

Incarnation and Humanization in the Theology of Karl Rahner

Author: Jose Celio dos Santos

Persistent link: <http://hdl.handle.net/2345/bc-ir:108065>

This work is posted on [eScholarship@BC](#),
Boston College University Libraries.

Boston College Electronic Thesis or Dissertation, 2018

Copyright is held by the author, with all rights reserved, unless otherwise noted.



**Boston College School of Theology and Ministry
Brighton, Massachusetts**

Incarnation and Humanization in the Theology of Karl Rahner

STL THESIS

A Thesis Submitted in Partial fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Licentiate in Sacred Theology (S.T.L) Degree
From Boston College School of Theology and Ministry

By
Jose Celio dos Santos
Directed by: O. Ernesto Valiente
Second Reader: Richard Lennan

May, 2018

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	03
CHAPTER ONE: THE INNCARNATION OF THE LOGOS OF GOD	08
1. Christological Perspectives.....	10
2. The Meaning of the Incarnation.....	16
2.1. Incarnation as God’s Self-Communication	18
2.2. The Church’s Teaching on the Incarnation	22
3. Incarnation and Soteriology.....	30
3.1. The Human Jesus, the New Testament, and the Teaching of the Church	33
3.2. The Word of God Became Flesh	34
CHAPTER TWO: KARL RAHNER’S THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY	39
1. Rahner’s Anthro-Theology	39
1.1. Rahner’s Theological Point of Departure	40
2. Rahner’s Transcendental Theology	44
3. The Human Person in the Theology of Karl Rahner	49
3.1. Human Being as Spirit and Matter	50
3.2. The Supernatural Existential and Personal Becoming.....	55
CHAPTER THREE: THE SOTERIOLOGY OF THE HUMAN EXISTENCE OF CHRIST ...65	
1. Rahner’s Notion of Christian Spirituality.....	68
2. The Human Jesus Christ Through the Rahnerian Perspective.....	75
2.1. The Humanity of Jesus Christ in the Scriptures	78
2.2. Jesus, Human Transcendence and Hope.....	79
2.3. Jesus, Human Freedom and Love.....	84
CONCLUSION	91
BIBLIOGRAPHY	95

INTRODUCTION

And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth (Jn 1:14).¹

What does it mean that the Word of God became human? What does it mean that Jesus Christ is the fullness of humanity? What does God as a human being accomplish for our salvation? What does human salvation mean?

Christians profess their faith in Jesus Christ as the one who is truly human and truly divine. Jesus Christ is God-Man without lacking any aspect of either the divine or the human. However, throughout the history of Christianity there have been tendencies which stress one nature over the other. Such tendencies lead to a kind of spirituality incapable of living the Christian faith according to its historical and transcendental dimensions.

Only God can save human beings because he is the principle of life. However, the Logos of God became human in Jesus the Christ, and it is as human that God performs the most salvific act of human history.

The doctrine of the Incarnation of the Logos of God is central for Christian faith so that without it there would be no such faith. Christian faith and hope, the way we live, and the way we understand our future are determined by the way we understand the mystery of the Incarnation. Christian theologians of all times, the Scriptures, and the Church tradition itself attest that the Word became flesh for our salvation. All agree with such a statement on the motive of the Incarnation. On the other hand, salvation can have different meanings, and there may be different ways of achieving such salvation. For example, the Incarnation takes place to reconcile us with God; to make us partakers of the divine nature; to be our model of holiness; so that we might know

¹John J. Collins, Mary Ann Getty, and Donald Senior, *The Catholic Study Bible: The New American Bible* (Revised ed., New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

God's love, and so on. There are many ways to approach the mystery of the Incarnation, and that is not because there are disagreements among Christians. Rather, it is because the Incarnation is central for Christian faith in such a way that we find the meaning of every aspect of human life in light of the Incarnation.

This thesis aims to answer the question of salvation from the perspective of what the Word of God has become: Human. A second question that this study pursues is the implication for Christians as they assume that human salvation takes place in Jesus Christ, and we participate in his mystery. In other words, to follow Jesus Christ means to become human according to the concrete experience of Jesus of Nazareth. Therefore, this thesis assumes salvation understood as the fullness of the human person, and Jesus Christ symbolizes such fullness.

Furthermore, assuming that Jesus Christ is the fullness of humanity, he must be treated in such a way that not only Christians, but every human being may have a personal relationship with him not only in temporal history, but also in the bonds that keep humanity throughout eternity. The main thesis for which this project advocates is that the human existence of Jesus Christ has a soteriological significance for Christians and all humans in general, and that salvation is achieved to the extent that we accept to live according to his existence.

What is the soteriological aspect of the humanity of Jesus Christ? Jesus Christ is human, but he is also truly God. This project investigates how Jesus Christ saves us in his humanity, in what God has become. Humanity here does not mean separation from Christ's divinity. Human is what the Logos itself became. Therefore, the question is how God saves us as human. The humanity of the Logos is not a temporal reality or a step that God takes toward our salvation.

To answer the question on the soteriology of the human existence of Jesus Christ, I dialogue with the tradition of the Church, and with the contribution of Karl Rahner (1904 –1984), one of

the most influential Catholic theologians of the twentieth century. Karl Rahner speaks for Christians of both present and future times. Through his thousands of published works on various themes of the Christian faith, Rahner's thought continues to make a significant impact on scholars and Christians in general. There are three main reasons why I choose Rahner. First, his theological perspective takes the Incarnation as the fundamental aspect of the economy of salvation, which allows us to speak about God, and about human being. Rahner's theological anthropology illuminates our understanding of what the Logos of God has become.

The second reason to choose Rahner is because he is a kind of classic theologian who provokes me, and many scholars and Christians to discover good news in the mystery of our salvation.

Every classic lives as a classic only if it finds readers willing to be provoked by its claim to attention... if the text is a genuinely classic one, my present horizon of understanding should always be provoked, challenged, transformed.²

Rahner is an example of a theologian who surprises me not just from an intellectual perspective, but also as someone who turns my intellectual activities into a kind of spiritual contemplation of the absolute mystery. Furthermore, Rahner's approach to the Incarnation and to the reality of human being establishes dialogue between theology, science, and culture, making Christian faith relevant in the context of the modern world.

The third reason is that Rahner is an intellectual who believes and prays to the divine mystery, which occupies the center of his theological activity. Because of that, his theology aims at an apostolic goal: to help Christians and all human beings realize their human vocation in this world as a continuous movement of transcendence toward our full realization in God.

² Tracy, David, *The Analogical Imagination* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 102.

The Church is always concerned to present a careful description of the doctrine of the Incarnation. The Fathers of Church responded to many issues, which seemed to be opposed to the faith of the apostles and of the early Christians. However, the way the ecumenical Councils of the Church define the Christological dogmas does not provide specific direction. Many of the first Christians developed different soteriological images of Jesus Christ in such a way that they make it difficult to canonize one soteriological approach. Still, the *lex orandi* and *lex credendi* of the Church determines if a given soteriological perspective is acceptable or not. The *lex credendi* (the law of believing, or the way the Church believes), for example, is expressed mainly in the Creed, which takes the faith of the Apostles and the Scriptures as authoritative sources. Karl Rahner's perspective is rooted in the Apostolic Faith, and the Scriptures, and in the long tradition of the Church. But his soteriology follows a very specific direction, and that is why he can contribute to this project. My question is very specific: what is the soteriological relevance of the humanity of Jesus Christ for human beings? My expectation is (a) to draw some insights from Rahner's theology, and (b) to point out how Christians can participate in the salvific reality of Jesus Christ.

I divide this project into three chapters to achieve the two mentioned goals. In Chapter One, I explore the doctrine of the Incarnation, highlighting its centrality in Christian faith and in theology, and how Christians may not have given enough attention to the humanity of the Logos. After that, I explain the plurality of soteriological images and perspectives of Jesus Christ in the Scriptures and in the tradition of the Church. Given the importance of the humanity of Jesus Christ for this project, I reflect on how the Scriptures and the Church have affirmed his humanity. I have always in mind the teaching of the Church and the contribution of Karl Rahner in all three chapters.

Chapter Two approaches some features of Rahner's theology, mainly the concept of anthropo-theology, and transcendental theology. It sets the base of Rahner's theological

perspective, which determines the whole argument of the thesis. After that, I treat the Rahnerian concept of human being in order to situate what the Logos of God became, and what the Incarnate Logos reveals about God and about ourselves. Four Rahnerian concepts are used in this section: human being as spirit and matter, transcendence, freedom, and love.

In Chapter Three, I describe Rahner's notion of Christian spirituality as a way to introduce how Jesus Christ is the one who provides such spirituality for those who follow him. After that, I situate the humanity of Jesus in both the Scripture and in Rahner's theology, applying to Jesus of Nazareth the same categories used in Chapter Two to describe the human person. At the end I conclude that the soteriological aspect of the human existence of Jesus Christ is revealed in the fundamental dimensions of every human being, which are given by God, not being part itself of our nature, but as God's supernatural gift, which guides us toward the absolute mystery.

CHAPTER ONE

The Incarnation of the Son of God

It is very common to hear a Christian saying: “I am not Jesus Christ!” Usually such a person means that we can neither do what Christ did nor live the kind of life he lived. This may happen because, in this person’s mind, the “emphasis on the divinity of Jesus overshadows” not only the distinction between him as God-Son and his Father, but also because his humanity does not find room in his or her faith.³ When this happens, Christian faith is reduced to a separate sphere in which Christ is worshiped as God, but without the possibility of a real discipleship because he is put far beyond what our humanity can respond to even with the grace of God.

On the the other hand, there are those Christians who take Jesus as human model in very distinct ways, but without a soteriological perspective. In this case, Jesus is portrayed, for instance, as psychologist, counselor, teacher, leader, revolutionary, and so on. We can enumerate many books published in the last decades that use the Scriptures to portray Jesus from one these perspectives.⁴ However, a person is called Christian if she or he relates to Jesus Christ as God-Man who guides our being in present and future time.

Any type of Christology is essentially a study of the person of Jesus Christ. The main affirmation about Jesus is that he is truly divine and truly human. Jesus Christ’s natures are distinct. However, we cannot separate these two natures or say that sometimes Jesus acts as God and other times as human being. This study has no intention to affirm one nature of Christ and deny or neglect the other because that would not be a real reference to the true person of Jesus Christ. In this sense, Leonardo Boff states that, “to speak correctly with Jesus Christ as our point of departure

³ Rausch, Thomas P., *Who is Jesus? An Introduction to Christology* (Collegeville, Min.: Liturgical Press, 2003), 5.

⁴ A few examples: *Jesus the Teacher: A Socio-rhetorical Interpretation of Mark* (Vernon Robbins, 1984); *Jesus the Teacher: Examining in Education* (Herman Horne, 1998); *Jesus, the Ultimate Therapist: Bringing Hope and Healing*, (Kerry Kerr McAvoy, 2110); *The Leadership Style of Jesus*, (Michael Yousef, 2001).

consists in this: One neither overstates the human nor the divine, one neither diminishes the man nor diminishes God.”⁵

We cannot separate Christ’s humanity from his divinity. However, we can identify his humanity because it is distinct from his divinity. This work will focus on the soteriological aspect of Christ’s humanity. However, in the same way that we cannot separate his divinity and humanity, we cannot associate the salvific feature of Jesus Christ only from the perspective of one or another nature. The focus on the humanity of Jesus Christ does not mean to reduce him to a mere human being. Furthermore, it is through his humanity that the divine is revealed to us, and it is only through the life of Christ that “theologians can perceive his meaning and begin to see God in the human being and the human being in God.”⁶ Therefore, this project aims to propose a spirituality for Christian discipleship, and the main thesis is that proper attention to the soteriological aspect of Christ’s humanity can help Christians to respond their human vocation in the concrete world. For this, it will be necessary to explain who human being are, and how Jesus of Nazareth responded with his own life the full meaning of being human.

The following reflections in this chapter intend to introduce four points that will work as fundamental bases for a dialogue with Karl Rahner’s anthropo-theological perspective in chapter two. This will help to understand how the man Jesus of Nazareth fulfills the ultimate horizon of the human person. The first reflection will deal with Christological approaches, and it will establish the Christological perspective for this project. After that, it will explain the meaning of the Incarnation for the Christian faith, highlighting its ascending and descending aspects. The third

⁵ Boff, Leonardo, *Jesus Christ Liberator – A Critical Christology for our Time* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1978), 183.

⁶ Ibid, 182.

and fourth considerations will treat Incarnation and its soteriological aspect according to the Church's teaching, and the Karl Rahner's contribution.

1. Christological Perspectives

Jesus turned and saw them following him and said to them, "What are you looking for?" (John 1:38)

This section looks for a perspective from which we can affirm Jesus Christ's divinity and humanity revealed as historical event. It is only possible by following the man Jesus of Nazareth, and the testimony of the community of believers.

The Gospel of John provides many Christological images of Jesus of Nazareth. However, the whole Gospel invites its addresses to follow Jesus closely to see in him the real presence of the Logos of God. In this way, John the Baptist, pointing to Jesus of Nazareth, said to his disciples, "'behold the Lamb of God.' The two disciples heard what he said and followed Jesus."⁷ Like the author of the fourth gospel, John the Baptist seems to know the identity of Jesus of Nazareth, or, at least, that Jesus is the answer to his faith in God's saving promise.⁸ But how do the Baptist and also the author of the fourth Gospel know that Jesus is the Lamb of God, and the Logos made flesh?

The above gospel passage takes place after the Johannine Prologue, which works as a kind of lens through which all Jesus' sayings and deed are interpreted.⁹ If we can compare the entire Gospel of John with a cordillera of successive high points of Christology, the Prologue is certainly the highest peak from which we can observe the whole massif.¹⁰ However, the author invites his

⁷ John J. Collins, Mary Ann Getty, and Donald Senior, *The Catholic Study Bible: The New American Bible*. Revised ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁸ In Mathew 11:1-6, Jesus answered John the Baptism's expectation of the coming of the Messiah, implying that the kingdom is manifested in him through visible signs. Therefore, his hope is fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth.

⁹ Konings, João, *Evangelho Segundo João: Amor e Fidelidade* (São Paulo-SP, Loyola, 2005), 101.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 101.

readers/listeners to climb the hill step by step following Jesus of Nazareth. Only that way will the disciples of the Baptism be able to see Jesus from the perspective of the Prologue, the Christian “Mount Everest.”

The disciples of John started following Jesus at a certain distance. However, Jesus invites them to get to know him in a different way: “come, and you will see” (John 1:39). Jesus proposes the method of discipleship, of participating in his life and ministry so that they may comprehend that in him God is manifested in a special way and as model for our human relationship with his Father and with ourselves.

Christianity above all is an experience of those who followed Jesus of Nazareth. They came to know Jesus through his faith, hope, and love, which was always related to the Father. These virtues were expressed throughout Jesus’ life, and radically manifested in his death on the Cross. Jesus’ experience of resurrection attested to not just his human and divine identity, but also to his human existence as an anticipation of the fullness of humanity. Therefore, there is no Christian faith without following Jesus in the way he shaped his whole life. In this same way we can say that without the person of Jesus of Nazareth there is neither Christology nor Christian discipleship.

Some people may think that both the author of the fourth gospel and John the Baptist had *a priori* knowledge of Jesus Christ so that they were able to introduce him to others in a very kerygmatic way.¹¹ However, Jesus Christ is not an abstract idea. If that was the case, there was neither revelation nor room for faith. We cannot know Christ without looking into the history of revelation, and without entering into a personal relationship mediated through prayer, scriptures, and the sacraments.

¹¹ By *a priori* it means the attempt to grasp God only through the faculties of human intellect. It would dispense the aspect of historical divine revelation.

The faith of the first Christian communities was an Easter faith, and the disciples did not grasp the resurrection as something given to their intellect. Rather, they had to connect their previous experience of Jesus of Nazareth with the new presence of the risen Lord. For instance, Mary Magdalene was capable of recognizing the presence of the risen Christ only because she heard Jesus Christ calling her by her name. Probably only Jesus used to call Mary in such a way (Jn 20:16). Another example is the disciples on the road to Emmaus. Jesus walked with them, and he explained the Scriptures to them. However, it is only when Jesus broke the bread that their eyes were opened. If the disciples were not familiar with Jesus' practice of blessing and breaking the bread, they would not have recognized the presence of the resurrected Lord (Lk 24:13-35). These are only two examples that allow us to affirm that Easter-faith is above all related to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. Therefore, any Christology must take into consideration the experience of the first Christians, and how the early Church has interpreted it.

Karl Rahner supports the already mentioned idea that there is no *a priori human knowledge* because all knowledge is rooted in experience, and such experience is fundamental in professing faith in the person of Jesus Christ. According to Rahner, the human person is open to acknowledge the presence of the absolute mystery, and he calls such openness an *a priori* human structure. However, it is different from *a priori knowledge*. Rahner notes that this openness is not part of our human nature; rather, it is called God's supernatural grace.

Human openness for being as such does not derive from a previous, albeit narrower openness, which would come to us with our very nature, making known to us some objects, such as our essence itself. Rather transcendence opens up for us when we receive an object given from without, showing itself by itself. This peculiarity of our spiritual nature and transcendence was the starting point whence we arrived at human historicity.¹²

¹² Karl Rahner, *Hearer of the Word*, trans. J. Donceel (New York: Continuum, 1994), 120.

In other words, Rahner claims that every human being receives a gift from God, which gives him or her the capacity to hear God's voice, and to be aware of objects and other subjects. It can be said that to be aware and to know means to find the meaning of a given reality such as, for instance, our awareness of self-presence and the presence of another. This presence means not just the objective reality of something, but the horizon of the whole existence. There is nothing in the animal world, for example, that may imply that animals question their own existence, that they sense their death, and that they have transcendental expectations. Human beings can question even themselves because they are transcendental beings. They transcend each of their particular questions toward the absolute answer, which lies in the Creator.

Transcendence is a human gift. All human beings receive such grace from God. Chapters Two and Three will treat this transcendence of the human person as one of the main keys to understand human being and the person of Jesus of Nazareth. For now, it is important to highlight that, according to Rahner, human beings receive uncreated grace in the sense that it is not part of their human nature. Rather, it is given to them. Moreover, it shows that such an *a priori structure* is not equivalent to knowledge of God in itself. But it is the fundamental condition for hearing God's voice.

Karl Rahner builds his theology from the perspective of the human person as transcendental being. On the one hand, Rahner starts from the experience of the human person, and, on the other hand, he claims that such a condition of possibility is above all God's grace. Therefore, Rahner maintains a dialectic relationship between so-called ascending and descending theologies. This project will adopt Rahner's Christological approach mainly because it is faithful to the theological tradition of the Church. However, Rahner notes that there are two basic types of Christology. He

defines them as approaching from “below and above.” Furthermore, Rahner describes these two perspectives as “saving history” Christology and “Metaphysic Christology.”¹³

Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, another important Catholic theologian of the Twentieth Century, also notes that there are two basic types or approaches to Christology. He calls the first one “theology of Incarnation, and the second one “theology of the Cross.” According to the emeritus Pope Benedict XVI, these two types of Christology are marked by polarities. But they are not mutually exclusive. He argues that the theology of Incarnation has a Greek influence, and it presents a more static perspective, while the theology of the Cross, a Pauline theology, presents a more dynamic description of the economy of salvation. He puts it this way:

The theology of the Incarnation tends toward a static, optimistic view. The sin of man may well appear as a transitional stage of fairly minor importance. The decisive factor, then, is not that man is in a state of sin and must be saved; the aim goes far beyond any such atonement for the past and lies in making progress toward the convergence of man and God. The Theology of the Cross, on the other hand, leads rather to a dynamic, topical, anti-world interpretation of Christianity, which understands Christianity only as a discontinuity but constantly appearing breach in self-confidence and self-assurance of man and of his institutions, including the Church.¹⁴

Ratzinger does not explain these two approaches to Christology in order to emphasize one over the other or to overcome their polarities. On the contrary, he claims that such polarities can correct each other. Therefore, they must remain as polarities, but complementing “each other toward the whole.”¹⁵

One the other hand, Karl Rahner explains the two approaches to Christology, but he does not draw a positive conclusion about the need for keeping both of them. One reason for that is the fact that he does not describe the two types of Christology in the same way that Ratzinger does. For Rahner, “saving history Christology” is equivalent to the whole mystery of Incarnation

¹³ Rahner, Karl, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, trans. William V. Dyck (New York: The Seabury Press, 1978), 340.

