-understanding it firstly could not claim to describe him as he really is and secondly secular man could not identify himself with it. Thus the possibilities for a real change of self-understanding are narrowed by the fact that secular man still must be able to recognize himself in this new interpretation. It must not describe anything but the previous self itself in order to be acceptable by *this* self. Therefore the structure of the human self is the hermeneutically limiting factor in Rahner's approach.

This for Rahner implies the necessity of adopting the main issues of secular philosophical anthropology in order to be understandable for modern secular man. A genuinely religious approach seems to be excluded. In order to show that in the end his approach does not only come to a mere *description* of secular man, Rahner now has to show that there is an actual *difference* between secular and christian self-understanding and that it is possible to *mediate* this difference in spite of the above-mentioned difficulties. Regarding the content both interpretations must be similar, even identical and yet there must be a difference: "Sie (die kirchliche Lehre, A.S.) ruft vielmehr die Wirklichkeit an, die nicht nur gesagt, sondern in der transzendentalen Erfahrung des Menschen wirklich erfahren wird. Sie sagt also dem Menschen sein eigenes immer - wenn auch unreflex - vollzogenes Selbstverständnis aus."<sup>156</sup> Rahner shifts the problem itself onto the level of consciousness and unconsciousness, respectively of reflection and non-reflection. Not the content but the level of consciousness is the actual difference between secular and christian self-understanding. The differences regarding content must be eliminated as much as possible, and it must be shown that even genuinely christian points of view are actually anthropological constants in order to make them acceptable to modern man.

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156 p.133.

## B) "Heilsmysterium"

The main theme Rahner uses to mediate with secular self-understanding is the idea of a "Heilsmysterium", defined according to ecclesiastical tradition and papal decree. This raises a second difficulty in Rahner's system. If anything is defined to be a mystery, then it must remain a mystery in order to remain what it is. If, however, the "Heilsmysterium" remains a mystery, then any interpretation, explanation and mediation of it becomes difficult.

Rahner is aware of this problem. He draws the only possible conclusion and thus switches the framework for the whole of his theology and concept of salvation. If the mystery cannot be made evident and if it is nevertheless to be mediated with human self-understanding then there is only one remaining possibility: "Und dieses eine Mysterium lässt sich dem Menschen durchaus nahebringen, wenn er sich als der versteht, der in das Geheimnis verwiesen ist, das wir Gott nennen."<sup>157</sup>

Moreover, as this mystery was defined to be a "Heils"-mystery Rahner implicitly has to conclude that God himself as the mystery is the content of our salvation. Rahner's following sentence makes this clearer: "So gibt es darüber hinaus doch nur die Frage, ob dieser Gott bloss der ewig Ferne oder darüber hinaus in freier Gnade in Selbstmitteilung die innerste Mitte unserer Existenz sein wollte. Nach der Bejahung der zweiten Möglichkeit als faktisch realisierter ruft aber unser ganzes, von der Frage getragenes Dasein, es ruft nach dem Geheimnis das bleibt."<sup>158</sup> Actually Rahner's whole book is nothing but the expounding of these few words, because they contain the whole of his theology - together with its problems. Rahner does not argue *whether* there is a God and *whether* this God is or could be our salvation. All this is *presupposed* because "unser ganzes, von der Frage getragenes Dasein" calls for it, demands it. For Rahner the only question that remains is *how far* God can be shown to be our salvation as "innerste Mitte unserer Existenz". As, however, God was defined as remaining mystery, our salvation must remain mysterious as well. Rahner has to try to achieve the impossible, to develop an understanding of God which conveys both at the same time: the possibility to think God as "der ewig Ferne" (i.e. the mystery) and the possibility to

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157 p.24.

158 p.24.

think God as "die innerste Mitte unserer Existenz" (i.e. God in his self-communication in free grace).

This, however, as I pointed out, can be mediated with secular self-understanding only, if Rahner can prove that all this is necessarily derivable from anthropological constants. He must take secular self-understanding as the starting-point in order to show that actually every human being *is* in the state of "Verwiesenheit" towards something which has the characteristics of his concept of God.

### II.3.3 TRANSCENDENTAL-ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACH

#### A) The a priori structure of subjectivity

Rahner asks what man is. And his first and all-decisive answer is that man always is a person. Man experiences himself *as* a person. And he experiences the world only due to the fact that it is different from himself. That implies and presupposes a *self* as a defined entity which is prior to any experience. Therefore Rahner can say that being-a-self cannot be considered to be something merely accidental but that it is the basic principle of human being.

However, being-a-self implies some further characteristic features like subjectivity, consciousness and self-disclosure. Being a subject is always intrinsically connected with one's being conscious of oneself. There is, however, no identity between both and this is Rahner's starting point for explaining what man is.

Being a subject is the necessary condition of having a consciousness, as I pointed out, because consciousness is dependent on the subject as its bearer and object. That means that consciousness is always posterior to a reality, which is not posited by itself. It is posterior to the *facticity* of the subject. Man's ontological origin is hidden from his own consciousness, because he never becomes totally objectified in it, due to the fact that the subject is the precondition of the consciousness and not vice versa. The origin of the self remains hidden from consciousness because it is not posited by the consciousness.

Rahner calls this "Selbstgegebenheit des Subjekts" the a priori structure of the self: "Die Struktur des Subjektes ist vielmehr selbst eine a priorische, d.h. sie bildet ein vorgängiges Gesetz dafür, was und wie etwas sich dem Subjekt zeigen kann.... Die a priorische Struktur einer Erkenntnisfähigkeit gibt sich nun am einfachsten dadurch kund, das sie sich in jedem einzelnen Akt der Erkenntnis des in ihr gegebenen Gegenstandes durchhält und zwar auch dann noch, wenn dieser Akt in seinem Gegenstand und als solcher die Aufhebung oder Bestreitung dieser a priorischen Struktur ist oder vielmehr sein will."<sup>159</sup> This becomes obvious if one remembers that the a priori structure of man was said to be his subjectivity. Subjectivity is the necessary condition for any act of cognition and any statement, even for the denial of one's own self, which thus becomes self-contradictory.

However, man does not only *have* this a priori structure, he also asks for it. Though the origin of his facticity must necessarily remain hidden and mysterious, man nevertheless asks for it. Man asks the "transcendental question" by asking for the necessary precondition of his own self. And as this necessary precondition is not posited by the consciousness, man experiences himself as dependent on something which is not himself. Rahner calls this experience the "transcendental experience" and as this experience derives from man's transcendental question, man himself is called "Wesen der Transzendenz"<sup>160</sup> - "transcendence" (not transcendentality) because in asking the transcendental question, man transcends the mere facticity of his reality.

And because asking this question necessarily derives from human consciousness, Rahner has now pinpointed what he thinks are the two main characteristics of man: the fact that his origin is hidden from himself and the fact that man nevertheless necessarily asks for it.

## B) Daseinsfrage as Heilsfrage

Thus man's condition is perceived as a mixture of freedom and bondage or dependency: as far as man is dependent on the mystery of his origin he is unfree and bound to something which itself is withdrawn from his disposal. However, this very dependency paradoxically is also the source of freedom.

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159 p.30.

160 p.42.

Only because man asks the transcendental question does he transcend himself towards something else. And only in this necessary experience of difference does man become aware of his own being as a person, of being a subject. For Rahner this is the source of freedom: "Wo das Subjekt sich als Subjekt erfährt, also als das Seiende, das eine ursprünglich nicht mehr aufzulösende Einheit und Selbstgegebenheit vor dem Sein durch Transzendenz hat, ... da wird in einem ursprünglichen Sinn Verantwortung und Freiheit im Grunde des je eigenen Daseins erfahren."<sup>161</sup>

Rahner knows that man is radically dependent on the world and its impacts on him, that man is always "verfügt" or "welthaft-geschichtlich bedingt". Man always remains within the causality of world and creation. Therefore one can never be sure, whether one's deeds are the result of one's own deliberate decisions or whether they are caused by influences hidden from our consciousness. However, man can be conscious of exactly this very ambiguity and in being conscious man distances himself from the causality and its effects conceptually. In becoming conscious of himself as the one who is different from the world (though indissolubly involved in it) man becomes free towards himself. Man as a person is free, because as subjectivity only he himself possesses himself. Subjectivity is unveräußerlicher Selbstbesitz: "Dort wo Freiheit wirklich begriffen wird, ist sie nicht das Vermögen, dieses oder jenes tun zu können, sondern das Vermögen, über sich selbst entscheiden und sich selbst tun zu können."<sup>162</sup>

That implies that man's existence is placed in his own hands; because man is free, as far as he is a person, the shaping and forming of his existence becomes his task and problem. Whether his life fails or not depends on himself, especially on a proper self-understanding because only through his self-understanding and self-reflection man becomes aware of himself as free *and* as bound to the world. Therefore the right self-understanding becomes the key for a proper understanding of oneself in the world and thus for a successful existence. The question of true self-understanding becomes the question of salvation: "denn der wahre theologische Begriff des Heiles besagt ja nicht eine zukünftige Situation, die von aussen her sachhaft als erfreulich oder, wenn es Unheil ist, unerfreulich den Menschen überraschend überfällt oder ihm nur aufgrund einer moralischen

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161 p.48.

162 p.49.

Beurteilung zuerkannt wird, sondern besagt die Endgültigkeit des wahren Selbstverständnisses und der wahren Selbsttat des Menschen in Freiheit vor Gott durch die Annahme seines eigenen Selbst, so wie es ihm in der Wahl der in Freiheit interpretierten Transzendenz eröffnet und übereignet ist."<sup>163</sup> Rahner's definition of salvation, as quoted above, is a key passage of Grundkurs des Glaubens. Salvation is definitiveness of true self-understanding and the acceptance of one's own self as it is put before us. We will consider the far-reaching implications of this definition later. For the time being we will confine ourselves to the conclusions Rahner himself draws from it: Human self-understanding can be definite only if it is true. As I showed above, according to Rahner, the two main characteristics of man are firstly the fact that his origin is hidden from himself and secondly the fact that he nevertheless asks for it. Now, within the above-mentioned context, man's transcendental question suddenly reveals itself to be the one important question on which his existence and salvation is dependent. However, if both characteristics are equally true, any explicit answer as to *what* the condition of the possibility of our subjectivity is, cannot be given. The only remaining possibility is to consider these two characteristics themselves to be the content of true self-understanding, the consequence of which is to consider man to be the one "der in das Geheimnis verwiesen ist"<sup>164</sup>. This, however, as we remember, is exactly what Rahner had to prove that the anthropological constant was, in order to be able to make the idea of God as the remaining "Heilsmysterium" plausible to human self-understanding and thus to be able to mediate christian tradition with secular self-understanding. At this point both Rahner's anthropological concept and his concept about God as the "Heilsmysterium" necessarily converge. Rahner now has to prove that the idea of a God as the mystery of *salvation* is logically derivable from the basic anthropological insight that man is "verwiesen."

### C) The unthematic knowledge of God

Surprisingly enough Rahner now states that the fact that man asks for the necessary condition of his self, proves that man must have some primordial knowledge about it, though it must remain a

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163 p.50.

164 p.24.

mystery. Rahner claims that man could not ask for his origin if he did not know anything about it, because asking for something necessarily implies that one knows at least about the possibility of the existence of what is asked for. What does man know about the necessary condition of his own self and where does he know it from?

Rahner calls this knowledge "unthematic" because it cannot be made an object of statements. We cannot make it explicit, yet it must be given to us, because it is necessarily the precondition of our asking for the origin of our own self. Exactly because of this, it cannot become an object of our consciousness and be made explicit.

Yet Rahner claims that this knowledge (which he just had stated to be "unthematic") is the knowledge of "Sein", Being-itself: "Der Mensch ist das Wesen der Transzendenz, insofern alle Erkenntnis und seine erkennende Tat begründet sind im Vorgriff auf das Sein überhaupt, in einem unthematischen aber unausweichlichen Wissen um die Unendlichkeit der Wirklichkeit, so können wir etwas kühn und vorläufig jetzt schon sagen."<sup>165</sup> Ontologically it seems reasonable to say that the necessary condition of the possibility of the self is the possibility of being, which logically is Being itself. Rahner now concludes, that the "Vorgriff", the transcendent drive of human intentionality does not only have Being itself as an object but that it is also carried and directed towards it by Being itself: "Da sich aber der Vorgriff als blosse Frage andererseits nicht selbst erklärt, muss er als das Walten jenes - eben des Seins selbst- verstanden werden, auf das hin der Mensch eröffnet ist. Die Transzendenzbewegung ist nun aber nicht das machtvolle Konstituieren des menschlichen Raumes des Subjektes vom Subjekt als dem absolut Seinsmächtigen her, sondern das Aufgehen des unendlichen Seinshorizontes von diesem selbst her. Wo immer der Mensch sich in seiner Transzendenz als der Fragende erfährt, der durch diesen Aufgang des Seins beunruhigte, der ins Unsagbare Hinausgesetzte, kann er sich nicht in diesem Sinne des *absoluten* Subjektes als Subjekt begreifen, sondern nur in dem Sinne der Seinsempfängnis, letztlich der Gnade."<sup>166</sup>

Here Rahner anticipates a main feature of his theology which is dealt with in more detail later. Whereas a few pages earlier Rahner had stated that the question for the condition of the possibility

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165 p.44.

