KARL RAHNER AND HANS URS VON BALTHASAR ON SALVIFIC TRUTH

1.   Introduction

The search for truth has always figured large throughout the history of philosophy. However, truth, in Latin *veritas* and in Greek *aletheia*, has proved to be quite elusive. One of our most elementary concepts, it is notoriously difficult to define. The classic definition, followed by a great many philosophers throughout history is the correspondence or adequation of thought to reality. Parmenides (fl. c. 480 BC) was the first to individuate this relational quality of truth and his insight was codified in the widely-used mediaeval formulation: "*adaequatio rei et intellectus*". This definition pinpoints the inter-relation between the intelligibility of the world and intelligent activity.

Aristotle (384-322 BC) was then responsible for the decisive impetus towards the development of the concept. He analyzed the act of knowing and theorized that one cannot speak of truth or falsity on the mere basis of a conceptual image of a thing; one can only speak of truth or falsity with the successive act of judgment wherein one asserts or denies that some thing *is* or *is not*. It is only here that our knowledge can be true or false, depending on whether it succeeds or fails to meet reality as it is. Thus truth, properly speaking, is in the intellect:

> As for 'being' *qua* truth, and 'not-being' *qua* falsity, since they depend upon combination and separation, and taken together as concerned with the arrangement of the parts of a contradiction (since the true has affirmation when the subject and the predicate are combined, and negation where they are divided; but the false has the contrary arrangement. How it happens that we combine or separate in thought is another question. By 'combining or separating in thought' I mean thinking them not as a succession but as a unity) for 'falsity' and 'truth' are not in things … but in *thought*; and with regard to simple concepts and essences there is not truth or falsity even in thought …[1]

According to the Stagyrite, we know the truth about something only when we know its cause; that is, when we move from noticing that something *is* (*oti*, or *quod est*), to establishing *why it is* in a necessary, universal and specific manner (*dioti*, or *propter quid*). "Thus it is clear that Wisdom is knowledge of certain principles and causes".[2] The key idea here is that truth is the measuring up to one another of understanding and object.

This way of thinking of truth can be termed the 'logical' conception. As a model, it achieves its classical form in Thomas Aquinas (1224/5-1274) and considers truth to lie in the intellect or understanding. The metaphor used is that of a reflection in a mirror which

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[1] ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysics*, VI, 1027b 18-28 : *Metaphysics*, translated by Hugh Tredennick, London 1980, 21ff.

[2] ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysics*, I, 982a 1-3 : *Metaphysics*, translated by Hugh Tredennick, London 1980, 2.

could be faithful or less so. Now, human understanding involves certain characteristics such as predication and the use of tenses, characteristics that are identical with those of human language. This is indeed no coincidence.

For, one can have no access to oneself or to the divine, independently of one's life experience and language. It is language, which, in its various forms enables the human person to conceive of and transmit his or her world to others. The rationality of the human person is qualified by his or her symbol-producing capacity.

Another definition of truth, which was already old in the eleventh century when Anselm (1033-1109) took it up and popularized it, is the identification of truth and rightness: *veritas est rectitudo sola mente percipibilis*. This definition can be termed the 'ontological' vision of truth, a version that is closely linked with Anselm's way of looking at things.[3] Here, truth is seen as inhering in things; it is to be found in *objects* insofar as they fulfill what is in the divine mind. It also affirms that there is no such thing as created truth: truth is eternal and is only one thing, the same in all things that have truth. As such 'truth' can be ferreted out by the intellect which is such that it can recognize the 'rightness' of things which constitutes their truth. It is this definition which will be criticized in this paper for it moves too quickly to knowledge of things as knowledge of the mind of God and does not take enough cognizance of the role of the understanding within the context of the linguistic community.

Theologians often falsely think that consideration of such philosophical frameworks are only tangential to their main work. They may tend to believe that confessing the resurrection of Christ or the mystery of the Trinity is more important than worrying about the theological consequences of such arcane-sounding differences in slant in gazing on such an abstract notion as truth.

Indeed, however, truth has a vexed role in theology. It is asserted, but always seems to run into barriers when the question of justification or assertion arises. For, theological statements present us with a special problem: how could one perceive the referent of a theological statement? If God is one than whom no greater can be thought, there seems to remain no standpoint outside of everything from which to judge whether what is said of God is true. Must we therefore hold that theological statements cannot be experienced but must only be believed or credited on authority?

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[3] I owe this conceptualization of a 'difference in slant' between Anselm and Aquinas which constitutes a distinct difference in feeling in the way the two look on truth to GERTRUDE ELIZABETH MARGARET ANSCOMBE's excellent article: *Truth: Anselm or Aquinas*, in *New Blackfriars* 66 (1985) 82-98.

Karl Barth (1886-1968) sums up this problem in a nutshell. He states that "only God himself can speak of God".[4] Theological assertions are expected to be, not human words, but, words of God. Yet they always remain words of human beings. This dividedness between the legitimate expectations that theology be what its name purports it to be and the just recognition that it seemingly cannot constitutes the peculiar jeopardy of theology in the matter of truth.[5] The only solution that appears possible to Barth is for the theologian to speak as witness to God's words, for the "proclaimed word of God [means the] human speech of God in which and through which God himself speaks of himself".[6] However, for Barth, one can never be completely certain that this, in fact, is occurring.[7] He claims that Christian theology can experience truth only insofar as it does not know about or ask about it as truth. It then runs the risk, however, of being reduced to the status of unreflective thinking in the presence of a self-revealing deity. This is an accusation that has often been made against Barth's theology.

Still further, is appearance the same as reality? Feuerbach (1804-1872), in *The Essence of Religion*, argued that "in the object of religion which we call *theos* in Greek and *Gott* in German, nothing but the essence of man is expressed".[8] For "God is the nature of man regarded as absolute truth".[9] Thus, this form of truth is a mere illusion: what seems to be about God is really about man.[10]

If such barriers were insurmountable, the situation would undoubtedly be a serious one since theology could then be accused of being promulgated by thoughtless speech and empty words and one could then additionally ponder whether the truth and the false *could* be experienced in theological assertions.

One must also steer away from the idea, sometimes attractive, that theology has to do with meaning but not with truth, and that what is important in theological assertions is their power to present meanings to contemplate instead of their truthful or untruthful

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[4] KARL BARTH, *Das Wort Gottes als Aufgabe der Theologie*, 1922, as quoted in ROBERT P. SCHARLEMANN, *The Being of God*, New York 1981, 7.

[5] BARTH called this jeopardy the '*Bedrängnis*' of theology.

[6] KARL BARTH, *Church Dogmatics*, I/1, edited by G.W. Bromiley – T.F. Torrance, Edinburgh 1956, 97, as quoted in ROBERT P. SCHARLEMANN, *The Being of God*, New York 1981, 8.

[7] See KARL BARTH, *Church Dogmatics*, I/1, edited by G.W. Bromiley – T.F. Torrance, Edinburgh 1956, 95, in ROBERT P. SCHARLEMANN, *The Being of God*, New York 1981, 8.

[8] LUDWIG FEUERBACH, *The Essence of Religion*, in *Des Wesen der Religion*, Leipzig 1851, 10, as quoted in ROBERT P. SCHARLEMANN, *The Being of God*, New York 1981, 9.

[9] LUDWIG FEUERBACH, *The Essence of Religion*, in *Des Wesen der Religion*, Leipzig 1851, 14, as quoted in ROBERT P. SCHARLEMANN, *The Being of God*, New York 1981, 10.

[10] See LUDWIG FEUERBACH, *The Essence of Religion*, in *Des Wesen der Religion*, Leipzig 1851, 14, as quoted in ROBERT P. SCHARLEMANN, *The Being of God*, New York 1981, 10.

connections to 'being'.[11] Arendt (1906-1975) here, would have a point if one were to postulate that the objects to which the mind in its capacity of intellect is related are only some somewhat elusive entities directly present to the mind alone. However, such a way of talking about meaning is confusing and harmful:

> And nothing is more wrong-headed than calling meaning (*Meinen*) a mental activity! Unless, that is, one is setting out to produce confusion. (It would also be possible to speak of an activity of butter when it rises in price, and if no problems are produced by this it is harmless.)[12]

Such a misguided presupposition depends on a picture of the self that is radically private and normally concealed. The social and historical circumstances in which the individual has any thoughts or feelings are radically played down and the strong temptation is to withdraw from what one says or does to attempt to achieve access to one's mind non-linguistically. The ascetic-sounding goal is to retreat from the world; to withdraw from the body in the hope of discovering something interesting about oneself and the divine. The community with the natural expressiveness of people's bodies, is thereby occluded.

On the one side, such an individualist-mentalist model leads to the depiction of the relationship of the believer with God to be one which is both direct and inward; one which excludes in advance all mediation by a historical community with tradition, rituals and so on.

On the other side, Wittgenstein (1889-1951) reminds us that all meaning must have conceptual links with the human system of doing things together. One's self-consciousness is created and sustained through one's being with others. There is nothing inside one's head that does not owe its existence to one's collaboration in a historical community.

The aim of this paper is twofold. Firstly it will show that, in the respective theologies of Karl Rahner (1904-1984) and Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905-1988), one can discern a parallel on the lines of the one presented above with respect to the different manners of conceiving of truth employed by Anselm and Aquinas. Secondly, it will present criticism of the former, and argumentation favouring the latter, notion of truth.

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[11] See HANNAH ARENDT, *The Life of the Mind*, 2 vols., New York 1977-1978, in ROBERT P. SCHARLEMANN, *The Being of God*, The Seabury Press, New York, 1981, 3.
[12] LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN, *Philosophical Investigations*, translated by G.E.M. Anscombe, Oxford 1974, §693.

2.   Karl Rahner

It is now time to introduce the topic by dealing succinctly with the heart of the theology of an amateur theologian, as Rahner liked to call himself.[13] In actual fact, Karl Rahner was, perhaps, the most influential theologian of the twentieth century and his achievement has been compared to that of Thomas Aquinas in his own age.[14] His sheer output of work was awesome: his bibliography numbers more than four thousand entries, including the great sixteen volumes of his *Schriften zur Theologie*, and his works cover almost every aspect of religious thought. His approach is contemporary and considered faithful to the Christian tradition. His thought is deep and his writings complex. His quest, however, is simple enough:

> [His] genius was to link the human search for fulfilment with the restlessness implanted in the individual's heart by God and to correlate God's Trinitarian presence in historical, somatic reality with what he affirmed to be the signs of God's grace investing human life with dignity and beatific destiny.[15]

In other words, while Rahner's entire theological project is not presented anywhere in a comprehensive manner, his central idea is the incarnational principle that God and the human, the latter echoing relentlessly and restlessly the Augustinian prayer,[16] must always be found together. His thought strongly reflects the Ignatian spirituality he was educated in: the mysticism of 'joy in the world' and that of 'finding God in all things'. His outlook on God's all-pervasive nearness, symbolized (in the real sense) by the stupendous act of the incarnation, is expressed by his fellow-Jesuit poet: "The world is charged with the grandeur of God".[17] In his own words:

> I do think that in comparison with other philosophy and theology that influenced me, Ignatian spirituality was indeed more significant and important … I think that the spirituality of Ignatius himself, which one learned through the practice of prayer and religious formation, was more significant for me than all learned philosophy and theology inside and outside the order.[18]

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[13] See J. A. DI NOIA, *Karl Rahner*, in *The Modern Theologians*, edited by David F. Ford, Oxford 1997, 118.
[14] See WILLIAM V. DYCH, *Karl Rahner*, London 1992, 1.
[15] *Karl Rahner*, edited by GEFFREY B. KELLY, Edinbugh 1992, 1.
[16] "Our hearts are made for you, O God, and they are restless until they rest in you!" (AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO, *Confessions*, I, 1 : *The Confessions of St Augustine*, translated by F.J. Sheed (= Spiritual Masters), London 1944, 1.)
[17] GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS, *God's Grandeur* (= *The Penguin Poets*), London 1953, 27.
[18] *Karl Rahner at 75 Years of Age*, Interview with LEO O'DONOVAN for *America Magazine*, in *Karl Rahner*, edited by Geffrey B. Kelly, Edinbugh 1992, 6.

2.1 *Philosophical influences*

When, during a visit to Fordham University in New York in 1980, Rahner was asked to say a few words about his philosophy, he is said to have simply answered: "I do not have a philosophy".[19] This statement was not just a modest disclaimer but throws light on his method of doing theology. He sees the first task facing theology to be the question of what knowledge has come to mean in our culture. He sees its description to be the following:

> Knowledge achieves its true nature and reaches its goal only when it sees through and thus dominates what is known, when it breaks it down into what is for us unquestionable and obvious, when it seeks to work only with clear ideas … when it is interested only in the functional connections of the details of the world of its experience.[20]

While Rahner does not question the value of this vision of knowledge, he does query its exclusive claim to be the only or even the most fundamental kind of human knowledge. And whereas he used to say that he only did the minimum amount of philosophy as to be able to function as a systematic theologian, it was his theory of knowledge that accounted for the original approach in Rahner's theological method.