¹⁴ Ratzinger, Joseph Cardinal, *Introduction to Christianity* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 229/30.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 230.

experienced in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Therefore, Rahner does not separate the theology of Incarnation from the theology of the Cross. The static aspect of the theology of Incarnation that Ratzinger highlights finds dynamicity in Rahner's perspective. Rahner refuses any static theological perspective, which he calls metaphysic. For Rahner, Descending Christology must be related with the experience of the man Jesus of Nazareth because it is in history that the Logos of God is revealed.¹⁶

As said before, Karl Rahner defines the two types of basic Christology as saving history Christology and metaphysical Christology or descending Christology. According to Rahner, saving history, which can mean economy of salvation, has the man Jesus as the point of departure.¹⁷

The eye of faith rests upon this man Jesus. He is the concrete sense described, the content of the specifically Christian experience, and the experience of saving history. Through him, as faith sees it, God's ultimate and irrevocable utterance of salvation to human beings is made.¹⁸

Theological perspective and method are pretty much equivalent. A method informs a kind of perspective. Rahner's theology places special focus on the ascending approach. For him, the economy of salvation reflects the reality of God in such a way that the Trinity revealed in history is the immanent Trinity.¹⁹ Therefore, it can be said that Rahner's theology is from both below and above. This project will assume the Rahnerian perspective, which focuses on the earthly existence of Jesus Christ as the point of departure for speaking about God and human beings. However, the

¹⁶ Rahner notes that many theological treatises, mainly from the Middle Ages, focus more on the descending approach, and they are independent in such a way that the doctrine of the Trinity and the Incarnation, for example, would not change anything in such literature. However, For Rahner, the economy of salvation must play a fundamental role in every theological approach.

¹⁷ Rahner, Karl, "The Two Basic Types of Christology," *The Content of Faith*, Ed. Karl Lehmann and Albert Raffelt (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 338.

¹⁸ Ibid, 339.

¹⁹ Rahner, Karl, *The Trinity*, trans. Joseph Donceel (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), 22.

project will keep the dialectic relationship between above and below because for Rahner heaven and earth, God and humanity, are deeply connected.

For Rahner, the person of Jesus of Nazareth is not an option for Christology. The earthly existence of Jesus Christ must be the point of departure for Christology. However, we can reflect on Jesus from many different perspectives. Some scholars focus on the historical aspects while others give more attention to the meaning of Jesus' practice, for instance. This study is not an attempt to approach Jesus through all possible angles. It believes that the figure of Jesus as savior can bring light for men and women who follow his way of responding to God as human beings.

The profession of faith concerning Jesus and with Jesus as starting point carries with it the demand to imitate his way of being (being-for-others). The Incarnation, therefore, involves a message that refers not only to Jesus Christ but also to nature and the destiny of each person.²⁰

Rahner approaches Jesus as the incarnate savior, the Christ of faith and of history, who is flesh, and shares our humanity.²¹ This thesis claims that a) human beings achieve their humanity to the extent they follow the person of Jesus Christ, and b) the existential experience of Jesus Christ implies a type of spirituality grounded in him that conforms our life according to his own. According to Rahner, such a following of Christ is measured only by the standard of Jesus himself and his life. For that reason, the following reflection will deal with the meaning of the Incarnation, the doctrine of the Church on Jesus' humanity, and its soteriological aspects.

2. The Meaning of the Incarnation

In times past, God spoke in partial and various ways to our ancestors through the prophets; in these last days, he spoke to us through a son, whom he made heir of all things and through whom he created the universe (Hb 1:2).

The main goal of this section on the Incarnation is to affirm that God really became human in all senses that imply the human condition, and that Jesus of Nazareth is the true *symbol* in whom

²⁰ Boff, 178/79.

²¹ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 289.

God can self-manifest, and that through Jesus we can become true human. For Rahner, “all beings are by their very nature symbolic, because they necessarily ‘express’ themselves in order to attain their own nature.”²² Moreover, Rahner notes that a being is known by its symbolic reality. In this sense, Jesus Christ is the symbol of God and of human beings in whom we can know both God and the human person. A symbol, according to Rahner, has an ontological reality, which expresses more than itself. In this way, Jesus Christ shows himself as a symbolic being, which expresses more than himself. The theology of symbol points to the transcendental aspect of a given being, and also to its present ontological reality. Rahner sums up the importance of the concept of symbol in theology in the following way:

The concept of symbol [...] is an essential key-concept in all theological treatises, without which it is impossible to have a correct understanding of the subject-matter of the various treatises in themselves and in relation to other treatises,” ... “The principle that God’s salvific action on man, from its first foundation to its completion, always takes place in such a way that God himself is the reality of salvation, because it is given to man and grasped by him in the symbol, which does not represent an absent and merely promised reality but exhibits this reality as something present, by means of the symbol formed by it.”²³

Rahner claims that the doctrine of the Incarnation should be the main chapter of a theology of symbolic realities, and this chapter would consist in an exegesis of Jesus’ saying: “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (Jn 14:9). Rahner notes that:

There is no need to dwell here on the fact that the Logos is image, likeness, reflection, representation, and presence –filled with all the fullness of the Godhead. But if this is true, we can understand the statement: the incarnate word is the absolute symbol of God in the world, filled as nothing else can be with what is symbolized.²⁴

The Rahnerian concept of symbol will be present throughout this project because it presumes that we can only talk about the symbolic reality of a given being. In the same way that

²² Rahner, Karl, “The Theology of the Symbol,” *Theological Investigations*, vol. IV, trans. Kevin Smyth (Baltimore: Helicon Press; London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1966), 224.

²³ *Ibid*, 245.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 237.

we cannot grasp being in itself, we cannot grasp absolute mystery in itself. In Chapter Two, I will treat the Rahnerian concept of the human person and his or her final orientation, and, Chapter Three will reflect on how Jesus fulfills our human vocation. The current approach aims to bring Jesus to the horizon of humanity. It does not aim to make him human according to our own standard, but to situate the soteriological aspect of his humanity.

2.1. Incarnation as God's Self-Communication

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us (Jn 1:1,14).

The New Testament in general is a narrative from the perspective of the Easter faith of the early Christians. The Gospels, for instance, focus on God's revelation in Jesus of Nazareth whose human existence revealed the salvific presence of God in a unique way in human history.

Even though the New Testament is an Easter narrative, it reflects the concrete life of Jesus of Nazareth, who is called the Christ (anointed) of God, and the experience of the first Christians. The infancy narratives in Mathew and Luke show God becoming human in the concrete human world. It is worthy to reflect on the immutable and infinite divine nature of Christ that assumes a finite and mutable mediation. However, I will focus on the man Jesus who can reveal both the divine and the fullness of the human person in her relationship with God.

The point of departure in this study is the economy of salvation. I mentioned before that the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity, and vice versa. Moreover, it is important to note that there is just one economy of salvation even though it takes place through particular and temporal events.

Theologians locate Jesus' Incarnation within the larger context of God's salvation plan in history. The Incarnation is the climax of such a plan. For instance, God's relationship with the

people of Israel is one of the main keys to understanding the Incarnation of the Logos of God, and Jesus' mission. Jesus Christ realizes their expectations as the Imago Dei, the New Moses, the New Adam, the one who overcomes even death.

Christians understand their faith in Jesus Christ mainly through the perspective of the Hebrew God who establishes a covenant with his people, and who always walks with them. Roch A. Kereszty situates a series of God's covenants and efforts as expression of God's solidarity with his people. By that time, Israel is the adoptive son of God. But there is still a big gap between God and his people. According to Kereszty, Incarnation is the ultimate step of solidarity with God, who in Jesus Christ makes Israel his true son.

A qualitatively new stage has begun in God's growing solidarity with humankind when in Jesus the Word becomes flesh. Jesus of Nazareth is not simply a man of God, nor is God just present in him.²⁵

The understanding of the Incarnation as God's plan since the moment of creation is already present in the writings of the Fathers of the Church. Saint Irenaeus, for example, notes that even before the beginning of creation God willed to "be seen of men, and converse with them on earth, and that He should discourse, and be present with that which He had formed, saving it, and having become such as to be received by it."²⁶ Irenaeus understands God's self-communication as salvation in itself. For him, a human being "will see God so as to live."²⁷ In this sense, the Incarnation is above all God's plan to bring humanity to its fullness. This study treats the twofold revelatory aspect of the Incarnation, which, on the one hand reveals God to the human being, and, on the other hand, presents the human being to God. The relationship of a human to God is necessary for the human to live, and "the Glory of God is a living man, and the life of man is to see God."²⁸

²⁵ Kereszty, Roch A., *Jesus Christ: Fundamentals of Christology* (Staten Island, NY: Paulus, 2002), 356.

²⁶ Irenaeus, Saint, Bishop of Lyon. *Five Books of S. Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, against Heresies*. trans. John Keble, M.A. (London, Oxford, and Cambridge, 1872), 366.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 367.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 369.

Theologians, in general, trace the history of salvation, pointing it toward its universality. They are aware that even though there is only one economy of salvation, God's self-revelation takes place in the particularity of each time and culture.²⁹

As Jesus is understood in light of the Old Testament, there is a risk of reducing the universal salvific aspect of the Incarnation to a particular world and culture. However, one of the most important challenges that Christianity faced in its beginning was precisely to present this good news to all the nations.³⁰

According to Karl Rahner, the mystery of the Holy Trinity is open to us in the mystery of the Incarnation.³¹ The life of the Church and of Christians as well have to be understood in light of the mystery of Christ. Rahner understands the Incarnation mainly as God's nearness to the world who self-communicate to humankind in Jesus Christ.³² Rahner asserts that God is always the absolute transcendent, and we human beings can only grasp the divine presence through mediated realities. God truly wants to talk to human beings face to face: "The Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a person speaks to a friend" (Ex 33:11). The Hebrew people believed that no one would truly see God face to face because the human person would disappear in the presence of the absolute mystery. In this context, face to face means in the presence. God's presence is mediated through symbols, and the Old Testament speaks of many theophanies in which human beings are capable to identify God's presence. The Hebrews believed in a transcendent God, who reveals himself freely. They kept this notion of God as a person who enters into relationship with human

²⁹ As human history is not reduced to the West and East experience, God has self-manifested authentically in other cultures and religions. The challenge for Christian faith is to affirm that while the Incarnation of the Word of God took place as a particular event, it has a universal significance without limiting or denying God's other authentic revelations. It does not mean to affirm the possibility of other Incarnations or to place the Christ's event in the same level of other divine mediations.

³⁰ In the Third chapter I will approach the universal soteriological aspect of Jesus Christ' humanity.

³¹ Rahner, Karl, "On the Theology of the Incarnation," *Theological Investigations*, vol.4, 105.

³² *Ibid*, 120.

beings. In this sense, God is not a concept or a static being. This understanding of God, who self-reveals in human history, allowed the Hebrews to live attentively in order to respond to God's words whenever God decided to speak.

Karl Rahner highlights the main meaning of the Incarnation as God's radical and special self-communication in Jesus Christ. He claims that, alike to Saint Irenaeus, the Incarnation is part of God's plan because God willed to self-communicate. For Rahner, such divine self-communication takes place ontologically in Jesus Christ in whom God speaks to human beings face to face. All of human history is a movement toward the Incarnation, which illumines the future of humankind.

Furthermore, many Fathers of the Church understood theophanies in the Old Testament as a sign of the pre-incarnate Logos.³³ Karl Rahner and many other catholic theologians claim that, in fact, the Old Testament describes God's willing to self-communicate. In Jesus, God is not just present, but God becomes human.

Rahner notes that "the idea of Godman is already implied as the eschatological climax to that process of historical mediation and revelation in which the transcendental self-bestowal of God is realized." Moreover, he points out that we must avoid mythological misconceptions in which the human side of the Godman is portrayed as a passive puppet or as a "mask through which God makes himself known."³⁴

Even though it seems disputable whether the Old Testament supports the idea of God's plan of self-incarnation, Rahner is right as he asserts that God's self-communication must have a

³³ Justin Martyr, Saint Augustin and other Fathers of the Church read the Old Testament through the perspective of the Incarnation of the second person of the Holy Trinity. The Incarnate Logos became direct reference to the Wisdom; the angel of the Lord is understood as reference to the existence of the pre-incarnate Son.

³⁴ Rahner, Karl, *The Content of Faith*, Ed. Karl Lehmann and Albert Raffet; trans. ed. Harvey D. Egan, S.J. (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 336.

climax, and it is fulfilled in the man Jesus. Let me return to the Old Testament to emphasize God's desire for self-communication.

We can call God's self-communication in the Old Testament as God's manifestations or theophanies. Theophanies are always mediated. For instance, the angel speaks in the first person as God who says to Abraham, "I will make your descendants so numerous" (Gn 16:10). On one hand, the angel self-identifies with the Lord, but on the other hand, he is distinguished from the transcendent God. God self-manifested through many other ways: for instance, natural phenomena (Ex 3:1-5; 33:12-23; Jgs 6:11-24; Am 7:7-9), and dreams and visions (Gen 15:1; 1 Sam 1:3;). All these realities mediated God's will according to their own capacity, but God-self became none of them.

In the Incarnation God breaks the barrier between the divine and the secular world because now we no longer say simply that God is in Jesus, but that Jesus is God.³⁵ Jesus of Nazareth is God's Word in history. God did not simply self-communicate through Jesus of Nazareth, but in him God became man. In other words, God did not just speak through a human being, but as human being. The New Testament and the Church's tradition have related to Jesus Christ as the Incarnate Word of God. The assertion of this first thesis is that "the Word of God has assumed an individual human nature and so has become man."³⁶

I mentioned that the first Christians related to Jesus Christ as the risen Lord, and as God: "My Lord and my God!" (Jn 20:28). Furthermore, they had to maintain their faith in the savior Jesus Christ, but keep their monotheist faith in the immutable and transcendent God.³⁷ The next

³⁵ If we do not affirm that Jesus is God, real Incarnation did not take place. The challenge for Christology is to affirm Jesus' divinity without opposing it with his humanity.

³⁶ Rahner, "On the Theology of Incarnation," 107.

³⁷ A common answer for that issue is that God can become subject to change in something else. That is why God can die as human person, but not as Godself. However, this statement is delicate because it can imply that any dimension of the person of Jesus Christ is untouchable like his divinity. We are dealing with a dogma and a mystery.

generations of Christians faced the issue of preserving Jesus' divinity without compromising his humanity.

The awareness that the risen Christ shares in God's sovereignty and power, and that he existed in a condition equal with God before his human birth, was already formulated in the first decades of the Church's existence. The belief itself became solidified most likely by the impression of Jesus' person, action and words in his earthly life as well as the Father's inspiration in the hearts of those who believed in him, specially in the hearts of Mary, John and Peter.³⁸

The affirmation of Jesus' humanity and divinity was never a simple definition or an easy agreement between Christians. It took centuries to define the common faith of the Church. The following reflection aims to describe how the Church defined the apostolic faith in the Incarnation of God in Jesus Christ having as reference the Council of Chalcedon.³⁹

2.2. The Church's Teaching on the the Incarnation

The experience of the resurrection of Jesus Christ shaped the life of his disciples. Jesus was a marvelous teacher, a prophet, friend of the poor, and close associate of sinners, but his death on the cross was a scandal and a frustration for his disciples. Jesus' death itself would not change history or save anyone.⁴⁰ It is precisely the experience of encountering the risen Jesus that caused his followers to resignify Jesus' whole life. The resurrection led the disciples to believe that Jesus Christ "is Lord in the same sense as Yahweh is the Lord of his people and of the entire universe. While there is only one God, the man Jesus himself is God,"⁴¹

Jesus' disciples knew that Jesus had a special relationship with God. He used to pray to

Christians believe in the immutability and transcendence of God, who can empty himself to assume the human nature.

³⁸ Kereszty, 187.

³⁹ *Chalcedon* did not put an end to this issue forever. This debate continued in many local churches.

⁴⁰ It does not mean that people cannot value the experience of someone even if it might be understood as a failure. A good deed may have intrinsic value, and it does not depend on a successful end according to human standards. For example, the death of Socrates delivered a powerful message to the Greek society because of Socrates' commitment to truth and justice. Another example can be the path of Martin Luther King Jr. He preached explicitly as Christian, and his inheritance is a source of life and hope even for many who are not Christians.

⁴¹ Kereszty, 155.

God who he called Abba, and he claimed to speak in the name of his heavenly Father as he performs his Father's will. After the resurrection the disciples believed that Jesus was God. But how can one who has a relationship with God be God? Christians began to understand that there are distinctions in the Godhead.⁴²

The Christian faith spread rapidly beyond the Jewish world. It became intelligible throughout the Greek- Roman world. In this process, Greek philosophy was assimilated into Christianity, and the "emphasis on metaphysics was largely due to" such assimilation.⁴³ Greek influence will be noted mainly in the language developed in the early Councils of the Church to explain the person of Jesus, for instance, *substance*, *prosopon*, and *nature*. Moreover, many misunderstandings named heresies come from such a Greek influence: Gnosticism and Arianism, for example. This Greek influence will become clearer to the extent that this study goes through the process of the development of the Church's doctrine on the Incarnation.

In the first three centuries of Christianity, Christians attempted to explain who Jesus was and how he was related to God.⁴⁴ They took many other centuries to define and to harmonize the many different directions they had debated, affirmed or denied. There was real tension between those who affirmed one or another aspect of Jesus Christ's identity such as his divinity or his humanity, and those who affirmed equally both the humanity and the divinity.

As Christian faith was spreading everywhere, but without a clear and systematic definition of who Jesus Christ was, many Christians developed their own understanding of the person of Jesus Christ. Later, many of these ideas were considered heretical because they were beliefs

⁴² Ibid, 155.

⁴³ Burns, Charlene P. E., *Divine Becoming: Rethinking Jesus and Incarnation* (Minneapolis, Mn: Fortress Press, 2002), 38.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 40.

opposed to the way the Church believes.⁴⁵ For example, the Gnostics believed that the world was created not by the Godhead, but by a principle less divine, like the demiurge present in the philosophy of Plato. In this context, Christ would be a heavenly creature, but not the Godhead. In this same way, for Arians, Jesus was not God. In the Godhead there are no distinctions. Even though Jesus is not a mere human being, neither is he divine. For Arians, Jesus is a creature, made, not begotten. Therefore, he might have had a beginning, and he had no direct knowledge of God.⁴⁶ Arius was influenced by Greek metaphysics in which God is immutable. He believed in Jesus, but not as God.

The Council of Nicaea (325) was convoked mainly to respond to the Arian controversy regarding his conception of the person of Jesus Christ. In the following passage Athanasius, one of those opposed to Arius, expresses his main ideas:

God was not always Father. There was when God was alone and was not Father. He became Father subsequently. (...) God, he says, was alone. The Logos and Wisdom were not yet being. Then, intent upon creating us, he made one being and named him Logos, Wisdom, and Son, and did so in order that though him he might create us.⁴⁷

According to Arius, the Logos was different from all other creatures such as angels and heavenly beings, but the Logos was a creature of God and, therefore, not essentially God-self.

Athanasius in *On the Incarnation* advocates for both Jesus' humanity and divinity. His point of departure is not the Greek philosophy and idea that "god" created the world from existing material. He parted from the concrete economy of salvation manifested in Jesus Christ. According to Athanasius, God "has made all things out of nothing by his Word, Jesus Christ our Lord."⁴⁸ He

⁴⁵ The Church in this context means the collegiality of many local Christian communities that gathered together to discuss relevant themes of their faith in Christ.

⁴⁶ Arianism was just one among many other heresies such as, for example, Adoptionism (Jesus was born as a mere man, and he was adopted later by God as Son), and Docetism (Christ's physical body and death were an illusion of God who is pure spirit).

