A Christian perspective on the construction of an authentic self

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A Christian Perspective on the Construction of an Authentic Self

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<u>Introduction</u>

In our contemporary Western society, the individual has an extraordinary amount of latitude to construct a personal identity. Faced with both the array of possible identities that such latitude entails, as well as the speed with which these identities can change, the process of self construction can be both bewildering and destabilizing. In order to ground this process in something more than just freedom of choice, the notion of authenticity has gained currency. Authenticity, understood as being true to oneself, implies that there is something innate about our identities that we must discover for ourselves. This thesis will argue that the truth of ourselves cannot be discovered in isolation from a relationship both with God and with others. Indeed, we will go even further and argue that the individual is too small a unit to contain the ultimate truth of his identity. Identity construction is a dialogical process, where both the infinite being of God as well as the infinite myriad of human relations must be allowed to shape the formation of the self. All too often though, this long and arduous process is circumvented by limiting the infinite horizon of one or other of these sources of the self. Authenticity is traded in for the stability of a fixed and clearly defined sense of self. While a modicum of stability is desirable in one's sense of self, the thesis of this paper is that authenticity results when the process of self-construction is recognized as dynamic and fluid, continually escaping our definitive grasp because the truth of who we are lies wrapped in the mystery of our relationship both with others and with God.

Chapter one focuses on the first source of the self: the journey into one's own interiority. As an entry point into this examination, we trace the development of the concept of the self in the tradition of Western philosophy. We will be attentive to how meaning was initially considered to

be something to be discovered within the self. The Enlightenment marked a shift in this notion, where meaning became something that could be constructed through freedom of individual choice. Our contemporary emphasis on authenticity as a value represents a return to the idea that there are innate sources of meaning within the individual to be discovered. Nevertheless, this chapter highlights how a purely individualist conception of personal authenticity leads to an impoverished and fragile sense of self.

Chapter two will explore how a relationship with God within a Christian framework helps to illuminate the inner depths of personal identity. This chapter is centered on Karl Rahner's conception of the human person as an event of God's self-communication. Conceiving the human person in this way leads to an appreciation of the manner in which our identities are inextricably linked with the mystery of who God is. The task of self-definition is a life-long task that is stretched out against the infinite horizon of God's own being. Throughout this thesis we will be attentive to the means by which an individual might be helped to remain open to the challenge that such an infinite horizon imposes on her. Conversely, this chapter will also demonstrate how the highly objective, individualistic notion of the self promoted by the Enlightenment prematurely forecloses the question that the person is to herself and fails to respect the transcendent aspect of our identities.

Our consideration of how relationship with the other person plays a vital role in the construction of the self occupies chapters three and four. Chapter three focuses on binary relationships with the other person. Here, we formulate the major challenge in the construction of the self as learning to navigate the process of identification with the other. This process must negotiate two opposing needs: the need to belong (proximity to the other) and the need to be original (distance

from the other). Attempts to deal with this challenge may proceed in either an acquisitive or beneficent fashion. Drawing on the thought of James Alison, we will show how acquisitive mimesis leads to the formation of a false self that seeks to acquire the being of the other. This forcible acquisition does not respect an authentic process of identification with the other where mutual recognition of similarity reveals the hidden depths of our own identities. Conversion is thus needed to move from an acquisitive to a beneficent way of relating to the other. This chapter analyses how Christ models such beneficent relationship for his disciples. The binary relationship between Christ and the disciple forms a new self in the individual through beneficent mimesis. However, the chapter ends by showing how such a binary relationship is insufficient to ensure the fulfilment of this new self that needs to be nourished by a community in order to attain its full potential.

The fourth and final chapter compares Western and African models of community. While Western philosophy tends to give epistemic priority to the individual, African anthropologies tend to proceed in the reverse manner, beginning with the community, which then endows the individual with an identity. This chapter examines the merits and pitfalls of each model and then proceed to highlight how the Church's model of community represents a hybrid of these two approaches. We will argue that the Church is the ideal community for the construction of the self in view of the way in which it manages to navigate the tension between belonging and originality in the life of the individual. Through the sacrament of baptism, the individual believer is conformed to an intense identification with Christ, an identification that is lived out in the Body of Christ that is the Church. This intense belonging to Christ and his Body, the Church, is nourished through the sacrament of the Eucharist. We will demonstrate how such belonging enhances

rather erases individual identity. This chapter will end with a consideration of how the Church

participates in the divine plan to draw all humanity into the communion of the one Triune God.

Chapter I: Interiority as a source of the Self in Western Philosophy

One way of approaching the construction of the self is to focus on the mechanism by which the disparate and ever-changing experiences, feelings, decisions and actions of an individual over time are given coherence. The undeniable change and process of becoming that every individual goes through during their lives creates a need for a grounding principle that gives direction and meaning to a person. It is in response to this need that the notion of narrative identity has been formulated. One way that the self emerges from the disparate experiences of my life is by telling my story. However, it is not simply the fact of ordering my life experiences into a chronological narrative that brings coherence to my story. The way I tell my story also reveals certain value judgements in terms of what has greater or less significance for me. A narrative may be more or less coherent depending on how well the story has been ordered towards a particular goal. As Charles Taylor highlights, the direction in which we are travelling gives our stories a particular orientation and enables us to give an account of ourselves in the present moment relative to where we have come from and how far we are from reaching our future goal.[1] According to Taylor, the direction in which we are travelling cannot be abstracted from an orientation towards the good. What I value and choose to give significance to in my life is intimately linked to my own conception of the good. Any conception of the good necessarily goes beyond the bounds of what can be circumscribed by my own individual life. Consequently, the narrative of my own life must be inserted within a much larger narrative in order for it to have meaning. Meaning is not

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[1]Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 47.

something we can construct for ourselves in isolation, it is something that derives from making connections to broader communal narratives on what constitutes the good.

In taking a position relative to a communal description of the good, a person can go in one of three directions, either by choosing to conform with it or by choosing to modify it or to outright reject it. These three options represent two opposing drives that animate self-definition: the drive to imitate (through conformity) and the drive to create (through modification or rejection). We will attempt to frame the construction of an authentic sense of self as consisting in a healthy oscillation between these two drives. The drive towards imitation gives the individual a sense of stability that arises from a sense of belonging to something larger than herself. The drive towards creation introduces a dynamism to the construction of the self that may induce a sense of instability and insecurity as the individual goes out on a limb to be original. This chapter will examine the challenges that an individual faces in balancing the stability and instability associated with the process of self-definition.

In order to limit the scope of our inquiry into such a vast field, we will defer to Charles' Taylor's authoritative study of the matter as he traces the gradual emergence of the notion of the self in Western thought from Plato to Herder. Taylor's analysis is of particular interest to us for the way in which it highlights how the sources of the self became gradually disconnected from external sources of meaning and increasingly turned inwards. Our journey begins with Plato, where the question of meaning is framed in terms of self-mastery over our inner chaos through connection to the idea of the Good that regulates the order and harmony of the cosmos. We will then look at how Augustine transforms the quest for self-mastery into the task of self-discovery that comes to fruition in the knowledge and love of God. Our next major turning point will be Descartes who

effectively dismisses connection with the external world as a major source of meaning and instead establishes the self as a source of order and clarity through the objectification of the world. The horizon of the self as a source of meaning is subsequently expanded by Locke who suggests that it is possible to remake the self. This intuition of Locke paves the way for the rise of authenticity as a value in the contemporary era. The rise of authenticity as a value in the contemporary era represents a high-water mark in the drive towards originality in the construction of the self. Lacking a concomitant valuation of the connection to external metanarratives that would provide grounding something larger than itself, the contemporary self is highly fragile and unstable. We will examine the ways in which the contemporary individual strives to gain some modicum of stability and evaluate the impact of such attempts on the very notion of authenticity.

1.1 Early history of the emergence of the self: Plato (424 – 348 B.C.) and Augustine (354 -430 A.D.)

Charles Taylor begins his investigation into the origins of our modern sense of self by contrasting Plato's ideal of self-mastery with the Homeric ideal of the warrior-citizen. This ideal focuses on the achievement of honor through brave and heroic deeds. In this paradigm, the human person achieves their highest good only in elevated states of being that enable him to perform heroic feats that require great courage. The force that enables a person to perform such heroic deeds is believed to come from an infusion of divine power. For this reason, the Homeric heroes, such as Agamemnon, Achilles and Odysseus are people characterized by fragmentation, split between the mundane banalities of everyday life and the exalted moments of great heroism. In contrast, Plato proposed that the supreme ideal of human fulfilment should be self-mastery. A person was

to strive for calm self-possession by using the power of reason to order her desires.[2] The person

who has not attained calm self-possession through the use of reason was a slave to endless

desire, a scene of chaos.[3] The state of being self-collected was seen as being continuous with all

our other states. It was not a special or heightened state, as in the case of the Homeric man, it

was rather the state from which we can survey collectedly all the other states. In this way, the

ideal state of a person's mind is the state in which one attains inner unity and harmony of being.

For Plato, this harmony was not simply something that one created for oneself. Rather, it came

about through according oneself with the order and natural harmony of the cosmos. The

correspondence between the inner order of the person and the outer order of the cosmos is

premised upon Plato's theory of the Good. The Idea of the Good for Plato was the highest value

to be sought after. The individual's pursuit of his own good forms part of a larger notion of the

Good of the whole cosmos.[4] Taylor argues that Plato's privileging of a self-reflective state that

calmly surveys all other states sets the stage for the beginnings of the conception of the mind as

a unified whole.[5]

In the comparing the Platonic and Homeric ideals, it is possible to identify the two contrasting

drives that animate the construction of the self. The Homeric warrior ideal is aligned with the

drive to create and to be original. It is true that the force for such creation is construed as

emanating from the gods. However, the primary goal is not one of connection to the divine, but

rather the achievement of feats of great courage that win the individual person honor and

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[2] Plato, *The Republic Book IV 430*, trans. F. Cornford, (London: Oxford University Press, 1970) 124.
[3] Ibid, *Book IV 441-444*, 140-143.
[4] Ibid, *Book VI 500*, 204.
[5] Taylor, *Sources*, 120.

accolades, thus setting him apart from ordinary mortals. Taylor notes how such an ideal is inherently unstable, because it values special elevated states of the self that are discontinuous with the ordinary self.[6] What is desired is not integration, almost the opposite, for these elevated states of self are desired precisely for their ability to render the individual extraordinary. Conversely, Platonic self-mastery is searching for integration and the stability that comes with connection to the cosmic sources of harmony and order. The imitation by the individual of the idea of the Good creates a sense of belonging to the cosmic order that is calming and brings the inner peace necessary to integrate the various passions and parts of the soul that would otherwise descend into chaos.

Augustine takes up Plato's notion of interiority and further develops it. Taylor highlights two major developments that Augustine brings to Plato's theory. Firstly, Augustine creates a synthesis between Jewish monotheism and Greek philosophy by linking the goodness that God sees in God's creation (Gn 1) and the Platonic idea of the good.[7] In this way, Augustine is able to use the Platonic paradigm to assert that the universe participates in the goodness of God.[8] The soul thus achieves its highest fulfilment when it is able to contemplate and love this goodness. This is the second addition to Plato's theory. Whereas Plato only required the soul to pay attention to the idea of the Good, Augustine stipulates that the soul must take a step further and love God in order for it to attain its purpose.[9] This represents an interesting development in terms of the

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[6] Ibid, 119.
[7] Ibid, 128.
[8] Augustine, *City of God, Volume III: Books 8-11*, Book XI, 2, 21-22, Loeb Classical Library, 429–31, 503–13, accessed March 24, 2020, http://www.loebclassics.com/view/LCL413/1968/volume.xml.
[9] Augustine, "Homilies on the First Epistle of John," Second Homily, 8-9, in *The Works of Saint Augustine* (4th Release). Electronic Edition. Volume I/14," 48, accessed March 24, 2020, http://library.nlx.com.proxy.bc.edu/xtf/view?docId=augustine_iv/augustine_iv.07.xml;chunk.id=div.aug.john1hom.10;toc.depth=1;toc.id=div.aug.john1hom.7;brand=default.

quest for belonging through being connected to an external source. The Platonic idea of the Good

is a static idea, connection to which guarantees maximal stability for the individual. This is why

Plato only requires that one pay attention to the Good. Being an impersonal idea, there is no

possibility of being in relationship with it, the connection and sense of belonging are one-way.

Augustine's stipulation of the need to love a personal being introduces a dynamic element into

this source of belonging. It is now a question of a relationship, which can produce both stability

and instability in the life of the individual.