166 p.44-45.



of subjectivity was all-decisive for human salvation and that it pointed to an infinite distance to that which *is* the condition of the possibility of our subjectivity, he now turns things around: Though we do not know the answer to our question explicitly, it must be given and near to us, because the question presupposes its object and therefore also our question for the origin of our subjectivity presupposes a primordial self-disclosure of its object. Before asking any question, man has received his own being from that which must therefore be thought to be the necessarily fulfilled condition of the possibility of his subjectivity and his human existence, Being-itself. And this primordial turning of Being itself to its "objects", us, is called "grace".

## II.3.4 THE SELF-COMMUNICATION OF GOD

### A) Transcendental self-communication

Rahner calls this God's self-communication. The first thing Rahner does is to see which possibilities of unfolding are inherent in his concept of this transcendently experienced "self-communication". First Rahner states that this self-communication has an eminently ontological character. As God was perceived to be Being-itself this is totally coherent: "Das Wort 'Selbstmitteilung' will wirklich bedeuten, dass Gott in seiner eigensten Wirklichkeit sich zum innersten Konstitutivum des Menschen selber macht. Es handelt sich also um eine *seinshafte* Selbstmitteilung Gottes."<sup>167</sup> God's primordial turning to man must not be considered to be a sort of epistemological revelation which enables man to ask for the condition of the possibility of man's being. Rather must man's being itself be considered to be this self-communication of God: the question for the condition of the possibility of man's being originates from the facticity of this being itself. Thus that which enables man to ask the transcendental question is the fact that man *is*. Therefore God's self-communication, which was supposed to enable man to ask this question, is his having "created" man (as far as God must be considered to be the ontological condition of the possibility of man). God's self-communication *is* his being the ontological condition of the possibility of man.

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167 p.122.

As I pointed out above, God in his self-communication is experienced both as "innerste Mitte unserer Existenz" and as "der ewig Ferne". By introducing the term "ontological self-communication" Rahner stresses the ontological (!) immediacy of man's transcendental dependency on God: "...(Es) soll damit gesagt werden, dass einerseits Gott für den Menschen in seiner absoluten Transzendentalität nicht nur west als das absolute, aber sich immer entziehende, immer nur asymptotisch gemeinte, radikal fernbleibende Woraufhin und Wovonher dieser Transzendenz, sondern dass er sich als er selber gibt."<sup>168</sup>

However, in this sentence Rahner admits that still both views of God as "distant" and as "innerste Mitte unserer Existenz" are possible. God's self-communication is not his revealing himself to be absolute closeness which could be experienced. As God's self-communication is the transcendental condition of our ontological reality it necessarily reveal exactly that, what we actually now know about God through our natural transcendentality. In the previous chapter we saw that God must, by means of natural transcendentality, be conceived to be a) the necessary condition of the possibility of our existence (and thus also of our natural transcendentality) and b) a "mystery" because man cannot have any knowledge about it except an unthematic one. As God's self-communication is the very condition of the possibility of man's natural transcendentality, the content of God's self-communication and the result of man's natural transcendental enquiries must necessarily be identical. Therefore Rahner says: "Diese Unmittelbarkeit Gottes in seiner Selbstmitteilung ist gerade die Entbergung Gottes *als* des bleibenden, absoluten Geheimnisses."<sup>169</sup>

The whole of our ontological reality must be considered to be the result, or as Rahner says, the "event"<sup>170</sup> of God's ontological self-communication. Rahner now derives from this the conclusion that God actually *is* the "innerste Mitte unserer Existenz": "Seinshafte Selbstmitteilung Gottes muss von vorneherein als Bedingung der Möglichkeit personaler und unmittelbarer Erkenntnis und Liebe zu Gott hin verstanden werden. Aber eben diese unmittelbar erkennende und liebende Nähe zu Gott als dem bleibenden, absoluten Geheimnis ist nicht als ein seltsames Phänomen zu denken, das zu

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168 p.125.

169 p.126.

170 p.122.

einer sachhaft gedachten Wirklichkeit hinzutritt, sondern als das eigentliche Wesen dessen, was das ontologische Verhältnis zwischen Gott und Kreatur ausmacht."<sup>171</sup>

But what enables Rahner to draw this conclusion? Had not he just claimed that whatever is man's ontological reality was the "event" of God's self-communication? One of Rahner's starting-points to describe man's reality, however, had been that man may also experience God as "distant". So how can he now claim that God must necessarily be perceived to be closeness? It is important to see that Rahner explicitly stresses that closeness is the characteristic of the ontological relation between God and creature, not necessarily the content of man's consciousness: by applying the transcendental method, Rahner asks for the *logically* and *ontologically* necessary *conditions* of man's reality, not for the characteristics of this reality itself! Due to its character of being the transcendental *condition*, God's closeness may well be the characteristic of man's *ontological* reality, but nevertheless not be the object of his consciousness. The condition of its possibility is ontologically prior to man's consciousness, but not necessarily conceptually. Also Kant did not claim that the categories are an empirical reality and part of man's nature, but only that they must logically be assumed, if cognition is supposed to be possible. In the same way Rahner can say, that if man's existence has God as the condition of its possibility, then ontologically the relation between man and God must be closeness. That does not affect the fact that man's experience of this relation to God may well be ambiguous.

The important point is that man's natural transcendental (which led him to the cognition of God as mystery and the transcendental condition of his existence) must in itself be thought to be the result of God's self-communication. This is because man *is* the event of God's self-communication and his natural knowledge of God identical with what God revealed about himself in his ontological self-communication. Regarding the content natural transcendental and God's ontological self-communication must therefore necessarily be identical. This becomes evident in the above-mentioned quotation: "Diese Unmittelbarkeit Gottes in seiner Selbstmitteilung ist gerade die Entbergung Gottes *als* des bleibenden, absoluten Geheimnisses."<sup>172</sup> Because God as the remaining

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171 p.128.

172 p.126.

mystery is the content of man's natural transcendental it must be thought to be the content of ontological God's self-communication through which he creates man and his natural transcendental.

From this characterization of the ontological relation between God and man Rahner draws two conclusions, an immanent one and a transcendental one.

The *immanent* one is concerned with the question what this kind of transcendental-ontological relation between God and man means for any concept of human freedom. As these considerations do not directly contribute to Rahner's concept of salvation but are nevertheless important for the whole of his line of arguments we will examine this problem in the framework of excursus.

The *transcendental* conclusion Rahner draws from the above-mentioned idea of the identity of natural transcendental and God's self-communication *as regards content* is of vital importance for our questioning. It is Rahner's infamous doctrine of the "supernatural existential". We will deal with it in the following section.

#### Excursus: Rahner's concept of the freedom of will

In expounding Rahner's ideas I left out this very important part in order to ease an understanding of Rahner's transcendental-anthropological approach in general. We had seen that freedom for Rahner originally meant person-hood or being a subject and being immediate and therefore free to oneself. Moreover, we saw that Rahner considered God to be the transcendental horizon in which subjectivity necessarily finds itself and which cannot be negated or denied because this denial would necessarily affirm the subjectivity of the speaker and its a priori structure which points to this horizon towards which it is "verwiesen". Thus it becomes totally impossible to deny or negate God's existence (provided one shares Rahner's concept of God). As we had seen in chapter III.3.3B Rahner's concept of freedom is paradoxical due to his transcendental approach. On the one hand one has to say that due to his being the necessary condition of the possibility of subjectivity God is the source of our freedom, i.e. being a subject. That makes possible the idea of a free individual. On the other hand, exactly due to his being the necessary condition of the possibility of subjectivity man is absolutely dependent on God, and cannot possibly deny him by an act of his subjectivity without affirming him. God is paradoxically both the source of human freedom and its limiting factor. Therefore, Rahner is in a difficult situation, if he now wants to point to the possibility of *free will* in order to make understandable any concept of sin. On the one hand he has to stress the absolute necessity of God, as he is the necessary condition of the possibility of our subjectivity. On the other hand he wants to preserve the possibility to think man to be free towards God in order to be able to explain the different ways of self-understanding of human beings. If God were to be conceived with necessity every human being would have the consciousness of his transcendental dependency. Freedom would be excluded: "Würde die Möglichkeit nicht bestehen, dann wäre es

mit einer wirklichen Subjekthaftigkeit der Freiheit, mit ihrer Eigentümlichkeit, dass es ihr um das *Subjekt* selbst und nicht um diese oder jene Sache geht, im Grunde genommen doch vorbei."<sup>173</sup> In order to be able to negate one's own dependency from the condition of one's own possibility it would be necessary to resolve the self-contradictory character of this denial or negation. This, however, is possible only if one resolved the paradoxical transcendental structure of the dependency of subjectivity on the condition of its possibility. One would have to make the "condition of the possibility" itself the *object* of the denial and not any longer what it really is, namely the *condition of the possibility* of the denial. Rahner does not tell us how this could ever work out. But he postulates its possibility in order to make possible a freely chosen "thematic no" against God.

It is not only Rahner's concern about man, which leads him to this postulate. Human freedom is a concept which is intrinsically necessary for the whole of his approach. Without the possibility of a radical turning away from God, any concept of salvation becomes hollow, as grace without the possibility of sin on the human side is pointless. Thus the concept of free will and a free rejection of God as such is necessary: "Schuld ist in der konkreten Ordnung als 'Sünde' das freie (und als Freiheit auf Endgültigkeit zielende) Nein zu Gottes unmittelbarer intimer Liebe im Angebot seiner Selbstmitteilung durch die ungeschaffene, vergöttlichende Gnade, darum ein absolut dialogischer Akt."<sup>174</sup> This human "no" against God, however, presupposes God's divine self-communication as its object. This means that God's loving grace is always prior to man's possible rejection of it, which is sin. We saw that this is a main difficulty in Rahner's concept of sin. As God's grace is an ontological one, man would have to reject what is the basis for this rejection, the necessary condition of the possibility of his subjectivity.

Due to his paradoxical concept of a transcendental dependency of man on God, also Rahner's concept of sin as the denial of God bears signs of being paradoxical: only because God is the necessary condition of our subjectivity is there anything like human freedom, i.e. being a subject of one's own, at all. But exactly due to this very structure freedom becomes intrinsically impossible, because every human being is ontologically *totally* dependent on the ontological condition of its possibility. Rahner in the end has to admit that there is at least an imbalance in his concept of sin and free will: "Natürlich darf das Nein der Freiheit Gott gegenüber, da es von einem transzendental notwendigen Ja zu Gott in der Transzendenz getragen ist und sonst gar nicht sein könnte (!) - also freie Selbsterstörung des Subjektes und innere Widersprüchlichkeit seines Aktes bedeutet -, nie als eine existential-ontologisch gleichmächtige Möglichkeit der Freiheit neben der des Ja zu Gott aufgefasst werden."<sup>175</sup> Strictly speaking one would have to say that the possibility of a thematic no on reasonable grounds is not only not "gleichmächtig" but totally excluded in Rahner's system. It remains a "Widersprüchlichkeit, dass dieses Nein wirklich zu dem transzendentalen Horizont unserer Freiheit sich verschliessend Nein sagt und dabei gleichzeitig von einem Ja zu diesem Gott lebt."<sup>176</sup>

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173 p.107.

174 *Sacramentum mundi*, Vol.I, p.1160.

175 p.109.

176 p.109. Basically one has to say that this contradiction could easily be resolved if Rahner was more realistic. His system always presupposes human beings to be totally conscious about the a priori structure of their subjectivity. However, certainly most people in this world are totally unconscious about it. As they therefore do not identify God with the condition of the possibility of subjectivity they subjectively can negate the former without denying the latter, because they do not know about the latter. I suppose this is how it works in reality, provided that Rahner's idea *that* God is identical with the condition of the possibility of subjectivity is right.

The divine self-communication is not an offer, which can be actually rejected (on rational grounds), it can only be denied against one's better judgement: "In diesem Sinn muss jeder, wirklich radikal jeder Mensch als das Ereignis einer übernatürlichen Selbstmitteilung Gottes verstanden werden, wenn auch eben nicht in dem Sinne, dass notwendigerweise jeder Mensch diese Selbstmitteilung Gottes an den Menschen in Freiheit annimmt."<sup>177</sup>

## B) The supernatural existential

This leads us to Rahner's doctrine of the "supernatural existential". This doctrine has often been misunderstood. It is, however, necessary to see it in its connection with the above-mentioned problem of the relation between man's natural transcendentality and God's ontological self-communication. As the latter was conceived to be the necessary *ontological* condition of man and his natural transcendentality, the result of man's natural transcendentality had to be understood implicitly as the content of God's own self-communication. However, the fact that man *is* the event of God's self-communication and that thus his natural knowledge of God is identical with what God revealed about himself, has an important impact on Rahner's view of the relation between God and man.

Rahner self-critically states about his whole concept of transcendental theology: "...so könnte man dennoch den Eindruck haben, dass der Satz, der Mensch sei das Ereignis der absoluten Selbstmitteilung Gottes, diesem von aussen in dem Raum einer blossen Begrifflichkeit zugesagt werde, dass er aber nicht eigentlich das vor den Menschen bringe, was der Mensch in Wahrheit selber ist und als was er sich selber im Grunde seines Daseins erfährt. Doch dies ist nicht so."<sup>178</sup> Of course Rahner knows that to the idea that man is the event of God's ontological self-communication no appropriate experience can be conveyed, due to its ontological and transcendental character. But he now claims that due to this very character his claim about God's ontological closeness to man can *transcendentally* be proved to be true.

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<sup>177</sup> p.133.

<sup>178</sup> p.132.