⁴⁷ Athanasius, in *The Council of Nicaea* (Colm, Luidhéid, 1983), 21.

⁴⁸ Athanasius, "On the Incarnation," in *Christology of the Later Fathers*. Ed. Hardy, Edward Rochie. Library of Christian Classics (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 58.

connects the Incarnation with the whole economy of salvation through a soteriological perspective. The Word of God became human for our own salvation. Athanasius asserts that Christ on the Cross was God, and “all creation was confessing that he that was made manifest and suffered in the body was not man merely, but the Son of God and Savior of all.”⁴⁹

The Council of Nicaea affirmed the divinity of Christ, and it provided a formal creed to be recited in Christian worship. This helped to create a common understanding about the person of Christ and the unity among Christian churches. Moreover, the Council had to find a new language to express the divinity of Jesus and his relationship to the Father. For instance, the participants debated on the Greek words *homoousios* and *homoiousios* to mean that Jesus Christ’s nature was the “same” of the Father or “of like (similar, not the same) in substance” of the Father. The participants agreed that *homoousios*, though ambiguous, was the more appropriate term to mean that Christ was true God from true God, begotten not made.

The Council of Nicaea affirmed the divinity of Christ. However, it did not address the doctrine of the two natures of Christ. The understanding of Christ’s divinity raised the question of the relationship between his divinity and humanity. Nicaea defined that Christ is the same nature of the Father. Therefore, he is God from eternity. Christ is the second person of the Holy Trinity. Alexandrian theologians were concerned that many would misunderstand the two natures of Jesus Christ as two persons, or that this concept of *homoousios* could imply that in Jesus Christ there was only one nature. The Antiochene school was concerned to defend the full human nature of Christ without implying that the Logos replaces the human soul because the Alexandrian school tended to understand that in the Incarnation the divine absorbed the human nature. Theologians from Antioch were concerned to protect the divine Logos because other Christians could interpret

⁴⁹ Ibid, 73.

that the Logos became a subject to the human person.⁵⁰

The Council of Chalcedon affirmed the two natures of Christ and denied any absorption by one or other nature. Moreover, it affirmed the union of the two natures at the same time it maintained their distinctiveness.

Following, then, the holy Fathers, we all with one voice teach that it should be confessed that our Lord Jesus Christ is one and the same Son, the Same perfect in Godhead, the Same perfect in manhood, truly God and truly man, the Same [consisting] of a rational soul and a body; *homoousios* with the Father as to his Godhead, and the Same *homoousios* with us as to his manhood; in all things like unto us, sin only excepted; begotten of the Father before all ages as to his Godhead, and in the last days, the Same, for us and for our salvation, of Mary the Virgin *Theotokos* as to his manhood; One and the Same Christ, Son, Lord, Only begotten, made known in two natures [which exists] without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the difference of the natures having been in no wise taken away by reason of the union, but rather the properties of each being preserved, and [both] concurring into one Person (*prosopon*) and one hypostasis—not parted or divided into two persons (*prosopa*), but one and the same Son and Only-begotten, the divine Logos, the Lord Jesus Christ; even as the prophets from of old [have spoken] concerning him, as the Lord Jesus Christ has taught us, and as the Symbol of the Father has delivered to us.⁵¹

Saying that Christ is truly human, the Council satisfied the Antiochene school, and affirming the full and true divine nature of Christ, it satisfied the Alexandrians. Therefore, Chalcedon represented a compromise between two theological schools that tried to preserve the integrity of the Christian faith. However, the debate does not end here, and it did not reduce the tension between Antiochenes and Alexandrians. Even after Chalcedon, some Christians would advocate for one single will of Christ, for example. But, as it is not the faith of the Church, they would not be accepted as true Christians, rather, as heretics.

The Church has no difficulty in affirming that Jesus' human nature is created; however, the Logos of God cannot be understood in such a way. The Fathers of the Church developed a

⁵⁰ A few scholars claim that such distinguish between schools is not too clear. However, they represent Christological perspectives that emphasizes one or other aspect of Jesus Christ, but they are not necessarily mutually excluded. In fact, it is common sense that Christology that had Greek influence tend to be more dualist and affirmed more the importance of the soul (divine) than the matter (flesh/human nature).

⁵¹ Chalcedonian Definition, in *The Incarnation – An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Incarnation of the Son of God*, ed. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, SJ., Gerald O'Collins, SJ. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 144.

specific language to explain the person of Jesus Christ. This language was not univocal between the Greek and the Latin church, but it helped to create a common understanding of the faith in Jesus Christ. For example, they affirm that in Jesus Christ there is a hypostatic union between his humanity and divinity.⁵² This means that the Logos of God assumed the humanity of Jesus Christ eternally. God took our humanity to the heart of the Holy Trinity. In other words, Jesus' humanity has an eternal significance. It allows Christians to say that the one who will come again in the final day is, of course, Jesus Christ as he is: human and divine. However, it does not seem that nowadays we Christians properly understand our profession of faith in the coming of this Jesus Christ who is at the same time God, and the humble man of Nazareth.

Karl Rahner takes seriously the Church's teaching on the hypostatic union of the human and divine natures. The human created nature of Jesus is assumed by the Logos of God. Rahner notes that, "according to the testimony of faith, this created human nature is the indispensable and permanent gateway through which everything created must pass if it is to find the perfection of its eternal validity before God."⁵³ For Rahner, we can speak of the second person of the Holy Trinity without the relevance of the flesh because the Son was always with the Father and with the Holy Spirit. He had no beginning. However, after the Incarnation of the Logos of God we no longer can refer to Jesus Christ without implying his humanity. The Word of God is found eternally in Jesus Christ. Rahner notes that Christians tend to reflect only on the historical and moral mediation of the Incarnate Word during his earthly life. But for Rahner, the humanity of Jesus plays fundamental role not only in the past, but also now and for all eternity.

Jesus "is now and for all eternity the permanent openness of our finite being to the living God of infinite, eternal life; he is, therefore, even in his humanity, the created reality for us which stands in the act of our

⁵² Rahner claims that the ecumenical Councils developed a philosophical language to describe the person of Jesus Christ. Even though he notes that such language is ambiguous and may not express appropriate meaning nowadays, Rahner advocates for this great contribution of the Fathers of the Church.

⁵³ Rahner, *The Content of Faith*, 331.

religion in such a way, that, without this act toward his humanity and through it (implicitly or explicitly), the basic religious act toward God could never reach its goal.”⁵⁴

Rahner claims that theologians and the faithful in general have to maintain such an incarnational perspective. For Rahner, for instance, the resurrection of Jesus Christ keeps the hypostatic union between the divine and human. Therefore, Christ took his humanity into the heart of the Trinity, and in his second coming his humanity will stand as the horizon of every human person. His humanity is divinized in the sense that Jesus achieved perfect communion with God as he surrendered himself completely to God.

Rahner’s Christological perspective follows the faith of the Church, which Chalcedon summarized after centuries of debates. For him, Chalcedon is a point of departure for theological reflection. Rahner tries to provide some directions to the dogmatic profession of faith, which is not self-evident in the Creed. Only those who seek for the relevance of the doctrine can find real challenge. In this sense, Rahner is aware that sometimes he provides his own interpretation, not because he disagrees with some articles of faith, but because usually they do not provide concrete direction. Rahner aims that the dogma itself may become a kind of spirituality that shapes Christian life.

The Council of Chalcedon is a reference on the definition of the two natures of Christ, and from it, the Church built a systematic understanding of the Incarnation of the Word of God. Jesus is affirmed as both true man and true God. However, it did not mean the end of heresies. In several regions Christians continued religious practices in which they accentuated one or another tendency, which were regarded as heretical ideas. Even nowadays Christians can misunderstand or neglect the full identity of Jesus Christ. Such misunderstanding can lead Christians to live a spirituality, which does not connect the present life with the eternal significance of the existence

⁵⁴ Ibid, 332.

of Jesus Christ. The main point this thesis wants to emphasize is the need for a spirituality of Christian discipleship that takes into consideration the significance of the humanity of Jesus for our own salvation as human beings.

The reason for describing and affirming Jesus' humanity lies in the fact that the Incarnation has a soteriological aspect that is achieved only insofar as the human person is divinized in the faithful following of Jesus of Nazareth. However, this thesis claims that divinization means humanization. In this sense, Christian discipleship means following the one who is truly human, and through whom we become human. This is the main thesis that I will develop in the third chapter, having this dialogue between the meaning of the Incarnation and the Rahnerian understanding of human person. So, the main question is: what does it mean to be truly human? But before I get there, I want first to conclude this chapter reflecting on the relationship between Incarnation and soteriology, and to explain briefly how the Church and the New Testament have affirmed Jesus Christ's humanity.

3. Incarnation and Soteriology

Karl Rahner claims that Christology and Soteriology cannot be two independent disciplines. According to him, God's self-revelation is always about salvation. Scriptures provide many images and metaphors to describe God's saving action in Jesus Christ. It is not possible to define the soteriological aspect of Jesus' life, death and resurrection through a single image. In this sense, it is important to keep the diversity of such images. They are insights of the Church's tradition, which help Christians to connect with the salvific role of Christ.

While the church gradually moved to craft dogmatic statements concerning the person of Jesus Christ, the spectrum of orthodoxy with regard to soteriology was a broad one, giving rise to a wealth of descriptions.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Ryan, Robin, *Jesus and Salvation* (Collegeville, Min: Liturgical Press, 2015), 50.

There are many images and metaphors, which explain the soteriology of the Incarnate Logos. However, it can be said that the Catholic tradition presents two basic types of soteriology regarding the theology of incarnation. The first perspective is represented by the Augustinian tradition in which the Incarnation takes place in order to overcome the damage of original sin. It does not mean that Augustine has a pessimistic understanding of creation. For him, everything is created by God. Hence, all things are made good.

It became clear to me that things which are subject to corruption are good. They would not be subject to corruption if they were either supremely good or not good at all; for, if they were supremely good, they would be incorruptible, and, if there was nothing good in them, there would be nothing which could be corrupted.⁵⁶

Christians have a sense that something in the world and in our humanity has been corrupted. For Augustine, evil “is a privation of the good, a corruption of something that is essentially good.”⁵⁷ In this way, the Incarnation takes place mainly to overcome such evil, which is caused by original sin. This perspective has many nuances according to different theologians. For instance, Saint Anselm connected the Incarnation with the theory of satisfaction. For him, Jesus Christ came to pay the price of our offense (sin) against God. It can be said that Thomas Aquinas also follows such a theory of satisfaction. For him, the Incarnation is what fits better in God’s saving plan: “because man, on deserting God, had stooped to corporal things, it was necessary that God should take flesh, and by corporal things should afford him the remedy of salvation.”⁵⁸ Aquinas assumes that sin was not necessary for the Incarnation. But he focuses on the economy of salvation, and he understands the Incarnation as the remedy for human sin.

⁵⁶ Augustine, *Confession*, trans. Rex Warner (New York: Signet Classics, 2009), 7.12.

⁵⁷ Ryan, 54.

⁵⁸ St. Aquinas Thomas, *The “Summa Theologica” of St. Thomas Aquinas*, Vol. Two (New York – Boston – Cincinnati – Chicago – San Francisco: Benziger Brothers, 1947), Pt.III.Q1.Art3.

The second perspective emphasizes love as the motive for the incarnation. Peter Abelard dialogues with the Anselm's tradition, and he suggests a quite different perspective that rejects the idea of satisfaction. Abelard's perspective focuses on the Incarnation as an example of the love of God, who invites human beings to follow such an example. For Abelard, "divine compassion could free man from every devil by a command alone."⁵⁹ Abelard maintains that Jesus Christ forgave sin during his ministry, and that many were saved even before the Incarnation because of their righteousness. Abelard does not deny the soteriological aspect of the Incarnation. But he highlights that love is the only motive for the Incarnation. "This is my command: love one another as I love you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends" (Jn 15:12-13). Abelard questions whether the death of Jesus has salvific significance in itself. For him, salvation lies in our human capacity to accept such a great example of love: "Are we also made more righteous in this through the death of the Son of God than we were before, that we should now be freed from punishment?"⁶⁰ Abelard's view of redemption cannot be seen as merely an exemplar.⁶¹ For him, the grace to love comes from God. Love is not an achievement of human effort itself. Rather, it is manifested through the life of Jesus Christ, and communicated to all.

Both perspectives find roots in the Scriptures, and we do not have to canonize either of them. Both the Scriptures and the tradition of the Church reveal that Christ's Incarnation has a soteriological aspect. However, they did not "give particular indication as to how that should be understood."⁶² The Catechism of the Catholic Church, which summarizes the work of patristic theologians, provides at least four soteriological directions of the Incarnation. It says that the Word

⁵⁹ Abelard, Peter, and. *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Seven R. Cartwright (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 166.
<http://www.jstor.org.proxy.bc.edu/stable/j.ctt284zn1>.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 167.

⁶¹ Ryan, Robin, *Jesus and Salvation*, 85.

⁶² Rausch, 188.

became flesh for: a) order to save us by reconciling us with God; b) so that thus we might know God's love; c) to be our model of holiness; d) to make us partakers of the divine nature.⁶³

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. (John 3:16-17)

The Church's teaching does not canonize any one soteriological interpretation, but the Church tends to emphasize the theory of atonement foremost in Catholic piety. This study will focus more on the second interpretation because it can provide significant insights for Christian praxis.

3.1. The Human Jesus, the New Testament, and the Teaching of the Church

Karl Rahner claims that the New Testament has precedence over any other Christian source for approaching the person of Jesus Christ. Rahner does not read the Scriptures in light of his theology, rather he does theology in light of the Scriptures. In other words, he does not develop a systematic anthropology and after that submit the Scriptures to its main concepts. For biblical scholars and theologians in general it seems to be self-evident to say that Jesus is truly human. But very often Christians distinguish their own particular task from that of Jesus in the world by erecting boundaries that seems to state "He was not like us," or, "I am not Jesus." Furthermore, Christians refer to Jesus Christ mainly with exclusive language that points to his divinity as one who acts as God, but with no reference to a concrete human being.

The gospel's claiming that the *Word of God became man* holds in itself deep meaning in such a way that challenges our perception about God and about our own human vocation. The God of Jesus of Nazareth is not the god of the philosophers who is hostage to the notion of perfection

⁶³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York – London – Toronto – Sydney – Auckland: An Image Book, 1995), 128.

and radical otherness in relation to his creation. God, the Father of Jesus Christ, enters into relationship with human beings. He makes decisions, he is love and compassion, and he works toward human salvation. God is not an isolated being, but a relational divine mystery in itself.⁶⁴ However, we find difficulty not only in our approach to the reality of God-self, but also in our understanding of what a truly human being means. Our concrete human existence tells us a lot about who we are. However, the invitation here is not to understand the person of Jesus according to our common sense, but to understand our humanity according to Jesus's humanity. He is the one who reveals the fullness of all human beings. In the second chapter I will develop this thesis according to some Rahnerian anthropological categories. This current section aims to affirm that Jesus is a truly human being, and he shares all conditions of the human life.

3.2. The Word of God Became Flesh

We human beings experience life as flesh. Our senses and intellect are deeply connected in such a way that we can say that there is no human being without body and soul. That is why the Church professes faith in the resurrection of the flesh. The unity between soul and body are conditions for the human existence. Therefore, to say that God became human necessarily means

⁶⁴ This point can find a more accurate explanation reflecting on God as the Trinitarian mystery in which the three divine persons are distinct expressions of God-self. Like a triangle, God cannot be understood without any of the three divine persons. Internally and externally God self-express as a perfect Trinitarian community. That is why According to Rahner, the Immanent Trinity is the Economic Trinity, and the Economic Trinity is the Immanent Trinity. He notes that God maintains his transcendental in the economy of salvation. However, according to him, God does not reveal anything less than God-self. Rahner's Trinitarian axiom is object of many disputable arguments; however, the second person of the divine Trinity truly became human, and, as the gospel says "whoever sees me sees the one who sent me" (Jn12:45). It is important to reflect on the mode of the Incarnation to not dismiss the fact that in Jesus the two natures, divine and human, are in perfection harmony without confusion and without one overlapping the other. The person of Jesus Christ has these two natures, and we cannot simply to affirm one or another or to say that he is either God or Man. He is truly God and truly Man. The Catechism of the Catholic Church asserts that "He became truly man while remaining truly God" (CCC, Par 1, part III:III, n.464 - the Profession of Faith, 130).

that God became flesh.⁶⁵ This basic understanding of the human person as body and soul challenges Christian anthropology to rethink the real significance of the human body in the history of salvation.

Since the children share in blood and flesh, Jesus likewise shared in them, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the Devil, and free those who through fear of death had been subject to slavery all their life. Surely he did not help angels but rather the descendants of Abraham; therefore, he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every way, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest before God to expiate the sins of the people. Because he himself was tested through what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested. (Heb 2:14-18)

The letter to the *Hebrew* several times clearly affirms that Jesus Christ shares in all things the human flesh. The *lex orandi* of the Church, for example in the Eucharistic prayer IV, prays without reservation affirming that the Son of God “shared our human nature in all things but sin,” and the climax of the whole liturgy is the consecration of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Jesus Christ.⁶⁶

The question whether Jesus Christ had a human body does not seem to be a problem for Christian faith in general. The challenge is to affirm without dualism that the person of Jesus Christ is both flesh and spirit, and that they are essentially connected.⁶⁷ Without that consideration, Christ would not have had real suffering on the cross; he would not have experienced hunger (Mt 4:1-11), crying (Jn 11:35), anguish, and even death (Mt 27:32-56). All these are human experiences. Furthermore, as humans we have limited knowledge; we are finite and dependent on the absolute God; we are tempted and we face the possibility of failure. Thus, how can we affirm that Jesus Christ, the Word of God, had real temptation and limited knowledge and faith as we have?

⁶⁵ Rahner understand “flesh” not just as body, but as a terms that refers to the reality of the whole human person. The theological assertion that the World became flesh means not just the embodiment of God-self, but the hypostatic union of the absolute Spirit with Jesus of Nazareth. It is important to note that the Incarnation takes place in the human nature, and not in a reality of an inanimate matter.

⁶⁶ USCCB, *The Roman Missal* (Washington, DC: Magnificat, 2011) 641.

⁶⁷ Karl Rahner developed his understanding of human person mainly through the idea of human being as *spirit and matter*. I will give proper attention to this theme as I move to the Chapter Two.

The Gospels have no reservation in portraying the humanity of Jesus Christ. In fact, the Church's teaching highlights that the Son of God shares all our humanity, except sin. Therefore, to affirm that Jesus Christ also had limited knowledge and that he was tempted does not dismiss his divinity. In this context, there are at least three main themes that seem to be arguable among some theologians: Jesus' beatific vision; his temptation and the possibility of failure, and his sinlessness.

There are those who affirm that Jesus had full knowledge, whether it is about the past, present or future, and that Jesus had no real temptation because it would contradict his divinity. However, this claiming seems to be an attempt to place Jesus of Nazareth into an abstract concept of divinity that does not give room for him to perform his mission as human person. Other people may claim that Jesus was not truly human because he did not sin. In fact, that Jesus is sinless is the only claim that the Church clearly makes regarding the difference between Jesus and all other human beings.⁶⁸ Jesus was faithful. However, to solve such issue we need to define the meaning of sin, and to provide a specific anthropological perspective.

First of all, sin is essentially about the way human beings respond to God. It is a refusal to God-self, a misuse of human will, freedom and understanding. We can discuss "free will" and the level of "human understanding," but I propose to describe Jesus' answer to God-Father, and his relationship with his fellow human beings in a very existential and concrete way. Second, only a positive anthropology can affirm that Jesus as human person is sinless. For example, if we look back to the book of *Genesis*, we can draw the conclusion that God saw that everything he made was good, and that sin or evil is not part of the creation or inherent part of human nature. Evil and

⁶⁸ The Church seems to make a kind of exception as she affirms the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary. However, this happens to the extent that Mary participates directly in the saving mystery of the Incarnation. Honestly, I have no more to say about that dogma unless to affirm that the Virgin Mary is the first one who participates in the fullness that Jesus Christ brought to all human beings.

sin entered into the human history by the misuse of human will. It is very common to say that “I sin because I am human.” However, according to a proper Christian anthropology, sin never can be a proper human response because that does not reflect the image of God. The idea of human being without sin is very biblical. We can understand that as the point of departure of human beings or as the final horizon of every human person. “God created mankind in his image; in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (Gen 1:27). Saint Paul affirms that Jesus Christ is the *Imago Dei* (2 Cor 4:4), and this interpretation has become very popular in contemporary Christology. The very genuine idea of human being reflects the image of God, and that is why I claim that Incarnation in Jesus of Nazareth really mediates the Logos of God.