The influences in Rahner's philosophy have been variously attributed. George Lindbeck (1927-) has argued that his thinking was based on a Heideggerian interpretation of the metaphysics of knowledge put forth by Aquinas, together with an ontological anthropology.[21] This attribution has since been seen as an understatement. For while Rahner does indeed draw heavily upon Aquinas, his reading has been marked by German transcendental philosophy as filtered through the works of Joseph Maréchal (1878-1944) and Pierre Rousselot (1878-1915). During his years at the Jesuit scholasticate (1926-1928), he was introduced to Kant (1724-1804) and Maréchal. The latter was widely considered to be the father of Transcendental Thomism. His *Le Point de départ de la Métaphysique* and especially its famous fifth volume, *Le Thomisme devant la Philosophie Critique*, exercised great influence. There, he argued that, if applied consistently, Kant's transcendental reflection on human knowledge need not have met with the dead-end of unexplored judgments about God, the soul and the world that Kant came up against. For, according to Kant, the categorial world is the limit of human knowledge. Thus, man is a prisoner in his own finite nature: he can only know what is

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[19] See WILLIAM V. DYCH, *Karl Rahner*, London 1992, 18.

[20] KARL RAHNER, *The Human Question of Meaning in Face of the Absolute Mystery of God*, in *Theological Investigations*, XVIII, London 1983, 95.

[21] See GEORGE A. LINDBECK, *The Thought of Karl Rahner*, in *Christianity and Crisis* 25 (1965) 211-215, in LOUIS ROBERTS, *The Achievement of Karl Rahner*, New York 1967, 9.

finite.[22] Hegel, however, recognized that it is not possible to know a limitation as such without having transcended it in some manner. One cannot know a single disparate object as such if there were nothing more beyond or behind it or the sum total of all such objects. In the same vein, according to Maréchal, if applied consistently, Kant's method should lead to metaphysical realism, not critical idealism.[23] The latter's mistake was his failure to observe that one of the *a priori* conditions of possibility for the speculative intellect's objective knowledge is the dynamism of the human mind.

The gulf Kant opened up between speculative and practical reasoning was filled in by Kant's successors. Fichte (1762-1814), for instance proposed a reconciliation based on the dynamism of the human spirit. According to him, the human subject is conscious that his activity in the world of knowing and willing is fundamentally a striving toward the Infinite Absolute that attracts them. His position was of great influence on Maréchal who saw his philosophy as a way to overcome Kant's critical idealism. Maurice Blondel (1861-1941) and Henri Bergson (1859-1941) then took up the argument and their combined contribution was of great influence on Catholic theologians such as Pierre Rousselot, who, like the Thomists of the early years of the past century attempted to free scholastic philosophy from Cartesian distortions that had crept into the neo-scholastic manuals.

To go beyond Kant, Maréchal integrated the insights of Fichte, Blondel and Rousselot. He was, however, mostly impressed by Fichte, whose philosophy he developed to show that a necessary *a priori* condition for any human knowledge is God's real existence. He also showed that, since God's real existence is a necessary condition for any speculative judgment, then all human knowledge consists in metaphysical affirmations. Any judgment that contradicts God's existence is, therefore, a contradiction in terms.[24] This dynamism of the human intellect (implying the metaphysical grounding in the infinite, final cause of all order in the mind and in the world) served to unite

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[22] According to Kant, objective knowledge about the three 'regulative ideals' is a metaphysical illusion. Their function as regulative ideals is to make possible the organization of the constituted objective judgments into a coherent intelligible whole. Kant therefore argued that, for the sake of purity of one's search for truth, one should ideally be agnostic about the existence of God.

[23] Kant, in his philosophy, opened a gulf between noumena and phenomena, sense and intellect, speculative and practical reason.

[24] This position is surely reminiscent of Anselm's for the latter's ontological argument claims that it is contradictory to assert that God does not exist. It claims that, although it involves a matter of fact and not merely of formal definition, the answer to the question of the existence of God is a self-answering metaphysical one: it is seen as soon as the idea contained in it is correctly understood. One, therefore, does not need experience to confirm or deny God's existence.

phenomena and noumena, speculative and practical reason, and sense and intellect, for it shows the Infinite Final Cause to be the condition of possibility for all.

This Maréchalian critique of Kant served to open up the reading of both Kant and Aquinas and to demonstrate their remarkably similar vision of the dynamic structure of human knowledge. In turn it profoundly influenced Rahner's own reading of the metaphysics of the Angelic Doctor and led him to formulate his own synthesis of philosophical anthropology with traditional dogmatic theology:

> Certainly I learned a variety of things from [Heidegger], even if I have to say that I owe my most basic, decisive philosophical direction, insofar as it comes from someone else, more, in fact, to the Belgian philosopher and Jesuit, Joseph Maréchal. His philosophy already moved beyond the traditional neo-scholasticism. I brought that direction from Maréchal to my studies with Heidegger and it was not superseded by him.[25]

Rahner held that a finite system such as man could never know itself as finite if it were nothing more than a finite system. For him, the human person is a being of infinite horizon, a horizon that continues to recede the more answers man gives himself. The human person realizes that an 'anticipation' of Infinite Being is the necessary condition for the possibility of both finite knowledge and human freedom. This anticipation is only possible if the human person, aware of his or her finite nature, is able to transcend it.

For him, while it is true that this 'anticipation' does not present God directly as an object to the human spirit (transcendental experience has no categorial content), in its experience as a necessary and actual condition of human knowledge and human action, there is consent to the existence of Absolute Being.

2.2 *The frontier between philosophy and theology*

Rahner the theologian held that philosophy and theology are necessarily correlated in one unitary structure: the perfect fit between the human mind (or better *Geist*) as receptacle and divine revelation as contents. He, for instance holds that: "a really *theological* question can only be put, […] if it is understood as being simultaneously a philosophical one".[26] For instance, he argues that Jesus of Nazareth is the perfect answer

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[25] *Karl Rahner at 75 Years of Age*, Interview with LEO O'DONOVAN for *America Magazine*, in *Karl Rahner*, edited by Geffrey B. Kelly, T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1992, 6. Rahner's *Spirit in the World* should be seen as an engagement in a 'Maréchalian' and Thomistic dialogue with Heidegger from whom he borrows various neologisms. However, even here, the borrowing is little more than verbal and the real debt is to Maréchal and Rousselot, and ultimately Kant.

[26] KARL RAHNER, *Theological Investigations*, IX, London 1972, 34.

to the question that philosophical anthropology shows to be an innate quest of the human spirit.[27] Thus:

> Philosophy and theology should always be done in concert. They should be continually and dialogically confronted in their respective teaching: on the one hand, the profane setting of the question, a reflection on the horizon of the problem, a prior understanding preparatory to revelation; on the other hand, revelation considered as the answer to the problems posed in the actual, existential situation, which already has its characteristic features in spiritual history.[28]

As such, if "nature, understood to be spiritual and transcendental, is an intrinsic, constitutive and necessary element not of grace as such, but of the reality and the event, in which grace can be effectively given",[29] then philosophy is to theology as nature is to grace. The essential task of philosophy, which is to study the structure of the receptacle is already able to telling us something *formal* about that which it is capable of receiving: God's self-revelation. It is then the task of the theologian to study the content of divine revelation as it was historically given. Rahner's theology is steeped in anthropology. He has frequently drawn attention to the 'anthropological shift' (the '*anthropologische Wende*') as a critical point in the history of philosophy which should not be reversed. He is convinced that dogmatic theology should be 'theological anthropology' where the basic question is the human being:

> … Dogmatic theology today must be theological anthropology and … such an 'anthropocentric' view is necessary and fruitful. The question of man and its answering … [should be regarded] as the whole of dogmatic theology itself. This statement does not contradict the 'theocentricity' of all theology … As soon as man is understood as the being who is absolutely transcendent in respect of God, 'anthropocentricity' and 'theocentricity' in theology are not opposites but strictly one and the same thing seen from two sides. Neither of the two aspects can be comprehended at all without the other.[30]

Man is *not* one particular theme amongst others. The urgency of the contemporary question about God can only be approached by asking in the first place about the human person who, in turn, is essentially open to the infinite. For the one's experience of oneself is always an experience of the infinite that accompanies the one's categorial experiences. This was brought out in Rahner's attempted doctoral dissertation subsequently published

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[27] KARL RAHNER, *Theological Investigations*, IX, London 1972, 28-29.

[28] KARL RAHNER, *Zur Neuordnung der Theologischen Studien*, translated as *La Riforma degli Studi Teologici*, by G. MORETTO, Brescia 1970, as quoted in PETER SERRACINO INGLOTT *Beginning Philosophy*, Malta 1987, 197.

[29] As quoted in PETER SERRACINO INGLOTT *Beginning Philosophy*, Malta 1987, 196.

[30] KARL RAHNER, *Theological Investigations*, IX, London 1972, 28.

as *Spirit in the World*.[31] In this important work, he presents his reading of just one article of the comprehensive *Summa theologiae*, the one in which the Angelic Doctor affirms the necessity of reference to a sensory context for understanding.[32] Karl Rahner justifies this 'limitation' by arguing that this article is central to the understanding of Aquinas' theory of knowledge. In this important work, he typically goes much beyond the parameters of a purely historical analysis of Aquinas' metaphysics of understanding. In it he distinguishes both practical understanding (*'Zugriff'*) and theoretical understanding (*'Begriff'*) from the implicit pre-conceptual pre-grasp (*'Vorgriff'*) of Infinite Being which is necessary for the intellect to, for instance, come to know itself through the process of judgment.[33] This *'Vorgriff'* is the dynamism of the human intellect as it strives towards the range of all possible objects: "On account of the *'Vorgriff'*, the single object is always already known under the horizon of the absolute ideal of knowledge and posited within the conscious domain of all that which may be known".[34] As such, the *'Vorgriff'* is conscious; while the *'Vorgriff'* is the condition of possibility for our knowledge, it is also some kind of knowledge in itself. The natural question now is: *whither* does man's anticipating knowledge transcend the single object which it grasps?[35]

For one must eventually come to the essential question whether the *a priori* structure of the human person is something that only exists in the human being's subjectivity or whether it corresponds to an objectively existing reality that is of an essentially different order of reality than man: the reality we linguistically call God.

2.3 *The heart of Rahner's theology*

The history of Western philosophy has typically offered three directions in answer to the question put above: the line of philosophy which extends from Plato explains that the *'Vorgriff'* extends towards Being as such; the Kantian answer is that the horizon within which knowledge is possible is that of sense intuition; whereas the answer

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[31] Originally published as *Geist in Welt*, Innsbruck 1939. Rahner subsequently entrusted work on an expanded edition to Johann Baptist Metz. This second edition was published in 1957 in Munich. It was the edition that was translated into English as *Spirit in the World*.

[32] "*Nisi convertendo se ad phantasmata*". (THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa theologiae* I, 84, 7 : *Summa theologiae*, edited by Thomas Gilby and others, XII, Cambridge 1968, 40.)

[33] Here, Rahner's thought runs parallel to Heidegger's who argued that the *Dasein* is the questioner whose question about Being goes through the beings of the world in its pre-grasp of the Horizon of Being. The essential and very important difference between the two is that Rahner, unlike Heidegger affirms that the term of the dynamism of the human intellect is not Nothingness but Infinite Horizon.

[34] KARL RAHNER, *Hearer of the Word*, translated by Joseph Donceel, New York 1994, 47-48.

[35] See KARL RAHNER, *Hearer of the Word*, translated by Joseph Donceel, New York 1994, 48-49.

proffered by Heidegger points towards nothingness.[36] This last reply is dismissed by Rahner on the grounds that the 'Vorgriff' towards that which is illimited already reveals the finiteness of all the immediate objects of our experience. He also sees, in Kant's argument a contradiction between the act by which the statement is asserted and the content of the statement (that 'the act within which our objects are conceptualized is the horizon of sense experience which does not reach beyond space and time').[37] He therefore goes for an answer that fits in with the presupposition of the *philosophia perennis*:

> Man is a transcendent being insofar as all of his knowledge and all of his conscious activity is grounded in a pre-apprehension ('*Vorgriff*') of "being" as such, in an unthematic but ever-present knowledge of the infinity of reality (as we can put it provisionally and somewhat boldly). [38]

This pre-apprehension of the unconceivable fullness of reality (the '*Vorgriff*') is at once the condition of possibility both for knowledge and for the individual thing objectively known. It does not immediately put God as an object before the mind, for it never represents an object in itself but the possibility of all knowledge of objects. However, the representation of Absolute Being is always already co-affirmed, even if not represented. The one's ability to transcend oneself is much more than a merely subjective ability: it is an infinite quality that is of an essentially different order of reality than oneself and one's world.