Again Rahner uses the transcendental question. He asks for the condition of the possibility of the *reception* of God's ontological self-communication in man. As, however, it is only through God's self-communication that man is created at all, the condition of the possibility of the reception and perception of God is also God's ontological self-communication itself: "Um Gott annehmen zu können ... muss diese Annahme von Gott selbst getragen werden, ist die Selbstmitteilung Gottes als angebotene auch die notwendige Bedingung der Möglichkeit ihrer Annahme."<sup>179</sup> We had seen that as regards content man's natural transcendentality must be identical with God's self-communication. As, however, this self-communication, due to its ontological character, is also the condition of the possibility of its own perception by man, one has to conclude that every attempt of man's natural transcendentality to know God is from the very beginning sustained and carried by God himself. Man's natural transcendentality is not only a merely human means of cognition which came into being only due to God's being the ontological condition of it. Rather it is also necessarily carried by and directed to God. Rahner therefore calls man's transcendentality "übernatürlich erhobene Transzendentalität" or "übernatürliches Existential": due to its being the event of God's ontological self-communication man's natural transcendentality is a priori directed and elevated to God and its content is God!

That means that actually God is close to man not only in an unintelligible ontological way, but also as the inherent aim and underlying principle of his natural transcendentality. Therefore Rahner can write: "Diese vorgängige und der Freiheit vorgegebene Selbstmitteilung Gottes bedeutet nichts anderes, als dass die transzendente Bewegung des Geistes in Erkenntnis und Freiheit auf das absolute Geheimnis hin so von Gott selbst in seiner Selbstmitteilung getragen ist, dass diese Bewegung ihr Woraufhin und Wovonher nicht in dem heiligen Geheimnis als ewig fernen, immer nur asymptotisch erreichbaren Ziel hat, sondern in dem Gott absoluter Nähe und Unmittelbarkeit."<sup>180</sup> As natural transcendentality *is* supernatural transcendentality Rahner can say: "Diese (the supernatural A.S.) Selbstmitteilung Gottes als angebotene und der Freiheit des Menschen als Aufgabe und Bedingung ihrer höchsten Möglichkeit vorgebene hat aber darum auch

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179 p.134.

180 p.135.

die Eigentümlichkeit aller Momente der transzendentalen Verfasstheit des Menschen überhaupt."<sup>181</sup> Both must be thought of to be identical. Therefore: "Die gnadenhafte Selbstmitteilung Gottes als die Modifikation der Transzendenz, durch die das die Transzendenz innerlich eröffnende und tragende Geheimnis als solches von absoluter Nähe und Unmittelbarkeit anwesend ist, kann daher nicht ohne weiteres durch eine einfache, individuelle Reflexion und psychologische Introspektion abgehoben werden von jenen Grundstrukturen der Transzendenz des Menschen..."<sup>182</sup>

That however implies that man's *experience* of God as closeness rather than as distance is not necessary. As man's actual, natural reality *is* his supernatural transcendentality he cannot expect any other experience than the one he has in his actual, natural reality. And the experience he has in his actual reality is ambiguous. Therefore Rahner speaks of a certain "Verhülltheit" of the experience of grace<sup>183</sup>. He has to admit that the ontological reality of God's self-communication does not necessarily imply also the experience or even only the consciousness of it. We saw that already above, when Rahner could infer God's self-communication *as* closeness in spite of the ambiguous character of man's actual experience. However: "so darf nur darum wegen der Unmöglichkeit einer direkten und sicher zugreifenden Individualreflexion nicht darauf geschlossen werden, dass die Selbstmitteilung Gottes eine absolut subjekt- und bewusstseinsjenseitige sei, die *nur* durch eine von aussen her an den Menschen herangetragene dogmatische Theorie postuliert wurde."<sup>184</sup>

#### D) The transcendental experience

Therefore Rahner's only possibility is to appeal to personal experience beyond the paradoxes of theory: "Hier kann zunächst nur an jene individuelle Erfahrung appelliert werden, die der Mensch von dieser Selbstmitteilung Gottes hat und haben kann und die zwar nicht in der individuellen Sphäre ... mit einer *eindeutigen* reflexen Sicherheit erkannt werden kann, die aber dennoch auch für eine Reflexion nicht einfach schlechthin inexistent ist"<sup>185</sup>. It remains however unsure, whether this

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181 p.135.

182 p.135.

183 p.135.

184 p.136.

185 p.136.



ontological self-communication is experienced positively as grace or negatively as distance. Both is possible, neither is necessary. Therefore Rahner can do nothing but to *encourage* the individual to risk getting involved with the experience of God's ontological self-communication. The quality of this experience is unpredictable: "Der Mensch, der sich überhaupt auf seine transzendente Erfahrung des heiligen Geheimnisses einlässt, macht die Erfahrung, dass dieses Geheimnis nicht nur der unendlich ferne Horizont, das abweisend und distanzierend-richtende Gericht über seine Um- und Mitwelt und sein Bewusstsein ist, nicht nur das Unheimliche, was ihn zurückscheucht in die enge Heimat des Alltages, sondern dass dieses heilige Geheimnis auch die bergende Nähe ist, die vergebenden Intimität, die Heimat selber, die Liebe, die sich mitteilt, das Heimliche, zu dem man von der Unheimlichkeit seiner eigenen Lebensleere und -bedrohtheit fliehen und ankommen kann."<sup>186</sup> It remains, however, unclear how Rahner thinks this "sich einlassen" to happen. Rahner uses mystical language to describe the event of this experience. It is, however, not any longer the language of transcendental philosophy: "Wo der Mensch theoretisch oder praktisch erkennend oder subjekthaft handelnd in den Abgrund seines Daseins fällt, der allein allem Grund gibt, und wo dieser Mensch dabei den Mut hat, in sich selbst hineinzublicken und in seiner Tiefe seine letzte Wahrheit zu finden, da kann (!) er auch (!) die Erfahrung machen, dass dieser Abgrund als die wahre vergebende Bergung ihn annimmt und die Legitimierung und den Mut für den Glauben gibt, dass die Deutung dieser Erfahrung durch die Heils- und Offenbarungsgeschichte der Menschheit (d.h. durch die Deutung dieser Erfahrung als des Ereignisses der radikalen Selbstmitteilung Gottes) die letzte Tiefe, die letzte Wahrheit eben dieser scheinbar so banalen Erfahrung ist."<sup>187</sup>

The perception of God as the "Abgrund", the depth, is an old mystical topos. In a way it matches Rahner's assumption that God is the infinite horizon beyond individual subjectivity. Therefore he can say that "in sich selbst hineinzublicken und in seiner Tiefe seine Wahrheit zu finden" is the *possible* way to experience God's graceful self-communication. As it is, however, not any longer the way of transcendental reflection, it is not possible to pursue this practical methodological advice theoretically. Rahner's line of *arguments* breaks off as the theological considerations end with what

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186 p.137.

187 p.138, exclamation marks by A.S.

they began, the ambiguity of the experience of the condition of the possibility of one's own subjectivity: "So bleibt er (der Mensch A.S.) sich selber in dieser Grundfrage seines Daseins, die er subjektiv schon immer beantwortet hat, in der Reflexion immer zweideutig als Subjekt, das die Subjektivität der gnadenhaft erhobenen Transzendenz vollzieht in der aposteriorischen, geschichtlichen nie adäquat verfügbaren Begegnung mit seiner Um- und Mitwelt, in der Begegnung mit einem menschlichen Du, an dem Geschichte und Transzendenz und durch beides die Begegnung mit Gott als dem absoluten Du in Einheit ihren einen Vollzug finden."<sup>188</sup>

### II.3.5 SELF-UNDERSTANDING AND SALVATION

#### A) Self-understanding and consciousness

Thus the result of Rahner's extensive theological speculations is that the *content* of secular and christian self-understanding in the end are identical because of the transcendental dependency of natural transcendental and divine self-communication. Neither, however, can amount to more than the cognition that God remains a mystery. As I pointed out above, this was also the necessary condition for the mediating of secular and christian self-understanding within the *same self*. Only if both are identical regards content, the self can accept either without losing its characteristic of being the *self*.

However, if both are identical, why do they have to be mediated at all? In other words, what is the special soteriological function of the Heilsmysterium for the *christian* self-understanding which the secular self-understanding does not have?

As one remembers, it cannot be any religious secret or arcane mysticism; rather Rahner pointed out that the level of consciousness with which reality is perceived is decisive: "Sie (die kirchliche Lehre A.S.) ruft vielmehr die Wirklichkeit an, die nicht nur gesagt, sondern gegeben und in der transzendentalen Erfahrung des Menschen wirklich erfahren wird. Sie sagt dem Menschen sein eigenes immer -wenn auch unreflex- vollzogenes Selbstverständnis aus."<sup>189</sup> That forces man to decide: "...und jeder ist dann gefragt, ob er sich als der Mensch erkennen könne, der hier sein

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<sup>188</sup> p.139.

<sup>189</sup> cf. footnote 156.

Selbstverständnis auszusprechen versucht, oder ob er verantwortlich vor sich und seinem Dasein die Überzeugung als seine Wahrheit setzen kann, dass er ein solcher Mensch nicht ist, wie ihn das Christentum ihm zusagt."190

Can, however, the making conscious and explicit of what the condition of the possibility of reality of man is, really redeem and change this very reality? In other words, can the existential ambiguity of man's ontological status (God either as distant *or* near) be made unambiguous and clear by his becoming conscious about the necessary condition of the possibility of this reality? It cannot; in Rahner's own theological considerations this conclusion has to be drawn. According to his own idea of the supernatural existential (that our ontological reality must transcendently be conceived to be the result of God's ontological self-communication) Rahner cannot possibly try to prove the possibility of an unambiguous experience of this self-communication, as human experience does not convey it either (though *transcendentally* one must conceive God as being gracious).

It seems, however, as if this deadlock in Rahner's theology was not caused by the limited divine self-communication which only reveals God as mystery, but by an implicit presupposition of Rahner.

The ambiguous character of God's self-communication *cannot* be cancelled out through the becoming conscious of it, because it is unavoidable. It seems, as if the ambiguous character of the experience of the condition of the possibility of subjectivity is the necessary reflexion of the twofold structure of consciousness itself: it is the very structure of self-consciousness that it (the self as subject) can be conscious of itself (the self as object). As far as the self perceives itself as the object of its self-consciousness (das Ich), it will necessarily see its ontological relatedness to the ontological condition of the possibility of the Ich as object, i.e. it will stress the ontological kinship with Being-itself and will perceive it as "innerste Mitte der Existenz". However, as far as the self concentrates on itself as its own self, the immediate absolute subject and Ich-denke, it will perceive the relation to the ontological condition of its own possibility to be "distance" because the absolute self is in *itself* totally singular, free and eigen-ständig. Only if it *relates* itself (sich) to itself (selbst), can it become conscious of itself as being not only the absolute subject but also the object of (or

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190 cf. footnote 155.

to) itself, which can not be derived from itself ontologically. If the latter prevails, true self-understanding leads to seeing one's own ontological dependency on the condition of one's own possibility.

This point is implied already in Rahner's preliminary considerations and it turns now out to be the main problem of his approach. He wrote: "Wo immer der Mensch sich in seiner Transzendenz als der Fragende erfährt, der durch diesen Aufgang des Seins beunruhigte, der ins Unsagbare Hinausgesetzte, kann er sich nicht in diesem Sinne des *absoluten* Subjektes als Subjekt begreifen, sondern nur in dem Sinne der Seinsempfängnis, letztlich der Gnade."<sup>191</sup> That is exactly the inversion of my objection. However, Rahner makes one mistake: he presupposes God's self-communication and then infers that it is impossible to perceive oneself as the absolute self. It is, however, quite the other way round. Rather is the self (which does not perceive itself to be absolute) the condition for the experience of an ontological self-communication of the condition of the possibility of its own subjectivity<sup>192</sup>. The self, however, is both subject and object. Thus the ambiguous character of transcendental experience seems to be the reflexion of the experience of the structure of human consciousness itself.

Thus the ambiguous character of God's self-communication which is present in secular self-understanding cannot be cancelled out in an explicit christian self-understanding. Christian self-understanding does not know anything additional, as it is identical with the secular and it can not say anything about *what* the condition of the possibility of itself is.

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191 cf. footnote 166.

192 It seems as if this was an apt starting-point for a further development of Rahner's system. The acknowledgement of the above-mentioned structure of human self would possibly lead to a consistent theory of why man can deny or affirm what ontologically is the condition of its own possibility, a point with which we were left a little bit unsatisfied by Rahner. The idea of God as the condition of the possibility of our subjectivity would remain untouched. But Rahner would have to do without the idea of the *structural possibility* of an unambiguity of the experience of God's self-communication. The self-communication itself is not ambiguous, as it is ontological, but its perception *necessarily* is, because of the structure of the human self. No self-understanding can change this, because the structure of the self can not be changed. Rahner actually came to this conclusion, but his line of arguments was meant to prove the opposite.

## B) Radical openness and salvation

Rahner nevertheless claims that it should be understood as *grace* and that one should ground on it a definite self-understanding. This self-understanding can of course only be the being conscious of the *facticity* that there is a condition of the possibility of my own subjectivity. It is the being conscious of being "verwiesen", which thus does not differ from secular self-understanding.