One of the best way of affirming Jesus’ humanity is precisely affirming that he had limited knowledge and real temptation. Some passages of the Scriptures depict Jesus as someone who knows the thoughts of his friends (Lk 9:47) and enemies (Lk 6:8). Such transcendent knowledge or vision is possible because “the human nature of Jesus is the Son’s own human nature; consequently, it is appropriate for this human nature to share in a human way the divine knowledge of the eternal Son.”⁶⁹ However, the Incarnate Son knows only what the Father has revealed to him. Furthermore, Jesus had to engage his mind to develop his common human knowledge in order to accomplish his mission.

In Jesus the Incarnation was unique. He is not only human; however, his divinity does not get in the way of his human existence. The Fathers of the Church affirm that in Jesus there is one person, with two natures, and two wills, one human and other divine, but they are in perfect harmony.

⁶⁹ Kereszty, 394.

Christ possesses two wills and two natural operations, divine and human. They are not opposed to each other, but cooperate in such a way that the Word made flesh willed humanity in obedience to his Father all that he had decided divinely with the Father and the Holy Spirit for our salvation.⁷⁰

Jesus was tempted in his human will, but his answered to God was positive, he was faithful, but not without using real efforts like any other human being.

Only the man who does not yield to a temptation, who, as regards that particular temptation, is sinless, knows the full extent of that temptation. Thus Jesus, the sinless One, is the one who really knows the full extent of temptation's power, and He knows it precisely because He did not yield⁷¹

The letter to the *Hebrews* (2:14-18) in the beginning of this section asserts that Jesus was tested in his suffering, and because he overcame temptation he became the one who leads us toward the true humanity. It is precisely through the perspective of these conditions of the human existence that I will argue that Jesus is the fullness of humanity.

In the next chapter I will introduce some main features of Rahner's anthropology, highlighting his concept of the human person, and how Jesus is a concrete person who guides us with himself toward our human vocation.

⁷⁰ Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Part One, n475), 134.

⁷¹ Morris, Leon, *The Lord from Heaven; a Study of the New Testament Teaching on the Deity and Humanity of Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), 51.

CHAPTER TWO

Karl Rahner's Theological Anthropology

1. Rahner's Anthro-po-Theology

What does it mean to profess faith in the Incarnation of the Word of God? For Rahner, the basic task of Christology is to answer this question. The first chapter introduced the meaning of this fundamental mystery of Christian faith. Regarding this theme, Karl Rahner acknowledges that we are dealing with absolute mystery, and that our approach to it is always limited.⁷² The focus of this project is not to describe the theology of the Incarnation, but to reflect on how this divine mystery is fundamental for Christian spirituality in terms of following Jesus.⁷³

The Incarnation is a mystery not only because we do not know the divine in itself, but also because our understanding of the human being is not self-evident, as we used to think. For Rahner, our human knowledge of God takes place as we are open to hear God's Word throughout human existence. We cannot understand God-self if we do not understand what God became and our human nature and existential condition in the world. In that sense, Rahner asserts that we cannot say anything about God without also saying something about human beings, and vice versa. That is why we need to reflect on the meaning of being human so that we may understand what God became in Jesus Christ, and who God is in himself.

According to Rahner, theology is not possible without taking into consideration God's relationship with human beings, and Jesus Christ is the one who reveals us both the true human being and the true God who became human. This chapter aims to introduce key features of the

⁷² *A Rahner Reader*, ed. Gerald A. McCool (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975), 146.

⁷³ Rahner, "On the Theology of the Incarnation," 105.

anthropological theology of Rahner, which will bring light to a proper understanding of the fullness of our humanity as we live a human life according to the human existence of Jesus of Nazareth who leads us toward God, who is our absolute horizon. Thus, I want to focus on Rahner's theological point of departure, his understand of the human person and her existential condition in the world.⁷⁴ The third chapter will situate Christians in this same perspective, and it will place them before the experience of Jesus of Nazareth, whom we are called to follow.

1.1. Rahner's Theological Point of Departure

From Greek philosophy until modernity, metaphysics occupied the center of philosophical debates. In general, metaphysics deals with the question of whether human beings can know any reality *a priori* and whether such knowledge is universal. Furthermore, the deepest question of philosophy is the reflection on the being in itself. It asks for the inner reality of the being. In this sense, metaphysics is above all ontology.

In more modern times, philosophers such as a René Descartes and Emmanuel Kant continued this reflection on metaphysics. They claimed that metaphysics is the first science, which shapes all other human sciences. However, from the time of Descartes (1596–1650), “philosophical thinking not longer began with the objective reality ‘lying before’ the mind.”⁷⁵ Descartes places radical doubt as the methodological starting point for any certainty of human reason. His philosophy was built on the idea of radical doubt, in which nothing that is perceived or sensed is necessarily true. The only thing that remains true is that there is a mind or consciousness doing the doubting and believing its perceptions, hence the famous formulation,

⁷⁴ For practical and linguistic reason, according to Portuguese and Spanish language, I will use, sometimes, the pronoun “she” for *human person*, and “he” for *human being*. But it does not mean gender as an existential grammar.

⁷⁵ Losinger, Anton, *The Anthropological Turn: The Human Orientation of the Theology of Karl Rahner* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 6.

‘Cogito ergo sum.’ Even God is doubted in order to deduce God’s existence. I offer this example only to illustrate that in the beginning of modernity *a priori and abstract* knowledge was radically questionable.⁷⁶ The object of human knowledge started by the comprehension of the subject itself, of its self-consciousness: “I think therefore I am.” From now on, human beings become the point of departure of all philosophical reflection as both the one who asks questions, and as the one who is the object of his/her own question. In fact, no one can talk about the advent of modernity without mentioning the anthropological turn. In this context, the ontological question is not answered without considering who is the one who asks and what is his/her condition in the world. Thus, the human being becomes both the subject and the object of the question.⁷⁷ For example, Kant analyzes different types of human reasons such as pure reason, practical reason, and aesthetic reason.

Even though most classic philosophers advocate that metaphysics is the root of human knowledge, they recognize its limits. For instance, Kant claims that human beings have an *aprioristic* intellectual structure. However, that does not mean that the human person can know everything. In this sense, he puts three main questions that human beings must ask: What can I know? What should I do? What may I hope? According to Kant, human reason is limited. What Kant call *a priori* is understood as categories from which human beings interpret human experiences. In Rahner’s theological system, *a priori* means human structures that open him/herself to the possibility to receive God’s self-communication.

⁷⁶ Thinkers admit the existence of abstract knowledge, for example, human mind can conceive the idea of a perfect Triangle without never have seen one perfect triangle. *A priori knowledge* is denied because it is not possible to know the reality of a given being without experience its existence or manifestation. *A priori knowledge* and *abstract knowledge* are two distinct concepts, and neither applies to the knowledge of the sacred mysteries.

⁷⁷ It does not mean that philosophy had never reflected before on the nature of a human person and her intellectual faculties. Modernity is marked by a spirit of autonomy of human beings, who allowed themselves continuous radical rethinking about their existential being in the world, and everything related to them.

While for Kant categories (*a priori*) are necessary conditions for human experience, for Rahner *a priori* is a pre-condition for God's revelation. However, Rahner notes that such an *a priori* human structure is essentially God's grace given to every human being. A second influence in Rahner's theology is Martin Heidegger.

From Kant, Rahner kept the insight of transcendental reflection, and from Heidegger he developed his existential analysis. These two aspects "indicate the contours of Rahner's basic position as a theological application of elements of the modern view of the human being."⁷⁸ On one hand we cannot say that Rahner makes theology only from below, from the existential perspective, because his theology is transcendental in the sense that he affirms *a priori* human structure (God's universal uncreated grace) as possibility of receiving God's revelation. On the other hand, we cannot claim that his theology is just from above because he also conceives that the supernatural existential appropriates the contents of human experience as the human person receives God's revelation.⁷⁹

If we presuppose a correct and also a critical understanding of the classical theology of the Trinity, and if we are clear about the fact that we know anything at all about the "immanent" Trinity only insofar as we experience a Trinitarian God in the "economy of salvation," and that the two are identical, then basically it is clear that a knowledge of the eternal Son and Logos is contained and grounded in the fact that we experience the historical self-expression of God in its historical reality, and there we experience it in its eternal possibility.⁸⁰

For Rahner, the dogmas of Christian faith are not pure abstractions. We have *a priori* structure, but it does not mean that we can grasp God-self or any other object without having some kind of experience of it. Rahner is also influenced especially by Thomas Aquinas. He is an interpreter of Thomas' theology in the sense that he appropriates Thomas as his own, but is always

⁷⁸ Losinger, 7.

⁷⁹ The concept of supernatural existential is fundamental in Rahner's theology. It will be developed when I approach his concept of human person.

⁸⁰ Rahner, Karl, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity* [orig. 1976], trans. W Dych (New York: Seabury, 1978), 302.

trying to be coherent with Thomistic thought. This will become more evident as I reflect on some features of Rahner's theology.

It can be said that Rahner's theological point of departure is the economy of salvation: in other words, God's revelation throughout human history. However, his theology is not primarily a theology of revelation. Revelation in itself means God speaking to human beings. Before reflecting on revelation, Rahner proposes to reflect on the one who receives such revelation and on his/her condition to respond to God's word.

In *Hearer of the Word*, Rahner explains the way he understands metaphysics as a common ground for both philosophy and theology.⁸¹ Even though Rahner wrote this book in the very beginning of his public theological career, it provides fundamental concepts that will shape his whole theological perspective. In the following reflection I will focus mainly on this book to explain how Rahner articulates the two horizons of his theology: the transcendental and the existential. After that, using other of Rahner's articles, I will explain his concept of human person, and I will relate such concept with other Rahnerian categories that define our human existence. My focus will not be on an essentialist understanding of the human person, but on her existential experience in the world. The reason for that is to see how the person of Jesus of Nazareth, the Incarnate Logos of God, shows us the way to live as true human beings, and as his disciples.

⁸¹ Karl Rahner, *Hearer of the Word: Laying the Foundation for a Philosophy of Religion* [1st, 1941], trans. J. Donceel (New York: Continuum, 1994).

2. Rahner's Transcendental Theology

One of Rahner's main theological contributions to fundamental theology and Christian revelation is his approach to the deep relationship between God and human beings. In general, the point of departure of classic theology is revelation in itself. For instance, the whole Scripture is about God's self-revelation to the whole creation. Rahner recognizes the value of the theology of revelation. For him, God's revelation is part of the daily life of every human being. Any theology must take into consideration God's revelation. However, Rahner does not start his theology from this point of departure. At least at the first moment it does not seem so. At the end of this section I may state that he does theology from what he calls real revelation. But first we must follow his fundamental theology till we get to such a conclusion.

In Chapter One, I introduced the tension of the two theological approaches: from below and from above. I advocated for the need of keeping both perspectives in a dialectical relationship. Certainly no one would disagree that anthropology is in the center of Rahner's theology. However, we can easily misread Rahner affirming that his theology comes from his anthropology, or from below. In fact, Rahner's anthropology is so fundamental to his theology that we cannot approach his theology without his anthropology. However, according to him, theology is not based in anthropology.

All sciences are, in a true sense, anthropology, except for theo-logy. All of them, irrespective of their reference to things, are based in their reality and procedures upon the logos of humanity; they are the "things in the spirit of humankind." Theology alone exists because there is a word of God to humanity.⁸²

According to Rahner, God has a word for humanity, and gave the grace to every human being to hear God's voice. God's revelation is not an abstraction of the human mind. Rather, it is God's self-giving. For Rahner, the human person is understood as the one who has absolute transcendence

⁸² *Hearer of the Word*, 145.

toward God, and we find God in the concrete human experience. In this sense, Rahner articulates “anthropocentricity and theocentricity in theology as one and the same thing seen from two different aspects, and each aspect is unintelligible without the other.”⁸³

Theology cannot study God-self as its object. Theology is a reflection of the revealed word of God. However, we can understand God’s word only in and through the one who receives it: in the human being in history. In fact, theology is not anthropology. However, it “presupposes a “theological” anthropology which may be called fundamental theological anthropology.”⁸⁴ Therefore, the anthropological perspective is part of theology in itself in such a way that there is no theology without the existence of those who hear God’s message.

According to Rahner, theology consists in our listening to God’s revelation. In *Hearer of the Word* he asserts that epistemological validation of theology lies in metaphysics. However, Rahner notes that this epistemological validation has not God as its object, but it reflects on our human capacity of listening to God’s message.

Such a metaphysic will view God as one who is free and unknown, and who cannot be clearly grasped by human groping. It will not make bold to decide a priori how this free, personal, unknown God will behave toward us, how God will establish the relationship between God and humanity.⁸⁵

The content of God’s revelation is not given *a priori*. *A priori* is “just” our human openness to hear the word of the free and absolute God. The capacity to hear the word of God is the condition for the possibility of God’s revelation. Rahner’s theological focus is not on describing the essence of human being. If that was the case, he would be doing anthropology. But he claims that, “insofar as we understood ourselves as the beings who, in freedom, have to listen to the possible message of the free God, we are doing theological anthropology.”⁸⁶

⁸³ Metz, Johannes B., “An Essay on Karl Rahner,” Foreword in Karl Rahner’s *Spirit in the World (Geist Welt)*. Willian Dych, S.J., trans. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), 16.

⁸⁴ Rahner, *Hearer of the Word*, 146.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 8.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 147.

Rahner bases his theology in his notion of supernatural existential or supernatural orientation. A human being is radically open to receive God's revelation, and such openness is oriented toward the absolute mystery. Therefore, the supernatural human existential has a telos. In this sense, God's revelation leads human beings into a dynamic movement toward God's will for them. This existence is supernatural in the sense that such openness and orientation are not part of our human nature, but given. For Rahner, human beings have the fundamental task to actualize such grace because it implies an ontological presence of God. In this sense, human beings do not add anything to their human existence. Rather, they actualize God's presence.

Human openness for being as such does not derive from a previous, albeit narrower openness, which would come to us with our very nature, making known to us some objects, such as our essence itself... This peculiarity of our spiritual nature and transcendence was the start point whence we arrived at human historicity.⁸⁷

For Rahner, God's grace is the ground of the human existence in all senses. The human supernatural orientation is sign of God's uncreated and universal grace. However, such grace works as God's offering an ultimate goal to the human person. It is God's free gift, and human beings must accept such orientation freely; otherwise, God's revelation should not be truly salvation. In this sense, Rahner asserts that "a salvation not achieved in freedom cannot be salvation."⁸⁸ Furthermore, God made such salvation "possible for every person even within the infralapsarian situation of original sin."⁸⁹ Rahner highlights that such supernatural orientation is God's gift for every person because it is God's will that every human being be saved. This perspective opens the horizon of traditional religions, which have difficulties to accept God's saving revelation in other cultures and religions.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 119.

⁸⁸ Rahner, Foundations, 147.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 147.

Following Rahner's theology of grace, we may state that all human beings received from God an *a priori* state of supernatural existential, in which God self-communicates orienting them toward God-self as their absolute horizon.⁹⁰ This grace is infused from the moment of creation, and human beings experience it throughout their life as they are moved by love and hope. For Rahner, God's grace is the source of human capacity of hearing God's message and the source of the creative spirit that guides the human person toward God-self. In this sense, Rahner notes that "man can never even begin to have anything to do with God or to approach God without being already borne by God's grace."⁹¹

Rahner claims that even human sin does not dismiss the operative aspect of such a supernatural existential, which is given unconditionally to every human being.⁹² For Rahner, a human being is always capable of hearing God's message. Furthermore, Rahner means that such openness has an ontological reality present in every human being, which we can somehow verify through individual introspection.⁹³ It may be said that for Rahner such supernatural elevation of the human spirit is the real revelation, even though it is unthematic. God is the orientation of such a grace, and he is the absolute being. Therefore, the human orientation is unthematic in the sense that human beings cannot describe such a horizon as a finite reality or object. In this sense, Rahner places himself into Saint Thomas Aquinas' thought:

⁹⁰ The fact that such supernatural grace is given to all human beings does not imply that it is part of the human nature. Rahner does not devote much time distinguishing what is "natural and what is supernatural" in human beings. Everything is seen under the umbrella of God's grace. We can say that *supernatural existential* is uncreated grace because God infuses such orientation in the human soul since the moment of the human creation. It seems that here Rahner is supported by Saint Thomas Aquinas' metaphysics. However, such grace appears not as an object but as unthematic horizon of transcendence. It does not appear in the same way as the grace of the sacraments of the Catholic Church, which are God's created graces to nourish God's people toward their ultimate goal. Some people may ask if created graces (for example, the ones from the sacraments) are necessary for human salvation. However, the point here is that all God's grace aims at human salvation, and nobody can respond to God's invitation without such a supernatural call of God.

⁹¹ Rahner, *Foundations*, 146.

⁹² *Ibid*, 146.

⁹³ *Ibid*, 149.

Whenever our acts of an intentional kind are elevated ontologically by supernatural grace, by the Spirit of God, these acts always and necessarily have a supernatural, *a priori* formal object which cannot be reached as formal object by a merely natural act, although in certain circumstances it can be reached as content.⁹⁴

This Rahnerian understanding of the divine grace that causes an *a priori* horizon of knowledge and freedom is understood not only as a specific and original revelation, but also “as the mode upon which all other revelation is based.”⁹⁵

I mentioned that Rahner does not depart from a theology of revelation because he wanted first to situate the human person as the one who is capable of receiving the divine revelation. If we agree with Rahner that the supernatural existential is God’s self-communication within the most intimate reality of every human being, and that it is the real revelation upon which all other revelations depend, we can assert that, at this level, Rahner’s theology is rooted in revelation. Furthermore, this reflection has shown that such supernatural existential finds its cause in God’s offer of communication and not in human nature per se. Therefore, Rahner’s standpoint takes into consideration the transcendental being who is open to hear the absolute God who speaks freely. In this sense, Rahner himself calls his theology transcendental theology. Moreover, his theology is transcendental because God is the principle and foundation of the human supernatural existential, and everything depends of God’s word.

By “transcendental theology” he understands “the systematic theology which (a) makes use of the tools of a transcendental philosophy, and also (b) thematizes the *a priori* conditions in the believing subject for the knowledge of important truths of the faith, doing so on the basis of genuine theological inquiries and much more explicitly than in the past where these conditions were thematized only in a quite general sense.”⁹⁶

Rahner’s anthropology is a transcendental anthropology, and such method is also the method for his theology, which we call transcendental theology. We cannot name his theology as

⁹⁴ Ibid, 150.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 150.

⁹⁶ Losinger, 54.

if it were a combination of two concepts: theology and anthropology. Let's just call it inseparably theological anthropology.

3. The Human Person in the Theology of Karl Rahner

The human person, par excellence, is the theological place of Rahner's theology. All God's revelation is possible because such a human being is radically open to enter into a relationship with God-self. However, God is always transcendent and a mystery, which means that the human person faces the absolute mystery. Furthermore, for Rahner, not only is God mystery, but also the human person as well. In this sense, "Rahner's theology is built upon the mystery (now with a lower-case initial) of man."⁹⁷

The human being confronts not just God as mystery, but also him/herself as well. However, the human person is a mystery to herself because of the greater mystery which God offered to her, the grace of being a transcendental being. Such supernatural grace intends to be the channel of communication between God and the human person. "Man is also a mystery because God's call has entered the very structure of his created being."⁹⁸ In this sense, the human being's self-understanding is essentially connected with God's revelation in human existence. Therefore, the human being hears his/her inner identity as he/she listens God's word.