Augustine adopts the Platonic distinctions of "spirit/matter, higher/lower, eternal/temporal,

immutable/changing" and places them within the overarching distinction of "inner/outer."[10] For

Augustine, "the road from the lower to the higher, the crucial shift in direction, passes through

our attending to ourselves as *inner*."[11] The reason that Augustine advocates a turning inward is

because he believes that this is where the path towards God lies. It is only in turning inwards that

we come to realize the true meaning of our experience of the outer by realizing its fundamental

correspondence with the ultimate origin of order and harmony who is God.[12] In this way being

present to oneself is a privileged means of coming to knowledge of God. However, Augustine

realizes that it is possible to be mistaken about the truth of oneself, as he had been when he was

a Manichean. This introduces the problem of how we can know that we have found our true

selves. In order to solve this problem, Augustine draws on the Platonic notion of memory, but

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[10] Taylor, *Sources*, 129.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Augustine, "De Vera Religione" Book XXXIX, 72, in *The Works of Saint Augustine* (4th Release). Electronic Edition. On Christian Belief. Volume I/8, 78, accessed March 24, 2020, http://library.nlx.com.proxy.bc.edu/xtf/view?docId=augustine_iv/augustine_iv.03.xml;chunk.id=div.aug.christianbelief.7;toc.depth=1;toc.id=div.aug.christianbelief.7;brand=default.

does so in a novel way. Instead of having recourse to Plato's idea of a prenatal self, Augustine develops the notion of innate ideas that exist in our memory whereby a soul can be said to "remember God." Consequently, the process of true self-discovery is one of bringing to explicit consciousness an already existent implicit understanding of who God is that exists in our memory.[13]

1.2 The Modern "Disengaged-Self" in Descartes and Locke

Taylor then proceeds to show how Descartes (1596 – 1650) took Augustine's notion of interiority and changed it in profound ways. Descartes' *cogito* reformulates the purpose of inwardness. The journey inward is no longer oriented towards the discovery of God, rather its purpose is to attain clear and distinct ideas about the external world.[14] For Descartes, God is no longer the ultimate end of the journey inward. Instead God is relegated to the role of guarantor of the trustworthiness of the knowledge attained through the journey inward.[15] Taylor puts his finger on an important shift that takes place from Augustine to Descartes. For Augustine, as for Plato, the moral sources that gave meaning, order and harmony to the cosmos were located outside of the individual. Certainly, the individual had to journey inward to discover them, but the individual was not the origin of her own moral sources. With Descartes we begin to see a shift where the individual, in her interiority, fabricates her own order and becomes a moral source in herself.[16]

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[13] Taylor, *Sources*, 135.

[14] René Descartes, "Letter to Gibieuf," 19 January 1642 in *Œuvres Complètes de René Descartes: Correspondence 1619-1650*, Electronic Edition, 472, accessed March 25, 2020, http://library.nlx.com.proxy.bc.edu/xtf/view?docId=descartes_fr/descartes_fr.01.xml;chunk.id=div.descartes.Correspondence.1619.352;toc.depth=1;toc.id=div.descartes.Correspondence.1619.352;brand=default.

[15] René Descartes, "Meditation Troisième," in *Oeuvres Complètes de René Descartes: Meditations Touchant la Première Philosophie*, Electronic Edition, XIa, 27-42, 48, accessed March 25, 2020, http://library.nlx.com.proxy.bc.edu/xtf/view?docId=descartes_fr/descartes_fr.06.xml;chunk.id=div.descartes.Meditations.3;toc.depth=1;toc.id=div.descartes.Meditations.3;brand=default.

[16] Taylor, *Sources*, 143.

The way that the individual achieves this is through the use of his reason, disengaged from the influence of any exterior source. In order to be able to perceive reality distinctly, Descartes insists that is it necessary that the soul disentangle itself from the confusion of the material world, including that caused by connection to the body. What is required therefore is an objectification of the world, including our bodies, that can only be attained by adopting the standpoint of a dispassionate, outside observer.[17]

In Plato's cosmology, there was an underlying order and harmony that the person was called upon to discover and then align herself with. It was this alignment of our inner structure with the outer harmony of the cosmos that produced stability and harmony in the soul. With Descartes, instead of discovering an external order, it is the individual who imposes an order on the world through the exercise of reason. All that is external to the individual becomes a potential source of instability and confusion. The only way this is combatted is by holding reality at a sufficient distance in order to be able to objectify it and gain a clear and distinct idea about it. This represents a major change in the way connection to the external world is conceived and navigated. Connection to the external world is regarded with a hermeneutic of suspicion as being a possible source of instability and confusion. The only stability that is available to me is that which I engineer for myself by holding the world at a distance. In terms of the construction of the self, we begin to see an element of mistrust of the external world develop. The drive for connection has to be chastened and passed through the prism of reason and objectification. This

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[17] Descartes, "Meditation Quatrième," XIa, 42 in *Oeuvres Complètes de René Descartes: Meditations Touchant la Première Philosophie*, Electronic Edition, XIa, 27-42, 48, accessed March 25, 2020, http://library.nlx.com.proxy.bc.edu/xtf/view?docId=descartes_fr/descartes_fr.06.xml;chunk.id=div.descartes.Meditations.3;toc.depth=1;toc.id=div.descartes.Meditations.3;brand=default..

process significantly attenuates the power of the external world to influence how I perceive myself. The imposition of my own categories on the world ensures I remain in control of how my connection to the world is lived out and I determine the manner in which my belonging to the exterior world is articulated.

The next stop in the history of the conception of the self is what Taylor terms "Locke's punctual self." With Descartes, the Platonic notion that there is some external order in the world that needs to be discovered falls away. Instead, it is the disengaged rationality of the individual that orders the outside world into a coherent whole. With John Locke (1632 – 1704), the disengagement of the self is taken to the next level. Not only is it possible to order the external world, Locke argues that it is possible to re-make our very selves. According to Locke, the goal of an individual's life is to attain happiness. The individual does this by seeking to maximize pleasure and minimize pain. For Locke, pleasure is acquired by seeking and obtaining the highest good. But in contrast to the philosophical tradition that has preceded him, Locke dismantles the notion that there might be some objective *summum bonum* to be sought by all individuals. Locke's unique contribution to this debate is to aver that each individual has their own *individual summum bonum*, the activity or interest that brings them the most pleasure. Furthermore, an individual can also train himself to change the things and activities that bring him pleasure by acquiring new habits. For example, and individual may wean himself off the pleasures of gluttony and drunkenness and reorient himself to find his greatest pleasure in reading. By changing his habits in this way, he has effectively re-made himself. Reason is seen as the instrument to be

used in the manipulation of the self in order to structure it so as to maximize happiness and fulfilment.[18]

Taylor designates Locke's idea of the self as a "punctual self" because it is merely a dot on the axis of life, unconnected to its past and possessing no future trajectory that might orient it in a particular direction. The "punctual self" has thus been unmoored from its anchorage in a narrative identity.[19] Neither the passage of time nor any orientation towards an absolute good contribute towards the formation of self-identity. The self is radically disengaged with a view to maximizing freedom for self-determination. Locke's position represents a departure from Augustine, where the journey inward was one of discovery of the sacred that was not to be manipulated because its ultimate ground was God. With Locke, the notion of self-discovery is replaced with one of self-construction.

1.3 Post-modernity and the Search for Authenticity

In Taylor's analysis, Locke's conception of the punctual self was enormously influential during the Enlightenment and prepared the way for the introduction of the notion of "authenticity" as the central value in the construction of the self. Taylor identifies three central ideas that contributed to the development of an ethics of authenticity. The first is attributed to Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712 – 1778) as being the recovery of "nature" as a source of the self. In what Taylor terms the "expressivist turn," Rousseau rejects the Enlightenment's reliance on the use of human reason

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[18] John Locke, "An Essay Concerning Human Understanding," in *The Philosophical Works and Selected Correspondence of John Locke*," 2.21.42-55, 69, accessed March 26, 2020, http://library.nlx.com.proxy.bc.edu/xtf/view?docId=locke/locke.01.xml;chunk.id=div.locke.human.11;toc.depth=1; toc.id=div.locke.human.11;brand=default.

[19] Taylor, *Sources*, 49.

as the sole path to human fulfilment.[20] Rousseau attributes an important role to nature as a

source of the self. He rejects Augustine's notion of original sin and postulates a pristine nature

that resides in each individual and has the capacity to lead that individual to fulfilment and

happiness.[21] This nature manifests itself in an *amour-propre* (self-love) that is neither good nor

bad in its primordial state.[22] Indeed, according to Rousseau, what leads to human depravity is a

loss of contact with our inner nature.[23] Taylor illustrates how such a position led construing

contact with one's own inwardness as a moral imperative.[24] It was Rousseau who popularized

the idea that each person is endowed with a moral sense to determine right from wrong that

manifests itself as a feeling.[25] Instead of being regulated entirely by reason, the sources of moral

discernment shifted into the domain of personal feeling. From here, it was a short journey to

endowing contact with one's own interior feelings with a moral force. In order to live a fulfilled

life, it was necessary to be in touch with one's own feelings. As the idea of personal subjectivity

became more thoroughly entrenched as a source of authority with the progress of the

Enlightenment, personal feelings took on an equal amount of authority.

The Enlightenment sharply challenged the constraints of social conformity, allowing the

individual greater freedom in the expression of personal tastes and inclinations. Rousseau was

once again instrumental in this process by endowing the act of personal choice with a moral

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[20] Ibid, 374 – 377.

[21] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "Lettre à Christophe de Beaumont," in *Collections complètes des Œuvres*, vol. 6, accessed March 26, 2020, https://www.rousseauonline.ch/Text/lettre-a-christophe-de-beaumont.php.

[22] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile: or On Education*, trans. Alan Bloom, (New York : Basic Books, 1979) 92

[23] Taylor, *Sources*, 357.

[24] Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991) 26.

[25] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts," in *Collections complètes des Œuvres*, vol. 7 accessed March 31, 2020, https://www.rousseauonline.ch/Text/discours-des-sciences-et-des-arts.php#heading_id_5.

value. This was the decisive second element in the emergence of a discourse of authenticity that Taylor designates as "self-determining freedom." Compared to the traditional ethical injunctions of Christianity, it was no longer important what one chose so much as the fact that it was in the individual choosing it because she felt that this choice aligned with her own personal feeling of fulfilment.[26] With Rousseau we witness the beginning of the decoupling of personal values and universal values. It is now no longer important whether a person's choice of what to value conforms to any external set of values; indeed, conformity to external norms comes to be regarded with suspicion. Conformity is set in opposition to the quest for originality. Taylor traces the foregrounding of originality as a value back to the German poet and author, Johann Herder (1744 – 1803). Herder advances the notion that each individual person has their own original "measure" of being human.[27] This is the third and final idea that was instrumental in the development of authenticity as a value in the construction of the sense of the self. Taylor summarizes it in this way: "there is a certain way of being human that is *my* way. I am called to live my life in this way and not in imitation of anyone else's. But this gives a new important to being true to myself, if I am not, I miss the point of my life, I miss what being human is for me."[28]

Thus far our analysis has centered on examining the major turning points in the emergence of the modern self in Western philosophy. We have noted how this process has given the modern individual greater freedom to be original in her manner of self-definition. There are a number of positive aspects that this revolution has brought about. The rejection of the grand narratives that

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[26] Taylor, *Ethics*, 26-27.
[27] Johann Herder, "Ideen zur Philosophie Der Geschichte der Menschheit," in *Herders Werke*, vol. 4, (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1969) 184-185.
[28] Taylor, *Ethics*, 29.

formerly provided meaning has sensitized the modern individual to the quest for meaning that life enjoins upon each individual. This has encouraged the modern individual not to simply complacently accept ready-made answers to these questions but to make of his life an earnest search for deeper meaning. However, this evolution has come at a high cost. The value of self-determining freedom has been exalted to the status of over-riding importance so as to negate the influence of any other value in the construction of the self. This has left the process of self-definition in a highly fragile and volatile state that offers little stability to the individual in the form of belonging that is necessary for the evolution of a healthy sense of self.

Does such an outright rejection of the meta-narratives of the good mean that the modern notion of authenticity is necessarily doomed to slide into the cul-de-sac of soft relativism? Taylor does not believe so, and is convinced that an ethics of authenticity can be salvaged and rescued from the futility of soft relativism. In order to do this Taylor embarks on a critique of the idea of self-determining freedom, understood as the idea that the individual, solely by the power of her own choice, can determine the significance of her own life without reference to any larger narrative. A discourse of significance or meaning cannot simply be created arbitrarily. Taylor illustrates this by recourse to a fairly mundane example of wiggling one's toes in mud. He argues that it is not enough for a person to simply decide to accord ultimate value to the action of wiggling their toes in the mud without any reference to a narrative that might explain why such an action was significant. Such an action could only take on ultimate significance if this person lived in a society where mud was construed to be "the element of world spirit, which you contact with your

toes."[29] However, by severing contact with all external moral, religious and mythical narratives, self-determining freedom has completely flattened the landscape of significance. The thrust of Taylor's argument is that the landscape of my meaning can only be given contours when considered against the backdrop of an overarching narrative of meaning. Authenticity as an ideal requires a recognition of the fact that life is not just flat, there are things of greater significance and those of less significance. Taylor quotes John Stuart Mill to the effect that "unless some options are more significant than others, the very idea of self-choice falls into triviality and hence incoherence."[30]

The corollary of the foregoing is that the discourse of authenticity cannot be carried out legitimately without some reference to others. Taylor points to two reasons for this being the case. The first reason is located in the fundamentally dialogical structure of human life that is anchored in language. A person cannot acquire the means for self-expression all on their own.[31] The language of self-expression is supplied to us within a cultural and social context that requires my interactions with others. The second reason is linked to the first and concerns the articulation of my own originality in terms of my difference from others.[32] These two reasons point to a fundamental tension within the ethics of authenticity, namely the need to have enough in common with those around me in order to accepted as a member of a particular group while having enough difference in order to be able to assert my originality.

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[29] Ibid, 36.
[30] Ibid, 39.
[31] Ibid, 33.
[32] Ibid, 35.