Yet Rahner claimed that this definite self-understanding was salvation. He states more precisely: "Was über die Gnade und die unmittelbare Anschauung Gottes erklärt werden kann ist ... eine Aussage, die nur in einer ganz bestimmten transzendental bleibenden Weise die Nennung Gottes und den stummen Hinweis auf unsere transzendente Erfahrung wiederholt, nur eben so, dass jetzt auch gesagt werden kann, dass diese Erfahrung ihre radikalste Möglichkeit nicht immer nur vor sich hat, sondern dass sie sie auch einholen wird, ja dass sie in der Bewegung auf diese Einholung hin schon immer durch die Selbstmitteilung der Zukunft getragen ist, auf die hin als absolut erfüllte diese Bewegung geht."<sup>193</sup>

It remains rather unclear how this "highest possibility" as the "unmittelbare Anschauung Gottes" can be achieved, because it is quite a different thing to be conscious of the ontological condition of one's own possibility or to claim that this is the underlying basis for an immediate visio beatifica. Rahner again identifies ontological self-communication of God with its existential experience. Ontological self-communication of God is understood as graciously encouraging sign and beginning of the existential "Bewegung" towards a full cognition of God. It remains unclear how Rahner can infer the one from the other. He continues: "Die Lehre von dieser Gnade und ihrer Vollendung ist darum der Befehl(!), sich in Glaube, Hoffnung und Liebe radikal und offen zu halten und sich nie abzuschliessen, bevor nichts mehr abzuschliessen ist, weil nichts mehr draussen ist, weil wir ganz in Gott und er ganz in uns sein wird."<sup>194</sup>

Finally we touch Rahner's implicit idea of how christian and secular self-understanding do actually differ; and here it becomes evident what he thinks that the content of the christian self-understanding is. Salvation is, however, nothing actual but something future: "Zukunft Gottes als

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193 p.132.

194 p.132, exclamation mark by A.S.

absolute Ankunft". Right self-understanding is not merely something which says how man should be conceptually conceived, but also what man has to do. We have to remember that for Rahner salvation was the definitiveness of both "des wahren Selbstverständnisses und der wahren Selbsttat des Menschen."<sup>195</sup> Salvation as the definite self-understanding is thus to understand oneself as being "verwiesen" not only ontologically towards the condition of the possibility of one's own being but also towards the "absolute future as absolute presence" of God. The resulting "Selbsttat des Menschen" is to keep himself radical and open for the future of God.

We have to say that it is quite unclear how Rahner can suddenly introduce this kind of future-tending eschatological element. It is neither derived nor derivable from Rahner's ontological and transcendental presuppositions. Moreover, it is not really understandable how we can base our radical openness towards God's absolute presence on his ontological revelation and self-communication, the content of which was God as the *remaining* mystery. How could one possibly keep oneself open towards something, the only thing one knows about which is that it will necessarily remain a mystery. Rahner's doctrine of grace thus has to be turned into a "Befehl". The passively to be received salvation has been turned into an ethical task, which is formulated with severe rigidity. God's grace is an order for man. Moreover, we finally have to ask whether "radical openness" towards an "absolute future" as definitive self-understanding is not a contradiction in terms. Radical openness as such towards something unknown (God as the remaining mystery) can never be definitive self-understanding, because such a self-understanding (if it is supposed to be really definitive and radical) must necessarily exclude the one and all-decisive possibility, the final revelation of the yet unknown. Thus it is no radical *openness* any more. Radical openness must take into account as its own possibility the dissolving and cancellation of itself into a definitiveness. Even if one did *not* exclude a final revelation of the yet unknown, how could one then ground a definitive self-understanding on radical openness, if one knows that the final revelation must reveal something different than the status quo (as now God is a mystery). Radical openness as definitive self-understanding is self-contradictory.

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195 p.50.

## II.3.6 HEILSGESCHICHTE AND HISTORY OF REVELATION

The main idea underlying Rahner's considerations of the idea of a Heilsgeschichte is not that history is a process leading towards a future state of salvation. This is the more classical approach. As, according to Rahner, salvation is God's ontological self-communication and (being the prior condition of the possibility of man) creates him and his history, salvation can be said to be going through history, "accompanying" man in his history: "Die vergöttlichende Transzendentalität des Menschen hat im Menschen, der sein Wesen in Geschichte vollzieht und es nur so in Freiheit übernehmen kann selbst individuell und kollektiv eine Geschichte."<sup>196</sup> Therefore the title of this passage is not meant to be disjunctive but conjunctive: the history which God's salvation necessarily has through its being actualized by man can be called Heilsgeschichte. It is the Geschichte which Heil inherently has, not the history which tends to a future Heil: "Göttliche Heilsgeschichte erscheint darum immer in menschlicher Heilsgeschichte, Offenbarung in Glaube und umgekehrt: also in dem, was der Mensch als sein Eigenstes erfährt und als dieses eigene als von dem fernen und zugleich (!) nahen Gott seiner Transzendenz zugeschickt entgegennimmt."<sup>197</sup> Rahner therefore can say that world history and heilsgeschichte are "koextensiv"<sup>198</sup> because they are intrinsically connected; regarding our above-mentioned consideration about human self-understanding one has to conclude that heilsgeschichte and world history are even identical, as the latter is the ontological consequence of the former. Rahner dares to say: "Die Weltgeschichte bedeutet also Heilsgeschichte. Das Selbstangebot Gottes, in dem sich Gott absolut an die Totalität des Menschen mitteilt, ist per definitionem das Heil des Menschen. Denn es ist die Erfüllung der Transzendenz des Menschen, in welcher er sich auf den absoluten Gott hin selber transzendiert."<sup>199</sup>

A less important but very interesting implication of this application of Rahner's transcendental-anthropological approach to history is that "heilsgeschichte" and history of the christian religion or the history of revelation which led to christianity are not any longer necessarily identical. As God's

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196 p.143.

197 p.147.

198 p.147.

199 p.148.

self-communication, which per definitionem is salvation, is ontological and transcendental and thus universal and necessary Rahner can say: "Wegen des allgemeinen Heilswillens Gottes hat der Christ kein Recht, das faktische Ereignis des Heils auf die alt- oder neutestamentliche explizite Heilsgeschichte zu begrenzen."<sup>200</sup> "Man kann angesichts der uns heute bekannten räumlichen und vor allem zeitlichen Ausdehnung der Menschheitsgeschichte nicht mehr im Ernst und nicht ohne willkürliche Postulate annehmen, dass alle Menschen mit der konkreten historischen Wortoffenbarung im engsten Sinn, also mit der expliziten Tradition einer paradisischen Uroffenbarung oder mit der alt- oder neutestamentlichen biblischen Offenbarung in Verbindung gestanden haben oder stehen müssten, um Glauben zu können und so ihr Heil zu erreichen."<sup>201</sup>

Rahner defined: "Weltgeschichte bedeutet Heilsgeschichte". He now develops this idea in accordance with the above-mentioned concept of natural transcendentality and God's self-communication. God is the a priori horizon of subjectivity and thus his ontological self-communication is primordial revelation: "Die göttliche Bewirkung des apriorischen Horizontes unserer Erkenntnis und Freiheit muss als eine eigentümliche, ursprüngliche, ja sogar alle übrige Offenbarung tragende Weise von Offenbarung angesprochen werden."<sup>202</sup> Thus revelation is not a magical, supernatural intervention into our physical reality: "Wir haben nicht erst dann mit Gott etwas zu tun, wo wir Gott gewissermassen begrifflich thematisieren, sondern die ursprüngliche, wenn auch namenlose, unthematische Erfahrung Gottes wird überall dort gemacht, wo und insofern Subjektivität und Transzendentalität vollzogen wird."<sup>203</sup> That is a fine summary of both Rahner's concept of natural transcendentality and his idea of the encounter with God in the depth of this very transcendentality, as I summarized it above. Nothing is new so far.

Until now Rahner has merely stated that through its being applied to man, God's self-communication itself becomes "historical". What precisely does Rahner mean by this? He had conceived man basically as the "Wesen der Transzendenz" and only due to this transcendentality is man able to distinguish himself from the world. But now, in order to make his concept of

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200 p.153.

201 p.156.

202 p.154.

203 p.155.





heilsgeschichte as history of revelation seem meaningful Rahner has to state, that man is also absolutely an *historical* being. Only then Rahner is able to connect ontological self-communication and human history. In order to do so, he must refer man's transcendentality to his historicity. Therefore he introduces the idea, that man's categorical history is the *self-explication* of his transcendentality: "Kategoriale Geschichte des Menschen als eines geistigen Subjektes ist immer und überall die notwendige, aber geschichtliche objektivierende Selbstausslegung der transzendentalen Erfahrung, die den Wesensvollzug des Menschen ausmacht. Dieser Wesensvollzug des Menschen ereignet sich nicht neben den Ereignissen des geschichtlichen Lebens, sondern in diesem geschichtlichen Leben."<sup>204</sup>

He now has prepared the ground for a possible alignment of ontological self-communication and categorical history. One has to have a very close look to see how elegantly Rahner now turns things around and finds a way to claim that actually human history is the self-explication of the eternal self-ommunication *itself*: "Gibt es also Geschichte als notwendige objektivierende Selbstausslegung der transzendentalen Erfahrung, dann gibt es offenbarende Geschichte der transzendentalen Offenbarung als notwendige Selbstausslegung derjenigen ursprünglichen transzendentalen Erfahrung, die durch die Selbstmitteilung Gottes konstituiert wird."<sup>205</sup>

A few pages earlier the identity of heilsgeschichte and world history was only a conceptual one: there was no direct effect of God's self-communication on the actual, categorical history. It was mediated by human transcendentality. History was the self-explication of human transcendentality and God's revelation was merely the condition of the possibility of this transcendentality. But now Rahner declares that the transcendental revelation itself has a history: in so far as it must be understood to be the condition of man, it creates the historical consequences actively! History now is the self-explication of that which intrinsically is the condition of the possibility of man; it is now directly the self-explication of the divine self-communication: "Diese geschichtliche Selbstmitteilung Gottes kann und muss als Offenbarungsgeschichte verstanden werden. Denn diese Geschichte ist

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204 p.157.

205 p.158.

die folgende Objektivation eben der ursprünglichen Gott offenbarenden Selbstmitteilung Gottes, sie ist deren Auslegung und so (!) eben deren Geschichte selbst."<sup>206</sup>

Thus Rahner has again introduced the old concept of heilsgeschichte as world history which tends to a future state of salvation and perfection. And if heilsgeschichte is not the mere self-explication of human transcendentality, which always remains what it is, then it is supposed to have a centre, a soteriological and revelatory climax: "Wenn transzendente Gotteserfahrung übernatürlicher Art sich notwendig geschichtlich auslegt, darum kategoriale Offenbarungsgeschichte bildet und diese somit überall gegeben ist, dann ist auch gesagt, dass eine solche Geschichte immer eine noch nicht völlig gelungene, anfanghafte, sich selbst noch suchende ... ist."<sup>207</sup> That implies that if there is an explication of divine self-communication, it will always be endangered of being misunderstood or distorted in its categorial manifestations. If one therefore wanted to find out what is really divine and what is merely human, one would have to have an absolute state of categorial objectivation for this divine self-explication. Rahner postulates the reality of such an absolute state and claims the person of Jesus Christ to be this: "Erst im vollen und unüberholbaren Ereignis der geschichtlichen Selbstobjektivation der göttlichen Selbstmitteilung an die Welt in Jesus Christus ist ein Ereignis gegeben, das als eschatologisches einer geschichtlichen Depravation, einer verderbenden Auslegung in der weiteren Geschichte der kategorialen Offenbarung und des Unwesens der Religion grundsätzlich und schlechthin entzogen ist."<sup>208</sup> This is a merely apodictic statement, which cannot be deduced from what has been said so far. Rahner knows this: "Wir werden im sechsten Gang die theologischen Grundlagen dieser Aussagen beizubringen haben."<sup>209</sup> However, Rahner has prepared the ground for an understanding of the person of Jesus Christ as the "absolute Heilsbringer".

Through the necessary self-explication of man in history we transcendently can and must assume that also God's self-communication explicates itself through man. Therefore we can infer

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206 p.158.

207 p.159.

208 p.161.

209 p.161.

conclusions about the eternal self-communication from its a posteriori historical consequences. And this is exactly what Rahner intends to do, when he now concludes that Jesus Christ with his way of self-explication is the categorical climax of the history of christianity and must *therefore* be considered to be the climax of divine self-communication as such. Christology and the transcendental-anthropological approach converge.

Thus Rahner's christology is characterized by an oscillation between the two poles of divine necessity and anthropological contingency. That is why it has often been considered to be unapproachable and incomprehensible: Rahner seems to deduce anthropology from divine eternal necessity, whereas in fact he infers the latter from the former according to his transcendental method. Thus (as an example and as preparation for the next section) the old and haunting problem of preexistent christology "from above" versus adoptianist christology "from below" is totally cancelled out in Rahner's theology: both are indissolubly connected and mutually dependent. As far as we see Jesus Christ with the explication of his transcendental experience which is merely human, we have to speak of an adoptionist christology "from below". However, as soon as we turn to the necessary condition (in Rahner's system) of the possibility of this anthropological self-explication, we have to consider a preexistent christology because any anthropological self-explication is necessarily the consequence of the self-explication of the divine self-communication. This is the methodological heart of Rahner's christology to which we will now turn.

### II.3.7 RAHNER'S CONCEPT OF CHRISTOLOGY

#### A) World history and consciousness

At first Rahner has to prove the necessity and the possibility of a transcendental christology. Though he had already mentioned briefly what kind of christology that would be, it still remained dubious, whether christology is necessary and therefore possible within his systematic approach. The question of necessity is to be considered in a general critique; by now Rahner is concerned to prove the possibility of christology.