God-self is the absolute otherness. There is no direct identification between God and the human person. However, God gave such grace to the human being in such a way that he/she not only receives God's word, but in finding God he/she finds him/herself.

⁹⁷Vass, George, *The Mystery of Man and the Foundations of a Theological System*, Understanding Karl Rahner; v. 2. (Westminster, Md: London, England: Sheed & Ward, Christian Classics, 1985), 1.

⁹⁸Ibid, 2.

As the human being is related to the absolute mystery, there is no way of defining his/her very nature. What I propose in the following reflection is to describe the human person according to Rahner's transcendental anthropology. I don't intend to do an exhaustive presentation on Rahner's anthropology; I want to focus on his notion of the human being as spirit and matter; transcendence; personhood; freedom; and love.

3.1. Human Being as Spirit and Matter

Christian faith is above all the religion of Incarnation. The fact that the Logos of God became human does not mean a limitation of God-self. On the contrary, the Incarnation enables the human being to listen to God-self, and to move toward the absolute being. The notion of Incarnation is central in Rahner's theology not just from the perspective of the theological dogma, but as the inner reality of every human being.

The first way that Rahner describes a human being is as *spirit and matter*. However, the way in which Rahner articulates such a statement provides a profound understanding of the human person in light of the great mystery of God who assumed eternally our humanity.

Human being are able to be aware of themselves, to self-reflect, and to imagine what they want to become. Their spirit moves toward all directions, past, future, and present, but always related to time and space even though they can try to go beyond history as object. All this is possible because the human being is spirit. We also experience ourselves as matter, which, by principle, places us in concrete reality of the cosmos.

We are *matter*: at the same time that we touch we are touched. We produce sounds at the same time we listen to them. We ask about our own being while we are the answer of our own question. We capture the meaning of life through the senses of our corporeity in a transcendental

experience. Some philosophical and traditional religions have depicted the human person only from the perspective of the spirit, in which the body is a mere tool of the human spirit. For instance, according to Plato, the body is the prison of the soul. Plato affirms the immortality of the human soul while the human body just perishes. However, from a Christian perspective, there is no human person without body and spirit as a substantial union. In this sense, we can never say that the human person is her spirit understood without an embodied reality. Such a misunderstanding of the identity of the human person happens when we think that the corporeity of the human being is a reality opposed to the spirit, or as something temporally used by the spirit toward its journey to God.

Again and again, matter has been experienced as something dark, anti-divine, obscure or chaotic; again and again, it has been seen as something which stands in contradiction and bitter combat against the spirit understood as the true image and representative of God in the world, a combat which constitutes the history of nature of the world. Again and again, Christianity has protested against these conceptions as incorrect and hasty interpretations of human experience and, even though not everything in this falsely interpreted human experience was wrong, has condemned them as error and heresy.⁹⁹

It is against such pessimism and misunderstanding of matter that Rahner retrieves the metaphysical concept of matter as an essential dimension of the human person, without which there is no human being at all.

Rahner does not deny that being *matter* means being conditioned in time and space, and that there is distinction between *matter* and *spirit*. However, they are not contradictory, and it is precisely because the spirit is incarnate as matter in the cosmos that human person can be herself and self-express. Furthermore, Rahner maintains the transcendence of the human spirit, which can self-transcend in historical experience. Therefore, even though the human person finds herself in time and space, she can walk toward the absolute and infinite being which is God-self.

⁹⁹ Karl Rahner, "The Unity of Spirit and Matter in the Christian Understanding of Faith," in *Theological Investigations*, trans. Karl-H. and Boniface Kruger (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1969), 155/56.

It might be said that Rahner follows Thomas Aquinas, who recovered the Aristotelian meaning of human body. Aristotle does not affirm the immortality of the human soul as he provides a unique concept of human body, which shapes Aquinas's understanding of the human being not as something that has a body, but as body. For instance, according to Aristotle, what we could call "a human eye" without light is not a human eye. In this same way, Aquinas claims that a dead body of a human being is no longer a human body.¹⁰⁰

Rahner is concerned with the concept of human person as a whole. In *Hominisation*, for example, he introduces some key concepts of his understanding of the human person in the context of the question of the evolutionary origins of human being. He proposes a reflection that enables us not to separate matter and spirit, but to affirm both of them as one single human nature.

Rahner acknowledges a certain distinction between spirit and matter. However, he claims that matter and spirit are dimensions, which constitute together the one essence of the human person. Therefore, we cannot distinguish spirit and matter without correlating them.

Spirit is a reality that can only be understood by direct acquaintance, having its own proper identity derived from no other. It is only possible to say what matter actually is by contrast with spirit so known.¹⁰¹

For Rahner, any spirit related to the cosmic history must have some corporeal reality. Only in this way can such spirit be present in time and space revealing itself as finite reality. God is the only infinite spirit. Rahner asserts that human being is finite spirit. However, such spirit as finite reality that has "nothing to do with matter is very far from being a proposition binding on a Christian."¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ One of the challenges of Christian faith regarding its contact with Greek Philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle is to affirm the immortality of the soul (Plato) and her embodied reality (Aristotle) as a condition of the possibility of self-expression; in other words, as human person.

¹⁰¹ Rahner, Karl, *Hominisation*, trans. W. T. O'Hara (New York: Herder and Herder, 1965), 53.

¹⁰² *Ibid*, 52.

There is limitation in being *matter*. In fact, according to Rahner, there is no pure spirit beyond God-self. A human being is limited not just because of his materiality. Rahner claims that it is a Platonic temptation to describe matter as the prison of the spirit. For him, it is not Christian to teach that spiritual perfection increases as we move away from our ontological material reality. The human being is essentially spirit in the world, and we are human beings only as incarnate spirit.

Spirit must be thought of as seeking and finding itself through the perfection of what is material. This again, however, is only conceivable if by their very natures spirit and matter are not simply juxtaposed as alien, heterogeneous realities.¹⁰³

In *matter* spirit becomes itself. It means that there is no point which the *spirit* reaches in *matter* where it “has no more need of matter, as though thereby he would become a pure spirit and as such have direct access to God as pure being.”¹⁰⁴ It is impossible to conceive the idea of the human being without the movement of the *spirit* as and through *matter*. In light of the theory of evolution, Rahner does not separate the idea of the human being as *matter* and *spirit*. Rather, he would say that “spirit, in its effort to become itself, lets matter emanate from itself.”¹⁰⁵

The main reference for Rahner’s positive understanding of the human nature as *spirit and matter* is the dogma of the Incarnation of the Logos of God. God-self assumed a finite reality to manifest himself. However, such becoming incarnate was eternally assumed in such way that in Jesus Christ the human spirit could find its perfection.¹⁰⁶ For Rahner, the mode of the Incarnation of the Logos is also how we must understand the human being. The hypostatic union of the divine nature and the human nature of Jesus became eternal. Rahner understands the human person as *spirit and matter* in the mode of the Incarnation. The infinite spirit assumed a finite reality as the

¹⁰³ Rahner, *Hominisation*, 59.

¹⁰⁴ Tallon, Andrew., and Karl Rahner, *Personal Becoming* (Milwaukee, Wis: Marquette University Press, 1982), 75.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, 35.

¹⁰⁶ Rahner, *Hominisation*, 60.

condition of the possibility for God's special self communication in human history. But the Son of God assumed the finite reality of Jesus of Nazareth as part of his own being, which is assumed eternally, and that is the mode of the human being as spirit incarnate.

Human nature is not derived from combined "previously existing independent elementary parts."¹⁰⁷ Rahner focuses on the intrinsic connection between *spirit and matter*, and he asserts that "both of them derive from the one infinite Spirit which is God as their Creator."¹⁰⁸

According to Rahner, a human being as finite spirit fulfills itself in its corporal constitution. That is why the doctrine of the resurrection of the body is so essential for Christian faith; otherwise there would be no real human being. The incarnation of the human spirit continues as such in the eternal life, which means that the human person cannot never be conceived without her corporeity.

The 'eternal life' we profess is also the 'resurrection of the body,' i.e., the perfection of life, which was the starting point of the history of this concept. The beatific, perfect community with God of personal human existence, which we profess in hope, is also the perfection of the life which we experience bodily here below and which we must slowly pass through and experience in all its human breadth and depth.¹⁰⁹

It is important to highlight the transcendence of the incarnate finite spirit. For Rahner, the movement of the incarnation of the finite spirit is above all about *to become*. But, to become what? To actualize itself, *to become a human person*. The human person is an ontological being, but s/he is invited to self-actualize, to express herself, himself, as an existential being. Rahner focuses on the impact of the supernatural existential in the human person particularly because s/he can hear God, who reveals her/his true vocation.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 53.

¹⁰⁸ Rahner, Karl, "Christology in the Setting of Modern Man's Understanding of Himself and of His World," in *Theological Investigation*, trans. David Douke (London: Darton, Longman & Todd; New York: The Seabury Press, 1974), 218.

¹⁰⁹ Rahner, Karl, "The Secret of Life," in *Theological Investigations*, trans. Karl-H. and Boniface Kruger (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1969), 144.

The human spirit is only possible in history. Therefore, the world is the place where the finite spirit is called to be itself toward its perfection in the beatific vision. I have used the concepts of human being and human person interchangeably. However, for Rahner, the concept of personhood is essential to understand what the human being is supposed to be and to become, and how to achieve such an accomplishment. For that reason, I want to connect, briefly, the twofold fundamental aspect of Rahner's transcendental anthropology from which we must understand the human person: the supernatural existential and the process of personal becoming.

3.2. Supernatural Existential and Personal Becoming

The theological debates in the first centuries of the Christian era surrounding the question of the identity of Jesus Christ and the formulation of the Trinitarian Dogma led the Fathers of the Church to develop technical languages to approach to such mystery. The concept of *person* is certainly a linguistic term that no one can ignore in Patristic and contemporary Christology. In general, theologians note that the concept of *person* has always been ambiguous in the theological debate. By the fifth century the terminology was more or less set thanks to the Cappadocians. They focused more on the concept of divine person than on nature itself. Rahner adopted most of their understanding of the human being in relation to the divine persons, not in terms of *what* the divine persons are, but *how* they are persons. According to the Cappadocians, human beings can never become God, but they can live as divine persons.

Man can never become God by nature – but to personhood. This means that man is free to affect the how of his existence either in the direction of the way (the how) God is, or in the direction of what his, i.e. man's nature is. Living according to nature (*kata physin*) would thus amount to individualism, mortality, etc, since man is not immortal *kata physin*. Living, on the other hand, according to the image of God means living in the way God exists, i.e. as an image of God's personhood, and this would amount to becoming God. This is what the *theosis* of man means in the thinking of the Greek Fathers.¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ Zizioulas, John D., "The Doctrine of the Holy Trinity: The Significance of the Cappadocian Contribution," *Trinitarian Theology Today*, Ed. Christoph Schwobel (London, T&T Clark Edinburgh, 1995), 55.

Karl Rahner presents an existential vision of the human being toward God. Human beings are deified to the extent they accept living according to God, who is their absolute horizon. Such deification does not happen in term of sharing in God's nature, but in terms of living as images of God. We know God's image because God self-reveals as persons, and each of the three divine persons is essentially related to one another.

Since the beginning of Christian faith, Christians have proclaimed faith in a personal God, and it became a fundamental assertion about God-self.¹¹¹ However, Rahner notes that the term *person* is ambiguous even though he claims that it is still the most appropriate concept to refer to God's self-revelation in the economy of salvation. Moreover, Rahner acknowledges, as I said before, that in its origin the term *person* was developed to approach the reality of God-self. However, in modernity the term was applied analogically to the human being as the human person. In this context, being person means above all being *subject*. In the contemporary world, mainly in the first world, there is a tendency to overemphasize the notion of *person* as an autonomous and independent being. Rahner asserts that God is the absolute being, who stands by himself. However, God self-reveals as a relational community of three persons.

Rahner advocates for keeping a distinction between God as *person* and human being as *person* analogically. Every statement about the human being must find its meaning in the concept of God as person. The human being is made according to God's image and likeness. There is no direct identification between God's own being and the human being. However, the human person finds her own identity as she sees herself through the horizon of the absolute person. As person, the human being is not self-sufficient because she does not stablish herself by her own power. Rahner provides a profound sense of human dependence of the absolute mystery:

¹¹¹ Rahner, "Man in the Presence of the Absolute Mystery", in *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 75.

His transcendentality is rather a relationship which does not establish itself by its own power, but is experienced as something which was established by and is at disposal of another, and which is grounded in the abyss of ineffable mystery.¹¹²

For Rahner, there are two ways to conceive of God as person. In the first, “God is not an individual person because he cannot experience himself as defined relation to another or limited by another, because he does not experience any difference from himself.”¹¹³ God self-manifests as three distinct divine persons. However, Rahner notes that the understanding of *person* in the Holy Trinity is essentially related to the concept of relationship. It might be said that the three divine persons are one relational being. Rahner uses the concept of *person* as God’s three ways of subsistence.¹¹⁴ Therefore, if personal God is the key to understand human person, we must assume that the human being is essentially a being of relationship.

Rahner’s basic understanding of human being as person means, unlike God, that such being needs to become something that it is not yet in itself. It is clear that such a concept of person does not apply to God-self. God is the infinite and absolute being. God cannot become something else in himself. Rahner claims that because God wanted to self-communicate to human beings God became something in something else, not in God-self. This is the second way in which Rahner understands the concept of personal God as closer to the idea of human person. In this perspective, Rahner asserts that in the Incarnation the Logos became “something which it is not already in itself, in its divine nature. [...] The flesh which is man is the self-utterance of God himself.”¹¹⁵

Since we maintain the distinction of God as person, and the human being as person analogically, as image and likeness of God, we can draw some insights from Rahner’s concept of

¹¹² Ibid, 42.

¹¹³ Rahner, 74.

¹¹⁴ Rahner’s notion of divine subsistence has no relation with “modalism” because of each subsistence is ontologically God, and it is understood always in relation to each other as a single and undivided being.

¹¹⁵ Rahner, “The Body in the Order of Salvation,” in *Theological Investigations*, trans. Margaret Kohl (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 75.

the human person, who finds her own identity as she sees herself through the horizon of the absolute person.

For Rahner, incarnation in general is always about spirit self-manifesting, self-revealing to itself and to others. The Logos, the infinite Spirit, became human in such a way that it reveals us not only who God is, but also who we are as human beings.

In other words, the Incarnate Logos reveals itself to us as well as its relationship with the Father and with the Spirit. In this sense, “what Jesus is and does as man, is the self-revealing existence of the Logos as our salvation among us.”¹¹⁶ Therefore, in Jesus Christ we have, on the one hand, the revelation of the second person of the Holy Trinity, and, on the other hand, the revelation of the true human person related to the absolute being.

In the previous section I explained Rahner’s understanding of human being as spirit and matter, as spirit that incarnates to become itself. Such spiritual dynamism of the human person is a central characteristic in Rahner’s transcendental anthropology. “Become is at the very heart of the relation of spirit and matter.”¹¹⁷

Rahner defines human person essentially as transcendental being, which means that she is always going beyond herself in order to accomplish her own being. Human person is not a static entity, rather she is a constant personal becoming. Personal becoming is a fundamental key in Rahner’s transcendental anthropology. Andrew Tallon notes that according to Rahner’s perspective “becoming must mean becoming other, if not becoming more. I succeed in becoming a person because I am capable of self-transcendence, because true becoming is self-

¹¹⁶ Rahner, “Remarks on the Dogmatic Treatise ‘De Trinitate,’” in *Theological Investigations*, trans. Kevin Smyth, (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1966), 94.

¹¹⁷ Tallon, Andrew, *Personal Becoming* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Marquette University Press, 1979), 51.

transcendence.”¹¹⁸ We can say that human person becomes other only in the sense that the human spirit has not realized itself in its fullness. In this sense, Rahner affirms:

Real becoming is not just duplication but surpassing of self in which what becomes really becomes more than it was and yet this ‘more’ is not simply something added to it from outside. [...] the absolute being is the cause and basic reason for this self-movement of what becomes, in such a way that, on the one hand, this self-movement has this basic reason within itself as an inner moment of the movement and thus there is true self-transcendence and not merely a passive ‘being-surpassed.’”¹¹⁹

Any approach to Rahner’s theology must take into consideration his theology of grace. For him, God’s grace is the ground of human identity. Grace is what sustains the human being, and God’s grace is what guides the human person towards God-self. God is the principle and foundation of the human person, and only in such a horizon can the human being become truly person. Rahner asserts that:

All reality experienced by us is grounded in its existence and nature, in its becoming, activity and self-achievement, in an absolute being which we call God and which is the original creative and always active ground which posits everything in its own being and activity.¹²⁰

Rahner’s notion of uncreated grace, which places the human being in such a supernatural existential condition, allows us to affirm that the human being is created for relationship, and he becomes human to the extent that he accepts being person to another: “he who hasn’t found his neighbor is truly not present to himself; he is not a concrete subject, capable of self-identity, but most an abstract philosophical subject, a man who has lost himself.”¹²¹

Rahner’s concept of the human person is very contemporary in the sense that he understands *being person* as an “concrete entity conceived with all its relations” while an individual being is “an abstract entity conceived without relations.”¹²² In this sense, Rahner does

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 55.

¹¹⁹ Rahner, “The Unity of Spirit and Matter in the Christian Understanding of Faith,” in *Theological Investigation*, vol. VI. trans. Karl-H. and Boniface Kruger (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1069), 174/5.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 173.

¹²¹ Rahner, in *Personal Becoming*, 175.

¹²² Tallon, 99.

not deny the ontological reality of the human being; however, *being person* means to self-transcend towards the absolute person. Only God is person to himself. We, human beings, are persons as we are in relation with others as subjects. “When persons face other free beings, they always manifest themselves, precisely as the persons they wish to be in regard to other.”¹²³

For Rahner, we can be human only in community, and only as human community we can manifest our humanity as much as possible: “We are actually human only in a humanity.”¹²⁴ According to Rahner, the diversity of people as a whole is the key to understanding human salvation as personal becoming. We become person as we learn what it means to be a person. We learn from one another to the extent that we open ourselves to enter into relationship with another person. Only the otherness can discover, and to help us to become persons. For Rahner, the existence of other human being is the condition of the possibility of becoming person. He asserts that God-self is the absolute person, the absolute otherness. However, other human persons can communicate their own experience of self-transcendence. When human beings communicate such personal stories, we have what Rahner calls human history. But there is no history of an individual person. For him, history is the movement of the finite spirit becoming itself, and it implies necessarily human relationship.

God offers a horizon to the human person to become what she is called to be. In this sense, the human person can refuse such a horizon. However, the refusal could be an alienation of the human person in the sense that she could not realize her own being.

Freedom is the fundamental element that defines human relationship and self-possession.¹²⁵ Rahner understands freedom not as just something that a human person performs,

¹²³ Rahner, *Hearer of the Word*, 73.

¹²⁴ *Ibid*, 111.

¹²⁵ Self-possession means the capacity of self-express, and self-realize according to the ultimate horizon of the human being.

but as the capacity of self-expression and self-realization. Freedom places us before the question about what type of human being we want to be, and what fundamental option have we made in terms of the ultimate meaning of our life. In this sense, the object of the human freedom is the human subject itself. In freedom a person does not performs things. In freedom she becomes herself. In this sense, Tallon notes that “personal becoming is our reason for being, and freedom is the means, because in free acts we exercise disposition over ourselves, integrate and appropriate ourselves in act, decide who and what we are becoming.”¹²⁶

Human relationship is essentially human because it is experienced in freedom. Rahner notes that to affirm the absolute horizon of the human person means to achieve the goals of human freedom. According to him, freedom has finality, which “is not an accidental condition imposed on humankind as something which thwarts human freedom. [...] on the contrary, this destiny is the mature result of freedom itself.”¹²⁷ In this sense, every moment of human freedom is an anticipation of human future, of his personal becoming. “In freedom, we anticipate the whole unity of our life.”¹²⁸ However, Rahner notes that such a human act can be authentic or inauthentic. An authentic human free action leads the human person to an ascending relationship to her destiny, while inauthentic freedom alienates the human person from her own identity, which is related to the absolute person. But how do we determine whether or not a human act is an authentic expression of human freedom?