In Taylor's thought, this tension might be located in the need for recognition that he identifies as an essential component of modern self-definition. As long as societies have existed, individuals within them have always experienced the need for recognition from those around them. However, this need is more acutely felt today than in the past because of the increased emphasis on original, personally constructed identities. To take the example of feudal societies, social roles were assigned to individuals who derived their identity almost entirely from these roles. The process of recognition did not need to take an explicit form because it operated implicitly through the adoption of socially constructed identities that were taken for granted by the majority of a particular group. There was little room for social deviance, and where it did occur, it was punished by ostracism. With limited scope for originality in self-definition, the individual rarely faced any challenge in getting her identity recognized by society. In sharp contrast the need for recognition is acutely felt by the modern individual because she is painfully aware of how the process of recognition can fail.[33]

It is this risk of failure that renders the process of self-definition within a Western context so fragile and unstable. As the process of self-definition has gravitated more in the direction of gratifying our desire for originality, the need for belonging has become more acutely felt. On a theoretical level, the post-modern individual professes complete independence in the process of self-construction. However, on a practical level, the individual still experiences a need for the contribution of others as she constructs her identity. The modern individual tries to fulfil this need in an *ad hoc* manner by gathering around herself a group of select significant others who

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[33] Ibid, 45.

are able to validate her tailor-made sense of self. Taylor points to the trend in our contemporary age for intimate romantic relationships to be used as the prime locus for self-discovery and self-fulfillment. The increased risk of rejection and the increased vulnerability associated with self-revelation have meant that individuals are more inclined to pursue their quest for recognition only amongst a small inner-circle of trusted friends and relatives.[34]

The need for belonging and connection to something larger than myself is only implicitly acknowledged through the constitution of a mini-community of significant others from whom the individual seeks validation. However, this need is not acknowledged on a theoretical level, which leads to an undervaluing of the community's role in the formation of a balanced and authentic sense of self. It is no accident that the same philosophers who contributed to the evolution of the conception of the modern self, Locke and Rousseau in particular, come to view society in terms of a social contract. I am prepared to give up only a minimum of my freedom in order to gain the comforts and securities that come with belonging to a bigger group of people. Society however does not have the right to comment or influence the way I construct my identity. In this way the social contract becomes a way to keep at bay the influence of society on my identity while still ensuring a minimal level of belonging. For what pertains to the deeper needs of belonging and affirmation, I am free to choose a select group of people with whom I feel comfortable and in whose presence I can explore my identity. Indeed, this ability to choose the specific individuals to make up my group of belonging can lead to a tendency for me to exclude voices of criticism from my community of significant others. The robust nature of a dialogical

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[34] Ibid.

identity that is forged in the furnace of honest exchange is significantly weakened in such a model.

In conclusion, we have tried to show how one positive aspect of contemporary Western individualism is its sensitivity to the demand on the individual to pursue his own quest for meaning. However, the manner in which he does this, through the objectification of both his inner and outer world does not respect the integrated nature of the person and his connections with the rest of humanity and creation. This leaves the individual radically unstable in his personal identity and leads him to want to prematurely foreclose the process of self-definition through the *ad hoc* validation he receives from a hand-picked selection of significant others. We have shown how this instinct fails to respect the dialogical nature of the construction of the self. The next chapter will focus on how a connection to the transcendent challenges the individual to remain in the liminal space of keeping open the question of who they are. We will explore how this relationship with God provides the individual with the necessary stability and courage to endure both the fragility and vulnerability that comes with remaining in this liminal space.

Chapter II: God as a Source of the Self: Rahner's Anthropology

The first chapter traced the journey into personal interiority that is an essential constituent of the construction of the self. We outlined how, in the history of Western philosophy, the realm of personal inwardness became increasingly disconnected from external sources of meaning and moral direction. In the course of our exposition, we dealt very briefly with the way in which the journey inward can connect us to the divine. This chapter will use the anthropology of Karl Rahner to explore how our Christian faith shapes the way in which we account for the self and for the process of self-definition. In particular, we aim to demonstrate how the connection to the transcendent enables the individual to avoid the temptation to prematurely end the quest for meaning by adopting a fixed sense of self. We will demonstrate that a connection to the transcendent provides the individual with enough stability to tolerate the fragility and vulnerability of keeping open the question of who she is. Indeed, we will show how, because the question of who we are is inextricably intertwined with the incomprehensible mystery of who God is, we can never acquire a definitive answer to this question this side of the eschaton.

Rahner elaborates an anthropology that conceives of the presence of God as the very ground of the being of each person. He conceives of the human person as an "event" of God's self-communication that takes the form of a continual offer of salvation from God to the person.[35] This offer of salvation, which is prior to any act of justification, constitutes the ground of a person's subjectivity and is designated by Rahner as the supernatural existential.[36] This offer of

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[35] Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, trans. W. Dych, (New York: Crossroad, 1978) 115.

[36] Karl Rahner, "Existential, Supernatural," in *Dictionary of Theology: Second Edition*, ed. K. Rahner and H. Vorgrimler, (New York: Crossroad) 164.

salvation that comes from God is unconditional and is made by God prior to any conscious choice by the individual. Rahner is clear to maintain the complete freedom of the person to reject or to accept this offer.[37] There is no compulsion on the part of God to force God's salvation on the person.

Nevertheless, Rahner does refer to this supernatural existential as imparting to the person a responsibility, such that the person is *"obliged to tend to his supernatural end."*[38] It is in this context that Rahner formulates his notion of human freedom as the capacity of a person to attend to his supernatural end by disposing of his whole self and responding to God with either a "yes" or a "no."[39] Rahner would thus reject the notion that there might be some neutral point between a "yes" and a "no" to God from which an individual might exercise her freedom. In Rahner's thought, the supernatural existential exerts a prior influence on the individual that places her squarely in the camp of a "yes" to God, whether she is conscious of such an influence or not. While Rahner does acknowledge the possibility of the individual responding with a "no" to God, he indicates that such an answer constitutes a denial of the person's very self. This "no" does not represent the sum total of a person's evil deeds, but is rather a negation of life itself and even of the condition of possibility for freedom of choice.[40] In this regard, a "no" is an absurdity, even if it remains a very real possibility. For the purposes of brevity, this paper will confine itself to considering the trajectory taken in order to arrive at a "yes" to God and will also

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[37] Rahner, *Foundations*, 38, 118.
[38] Karl Rahner, "Existential, Supernatural," 164.
[39] Rahner, *Foundations*, 118.
[40] Rahner, *Foundations*, 101.

pass over a detailed consideration of sin and guilt that nevertheless form essential aspects of human freedom.

We shall now proceed to an examination of the various stages involved in orienting one's freedom towards this yes. Rahner distinguishes between three levels on which the person can be said to exist. At a most primary and basic level there is the "seminal (*ursprunglich*) person, understood as transcendent spirit and as freedom before God;" secondly, there is "the world-like and piece-meal intermediary reality in which the person searching for himself, must achieve himself;" and thirdly "the achieved person who has freely fulfilled himself *via* his intermediary reality."[41] We will show that these three levels on which the person can be said to exist correspond to three stages that can be discerned in Rahner's account of the trajectory an individual must follow in order to attain self-realization. The first stage, that of acquiescence to the question of transcendence takes place at the level of the seminal person, the second stage of accepting the task that freedom imposes on us takes place at the level of the intermediary reality and the last stage, that of surrender to God, takes place at the level of the achieved person.

2.1 Acquiescence to the question of transcendence

The first stage might be characterized as an acquiescence to being, where being manifests itself as an openness to the infinite that requires a response in freedom from the individual to the question that is life. Implicit in any real and authentic response will be the acquiescence to self-transcendence. The apprehension of the transcendent nature of her being is not something that the person grasps immediately, but rather arrives at through a gradual process of self-realization.

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[41] Karl Rahner, "Guilt and its remission the borderland between theology and psychotherapy," in *Theological Investigations* (vol. 2), trans. K-H. Kruger, (New York: Crossroad, 1990) 272-73.

Rahner locates this dawning realization in the capacity of a person to radically question every aspect of her being and the world that surrounds her. The human person for Rahner is "a being with an infinite horizon."[42] The support for this assertion lies in the fact that the human person is acutely aware of her own finiteness, meaning that there must be a part of ourselves that reaches beyond this finiteness, into infinite transcendence, thus enabling us to dimly grasp lie finite nature of our existence. Rahner characterizes this aspect of our being that reaches beyond our finite nature as the "*Vorgriff*" a pre-apprehension of being that makes present to us the "knowledge of the infinity of reality."[43]

It is this at this most basic and primary level being that Rahner locates the seminal person. The seminal person constitutes the core of our identity. This core of our being is so intimately intertwined with the identity of God that it is not immediately accessible to us. It is at the level of the seminal person that we must locate the existential supernatural, understood as the inchoate offer of salvation from God to the person that conditions the individual's subjectivity and forms the horizon of her freedom. Rahner maintains that this level of our being human must be "dropped into the incomprehensibility of God."[44] We remain mysteries to ourselves at this very fundamental level, where the divine meets the human and constitutes our subjectivity.

A person may try to naively avoid dealing with the question of transcendence that arises from her subjectivity. It is possible to devote oneself entirely to the task of realizing only what one can directly control and manipulate and thereby seek evade the larger questions of life that lie

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[42] Rahner, *Foundations*, 32.
[43] Ibid, 33.
[44] Karl Rahner, "The Theological Dimension of the Question About Man" *Theological Investigations* (vol. 17), trans. M Kohl (New York: Crossroad, 1981) 61.

underneath our everyday experience.[45] Nevertheless, the acceptance of the invitation to transcendence does not necessarily have to be a conscious one, and can remain on the level of the non-reflexive.[46] A simple openness to the infinite horizon of our being expressed by a willingness to keep open the question of our being can be considered as validly constituting the first step towards self-realization. Conversely, any attempt to foreclose this questioning and to reject the boundless nature of our freedom and possibilities by instead seeking to control every aspect of our existence would move the individual in the direction of a failure to realize themselves.

2.2 Accepting the task of Freedom: a journey towards self-mastery

The second stage in self-realization consists in taking up the task that is imposed on us by our freedom. The corollary of human freedom is human responsibility. In light of God's offer of salvation, each individual has a responsibility to realize in freedom the potential contained within himself. The responsibility that freedom imposes on the individual is to respond to God's offer of relationship with either a "yes" or a "no," which Rahner terms the fundamental option of each individual. In view of the way our beings are structured in the form of a question that is radically open to the Ultimate Mystery, the only response that would be commensurate with such a question would be one that engages our whole being. This is why Rahner conceives of freedom as the capacity for total self-disposal in view of a fundamental option for or against God. Consequently, freedom is not to be conceived of as the capacity to choose between this and

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[45] Rahner, *Foundations*, 32.
[46] Ibid, 26.

that.[47] Freedom is not the possibility of infinite revision, neither is it infinite possibility, rather it is the capacity to relinquish infinite possibility and to "do something uniquely final."[48] In the same vein, not all free acts have equal value or weight, but must be judged by the extent to which they dispose of the whole self and contribute to this "uniquely final act."[49] The only way in which we might do something "uniquely final" is by disposing of our whole selves and choosing to use our freedom in a way that is aligned with the fundamental orientation of our being to God.

Thus for Rahner, freedom entails the capacity for self-mastery. Nevertheless, complete self-mastery of oneself is an ever-elusive goal, because it would entail being able to completely objectify and grasp oneself at the seminal level, a feat that Rahner underlines is not possible. This is true for two reasons. Firstly, we do not have direct access to this level of our being. Secondly, such self-mastery would entail being able to enact the self-awareness of the truth of our existential-supernatural in every single consecutive act we make, a feat that is beyond even the most self-aware and disciplined person. We can only tend towards the realization of this goal asymptotically.[50] The realization of our being can only be at best fragmentary and incomplete, because it is mediated by categorical experiences. We cannot systematize completely our selfhood because we are beings who must exist within certain parameters that constrain us and codetermine our freedom. In this way, our lives constitute a series of objectifications: the goal of each act of freedom is to gather ourselves and objectify the totality of who we are as a response

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[47] Karl Rahner, "Theology of Freedom," *Theological Investigations* (vol. 6), trans. K-H. and B. Kruger, (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1969) 185.
[48] Karl Rahner, "Self-Realization and Taking Up One's Cross," *Theological Investigations* (vol. 9)*,* trans. G. Harrison (New York: Seabury, 1972) 254.
[49] Rahner, "Theology of Freedom," 186.
[50] Karl Rahner, "Christology in the Setting of Modern Man's Understanding of Himself and of His World," *Theological Investigations* (vol. 11), trans D. Bourke, (New York: Crossroad, 1982) 217.

to the self-communication of God. We only succeed in this task to varying degrees and often in ways that lack a systematic apprehension of the import of this task. Rahner illustrates how even though each individual act of freedom is unsystematic, we can, over time, by reflecting on our experience, become dimly aware of the systematic and objective character of the ensemble of our acts that form the people we are.[51]

If we take up the metaphor of a seed contained in the notion of the seminal person, this level of our being may sprout, given the right conditions, and bring to the level of our consciousness our fundamental identity in God. However, such a coming to consciousness of our seminal person can only ever be incomplete and "piece-meal" since it comes about through the various mediations of our agency in the world. Rahner avers that "man is that strange being who attains self-consciousness only by being conscious of something other than himself."[52] A person slowly manages to realize the potential that his seminal self contains through progressive objectifications through his agency in the material world that constitute encounters with the Other. It is, as it were, that by butting against something who is not himself, a person slowly comes to an awareness of what is himself. This is what we might properly characterize as the self in the thought of Rahner. The self is therefore always an incomplete and piece-meal apprehension of the real truth of who we are before God. Our self-comprehension will always fall woefully short of the full depth of our identity in God. This is what Rahner means when he says that we can only realize ourselves in an "intermediary reality."[53]

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[51] Ibid, 178.
[52] Rahner, "Guilt and its remission," 269.
[53] Rahner, "Guilt and its remission," 272.