We had already seen, that he thought world history to be effected by the ontological self-communication of God by means of human transcendentality. In order to show a possible

embedding of his christology in the general process of world history he provisionally reverses this idea and claims that, seen from the stand-point of natural transcendentalism, man can be considered to be the matter which comes to itself through the spirit by means of its natural transcendentalism: one must try "den Menschen als das Seiende zu verstehen, in dem die Grundtendenz der Selbstfindung der Materie im Geist durch Selbsttranszendierung zu ihrem definitiven Durchbruch kommt, so dass von daher das Wesen des Menschen selbst gesehen werden kann innerhalb einer Grund- und Gesamtkonzeption der Welt."<sup>210</sup> This general concept must necessarily be an assignment of Geistesgeschichte as history of man and Naturgeschichte: "Wenn so der Mensch die Selbsttranszendenz der lebendigen Materie ist, dann bilden Natur- und Geistesgeschichte eine innere gestufte Einheit, in der die Naturgeschichte sich auf den Menschen hin entwickelt, in ihm als *seine* Geschichte weitergeht, in ihm bewahrt und überboten ist und darum mit und in der Geistesgeschichte des Menschen zu ihrem Ziel kommt."<sup>211</sup> This inherent goal of world history must therefore be the "highest possibility" of man as Geistwesen. We have come across this term already. There it meant the immediate cognition of God, as the character of grace, which is given in God's gracious self-communication. Also here for Rahner this highest possibility of man as the highest point and goal (not end) of history is man's self-transcendence into God: "Dieses Ziel ist entsprechend der Transzendenz des Menschen auf die absolute Wirklichkeit Gottes als des unendlichen Geheimnisses, gerade weil in der unendlichen Fülle Gottes bestehend, dem Menschen selbst verborgen und entzogen."<sup>212</sup> The "Fülle Gottes" is man's inherent goal, however, it remains withdrawn and hidden due to the unavoidable ambiguity of experience. If one unites both aspects the well-known term of the "Verwiesenheit" towards the remaining mystery is the result. Thus world history is a continuous process of the "Zusichselbstkommen" of matter in spirit, and the self-transcending of this spirit into the openness of what is its condition and horizon: God.

Now Rahner infers a very important argument which, however, rests on shaky ground: "Eben weil die Bewegung der Entwicklung des Kosmos von vorneherein und in allen Phasen getragen ist von dem Drang nach der grösseren Fülle und Innigkeit und dem immer näheren und bewussteren

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210 p.182.

211 p.188.

212 p.189.

Verhältnis zu ihrem Grund, liegt die Botschaft, dass es zu einer absoluten Vermittelbarkeit mit diesem unendlichen Grund komme, durchaus in ihr selbst gegeben vor. Ist die Kosmosgeschichte im Grunde immer Geistesgeschichte, das Kommenwollen zu sich und seinem Grund, dann ist die Unmittelbarkeit zu Gott in der Selbstmitteilung Gottes an die geistige Kreatur und in ihr an den Kosmos überhaupt das sinngerechte Ziel dieser Entwicklung."<sup>213</sup>

Rahner therefore infers the actuality of a consummation from the mere facticity of its process. The assumption of this state of perfection is claimed to be "sinngerecht". Now Rahner again applies the transcendental question to his concept of world history as process of spirit and can therefore say that the immediacy of creature and God is based not on a merely human effort to transcend himself towards what is beyond him, but that this transcending itself is in turn based on God's self-communication as its condition. Thus Rahner can produce the apparently paradoxical sentence: "Wir setzen voraus, dass das Ziel der Welt die Selbstmitteilung Gottes an sie ist, dass die ganze Dynamik ... immer schon auf diese Selbstmitteilung und ihre Annahme durch die Welt ausgerichtet ist."<sup>214</sup> But it is of course not meant, that the world is thriving towards God's self-communication as something which it did not yet possess; as God's self-communication is the ontological condition and prior to the world, the process of world history must be understood as a continuous becoming *conscious* of the fact of God's self-communication. This is exactly the idea I pointed out already in chapter II.3.5A but now it is applied not to the individual but to the world in general.

If one views this process as the process of becoming conscious one can understand Rahner's idea that man *reaches*, or *gets* this self-communication, that he is put before it and that he then has to decide for or against it. Because he thinks of the event in which man becomes conscious of the primordial state of being as the "Ereignis einer freien, ungeschuldeten und vergebenden, absoluten Selbstmitteilung Gottes"<sup>215</sup> Rahner can speak of God's self-communication as a contingent event within history: it appears in history, because man becomes conscious of it. However, how can man become conscious of it and decide for affirmation or rejection of this self-communication (see the excursus in chapter II.3.4)? There must be a starting point or catalyst: "Diese Selbstmitteilung

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213 p.192.

214 p.193.

215 p.122.

Gottes muss einen bleibenden Anfang, darin eine Garantie ihres Geschehens haben, durch die sie mit Recht die freie Entscheidung zur Annahme dieser göttlichen Selbstmitteilung fordern kann."<sup>216</sup> As necessary according to his concept that God's self-communication is the condition of the possibility of man's subjectivity, Rahner adds: "Diese freie Annahme oder Ablehnung von seiten der einzelnen Freiheiten befindet nicht eigentlich über das Ereignis der Selbstmitteilung Gottes als solcher, sondern nur über das Verhältnis, das die geistige Kreatur zu dieser Selbstmitteilung einnimmt."<sup>217</sup>

#### B) Christ and consciousness

The "bleibende Anfang" must therefore be the event or person through which God's self-communication for the first time becomes totally and evidently apparent for man. As far as one can say that in becoming conscious God's self-communication "comes" or "happens" or "reaches earth and man" one can call this person (or event) the "absolute Heilsbringer": "Von hier aus ergibt sich nun zunächst der Begriff des *Heilsbringers schlechthin*. Wir nennen so jene geschichtliche Persönlichkeit, die - in Raum und Zeit auftretend - den Anfang der ins Ziel kommenden absoluten Selbstmitteilung Gottes bedeutet, jenen Anfang, der die Selbstmitteilung für alle als unwiderruflich geschehend, als siegreich inauguriert anzeigt."<sup>218</sup> Thus the Heilsbringer is the one who awakens man's consciousness of God's self-communication, which is irrevocable and victorious because it has already happened as it is the prior condition of the being of man. That means that, strictly speaking, the Heilsbringer is not the "Heil" himself. He "brings" man to the consciousness of that ontologically previous "Heil": "Mit diesem Begriffe des Heilsbringers (genauer vielleicht des absoluten Heilsbringers) ist nicht gesagt, dass die Selbstmitteilung Gottes an die Welt in ihrer geistigen Subjektivität *zeitlich* erst mit ihm beginnen müsse. Sie kann schon vor dem Heilsbringer beginnen, ja koexistent sein mit der ganzen geistigen Geschichte der Menschheit und der Welt, so wie es ja faktisch auch nach christlicher Lehre der Fall war."<sup>219</sup>

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216 p.194.

217 p.194.

218 p.194.

219 p.194.

The "Heilsbringer" reveals God's self-communication through his natural self-transcendence and his being conscious of the self-communication. He is the event of the *absolute* self-communication in the sense that he is absolutely conscious of it, what transcendently presupposes the total self-explication of God to his subjectivity. However, according to Rahner's concept of natural transcendentalism he has to admit: "Eine solche und absolute Selbsttranszendenz des Geistes in Gott hinein ist aber zu denken als in *allen* geistigen Subjekten geschehend."<sup>220</sup> Therefore Rahner must conclude that *ontologically* there is no difference between the "absolute Heilsbringer" and mere mortals: "Man sieht daraus, wie schwer es ist, das Verhältnis genauer zu bestimmen zwischen jener Vollendung, die der christliche Glaube allen Menschen zuerkennt und jener einmaligen Vollendung menschlicher Möglichkeit, die wir als *unio hypostatica* bekennen."<sup>221</sup> "Die These, die wir anstreben, geht dahin, dass die *unio hypostatica* wenn auch als in ihrem eigenen Wesen einmaliges und in sich gesehen höchstes denkbare Ereignis, doch ein inneres Moment der Ganzheit der Begnadigung der geistigen Kreatur überhaupt ist."<sup>222</sup>

However, there is one necessary difference between us and Jesus Christ as the "absolute Heilsbringer": in him God's self-communication must be thought of as being perfect and absolute, due to his perfect and total self-transcending (again we infer the former from the latter). Therefore Jesus is God's promise to us, the promise of the *possibility* of the state of absolute self-transcendence which we have not reached yet: "Diese *unio* unterscheidet sich nicht von unserer Gnade durch das in ihr Zugesagte, das ja eben beides mal die Gnade (auch bei Jesus) ist, sondern dadurch, dass Jesus die Zusage für uns ist und wir nicht selber wieder Zusage sondern Empfänger der Zusage Gottes an uns sind."<sup>223</sup> In order to understand the full implication of this sentence, we have to remember that Rahner's transcendental-anthropological approach led to the final conclusion that grace was the *Befehl* to keep oneself open and radical towards the future of God. And this is what happens through the "absolute Heilsbringer". In him the absolute future of God is radically present due to his absolute self-transcendence. And therefore *the grade of perfection of his*

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220 p.198.

221 p.200.

222 p.201.

223 p.202.

*ontological state* (not his person of course) is the promise to us. However, it is not the promise that this state will occur to us automatically or necessarily. It implies the task, the "Befehl" to transcend oneself in order to keep oneself open towards the absolute future of God. The "absolute Heilsbringer" in Rahner's system is not a supernatural, graceful intervention of God into our reality on behalf of man. He is a shining example of total self-transcendence and therefore proof of the facticity and possibility of a total self-communication of God to all human beings. From that derives "grace" as the "Befehl" to follow his example in keeping oneself open towards the absolute future of God.

### C) Salvation and negation

However, which are the actual signs which substantiate the idea for me that Jesus is the highest possibility of human transcendence? This self-transcendence must be presupposed in order to infer from it the idea of an a priori self-communication of God. The question we ask is the question of the categorical sign of the a priori self-communication of God in human life. We ask for God in the realm of categoriality, in order to see whether Jesus of Nazareth really is a guarantee for the event of absolute self-communication; Rahner had presupposed that the "Heilsbringer" is the guarantee for the self-communication of God and the necessary condition for our deliberate decision for or against it. What, however, is the guarantee of the "Heilsbringer" himself? What are the signs which would make it plausible to assume that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ. Rahner states disappointingly: "*Wie das Endliche und Bedingte und Vorläufige das Kommen des Unendlichen, Absoluten und Endgültigen melden und Hoffnung dafür überhaupt erwecken kann, ohne Gott selbst zu kategorialisieren und zur blossen Chiffre einer 'unendlichen' offenen Bewegung auf etwas immer Endliches zu machen ... das müsste in einer Theologie der Offenbarung überhaupt genauer bedacht werden, was hier nicht nochmals möglich ist.*"<sup>224</sup> Rahner only hints at how it could be possible to think God in categorical terms. Surprisingly enough he comes to a similar conclusion as Tillich in the same situation. The divine in the realm of the categorical must be thought of as the *negation* of this very realm: "Jedenfalls aber kann Gott als er selbst im Raum des Kategorialen...

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224 p.209.



nur sich offenbarend anwesend sein im Modus der Verheissung (als des dauernden Überstieges über das Kategoriale, der den Ausgangspunkt der Hoffnung und ihr kategoriales Ziel *als* blosser Etappe der Hoffnung schlechthin bejaht - als Vermittlung der Offenbarung - *und* so auch verneint als nicht identisch mit dem eigentlich Gemeinten) und des *Todes* als des radikalsten Ereignisses jener Verneinung, die zum Wesen jeder geschichtlich vermittelnden Offenbarung gehört und im Tod absolut wird, weil nichts Kategoriales mehr gehofft werden kann und so nur noch die Hoffnung auf "alles" oder die blosser Verzweiflung übrigbleibt."<sup>225</sup> Applied to the idea of the human Heilsbringer that means: "Die Katorialität der irreversiblen Selbstzusage Gottes an die Welt als ganze, die diese unwiderrufliche Zusage da sein lässt und die *dieser* Zusage entsprechende Hoffnung vermittelt, kann nur ein Mensch sein, der einerseits im Tod jede innerweltliche Zukunft aufgibt und der andererseits sich in dieser Todesannahme als von Gott endgültig angenommen erweist."<sup>226</sup>

Thus the presence of God's graceful self-communication, which is the condition of the possibility of our subjectivity, is recognizable in the man who dares to negate every "innerweltliche Zukunft" in order to transcend himself toward the mystery of his own existence. The consequence is a radical openness towards death and any negation of human existence. By being that way, Jesus of Nazareth can be considered to be the event of the absolute divine graceful self-communication. Thus it is supposed to encourage us (or better: it orders - as it is a "Befehl") to risk and dare the same, namely to become conscious of our ontological reality of being "verwiesen". It orders to transcend and negate ourselves towards the inherent goal, horizon and condition of our life, the mystery of God. The consequence is negation of our existence and radical openness towards the "absolute future of God" which in the last analysis turns out to be radical openness towards death, as the radical and highest possibility of negation of our existence.

It is surprising how in the very end Rahner's theological considerations resemble Heidegger's existential-ontological analysis. Also Heidegger had perceived death as the ultimate and highest possibility of human existence in which the Dasein becomes apparent in its ontological structures.

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225 p.210.

226 p.210.

And through the contemplating anticipation of the own death Dasein becomes "eigentlich" and reaches its inherent fulfillment.