Rahner's anthropological approach to theology, in which he uses the transcendental method, finds its core in the concept of the 'supernatural existential'. This concept, which is the same as his concept of transcendental experiences (although under a different aspect) is the central one in his theology. The term 'existential' again comes from Heidegger and is meant to designate those components that are proper to and characteristics of a human existent: those factors that distinguish a human being from other kinds of beings.

Rahner has expressed the conviction that while the distinctions made between nature and grace, revelation and natural metaphysics are justified from the methodological point of view, because grace is a gratuitous offer, they are secondary, additional distinctions in creation. Rahner does insist on the possibility of a pure human

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[36] Rahner sees this latter argument as the logical outcome of a Kant divorced from German Idealism.
[37] See KARL RAHNER, *Hearer of the Word*, translated by Joseph Donceel, New York 1994, 50.
[38] KARL RAHNER, *Foundations of Christian Faith. An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, London 1984, 33.

nature that has not been 'affected' supernaturally, and he does so in order to ensure the gratuitousness of God's grace. Grace as God's free self-communication is gratuitous insofar as we are finite creatures and insofar as we are sinners: for both reasons, grace can never be merited by humanity. However, Rahner also holds that the possibility of pure nature has never been a reality. Pure nature is only a 'remainder concept' (*Restbegriff*).[39] The human person has never been pure nature; God's offer of grace is always present as an *a priori* transcendental. The gratuitousness of this offer means that such a transcendental is a *supernatural* one: it is God's free sharing of Godself in God's Trinitarian reality with humanity and God's communication of Godself.[40]

God's offer of grace, therefore, is a reality that is present at the very core of the human person's existence in knowledge and freedom: man is not able to abandon this transcendental manner of his being. Thus, this gratuitous offer determines the human person to such an extent, that it continues to determine his or her existence both ontically and ontologically,[41] even when refused. It does so *a priori*, that is, transcendentally, preceding all the human person's decisions. This state of being means God is not a foreign or alien term for human-kind.[42] One cannot say something about God without saying something about the human person and vice versa.[43]

This central concern of Rahner's theological work is God's indwelling at the very centre of the existence of every human person. The human being is seen in his or her very transcendental structure as being called by God to supernatural salvation. This state of being called is a permanent and ontological factor.

This transcendental structure does *not* mean that the truth that God is mystery is forgotten. Certainly, Rahner's way of speaking about God is marked with a certain vagueness:

> … [T]he concrete place where man's experience of himself is also his experience of God is at the same time his experience that is transcendental and based on categorial objects and

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[39] See KARL RAHNER, *Theological Investigations*, I, London 1961, 313-314. The 'remainder concept' is a reality that must be postulated in human beings; a reality that remains over when the supernatural existential is subtracted.

[40] This idea is, according to Herbert Vorgrimler, the most important in Rahner's theology. (See HERBERT VORGRIMLER, *Karl Rahner: His Life, Thought, and Work*, London 1965, 28.)

[41] The influence of Heidegger upon Rahner is very evident here.

[42] One must here note that – rather like Anselm's ontological argument, which is rooted in his belief and is couched in the experience of prayer – Rahner's supernatural existential factor *pre-supposes* faith. In Rahner's case, it is a concept that provides answers to certain theological problems; for instance it helps answer a number of questions within the theology of grace.

[43] See KARL RAHNER, *Theological Investigations*, IX, London 1967, 28.

that his reflection about the transcendentality of this experience does not, in Rahner's view, bring about that experience, but is precisely a later reflection about it.[44]

In selecting a name to describe the experience, one would be restricting the same experience. Also, the condition of the possibility of all categorial distinction cannot itself be marked off from anything else through distinction. In this light, Rahner tends to speak about God by using such terms as: infinite horizon, the fullness of being, the ground of all hope, the unlimited distance, the sacred or holy mystery, love, faithfulness and truth.[45] The incomprehensibility of God; the experience of God as an experience of emptiness, darkness and non-understanding looms large in Rahner's theology:

> My Christianity is … an act in which I allow myself to be released into the incomprehensible mystery and is consequently in no sense an explanation of the world or my own existence. It is rather an act in which I am prevented from regarding any experience or any understanding of reality, however good or illuminating I may be, as definitive or as entirely intelligible in itself … [The] Christian … is … 'the most radical of all skeptics' … because a Christian – if he really believes in the incomprehensible nature of God – cannot accept any single, individual truth as the ultimate answer to his questioning. Every individual question leads ultimately to the unanswerable question of God.[46]

Rahner introduced the idea of the supernatural existential to provide a better framework for the theology of grace. The supernatural existential is not grace itself but the potency that human beings always have for the love which is God. "This potency is what is inmost and most authentic in them, the centre and root of what they are absolutely … The capacity for the God of self-bestowing personal love is the central and abiding existential of man as he really is".[47] For him, God's offer of grace is a reality that is always present at the very centre of the human person's existence in knowledge and freedom; it could be either accepted or rejected.

It is important to note that before Rahner's work and before the effects of the efforts of the movement of *nouvelle théologie* had begun to set in,[48] the relationship between nature and grace was not without strong traces of 'extrinsecism'. Nature was seen rather negatively: it was only seen as 'possessing' the *potentia oboedientialis*. This meant only a

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[44] KARL-HEINZ WEGER, *Karl Rahner: An Introduction to His Theology*, London 1980, 68.

[45] KARL-HEINZ WEGER, *Karl Rahner: An Introduction to His Theology*, London 1980, 69.

[46] KARL RAHNER, *Christian at the Crossroads*, translated by V. Green, London 1975, as quoted in KARL-HEINZ WEGER, *Karl Rahner: An Introduction to His Theology*, London 1980, 70.

[47] KARL RAHNER, *Theological Investigations*, I, London 1961, 311-312. The exact ontological status of this existential has never been clarified quite adequately in Rahner's works. Clearly it is not justifying grace. Is it, perhaps, a supernatural accident inhering in the soul? And if so, what is its relationship to grace?

[48] The members of this movement, which was active in France following World War II, set themselves the task of re-thinking the relationship between nature and grace. They postulated a '*desiderium naturale visionis beatificae*' which concurred very well with the theology of the Angelic Doctor.

minimal relationship to grace; it implied that as such nature did not obstruct its own perfection through grace.[49] Grace, therefore, was seen not as the real centre and goal of human existence but as an addition: it was, therefore, difficult to conceive of God as the human person's ultimate aim and longing. Grace was seen more as an 'accident', a perfection *added* to man rather than the fulfilment of the human person's innermost dynamism.

The supernatural existential manifests God's will to save the human being as a reality that determines the human person's entire life and being even if he or she rejects God in sin. The freedom of the human person is retained: the supernatural existential factor is an offer made to the human being not a justification of the human person.

This factor, does mean, however, that the logic of faith is never a logic acquired categorially from outside: the historical revelation of God's word comes to the human person who is always *a priori* transcendentally oriented towards this word of God in history: the human person is in a state of continuous expectancy for this word of revelation as a promise of salvation. This openness toward God is not only the condition of the possibility of that which the human person is and has to be but is also the factor that makes revelation possible:

> Firstly, revelation is revelation of salvation and therefore theology is essentially salvation theology … the statement must be taken seriously. Only those things can belong to man's salvation which, when lacking, injure his being and his wholeness. Otherwise he could eschew salvation without thereby being in danger of losing it … In other words, a theological object's signification for salvation … can only be investigated by inquiring at the same time as to man's *saving receptivity for* this object.[50]

The heart of the Christian faith is, ultimately, extremely simple: it is knowing that one is accepted by God in Jesus Christ.[51]

2.4 *What about erring heads?*

The Christian faith has always been convinced that in order to achieve salvation the human person must believe in Jesus Christ as Lord: this is a necessary and absolute

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[49] See KARL RAHNER, *Theological Investigations*, I, London 1961, 309.

[50] KARL RAHNER, *Theological Investigations*, IX, London 1972, 35.

[51] It would be an excursus to the path taken by this paper to comment on Rahner's theology of grace. It should suffice to say that, for the Swabian theologian, justifying grace is primarily uncreated grace: the indwelling of the economic Trinity within the justified person. Created grace is not the efficient cause of uncreated grace but rather its material cause: the ultimate disposition that renders the human spirit apt to receive God's quasi-formal communication (the term serves to distinguish from formal causality, which would imply a negation of the difference between God and the human person) of Godself.

condition, it is an unavoidable way of access to salvation.[52] This teaching, along with the old adage *extra ecclesia nulla salus*,[53] seem to exclude the possibility of salvation for those of erring heads. To be quite fair, this dogmatic pronunciation was made in an era of Christendom, when there was no idea of "the experience of a world-wide and militant atheism, confident of its own self-evident nature".[54]

The contemporary pluralism and the sociological pattern current nowadays means that there are countless people who do not believe in Christianity for a variety of reasons which might range from unfamiliarity with the Christian message to their personal rejection of or indifference towards the Christian faith. Rahner correctly surmised that the idea of exclusion from salvation rankles with the modern Christian who feels that he or she is solidly united with the whole of humanity and does not want a heaven from which so many are excluded in advance.

A parallel problem in this regard is the additional fact that one could never achieve supernatural salvation solely by means of one's good will: a *fides supernaturalis* is required even in the case of a theoretically justified non-Christian; one is sanctified because, in Christ, one shares in God's life. At the same time if one wants to profess the entire Christian faith, one must assert one's belief in the "universal and serious salvific purpose of God towards all men which is true even within the post-paradisean phase of salvation dominated by original sin".[55] While this does not say anything about the individual salvation of the human person, it does mean that it is a salvation really intended for all human beings. Now:

> If, on the one hand, we conceive salvation as something specifically *Christian*, if there is no salvation apart from Christ, if according to Catholic teaching the supernatural divinization of man can never be replaced merely by good will on the part of man but is necessary as something itself given in this earthly life; and if, on the other hand, God has really, truly and seriously intended this salvation for all men – then these two aspects cannot be reconciled in any other way than by stating that every human being is really and truly exposed to that influence of divine, supernatural grace which offers an interior union with God and by means of which God communicates himself whether the individual takes up an attitude of acceptance or of refusal towards this grace.[56]

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[52] See KARL RAHNER, *Theological Investigations*, VI, London 1969, 390-391.

[53] This statement was used by authorities such as Cyprian of Carthage and Fulgentius of Ruspe and in the famous *Unam Sanctam* (1302) by Boniface VIII. It was defined as an infallible statement by the Council of Florence (1438-1445). (See *Enchiridion Symbolorum Definitionum et Declerationum*, edited by H. DENZINGER - A. SCHÖNMETZER, Bologna 1996, §1351, 600-601.)

[54] KARL RAHNER, *Theological Investigations*, IX, London 1972, 146-147. Note that Vatican II in texts such as *Gaudium et spes* 19-22, *Lumen gentium* 16 and *Ad gentes divinitus* 7 does not make any reference to the commonly-held idea that positive atheism could not conceivably be entertained for a considerable period of time by a normal, responsible human being without him becoming personally culpable.

[55] KARL RAHNER, *Theological Investigations*, V, London 1969, 122.

[56] KARL RAHNER, *Theological Investigations*, V, London 1969, 123.

The self-communication on the part of God, which God imparts in the incarnation and the bestowal of grace, is not an optional addition to the human being's reality but rather constitutes the goal of all creation. Also, since God's word effects what it says, even before the human person freely takes up an attitude towards it, it stamps and determines the human nature with the characteristic that has been called the 'supernatural existential'.[57] The expressly Christian revelation, therefore, becomes the explicit statement of the self-revelation of God that the person always experiences implicitly in the depths of his or her being in experiencing his or her limitless openness no matter how unthematic and incomprehensible it always is. One may accept this revelation whenever one really accepts oneself completely, for it already speaks within oneself.[58]

However, precisely because this transcendental aspect is not a categorial experience, it could be differently interpreted, or even repressed or denied. This might happen for reasons for which the individual is not culpable. A refusal of this offer, however, will bring one into contradiction with oneself even in the sphere of one's own being and existence. The transcendental experience is always present of necessity: it is when this is denied in a free action by gravely sinful unfaithfulness to conscience or by a sinful, false interpretation of existence (by considering it as 'utterly absurd', for instance) that one can speak of culpable transcendental atheism which excludes the possibility of salvation for as long as it persists.[59] On the other hand, when such a categorial 'unbeliever' takes up the duties and demands of each day as his or her conscience demands, no matter how the said 'unbeliever' categorially understands and expresses his or her transcendental nature, he or she is not only an 'anonymous theist' but should be called an 'anonymous Christian'.[60]

While an unfavourable historical or sociological situation might obstruct this development, the appellation itself manifests that this fundamental state of salvation is not self-satisfied; it contains an inherent dynamism that moves it forth towards an explicit, categorial expression:

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[57] See KARL RAHNER, *Theological Investigations*, VI, London 1969, 393.
[58] See KARL RAHNER, *Theological Investigations*, IX, London 1972, 156.
[59] See KARL RAHNER, *Theological Investigations*, IX, London 1972, 156.
[60] This reflection does not apply to those who culpably move from a situation of transcendental and categorial theism to reject God, either as sinners, denying God, or by going on to reject God whom they had correctly objectified in real, free unbelief. The latter signification is what was traditionally understood by the appellation 'atheist'.