In the attempt to attain self-mastery, there are two factors that inhibit the realization of a final act. Firstly, there is the frustration generated by the disjuncture between experiencing oneself as an infinitely boundless task and only being able to fulfil this task in a piece-meal and fragmentary way in the categorical realm. The central challenge of freedom is to be able to embrace fully, within the limits of our finitude, the boundlessness of the invitation that freedom contains. One temptation that a person could fall into would be to withhold his freedom while waiting for an object in the categorical commensurate with his desire. As no such object exists, such a person is susceptible to sinking into the despair of his own emptiness. Conversely, a person could give himself so totally over to the categorical realm that he becomes satiated in the "slavery of the finite." It is only through loving God that we might find respite from such a fate. Rahner illustrates that God liberates us from the "slavery of the finite" by at once "refusing himself and declaring himself, by remaining afar off and by drawing near."[54] God gives Godself to us in a manner that allows us to experience simultaneously his immanence as well as his tantalizing transcendence that always leaves us with the "blessedness of the painful flame of yearning."[55] It is thus only love of God that is commensurate with the boundlessness of our freedom. In this way, Rahner demonstrates how our freedom is rescued from "the dilemma of being either a freedom given up to the finiteness of the chosen finite possibilities and thus enslaved, or a freedom preserved but starving to death on account of its own emptiness." [56]

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[54] Karl Rahner, "Freedom in the Church," *Theological Investigations* (vol. 2), trans. K-H Kruger, (New York: Crossroad, 1990) 94.
[55] Idem*.*
[56] Idem.

For this reason, Rahner identifies sin as being every refusal on the part of the human person "to entrust himself to this boundlessness."[57] Fundamentally what is at stake here is the person's recognition and acceptance of his own creatureliness. It is this recognition of his creatureliness that should lead a person to an attitude of complete and utter dependence on God.[58] This dependence is not optional for the person, it is not something that the person can choose to do. This dependence rather defines the very ground of a person's being, and all that the person can choose to do is to accept it or to try to resist it. Paradoxically, Rahner argues that instead of diminishing a person's freedom, this dependence increases a person's freedom, the more it is recognized and lived into.[59] For indeed this dependence is not of the order of the way a child might depend on her mother for sustenance in the early years of her life and then gradually grow into material independence while still maintaining a certain psychological dependence on her relationship with her mother. The relationship with God, while often construed after the manner of a child to parent, goes beyond this metaphor because of the nature of the surrender to God that Rahner underlines must form the basis of this relationship in a permanent way.

The second factor that inhibits our quest for the self-mastery necessary to accomplish a uniquely final act is the anxiety that arises from the lack of integration that we perceive in ourselves. This lack of integration stems from our inability to access the union of our being at both the seminal level and at the realized level while having to contend with the plurality of being as we experience

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[57] Rahner, "Theology of Freedom," 188.
[58] Rahner, *Foundations*, 76 – 77.
[59] Rahner, *Foundations*, 79.

it in the categorical. A fuller understanding of the nature of this challenge requires a short detour into Rahner's theology of symbol.

Rahner begins his reflection on the theology of symbol by observing that all beings are not absolutely simple, they are composite and therefore represent a multiplicity of things. This is because for Rahner the nature of being is to express itself. Being is animated by a movement to emerge from itself into an expression which becomes other than itself. This expression of being creates a plurality of being that stems from an original unity. Owing to this plurality, all beings "are or can be essentially the expression of another in this unity of the multiple."[60] Rahner argues that this plurality has an ontological density to it such that is cannot be simply reduced to its original unity in a completely systematic way.

Rahner demonstrates the ontological density of this plurality by invoking the example of the Trinity. It would be a mistake to think that the plurality of being is due to the finitude of created beings, for the same plurality exists within the Trinity itself. The Trinity, though simple and eternal, possesses a plurality of being in the three persons. Consequently, plurality of being is not to be regarded necessarily as a weakness. Indeed Rahner argues that it would be heretical to maintain that God might be in some way "simpler" if God were not to be Trinitarian. What Rahner wants to avoid is a situation where we claim that the original and simple unity of the Trinity lies in the Father who begot the Son and the Spirit. It would be a mistake to postulate the unity of the Trinity as being chronologically prior to its plurality. The plurality of God is not simply an add-on to God's original unity. Conversely, God's unity must not be construed as merely the

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[60] Karl Rahner, "The Theology of the Symbol," *Theological Investigations* (vol. 4), trans. K Smyth (New York: Crossroad, 1984) 226.

juxtaposition of the individual parts, for then the unity would not be constitutive of being and would be a secondary add-on to individual parts that once existed separately.[61] Rahner clarifies that we should not see this unity as existing in some way above the plurality in some higher plane of being. In this way, Rahner uses the example of the Trinity to demonstrate a general fact about all being, namely that its plurality its unity must be understood as both existing as "ontological ultimates."[62]

For Rahner self-realization consists in the symbolic expression of oneself "by constituting a plurality." When being expresses itself, it "gives itself away from itself into the 'other,' and there finds itself in knowledge and love."[63] The self-expression of a being thus necessarily escapes the control of the being itself, the consent to give oneself away in self-expression requires the surrender and vulnerability to be received by another. It is only in the process of this reception that one comes to knowledge and love of oneself in the other. This is the perichoretic dynamic that animates the Trinity.

While this *perichoresis* within the Trinity takes place in the perfection of seamless and total mutual self-communication, surrender and love, the same cannot be said for the human person. This is for a number of factors. The first is that the human person does not have the capacity to immediately dispose of herself completely and express herself perfectly in a final act of self-expression. One has to work on acquiring this capacity for self-disposal throughout the entirety of one's life. Secondly, and perhaps more primordially, in order to dispose of the entirety of one's

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[61] *Ibid*, 227.
[62] *Idem*.
[63] *Ibid*, 230.

being in this way there has to be a modicum of conscious assent to the process of giving oneself away. In other words, one needs to consent to a certain loss of control in the process of self-expression. There needs to be a consent to the vulnerability that comes with self-expression in the possibility of a non-reception or rejection by the other. In the same vein, an individual's self-expression must also leave space to receive the expression of the other. Finally, not having access either to her original unity at the seminal level or to her final unity at the realized level, all the human person has access to is the plurality of being at the intermediate level in the categorical realm. There must be a preparedness on the part of the person to engage in the onerous and complex task of discerning this unity in the plurality of disparate and fragmentary manifestations of being that her acts of freedom in the categorical constitute. There must be both a willingness to let the original unity of this plurality of being emerge with the passage of time. This process is aided by systematic reflection on our experience that teaches us to recognize and integrate the disparate experiences of our lives. To this reflection we must add a conscious striving to attain a unity of purpose and personal integration as we orient our beings towards the Absolute Future, knowing that fulfilment of our humanity lies in the Mystery that is always beyond us.

All of these movements imply the possibility of suffering and necessitate the openness towards a certain kind of death. If, as a person, one has not understood these requirements, it is clear that the process of self-expression will be a very frustrating one and one that is doomed from the start. Fundamentally we do not have direct access to being and our origins. It is through freedom that we gain access to our being. However, even freedom does not give us direct access to knowledge of our being without the mediation of the other. Rahner's insight that being must "give itself away to the other" stresses the importance of the other person if we are to truly come

to knowledge and love of ourselves. This is why Rahner goes on to assert that it is only really through love of God and of neighbor that we are able to gather up the entirety of the plurality of our being and dispose of it in a way that leads us back to our original unity that is simultaneously our ultimate end. Rahner affirms that whenever the love of another person assumes its "proper nature and its moral absoluteness and depth" it is to be considered as being love of God, "whether it be explicitly considered to be such a love by the subject or not."[64] Rahner maintains that there is in fact "a mutual conditioning" between love of God and love of neighbor. Both these acts lead us away from our "curved-in-on-itself-subjectivity" and break us out of the narrowness of our own existence into a space where we finally encounter the freedom to surrender to the Mystery that draws us to Itself. [65]

2.3 Self-realization through surrender

In all of the foregoing we have outlined the enormous task that a person's freedom must realize. While the individual may achieve a fragmentary success, ultimately it is God alone who can bring the individual into self-realization, for the truth of herself lies in the incomprehensible Mystery who is God. Very simply, if the person cannot know objectively, in a systematic way, the truth of who she is and who she is becoming, then there is no way that the person can achieve this truth by herself. We come then to the crux of Rahner's treatment of freedom, namely that freedom can paradoxically only find its fullest realization in surrender to God. The task for each person is precisely the task to dispose of her whole self and yield it up to her Creator in love. Ultimately, every act of love is in one sense or another a letting go, a giving away of oneself. To the extent

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[64] Karl Rahner, "On Love of God and Love of Neighbor," *Theological Investigations* (vol. 6), trans. K. H. and B. Kruger (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1969) 237.
[65] Karl Rahner, *The Love of Jesus and the Love of Neighbor,* trans. R Barr, (New York: Crossroad, 1983) 70 – 71.

that we are able to give ourselves away in love to the other, we achieve self-realization. However,

logic dictates that we do not have access to that which we give away, after we have given it away,

which is why Rahner maintains that we do not have access to the final stage of our self-

realization. No matter how successful we are in integrating our lives and uniting the disparate

and fragmentary realizations of our freedom, we will never fully manage to attain the unity that

we yearn, for this unity is to be found in God alone. It is the love of God alone that is "able to

unite all man's many-sided and mutually contradictory capabilities because they are all

orientated towards that God whose unity and infinity can create the unity in man which without

destroying it, unites the diversity of the finite."[66] This synthesis of all the actions of a person into

one unity of purpose, into a final and definitive orientation towards God takes place at the level

of the achieved person, which represents the final stage of self-realization: the person as she

stands before God.

This love of God must take the form of surrender, for as Rahner points out, we cannot possess

God, in the manner in which we might objectify and possess the object of our love in the

categorical realm. The Mystery of God is so impenetrable and incomprehensible that our

reaching out to God through self-transcendence must ultimately renounce any attempt to know

the object of our yearning as an object and simply surrender to this mystery. [67] Rahner gives his

own rendition of Jesus' paradoxical axiom "he who wishes to save his life will lose it, but he who

loses his life for my sake will save it" (Mt 16: 25), where he asserts that in order to attain the

fullness of God we must be prepared to let go of the particular, where this fullness is not the

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[66] Rahner, "Theology of Freedom," 187.
[67] Karl Rahner, "On the Theology of Hope," *Theological Investigations* (vol. 10), trans. D Bourke, (New York: Crossroad, 1977) 249.

"sum total of particular finite possibilities, but lies ahead of us as the one, whole, 'absolute' future, which in Christian terms we are accustomed to call 'God.'"[68]

It is against the backdrop of this problematic of a finite human person longing to be filled with the infinite that Rahner's Christology is framed. For Rahner, Christ is the very condition of our possibility of receiving the infinite mystery who is God. Jesus "is for all eternity the *permanent openness* of our finite being to the living God of infinite, eternal life."[69] Rahner asserts that our human nature is structured in such a way that it can only find fulfilment by giving itself away to incomprehensible Mystery. In this process, "the nature which surrenders itself to the mystery of the fullness belongs so little to itself that it becomes the nature of God himself. The Incarnation of God is therefore the unique, *supreme*, case of the total actualization of human reality, which consists of the fact that man *is* in so far as he gives himself up."[70] In Rahner's view, it is the person of Jesus Christ that reveals to us that the question that the human person is to himself is not a cruel joke on the part of the Creator: that is to say a question without a possible answer. For Jesus Christ was the only person to have completely accepted the full import, the full breath of the horizon of this question, and then to surrender himself to the answer that quietly suggested itself in the Mystery of the Creator. Rahner argues that, contrary to Christ, the individual human person is a bit "farther from God" because each person thinks that he is the only one who can

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[68] Rahner, "Self-realization and taking up one's cross," 254.
[69] Karl Rahner, "The Eternal Significance of the Humanity of Jesus for Our Relationship with God," *Theological Investigations*, (vol. 3), trans. K.H. and B. Kruger, (New York: Crossroad, 1982) 44.
[70] Karl Rahner, "On the Theology of the Incarnation," *Theological Investigations* (vol. 4), trans. K Smyth (New York: Crossroad, 1984) 109-110.

understand himself. Conversely, Jesus knew that the Father understood the depths of his being and therefore was able to surrender himself to the Father unreservedly.[71]

For Rahner, Jesus Christ's acceptance of death on the cross is the paradigmatic expression of what it means to surrender to God in love. This is why the surrender to God that each person is called to culminates in the death of the individual. Death is the means by which our fundamental option is finalized and our "yes" or "no" is finally locked in. In death we are able to attain the uniquely final act to which we tend only asymptotically during our lives.[72] Thus Rahner has a very positive view of death, as the event that finally frees us from the ambiguity that our finitude brings about in us, understood as the inability to choose definitively between a yes or a no. Death locks in our choice and confirms our "yes" to God. Consequently, death also heralds the moment in our lives where the plurality of being no longer presents itself to us as an obstacle to unity or as a temptation to vacillate about our fundamental option. The unity of all creation opens up before us and in death we enter into this unity at "the deepest level of the reality of the world."[73] Once again, for Rahner it is the death of Christ that proves paradigmatic for us and thus what is postulated about Christ holds true for the Christian as well: "when the vessel of his body was shattered in death, Christ was poured out over all the cosmos."[74] In death then the contribution of our lives is added to the cosmos.

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[71] Ibid, 111.
[72] Karl Rahner, "Experience of the Holy Spirit," *Theological Investigations* (vol. 18), trans. E Quinn (New York: Crossroad, 1983) 198.
[73] Karl Rahner, *On the Theology of Death*, trans. W J O'Hara (Freiburg: Herder, 1965) 63.
[74] Rahner, *On the Theology of Death*, 66.

2.4 A Rahnerian Analysis of the Evolution of the Self in Western Thought

With Rahner we have seen that the acknowledgement that the construction of ourselves is underwritten by the very source of all Being gives us the security we need to accept our own openness to an infinite horizon. An explicitly formulated conviction in the mind of the individual of this idea is not a pre-requisite for the beginnings of a "yes" to God. What is necessary is the attitude of trust in God that this conviction represents. This attitude of trust and openness to being itself represents an unthematic acceptance of the principle described above. What is important at all stages of the construction of the self is a willingness to keep open the question of who I am. What provides the courage and existential stability to remain in such a liminal space is our fundamental connection to the source of all Being. The daunting aspect of the enormity of the question is mitigated by the gratuity of Being that is communicated to me through my relationship to God.