The question on human free action is not easy to answer. However, Rahner claims that *love* is the key to understand the real meaning of human freedom. As a matter of fact, we cannot move back to the past even though our present action is informed by our past experience. On the other

¹²⁶ Tallon, 13.

¹²⁷ Rahner, *The Contend of Faith*, 109.

¹²⁸ *Ibid*, 111.

hand, the human being is essentially a being which realizes its future, somehow, in present, at least in some levels. Therefore, a human free act must be a moment of the human's whole life that anticipates its futurity. Rahner notes that only when the human person performs her freedom in love is she capable of evolving her whole life. The dynamism of human existence is comprehended and expressed only in love.

In the Scriptures, there is nothing that involves human person in her totality more than the commandment of love: "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself" (Luke, 10:27). For Rahner, such an act of love tends toward the moment in which the human person finds herself in a "temporal eternity." [...] In this moment, an integration of our own whole life takes place. It is by no means self-evident how love, and only love, is able to bring about this integration."¹²⁹

For Rahner, the love of God unites the whole reality of the human person in her existential experience. God's love alone is the creative power that binds together everything that seems contradictory and opposite in human being.

without love, the individual, anxiously guarding his finite ego, would husband his future and yield it but grudgingly. Love alone can, as it were, draw God on to this earth, thus integrating all earthly love in the moment of eternity.¹³⁰

Love is the fundamental act that embraces every aspect of human life. One would ask what a genuine human act in love should be. Rahner has in mind the divine love. In this sense, the human being is not the point of departure in his theology. God-self is the reference. God is love, and we are called to identify ourselves with our absolute horizon, which means that we are human to the extent that we love. "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). The first *Letter of John* claims that we see God as we love, we know God as we love, and we are begotten by God as we

¹²⁹ Ibid, 112.

¹³⁰ Ibid, 113.

love. For Rahner, our love is nothing else than our response to God's love, which is God's generous grace poured out into our heart.

Furthermore, Rahner claims that such response to God's love is not conceivable without loving our neighbors. Human self-realization is achieved through encounters with other human persons, who together walk toward God-self. In this way, human response to God's love always must involve our neighbors. Rahner notes:

Love of God and love of neighbor constitute a unity.[...] the experience of God and the experience of self are one, and on the other that experience of self and the encounter with our neighbor are one, that all these three experiences ultimately constitute a single reality with three aspects mutually conditioning one another.¹³¹

A statement about the human being is a statement about God because the human person does not experience God and herself in two different moments, but in a single experience. It has shown that the human person is a relational being, and we are human only in community. Human beings realize themselves through their relationship to one another. Together they accomplish their final destiny, which means the realization of human future. The anticipation of such future is only possible as act of love. Therefore, human love must be a relational experience in the human community. In this way, Rahner advocates for the unity of love of God and love of neighbor.

For Rahner, the base of human love is God-self, and we respond to such experience of love. However, he asserts that "God who *is* Love (1 Jn 4:16) has loved us, not so that we might love him in return but so that we might love *one another* (1 Jn 4:7, 11)."¹³²

Rahner notes "that not every act of love of God is a formal act of love of neighbor." But he presumes that formal act of love of God must, at some level, reach the horizon of the neighbor. Furthermore, Rahner claims that one may love God unreflected in the neighbor, and this still

¹³¹ Rahner, "Experience of Self and Experience of God," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. XIII. trans. David Bourke (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975), 128.

¹³² Rahner, "Reflections on the Unity of the love of Neighbor and the Love of God," in *Theological Investigations*, Vol. VI, 235.

intends God in supernatural transcendentalty.¹³³

It is not necessary to explain here how Rahner articulates the unity of love of God and the love of neighbor. What I wanted to show in this section is that love is the human act per excellence, and that we cannot respond to God's love without having our neighbor in our horizon.

In the judgment, love of neighbor is given in St. Matthew as the only explicit standard by which man will be judged (Mt 25: 34-46), and that the cooling down of this love is represented as the content of 'lawlessness' among the afflictions of the last days (Mt 24:12).¹³⁴

Love is central in Rahner's transcendental anthropology because only in free act of love can the human person embrace her own being as a whole, anticipating temporally her final destiny.

In the next and final chapter, I will reflect on the person of Jesus of Nazareth having such a Rahnerian concept of human person as spirit and matter, transcendence, relationship, freedom, and love. After that, I will propose some insights for a Christian spirituality of discipleship from the perspective of the personhood of Jesus Christ, the incarnate infinite spirit.

¹³³ Such Rahnerian perspective is the key for his idea of Anonymous Christians.

¹³⁴ Rahner, "Reflections on the Unity of the love of Neighbor and the Love of God," 234.

CHAPTER THREE

The Soteriology of the Human Existence of Jesus Christ

Rahner was a theologian inspired by Ignatian mysticism. He sought to find God in all things. His writings can be read as his attempts to communicate his own experience of nearness to the absolute and transcendent God. Furthermore, Rahner's work reveals a deep concern for the pastoral issues in which he was engaged. In this sense, "Rahner's theology is rooted in a deep spirituality, in a deeply personal experience of faith, and in pastoral activity."¹³⁵ For Rahner, theology cannot be separated from an experience of God. For instance, he notes that St. Thomas Aquinas' theology comes from his own experience of God and not simply from a previous theological tradition: "Thomas's theology is his spiritual life and his spiritual life is his theology."¹³⁶ Moreover, Rahner was a Jesuit who found inspiration in the life of St. Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Society of Jesus. Convinced that Ignatius' apostolic inspiration emerged from his desire to communicate his own experience of God, Rahner identifies the experience of God as the root of all those who inspired him as a Christian and theologian. Those who try to understand Karl Rahner could then conclude that Rahner's understanding of the spiritual root of his "masters" also applies to himself. Hence, to reflect on Rahner's spiritual roots helps to understand his theological perspective.

I have experienced God directly. I have experienced God, the nameless and unfathomable one, the one who is silent and yet near, in the trinity of his approach to me. I have really encountered God, the true and living one, the one for whom this name that quenches all names is fitting. God himself. I have experienced God himself, not human words about him. This experience is not barred to anyone. I want to communicate it to others as well as I can.¹³⁷

¹³⁵ Ibid, 34.

¹³⁶ Karl Rahner, in Marmion, Declan, and Université Catholique De Louvain. *A Spirituality of Everyday Faith a Theological Investigation of the Notion of Spirituality in Karl Rahner*, Louvain Theological & Pastoral Monographs; 23 (Louvain: Peeters Press, 1998), 43.

¹³⁷ Ibid, 44.

In the above passage, Rahner's places himself as Saint Ignatius of Loyola, describing the importance of personal relationship with God. Rahner wants to communicate such experience to others because he believes that all human beings are invited to a transformative encounter with God. It shows that Rahner did theology as a Christian who prays and who is always attentive to hearing God's word. In his writing Rahner did not only intend to communicate human words and ideas, but he wished to encourage others to enter into experiences of God. Thus, experience itself is a key for understanding Rahner's notion of spirituality.

Rahner's writings covered many relevant themes of Christian faith and human life. They can be distinguished between scientific and spiritual/pastoral writings. However, Rahner's readers must consider such a distinction as a unit, since these two types of writings emerge from a single theological inspiration. For instance, Rahner considered many of his "pious" books just as important to him as those which were strictly theological works.¹³⁸ Rahner had in mind an apostolic goal, which is grounded in a deep spirituality. Thus, even in his most philosophical and conceptual work, Rahner revealed a kind of spirituality. For instance, Rahner always treated God as the absolute mystery, which is simultaneously near to human beings and always greater than human experience. Moreover, in *Hearer of the Word*, where he introduces his philosophical/metaphysical anthropology, Rahner treats human beings as a mystery, whose true identity depends on the absolute mystery. Therefore, as spiritual beings involved in a process of personal becoming, they go beyond themselves in every human act.

A motivating factor for choosing to study Rahner is his theological and pastoral concern. Rahner's theology, from its inception, reveals his pastoral focus, and shows his concern for the faith of his brothers and sisters. To this day, Rahner, the theologian, is a pastor for many.¹³⁹ This

¹³⁸ Rahner, *The Content of Faith*, 35.

¹³⁹ *Ibid*, 34.

pastoral feature of Rahner's theology has become evident to the extent that many Christians are now beginning to appreciate the relationship between spirituality and theology in his works. Rahner's work shows the significance of systematic theology for Christian practice. It can be said that "Rahner is a great pastoral theologian precisely because he is one of greatest systematic theologians of" his time, and that his "combination of pastoral work and theological lecturing during the war years gave him a keen appreciation of theology's pastoral implications."¹⁴⁰

It has been shown that both Incarnation and anthropology are foundational for Rahner's theological system. This fundamental aspect of his theology has pastoral significance, and it provides important insights to understand his Christian spirituality.

In the contemporary world, Christians need to rethink the way they live as historical beings. In this context, Rahner's theological insights are worthy sources for a Christian spirituality, which aims to highlight human history as the time and place of God's self-manifestation. For that reason, the first section of this final chapter will briefly treat Rahner's understanding of spirituality. After that, a description will follow of how Jesus Christ lived his humanity according to Rahner's understanding of the human person, and how his concrete existence must shape Christian spirituality. Finally, it will argue that, for Rahner, the model of the Incarnation is the goal of the individual spirit becoming human, and that to be a disciple of Jesus Christ means to become human according to the example of the concrete man Jesus Christ.

¹⁴⁰ A Rahner Reader, 19/24.

1. Karl Rahner's Notion of Christian Spirituality

For what fills and satisfies the soul consists, not in knowing much, but in our understanding the realities profoundly and in savoring them interiorly.¹⁴¹

Several different concepts can help to explain the spiritual basis of Rahner's theology. However, the first and most indispensable is his notion of an experience of God. A theologian communicates what she/he apprehends from her/his experience of the transcendent God. Experience, here, is understood as a relationship between two subjects, two persons who speak and listen actively.

According to Rahner, a genuine experience of God is essentially an encounter with the transcendental mystery, which involves the human person in the mystery of God in such a way that every single aspect of human life is understood in light of God, who is the absolute horizon of the human person.

This work has shown that, for Rahner, human beings only enter in true relationship through freedom and love. I will deal again with these two aspects of human person as I investigate the person of Jesus Christ at the end of this chapter. Here, it will be sufficient to point out that God is the absolute other who enters into relationship with human beings in love and freedom. Moreover, for Rahner, an experience of God is always an experience of alterity, which requires more than acknowledging the presence of the other. In such experiences God is the absolute mystery, and only he, the absolute being, can satisfy the human search for meaning.

The human person is a transcendent being who mainly asks questions about herself in addition to some questions about external realities. Human achievement becomes possible insofar as the human person can find the proper way to respond such question about herself. For Rahner,

¹⁴¹ Saint Ignatius, *Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*, trans. George E. Ganss, S.J. (St. Lois: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1992), 22.

only God is self-sufficient, self-explanatory; human beings find their meaning to the extent that they are related to the absolute being: God.

A young man wrote to Rahner to share the way he understands the meaning of human life and to ask for Rahner's thoughts. The young person's basic point was that human beings need to find an external reality to ground the meaning of life. He claimed that humans are a subordinate part of a complex system and that individuals have different roles in that system. Rahner replied by identifying several positive aspects of the young person's search for meaning. However, he noted that one cannot base a sense of life on what the young person called the subjective meaning found in relationship with created realities.

To be sure the real meaning for human beings is not to be sought in nicotine, alcohol, money, work. Neither, however, must it be sought in fame and in a history-making feat since, at bottom, all these things are transient and have no "external existence." The ultimate, true and final meaning for a human being lies at the base of his or her openness in mind and in freedom to the totality of all reality and its divine primary ground that—as we know at least through the Christian revelation—wants to communicate to us human beings precisely this infinite meaningful primary ground—ultimately understandable only in itself—that we call the direct intuition and contemplation of God.¹⁴²

Rahner acknowledges the existence of subjective meaning in terms of human relationship with the whole of creation. However, employment, material acquisition, pets, entertainments, fame, prestige, and all other earthly things only have meaning insofar as they mediate the real relationship between God and the human person. Seeking to find the meaning of life in a worldly reality amounts to a kind of idolatry or alienation since only in God can the human being find meaning. Finite objects cannot fill the infinite human horizon, and the resulting experiences of frustration with such realities "reveal our essential contingency, our dependency on a power greater than ourselves."¹⁴³ Rahner does not dismiss the value of finite objects, but he claims that everything must lead human beings to their absolute goal. He seems to follow the Ignatian

¹⁴² Rahner, Karl, *Christian Life Possible Today?* (Denville, New Jersey: Dimension Books, 1984), 105.

¹⁴³ Marmion, 56.

Principle and Foundation: “The other things on the face of the earth are created for the human beings, to help them in the pursuit of the end for which they are created.”¹⁴⁴

As noted above, for Rahner, an experience of God is a transformative encounter. Relationships with mere external objects do not change the human person in the sense that they do not speak to the hearts of human beings. Only a person can speak to other person, and such human relationship is an experience of alterity. According to Rahner’s anthropology human persons only exist in community. In the concrete world, another human person is a being who best reveals who one is. Human beings, however, are never merely an object for the other person. If one denies another’s personhood, they would be denying themselves. The other human person is rather a brother or a sister with whom one walks toward the absolute being. Interpersonal relationship is transcendent not because of the objective meaning of other people, but precisely because God is the primary ground and absolute horizon of all human beings. Therefore, interrelationship can be understood as a mediation of an experience of God. However, this does not mean that human beings are a tool or an object which mediates the experience of God.

The event of the Incarnation of God reveals that we cannot have direct experience of the absolute mystery. Hence, God became something else, not in God’s self but in Jesus of Nazareth, in order to self-communicate to humankind because of human limitations. Therefore, an experience of God is always mediated, and Jesus Christ is the highest mediation of God’s word. This does not mean that Jesus Christ is not God-self, though. For Rahner, God is always transcendent and absolute mystery; even in Jesus Christ one cannot grasp God’s totality.

We experience ourselves as beings which constantly reach out beyond themselves towards that which cannot be comprehended or circumscribed, that which precisely as having this radical status must be called infinite, that which is sheer mystery, because as the condition which makes every act of apprehending, distinguishing and classifying possible, it itself cannot in turn be experienced in

¹⁴⁴ Ganss, George E. trans., *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*, n.23 (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1992), 32.

that mode which it itself makes possible and of which it is the condition. It is present as the abiding mystery.¹⁴⁵

Human beings can absolutize finite reality or objects. Doing that, they do not transcend themselves because it is God, as the absolute horizon, who moves human beings toward their fulfillment. The following reflection will advocate for Rahner's claim that human beings must open themselves to an experience of God, surrendering to the absolute mystery.

For Rahner, an experience of God is not something extraordinary in the sense that it would be a particular moment in one's life. God-self speaks to the human person throughout their everyday life. The divine mystery is present in the details of the daily human experience of life. Rahner asserted that to speak about the human is already to speak about God. In this way, speaking about human experience is speaking about an experience of God. They are related. God is always present in every human action. Hence, human experience is already an experience of God. Because of human freedom and a lack of love, the absolute horizon in any human act can be refused or alienated. Even in such a case, God is still in relationship with human being, inviting them to a proper human experience.

Rahner noted that the experience of God is not restricted to a few people. Every human person receives the divine grace to be open to hear God's word. Rahner called this personal and interior experience of God *mysticism*. Influenced by Ignatian spirituality, Rahner finds God in all things. For Saint Ignatius, a Christian is called to search for God in every reality of their life.

Commentators often highlight the intellectual influence of great theologians and thinkers on Rahner's work. Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventure, Maréchal, Emmanuel Kant, Heidegger, and Hegel, comprise some of the most important of these influences.¹⁴⁶ However, scholars have also

¹⁴⁵ Rahner, Karl, "The Experience of God Today," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. XI. trans. David Bourke (London, New York: The Seabury Press, 1974), 156.

¹⁴⁶ Egan, Harvey D., *Karl Rahner: Mystic of Everyday Life* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998), 28.

noted that Rahner is a Jesuit trained in Ignatian spirituality, which shaped his faith and theology. Thus, Rahner's notion of spirituality is grounded essentially in Ignatian mysticism, regardless of other influences.

Saint Ignatius of Loyola stressed the possibility of experiencing God in a personal way through the Spiritual Exercises. He believed in God's willingness to self-communicate to the human person in freedom. Ignatius' insights that God is near to us, that God wants to be found in everything of our daily life, and that we receive the grace to enter into such a relationship with God, are fundamental for Rahner's spirituality.

This Ignatian insight is almost a short formula for the entire Rahnerian enterprise. His theological point of departure is nothing less than a genuine, original experience of God, a starting point he himself experienced.¹⁴⁷

Personal experiences of God are so central to Rahner's spirituality that he claims, "the Christian of the future will be a mystic, or he will not exist at all." For Rahner, mystical experience does not imply parapsychological phenomena, "but a genuine experience of God emerging from the heart of our existence."¹⁴⁸ On one hand, Rahner affirmed both the communitarian experience of God and the value of tradition that shapes Christian spirituality. On the other hand, he claimed that tradition and popular opinion would no longer be sufficient to sustain personal faith. By way of example, Rahner's speaks as if he were the person of Saint Ignatius on the importance of a personal experience of God: "my mysticism had given me such certainty in my faith that it would remain unshaken even there were no Holy Scripture."¹⁴⁹

Concerning the spirituality of the Church of the future, Rahner concluded that "a Church community [could] only be built up from spiritually aware people who have really met God."¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 32.

¹⁴⁸ Karl Rahner, "The Spirituality of the Church of the Future," in *Theological Investigations*, trans. Hebblethwaite Peter, Vol. XX (London: Darton, Longman & Todd; New York: The Seabury Press, 1973), 149.

¹⁴⁹ Karl Rahner, "God and Human Experience," in *Spiritual Writings* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Book, 2004), 37.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 40.

Therefore, there is no Church if there is no real personal and communal encounter with God in Jesus Christ. In this sense, the Church must be above all a witness to God who willingly wants to self-communicate.

The Church is a community of those who have experienced the risen Lord. Thus, a Christian gathering is one where people share their experience of the living God. In light of that, the mission of the Church is no less than the promotion of a personal experience of God. For Rahner, Christians must personally experience God-self, rather than relying on someone else's word. In this sense, teaching people to repeat the Apostolic Creed does not make that people Christian. Thus, Rahner is concerned with the mystagogical aspect of the Christian message. In other words, the Church's teaching must be a way to guide people through a personal experience of the absolute mystery. Such an experience cannot be manipulated because, ultimately, it is an experience between God-self and an individual human being. Rahner claims that the Church of the future "will be transformed into a Church made up of those who believe as a matter of personal conviction and individual decision."¹⁵¹

For Rahner, the Christian of the twenty-first century is a mystic because his/her faith is rooted in a personal experience of God and attested to by the Christian community. The Christian Church is essentially grounded in the personal experience of Jesus' first disciples. Yet, it is not possible to experience the historical Jesus in the same way as those with whom he lived and among whom he worked in his earthly life. However, Rahner claimed that Christianity stands as an existential process of personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

There must be a unique and quite personal relationship between Jesus Christ and each individual in his faith, his hope, and his unique love, a relationship which is not exhausted by abstract norms and universal laws.¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ Rahner, "The Theology of the Future," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. XIII, 40.

¹⁵² Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 307.

Christianity is not an abstraction, rather it is an experience of encountering God in Jesus Christ. Moreover, Rahner claimed that the person of Jesus Christ is not just one mediation of God among others. According to him, the Christ event, the whole mystery of the Incarnation, is the indispensable and perfect mediation in which God self-manifests. Therefore, every human being must have an encounter with Jesus Christ either explicitly or implicitly. Rahner notes that human beings always encounter Jesus Christ from the perspective of the final horizon who he himself is, and in the genuine human act of love. Jesus Christ is the absolute immediacy of God, even to those who walk toward human fulfillment unaware of his active presence. In this way, Rahner affirms universal salvation in Jesus Christ, and the existence of authentic anonymous Christians. The idea of universal salvation has a subjective aspect in the sense that each person must realize some experience of radical love.