Hence, it will not be possible in any way to draw the conclusion from this conception that, since man is already an anonymous Christian even without it, [the] explicit preaching of Christianity is superfluous. Such a conclusion would be just as false (and for the same reasons) as to conclude that the sacraments of baptism and penance could be dispensed with because a person can be justified by his subjective acts of faith and contrition even before the reception of these sacraments. The reflex self-realization of a previously anonymous Christianity is demanded (1) by the incarnational and social structure of grace and of Christianity, and (2) because the individual who grasps Christianity in a clearer, purer and more reflective way has, other things being equal, a still greater chance of salvation than someone who is merely an anonymous Christian.[61]

3.   The parallel between Anselm and Rahner

At the same time, the human person is a discursive knower, meaning that his or her knowledge must begin with sense perception and that his or her knowledge progresses through on-going inquiry. Thus the human person is not Being by identity but participates in Being in his or her own finite measure. Rahner's epistemology is basically similar to the Angelic Doctor's. His originality however lies in his attempted anti-Cartesian campaign: he laid bare the tremendous pre-suppositions necessary in even the simplest act of understanding. While Aquinas here finds himself in an anachronistic position, Rahner's effort to remove the illusion that anything could be simply understood is certainly on the same side as Aquinas' epistemology and Wittgenstein's theory of language. However, he did not go far enough.

While it may not seem too evident that Rahner's epistemological and metaphysical line lie parallel to Anselm's – after all Rahner was in dialogue with Aquinas, not Anselm – there are a number of similar points that bear further elucidation.

The first concerns Rahner's postulation of the unity of being and knowing. His metaphysics and epistemology lead him to assert that, in the activity of human questioning, a questioning that inevitably raises the implicit and primordial question of Being, Being reveals itself as luminous self-presence. This does not exactly mean that Being is clearly self-evident:

> … What being is, is not always obvious. We know of it ('*bekannt*') but we do not really know it ('*erkannt*'). Although we know of being, our question is not a rhetorical one. We ask it, because we do not yet really know what we are inquiring about. Finally our question always makes a distinction between being and beings. It is precisely this which enables us to inquire about being. We know of beings, we know beings, we have continually to do

[61] KARL RAHNER, *Theological Investigations*, V, London 1969, 132. The reason why a believing Christian has a 'greater chance' of salvation than a non-Christian is that there is, all things being equal, a greater chance that one who is more reflective and who knows how to express oneself in freedom would be successful in this self-expression than one who only can express one's humanity in a vague and unreflecting manner.

with them, our knowledge refers to them. But we do not know what the being of these beings is. That is why we inquire.[62]

He argues that: "Knowledge is the self-presence of Being and this self-presence is the being of any entity".[63] Now, being is knowledge or truth only to the extent that being is or has Being. For, Rahner, in rejecting an idealist, panentheistic interpretation of the unity of Being and knowing (or what he calls the 'self-luminosity' of Being[64]), maintains that 'Being' is an analogous concept. This, as shown before is a quintessentially Thomistic perspective. However, his exact interpretation appears to locate knowledge or truth[65] in the degree of self-possession an existent enjoys. At any rate, there is very little scope for truth as the fruit of a relation between the intellect and the thing known or at least, this relationship is quite different from the Angelic Doctor's:

> We must … start from this: that being is of and by itself knowing and being known, that being is self-presence … The complete ontic reality of the intellect is that which is actually known. Since this statement refers to the essence, it is also reversible: in order to be actually known, that which is knowable must basically be the ontic reality of the intellect itself … something is known to the extent that it becomes in its being identical with the knowing subject.[66]

Moreover, Rahner holds that intelligibility does *not* 'develop' in being from without; it does not consist only in a relation that is extrinsic to the being itself or in some knowledge that happens to grasp the being in question. He believes that intelligibility belongs intrinsically to the very nature of the being in question: when one affirms being, being is always already expressing itself. Every being has, on account of its very being an "inner ordination to possible knowledge and so to a possible knower".[67] Intelligibility belongs to the essence of every being.

This principle is based on the original and fundamental concept of being from which all other objects of knowledge are but derivations: actual being or *esse*. This original unity of knowable and knowing implies that the intellect and the object have the

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[62] KARL RAHNER, *Hearer of the Word*, translated by Joseph Donceel, New York 1994, 28. This translation contains an error in the first sentence quoted above and reads: "What being is, is always obvious". This error has been corrected in the quotation from the same translation in *A Rahner Reader*, edited by Gerald A. McCool, London 1975, 6.

[63] As quoted in PETER SERRACINO INGLOTT, *Beginning Philosophy*, Malta 1987, 202.

[64] See KARL RAHNER, *Hearer of the Word*, translated by Joseph Donceel, New York 1994, 30.

[65] See KARL RAHNER, *Hearer of the Word*, translated by Joseph Donceel, New York 1994, 39-40, where Rahner equates 'knowledge' and 'truth'.

[66] KARL RAHNER, *Hearer of the Word*, translated by Joseph Donceel, New York 1994, 32.

[67] KARL RAHNER, *Hearer of the Word*, translated by Joseph Donceel, New York 1994, 29.

same origin; in Thomist terms: the intellect and that which is intelligible in act are one.[68] Thus, being is, in itself knowing and knowing is nothing else than the self-presence of being that is inseparable from its very make-up. Knowledge is self-possession or self-presence; being is self-luminosity.

Rahner also argues that one's interpretation of the Angelic Doctor's epistemology would be extremely shallow if one were to interpret the unity of the knowing and the knowable as if it simply meant that the known as such must be known to some knower; that the knower must know something and that it is in this sense that both must be one. For him, what Thomas really means is that, that which is knowable is basically the ontic reality of the intellect itself.[69]

Thus, in Rahner's interpretation of Thomas, there is no distance or gap between the knower and the known. The intellect and that which is intelligible in act are one. Knowledge essentially takes place through the return of the knowing subject into him or her self. This possibility of '*reditio in se ipsum*,' in turn, is the basic constituent in being.[70] It belongs to the basic constitution of the human person that not only *can* he or she inquire about being but that he or she *must* do so. The human person is not absolute consciousness; he or she is a finite spirit. It is only the pure act of being that is the absolute identity of Being and knowing; it is only that which possesses itself in pure luminosity.

Thus, the more one knows and wills, the more one draws back into oneself and the more one becomes present to oneself and, concomitantly, the more one places oneself in the presence of Absolute Being. The real and primordial object of knowledge is the knower him or herself:

> The *degree* of self-presence, of luminosity for oneself, corresponds to the intensity of being, to the *degree* in which being belongs to some existent, to the *degree* in which, notwithstanding its non-being, a being shares in being. And the other way round: the degree of intensity of being shows in the degree in which the being in question is able to return into itself, in which it is capable, by reflecting upon itself, to be luminous for itself.[71]

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[68] "*Cum intellectus et intelligibile in actu sint unum*". (THOMAS AQUINAS, *In Metaph. Prooem.*, in KARL RAHNER, *Hearer of the Word*, translated by Joseph Donceel, New York 1994, 31.)

[69] See KARL RAHNER, *Hearer of the Word*, translated by Joseph Donceel, New York 1994, 32.

[70] The problem Rahner sees in Thomistic epistemology lies rather in the direction of how the known, which is originally identical with the knower can stand in a relation of otherness. Rahner considers the answer to lie in his postulation of the '*Vorgriff*' towards being as illimited in itself, which is the transcendental condition of the possibility of an object known as object.

[71] KARL RAHNER, *Hearer of the Word*, translated by Joseph Donceel, New York 1994, 37.

Via Rousselot and Maréchal, Rahner has taken up the Kantian assumption that the nature of what is to be sought as *a priori* condition for knowledge of anything is an objective mental structure. Thus, Rahner's epistemology is an individualist-mentalist one: his assumption is that communication only comes after language and language only comes after having concepts: the image is of an individual who could locate, through a private, mental act, some item of his or her own consciousness, while the other is isolated and hidden behind the wall of his or her body. The picture is one of epistemological solitude, where human persons are even naturally unintelligible to one another: human beings turn out to be a crowd of hobbled angels.[72] In emphasizing the individual cognitive processes, the self-reflexiveness and the unlimited capacity to know, Rahner rapidly leaves time, space and the human community behind. As such, his epistemology gives scant attention to the social and collective aspects of the history of salvation.[73]

Also, it falls prey to the import of Frege's 'fundamental principle' indicating the sharp separation of the psychological from the logical.[74] Against Frege's warning, it commits the error of confusing the account of the mental conditions that account for the genesis of a proposition with a logical analysis of it. It is a continuous, unhelpful combination between the logical and the psychological spheres. For, as contemporary philosophy is showing, the genesis of a true proposition is not the unconscious *a priori* structures, whatever these might be, but it is the logical nexus between language and the world and culture. The context of any act of understanding is pre-eminently social.

Also, Rahner maintains that the union of knower and known in the human person's act of knowledge demands their prior identity in Absolute Being as the condition of its possibility. In this regard, Rahner's interpretation of Aquinas is surely largely correct, even though his perspective from a post-Cartesian point-of-view vastly influenced by Kantianism is very different from that of the Angelic Doctor's. Indeed, Rahner understands the relation between the intellect and the thing known in a very different manner from that envisaged by Aquinas; in fact he may be said to give a somewhat Anselmian interpretation to Aquinas' vision. For, his understanding of intelligibility and knowledge is an almost exclusively transcendental one which gets intelligibility into things and knowledge into intellects by deriving both very hastily from the *summa veritas*, which is God.

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[72] See FERGUS KERR, *Theology After Wittgenstein*, Oxford 1989, 80.
[73] See JOHANN BAPTIST METZ , *Preface* to KARL RAHNER, *Spirit in the World*, London 1979, xviii.
[74] See PETER SERRACINO INGLOTT, *Beginning Philosophy*, Malta 1987, 201.

This epistemological and metaphysical idea is an extremely alluring one and it produces abundant fruit in Rahner's philosophico-theological system. For instance, in the '*Vorgriff*' as the necessity that drives the human person to anticipate being as such, the existence of an absolute being (hence of God) is always co-affirmed, even though not categorially represented. The '*Vorgriff*' affirms Absolute Being as real and, in this sense, one may say that the '*Vorgriff*' aims at God. Thus, Rahner maintains that this is *not* an *a priori* demonstration of God, like that of Augustine, Anselm or Leibniz (1646-1716) for the '*Vorgriff*' and its range could only be known and be affirmed in the *a posteriori* knowledge of a real being and as the necessary condition of this knowledge.[75] However, whereas Thomas holds that the concept of God comes last in all our knowledge, Rahner's '*Vorgriff*' implies that in every act of knowledge God is already implicitly known as the previous condition of that knowledge.[76]

Like Anselm, Rahner does not distinguish carefully between philosophy and theology. Like Anselm's, Rahner's demonstration (while derived from *a posteriori* experience) depends on inner individualist-mentalist experience. In rather the same Platonic-Augustinian line as Anselm, he seems to present thinking as inconceivable except as a participation in being and as an interpretation of being. The ancient idea of the illumination of the soul by God appears to lurk behind Rahner's metaphysical epistemology as related to the idea that the image of God in the interior of the human person is the *locus* where God directly manifests Godself. In a similar way to Anselm's presentation of his celebrated argument, Rahner presents his idea of the '*Vorgriff*' as the condition of the possibility of all knowledge of objects and all human action (Anselm might be said to have presented the concept of God as the supreme idea that is required for thinking and in which thinking transcends itself). Like Anselm' argument, Rahner's understanding of the '*Vorgriff*' and of the 'supernatural existential' might well be dismissed by the modern thinker for much the same reasons as Anselm's ontological argument was rejected by Kant.[77]

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[75] Rahner maintains that his understanding of the knowledge of God is but a new translation of the traditional Thomist ways demonstrating the existence of God. The translation takes place from the language of the metaphysics of being to that of the metaphysics of knowledge. (See KARL RAHNER, *Hearer of the Word*, translated by Joseph Donceel, New York 1994, 51.)