In chapter one, we saw how the question of the horizon of our meaning has a significant impact on how the self is constructed. We traced the way in which the parameters of this horizon gradually changed from one that looked outwards to the created order to one that looks inwards. While we noted that this development resulted in an emphasis on personal creativity and originality, there were major drawbacks to the severing of the connection with the outer world. We might discern in the developments outlined in the first chapter a desire to limit the horizon of meaning to a size coextensive with the capacities of an individual to control and manage. If the construction of the self happens in isolation from all reference to the Ultimate source of our Being in God, then it is easy to see how the individual would be reluctant to accept an openness to an infinite horizon. Such an openness would be far too daunting and beyond the individual's

ability to control or manipulate. If we are to see the construction of the self as an answer to the question that we are to ourselves, then we will frame the question in such terms as to feel capable of providing an answer. If the sources for providing such an answer are limited to own creativity and a few privileged relationships with significant others, our framing of the question will be severely impoverished. Further to this, lacking the stability that comes with connection to something greater than ourselves, we will be inclined to terminate the period of questioning as quickly as possible in order to gain stability from a fixed and objective answer to the question of who we are.

The impetus towards greater control, arising from an increased sense of instability and insecurity, manifests itself in the drive to objectify both the outer world and our inner selves. Locke's "punctual self" represents the beginnings of the modern attempt to objectify the self in order to be able to manipulate it at will. A Rahnerian account of the self reveals precisely what is so deeply problematic about this attempt. For Rahner, the self that we can consciously apprehend will always only ever be a "piece-meal" "intermediary reality." This is because it represents an attempt to bring to consciousness our relationship with our infinite horizon. Rahner does not deny the necessity of making such objectifications, but underlines that they should never be taken for an expression of the ultimate truth of our beings. If the truth of our beings lies hidden away in the incomprehensible mystery of who God is, then it follows that our objectifications of this mystery have a radically provisional nature. We are walking on sacred ground when we attempt to objectify this mystery in the realm of the categorical. Locke's "punctual self" fails to respect this mystery by assuming that my current objectification of the self is all that there is to me. My current apprehension of who I am is mistaken for the complete truth of my being.

We also noted in chapter one how the "punctual self," true to its name, ignores the narrative and historical embeddedness of the self. The punctuality of this self represents a refusal to deal with the fragmentary nature of our objectifications of our seminal self over time in the realm of the categorical. Rahner does not advocate an attitude of helplessness faced with this fragmentary nature of ourselves. Rather he advocates an attitude of humble reflection on one's experience in order to be able to piece together the larger patterns of the significance of our lives as we slowly develop an appreciation of how our exposure to the infinite horizon of Ultimate Mystery is shaping the people we are becoming. The punctual self represents the allure of instant ready-made truth that eschews the difficult soul-work of piecing together a coherent story about ourselves. What is also tragic about the punctual self is that it fails to attain Locke's stated goal of maximal happiness for the individual. This is because happiness is not simply a matter of finding integration and self-mastery in the present moment. If Rahner's analysis of the self is correct, then true happiness is only achieved when we manage to live our lives in such a way that we may discern the outline of a coherent and sustained "yes" to God emerging over time. This requires a sustained effort to establish a correspondence between the seminal person and the intermediary reality of our selves.

The only way that we achieve such correspondence is by honest and courageous self-exploration in order to discover the mystery that lies within us and then to attempt to express the truth of this mystery in our actions. We observed that with Locke the journey towards self-discovery articulated by St. Augustine morphs into self-construction. With Locke we lose the notion that there is some underlying datum to our beings that needs to be realized and brought to self-consciousness through reflection and praxis. With the loss of this datum, we lose that which is

most abiding about the self, a permanent substratum that gives stability and coherence to the self as it evolves through time. Unconstrained by the need to discover anything about himself, the individual is free to "invent" himself through time, changing his self-definition as he so pleases in order to assure his own maximal happiness. This self is unmoored from its anchorage in the mystery who is God and is therefore radically unstable and in need of the security that comes with increased control in the process of self-definition.

One positive aspect of our contemporary emphasis on an ethics of authenticity is the partial recovery of the notion of self-discovery through Herder's intuition that we each have our own original way of being ourselves that each person must discover for herself. This conception of authenticity represents a recovery of the idea that there is a datum of some sort already present in us that needs to be discovered and brought to fulfilment. The idea that I will miss the point of my life if I do not discover it suggests that it is not simply a matter of deciding what gives me the greatest pleasure that should be the determining factor in the construction of myself. The idea of authenticity points to an underlying principle that gives coherence to the ensemble of my life choices over time. This is certainly an improvement upon Locke's punctual self as it lends itself to the cultivation of a historically embedded self.

However, our analysis in chapter one identified serious flaws with the underlying principle that has been chosen by post-modernity as that which gives coherence to an individual's life. We noted that this underlying principle was that of self-determining freedom. All that is important about the principle that gives meaning to my life is that it is I who choose it. We highlighted how the only criterion available to aid me in this decision is my own affectivity. I decide what is the most authentic version of myself based on a feeling. We saw how Taylor critiqued the arbitrary

nature of trying to construct a discourse of significance based on personal feelings. Rahner's analysis of the construction of the self offers a more concrete barometer for self-fulfillment. The extent to which I am prepared to sacrifice myself in love of others and in surrender to God is a far more reliable and objective barometer for self-fulfillment. It is paradoxically only when I am prepared to give myself away in loving and vulnerable relationship that I truly become the person I am meant to be. This brings us to the question of the role of the other person in the construction of myself, an issue that we have only dealt with in passing thus far. It is to this question that we now turn in our third chapter.

Chapter III: Relationship with the Other as a Source of the Self

In our second chapter, we noted with Rahner how a person only comes to knowledge of herself by encountering that which is not herself. This experience of the other takes diverse forms and enables us to gradually discern the boundaries of ourselves. Developmental psychology has traced this path towards full self-consciousness in young children as they move from a fusional view of themselves with the rest of reality to a gradual awareness of the separateness between themselves and the outside world. This process happens in a very visceral and physical way when the young child literally bumps into material objects that are not herself and that she cannot control or manipulate at will. As developmental psychology goes, this is a fairly quickly acquired awareness. A similar, but far more slow and painful process takes place on the level of relationships, where the person has to learn to navigate encounters with other people.

This chapter will explore how relationship with the other plays an essential role in the formation of an authentic sense of self. Relationship with the other can either be lived in a competitive or gratuitous manner. We will show how a self that is constructed through competitive relationships is built on an illusion and is thus a false self. Drawing largely on the thought of James Alison, this chapter will describe the process of conversion as one where the individual is able to shift away from an acquisitive or competitive mode of relating to the other to a gratuitous and altruistic approach to relationship. Alison's and Rahner's anthropologies, though different in approach, will be shown to be mutually enriching in the articulation of the formation of an authentic self in a Christian context. In particular, we will be attentive to the way in which their Christologies help overcome the two problematics of self-construction articulated in the first chapter.

3.1 The Other as a Competitor

Before outlining Alison's theology, it is helpful to begin with a brief consideration of two of his major sources: Jean-Michel Oughourlian, a French psychologist, who draws on René Girard's theory of mimetic desire, in order to describe the formation of the self in the individual. According to Oughourlian, desire is what gives rise to the self, and following Girard, he affirms that desire is mimetic. [75] This means that the individual does not invent her own desires out of nothing, but rather copies them from another person. Girard expounds the dynamics of mimetic desire by suggesting that all desire has a triangular structure. The three corners of desire are constituted by the subject who desires, the object that is desired and the mediator who is the source of the desire for the object in the subject.[76] This triangular nature of desire describes the process by which the object of the desire of another becomes the object of my desire as I copy the other in his desiring. The other is then perceived as a competitor and a threat to my own attainment of the object of my desire. Girard has demonstrated how this process leads to the onset of violence between me and the other to the point that the object of desire can even be forgotten, as I throw all my energies into eliminating the other who I have come to perceive as a threat.[77] For as Girard indicates, "the object is only a means of reaching the mediator." What desire is really all about is desire to be the other.[78] This violence ultimately culminates in the death of the other, as is the case in the Cain and Abel story. The antagonism that characterizes this type of mimesis leads to its designation as rivalistic mimesis.

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[75] Jean-Michel Oughourlian, *Un mime nommé désir*, (Paris: Grasset, 1982) 26.
[76] René Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel; Self and Other in Literary Structure,* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1965) 3–4.
[77] René Girard, *The Girard Reader,* ed. J. Williams, (New York: Crossroad, 1996) 9.
[78] Girard, *Deceit,* 53.

Oughourlian takes this account of mimetic desire and applies it to the formation of the self. He proposes that we come to knowledge of ourselves through mimetic rivalry with another. Oughourlian advances his argument by remarking how an infant experiences an attraction to an adult and will relate to this adult by way of imitation. Outside of this desire for imitation, there is no real "me" that can be spoken of with reference to this infant. This desire for imitation constitutes the entirety of the relational framework of the infant. When the infant sees an adult play with a toy, the infant's attention is drawn away from the person of the adult and fixates on the object. It is in this process that the infant begins to come to a sense of autonomy and experiences its own desire as separate from the desire of the adult. The adult now becomes a rival for possession of this toy. However, it is not just enough for the infant to gain the toy, the infant experiences a primal desire to imitate the very being of the adult, in other words to be at the origin of her own desiring. Oughourlian underlines how this desire is at the level of *being* and in this way dovetails with what Freud designates as identification: "wanting to be who the other is."[79] However, because the child is too weak to actually expel the victim (the adult), it must metaphorically murder the victim in its own mind in order to complete the process of this identification and come to an autonomous sense of self. The only way in which I can assert the originality of my own desire is to forget that I copied this desire from another person. This is the illusion on which the self is based. Oughourlian thus speaks of the metaphorical murder of the other person, through the process of forgetting, in order to be able to assert the originality of my own desire.[80] Thus we see the two central forces in the formation of the self – the desire for

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[79] James Alison, *The Joy of Being Wrong: Original Sin through Easter Eyes,* (New York: Crossroad Pub Co, 1998) 29.
[80] Oughourlian, *Un mime*, 24-26.

likeness and the desire for originality. It is clear how these two desires create a tension within the individual self because of their oppositional quality, requiring both proximity to (likeness) and distance from (originality) the other.

James Alison has discerned in Oughourlian's account of the genesis of the self a psycho-cultural rendition of the doctrine of original sin. Alison maintains that it is this primal and instinctive "reaction to the other as a rival to be eliminated" that can be construed to be our original sin. In this analysis, the tragedy of sin is pinpointed as the inability to navigate peacefully our desire for likeness, such that I construe the other as a rival instead of a collaborator in the construction of myself. It is once again a short-cut to a stable and fixed sense of self that seeks to by-pass the messiness of relationship. The individual comes to a false of sense of self because it is essentially based on an illusion. As we saw in our Rahnerian analysis of the contemporary construction of the self, the virtues that are lacking here are those of courage and patience to let a complex self emerge from the process of interaction with the other that fulfils both the desire for likeness and originality. Instead, I become convinced that I can only bolster my own sense of self by decreasing, or even eliminating the being of the other. Nevertheless, for Alison, it is not so much the rivalry with the other that constitutes the original sin or the fundamental defect in the way we construct ourselves. Rather it is an attitude of "acquisitiveness", or "grasping" that is at the root of a false sense of self. Alison designates this as "acquisitive mimesis" that "works by grasping and appropriating being rather than receiving it."[81]

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[81] Ibid, 44.

3.2 The Other as a Friend

Alison contrasts "acquisitive mimesis" with "beneficent mimesis" which is where a person experiences the gratuitous love of another and imitates this gratuity in a non-rivalistic manner. A more detailed analysis of beneficent mimesis shall be presented later in this chapter. Our purpose at the moment is to contest Alison's affirmation that the self is generated exclusively through rivalistic mimesis. It would be a simplistic to assume that an infant's way of relating with others is confined to the type of relationship circumscribed by rivalistic mimesis. As John Macmurray illustrates, an infant is capable of engaging in purely gratuitous exchanges with another person that revolve around non-utilitarian behavior. Macmurray gives the example of a mother who will cuddle and caress her baby, who in its turn participates freely in this relationship by responding with delight.[82] One could argue about the degree to which the infant is conscious of itself as an individual and separate agent from the mother, but the point is that such an interaction between mother and child forms the foundation of the development of a non-rivalistic type of encounter with the other. In time, Macmurray argues, the child is even able to learn "to subordinate his own desires to those of another person."[83] Once again, this habit in the child constitutes the beginnings of an ability to see the other person as having an importance of their own, beyond their merely instrumental value in fulfilling the child's own interests.

We see here the beginnings of a journey towards seeing the other not as a rival to the security and stability of my own self, but rather as someone who can enrich my sense of self through the reciprocity of loving relationship. The paradigm of such loving relationship is friendship, where

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[82] John Macmurray, *Persons in Relation,* (Amherst, N.Y.: Humanity Books, 1999) 63.
[83] Ibid, 59.

we learn to interact with the other person in a mutually enriching way. Friendship is effectively the art of being able to hold in creative tension the desire both for belonging, through identification with the other, and the desire for originality, through the assertion of my own individuality. Authentic friendship thus eschews the fusional impulse of erotic love as well as the narcissism of an exaggerated individualism.