Rahner highlighted the personal aspect of human salvation, affirming that a personal relationship with Jesus Christ is an essential part of Christian faith. He noted that this relationship takes place in different ways. For instance, it occurs through the human conscience, through sacramental life, “through the preaching of the gospels and the deliberate practice of a Christian and ecclesial life,” and through prayer.¹⁵³ However, all these experiences happen in a person as something that needs to be radically actualized throughout their whole existence.¹⁵⁴ Furthermore, Rahner asserted that such a relationship with Jesus Christ takes place essentially in the love of the neighbor, and in the experience of death.

The whole existence of Jesus informs the horizon of a Christian. In this sense, the disciples of Jesus comprehended that Jesus’ hope had to be their hope, Jesus’ love had to become the way

¹⁵³ Ibid, 306.

¹⁵⁴ Rahner gives special attention to the encounter with Jesus Christ in love and in prayer. We can note this in his first writings, which are essentially spiritual writings. Moreover, throughout his life, he kept writing his prayers in such a way that we can trace his theological insights through them.

they love. In this way, the disciples believed that they were participating in the mystery of Jesus Christ revealed in the resurrection.

This discipleship is not imitation, but rather an ever unique call from out of one's own concrete life, and into participation in the mystery of the life of Jesus from his birth until his death. This discipleship and participation are at the same time always and everywhere an initiation into his death and resurrection.¹⁵⁵

Jesus' death and resurrection cannot be understood a part from his whole life. The resurrection of Jesus Christ reveals the authentic human experience of Jesus of Nazareth, which become the right path to our ultimate goal: Intimate participation in the divine reality. A reflection on how Jesus Christ lived his humanity may help to understand how people can really become his disciples. By connecting Jesus Christ's human experience to the Rahnerian concepts of transcendence, relationship, freedom, love, and hope, it will propose that Jesus of Nazareth is, in fact, the way, the truth, and life of the human person.

2. The Human Jesus Christ Through the Rahnerian Perspective

The significance of the humanity of Jesus Christ is a fundamental question of this thesis, which aims to shed light on a spirituality of Christian praxis. However, such significance comes from a particular and historical event: The Incarnation. As such, the experience of the Incarnation takes place in time and space. Individual human beings, finite spirits, become incarnate in a concrete reality, and assume characteristics that they will self-express. For instance, some are born with physiological structures different from others: some are male, others female; some are white, others black. We have different talents, vocations, personalities, etc. A single person cannot be or accomplish all the possibilities of human existence. We are finite beings. Moreover, we are born in different times even though we belong to the same human history. This project does not intend

¹⁵⁵ Rahner, *Foundations*, 311.

to look into the particularity of the person of Jesus Christ in terms of gender and race, his ability to teach or tell stories, but rather, to focus on the universal significance of his concrete human experience.

The first chapter demonstrated that the Incarnation does not stand over the human, but completes and fulfills it absolutely. Moreover, Jesus Christ is both truly human and truly divine--one person, and two wills. Without this understanding, it is difficult to propose that Jesus Christ is the realization of human destiny, and that by following him, we fulfill this destiny.

The Second Council of Constantinople (553) affirmed that in Jesus Christ there is one divine hypostasis (person) who shares his nature with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Constantinople also affirmed that Jesus Christ performed miracles and suffered on the Cross because “the Word of God was united to the flesh in respect of personality.”¹⁵⁶ The Third Council of Constantinople (681) affirmed the two natures of Christ, the two operations, and the two wills. This Council highlighted Jesus’ human will, which follows the divine, omnipotent will without resisting or going against it. Rather, the two wills of the person of Jesus Christ are in perfect harmony. In this sense, human beings are deified to the extent that their will is in conformity with the divine will. The Incarnation does not replace or destroy the human will of Jesus of Nazareth. In our relationship to God our will tends to become one with God.

For as his all-holy and immaculate ensouled flesh was not destroyed by being deified, but persisted in its own state and sphere; so also his human will was not destroyed by being deified, but was rather preserved, as Gregory the theologian says: ‘For the willing that we understand to be an act of the Savior’s will is not contrary to God but is wholly deified.’¹⁵⁷

Centuries later, Saint Thomas Aquinas advocated for the doctrine of the two natures of Jesus Christ; his singular personality; and Jesus Christ’s unity of wills: “The eternal being of the

¹⁵⁶ Bettenson, Henry, and Maunder, Chris, *Documents of the Christian Church*, 4th ed. (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) 96.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 98.

Son of God, which is the Divine Nature, becomes the being of man, inasmuch as the human nature is assumed by the Son of God to unity of person.”¹⁵⁸ Thomas claims that will pertains to the nature and so Jesus Christ must have two wills. However, the human will of Christ “had a determinate mode from the fact of being in a Divine hypostasis, i.e. it was always moved in accordance with the bidding of the Divine will.”¹⁵⁹

It is not enough to note that Jesus Christ is equal to all human beings except in sin.¹⁶⁰ A Christian spirituality is not rooted in the immaculate aspect of Jesus. Rather, such spirituality must ask why Jesus Christ is sinless. The answer for such question lies essentially in the consideration of the real and free relationship between the two wills of Christ.

Every human being experiences a relationship between the human will and the divine will. Therefore, Jesus Christ is the model to understand our own relationship with God. The saints, for instance, are those who surrendered their own will to God. Of course, the human will of Jesus Christ operates according to the hypostatic union. The Incarnation is unique in Jesus of Nazareth. However, we can still talk about Jesus’ human relationship to God, and how he realizes the absolute horizon of the human person.

In the last two centuries, principally, there were significant studies around the question of the historical Jesus and his individuality. Situating the person of Jesus Christ within his historical context, language, culture, economic class, gender, etc., can help Christians to ground their faith in a historical person. However, such individual characteristics have no universal significance in themselves for the whole of humanity. Rather, it is his particular existence and the way in which he lived his humanity in relation to the divine mystery that Jesus Christ possesses saving

¹⁵⁸ Thomas, Aquinas, Saint, *The "Summa Theologica,"* 2125.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 2126.

¹⁶⁰ This theme was treated in Chapter One.

significance for the whole human community. The way in which Jesus engaged the world is related to the universality of the human orientation and destiny, and it is valid for all human beings as individuals, and as human community.¹⁶¹

Every human being walks toward the fulfillment of his or her destiny. One way to define salvation in a Rahnerian perspective is exactly as wholeness, which we seek to achieve. In Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, God reveals us not just himself, but also our human destiny already realized in the Incarnate Son.

2.1. The Humanity of Jesus Christ in the Scriptures

The Scriptures are authoritative as the primary sources for any study on the personhood of Jesus Christ. Rahner makes clear that Christology is not an abstract theology, but rather, a reflection on an historical and existential event attested by the Scriptures: God's self-revelation who became human. This section aims to provide a biblical approach to the humanity of the person of Jesus Christ in light of the Rahnerian concept of human person. It will follow some short reflections on Jesus and transcendence, relationship, freedom, love, and hope. Rahner treats all these concepts individually in many of his works in such a way that we name them *transcendental theology*, *theology of hope*, *theology of death*, *theology of grace*, so on. Since these concepts in his theology are interconnected and mutually dependent, the following reflection will correlate such concepts applied to the man Jesus Christ.

¹⁶¹ Pannenberg, Wolfhart, *Jesus—God and Man*, trans. Lewis L. Wilkins and Duane A. Priebe (Philadelphia, Pens: The Westminster Press, 1977), 191.

2.2. Jesus, Human Transcendence and Hope

Transcendence is the primordial characteristic of every human being. It means not just the openness of a finite spiritual being, but also its movement towards the absolute mystery. Such movement is the concrete human existence in which a person transcends his/her own conditions of possibilities in the world. Rahner notes that human beings never completely accomplish their possibilities in history.¹⁶² Moreover, human transcendence does not stand by itself or by its own power. Rather, it “is experienced as something which was established by and is at the disposal of another, and which is grounded in the abyss of ineffable mystery.”¹⁶³ Human transcendence stands in God. Therefore, human transcendence is essentially an experience of dependence; of finding meaning and support in the absolute mystery. For Rahner, such an experience of dependence takes place through one’s whole life, but mainly in the experience of death.

Even though human experience of transcendence is directed beyond the reality of this world, Rahner asserts that God’s salvation is offered in history. Therefore, human beings must work out their “salvation by finding it there as offered to” them and accepting it.¹⁶⁴ The experience of transcendence appears as promise of something greater, and as a guarantee in time and space that such a promise is not empty. In this sense, the human experience of love, suffering, struggles, and even death, are not devoid of meaning. Moreover, Rahner claims that God’s revelation cannot stay hidden in transcendence only as promise. Revelation must become realized in history because we encounter God in the world. In this sense, Rahner claims that in Jesus Christ, human transcendence achieves its climax in the world. Jesus Christ is the human reality in which such promise is realized. His whole life expresses his experience of transcendence and his resurrection

¹⁶² Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 42.

¹⁶³ Ibid, 42.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, 41.

is God's guarantee for those who live according to him.

In the eschatological word God promises himself to the world, not merely as its final and unsurpassable opportunity, but as his own effective fulfillment of this opportunity. This, I think, is also the meaning of Jesus' message that in him a victorious immediacy of God's kingdom is present, as it had not formerly been present and consequently cannot consist solely in the opportunity already existing, albeit through grace of freedom to decide for God.¹⁶⁵

Rahner notes that the New Testament is an account of the experience of the early Christians in light of the mystery of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Easter faith is central for the eschatological Christian hope. However, Rahner maintains the fundamental relationship between Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. The death of Christ only happened because the Logos accepted becoming human, emptying himself, and assuming humanity forever as his own reality. In this way, Jesus of Nazareth realized the salvific human experience, which Rahner defines in three aspects: to love the neighbor; to accept death with faith; and to keep hope.

The experience of transcendence was constant throughout Jesus' life, seen in the frequency which he would withdraw to pray (Lk 3:21; Mt 14:23; Mk 6:46; Jn 17:9; Hb 7:25). In prayer Jesus revels his relationship to his Father in terms of communion and dependence. He did not stand by his own power, rather he preached the kingdom of God, which was the main theme of his ministry (Lk 4:43; Mk 1:14-15; Mt 3:1-2). He proclaimed the realization of the kingdom, which has an eschatological tension in the sense that it is already here but not yet fully here. The kingdom proclaimed by Jesus is fundamental to understand God's plan for human being.

Pope Francis in his new Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate*, On the Call to Holiness in Today's World, reminds us of the centrality of the kingdom in our identification with Jesus Christ and his mission.

Just as you cannot understand Christ apart from the kingdom he came to bring, so too your personal mission is inseparable from the building of the kingdom: "Strive first for the kingdom of God and righteousness" (Mt 6:33). Your identification with Christ and his will involves a commitment to

¹⁶⁵Rahner, Karl "The Death of Jesus and the Closure of Revelation," in *Theological Investigations*, Vol. XVIII, trans. David Bourke (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975), 137.

build with him that kingdom of love, justice and universal peace. [...] You cannot grow in holiness without committing yourself, body and soul, to giving your best to this endeavor.¹⁶⁶

The reflection on the kingdom is important to understand the person of Jesus Christ because he self-identifies with the kingdom. Such a perspective is more evident in the gospel of John in which all Jesus' signals lead to himself as the fullness of human life.

The New Testament describes countless moments of Jesus' dependence on God the Father. Furthermore, Jesus had to deal with experience of frustrations regarding to human relationship with his disciples, and with those who opposed his message, and life style. The radical experience of hope and love in the moment of his death describes the experience of the whole life of Jesus of Nazareth.

Rahner distinguishes hope from love and faith, but he always relates it to the other two theological virtues. For him, hope itself has no objective promise; rather God-self is the promise. For example, in the context of Jesus on the Cross, he would recite Psalm 23 "The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I lack" in a different way. Probably like this: "The Lord is my shepherd, he will not fail me. Even if I die understanding nothing, I still trust you." For Rahner, hope is the virtue to believe, to be faithful, even when we do not see anything. In Rahner's understanding of hope, there is nothing promised in terms of achievements or acquisitions. Only God remains as the absolute horizon. God is the only promise we do not control.

Hope is the name of an attitude in which we dare to commit ourselves to that which is radically beyond all human control in both of man's basic dimensions, that, therefore, which is attained to precisely at that point at which the controllable is definitely transcendent, i.e. in the ultimate consummation of eternal life.¹⁶⁷

Hope seeks for God's self and nothing else. For Rahner, Jesus' death represents the most

¹⁶⁶ Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate: On the Call to Holiness in Today's World* (https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20180319_gaudete-et-exsultate.html), (accessed in 04/18/2018).

¹⁶⁷ Karl Rahner, "On the Theology of Hope," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. X. trans. D. Bourke (New York: Crossroad, 1977), 250.

radical act of hope. He surrendered himself to the absolute and uncontrollable promise, which he called Father. Rahner claims that every human being can realize Jesus' experience of hope in their experience of death. However, his focus on Jesus' death is not significant in itself, but because it focuses on Jesus' radical act of hope. Two biblical passages in the same context help to illustrate this point.

My soul is sorrowful even to death. Remain here and keep watch with me." He advanced a little and fell prostrate in prayer saying, "My Father, if possible, let this cup pass from me; yet, not as I will, but as you will. (Mt 26:38-39).

Jesus did not face his final moment on the Cross as an accident, or as something determined even before he was born. Instead, the above passage from Matthew shows Jesus' human will which surrenders to the divine will in freedom. He was able to find meaning for this crucial moment of his final human experience. Transcendence in this context means embracing one's own pain and fear, anguish and confusion, impotence and dependence. But always entrusting in the absolute mystery.

God is person, and he is free to communicate himself. We human beings can only be prepared to listen when God decides to speak. However, for Rahner we must listen God even in the silence: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mt 27:46); "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit" (Lk 23:46). These two passages highlight how Jesus' final words reflect the experience of many human beings who experience the profound silence of God.

Rahner follows the Fathers of the Church who affirm the full humanity of Jesus Christ because it has relevance for human salvation. For instance, Gregory of Nazianzus asserted that "which he [Christ] has not assumed he has not healed."¹⁶⁸ The Logos assumed humanity as a whole because only this way can the Son show the truth of human beings and of God. Jesus of Nazareth

¹⁶⁸ Hardy, Edward R., *Christology of the Later Fathers*, 218.

accepted abandonment by God. He redeemed everything because he accepted all things symbolized in the radical experience of abandonment by God on the Cross.¹⁶⁹ Jesus trusted in God's presence even when he did not experience him, even in God's silence. Jesus understood that God is near even when we believe that we have been abandoned by him.¹⁷⁰ For Rahner, the experience of death is an experience of transcendence because in it, we entrust our own being to the absolute mystery. For Jesus, the silence of his Father was not empty. Rather, he found in this experience of radical emptiness opportunity to trust in God. This kenosis itself is the experience of Incarnation. In this way, Rahner places the experience of Jesus' death as central to understand his resurrection as the realization/salvation of humanity in its fullness.

Jesus surrendered himself in his death unconditionally to the absolute mystery that he called his Father, into whose hands he committed his existence, when in the night of his death and God-forsakenness he was deprived of everything that is otherwise regarded as the content of a human existence: life, honor, acceptance [...] In the concreteness of his death it becomes only too clear that everything fell away from him, even the perceptible security of God's love, and in this trackless dark there prevailed silently only the mystery that in itself and in its freedom has no name and to which he nevertheless calmly surrendered himself as to eternal love and not to the hell of futility.¹⁷¹

In Rahner's Christology, the Cross and Resurrection can never be separated from one another. Therefore, we cannot even say that death has soteriological significance in itself, nor that resurrection is an independent event as anticipation of human destiny. On the contrary, Rahner understands death and resurrection as a single event, which does not mean a beginning of a new period of Jesus' life, rather it is the full realization of humanity in Jesus Christ.

It means rather and "precisely the permanent, redeemed, final and definitive validity of the single and unique life of Jesus who achieved the permanent and final validity of his life precisely through his death in freedom and obedience."¹⁷²

In the resurrection of Jesus Christ, Christians find the definitive realization of the human

¹⁶⁹ *Psalm 22* presents distress, but it also contrasts with God's past mercy, and with hope that God will rescue him/her at the end.

¹⁷⁰ Karl Rahner, "See, What a Man," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. VII, 138.

¹⁷¹ Karl Rahner, "Following the Crucified," in *Theological Investigations*, Vol. XVIII, 165

¹⁷² Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 266.

person. Human plenitude happens to the extent that the human being experiences transcendence, understood here as experience of trust in God as the absolute horizon. In Jesus Christ, Christians find the historical legitimization of such committed reliance on God. In Christ, the “transcendental experience of God and experience of Jesus come together in a mutually conditioning relationship.”¹⁷³

2.3. Jesus, Human Freedom and Love

Chapter Two defined Rahner’s perspective on human beings through three existential concepts: transcendental existential, freedom, and love. The previous section showed that transcendence is not just an *a priori* human structure, which makes them open to God’s self-communication, but is also a horizon in which human beings fulfill their being. For Rahner, Jesus Christ is the one in whom all these three aspects of a human person are realized. In a radical act of hope, he transcended his experience of absurd death, embracing in himself the absolute and uncontrollable mystery.

This project has taken Rahner’s concept of human salvation as human realization. From an existential perspective, this realization takes place through the fundamental dimensions of the human being. Jesus realized the most fundamental dimensions of human being: transcendence, hope, and love. All of these features of human being are theological gifts, which determine our human identity. Therefore, we comprehend our humanity only in light of the absolute being, and to the extent we freely actualize these gifts given to us.

¹⁷³ Rahner, Karl, *The Practice of Faith*, ed. Karl Lehmann and Albert Raffelt (New York: Crossroad, 1986), 61.

For Rahner, freedom is a fundamental key to understanding human salvation and realization. Therefore, it is illuminating to investigate how the Scriptures describe Jesus' freedom in relationship with the divine mystery which he called Father.

It has been shown that personal becoming is the reason for human being, and that freedom is the means in which humans decide who and what they are becoming. Freedom is a human act of appropriation of self. However, Rahner noted that freedom is not the human capacity to choose between objects. Rather, freedom is human action toward its absolute realization.

Rahner investigated the theological aspects of freedom. For him, freedom itself is oriented toward the absolute mystery. And, as I noted previously, God is not an object among others. God is our ground of existence. Freedom is received from God and directed toward God. It is not arbitrary or accidental in human nature. Moreover, Rahner highlighted that humans stand freely before the free God. Therefore, "this freedom implies the possibility of a yes or a no toward its own horizon and indeed it is only constituted by this."¹⁷⁴ The transcendental horizon of freedom is not just the condition of the possibility of freedom, but it is also its own object.

Freedom is a permanent, constitutive element of human nature, and it plays an important role in human salvation.¹⁷⁵ For Rahner, human beings are responsible for doing good or evil, for affirming or denying their absolute horizon. Therefore, human persons are responsible for their own actions, thus determining their humanity in terms of good and evil. Human salvation, then, is a matter of accepting freely the grace of living as a saved person.

The Gospels treat Jesus as a concrete human being. The previous reflection showed that there was a tension between Jesus' human will and the Father's will just before Jesus decided to face the Cross in a redemptive way. "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet,

¹⁷⁴ Rahner, *The Content of Faith*, 98.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 100.

not as I will, but as you will” (Mt 26:39). A quick glance at this scene could lead to a confused understanding that there is an opposition between the human will and the divine. Humans must pass through this experience of compromise within themselves when engaged in an act of freedom. This biblical passage highlights not just a moment in Jesus’ life, but also his capacity to affirm the meaning of his whole life.¹⁷⁶

Jesus’ entire life was a profound and positive experience of identification of his will with the divine will. In him, there is evidence to affirm human plenitude as he fully accepts the divine will. Such acceptance is expressed mainly in the moment of his death, even death on a cross (Phil 2:8).