[76] This is also held by Aquinas who also argues that in every act of knowledge we implicitly know God (See THOMAS AQUINAS, *De Veritate* XXII, 2 ad 1). However, Aquinas is much more mindful of the limitations of human knowledge: he maintains that what is self-evident in itself is not necessarily self-evident to the human person.

[77] Anselm's argument was largely neglected during the remainder of the Medieval Period due to its having been rejected by Aquinas in favour of the Cosmological Argument. However, in the seventeenth century, it

Rahner and Anselm assume that the 'being', to whose existence their respective methods lead to, is to be identified with the Christian God: this leap, once again blurs the distinction between philosophy and theology for there *is* a difference between the usage of the term 'God' as a general term and its usage as a proper name. The non-conceptual, pre-thematic postulation of an ultimate, absolute or infinite[78] or the experience of the dynamic movement of thought beyond itself makes no explicit reference: there is no explicit answer to the implied 'whence' of the experience.[79] Clearly, however, both Anselm and Rahner think that the experiences to which they appeal necessarily give rise to explicit beliefs. They would argue that the experiences and the beliefs are inseparable. On the contrary, however, one would never be able to specify an explicit object (such as God) without having the appropriate beliefs and without having contact with a linguistic community which shares those beliefs.

According to the justificatory picture presented by Anselm and Rahner, the Christian seeks to test the truth of his or her belief by locating some inward experience

was brought into prominence again by Descartes in his *Fifth Meditation*. The latter's presupposition was that existence is an attribute or predicate which like other predicates, a given *x* can meaningfully be said to have or to lack. He argued that just as the idea of a triangle necessarily includes among the defining attributes of a triangle that of having its three internal angles equal to two right angles so the idea of a supremely perfect Being necessarily includes the attribute of existence. Therefore, we can no more think without contradiction of a supremely perfect Being, which lacks existence, than of a triangle, which does not have three sides. Descartes then considered the objection that from the fact that in order to be a triangle a figure must have three sides, it does not follow that triangles exist; and likewise in the case of a supremely perfect Being. His reply was that whereas the notion (or essence) of a triangle does not include the attribute of existence that of a supremely perfect Being does. Therefore in this case alone, we are able to infer existence from a concept.

Descartes' defence of the Ontological Argument had some important critics, but the most invoked criticism was offered by Immanuel Kant in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, Book II, Chapter III, Section IV of his *Transcendental Dialectic*, entitled *Of the Impossibility of an Ontological Proof of the Existence of God*. There Kant rejected the argument on two bases:

First, leaving the argument's presuppositions unchallenged for the moment, he granted the analytic connections Descartes had asserted between the concept of God and that of existence. Therefore in the proposition 'a perfect Being exists', one could not affirm the subject and reject the predicate. However, one *could* choose not to affirm both the subject and the predicate without contradiction i.e. to reject as a whole the concept of an existing all-perfect Being.

Secondly, Kant rejected the assumption that existence is a real predicate (if it were a real and not merely a grammatical predicate, it would be able to form part of the definition of God, and it would therefore be an analytic fact that God exists) on the grounds that propositions asserting existence are always true or false as a matter of fact rather than as a matter of definition. The function of 'is' or 'exists' is not to add to the content of a concept, but to lay down a real object answering to a concept. Thus the real contains no more than the imaginary (a hundred real dollars are the same in number as a hundred imagined ones); the difference is that in one case the concept does, and in the other the object does not correspond to reality.

[78] Anselm too would argue along these lines, for the idea of God he embraces is the point at which thinking necessarily transcends itself and thinks something it is incapable of thinking out any further because the infinite is incapable of being captured in any finite concept.

[79] See FRIEDRICH SCHLEIERMACHER, *The Christian Faith*, translated by H.R. Mackintosh - J.S. Stewart, Philadelphia 1976, Part I, in BRUCE MARSHALL, *Trinity and Truth*, Cambridge 2000, 75-76. It is, however, difficult to conceive of the possibility of such experiences, as Rahner and Anselm point to, as being linked to some term in the sense of being experiences 'of' something or 'about' something.

and determining whether the belief in question originates from that experience and expresses its content in a relatively adequate manner. However, the person, in turn, must hold many beliefs (and therefore many sentences) to be true in order to have such an experience. Moreover, while a person must hold true many beliefs in order to have an experience, having the experience does not require that the beliefs actually be true. For, one could quite easily think of a person who is afraid of an imaginary mouse. Thus, appeal to such pre-thematic experiences simply refers one to the beliefs on which such an experience depends. Having experiences that put us in contact with God depends on having true beliefs; deciding which experiences are 'true' depends on deciding which beliefs are true.

Rahner's basic attitude seems to be that human beings are overly conditioned and limited by sense experience. In his theology, the human person always appears first in terms of the consciousness or self-awareness of the individual cognitive subject:

> The original self-presence of the subject in the actual realization of his existence strives to translate itself more and more into the conceptual, into the objectified, into language, into communication with another. Everyone strives to tell another, especially someone he loves what he is suffering. Consequently in this tension between original knowledge and the concept which always accompanies it, there is a tendency towards greater conceptualization, towards language, towards communication, and also towards theoretical knowledge of itself.[80]

Central to Rahner's theology is the quest for the individual to take up a standpoint beyond his or her bodily, historical and cultural immersion in communal society. However, any understanding at all could only be thought and learnt in a social *milieu*. Growth in understanding is synonymous with one's social initiation into a concrete 'form of life'. It can be seen, not by delving into supposed individual mental structures and processes, but by entering the working of language itself.

In the light of the above, language or action, conversation or collaboration could be more likely starting-points. Perhaps Rahner's thesis would sound more plausible if one could reformulate it in terms of communication and community.

4. Hans Urs von Balthasar: The meeting of the 'I' and the 'Thou'

The meeting of the I and the Thou is at the heart of being human and divine. Indeed, the human first comes to self-consciousness not by any *gnoti sauton* but by being addressed by another. The very existence of the unique individual is created by

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[80] KARL RAHNER, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, London 1984, 16.

interpersonal meetings; in a word, "man, this image of the Logos, is from ground up dialogically created; every monological self-explanation must destroy him".[81] The only alternative to discursive thought is silence; the self-expression of the human person is always intrinsically a dialogue with others and the truth first comes to light in this dialogue.

This dialogue is only first possible to humanity where bodies meet one another. It is human encounter that opens the way forth for the possibility of human awareness of being and God. In the biblically-inspired anthropology proffered by Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905-1988), this awakening is seen happening in the most basic of human relationships: that between mother and child. The little child awakens to self-consciousness through being summoned to awareness by its mother's love expressed in her smile. It is in this primordial I-Thou relationship that the fullness of reality is fundamentally opened up.[82] Space and the world are not experienced by virtue of the 'I' but by virtue of the 'Thou'. The light of Being arises in the light of love shown by the 'Thou'. Being and love are co-extensive. Love becomes the astonishing dimension of being, the answer to the question of why there is something rather than nothing. While being is always mediated by the 'Thou', it is the cause of radical astonishment. The metaphor here is that of childlikeness: what the philosopher most admires in the child is its wonder at Being.[83] This attitude is the one most in harmony with our status as creatures and indeed with the very nature of reality, for existence is indeed play;[84] the search for truth is a serious game.

One can only become an 'I' as awakened by the love of a 'Thou'. For it is in the answer of the child toward this encounter that it first experiences '*I* give *myself*'.[85] Thus the 'Thou' is prior within the 'I' because one is first a 'Thou' and then learns to be an 'I' from the 'Thou':[86]

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[81] HANS URS VON BALTHASAR, *Theodramatik*, IV, Einsiedeln 1980, 133, as quoted in RAYMOND GAWRONSKI, *Word and Silence. Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Spiritual Encounter between East and West*, Edinburgh 1995, 81.

[82] See HANS URS VON BALTHASAR, *The Glory of the Lord. A Theological Aesthetics*, V, Edinburgh 1991, 613-634.

[83] HANS URS VON BALTHASAR, *Theodramatik*, IV, Einsiedeln 1980, 128, as quoted in RAYMOND GAWRONSKI, *Word and Silence. Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Spiritual Encounter between East and West*, Edinburgh 1995, 159.

[84] See HANS URS VON BALTHASAR, *The Glory of the Lord. A Theological Aesthetics*, V, Edinburgh 1991, 616.

[85] See HANS URS VON BALTHASAR, *Creator Spirit. Explorations in Theology*, III, San Francisco 1993, 16.

[86] This priority founds van Balthasar's reservations against the transcendental philosophy treated above, which advocates the priority of the dynamism of the subject.

In that encounter, the horizon of all unlimited being opens itself for him, revealing four things to him: 1) that he is one in love with the mother, even in being other than his mother, therefore all Being is one; 2) that love is good, therefore all Being is good; 3) that that love is true, therefore all Being is true; and 4) that that love evokes joy, therefore all Being is beautiful.[87]

Thus, the transcendentals, as properties of Being, are discovered in this and every encounter. In the love and security of the maternal embrace, the child moves forward and perceives Being as one, true, good and beautiful. The entire metaphysics are, therefore, here placed within the horizon of a meta-anthropology;[88] unlike Rahner, however, this meta-anthropology is an eminently dialogical one. In fact, the person becomes conscious of its own being (in the paradigmatic instance of that pre-eminent I-Thou relationship between mother and child) when it recognizes the being of its mother in all the concreteness of its transcendental properties. The pattern is as follows:

A being *appears*, it has an epiphany: in that it is beautiful and makes us marvel. In appearing it *gives* itself, it delivers itself to us: it is good. And in giving itself up, it *speaks* itself, it unveils itself: it is true (in itself, but in the other to which it reveals itself).[89]

His specific option for the transcendentals, in turn, means that his use of analogy is allowed a far more concrete application in dealing with reality than the more traditional analogy of Being in itself. Balthasar hereby attempts to construct "a philosophy and a theology starting from an analogy, not of abstract Being, but of Being as it is encountered concretely in its attributes (not categorical , but transcendental)".[90]

The difference between Rahner and Anselm, and Balthasar is here clear: for Rahner and Anselm, the movement toward Being requires but little time spent analyzing the transcendental in contingent things. For Balthasar, however, the more deeply one delves into the transcendentals in concrete, individual, contingent things in which Being reveals itself, the more deeply do they reveal Being to one. The human person grasps the thing only through its communication and not in itself. The epiphany of Being is an appearance that takes place in an encounter with a manifestation of Being. The more deeply one goes into 'dialogue' with things in which Being subsists in a certain mode, the more one could comprehend Being.

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[87] HANS URS VON BALTHASAR, *My Work: In Retrospect*, San Francisco 1989, 114, as quoted in ANGELO SCOLA, *Hans Urs von Balthasar. A Theological Style*, Edinburgh 1995, 26.
[88] One must here stress that, in justifying his preference for a meta-anthropology over a meta-physics, Balthasar does *not* maintain that his perspective eliminates the more classical one.
[89] HANS URS VON BALTHASAR, *My Work: In Retrospect*, San Francisco 1989, 116, as quoted in ANGELO SCOLA, *Hans Urs von Balthasar. A Theological Style*, Edinburgh 1995, 31.
[90] HANS URS VON BALTHASAR, *My Work: In Retrospect*, San Francisco 1989, 115-116, as quoted in ANGELO SCOLA, *Hans Urs von Balthasar. A Theological Style*, Edinburgh 1995, 30.

God Godself is included in this human encounter because in this encounter with a manifestation of Being, the 'Thou' is identical with the creator as an exemplar.[91] Thus dialogue is the key to understanding and being a human person. It is the essential sphere in which human persons are placed. Outside dialogue, there is only the isolation which is the sphere of sin.[92]

5.   The search for God

The human person exists only through language; that is, through inter-human dialogue. Now, this dialogue is only possible because reality is created in Christ. It is the unlimited 'I' of God that calls the finite 'I' of the human person into existence in God's Word. God, who relates to the human person as a 'Thou' speaking to an 'I' is not merely a 'Thou' among others. God is in the 'I'; God is even the deepest grounding of the 'I'. The 'I' of the human person is the 'Thou' created and addressed by God.[93] Thus, the human person discovers who he or she is only in dialogue; God reveals Godself through the dialogic character of Being.

This revelation *is* connected with an innate hunger for God in humanity. This longing in the human person does not, however, mean that humanity possesses an innate knowledge of God. For it is God who has, since the very beginning of humanity revealed Godself to the human race.[94] It is God who takes the initiative: everything does depend on "whether God has spoken to man or if the Absolute remains silent beyond all words".[95]

Without the Word, one has "no object of love left other that oneself".[96] One's *eros*[97] (or *desiderium*) remains radically unfulfilled: it could end up turning on itself exalting the self into an idol. This unquenched and unquenchable longing, the utmost distress and misery is Hell.[98] Without revelation, because of the Fall, the longing in humankind that impels humanity to embark on a searching mission loses its focus and tends to be turned

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[91] See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord. A Theological Aesthetics*, V, Edinburgh 1991, 616.