For an analysis of how the self is enriched by friendship, we turn to Aristotle's treatment of the matter in his celebrated work *Nicomachean Ethics.* Aristotle defines friendship as occurring when two people consciously wish the best for the other and acknowledge this feeling as mutual. Within this broad definition, Aristotle distinguishes three types of friendship, based on the mutual good that the two friends derive from the friendship. The first type of friendship obtains where the mutual good is one of utility. In a friendship of utility, the one does not love the other for the person that she is in herself, but rather for some other good that derives from the acquaintance.[84] For example, two people choose to be friends because of the high quality of tennis that they are able to produce when they play against or with each other. The second type of friendship is one based on pleasure. Aristotle gives the example of a friendship where two friends derive pleasure from their conversation together because it is witty and humorous. They do not love each other for the people that they are, but rather for the pleasure of laughter that is generated by their conversation. These first two types of friendship are not stable or enduring, because as soon as the good disappears (they both grow too old to play tennis, or lose their sense

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[84] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics VIII, 4,* trans. W.D. Ross, (Kitchener, Ont.: Batoche Books, 1999) 128–29.

of humor), so does the friendship. Aristotle observes that because our lives are always in a constant state of flux, such friendships are bound to be impermanent.[85]

The third type is a friendship of virtue, and one that is far more stable. This is because the good that it seeks is not external to the two friends. In this third type of friendship, each person wishes the good of the other *for their own sake*. In the first two types of friendship, each person wishes the good of the other, but it is not for the other's sake, but rather for their own. It is a kind of enlightened self-interest, where a person realizes that the well-being of the other is essential to the continued existence of the good of the friendship, whether that be its utility or its pleasure. However, in a friendship of virtue, a person wishes the good of her friend purely for her friend's sake, independent of what gain might accrue to herself from this friendship. One could argue, as many have, that this is still a form of enlightened self-interest, albeit far more sophisticated. Some have argued that no matter how much a person might profess an indifference towards personal gain in the love of another, love can never be fully stripped of self-interest. The purpose of this paper is not to rehearse these different arguments that attempt to show that all altruism is, in effect, a sophisticated form of egoism. Our purpose is to get to the point where we are able to show that a framework that attempts to pit self-love against altruism is setting up a false dichotomy. The framework that creates such a dichotomy is a direct result of the radical individualism of the Enlightenment and its intellectual predecessors that we had occasion to critique in the first chapter. The contention of this paper is that the self of an individual person is

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[85] Ibid, 129–30.

so intimately linked with the self of the other such that we need to reject any framework that construes self-love and altruism as being a zero-sum game.

The truth that undercuts the illusory separateness of the self from the other is the paradox that lies at the heart of the Christian message. We have already briefly alluded to this paradox in the thought of Rahner where we observed that a person only really finds their true self by giving it away to another in love. This is the truth otherwise expressed in the gospels "anyone who wants to save his life will lose it, but anyone who loses his life for my sake will find it," (Mt. 16: 25).[86] It is only possible for this dictum to hold true if in some way the other is who I am. The mystery of my own identity and well-being is wrapped up in the identity and the well-being of the other person. It is this same truth that finds an echo in Aristotle's emphasis on altruistic love as the highest form of human relationship. For it is only when I am able to engage in the self-sacrifice of altruistic love that I show that I am able to identify the other person as a part of my own self.

For Aristotle, it is this ability to identify with the other that is at the heart of altruistic love. Aristotle does not elaborate on the means by which this identification with the other is wrought. He simply limits himself to stating that a person "is related to a friend as to himself (for his friend is another self)."[87] Mary Rousseau makes a convincing attempt at elucidating the philosophical underpinnings of such an identification using Aristotle's own notion of cause and effect. In Aristotelian metaphysics, the cause of an action always resides in the doer, but the effect is located in the receiver. In this way, because the effect of one's own action lies in another, there

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[86] Unless otherwise stated, all biblical citations are drawn from *The New Jerusalem Bible*, Standard Edition, (London: Darton, Longmann & Todd, 1985).
[87] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics IX, 4*, 151.

is a sense in which a part of oneself is located in that other. In Rousseau's words "the effect of love's activity is an extension of the lover's being, his very self in action, residing in his beloved, sharing the beloved's being."[88]

We have seen how the challenge of friendship is to steer a middle ground between the drive to fuse one's identity with the other and the opposite drive to eliminate the other. In an authentic friendship, my own originality is not threatened by the drive towards an identification with the other. Authentic friendship should enhance my own sense of uniqueness and originality and help me to further express this originality. We have already alluded to the dialogical nature of self-definition in the first chapter in the thought of Charles Taylor. Norris Clarke offers a more detailed presentation of this process. Clarke highlights how, in the process of self-construction, there is a "basic polarity of presence to self and presence to others." Using a Thomist conceptual framework, Clarke asserts that every human person is constituted by a "living synthesis of substantiality and relationality."[89] The gradual acquisition of full self-consciousness by an individual can be described as the process whereby the potential contained in their substance is slowly actualized through engaging in relationships. It is through the process of being acted upon and then actively responding in relationship that a person realizes their full potentiality. It is through the mediation of the other that I am returned to myself and become conscious of myself as a unique being. It is because of the respect that people treat me with as a "Thou" that I come to realize my own value and dignity as an "I."[90]

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[88] Mary Rousseau, *Community: The Tie that Binds*, (Lanham: University Press of America, 1991) 16-17.
[89] W. Norris Clarke, *Person and Being*, The Aquinas Lecture 1993 (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1993) 64–65.
[90]Ibid.

Like Rahner, Clarke is persuaded that the deepest ground of my being is wrapped up in the mystery of who God is. The journey inwards brings me into contact with the deepest truth of who I am. However, Clarke is quick to adduce that mere introspection is not sufficient to reveal to myself the mystery that I am, because I am likely to lose myself in "an impenetrable abyss of unlit mystery."[91] Relationship with others is the light by which I can profitably explore the depths of my inner self. The dialectic of presence to self and presence to others is in fact a spiral, and not an interminable circle. Relationship with others draws me out of myself only to return me to myself afterward as I internalize and deepen the self-knowledge I have gained through relationship. I then return to my relationship with others with a deeper sense of self-possession and a more enriched ability to be in relationship, which in turn reveals further depths of my own self to me, and so the spiral should ideally continue. Thus Clarke concludes that "paradoxically, the more intensely I am present to myself at one pole, the more intensely I am present and open to others at the other. And reciprocally, the more I make myself truly present to the other as an "I" or self, the more I must also be present to myself, in order that it may be truly *I* that is present to them, not a mask."[92]

This process of gradual self-discovery with the other person follows a similar structure of the gradual deepening of the mystery that characterizes relationship with God. In chapter two we referenced Rahner's assertion that God liberates us from the "slavery of the finite" by at once "refusing himself and declaring himself, by remaining afar off and by drawing near."[93] It is this double movement of God that keeps us honest in the construction of ourselves by keeping

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[91] Ibid, 68.
[92] Ibid, 69-70.
[93] Karl Rahner, "Freedom in the Church," p. 94.

ultimate consummation always tantalizingly out of reach. It is this unattainability of ultimate consummation that keeps us in the liminal space of continual self-definition, a task that will only find its completion in our deaths. As a mediation of relationship with the divine, my relationship with the other mimics this double movement. Just as I cannot exhaust the mystery of who I am, neither can my relationship with the other exhaust the mystery of who they are. In this way, no matter how intimate a relationship, there will always be a remainder of the other that is tantalizingly held back from me, whether consciously or not. The mystery of their beings is underscored by the incapacity of either person to completely encompass the realities of their very selves that are engaged and revealed in relationship. In this way, neither party has control over the exact form of their selves that will be drawn out of them and revealed in a particular relationship. It should be clear from this analysis how the other has a capacity to call out a certain aspect of my self, and try as I may or even try as she may, neither of us can force this process of self-revelation. We must therefore be patient and allow the relationship to yield up the truth of our inner selves in its own time.

3.3 The Need for Conversion

Thus far we have attempted to distinguish between two basic modes of relating to the other: the first that sees the other as a competitor and the second that sees the other as a friend. However, a far more helpful distinction for our purposes emanates from Alison's categories of acquisitive versus beneficent mimesis. In this categorization, even the first two types of friendship identified by Aristotle fall firmly within the camp of acquisitive mimesis. They are both characterized by a grasping and acquisitive attitude towards relationship. They both demonstrate an impatience to let the question of who I am slowly emerge in relationship with the other person. The mechanism

of identification has a contrived nature to it, as both parties seek to increase identification in order to maximize either their utility or pleasure. It is only the third type of friendship that manages to break this pattern by demonstrating a willingness to receive oneself from another, instead of grabbing it. In a friendship of virtue, the process of identification with the other is lived in a gratuitous fashion which we might characterize as "beneficent mimesis." Both parties realize that they are standing on sacred ground and do not seek to prematurely fabricate or manipulate this process of identification.

In chapter one, we highlighted how the culture of authenticity has led the contemporary individual to seek validation amongst a small select group of significant others. Our analysis here highlights how these relationships run a high risk of falling under the category of a friendship of utility. The validation that one seeks from another is a form of utility. The radical instability of the unmoored self in postmodernity places an enormous amount of pressure on the process of validation in order to provide much needed stability to a fragile self. Given this pressure, this validation can often have a contrived nature to it, having been extracted before the other person is truly ready to grant it. The desperate longing for validation of the self places this form of relationship squarely in the camp of acquisitive mimesis. Once again, the patience required to allow an authentic sense of self to emerge from the gratuity of mutual love is missing from this type of relationship. What is at the heart of this impatience is a lack of trust in the ultimate gratuity of life. It is a failure to recognize the infinite horizon that constitutes the question that we are to ourselves and to trust that if the question is infinite, then the wherewithal to provide an answer to this question is also boundless. We might characterize the process of conversion then as one that moves the individual from a distrustful grasping to a trustful openness to the

gratuity of life. The question we now turn to is how this movement comes about in the life of an individual.

Alison proposes that the only way a person might move into this space is by experiencing the gratuity of God's love. He suggests that God's love works in us to produce a "a capacity to accept – as purely gratuitous – the self-giving other." Alison argues that we can only learn to truly give gratuitously of ourselves by having first learnt how to receive the gratuitous gift of the other. It is God's self-giving to us that models for us this new way of being in relationship. We need first to receive this self-giving in a non-grasping manner, trusting that the well-springs of God's giving will never dry up, in order to be able to give in a similar manner.[94] It is this imitation of God's self-giving that enables us to abandon the false self and embrace a new gratuitous way of being ourselves. Alison designates this type of mimesis as "pacific" or "beneficent" mimesis. Both Alison and Rahner are in agreement in seeing God's gratuity as the ground of our own gratuitous way of being. The point at which they disagree would be the way in which this appropriation of God's gratuitous being takes place in the life of the individual.

3.4 The Formation of a New Self in Rahner and Alison

As we saw in chapter two, for Rahner, the appropriation of God's gratuitous being takes place initially at the pre-conscious, unthematic level of the *Vorgriff*, and is only gradually thematized in the realm of the categorical. As the individual slowly becomes aware of the infinite nature of the horizon of her being that is stretched before her there is a dim apprehension of the gratuity of all life that begins to take shape in her consciousness. This apprehension crystalizes in the form

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[94] Alison, 45.

of a question as to whether or not she will accept the responsibility that this boundless gratuity of life imposes on her to respond with equal gratuity and trust. In contrast, Alison states that even though this boundless gratuity of life is *logically* anterior to an acquisitive attitude towards being, in "the order of discovery" it is *chronologically* posterior to the rivalistic mimesis that forms the self.[95]

Alison's notion of the "order of discovery" needs some explanation. The "order of discovery" follows the chronology of the human experience of grace and sin. Alison inverts the traditional order that has grace precede the experience of sin, an order that is enshrined within the account of creation in the first three chapters of Genesis. For Alison, even though the gratuitous grace of God is logically anterior to sin, we only come to realize this in the light of revelation, which reaches its culmination in Jesus Christ. In the "order of discovery" knowledge of original sin (a self formed by acquisitive mimesis) precedes knowledge of grace (a self formed in pacific mimesis). Alison insists that we cannot separate the order of salvation from the order of revelation, where it is clear that the full gratuity of God's creation is only really known after the resurrection where Jesus returns to his disciples as a forgiving victim.[96]

Alison's order of discovery underlines the importance of authentic conversion in the formation of a new self that requires the death of the false self. However, the schematic presentation of this "order" does not do complete justice to the full complexity of the formation of the self in the individual. A person may experience concurrently both a drive towards acquisitive mimesis as well as beneficent mimesis. Rahner's thought helps us to understand how, even though a person

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[95] Ibid, 44.
[96] Ibid, 203.

may not be fully conscious of the gratuitous nature of the *supernatural existential* that dwells in her, she can still be influenced by this gratuity and decide to construct herself in a way that demonstrates an openness to this horizon. Granted, a full conversion on her part of the aspects of herself that are formed through acquisitive mimesis is still required in order for her authentic self to reach fulfilment. This, however, is a lifelong journey that does not preclude the gradual development of a beneficent self alongside an acquisitive one. The parable of the wheat and tares (Mt. 13: 24-30) could be taken to allude to this heterogeneous nature of the self that continually needs purification.

Our consideration of these two theologians highlights a major difference in methodology between the two. The point of departure for the two anthropologies is very different. Rahner's is located at an unthematic, transcendent level, beyond the consciousness of the individual. Here, the person's subjectivity is constituted before God by an offer of salvation. It is not necessary that this call be responded to or even acknowledged in order for it to exert a mysterious influence on the person and the construction of her self. Alison rejects this metaphysical starting point, arguing that we have no conscious access to it, and therefore it has no influence over us. Instead, Alison's starting point is the formation of the self at the first moment of self-conscious awareness that the individual arrives at through the encounter of the other. The fundamental difference between these two theologians framed in terms of the emphasis they place on the importance of self-consciousness, with Alison according more attention to self-consciousness than Rahner does.