### II.3.8 CRITIQUE

In order to have a closer look at the advantages and problems of Rahner's theology one must analyse it in more detail. Rahner makes it very clear from the beginning that his aim is to mediate the christian Heilsmysterium with modern secular self-understanding and worldview. Thus Rahner from the very beginning outlines the limits of his theology: any positivistic revelatory theology is a priori excluded; if Rahner wants to mediate self-understanding and mystery of salvation he has to find common ground between both. This endeavour, however, presupposes that there actually *is* common ground between the secular worldview and the christian mystery of salvation; this assumption of a communality between the divine and the human realm is exactly what distinguishes natural theology from revelatory theology. So basically his aim to mediate forces Rahner to develop a natural theology.

As Rahner wants to mediate self-understanding, his first step is to show that the christian mystery of salvation is a priori implied in or the content of *every* true self-understanding, even the secular. Otherwise it would not be possible to demand that modern secular man should accept this understanding as an understanding of himself. I already pointed out above in how far that narrows the range of possible theological approaches. It is, however, even more limited if Rahner wants to do justice also to his second presupposition: he presupposes a *mystery* of salvation and thus accepts the facticity of its character as being mysterious unquestioned and ultimate. If it is therefore supposed to remain a mystery the only possibility to refer human self-understanding to this mystery is to prove that man is already a priori *referring* to this mystery, that man is always the one "der in das Geheimnis verwiesen ist, das wir Gott nennen."<sup>227</sup> Thus from the very beginning Rahner has predefined *what* has to be mediated (mystery as underlying principle of human self-understanding) and *how* this mediation must operate: due to the necessity of showing the a priori character of the mystery, Rahner has to proceed by transcendently asking for the condition of the possibility of

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227 p.24

human self-understanding. And actually the idea of a necessary condition of the possibility of human self-understanding turns out to be a most apt way of showing the a priori Verwiesenheit of man. The idea of transcendental dependency conveys exactly the possibility to do justice equally to either of Rahner's presuppositions: the idea of a necessary condition of the possibility of man's subjectivity (which is the condition of the possibility of any self-understanding) is logically *necessary* and it can therefore be proved to be necessarily immanent in every human subjectivity. It is by definition a priori. On the other hand the condition of the possibility of man's subjectivity is only a *logical* necessity and does not necessarily affect man's empirical reality. Due to this very character it does not become an object of the consciousness; man is merely verwiesen towards it.

The more difficult question is how one can possibly perceive this logical necessity to be of divine character. Rahner's approach is basically dialectic. For Rahner the idea of the mystery of salvation and the necessary condition of the possibility of man's subjectivity necessarily converge: firstly man is actually (i.e. logically necessarily) dependent on the condition of the possibility of his subjectivity and secondly the actual character of this condition remains withdrawn from man's consciousness. Thus the idea of the necessary condition of the possibility of man's subjectivity fulfils both criteria of the divine mystery of salvation: man is verwiesen towards it and it remains a mystery.

However, the equation of God as the mystery with the ontologically and logically necessary condition of the possibility of man's subjectivity is problematic: the assumption of such a condition is logically necessary but it is an a priori analytical statement and thus conveys no real cognition. Moreover it remains unintelligible whether any real entity corresponds to this logically derived necessity. Rahner personifies the object of this analytical judgement when he declares it to be God as the mystery. This is not only theologically difficult: the criteria of any relating "God" to a certain realm in human reality always remain highly arbitrary in natural theology. They entirely depend on the individual choice of the theologian as any "objective" theological criteria like "revelation" have been excluded. Rather Rahner's personifying of the necessary condition contradicts in a way his own presupposition that the actual *what* of this condition is totally withdrawn from human consciousness: so how does Rahner know that the logically necessary condition of the possibility of

man's subjectivity is more than just the *logically* necessary condition of the possibility of man's subjectivity?

Then he postulates the even further reaching anthropological assumption that man is the "event of a primordial self-communication of God". This becomes understandable if one recalls that "God" was nothing more than the ontologically and logically necessary condition of the possibility of man. Without it man would not be and therefore man can be perceived as being existent only due to the self-communication of this condition. The being of this condition to be what it is (namely an ontological condition) is expressed as an active process of "self-communication". However, one must again bear in mind that the formula "ontological self-communication of God" and all its implications are merely the categorical and half-mythological circumscription of what is nothing but a *logical* necessity. Due to this idea of "ontological self-communication" Rahner can also conclude that man's natural transcendentality and its cognition of God as mystery is identical with what God actually reveals about himself and that there is no further or other cognition of God possible. As God's ontological self-communication *is* his self-communication, man's natural transcendentality must be considered to be the medium through which God mediates himself to man. Any supernatural revelation can be excluded. Rahner's proceeding becomes understandable if one thinks of God as the ontologically and logically necessary condition of the possibility of man's subjectivity: due to this, everything this subjectivity knows about this condition must be thought to have "originated" from this condition and there can be nothing which has not. One must, of course, not forget that there is nothing to know about this condition except *that* it is a logically necessary condition and that we are therefore logically dependent on it. In Rahner's terminology this reads like the claim that man's natural transcendentality is identical with divine self-revelation as regards content.

Rahner, however, wants to show that this condition (or divine self-communication) can be regarded as man's salvation. Rahner had defined salvation as "Endgültigkeit wahren Selbstverständnisses"<sup>228</sup> of man, the state when man accepts and knows that he is the one who is

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228 p.50.

verwiesen towards God, who then becomes the "innerste Mitte unserer Existenz"<sup>229</sup>. Both ideas together constitute Rahner's concept of salvation. (The critique of his general concept of salvation will concern us in the last chapter). If it is possible to show *that* and *how far* God actually is the innermost centre of our existence and not only the logical precondition of it the task of showing the reality of salvation is according to Rahner's presuppositions fulfilled. But so far he has said nothing that could ever be connected with man's actual existence and experience of it. Due to the transcendental character of his approach Rahner is not concerned with man's reality itself but only with its *logical* "pre"-conditions. Therefore Rahner has to ask: "...so könnte man dennoch den Eindruck haben, dass der Satz, der Mensch sei das Ereignis der absoluten Selbstmitteilung Gottes, diesem von aussen in dem Raum einer blossen Begrifflichkeit zugesagt werde, dass er aber nicht eigentlich das vor den Menschen bringe, was der Mensch in Wahrheit selber ist und als was er sich selber im Grunde seines Daseins erfährt. Doch dies ist nicht so."<sup>230</sup> But how far can Rahner's theological claim be mediated not only with man's logical presuppositions but with his real self-understanding? In other words, in how far is God as the mystery, is God as the logically necessary condition of the possibility of man, also man's salvation?

Again, Rahner argues transcendently and comes to the conclusion that ontologically and epistemologically God has to be considered to be the underlying principle and the inherent aim of man's being and his natural transcendental. Due to the fact that man is dependent on the condition of the possibility of his subjectivity not only his being but also his natural transcendental must a priori be thought of as "supernaturally" sustained and directed by God, as his self-communication makes possible also man's perception and reception of it. Therefore man must be thought of as such that God necessarily and a priori is the "innerste Mitte" of his existence. However, again this argument of the "supernatural existential" amounts to nothing more than a merely logical statement about man's ontological, transcendental dependency upon the condition of his possibility. Due to his transcendental approach Rahner can not possibly claim any soteriological plus beyond what is already human reality. In Rahner's system there is no place for any further

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229 p.24.

230 cf. footnote 178.

event or state with saving character, because he asks only for the conditions of the possibility of reality and thus posits this reality as absolute and immutable. In the end he has to admit that human *experience* of God remains ambiguous and unpredictable. God is with necessity ontologically the "innerste Mitte unserer Existenz", but not as far as our actual experience and thus our actual "existence" is concerned. The question of how far God can be individually experienced and regarded as salvation remains unanswered.

The only thing that Rahner can do now is to encourage the individual to find the experience of grace in his own depth. Rahner has to leave the realm of systematic theology and turns to pastoral theology.

At this point two problems are imminent: the first is that Rahner according to his transcendental approach could not make probable any actual soteriological function of the christian self-understanding. It can amount to nothing more than secular self-understanding does.

Secondly an even greater problem is that Rahner's system at this point seems to be complete and finished: it has exhausted all inherent implications of its transcendental presuppositions, however, without even having touched particularly christian issues like revelation and christology. Though his system is seemingly self-sufficient Rahner now has to show the necessity of a christological extension. And only if he can show this necessity within his system has he also the possibility to introduce it.

However, here Rahner's major problems begin: if Rahner wants to mediate any soteriological plus of christian self-understanding by connecting it with particularly christian contents, he has to leave his transcendental presuppositions because the idea of God as our salvation, as the *a priori* condition of every human consciousness, is then no longer tenable. And then also the issue of how to mediate a "self"-understanding has again to be raised. But Rahner has within his system no choice: he has to show the necessity of a specific soteriological function of christian self-understanding which then can be shown to be connected with and mediated through a concept of revelation and christology: Rahner introduces the idea of the "absolute future of God" towards which we are supposed to keep ourselves open.

Whereas grace formerly had been the quality of man's ontological status it now becomes the order (!) to wait for something which is supposed to be existent but not fully to be experienced yet and the fulfilment of which is therefore still to come and to be expected. Finally here Rahner has *changed his presuppositions* and has left the realm of the transcendental questioning. The idea of a *future* event cannot be justified transcendently. Rahner has switched over from ontology into eschatology: "the absolute future of God" is substituted for salvation as "God as the necessary condition of the possibility of man's subjectivity".

Rahner then introduces the idea of a history of revelation which reaches its revelatory climax in that human being who transcendently must be considered to be the event of the *absolute* self-communication of God. I already showed above the dialectical turn of Rahner with which he projects the idea of history as the result of man's transcendental ontology onto the level of man's transcendental ontology as the result of the history of God's self-communication.

According to Rahner Jesus must be considered to be the absolute Heilsbringer because his existence transcendently proves the possibility of an absolute state of God's self-communication in man. Again this cannot any longer be considered to be in accordance with Rahner's transcendental presuppositions according to which God's self-communication was the necessary condition of the possibility of man's subjectivity and thus always a priori fulfilled and intelligible through natural transcendental ontology. Any *proof* of an a priori statement is by definition not necessary. And the idea of the "possibility of an *absolute* state of God's self-communication in man" contradicts the idea of its transcendental ontological and therefore necessarily universal character.

Moreover even Rahner's immanent reason why Jesus *is* this proof remains dubious: Rahner claims that from Jesus' absolute negation of his categorical being and existence one could transcendently infer the actuality of a previous absolute self-communication of God. According to Rahner this "proof" or "guarantee" of the possibility of an absolute state of God's self-communication can and should encourage man to dare and to risk also to negate his categorical being and thus keep himself open towards the absolute future of God in which his self-communication will finally be experienced. Here again it becomes obvious that this self-communication *cannot* be thought of as

transcendental because it is still to be expected in the moment of radical negation of categorical being, in the moment of death.

One can easily see that at least two problems permeate Rahner's theological system: firstly Rahner's theology is based on the methodological approach of transcendental questioning. However, with his identification of purely logical assumptions with issues of natural theology Rahner overstretches the inherent possibilities of any transcendental approach, as it does not convey any hermeneutical categories which make the relation of both understandable or even necessary.

Secondly Rahner does not succeed in combining his transcendental natural theology with specifically christian ideas, because he only asks for the transcendental condition of reality which is thus perceived to be absolute. Rahner in the end has to acknowledge that reality itself does not answer the question of man's salvation which this reality raised. Therefore Rahner has to leave his transcendental ontological approach and develops a classical revelatory theology which enables him to introduce the answers for man's quest for salvation from outside this reality.



### III. CRITICAL EVALUATION

#### III.1 INTRODUCTORY REMARK

After having expounded and criticized the theologies of Paul Tillich and Karl Rahner in general we finally come to the examination of their inherent view of salvation itself, which as I have shown is definitely a major issue in the theology of both of them. And as the problem of salvation is the core of their theology by expounding it we will be able to see more clearly the structure of both theologies in general with their advantages and weaknesses, similarities and differences. The examination of their concept of salvation leads us to a structural comparison of Paul Tillich's and Karl Rahner's approaches. Due to the complexity of the matter, due to the interdependence of form and content within theological systems, it did not seem reasonable for me to separate the examination of the concept of salvation from the structural comparison. Rather, I think that both issues can be properly understood only through each other as they elucidate one other. In a final step we will see whether and how far this concept of salvation is applicable to the criteria I formulated in the introduction.

We had seen that the criteria for a soteriology in the modern, secular society had been developed through a process starting with Hegel. Since Hegel two different things had happened to the theological idea of salvation. On the one hand salvation was definitely and finally conceived to be the overcoming of the alienation of man. However, as we saw, the concept of what alienation meant was quite different with different philosophers. On the other hand we saw that throughout the development of philosophy in the 19th and 20th century some criteria became apparent and became conditions for every concept of salvation in the framework of modern secular thinking. Salvation was separated from the purely religious realm: due to the all-embracing concept of salvation as the overcoming of man's alienation it could also become relevant in other fields like philosophy, politics and sociology. The first criterion I pointed out to be most important for modern consciousness was the assumption of the unity of reality in which man, his quest for salvation and salvation itself are set. The Ideologiekritik of Marx and his followers let religious or ideological systems fall victim to the suspicion of being massively oppressive and authoritarian systems which alienate man from himself and the real world. Therefore any concept which goes by

the assumption of two realities, a religious heavenly realm and the earthly realm is suspicious: modern secular thinking presupposes only one reality. And since Heidegger's turn to the existential structure of the human Dasein this reality has to be understood in radically *individualistic* and *existential* terms. From this originates the second criterion, the demand for personal experience which verifies or falsifies the claim of any concept, religious or ideological. Only personal experience is considered to be an apt means of reassuring their rightness. Moreover, as salvation is now generally (though mostly implicitly and unconsciously) perceived in terms of overcoming alienation, it must also have the notion of the *experience* of happiness; "die Forderung seines wirklichen Glückes"<sup>231</sup> is a category which obviously has been introduced by Marx: salvation must be something *better* than the status quo and in terms of *experience* that means it must convey actual *happiness*.