[92] See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord. A Theological Aesthetics*, I, Edinburgh, 1982, 478.

[93] See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Creator Spirit. Explorations in Theology*, III, San Francisco 1993, 310.

[94] See Raymond Gawronski, *Word and Silence. Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Spiritual Encounter between East and West*, Edinburgh 1995, 6.

[95] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Christlich Meditieren*, 7, as quoted in Raymond Gawronski, *Word and Silence. Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Spiritual Encounter between East and West*, Edinburgh 1995, 7.

[96] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Christlicher Stand*, 59, as quoted in Raymond Gawronski, *Word and Silence. Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Spiritual Encounter between East and West*, Edinburgh 1995, 7.

[97] Balthasar's identification of this longing for God with *eros* can be seen in his *The Glory of the Lord. A Theological Aesthetics*, V, Edinburgh 1991, 265-267.

[98] See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord. A Theological Aesthetics*, III, Edinburgh 1986, 458-459.

in on itself resulting in "titanic forms of mysticism of identity or of a pure humanism which placed man in the place of God".[99] Humanity continues to search but its discoveries remain dubious.

In *The Apocalypse of the German Soul*,[100] Hans Urs von Balthasar argues that the German philosophers, poets and dramatists of the eighteenth to the early twentieth centuries attempted to resolve the riddle of existence in two broad ways which he called the 'Promethean' and the 'Dionysian' solution respectively.

The first solution is the exaltation in self-affirmation; the attempt at emancipation from biological, historical and traditional constraints to grasp at total mastery of existence. It tends towards the postulation of the openness and identification of the human mind to the divine mind. This tendency is to be found eminently in the rationalist and idealist writers of the Enlightenment. It is, however, found, albeit to a lesser degree, in both Anselm and Rahner.

The Dionysian solution also takes off from the unboundedness of humanity's aspirations. Rather than dominating the inherent limitations in human existence, however, the Dionysian human being seeks to leave reason behind in a dynamic movement of mystical exaltation. This effort, however, is doomed to be disenchanted. The result is the sense of absurdity to be found in certain exponents of philosophical movements such as Expressionism and Existentialism.

Quite evidently, it seems very difficult for human beings to correctly satisfy their longing for wholeness. The natural human tendency, in fact, appears to incline away from God into ever-deeper error.

In his later work, the *Cordula*,[101] Balthasar attacks precisely Rahner's emphasis on the capability of the human person of apprehending the divine by virtue of his or her own inherent, spiritual dynamism. This identification, he argues, leads to a confusion of the vital distinction between the human apprehension of the divine and the divine self-revelation. Above all, Rahner's position loses sight of the place of martyrdom (witness) and mission as a response to the encounter with the revelation *Gestalt* of Christ which changes one into his likeness from one degree of glory to another.[102] Christian discipleship and witness are *particular*; one cannot dilute their meaning by baptizing

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[99] HANS URS VON BALTHASAR, *Christlicher Stand*, 125, as quoted in RAYMOND GAWRONSKI, *Word and Silence. Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Spiritual Encounter between East and West*, Edinburgh 1995, 8.

[100] See HANS URS VON BALTHASAR, *Apokalypse der deutschen Seele*, I-III, Salzburg, 1937-1939.

[101] See HANS URS VON BALTHASAR, *Cordula oder der Ernstfall*, 1966, translated by Richard Beckley, *The Moment of Christian Witness*, Glen Rock/NJ 1969.

[102] See 2 Co 3, 18.

other forms of spiritual life with the nomenclature of 'anonymous Christians'. Balthasar accuses Rahner of having made the faith inadmissibly easy; he claims that Rahner has adapted the faith to bend to the needs of contemporaries and has thereby trivialized the seriousness of the history of God with humanity.[103]

5.1 *The God who seeks*

Balthasar insists that it is only God who can cast across a bridge between Godself and creation, between the One and the Many.[104] The Biblical experience is one of a people who has been found and claimed by God; a people who do not inquire much about God but from whom God asks uncomfortably much.[105] This does *not*, however, mean that the search for God is something superfluous to the human experiential journey. The human itinerary is one which intrinsically entails the "'search for God in all', for God has placed humanity in the world to 'seek him, if perhaps they might touch him and find him, for he is indeed not far from each one of us' (Acts 17, 27)".[106] The experience of the First Testament Jews is that of having been found by God since their very constitution as a people. Thus, while the human solitary (in the communitarian sense) itinerary is not guaranteed success, humanity finds itself sought and found by God. As such, humanity is summoned to continue to strive forth in its search for the Lord; a journey that really begins on the initiative of God who speaks to the deepest longing of the human heart.

The speech by God to humanity has something of the 'Thou' about it. It is a living, dialogical encounter. However, it is also far above and other than human dialogue. The only adequate language between God and humanity is the Word of God: Jesus Christ as the fulfilment of human longing and the crucified one. Certainly no one could have projected such a response on one's own; indeed, this response is one that the majority of humans reject as something that is not desired, as scandal and as folly.[107] One here can

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[103] For Balthasar's treatment of the identification with the unique mission that God has for each, within the mission of his Son, as inherently essential for personhood in the deepest, theological sense see HANS URS VON BALTHASAR, *Homo Creatus Est. Skizzen zur Theologie*, V, 33. 236. See also RAYMOND GAWRONSKI, *Word and Silence. Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Spiritual Encounter between East and West*, Edinburgh 1995, 84. For Balthasar's critique of Rahner, see HERBERT VORGRIMLER, *Understanding Karl Rahner. An Introduction to his Life and Thought*, London 1986, 125.

[104] See HANS URS VON BALTHASAR, *The Word Made Flesh. Explorations in Theology*, I, San Francisco 1989, 143.

[105] See HANS URS VON BALTHASAR, *Creator Spirit. Explorations in Theology*, III, San Francisco 1993, 310-320.

[106] HANS URS VON BALTHASAR, *Homo Creatus Est. Skizzen zur Theologie*, V, 368 in RAYMOND GAWRONSKI, *Word and Silence. Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Spiritual Encounter between East and West*, Edinburgh 1995, 86.

[107] See 1 Co 1, 23.

discern the influence of Erich Przywara's (1889-1972) notion of *analogia entis* which follows the famous formulation of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215): "That, however great the similarity between creator and creature may be, the dissimilarity always nevertheless remains greater".[108]

The human being, however, was created for this Word and by this Word and in the Spirit can enter into God's dialogue. As such, the history of God with humankind is a dramatic one, involving both a word addressed and a response, both divine and human freedom.

The Word addressed by God was delivered in three speeches: Creation, Scripture and Incarnation.[109] As such, it is never simply a verbal emission; it is always a speech-act, a word-deed.[110] From the very beginning, there was both the Word and the Deed: both are one. The voice of God to Abraham and to the prophets was never just a word but also a deed.[111] The divine *Logos* himself is a word-deed: the truth of the Logos is not limited to problems of speech but the total expression of God in him who is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

Creation, as the first of the words of God takes place through the speech of God.[112] It is, however, limited or partial speech as it is still largely a speech *about* God even if it is uttered, ultimately, by God. Every individual creature reflects in its uniqueness something of God's uniqueness and God's majestic freedom. Creation is a language, constantly presenting itself to humankind. While God is always other than the image the creature has of God (the relation is never quite a simple human 'I'-'Thou') any attempt to climb to God by turning away from creatures is, ultimately the sin of hubris. The only possible response to this first speech of God, however, is mystical silence.[113]

The second speech is speech as one commonly knows it: it is the world of Scripture as the spoken and written word. This word, pronounced by God on God's initiative develops on a level of conscious address and response. In a dialogical spirit, God reveals

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[108] HANS URS VON BALTHASAR, *Klarstellungen*, 26, in *The von Balthasar Reader*, edited by Medard Kehl – Werner Lőser, New York 1982, 182.

[109] This image was used by IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH and was much favoured by HANS URS VON BALTHASAR. (See HANS URS VON BALTHASAR, *Homo Creatus Est. Skizzen zur Theologie*, V, 260 in RAYMOND GAWRONSKI, *Word and Silence. Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Spiritual Encounter between East and West*, Edinburgh 1995, 90.)

[110] This term, which has been borrowed from Balthasar (who uses it [*Tatwort*] to emphasize the 'event' character of the Incarnation and to fight against any disincarnate spiritualization of the Christ-event) has here been taken out of context to express the strong connections between word and action in all acts of communication, not least God's self revelation.

[111] One may here mention the prophetic gestures or *ōt* which really symbolized what they demonstrated.

[112] See Gn 1, 3-2, 3.

[113] This response is reflected in the so-called 'religions of silence'.

Godself though 'speech events'.[114] The ineffable is put into words. However, the human 'I' is not on the same level as that of God: between God and humanity, the only common language is the Word of God; the human person must be adapted to listen to the speech of God. God Godself must 'adapt' the human person to be able to 'grasp' the Absolute.[115] While this action of God can be based on the general human ability to receive and utter communicative speech-acts, an ability that is indispensible for the concretation of revelation, this receptivity which is a mark of those who are truly 'empty' for God is the distinctive sign of the *anawim* and especially of Mary, who is the paradigm of the spiritual stance of listening to the Word. It cannot be attained by humanity alone: it is an attitude which is the result of a cooperation between Creator and creature which, yet, is never on the same level.

The supreme speech as answer to the longing of human hearts, however, is the Incarnation. This word, which is the sufficient and complete expression of God beyond which no other is needed is, as it were, made up of three syllables: life, passion/death, resurrection. It is only in the light of the Incarnation that the first two speeches of God can be correctly read as it is only in and through the Incarnation that God leads humanity to its perfection that is the Glory of the Resurrection.

Perhaps it is here that the difference that has been pointed out throughout the course of this paper may emerge most clearly. Both in the case of Anselm and Rahner, the hermeneutic horizon is the universal. In the case of Anselm, the Incarnation takes place against the horizon of the need for satisfaction to restore the intelligible universal order that was disturbed by sin. Through his theory of satisfaction, Anselm went so far as to give a reason for Christ's death: he maintained that, since Jesus' life of perfect obedience was not enough for redemption as man, as a creature is already bound to obey the creator, satisfaction could only be made by doing something that Jesus, as man, was not bound to do: therefore, since, being sinless, he was not subject to death, his voluntary acceptance of such a fate adjusted the disturbed order of the universe and made satisfaction for all.[116] Set within this framework, the whole question is not primarily a question of God or of

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[114] See HANS URS VON BALTHASAR, *The Glory of the Lord. A Theological Aesthetics*, VI, Edinburgh 1991, 375.

[115] See HANS URS VON BALTHASAR, *Theodramatik*, II, 1, 1976, 365 in RAYMOND GAWRONSKI, *Word and Silence. Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Spiritual Encounter between East and West*, Edinburgh 1995, 91.

[116] Anselm of Canterbury expounded his famous theory of satisfaction in his *Cur Deus Homo*. Thomas Aquinas qualified and modified this theory which had been understood in terms of necessity to couch it in terms of pure suitability in his *Summa theologiae* III, 1, 2 : *Summa theologiae*, edited by Thomas Gilby and others, XLVIII, Cambridge 1976, 9-15.

man; it is simply a matter of the order and the beauty of the world which had been disfigured by sin. Anselm's notion somewhat abandons the Biblical anthropology, in favour of the abstract Greek concept of ideas and essences. His is the Platonic approach: he speaks of essences before speaking of fellow humanity. He addresses social and cosmic order before considering human *persons* in community.

In a similar manner, Rahner's concept of the transcendental idea of Christ and his postulation of the universal expectation of an Absolute Saviour who responds to the deepest yearnings and expectations of humanity tends to conceptualize and 'philosophize' the Incarnation, losing its grounding in the concrete particular event and universalizing the event in a manner akin to more Gnostic-sounding claims.[117] Within this framework, the 'I'-'Thou' relationship has not been considered. Thus, the question of the human person's social being is bypassed: the 'other' has disappeared with the result that the individual has been separated from the community. It is this which leads Rahner to his postulation of the mentalist-individualist '*Vorgriff*', a notion that misses completely the link between the individual and the community.

The tendency in both is to set aside the concrete human person in favour of an idea that the human being herself projects. Perhaps more satisfactory would be a perspective wherein one recognizes oneself as striving forth as a response enabled by the invitation of the God who has revealed Godself as a God who speaks to the human person. This is a perspective wherein one sees oneself as the image of the *Logos*, as dialogically created and as one who, therefore, could *not* be explained monologically.