The relative importance that the two theologians give to self-consciousness results in slightly divergent foci: Alison being more interested in the formation of the self, and Rahner being more

interested in the formation of the person. The distinction between the self and the person is largely one of self-consciousness. The reality of the person exceeds what is circumscribed by self-consciousness. Rahner has already demonstrated the inability of the self to fully grasp the reality of the person. It is for this reason that Rahner prefers to focus on the freedom and responsibility of the person, rather than on the conscious self. Ultimately what is of paramount importance for Rahner is the achieved person who stands before God and has fully realized herself through her intermediate self. The intermediate self will only ever have a fragmentary understanding of how the seminal person is slowly being transformed into the achieved person through a combination of God's grace and human agency. Both the seminal person and the achieved person remain caught up in the Mystery who is God and therefore cannot be fully comprehended by the conscious self. It would only be at the eschaton that the self would finally have full access to the reality of the achieved person. During its earthly sojourn the self must simply trust in this slow and invisible work of God, a point underscored by countless mystics, most notably John of the Cross, in his work, *The Dark Night of the Soul*.

Nevertheless, Rahner's focus on both the seminal person and the realized person can lead to an undervaluing of the importance of conversion. This is exactly the critique that Alison pointedly levels at transcendental anthropology in failing to sufficiently account for the ways in which the false self can derail the process of human becoming. According to Alison, transcendental anthropology reduces the sacraments and Christ's redeeming work to a mere making explicit of this slow and invisible process of transformation that has already begun within the person at an

unconscious level through the supernatural existential.[97] Alison is indeed right to labor this point, for he maintains that the *sine qua non* of true conversion is an acknowledgement of the way in which the human person, and indeed humanity as a whole is complicit in a cycle of violence, oppression, victimization and scapegoating of the weakest and most vulnerable in our society.[98] Without such a radical renunciation, which needs to go to the heart of how we have constituted our very selves, our religious practice runs the very real risk of being superficial piety, or even worse, hypocrisy and perhaps even a cover-up for further cycles of oppression and violence perpetrated by an unrepentant, but cleverly hidden false self, still caught in the quagmire of rivalistic mimesis. It is hard to ignore such a compelling critique by Alison at a time when the Church is having to deal with a sex abuse scandal that has revolved around cover-ups specifically targeted at shoring up the self and power of the clergy in a desperate attempt to preserve the idol that clericalism has so masterfully constructed over the period of several centuries. It is for this reason that Alison places such a high value on the importance of self-consciousness as it pertains to becoming aware of the twisted nature of the false self and the need for conversion.

Our purpose in highlighting the difference between these two theologians is not to in order to side with one over the other, but rather to point out how they can be mutually enriching, coming as they do from different perspectives. As John Edwards astutely observes, Rahner's anthropology is actually an anthropology that is constructed from the perspective of God. What interests Rahner is how the person appears before God. He is less interested in the person's own self-understanding, which is perforce incomplete and fragmentary. Alison on the other hand is

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[97] Ibid, 42.
[98] Ibid, 101.

an anthropology constructed from the perspective of the human person. Edwards maintains that this allows the theologians to highlight different, but mutually enriching aspects of the construction of the self:

> "Alison emphasizes the discontinuity because he is viewing the self from the moment of discovery (in the Resurrection) in which the person's understanding of oneself changes drastically. Rahner, on the other hand, emphasizes the continuity of persons throughout the process of conversion because he uses the moment of discovery/revelation to reconceptualize the moment of creation from which he views the self."[99]

This difference in perspective also impacts the way in which they construct their Christologies. Our interest in their Christologies is to examine how they formulate the salvific impact of the Christ event on the formation of the self. Our inquiry has been structured around two fundamental problematics. The first has been the problematic of formulating a self that adequately responds the question imposed on an individual by her infinite horizon that opens into transcendence. The second has been the challenge of negotiating the need for originality with the need for belonging in relationship with the other. It is our contention that the Christologies of Rahner and Alison respond to these problematics. We have already seen in chapter two how Rahner's Christology responds to the first problematic by casting Christ the condition of possibility of a human response to his infinite horizon by complete surrender to God. We now turn to Alison's Christology in order to elaborate how the encounter with Christ

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[99]John Edwards, "The Self Prior to Mimetic Desire: Rahner and Alison on Original Sin and Conversion," in *Horizons*, vol. 35/1, 2008, p. 31.

reconfigures our relationship to the other and enables us to live the tension of originality and belonging.

3.5 Encountering Jesus as embodiment of God's gratuitous love

For Alison, the creation of this new self happens through the encounter with Jesus, who models for us the gratuitous love of the Father. Jesus reveals to us that the other does not necessarily have to be a threat to our own sense of self and our originality. In this way, Jesus is the second Adam, he is the second "other," different from the first other, whom we felt we had to be in competition with and eliminate in order to secure our own sense of self.[100] During his life on earth, Jesus freely gave of himself to others without ever seeking to possess them or define himself over against them.

During Jesus' public ministry, those who encounter him and journey with him are given fleeting glances of this new way of being. The encounter with Jesus does not in and of itself produce an instantaneous conversion within the individual to a gratuitous way of being.[101] To support this position, it is sufficient to note that even those who constitute his most inner circle and journey with him throughout his public ministry remain locked within rivalistic mimesis, as is evidenced by the quibbles amongst the disciples for earthly glory and prestige (Lk 22: 24-30). The disciples must wait for the death and resurrection of their Master for them to be able to cast off their old selves and acquire a new way of being. The reasons for this are threefold: (1) the "cover-up" that undergirds the construction of the false self in rivalistic mimesis must be exposed and forgiven through the death and resurrection of Jesus, (2) the fear of death must be overcome through the

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[100] Alison, 57-58.
[101] Ibid.

gratuity of life manifested in the resurrection and (3) the new self only fully reaches its realization in the new community constituted by the outpouring of the Spirit. We shall now proceed to a fuller treatment of each of these three reasons.

Alison underlines that an essential component of the process of conversion is the acquisition of what he terms "the intelligence of the victim."[102] It is not merely enough to know the beneficent and gratuitous love of God the creator. It is also necessary to acknowledge the destruction and suffering caused by our acquisitive mimesis. It is only possible to truly know this destruction and pain by developing an intimate relationship with the victim who imparts to us his point of view from the underbelly of history. In becoming conscious of the suffering of the victim, we comprehend the illusion that lies behind the formation of the self in rivalistic mimesis. However, in the face of the suffering and desolation of the victim, a normal human reaction would be paralysis that leads ultimately to despair and depression. This is because the victim is normally a broken person. Even if the victim is able to find it in themselves to rise above bitterness and the desire for revenge and instead offer forgiveness, this victim is rarely able to offer the victimizer a gratuity of life needed for a fresh start. Indeed, in its most violent form, the scapegoating mechanism kills the victim, meaning that the victimizer has no way of encountering his victim. In the normal course of the scapegoating mechanism, the "cover-up" that feeds this mechanism is never exposed for the lie that it truly is. It is for this reason that Jesus Christ is unique as a victim in the cycle of scapegoating. Jesus comes back after death as a forgiving victim, at once exposing

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[102] Ibid, 80.

the lie of the "cover-up" and simultaneously offering a gratuity of new life that forestalls the victimizer falling into despair.[103]

We have seen that if the gratuity of relationship is to be lived to its logical conclusion, a person must be prepared to give up her very life for the sake of the other. When a person has reached the stage of being prepared to give up her life for another, the process of identification of the other as another self has reached its climax. However, what is necessary at this stage is the assurance that this identification with the other, the tie that binds me to the other will endure beyond death. The threat that death poses to this bond must be shown to be an empty one. This is precisely what Jesus' resurrection does by showing that not even death can break this bond of belonging formed by the self in gratuitous love of the other. Jesus reveals that those who are prepared to allow their selves to be formed in beneficent mimesis, have nothing to fear, not even death, for Christ has conquered death.[104]

Lastly and perhaps most importantly, this new self that Jesus offers to us is not one that can exist in a binary relationship, even if that relationship is with Jesus himself. The binary relationship merely marks the birth of the self, but once brought to birth it must be structured and given form in the context of a community. Jesus' public ministry opens the disciples' eyes to the possibility of a different way of being: the binary relationship of Master/disciple calls out of the disciples a new self. This full genesis of this self occurs at the resurrection, as this binary relationship is consummated and demonstrated beyond doubt to be true and life-giving. It is at this stage that Jesus ascends to his Father, and the Spirit is poured out on this group of people that has

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[103] Ibid, 74-76.
[104] Ibid, 117.

assembled around the Risen One, now willing to make his story their story. From this point on, this new way of being that Jesus has called his disciples to will be lived out in the context of a community. The relationship with the earthly Jesus that gave birth to this new self will continue to nourish this new self through the mediation of the nascent Christian community.

This chapter has enabled us to reach a point in our investigation where we can assert that the other is a fundamental part of my own self. To deny this truth is to set off on a false path that can lead to a vicious cycle of victimization that is toxic for both victim and victimizer. The only appropriate response to the mystery that my identity is inextricably linked with the identity of the other is that of gratuitous altruism. Any attempt to force this self to emerge prematurely from relationship with the other amounts to a reversion to the false self. Patience is therefore required to allow the mystery of relationship to yield up in its own time and in its own distinctive way the truth of the self. Finally, we have noted that once the new self has been brought to birth through an encounter with Jesus Christ, it is called to find its fulfilment in the community. It is to this process that we now turn.

Chapter IV: The community as a source of the self

So far our inquiry has underlined the vital importance of relationship with the other person in the formation of an authentic sense of self. What remains to be established is the degree to which one can be selective about *how many* and *which* others have an input on the construction of one's self. In chapter one, we highlighted the tendency of individuals in modern Western societies to be highly selective about the significant others they choose to let shape their sense of self. In tracing the evolution of the self, our trajectory has departed from the perspective of the individual with a view to arriving at a definition of the community as the final fulfilment of the individual self. Accordingly, we have begun with a consideration of an individual's own interiority and subsequently examined how this interiority is enriched and sustained through relationship with God, with the other and now finally within a community. Within a modern Western philosophical framework, the individual as a stand-alone entity is asserted *a priori*. The challenge that then befalls any anthropology that takes the individual as the starting point is to articulate how this individual is bound to his fellow human beings. It is to this challenge that we now turn in this final chapter.

However, this chapter will also demonstrate that it is necessary to proceed in completely the opposite direction. Such an approach accords the existence of the community epistemic and ontological priority over the individual. Our entry point into such a communal anthropology will be the Southern African philosophy of *Ubuntu*. This approach will allow us to frame our question in terms of how the community confers an identity on the individual. In contrast to the Western stress on the individual, African anthropologies conceive of the community as the primary agent in identity construction, gradually integrating the individual into communal life and thereby

conferring an identity on him. In the final part of this chapter we will examine how the Church can be understood from both perspectives alluded to above: firstly, as the terminus of the individual's search for an authentic self and secondly as the starting point of a journey into a collective identity that must be made personal.

4.1 The Philosophical Underpinnings of the Ties that Bind us to One Another

In his seminal work *Democracy in America,* Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859) characterized the modern individual's penchant for selective community as " a calm and considered feeling which disposes each citizen to isolate himself from the mass of his fellows and [to] withdraw into the circle of family and friends ; with this little society formed to his taste, he gladly leaves the greater society to look after itself."[105] When de Tocqueville made this observation he was evidently concerned about the negative impact such an individualist attitude might have on political society. Our study is more concerned with the impact of such selective community on the construction of the self. For some time now, a number of thinkers in the personalist current have expressed deep misgivings about such an individualist attitude, maintaining that it fundamentally goes against the grain of our human vocation. As we saw in our first chapter, the justification for such a stance is to be found in the over-riding value accorded to self-determining freedom. The modern Western individual has found it convenient to use his personal autonomy to construct around himself a select group of significant others who will have an input on his sense of self. In the best case scenario, it is within this small circle of select individuals that a person will seek to develop friendships, grounded in altruistic love, that enable the emergence of an authentic sense

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[105] Alexis de Toqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. G. Lawrence, ed. J. P. Meyer, (New York : Doubleday, 1969) 506.

of self. Ideally, this is where the gratuity that is necessary to transcend an acquisitive way of being in relationship is acquired. Outside of this small circle of family and friends, relationships with the rest of the world are negotiated through contracts. It is this contractual aspect of relationship that regulates human interaction in most Western developed societies that causes philosophers in the personalist school such deep concern. However, in order to prove that such a contractual approach to relationship goes against our fundamental human vocation, these philosophers must demonstrate how it is not just those whom we select to be in our circle of friends that have a claim over us, but every living human being. They must in effect give an account of how we are all bound to one another. Amongst these philosophers, the arguments of Mary Rousseau are particularly compelling and it is to her rendition of the ties that bind us together that we now turn.