These were the criteria and conditions of any future soteriology consonant with modern secular thinking as I expounded it in the introduction.

## III.2 COMPARISON AND CRITIQUE

### III.2.1 Comparison

#### A) Mediation and Natural Theology

I showed how the basic idea and intention to mediate between this modern secular thinking and the christian tradition was a matter of concern for both Tillich and Rahner. Tillich explicitly developed the "method of correlation" in order to do justice to the necessity of applying the existential question of modern man to the christian answers and vice versa. I here already called into doubt the theological appropriateness of this method. However, the point is that Tillich is aware of the necessity to mediate. Also Karl Rahner is concerned with the general problem of whether and how self-understanding can be mediated (and therefore be changed) without losing its character of being *self*-understanding. This basic idea of mediation leads both theologians to the attempt to "construct" a modern natural theology. As the criteria for the mediation are the ones of

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231 see footnote 19.

secular thinking for both Rahner and Tillich, they have to cope with the demand for the epistemological unity of reality and they do so by stressing and showing either the unity (Tillich) or the transcendental dependency (Rahner) of religious and secular realm. This is a basic feature of natural theology the use of which might seem even more surprising if one remembers Tillich's claim to be a dialectical theologian and the fact that he presupposed the unconditional and revealed "protestant principle" for the whole of his theology. Also Rahner's stress on revelation as the self-communication of God at first glance does not seem to blend with the idea that this approach is one of natural theology. However, this becomes quite obvious as soon as one regards the starting point of either theologian which is *mediation* and not *crisis*, as in Barth. The justification and the rightness of the facticity of the secular world are actually presupposed. Secular man and his problems are taken seriously and the christian tradition does not just claim its rightness but feels the urge to *show* it. This is certainly the main reason why both Tillich and Rahner chose the existential approach to anthropology: man in his actual existence and his criteria are the condition and the limit of Rahner's and Tillich's attempt to mediate.

Tillich's basis for a natural theology is his idealistic starting-point, the assumption of the "identity of thinking and being"<sup>232</sup>. In his pursuit of this idea he finally comes to the result that intellectual cognition of the essence of something is ontological participation. This basically means that there is no ontological "gap" between the human and the divine realm: as God is the ground of being and as man participates in the ontological structures of this ground of being (as he participates in it through his intellectual cognition, even if only in terms of asking for it) man also participates ontologically in God himself. This *is* natural theology.

Rahner deals with the problem somewhat differently but it is obvious that he also offers a system of natural theology. World and God are indissolubly connected, because God, as Being itself, is the transcendental condition of the possibility of man and world. Thus man and God are united in an all-embracing system of ontological transcendental dependency. I already pointed out above the logical and philosophical limits of this idea what I shall not repeat here. It is, however, important that both theologians actually see the importance, even necessity, to show that the divine realm is

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232 see footnote 61.

not something like a second reality beyond our human reality. Rather is God himself the "innerste Mitte unserer Existenz"<sup>233</sup>(Rahner) or the "essence" (Tillich) of ourselves. One reality embraces God and man. However, also the limits are immediately clear: if there is only one reality, then God must be something out of this reality. And everything now depends on the choice of the theologian what out of the experience of man is to substitute the seemingly old-fashioned term "God".

## B) Salvation and God as Being itself

For both theologians not any extraordinary state of happiness but God himself is the content of salvation. According to Tillich in God man finds his "true" being, his "essence", which is revealed in the "New Being" of Jesus Christ which in turn is uninterrupted unity of Christ with God as Being itself. Salvation is the state of being united with God as our ultimate concern, nothing more, nothing less. Also Rahner states so explicitly when he says that God himself is the mystery of salvation into which man is verwiesen<sup>234</sup>, and in which man will find his definite, final self-understanding which is Heil<sup>235</sup>. Thus for both theologians the basic feature of existence is *self-alienation* which can and has to be overcome. Salvation is therefore basically the overcoming of existential alienation. Theologically speaking that means that God himself, as he is himself salvation, is the means of overcoming the alienation. Rahner does not explicitly call the human condition the state of alienation as Tillich does, but it is evident that for both existence is the state of being separated from God. And in this state man is also alienated from himself due to the lack of either "essence" or "definite self-understanding" which can be found only in God himself as he is the ground of being (Tillich) or Being itself (Rahner). This is the idea of salvation which both Tillich and Rahner have in common, though their theologies at first glance seem to be totally different. However, the origin of their understanding of the concept of salvation and alienation is complex and must be examined in more detail.

It is surprising how closely Tillich and Rahner stick to the philosophical traditions of the 19th and 20th century: in their idea that salvation is the overcoming of alienation of man they show their

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233 p.24.

234 p.24.

235 p.50.

theological dependency from Hegel's concept of alienation and salvation. However, there is also a remarkable difference from Hegel: for Hegel the identity of God and man was not to be found *in* God but in the tertium comparationis beyond God and man, in the Absolute Consciousness. Tillich and Rahner, however, assume that in God himself alienation can be overcome. Their use of Hegel seems to be influenced by Feuerbachian points of view: for Feuerbach the identity of God and man was found in man himself, and only the wrong perception of him led to a theistic concept of God. When both Rahner and Tillich claim that in *God* man's *self*-alienation is overcome they implicitly state that the actual Wesen of man *is* God! For Tillich God is man's essence, for Rahner he is the "essential" and all-decisive feature of our existence, the "innerste Mitte unserer Existenz". *Salvation is perceived as the actualization of the essential identity of God and man.*

However, there remains a tension between the two quite different assumptions that a) God is the overcoming of the alienation of man and b) that it is the *self*-alienation of man which is overcome in God. And here the influence of Heidegger becomes evident. Both Tillich and Rahner cope with this problem by referring to Heidegger's transcendental ontological analysis of existence. Together with Hegel's concept of the Absolute as the overcoming of man's alienation, Heidegger's concept of human existence and its ontological relatedness to Being itself is the basic idea of both Tillich's and Rahner's soteriology: Tillich and Rahner, however, identify God and Being itself whereas in Heidegger's Sein und Zeit Being itself had by no means been perceived to be of divine character. Being itself is no longer just the transcendental condition of man's Dasein as Heidegger had claimed, but it can now be perceived to be the Hegelian absolute, in which man's alienation is cancelled out. However, as the traditional theistic concept of God has been replaced with the idea of God *as* Being itself, it is also possible to think that it is no longer man's alienation from *God* which is overcome in Being itself, but his alienation from himself, as far as he is alienated from the ground of *his own being*. By stressing the character of God as Being itself in which man through his own being already participates it becomes possible to say that man's self-alienation and his alienation from God are identical, rather than to say that religion and concepts of God in general are what alienates man from himself. This had been the conclusion of Feuerbach. Tillich and Rahner take the wind out of the sails of the critique of Feuerbach and Marx by substituting the theistic

concepts of God with a concept in which the very essence of man himself, his not-being-alienated, coincides with what God is. As far as man is alienated at all he *is* alienated from God. God now is not the source of man's alienation but by definition the very essence of man and thus religion can no longer be blamed for alienating man by distracting him from his actual human reality. But the price Rahner and Tillich had to pay was the rejection of theistic concepts of God. However, one must see that this interpretation of the nature of Being itself does not do justice to Heidegger's original idea. Tillich and Rahner reintroduce remains of essentialist thinking into Heidegger's concept of Dasein and Being itself.

The advantage of Tillich's and Rahner's proceeding is that they are now able to claim the existence of God within the boundaries of man's existence and thus can maintain the claim of the unity of reality, a criterion basic for modern man's self-understanding.

However, there is a remarkable difference between Tillich and Rahner as far as the estimation of the *reality* of man's alienation is concerned. Both are influenced by Heidegger's analysis of man's existence. But whereas Tillich adopted the Heideggerian concept of the interrelation of Being itself, finitude and anxiety, Rahner made use of Heidegger's idea of Being itself as the transcendental condition of Dasein. According to Heidegger the main characteristic of Dasein was temporality, which led to the fact that Dasein had to perceive its being as continuous "potentiality". This implied the danger of losing the Eigentlichkeit and to flee into the anonymous Uneigentlichkeit of the Man. Only a definite understanding of the nature of Dasein as being finite and bound to death as its "eigentlichste Möglichkeit" prevented it from "falling" into Uneigentlichkeit. In fact the same idea is found in Rahner's soteriology, when he defines "Heil" to be definite and final self-understanding<sup>236</sup>. However, in distinction to Heidegger definite self-understanding for Rahner is to understand that one is "verwiesen" towards God as the mystery of Dasein. The main stress is on the mysterious character of God and not on death and mortality, although these features play a certain role also in Rahner's theology, when he describes "grace" as the Befehl to keep oneself radically open towards the "absolute future of God", which in the last analysis turned out to be radical openness towards death. Generally speaking Rahner's concept of alienation is far more optimistic

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236 cf. footnote 235.

than Tillich's, because for Rahner definite self-understanding is *actually* possible by perceiving oneself as being "verwiesen" into the mystery. Therefore, according to Rahner, also "Heil" is actual. However, the soteriological character of this "Heil" remains vague and obscure.

Tillich is much more radical and existential in his analysis. He adopted Heidegger's idea that the main characteristic of human existence is its mortality and finitude. Tillich claims that the cancellation of man's self-estrangement enables him to cope with his existential anxiety in the face of death and mortality, thus having a practical psychological result. Death itself for Tillich is a characteristic of existence itself and can therefore not be abolished. Tillich never says that the overcoming of death itself is the result of God's saving activity as one might possibly here expect in the light of the christian doctrine of resurrection. Man's anxiety is what has to be overcome and what according to Tillich also *can* be overcome as it is the result of man's self-estrangement. Although Tillich adopts Heidegger's concept of alienation, anxiety and finitude he changes it in one decisive point: according to Heidegger the effect of Eigentlichkeit was *not* to come to terms with the anxiety before death. It was the "uneigentliche Dasein" that did not accept the own death as its ultimately "own" but flees from it and tries to hide in the anonymity of the "Man": "Das Man lässt den Mut zur Angst vor dem Tode nicht aufkommen ... Versuchung, Beruhigung und Entfremdung kennzeichnen aber die Seinsart des Verfallens. Das alltägliche Sein zum Tode ist als verfallendes eine ständige Flucht vor ihm. Das Sein zum Ende hat den Modus des undeutenden, uneigentlich anstehenden und verhüllenden Ausweichens vor ihm."<sup>237</sup> The effect of Eigentlichkeit is therefore not the overcoming of existential anxiety; rather it is the admission of this very anxiety in which Dasein gains Eigentlichkeit.

### C) Consciousness and the Actuality of Salvation

So far we have seen that the attempt to mediate the christian tradition with the philosophical tradition of modernity led Tillich and Rahner to develop a natural theology in which God is Being itself and in which thus the unity of reality can be maintained through the idea that alienation from God is identical with alienation from one's own self. However, if one wants to pursue the

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237 cf. footnote 43.

existentialist line of thought then the actual *presence of salvation* must be claimed and shown. Here one of the fundamental weaknesses of Tillich's and to a certain extent also of Rahner's system becomes evident. Both have to deal with the problem that salvation must be conceived as simultaneously present *and* absent. As far as man's real existence is concerned Tillich and Rahner conceive man as alienated and self-estranged. However, as there cannot be any reality apart from this existence, salvation as the overcoming of this very alienation must be shown to be also present. Both Tillich and Rahner have the same problem but they try to solve it in different ways. For Tillich absence and presence are simultaneously possible if one shifts the problem onto the level of consciousness and unconsciousness. According to his idea that due to the dialectical character of man's being he participates in the ontological structures of Being itself he only has to become increasingly aware of himself and of Being itself in order to participate (identity of thinking and being) in it more fully, which leads to the overcoming of self-estrangement and of alienation from God. Ontologically salvation is present; as far as man's being unconscious about it is concerned it is absent.

Rahner solves the problem differently: due to his transcendental approach he does not have any difficulties with simultaneous presence and absence. As far as God is the logically *necessary* condition of the possibility of our existence we must perceive ourselves as radically verwiesen towards God. As far as he is only *logically* necessary we are separated from him in our actual, practical existence. God as the salvation of man does not actually affect man's being; the ambiguous character of the presence and absence of salvation is grounded in the transcendental and therefore ambiguous character of our relation to God himself. It is a matter of self-understanding how far his saving character becomes relevant for us. In the perception of ourselves as being verwiesen towards God the overcoming of the alienation from God and from ourselves coincide. In perceiving God as the mystery we finally perceive him as that which he is and we are then able to perceive ourselves to be what we actually are, namely verwiesen towards this mystery. However, also in Rahner's theology as in Tillich's in the end it boils down to a difference in the grades of consciousness. The only difference is that in Rahner's theology man is *conscious* of the ambiguous character of man's existence as being both separated and united with God as its transcendental



condition. In Tillich's theology it means a *lack of consciousness* not to realize the primordial participation of man in Being itself. In Rahner salvation means being conscious about the ambiguous character of existence; in Tillich it means that the ambiguity of consciousness which is not conscious about the actual character of existence is abolished.