A much more concrete perspective of theology is provided by Thomas Aquinas, who was, moreover, one of the pioneers in the resolution of the epistemological status of the, then, newly-autonomous disciple that is theology. The Dominican philosopher called the theological science '*sacra doctrina*', '*theologia sacrae Scripturae*' or '*theologia quae in sacra Scriptura traditur*' and contrasted it with metaphysics or what he called 'philosophical theology'. The former is the scientific study of the Word of God, for theology considers God and creation in the light of divine Revelation. The latter is useful to theology for it prepares the way for faith (as in, for instance, the 'ways' demonstrating the existence of God); it clarifies the faith through the provision of images and analogies;

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[117] Rahner's conception of the subject as essentially open to the absolute implies that the incarnation almost ceases to be a scandal and seems almost natural. (See KARL RAHNER, *Current Problems in Christology*, in *Theological Investigations*, I, London 1963, 149-200.)

and it helps combat falsehoods through dialectic.[118] It also provides a rational schema, enabling the theologian to enter ever more deeply into the meaning of the Word of God, to interpret it ever better and to express it ever more clearly. Evidently, it is not in conflict with theology for:

> All the same holy teaching also uses human reasoning, not indeed to prove the faith, for that would take away from the merit of believing, but to make manifest some implications of its message. Since grace does not scrap nature but brings it to perfection, so also natural reason should assist faith as the natural loving bent of the will yields to charity. St Paul speaks of "bringing into captivity every understanding unto the service of Christ" (2 Co 10, 5). Hence holy teaching uses the authority of philosophers who have been able to perceive the truth by natural reasoning …[119]

Thus, for Aquinas, the real and principle domain of theology is that of understanding the Word of God ever more profoundly. He argues that "[i]n this … manner is Christian theology a science, for it flows from founts recognized in the light of a higher science, namely God's very own which he shares with the blessed. Hence as harmony credits its principles which are taken from arithmetic so Christian theology takes on faith its principles revealed by God".[120] As such, the method used in theology is in the contrary sense to that used in philosophy. For, whereas the latter moves from the effects to the cause (*resolutio*), theology moves from the universal cause to the particular effects (*compositio*). Thus, for the Angelic Doctor, whereas the philosophical method is aetiological, seeking the universal from the particular, the theological method seeks to understand better the mysteries of faith (of which the most eminent are the creation and the redemption events) worked out in human history by the one who is *prius in esse*.[121]

Balthasar, too, upholds a highly concrete Christology. He is not especially concerned with ontologically-inspired questions such as the hypostatic union and its implications except insofar as these are directly involved in an account of the mysteries of Christ's life. His series of meditations on the mysteries of the life of Christ have been compared, very suggestively, to the iconography of Andrei Rublev and Georges Roualt.[122] Accordingly, he takes the Paschal Event rather than the transcendental Trinitarian life or the universal order in the cosmos as the hermeneutic horizon. For

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[118] See THOMAS AQUINAS, *Expositio Super Librum Boethii de Trinitate, Prooem.*, 1, 3.

[119] THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa theologiae* I, 1, 8, 2 : *Summa theologiae*, edited by Thomas Gilby and others, I, Cambridge 1964, 31.

[120] THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa theologiae* I, 1, 2 : *Summa theologiae*, edited by Thomas Gilby and others, I, Cambridge 1964, 11.

[121] See THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa theologiae* I-II, 14, 5 : *Summa theologiae*, edited by Thomas Gilby and others, VII, Cambridge 1970, 152.

[122] See *Introduction* by AIDAN NICHOLS, to HANS URS VON BALTHASAR, *Mysterium Paschale*, Edinburgh 1990, 6.

Balthasar, the doctrine of the Trinity has its centre and origin in the events of the three days of the *Sacrum Triduum*, where, in the paschal mystery he recognizes that God has not just redeemed the world but disclosed God's own being.[123] He writes that "God's message to man in Christ … is credible only as love – and here we mean God's own love, the manifestation of which is the manifestation of the glory of God".[124] God is not simply to be defined as 'that than which nothing greater can be thought' but rather as the One whose love is 'that than which nothing greater can be thought'. This corresponds to Balthasar's plea to Rahner. In an inscription he noted in one of the books he presented to him, Balthasar entreated Rahner to: "Write a theology of the cross".[125] For the Cross is the first goal of the Incarnation;[126] in turn, the cry of abandonment is at the heart of the Cross. It is time to turn to this great, inexplicable cry that rent the silence at Calvary.

5.2 *The significance of the cry of abandonment*

The dramatic hour of Jesus is that scandalous point at which, not only did God become man but that God became *caro peccati*.[127] The starting point here is the Trinity as the ground for the possibility of the Paschal Event: the occasion wherein "God the Father yields his Son to the death of darkness for the salvation of every Thou".[128] One can here take up the Anselmian concept of vicarious substitution which has virtually become a vital theologoumenon, as re-interpreted by Hans Urs von Balthasar.

The Trinitarian ground for the possibility of this soteriological exchange of places is the Immanent Trinitarian distinction (*diastasis*) between the Father and the Son. It is the economic form of the difference-in-unity constitutive of the Triune God:

> This opposition between God, the creative origin (the "Father") and the man who, faithful to the mission of the origin, ventures on into ultimate perdition (the "Son"), this bond stretched to breaking-point does not break because the same Spirit of absolute love (the "Spirit") informs both the one who sends and the one sent. God causes God to go into abandonment by God while accompanying him on the way with his Spirit.[129]

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[123] HANS URS VON BALTHASAR, *Mysterium Paschale*, translated with an Introduction by Aidan Nichols, Edinburgh 1990, 29.

[124] HANS URS VON BALTHASAR, *Love Alone: The Way of Revelation*, edited by Alexander Dru, London 1968, 7-8, as quoted in ANNE HUNT, *The Trinity and the Paschal Mystery: A Development in Recent Catholic Theology*, Minnesota 1997, 58.

[125] See HERBERT VORGRIMLER, *Understanding Karl Rahner. An Introduction to his Life and Thought*, London 1986, 124.

[126] See HANS URS VON BALTHASAR, *The Word Made Flesh. Explorations in Theology*, I, San Francisco 1989, 113.

[127] See HANS URS VON BALTHASAR, *Theologik*, II, 201-329, in ANGELO SCOLA, *Hans Urs von Balthasar. A Theological Style*, Edinburgh 1995, 80.

[128] HANS URS VON BALTHASAR, *The Glory of the Lord. A Theological Aesthetics*, V, Edinburgh 1991, 649.

[129] HANS URS VON BALTHASAR, *Elucidations*, 51, as quoted in *The Modern Theologians*, edited by David F. Ford, Oxford 1997, 143.

In this infinite distance what is exposed, is both the infinite distance within God which is the presupposition of eternal love, and which is bridged by the Holy Spirit, and the salvation-historical distance in which the alienated world is reconciled with God.[130]

Of all the words on the cross, primacy must be granted to the cry of Jesus from the cross commonly known as the 'cry of abandonment'.[131] Now, this is, perhaps, the most astonishing event of the Cross.[132] Jesus, as the one who understands both the speech of God and that of humanity no longer hears or understands the speech of the Father.[133] He

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[130] See HANS URS VON BALTHASAR, *De dreifache Kranz*, Johannes-Verlag, Einsiedeln, 1977, 64-67, in *The von Balthasar Reader*, edited by Medard Kehl – Werner Lőser, New York 1982, 149.

[131] See HANS URS VON BALTHASAR, *Mysterium Paschale*, translated with an Introduction by Aidan Nichols, Edinburgh 1990, 125.

[132] See Mt 27, 46 and Mk 15, 34. This death cry, which Jesus screams (Mark *boan* and Matt uses *anaboan*, the semantic range of which includes solemn proclamation, the acclamation or shout of a crowd and a desperate cry for help, and both refer to his utterance as *phonē megalē* or 'loud cry') is particularly significant (as the last words of any person are). Particular poignancy is however lent to the words since they are uttered by the Son of God himself. Since the very beginning of the Church, this utterance has been seen as problematic: particular rejection has often been shown towards the interpretation that Jesus expressed the sentiment of being forsaken by God. Some have tried to explain away the import of the obvious meaning of the words by postulating that the cry of Jesus was not a reproach against God but the explosion of suffering in love (!) or that Jesus cried, not in his own name but in the name of sinners or the Jews (this is an ancient interpretation manifested by Origen, Athanasius, Augustine and Cyril of Alexandria). Others attempt to harmonize the utterance in Matt/Mark with Luke or John so that, for instance Luke's "Father, into your hands I place my spirit" becomes the correct interpretation of the utterance. Still others attempt to soften the import of the Aramaic or Greek terms used by Matt/Mark. Theologically a literal interpretation of the death cry in Matt/Mark has been seen as an attribution of despair (understood as loss of hope) to Jesus or even as a denial of Jesus divinity. Many try to soften the dour import of the death cry by invoking the hermeneutical principle that a NT citation of a specific OT passage should be understood with reference to the entire context of the OT passage: in this case, by the end of Psalm 22, the psalmist takes the positive view that after all God did not reject him or "turn his face away" (Ps 22, 25). Raymond Brown, in his extensive consideration of the death cry, does not take up this view. He argues that elsewhere, in quoting psalms, Matt/Mark show the ability of quoting verses with precise appropriateness. In this particular case, contextualization should *not* be used to invert the literal sense of the Cry. It can, however, be used to supplement this sense by showing that, in attributing the sentiment of abandonment to Jesus, Mark is not attributing despair or loss of hope to the Lord. Mark *knew* that the Jesus' passion culminated in his victory even if he plumbed the depths of lonely suffering to the extent of God-forsakenness. Jesus' situation is particularly poignant because, when considered against the background of the entire Psalter (which stresses that God does *not* abandon those who seek help), for the first time, God seemingly has forsaken the one seeking God's help. The death cry forms an *inclusio* with the prayer at the beginning of the passion narrative (Mk 14, 35-36; Matt 26, 39) where God is addressed as Father (Mark is attentive to report the first prayer as being addressed to *Abba* which constitutes an important contrast with the addressee of the death cry: *Elōi*). The first, filial, prayer was not visibly answered and, having endured the agony of the hour, Jesus screams out a final prayer that forms an *inclusio* with the first prayer. If one accepts literally Jesus' anguish at the opening moment where Jesus still calls his Father '*Abba*' one should accept equally literally the screamed protest against abandonment wrenched from the utterly forlorn Jesus who is so isolated that he no longer uses 'Father' language but speaks as the humblest servant. Jesus is portrayed as profoundly discouraged at the end of his whole battle because God, to whose will Jesus had committed himself at the beginning of the passion has not intervened and has seemingly left him unsupported. Despite a long-range confidence in God, Jesus has reached a low point at death. He cries out, hoping that God will break through the alienation he has felt. God exercises overwhelming power but only after the death of the Son. (See RAYMOND BROWN, *The Death of the Messiah: from Gethsemane to the Grave: a Commentary on the Passion Narratives in the Four Gospels*, II, New York 1994, 1043-1058.)

[133] See HANS URS VON BALTHASAR, *Theologik*, II, 316.

has thus taken up upon himself the sinful distance of the world from God which resounds in the intra-divine distance with the voluntary entrance of the Son into the darkness of this 'no'.

The cry is the utterance of the one who is abandoned on all sides; abandoned by all men and most particularly by God. The Crucified One is the Word that the Father addresses to the world. At this moment, the Word cannot hear itself. It collapses into this great scream: the cry to the lost God.[134] It is the cry uttered as Jesus stands at the edge of life and death: "the scream of passing existence at the border" of death.[135] It manifests the Word collapsing into a scream for the lost God. The fountain from which the Son eternally lives appears to be empty.[136] Jesus does not enter death with all the answers, but with a "Why?"[137] This experience of abandonment should be stressed. Here, "the concentration of everything contrary to God in the Son is experienced as being abandoned by the Father".[138]

Truly, that God gives up his Son is the most unheard-of statement in the New Testament; it must not be weakened in the sense of 'sending' or 'gift'. The paschal event fulfils what Abraham did not need to do: Christ is the one given up for our sins,[139] the one cursed by God *pro nobis*.[140] He really takes upon himself the sins of the world in their entirety.[141] As the embodiment of sin, Jesus can no longer find any support in God; he has identified himself with that which God must eternally turn away from him.[142] It is humanity's God-forsakenness that is there in its dying in remoteness from God that he experiences in his 'being delivered', only he experiences it more deeply than any creature

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[134] See HANS URS VON BALTHASAR, *The Glory of the Lord. A Theological Aesthetics*, VII, Edinburgh 1989, 226.

[135] See HANS URS VON BALTHASAR, *Herrlichkeit*, I, Einsiedeln 1961, 19, in RAYMOND GAWRONSKI, *Word and Silence. Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Spiritual Encounter between East and West*, Edinburgh 1995, 100.

[136] The words "I thirst" in John 19, 28 express the abandonment in another, equally impressive, manner: the source of living water has drained away and itself become thirsty ground (See HANS URS VON BALTHASAR, *Mysterium Paschale*, translated with an Introduction by Aidan Nichols, Edinburgh 1990, 125-126.)