From the beginning of his public ministry, Jesus proclaimed the Good News of the kingdom of God. He came in the name of his Father (Jn 5:43). He always maintained that he did not come to do his own will, but his Father’s mission, and his food was to do the will of his Father (Lk 2:41-52). Therefore, why would one conclude that at the end his life Jesus Christ would choose to do anything less than his Father’s will? How is it possible that a human will stands in opposition to the divine will? For the rest of humanity, the human and divine will are not always in accord. Every human being experiences pain, despair, confusion. In this context, humans can alienate themselves to the extent that they choose a finite horizon in which they will not self-realize. In the context of his radical despair Jesus freely affirmed his faith in his Father. “Not my will, but yours be done” (Lk 22:42). The meaning of Jesus’ words imply that his will is to do the will of the Father. Therefore, Jesus had to discern/hear his voice. The Son did not incarnate with a detailed

¹⁷⁶ There is no clear evidence in the Scriptures that Jesus’ death on the Cross was necessary for human salvation. It has soteriological significance, but only to the extent that it connects with the resurrection. Jesus’ acceptance of the Cross was the most radical act of human freedom toward the given horizon.

plan for his whole life, thus making his will predetermined. The only plan he had was to reveal the fullness of humanity in light of the divine love.

Rahner claimed that genuine human freedom is essentially an act of love. Jesus, then, is the one who shows the meaning of love. He did not live for himself, but for others. For Jesus, love is a choice, and he loves his friends, which is evidenced by his laying down his own life for theirs. In him, love becomes a reality, because “no one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (Jn 15:13). Moreover, Jesus claims that we have to love not just those who love us, but also our enemies. Thus, at least one conclusion follows: Love is not based on merit or justice among equals. If so, no one would be worthy of the love of God.

Jesus’ self-surrender on the Cross is not his only example of love for all. Rather, the Cross acts as the climax of the way he spent his time with the poor and with sinners; it is the climax of his commitment to the Kingdom of God; it is the climax of his mercy and compassion. Love must not be a single moment in one’s life. Rather, love must be characteristic of every free, human act.

Chapter 2 mentioned the influence of the anthropological turn in Rahner’s theology. Here, it is appropriate to point out the Christological turn/centrality of his theology. Every single aspect of the human life (transcendence, hope, freedom, and love) is understood in light of Jesus Christ. This was the experience of the first Christians. For them, Jesus is the one who teaches with authority because, in Jesus himself, God’s kingdom becomes concrete.

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim the liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord....] Today this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing” (Lk 4:18-21).¹⁷⁷

Jesus presents himself as the anointed one who brings every aspect of human life to its fulfilment. However, he was rejected in his hometown. Jesus announced something already

¹⁷⁷ The Catholic Study Bible, NAB, 2nd Ed, (New York, Oxford University Press, 2011).

familiar to his fellow Galileans (Isaiah 61:1-2). There was nothing new because his message was already known as God's promise for them. The conflict and his rejection happen because his listeners did not expect the realization of God's promise or, more likely, they did not see the physical and historical signs that they expected would accompany it. Or probably they did not want to see that: "The blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them" (Mt 11:5). The first Christians, on the other hand, understood that Jesus not only announced the Kingdom of God, but he self-identified with it.¹⁷⁸ As such, Jesus was the sign of the coming kingdom not as something purely internal or as purely promise in a future life.¹⁷⁹

The Kingdom of God is an eschatological promise. However, it must also have a historical relevance and realization. Otherwise, Jesus would not ask his disciples to pray to his Father: "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven" (Mt 6:10). Jesus is the one who does the will of the Father on earth and in heaven, and he symbolizes the kingdom.

In Matthew 25, Jesus proclaims that the kingdom of God is a kingdom of those who love and who engage in proper human relationship with those who are in need. Moreover, the first Gospel notes that every act of love toward a neighbor in need is an act of love toward Jesus himself.

Every love for one's fellow man has, at least in its nature, the character of an absolute commitment of one's personal existence to that fellow man. Hence where there is real love, it is achieved whether consciously or unconsciously, in the hope that, despite all the questionableness and fragility by reason of which that fellow man cannot in any sense supply a complete justification of the absolute character of the love that is borne to him, such a commitment is reasonable, and need not necessarily meet with ultimate disappointment.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁸ The *kingdom* is essential to understand the person of Jesus Christ. He preached the kingdom, and lived and died for it. The *kingdom* is Jesus' word most used in the four Gospels.

¹⁷⁹ Lohfink, Gerhard, *Jesus of Nazareth: What He Wanted, Who He Was* (Collegeville, Min: Liturgical Press, 2012), 25.

¹⁸⁰ Karl Rahner, "Ideas for a Theology of Death," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. XIII, trans. David Bourke (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975), 197/8.

For Rahner, human action is only properly human to the extent that it is free and is an act of love. The Gospel of John shows that Jesus is the Logos incarnate, sent by the Father for the sake of the world. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes him might not perish but might have eternal life” (Jn 3:16). Hence, the Incarnation itself reveals the love of God. The Incarnation as a divine act is essentially a radical act of love.

Love is the center of human self-realization. Accordingly, Jesus summed up the whole of Jewish law in two commandments, which in fact is only one: the commandment of love. “You shall love the Lord, your God... [and You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:36-40). Everything else depends on this double commandment. In Luke’s Gospel Jesus claims that if people do that (love), they will live (Lk 10:28). To live in this biblical context means to be saved, to have life in fullness. Rahner understood salvation as the fullness of human life. Therefore, to love means to become truly human.

Concerning his Christological turn, Rahner explored the Christology of John’s Gospel. In earlier tradition (Matthew, Mark and Luke), Jesus invites people to love the Father. The fourth Gospel, though, transferred this love to the person of Jesus Christ.¹⁸¹ Jesus, however, did not claim this love for himself. Rather, he gives a new commandment: to love each other. “As I have loved you, so you also should love one another” (Jn 13:34).

The commandment to love undergoes a Christological turn in the Gospel of John according to the theology of Karl Rahner. The way Jesus loved is the example for those who follow him. To be called a Christian requires that one loves as Jesus loved. Love itself is God’s grace. Jesus loved humanity first so that humans will be able to love in return. For Christians, love is a concrete

¹⁸¹ Moloney, Francis J., *Love in the Gospel of John: An Exegetical, Theological, and Literary Study* (Baker Academic, 2013), 4.

experience, and the way Jesus loved is the way they are invited to love. Jesus is the *Imago Dei*.¹⁸² In him, the Father becomes visible, as does the realization of human potential. “*As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you*” (Jn 15:8). Those who keep Jesus’ love share the relationship that Jesus has with his Father. The Logos became human to show his Father’s love. Humans, likewise, become Christian to show Jesus’ love. Furthermore, those who show authentic love are already authentic Christians, because there is only one fount of love: God who became love in the man Jesus of Nazareth. In him the absolute mystery becomes visible. Humans only fulfill their being to the extent that they achieve this intimate communion with God. In Jesus, God and man is one. They are one in love for the world, and they are one in love for all of humanity. As the Father and the Son are one in perfect relationship, so too can every human being be one in the love of Christ.

¹⁸² Col 1:15.

CONCLUSION

A person is a Christian in order to become one, and this is also true of what we are calling a personal relationship to Jesus in faith, hope and love.¹⁸³

The Logos of God became human for the sake of human salvation. Additionally, the Incarnation reveals that God participates in human history in time and space. Karl Rahner saw more than that. He asserts that the Incarnation shows the fullness of being human in the concrete man Jesus of Nazareth.

The title of this thesis is *Incarnation and Humanization*. This work has affirmed not simply the humanization of the Logos, but the humanization of the human being through the person of Jesus of Nazareth. The Logos became what humans are supposed to be. It is Good News for the salvation of humanity that the Logos became human. Many theologians view human destiny as a process of deification. However, for Rahner, deification is above all humanization. Human beings find their identity in God. Therefore, a truly human being reflects the divine reality in such a way that they could say with Jesus: whoever has seen me has seen the Father (Jn 14:45).

Rahner held that becoming a Christian was to become a person. If so, how did Jesus become a real person in such a way that he is the fullness of humanity? To this question Rahner simply answered that Jesus encountered his own being by loving humanity: “We are existential beings because God willed to be man, and thereby willed that we should be those in whom he as man can only encounter his own self by loving us.”¹⁸⁴

Human being become person in community, and they are only human insofar as they love. However, love is not just a feeling. Love is a free, human act. In light of Rahner’s spirituality, three questions arise: Do human actions make one more human? Does Jesus’ way of living

¹⁸³ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 306.

¹⁸⁴ Rahner, “Current Problems in Christology,” in *Theological Investigations*, Vol. I, trans. C. Ernst, (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1961), 184.

determine the way that humans should live and perceive reality? And, should humans view the concrete world as God's gift and as the place where self-actualization is possible?

The first question can be addressed with one of Rahner's main contributions to Christian spirituality: his understanding of human transcendence. Capable of transcendence, in which we can overcome ourselves, humans become more human every day because our horizon is the infinite being. Rahner draws this insight mainly from Ignatian mysticism, which encourages working for the greater glory of God, which is, according to St. Irenaeus, a human being fully alive. Moreover, human beings do not exist solely for themselves. They are social beings who exist in relation with others. Jesus' life was always expression of a being who lived for his Father through the love of his brothers and sisters. Therefore, Christians do not live for themselves, but for the whole human community.

The second question has to take into consideration the whole life of Jesus of Christ from his birth to his resurrection. The way he lived the theological virtues (faith, hope, and love) has implications for every Christian person. Rahner does not provide a systematic treatment of spirituality. This is most likely due to the fact that he was aware that one can only derive specific insights from Jesus' life for a Christian spirituality. While it may not be a complete systematic spirituality, his insights are still valuable sources for many other theologians.

The third question is answered in light of Rahner's understand of human person as spirit and matter, as historical being. The world is not a prison for human being. Rather, it is the condition of possibility of their realization toward the absolute horizon. Therefore, Christians might have a positive view of the world, of themselves as spirit incarnate.

Many critics of Rahner's theology, even in their criticism, still take advantage of his work as they develop one point or another from his theology. For instance, Rahner believed that the

world is the place where human beings become themselves. Liberation theologians, similarly, see the world as the place where humans experience the reality of the kingdom of God. Moreover, for both Rahner and the liberation theologians, the fullness of these realities is already and not yet realized. Only in the risen Christ do such realities become full.

Oftentimes, Christians are identified as having a pessimistic view regarding humanity and the world in general. Combatting this, Rahner invited Christians to think of themselves as spiritual historical beings. Humans are only being deified if they really become human, and the determination that humanity happens is in the immediacy of history. Therefore, for Rahner, a Christian spirituality must assume that the world is the condition for the possibility of being human, of full realization. Such a task is realized only in community. As such, Rahner never advocated for an individualistic Christian faith. He claimed that a personal experience of God in Jesus Christ is necessary for becoming a person. These experiences take place through interpersonal relationships, especially in the Church as a sacrament of Christ. At present, there is an appreciation of sacred, religious, and mystical experiences. However, there is also prominent detachment of the individual with community and ecclesial life. Religious experience, thus, tends to be reduced to the private sphere. However, for Rahner, any authentic experience of God in Jesus Christ opens one's self to the horizon of other human being.

Humans only know themselves because the Incarnate Logos reveals their true human identity, and following Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Logos, is nothing other than becoming what the Logos became: human. This human Jesus of Nazareth shows the proper way of becoming human: surrendering to God, and living for others, especially for those whose humanity has been denied. A person who does not live according to the values of Jesus of Nazareth cannot be called Christian. Furthermore, they are far from being human. Saint Ignatius, in his Spiritual Exercises, insisted on

asking for the grace of a better understanding of the person of Jesus Christ. The reception of such a grace allows one to better follow and to better love Christ. Humans of every age need the same grace, because it is in knowing him that they become better human beings.

In conclusion, the way Jesus lived his life (what he preached; how he entered into relationship with his Father, sisters, and brothers, always in love and trust), and the eternal significance of his humanity brought to the heart of the Holy Trinity, represents the realization of God's plan for every human being. The Logos did not incarnate to become divine. The Logos incarnated to become human. Every person who follows Jesus Christ must become truly human otherwise he/she has misunderstood who she/he is following. Furthermore, every Christian must ask questions such as: Am I human enough? Is this all I can do to express my humanity? Does my humanity reflect the way Jesus lived? Does His humanity advocate for war, for walls between people, for exploitation and objectification of the neighbor? There are many other questions that a Christian would ask him/herself, but the most important one is: Do I love as Jesus loved? A person is a Christian in order to become one.¹⁸⁵ To follow Jesus Christ is above all a process of humanization, and salvation means a full human being.

¹⁸⁵ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 306.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abelard, Peter. *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Seven R. Cartwright (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2011).

<http://www.jstor.org.proxy.bc.edu/stable/j.ctt284zn1>.

Athanasius. in *The Council of Nicaea* (Colm, Luidhéid, 1983).

Augustine. *Confession*, trans. Rex Warner (New York: Signet Classics, 2009).

Bettenson, Henry, and Maunder, Chris. *Documents of the Christian Church*, 4th ed. (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) 96.

Boff, Leonardo. *Jesus Christ Liberator – A Critical Christology for our Time* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1978).

Burns, Charlene P. E. *Divine Becoming: Rethinking Jesus and Incarnation* (Minneapolis, Mn: Fortress Press, 2002).

Catechism of the Catholic Church (New York – London – Toronto – Sydney – Auckland: An Image Book, 1995).

Davis, Stephen T., Kendall, Daniel, S.J., O'Collins, Gerald., editors. *An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Incarnation of the Son of God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

Egan, Harvey D. *Karl Rahner: Mystic of Everyday Life* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998).

Francis J. Moloney. *Love in the Gospel of John: An Exegetical, Theological, and Literary Study* (Baker Academic, 2013).

Ganss, George E. Trans. *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*, n.23 (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1992).

- Hardy, Edward R. *Christology of the Later Fathers*. Library of Christian Classics (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006).
- Irenaeus, Saint, Bishop of Lyon. *Five Books of S. Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, against Heresies*. trans. John Keble, M.A. (London, Oxford, and Cambridge, 1872).
- Kereszty, Roch A. *Jesus Christ: Fundamentals of Christology* (Staten Island, NY: Paulus, 2002).
- Kinings, João. *Evangelho Segundo João: Amor e Fidelidade* (São Paulo, SP: Loyola, 2005).
- Komonchak, Joseph A., Collins, Mary., and Lane, Dermot A. *The New Dictionary of Theology*, (Wilmington, Del: Michael Glazier, 1987).
- Lohfink, Gerhard. *Jesus of Nazareth: What He Wanted, Who He Was* (Collegeville, Min: Liturgical Press, 2012).
- Losinger, Anton. *The Anthropological Turn: The Human Orientation of the Theology of Karl Rahner* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000).
- Marmion, Declan, and Université Catholique De Louvain. *A Spirituality of Everyday Faith a Theological Investigation of the Notion of Spirituality in Karl Rahner*, Louvain Theological & Pastoral Monographs; 23 (Louvain: Peeters Press, 1998).
- McCool, Gerald A., editor. *A Rahner Reader* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975).
- Metz, Johannes B. “An Essay on Karl Rahner,” Foreword in Karl Rahner’s *Spirit in the World* (Geist Welt). Willian Dych, S.J., trans. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968).
- Morris, Leon. *The Lord from Heaven; a Study of the New Testament Teaching on the Deity and Humanity of Jesus Christ*, A Pathway Book (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958).
- Pannenberg, Wolfhart. *Jesus—God and Man*, trans. Lewis L. Wilkins and Duane A. Priebe (Philadelphia, Pens: The Westminster Press, 1977).

Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate: On the Call to Holiness in Today's World*(https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papafrancesco_esortazione-ap_20180319_gaudete-et-exsultate.html), (Accessed, May 17, 2018).

Rahner, Karl. "Christology in the Setting of Modern Man's Understanding of Himself and of His World," in *Theological Investigation*, trans. David Bourke (London: Darton, Longman & Todd; New York: The Seabury Press, 1974).

_____. Rahner, Karl. "Current Problems in Christology," in *Theological Investigations*, Vol. I, trans. C. Ernst, (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1961).

_____. "Experience of Self and Experience of God," in *Theological Investigations*, trans. David Bourke, vol. XIII, (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975).

_____. "Ideas for a Theology of Death," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. XIII, trans. David Bourke (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975).

_____. "On the Theology of Hope," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. X, trans. D. Bourke (New York: Crossroad, 1977).

_____. "On the Theology of the Incarnation," *Theological Investigations*, vol. IV, trans. K. Smyth (New York: Crossroad, 1982).

_____. "Remarks on the Dogmatic Treatise 'De Trinitate,'" in *Theological Investigations*, vol. IV. trans. Kevin Smyth (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1966).

_____. "The Body in the Order of Salvation," in *Theological Investigations*, trans. Margaret Kohl (New York: Crossroad, 1981).

_____. "The Body in the Order of Salvation," *Theological Investigations*, vol. 17. trans. Margaret Kohl (New York: Crossroad, 1981).

_____. "The Death of Jesus and the Closure of Revelation," in *Theological Investigations*, Vol. XVIII, trans. David Bourke (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975).

- _____. "The Secret of Life," in *Theological Investigations*, trans. Karl-H. and Boniface Kruger (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1969).
- _____. "The Spirituality of the Church of the Future," in *Theological Investigations*, trans. Hebblethwaite Peter, Vol. XX, (London: Darton, Longman & Todd; New York: The Seabury Press, 1973).
- _____. "The Theology of the Future," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. XIII.
- _____. "The Theology of the Symbol," *Theological Investigations*, vol. IV, trans. Kevin Smyth (Baltimore: Helicon Press; London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1966).
- _____. "The Two Basic Types of Christology," *The Content of Faith*, Ed. Karl Lehmann and Albert Raffelt (New York: Crossroad, 1993).
- _____. "The Unity of Spirit and Matter in the Christian Understanding of Faith," in *Theological Investigation*, vol. VI. trans. Karl-H. and Boniface Kruger (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1969).
- _____. *Christian Life Possible Today?* (Denville, New Jersey: Dimension Books, 1984).
- _____. *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, trans. William V. Dyck (New York: The Seabury Press, 1978).
- _____. *Hearer of the Word: Laying the Foundation for a Philosophy of Religion* [1st, 1941], trans. J. Donceel (New York: Continuum, 1994).
- _____. *Hominisation*, trans. W. T. O'Hara (New York: Herder and Herder, 1965).
- _____. *The Content of Faith*, Ed. Karl Lehmann and Albert Raffet; trans. ed. Harvey D. Egan, S.J. (New York: Crossroad, 1992).
- _____. *The Practice of Faith*, ed. Karl Lehmann and Albert Raffelt (New York: Crossroad, 1986).

_____. *The Trinity*, trans. Joseph Donceel (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970).

_____. "God and Human Experience," in *Spiritual Writings* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Book, 2004).

Ratzinger, Joseph, Cardinal. *Introduction to Christianity* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004).

Rausch, Thomas P. *Who is Jesus? An Introduction to Christology* (Collegeville, Min: Liturgical Press, 2003).

Ryan, Robin. *Jesus and Salvation* (Collegeville, Min: Liturgical Press, 2015).

St. Aquinas Thomas. *The "Summa Theologica" of St. Thomas Aquinas*, Vol. Two (New York – Boston – Cincinnati – Chicago – San Francisco: Benziger Brothers, 1947).

Tallon, Andrew, and Karl Rahner. *Personal Becoming* (Milwaukee, Wis: Marquette University Press, 1982).

The Catholic Study Bible, NAB, 2nd Ed, (New York, Oxford University Press, 2011).

Tracy, David. *The Analogical Imagination* (New York: Crossroad, 1981).

USCCB, *The Roman Missal* (Washington, DC: Magnificat, 2011).

Vass, George. *The Mystery of Man and the Foundations of a Theological System*, Understanding Karl Rahner; v. 2. (Westminster, Md: London, England: Sheed & Ward, Christian Classics, 1985).