#### D) The Problem of Experience

Thus the first criterion of secular thinking is fulfilled in both approaches: the unity of reality. The attempt of a natural theology and its idea of God as Being itself in which man participates, the idea of salvation as the overcoming of self-alienation which is identical with alienation from God, and the attempt to explain the simultaneous ontological presence and absence of salvation in terms of grades of consciousness, all this served the purpose of doing justice to the criteria of modern secular thinking, in order to make possible a real mediation. However, at this point in both approaches the same problem emerges: the question of *experience*. I had pointed out that the possibility of individual experience was the second criterion of any future doctrine of salvation. However, the ontological presence of salvation is not as evident in real experience as it is in the theory of the different grades of consciousness. Rahner has to admit that the transcendental experience always remains ambiguous; Tillich does not even mention the problem expressis verbis but it emerges as a necessary implication of his theology if one applies his method of correlation to his own theology: if the quest for salvation already implies a certain primordial participation in Being itself, why does man still ask for it, even *has* to ask for it? As far as experience is concerned the mere self-awareness and the awareness of one's ontological participation in Being itself does not seem to be sufficient to overcome man's existential anxiety or his self-estrangement, though it should be in theory.

Actual experience does not verify the theological claim of either theologian. Both have the same problem and both chose a similar way of dealing with it: they leave the realm of natural theology and introduce a theology of revelation which enables them to do both, to deal with the fact that man's existence is such that he still has to seek salvation in spite of all assertions that it is *ontologically* present. Salvation is present in the consciousness but not in experience!

The second problem which can be dealt with by introducing a revelatory theology is the lack of peculiarly christian features. I already showed the turn or shift in the system of both theologians at this point: Tillich introduces his more dualistic understanding of man's existence as opposed to essence what makes necessary the revelation and appropriation of essence from a realm outside existence. Rahner develops the idea of an absolute future of God which is *not* present yet and still to come. That actually does justice to man's empirical experience of the *absence* of salvation, the experience of alienation; thus it serves the purpose of doing justice to the criterion of experience; however, it does not prove the positive claim of the presence of salvation; it only affirms the rightness of man's actual experience that salvation is not at hand.

Moreover, this cancels out all achievements of Tillich's and Rahner's natural theology, the effort to maintain the unity of reality in which man, his quest for salvation and salvation itself are set. By projecting the actuality of salvation into either a realm of "essence" outside man's existence or into an absolute "future" the unity of man's reality is broken. The above-mentioned attempt to understand the presence and the absence of salvation in terms of different grades of consciousness of salvation as ontological matter of fact (Tillich) or transcendental postulate (Rahner) becomes pointless: salvation is no longer an *ontological fact* or *transcendental postulate* but a transcendent and future event. Paradoxically both theologians have to leave the realm of natural theology and have to develop a classical revelatory theology in order to be able to do justice both to the claim of the actuality of salvation *and* to the actual experience under the conditions of existence.

As both theologians have to cope with the same problems it is no wonder that the similarities in both *christologies* are striking. The terms differ, but the meaning of the different dogmatical topics within the theological systems is nearly the same. Both theologians have to consider existence as the state in which man is in need of salvation, which is characterized through the absence either of "essence" or the absolute future of God. And now something remarkable happens in Tillich's and Rahner's theology: whereas in the beginning and in the preliminary remarks both theologians had stressed the necessity to take man's actual existence seriously and to mediate it with the classical tradition all that is suddenly no longer relevant. The characteristic feature of salvation which is now revealed in Jesus Christ is no longer a sort of consummation of existence or its inherent climax, but

something qualitatively totally different: it is the *negation* of existence! Salvation is not the redemption of, but the redemption from, existence. However, paradoxically enough this U-turn is the necessary implication of the existential approach of both Tillich and Rahner: by interpreting man's existence as the only reality and the criterion for the verification of theological statements they posit this reality as *absolute*. Therefore both Tillich and Rahner cannot but define salvation negativo as that which is *different* from man's actual existence. However, if there is nothing but this reality then there is nothing existing which could be different from it; therefore salvation of existence must now be considered to be the *negation* of this very existence. For Tillich the presence of "essence in existence" is characterized by the fact that Christ has to sacrifice and to neglect entirely everything that "is merely 'Jesus' in him"<sup>238</sup>. And in Rahner's theology the presence of the absolute in the categorical is consummated in the mode of promise as the negation of the ontological status quo and in the mode of death "als des radikalsten Ereignisses jener Verneinung"<sup>239</sup>: Jesus is the absolute Heilsbringer in so far as he is the one "...der im Tod jede innerweltliche Zukunft aufgibt"<sup>240</sup>. This sharply contrasts Tillich's and Rahner's above-mentioned conviction that man's existence in its dialectical character is either "open to the ontological structures of being" (Tillich) or transcendently united with God who as "dieses heilige Geheimnis auch die bergende Nähe ist, die vergebende Intimität, die Heimat selber, die Liebe, die sich mitteilt, das Heimliche, zu dem man von der Unheimlichkeit seiner eigenen Lebensleere und -bedrohtheit fliehen und ankommen kann."<sup>241</sup> As this claim could not be maintained in the face of man's experience man's existence is now totally devalued and emptied of any positive aspect. Ironically enough the content of the divine revelation or of salvation as essence or of the presence of the absolute remains totally empty and without any positive content as it is dialectically dependent on the prior definition of existence: philosophically revelation is defined through man's existence, whereas theologically the very opposite is intended.

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238 I, 156.

239 p.210.

240 *ibid.*

241 cf. footnote 186.

Existentialist theology is thus in a dilemma. It wants to do justice both to the criterion of the unity of reality and to the criterion that theological assumptions at least must not contradict actual experience. To do justice to the former, the claim of thinking, Tillich and Rahner have to claim the presence of salvation in existence. To do justice to the latter, the claim of experience, they have to admit the absence of salvation and must therefore introduce the category of revelation and of the transcendent which cancels out the claim of the unity of reality. Both at the same time seem to be impossible.

However, there is a slight difference between Rahner's and Tillich's way of coping with this dilemma. As I pointed out Tillich claims the actual ontological presence of salvation in which we participate ontologically. We are not conscious of that though; therefore this does not affect our experience. However, this leaves untouched the question *why* man does not become or is not conscious of it. Tillich at least concedes the structural possibility of experiencing salvation and can therefore be tied down to his claim.

Rahner tries to solve the problem more elegantly: he avoids the question for actual experience altogether by stressing the fact that God (as salvation) actually is the *transcendental* condition of man's existence, which is a priori not open to experience. Due to his transcendental approach Rahner is able to integrate the absence of experience into his system. Nevertheless he goes by the assumption of an absolute *future* of God as salvation. Any *presence* in which salvation could be experienced is excluded. And, more important, this means that Rahner cannot convey any proof for his concept of salvation through experience. Rahner wrote a revealing passage about the conditions and limits of his theology and of any theology which wants to take seriously christianity's claim of the facticity (if not even presence) of salvation: "Es ist für ein heute zu realisierendes Verständnis von Erlösung von grösster Wichtigkeit, dass ihre Verkündigung von vorneherein für immer so dargelegt wird, dass die *Gesamtgeschichte der Menschheit* immer und überall unter der vergebenden Liebe Gottes in Christo steht, dieses Erlösungsereignis des Kreuzes Christi also nicht *so* Ursache der Erlösheit ist, dass es nicht (oder auch nur in wesentlich anderer Weise) Ursache des Heils der vorchristlichen Menschheit wäre. Sonst setzt sich der Prediger der skeptischen Frage aus, was sich den 'seit' Christus in der Welt geändert hat. Weil aber seit jeher und immer vergebende

Selbstmitteilung Gottes (auf Christus hin) in der Welt wirksam war, ist die Frage, was sich denn 'seit' Christus zum Besseren gewandt habe, von vorneherein falsch gestellt oder jedenfalls sekundär. Wir haben gar keine Möglichkeit, empirisch schlechthin ausserhalb des 'experimentum Christi' zu treten und zu sehen, wie es mit der Welt ohne Christus bestellt wäre."<sup>242</sup> Rahner on the one hand sees that "experience" actually is one of the criteria which theology has to face and to meet. On the other hand his theology cannot give any answer which does not exceed or transcend this question, though it is of course dialectically dependent on it. The problem remains unsolved.

#### E) Salvation and Predestination

One final and more general point has to be considered. It hopefully became quite evident that the framework of Tillich's and Rahner's concept of salvation as overcoming of alienation is human "consciousness": the self-alienation of man which *is* his alienation from God must (and according to both *can*) be overcome by a change of consciousness, by a change in man's self-understanding. In both Tillich's and Rahner's theology finally the saving character of salvation is not any actual impact on man himself from outside. It is his *assumption* of the facticity of salvation which changes him. And it is certainly psychologically true that for the individual whose self-understanding changes also the perception of reality changes, and that means that *subjectively* also reality itself seems to change. Thus possibly the notion of experience is *subjectively inherent* in Tillich's and Rahner's theology but due to its very character cannot be expressed *objectively*. But this leaves untouched the possibility that it might be true *subjectively*, even for every subject (and the latter is certainly what existentialism claims). And surely this is what is the positive legacy of "existentialist theology". Not only is it a remarkable attempt to come to terms with the altered situation of religion and theology in a post-enlightenment and secular society. Also its emphasis on consciousness and the insight that a change of self-understanding may subjectively (and possibly one day also objectively) change reality.

However, being a sort of Bewusstseinstheologie Rahner's and Tillich's system have a theological implication which finally must be considered and which leads us back to more traditional or

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242 Sacramentum mundi, Vol.I, p.1163-1164.

revelatory concepts of theology: it is the question of how one can gain this altered self-understanding in order to participate in the process through which man's existential reality may actually change. Why do some people have the consciousness of the a priori, transcendental grace (Rahner) or of their being united with Being itself (Tillich)? And why do some not have this self-understanding if it is supposed to be preferable? This is the point at which in classical theological systems the question of predestination was treated. In his famous book Courage to be Tillich answered this question by saying having or not having this courage was a matter of "grace"<sup>243</sup>. Thus using the old theological concept of the absolute and transcendent will of God Tillich makes everything dependent on the divine decision according to his "protestant principle" that "in relation to God everything is by God"<sup>244</sup>; Tillich admits that only some people experience this grace and that others do not. Therefore his usage of the term "grace" in this context implies the whole problem of predestinatio either simplex or even gemina. Rahner has some more difficulties: as secular and christian self-understanding are identical (as man himself must be considered to be the event of God's ontological self-communication) it is totally a matter of personal decision whether one chooses to consider oneself to be a secular human being or whether one sees oneself as the event of God's ontological self-communication. But who would not rather see himself as the latter if this conveyed an alteration in his attitude towards reality with the above-mentioned psychological effects. Nevertheless not every one shares Rahner's opinions about the ontological conditions of man. Therefore in Rahner's theology there is at least one undefined spot: there must be some other force (be it predestination, fate or whatever) which *graciously* actualizes the potentiality in man's consciousness to see God as his gracious transcendental condition. This force is not explained or mentioned in Rahner's approach. And the difficulty is that it could not ever possibly be mentioned at all because it would question the logical *necessity* of God's being the transcendental condition of man's subjectivity. Finally here is a sort of contradiction in Rahner's system which remains unsolved. Tillich with his introduction of the term "grace" goes back to categories from outside his

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243 p.87.

244 III,141.

theological approach. Rahner is altogether unable to consider the problem if he wants to maintain the consistency of his theological approach.

### III.2.2 Critique

Finally we have to state that existentialist theology generally like those of Paul Tillich and Karl Rahner does not provide the urgently needed theological solution of the predicament soteriology is in nowadays. Both criteria which I developed in the beginning *together* seem to make any theology impossible if it wants to pursue the claim of the facticity of salvation: either one does justice to actual experience and must concede that whatever salvation might mean is absent. Then the only possibility is to leave the realm of our existential reality and to *hope* for salvation from outside reality. But if one also wants to meet the requirements of thinking, if one does not want to give up the idea of the unity of reality, then also this solution becomes impossible. We have to see that with both criteria together a successful approach towards soteriology becomes impossible: our experience, if it is supposed to be justifiable before the thinking, tells us that salvation is absent. In distinction from Tillich we have to say that *asking for salvation* does not presuppose its ontological presence. Rather, it proves its absence: the idea of God as the overcoming of our alienation, God as salvation, still presupposes a second, divine realm beyond our reality because it still goes by the all-decisive and fundamental assumption of *God* itself. Otherwise there is nothing but our bare reality which makes us ask and long for salvation.

Moreover in this context also the old problem of natural theology versus revelatory theology again became virulent and it became obvious that the problem of natural theology is not yet obsolete or even solved. If one wants to mediate between christian and secular thinking natural theology will always be necessary. But there will always be a gap or a break in it when it comes to deal with those things which *exceed* the secular worldview. And these things will always have to be dealt with; otherwise the whole attempt to mediate was unnecessary because there was no difference between the two worldviews. Both the necessity to mediate and the incompatibility of natural and revelatory theology is a structural problem for theology in general.

It is to the credit of theologians like Rahner and Tillich that they dared a new synthesis of both in a time when all attempts of natural theology seemed to be discredited by the theology of Karl Barth, the "Church Father of the 20th century" as he has been called. Without theologians like Rahner and Tillich theology would have become alienated even more from the secular world than it is today. In the last analysis, however, even they have not been wholly successful in mediating and explaining the claim of the christian gospel. The christian concept of salvation seems to exclude modern secular thinking and vice versa. Either must be wrong.



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