[137] See RAYMOND BROWN, *The Death of the Messiah: from Gethsemane to the Grave: a Commentary on the Passion Narratives in the Four Gospels*, II, New York 1994, 1047.

[138] HANS URS VON BALTHASAR, *Der dreifache Kranz*, 64, as quoted in *The von Balthasar Reader*, edited by Medard Kehl – Werner Löser, New York 1982, 148.

[139] See Rm 4, 25.

[140] See Ga 3, 13.

[141] See 2 Co 5, 14; Ga 3, 13; Ep 2, 14-16.

[142] HANS URS VON BALTHASAR, *Der dreifache Kranz*, 64, as quoted in *The von Balthasar Reader*, edited by Medard Kehl – Werner Löser, New York 1982, 149.

can experience it. This is a *theologia crucis* in all its radicality. Only when this has taken place can one speak of the self-giving of the Son that goes to the very end.[143]

The cross reveals that it is of the Son's very being to keep nothing for himself but to give everything to the Father His obedience is constitutive of his very identity as the Son; it is not an expression of subservience but one of sovereign liberty. The passion of Jesus is the experience of active not-wanting to defend himself; it is based on his freedom to give up his life.[144] The real meaning of the self-giving of Jesus is the free acceptance of the world's guilt that has been placed upon Jesus. The paradox of the passion is thus "based upon a passivity that exceeds all limits of the ability to suffer, a passivity made possible though prior active power that exceeds all limits of possible self-giving".[145] This gives rise to what Balthasar calls a 'second paradox'. The absolute love-obedience of the incarnate Son to the Father makes possible his absolute self-gift to the world's sin which is also his being handed over by the Father to sin. This absolute self-gift and active passivity obtains the meaning of abandonment that is the innermost essence of his experience of the situation of sin.[146]

Jesus' passion experience is not restricted to his solidarity in physical death. It also and pre-eminently represents his solidarity with those who have isolated themselves from the love of God. In his experience of abandonment, Jesus disturbs the absolute loneliness striven for by the sinner and the culpable unbeliever. The one who wants to be damned apart from God finds God again in his loneliness: God who in the absolute weakness of love enters into solidarity with those damning themselves.[147] Even the Nietzschean cry "God is Dead" which has become the classic logoumenon typifying contemporary atheism and religious indifference takes on a completely new meaning established by God Godself who has experienced the silence of God.[148] God is the one who enters the monological loneliness of the errant one as someone who is even more lonely and distant from life-giving dialogue. This does not mean that the human person's freedom to make the choice of Godless-ness is denied or over-ridden by the sovereignty of God. God's creation of genuine human freedom necessarily implies the risk of the human person's

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[143] See HANS URS VON BALTHASAR, *The Glory of the Lord. A Theological Aesthetics*, VII, Edinburgh 1989, 225.

[144] See Jn 10, 17-18.

[145] HANS URS VON BALTHASAR, *Death is Swallowed up by Life*, in *Communio* 14 (1987) 50.

[146] See HANS URS VON BALTHASAR, *Death is Swallowed up by Life*, in *Communio* 14 (1987) 51.

[147] See HANS URS VON BALTHASAR, *Pneuma und Institution*, 409, in *The von Balthasar Reader*, edited by Medard Kehl – Werner Lőser, New York 1982, 153.

[148] See HANS URS VON BALTHASAR, *Pneuma und Institution*, 409, in *The von Balthasar Reader*, edited by Medard Kehl – Werner Lőser, New York 1982, 153.

choosing to reject God and so choosing a radical being-only-to-oneself. However, God, in God's freedom chooses to accompany the human person who chooses desolation and loneliness. Human freedom remains untouched but God enters into solidarity with those who reject all solidarity: "God, with his own divine choice accompanies the human person into the most extreme condition of his (negative) choice. This is what happens in the passion of Jesus".[149] He obeys the Father to the point where the last trace of God seems lost together with every other communication. God in Christ is free to encounter the errant one in the form of the crucified brother abandoned by God. In such a way, it becomes clear to the one who turned away that this (like the errant one) God-forsaken one is so for his or her sake.[150] Thus the loneliness of atheism and even hell is understood as a 'sphere' in God.[151]

At the same time, the scream itself is evidence of the preservation of dialogue within God, a plea which is vindicated when the Father responds by raising him from the dead. The resurrection shows that, even in the moment of their most extreme separation, Father and Son were united:

> On the one hand; in the contrast between the two wills of the Father and the Son on the Mount of Olives, and in the abandonment of the Son by God on the Cross, the drastic counterposing of the divine Persons in the economy became visible. On the other hand: for the individual who thinks this out more deeply, this very opposition appears as the supreme manifestation of the whole, integrated saving pattern of God whose internal logic (*dei*: Mk 8, 31 and parallels; 9, 31 and parallels; 10, 34 and parallels) is once more disclosed in the inseparable unity of the death of the Cross and the Resurrection.[152]

The dialogue was therefore always maintained, even when there seemed to be an irretrievable break. Even in the moment of their extreme separation, the Father and the Son were united in the Spirit. It was the Spirit who 'held open and bridged over the separation of the Father and the Son and who is the 'instrument' and the 'milieu' of the resurrection.[153]

The freedom to lose the way to God and the deadly consequence thereof is never denied here. The human person may choose to reject God. However, with the paschal

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[149] HANS URS VON BALTHASAR, *Pneuma und Institution*, 409, in *The von Balthasar Reader*, edited by Medard Kehl – Werner Lőser, New York 1982, 152-153.

[150] See HANS URS VON BALTHASAR, *Pneuma und Institution*, 444, in *The von Balthasar Reader*, edited by Medard Kehl – Werner Lőser, New York 1982, 422.

[151] See ANNE HUNT, *The Trinity and the Paschal Mystery: A Development in Recent Catholic Theology*, Minnesota 1997, 72.

[152] HANS URS VON BALTHASAR, *Mysterium Paschale*, translated with an Introduction by Aidan Nichols, Edinburgh 1990, 203.

[153] See HANS URS VON BALTHASAR, *Mysterium Paschale*, translated with an Introduction by Aidan Nichols, Edinburgh 1990, 211.

event, the sinner is no longer alone. One who chooses to lose one's way to God finds oneself in the company of the God-forsaken Son who is so for one's own sake. One who rejects God henceforth never finds oneself in mere solitude; one's situation is that of a co-solitude. For God loves even when rejected.

The paschal event, therefore, means that God, in love, has entered the abyss of physical and spiritual death. God has taken the full measure of our God-forsakenness, sharing our monological desolation from the inside, and incorporated it into Godself. Despite the reality of sin as the free rejection of God, no one is God-forsaken for it is God's love that ultimately prevails.

In the world of words, Jesus is the speech of God to human beings and the speech of human beings to God. On the cross, in the great experience of abandonment, all speech is gathered into this weak utterance, this unutterable scream as Jesus experiences the great emptiness, that is the silence of the Father, as he is given over to the silence of death. This cry is the only way for "that which remains unutterable in life [to] become speech".[154] As "incomprehensible and unique 'separation' of God from himself", it is the supra-event that "includes and grounds every other separation – be it never so dark and bitter".[155] It is the speech expressing that God is love throughout all the depths of darkness. This cry includes all questions, all suffering; it is the communication from the bowels of the man who shows the heart of God. Without it, humanity would not have known that God is love throughout all the depths of darkness.

6.   Conclusion

This reflection on Jesus' cry of dereliction clearly brings out the differences between Rahner's and Balthasar's ways of presenting salvific truth. The former decries the limitations due to sense experience and seeks to postulate a self that occupies a standpoint beyond immersion in the bodily, the historical and the institutional. The latter loudly and constantly celebrates the diversity and the particularity of creation. To him, the human person's relation to his or her physical setting is a matter for gratitude and celebration, not one of resentment and frustration. For, God is the artist whose conception has taken on material form, the poet whose words have come to life. Thus, theology is

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[154] HANS URS VON BALTHASAR, *The Glory of the Lord. A Theological Aesthetics*, VII, Edinburgh 1989, 86.
[155] HANS URS VON BALTHASAR, *Theo-Drama*, III, San Francisco, 325, as quoted in *The Modern Theologians*, edited by David F. Ford, Oxford 1997, 143.

concerned with the particular, the world of things and of words in which the Son became incarnate and communicated his salvific presence.

It has been seen that the mentalist-individualist conception of the self that lies at the roots of Rahner's theology of salvation tends to represent human beings as more or less deficient angels[156] fallen into the flesh. The temptation that thinking ought to take place in some pure zone, bereft of time and space and independent of bodily limitation ought to be resisted. However, the desire to think away one's incarnate nature, to rise above the merely human, remains as seductive as ever.[157] Such a picture of the self dominates many modern and not-so-modern theological theories.

However, the very initiation of human beings into the use of the word 'God' is most often not really connected with the inferring of the presence of some invisible entity. It has more to do with the experience of God's saving deeds in history and with such varied activities such as blessing, celebrating and lamenting, repenting and forgiving, the cultivation of certain virtues, the experience of community worship and so forth. The deep meaning of Christianity can only really adequately be grasped from within the community of believers.

The theology vouched for by Balthasar is a theology that seeks to take radical issue with the Cartesian, individualistic vision of the believer that still dominates contemporary culture. It is a theology for ceremonious persons rather than one for celebrating solipsists, a theology which starts from where the human person is, rather than one which immediately treats some undetectable inner or outer object. It treats the human person as an irreducible unit rather than as a ghost in a machine. It initiates at the concrete rather than at the transcendent, considering primarily the living human being and the event, rather than metaphysical reflections about a divine being. It considers the human person as part of the world; a special part no doubt, but still *part* of the world. This world-view militates against the philosophical background of quite a number of prominent theologians. Balthasar put it well when he maintained that:

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[156] See CORNELIUS ERNST, *Introduction*, in KARL RAHNER, *Theological Investigations*, I, London 1961, xiii fn.

[157] See CHARLES TAYLOR, *Philosophical Papers*, I, Cambridge 1985, 112, as quoted in FERGUS KERR, *Theology After Wittgenstein*, Oxford 1989, 186. The Anselmian notion of truth is confirmed and compounded in much 'modern' theology by the Cartesian bias in philosophy that portrayed the human person as being opposed to the world. Moreover, Descartes' definition of the human self in terms of *res cogitans* reveals a certain antipathy to the body and a striving to rise above the historical and cultural concrete situation. It aims at a bodiless and language-free experience of epistemological solitude. It looks upon finitude as a flaw.

The tendency today is towards the destruction of form: whether it is the Bultmannians [with their demythologization], anthropological transcendentalists, … they are all following the trend to the formless … Against this strange univocity … the character of *form* of the revelation must be maintained … for only when we accept the unique incarnation of the Logos can the infinite dimensions of the Pneuma be understood as his glorification (Jn 16, 14) and not as his dissolution.[158]

The experience of the human person is one in which no individual human being is totally autonomous; fulfilment can only be achieved when communication points to communion. The human person's experience is a bodily one; the human person is an irreducible unit, not some sort of amalgam of mind and body: his or her four-dimensional personal occupancy of space and time tends towards inter-subjectivity. The human person is also immersed in the vicissitudes of that most social of phenomena: language, which in turn is the distinguishing feature that characterizes the human being and picks him or her out from among other beings. Even Descartes' famous excogitation, made as it was in solitary self-imposed confinement, was a linguistic event.

The conclusion, here, might well be that while the human person can transcend herself and her surroundings, she is naturally situated in time and space, history and the world. The experience of the human person is a bodily one, immersed in the historical and social vicissitudes of language. Knowledge of the universal necessarily depends on (and cannot replace) knowledge of the particular. This is, perhaps the reason why considering the execution of an innocent man is a far more promising point of departure for sustaining Christian soteriology than setting out to show the necessity of a pre-thematic knowledge of God as the previous condition of every act of knowledge. For concrete historical existence remains central:

The theological vision of Being which remains bound to 'myth' (that is, to the existent forms of revelation in Biblical salvation-history) as its *locus* of insight will then remind man the philosopher that ultimate knowledge cannot, for him, lie in turning away from that which is concretely finite (a movement which is so natural!), but in turning towards the phenomenal existent (*conversio ad phantasma*) as the only place where the mystery of Being will shine forth for him who himself exists bodily and spiritually … It is only the man who has encountered the living God in the particular form of revelation chosen by him who can really find God in all things and thus, who can truly and really philosophize.[159]

[158] HANS URS VON BALTHASAR, *The Glory of the Lord. A Theological Aesthetics*, IV, Edinburgh 1989, 37.
[159] HANS URS VON BALTHASAR, *The Glory of the Lord. A Theological Aesthetics*, I, Edinburgh 1982, 146.