Operating out of a Western philosophical framework, Rousseau's starting point is the separateness of the individual from the rest of reality. This separateness induces an ontological loneliness that is also felt psychologically. The individual longs for connection with other beings as a means to healing this ontological and psychological loneliness.[106] However, this connection should not be so total as to subsume the individuality of the person into some kind of corporate being such that the individual loses her autonomy. Rousseau proposes that the ideal community is that which "encourages our uniqueness and autonomy" and "brings the warmth and security of total belonging," where "closeness does not threaten independence but enhances it," because "we belong but are not possessed."[107] Rousseau's central problem is how to account for a real

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[106] Mary Rousseau, *Community: The Tie that Binds*, (Lanham: University Press of America, 1991) 34.
[107] Ibid, 3-4.

communion between the individual and others that is not simply a psychological crutch to overcoming the *feeling* of loneliness. If the communion that heals ontological loneliness is to be more than just a feeling, then there must be an ontological quality to it.[108]

The challenge is thus presented as articulating the ontological grounds for the ties that bind us to others. For Rousseau, this challenge is just another version of the age-old philosophical problem of the one and the many. In trying to find a way out of this problem, Rousseau begins by outlining the two extremes that lie on either end of this problem. On the side of the many, there is the position that maintains that all beings are fundamentally unique and do not share any measure of being in common, a position that amounts to making all connection a mere illusion. On the other end of the spectrum is the position that fundamentally all beings share one, simple existence, a position that amounts making all diversity a mere illusion. Having staked out the two ends of the spectrum, Rousseau opts for a middle position that would see all beings, while maintaining their fundamental diversity, sharing an ontological connection by virtue of having a relationship to one transcendent Being who is the source of all being. In the Western philosophical tradition this transcendent One is commonly referred to as God.[109]

By virtue of the fact that we share a common creator, who is in relationship with us all and from whom all being proceeds, we are all *ontologically* bound to one another, whether we realize it or not. For Rousseau, it is this ontological bond between people that forms the foundation of my identification of the other as another self that we outlined in the preceding chapter. We saw how it was the identification of the other as my other self that gave me the motivation to give myself

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[108] Ibid, 40.
[109] Ibid, 77-79.

in altruistic love to the other, even to the point of sacrificing my very life. We illustrated how Rousseau found the justification for such an identification in Aristotle's analysis of cause and effect. The act of causing a good effect in the other person through altruistic love created a bond between myself and the other person. This act of mine enabled me to see how a part of myself had been given to the other through this act of love which in turn enabled me to identify the other as another self. Here we see Rousseau providing an altogether different justification for the identification of the other as another self, one that precedes any act of altruistic love on my part. Indeed, basing the ontological bonds between people on the fact that they have a common Creator means that we are tied not only to those we choose to love, but even to those that we do not. Rousseau's analysis highlights that the act of choosing to love another person altruistically is simply a *psychological* appropriation of an ontological bond that is already present.[110]

There are two important consequences of this truth. The first is the exposition of the fundamentally flawed nature of selective community. The problem with selective community within a paradigm of self-determining freedom is its assumption that it is the individual who is creating bonds between herself and those she loves by freely choosing to love them. Rousseau's analysis demonstrates that this is not the case. All that the individual is doing is consciously appropriating a truth that is already present.

The second consequence relates to the exclusive aspect of selective community. Rousseau argues that the choice to love one person, if it is to be truly altruistic love, must actually entail a choice (either implicit or explicit) to love all people. This conclusion is premised on the fact that we are

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[110] Ibid, 80.

all bound to each other by an ontological bond through a common Creator. Consequently, loving

a person in a way that abstracts or even negates their connection to all other people is not

authentically altruistic. Rousseau contends that a relationship that does not, at least implicitly,

embrace a person's connections to all other people is fundamentally contractual. Failure to

embrace a person's connections to all other people amounts to a refusal to love them for the

totality of who they are. Loving a person for only a part of who they are, the parts that interest

me, and abstracting from their connections to others amounts to relating to them in a contractual

way. For this reason, Rousseau concludes that a community based on selectivity is not a real

community.[111] This is because selectivity about who I let into my circle of concern amounts to

relating to the people in this circle in a manner that abstracts from their connections to all other

people. Selective communities are built on contractual relations. Real community can only be

constructed through altruistic love. Consequently, communities, if they are to be authentic, must

entail an openness to loving all people. In practice, it is not possible for a person to include every

single person on the planet in her circle of concern and love. Human finitude dictates that an

individual will always be limited in the number of people to whom she is able to show altruistic

love. This is why the operative attitude in ensuring an authentic community is its *openness* to

loving all people. A community must not be selective about who it lets into its circle of concern.

Having shown that it is not sufficient to simply selectively choose the significant others who will

aid me in my identity construction, the next task is to tease out the positive implications that the

individual's ontological ties to the rest of humanity have for identity construction. In Rousseau's

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[111] Ibid, 65-72, 81.

analysis, the response of the individual to this truth of ontological connection to the whole of humanity should be one of an open-ended altruistic love. This love is made concrete in the choice to commit to working for the well-being of a certain number of people with the acknowledgement that in doing so, I am committing myself to the well-being of the entire human race. This commitment on my part procures a psychological appropriation of an ontological truth that is already present even prior to my commitment. This psychological appropriation has very real effects, in the creation of real communion, the conversion of a latent ontological communion into a real, felt and lived communion in concrete communities.

Rousseau's analysis proceeds in a very intentional way from the perspective of the individual. It is up to the individual to make the decision to commit to loving others with an altruistic love in order to create community. Rousseau's analysis, coming from the perspective of the individual, is not really sensitive to the way in which the community can be more than simply the sum of the individuals that constitute it. Rousseau's analysis has underlined the dangers of being selective about whom I choose to interact with, but it has not really got us beyond the dynamics of a binary relationship. Granted the individual cannot be selective about who she enters into this binary relationship with, but the individual is still very much the central agent in a one-on-one relationship with another person. Our contention is that a crucial part of the construction of the self happens in community, where the community, considered as a collective, is the central agent of action on the individual. In order to better understand how this dynamic works, we need to leave the Western frame of reference that we have operated under up to this point and engage a different anthropology.

4.2 <u>The Ontological Priority of Community in African Anthropology: Ubuntu</u>

In dealing with the African notion of the self, it is necessary from the outset to acknowledge the wide diversity of cultures and peoples in Africa that often defy attempts to unify them under one umbrella of "African identity." This said, as regards the relationship between the individual and the community, there is enough in common across multiple African cultures to warrant a broad treatment of the African conception of a person-in-community. Nevertheless, in order to narrow our frame of reference, our study will focus largely on the Nguni notion of *ubuntu*, chosen for its particularly apt rendition of the more general African conception of a person-in-community. In the Nguni culture the word *Ubuntu* [or its Shona cognate *unhu*] designates the concept of humanness. The shape of this humanness is often encapsulated in the proverb "*umunhu ngumunhu ngabantu*" "a person is a person because of other people." The notion of the person depending on the community for her sense of being has been rendered by John Mbiti in the axiom "I am because we are."[112]

The ties that bind a person to another are created by an intricate and expanded notion of kinship. The network of kinship establishes a powerful sense of belonging and effectively confers personhood by determining the type of relationship that a person should engage in with every other individual in the community. This sense of belonging is further intensified by an ever-present awareness of the ties that bind a person and a community to their departed ancestors. Mbiti notes how the detailed knowledge and respect for one's genealogy that prevails in many African cultures creates a sense of "historical belongingness, a feeling of deep rootedness and a

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[112] John S. Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy*, 2nd rev. and enl. ed.. (Oxford ; Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 1990) 106.

sense of sacred obligation."[113] In the African cosmology, it is the network of kinship that forms the backdrop against which the decisions of an individual take on meaning. The obligations that arise from the bonds of kinship are what give a sense of self to the African individual.

One of the dangers associated with such a strong sense of belonging established by the bonds of kinship is the temptation represented by tribalism. The scourge of tribalism in Africa is a prime example of the toxic effects of selective communities. One way many African communities mitigate the exclusive dynamic of tribalism is through the practice of adoptive kinship. Augustine Musopole points out that this important custom is especially effective in urban centers, where the ties of blood kinship are significantly weakened because of the geographical dispersion of families.[114] Adoptive kinship is the process by which strangers are adopted into a family by being conferred with an honorary title of kinship. Nevertheless, unlike Mary Rousseau's ontological grounding of the inter-relatedness of all people that ensures that no one is left out of the wider human community, adoptive kinship remains an *ad-hoc*, voluntary process. In our next section on the Church, we will illustrate how the mechanism of adoptive kinship operates in a far more open and non-selective manner.

The forgoing analysis makes it clear that the African tendency is to approach the construction of the self from the perspective of the community. As Mbiti has it "the individual does not and cannot exist alone except corporately … the community must therefore make, create or reproduce the individual … Physical birth is not enough: the child must be integrated into the

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[113] Ibid, 103.

[114] Augustine C. Musopole, *Being Human in Africa: Toward an African Christian Anthropology*, American University Studies. Series XI, Anthropology/Sociology Vol. 65. (New York: PLang, 1994) 78.

entire society."[115] Ifeanyi Menkiti has underlined the "processual nature of being in African thought."[116] An individual is gradually initiated into what it means to be a person in the community. In seeking to distinguish the sense of community that obtains in African societies from collectivism, Menkiti observes that African communities are not just "the aggregated sum of individuals."[117] The community has an ontological existence of its own that in turn gives life to the individuals that form it. This primacy of the community over the individual is not only ontological, but also epistemic. In other words, the individual cannot come to a knowledge of herself independent of the community.[118] The community is the privileged point of access of the individual towards self-knowledge. It is the community who reveals to the individual who he most deeply is as a person. In this way personhood is constructed communally through well-defined cultures and traditions.

This epistemological approach to personhood through the community highlights an important difference between the African and Western conceptions of selfhood. Leo Apostel observes that in contrast to the Western notion of the self that is distinct from the world and a unified entity, the African self lacks this internal unity and is not entirely distinct from the world. If what defines a person in the African world-view is their relations to other persons and to the external world, then Apostel concludes that an individual would therefore possess "many distinct internal centers of personality, determined by these various relations."[119] This sentiment is echoed by

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[115] Mbiti, 106.

[116] Ifeanyi A Menkiti, "Person and Community in African Traditional Thought," in *African Philosophy: An Introduction*, ed. Richard A. Wright, Third ed., (Lanham: University Press of America, 1979) 171-172.

[117] Ibid, 179.

[118] Ibid, 171.

[119] Leo Apostel, *African Philosophy: Myth or Reality*, (Gent: E.Story-Scientitia, 1981) 36.

John Taylor who conceptualizes the person as a "centrifugal selfhood … interpermeating other selves in a relationship in which subject and object are no longer distinguishable."[120] It is interesting to place this observation in conversation with the objectification of both the world and the self that slowly gained traction in Western thought through the work of Descartes and Locke. It would seem that the unity and sense of distinctness from the world of the Western self is bought at the price of withdrawing from the world in order to objectify it. We noted how such a withdrawal attenuates a sense of belonging in the individual. The African epistemology of the person-in-community reveals that Locke's objectification of the self necessarily fails to capture the full essence of the self because the self can only be known in relationship.

What our analysis of the person-in-community in an African context highlights is the willingness of an individual to allow her sense of self to be held by the community. Our presentation of the construction of the self within an African context illustrates how it is completely natural for the self to be socially constructed in such a way that the individual does not experience a pressing need to extricate her sense of self from the hands of the community in order increase her own role in her identity construction. The individual is content to have a sense of self that finds its organizing principle in the community itself rather than in personal autonomy. In the preceding chapter, we saw how an individual can reach a stage of such intense identification with another person that they are able to see in the other another self. Through committing to love this person altruistically, they simultaneously give away a part of themselves and recognize a part of themselves in the other. Our analysis of African communitarianism takes this process to the next

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[120] John Vernon Taylor, *The Primal Vision: Christian Presence amid African Religion,* (London: SCM Press, 1972) 41.

level where the individual identifies so intensely not just with one person, but with a group of persons that he finds his sense of self in this community. In the case of African communitarianism, the community is more than just the sum of the individuals that make up the community. That the individual finds a constituent part of herself in the community is not a consequence of having an intimate relationship with all the members who make up this community. It is in this sense that the community has an existence that goes beyond the bounds of the sum total of the existences of the individuals that constitute it. There is a surplus of meaning contained in the community that is evident in the trust that the individual accords to the community in allowing it to be the locus of his sense of self. In order to further explore this surplus of meaning that is at the heart of the trust the individuals place in the community we shall now turn our attention to the Church as the community *par excellence.*

4.3 The Fulfilment of the Self in the Ecclesial Being of the Church

Our investigation now reaches its climax with our consideration of the construction of the self within the community that is the Church. The first section of this chapter considered Mary Rousseau's proposal that the foundation of the ontological connections between people is the fact that we all share a common creator. While this is certainly true, its theistic thrust stops short of being explicitly Christian. Our consideration of the Church will interrogate the uniquely Christian contribution to the ontological foundations of the ties that bind us all to one another. In order to limit the scope of our inquiry we will focus only on those aspects of the Church that relate to the bonds that tie the individual to the community. The model of communion ecclesiologies is particularly well-suited to this purpose and will consequently form the framework for our consideration of the Church.

Brian Flanagan has identified two broad currents of thought in the communion ecclesiologies of the past century. The first is largely concerned with exploring the notion of communion with a view to furthering the ends of the ecumenical movement. The second draws on the models of the Church as the Mystical Body or Christ or the People of God in order to give an account of the "spiritual, theological reality of the church of which its structural and visible reality is the expression and support."[121] It is this latter current of communion ecclesiology that we intend to present, drawing largely on the thought of two of the foremost proponents of communion ecclesiology: Yves Congar and Jean-Marie Tillard.

Given the brevity of our presentation of this ecclesiology, we intend to treat communion under the following headings: 1) as founded on the life of the Trinity; 2) as an eschatological promise;3) as a sacramental realization of the Body of Christ. Under each of these headings, we will be attentive to what makes the Church the ideal community that provides the individual with the stability he needs in order to live in the liminal space of identity construction. We will also examine how the Church as a community provides the individual with a sufficient sense of belonging while affirming personal autonomy and uniqueness.

4.3.1 The Trinity as the foundation of the communion of the Church

Trinitarian theology provides the fundamental basis for communion ecclesiology. Yves Congar proposes that the oneness of the Church can best be understood as "a communication and extension of the oneness of God Himself."[122] For Congar, the Church is not just a society of people

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[121] Brian Patrick Flanagan, *Communion, Diversity, and Salvation: The Contribution of Jean-Marie Tillard to Systematic Ecclesiology*, Ecclesiological Investigations ; v. 12 (London ; New York: T & T Clark, 2011) 24–25.
[122] Yves Congar, *Divided Christendom: A Catholic Study of the Problem of Reunion* (London: GBles, 1939) 48.

that have decided to imitate the communion of Trinity as best they can by living in fraternal charity. The Church is a sharing in the very life and existence of the Trinity itself, it is "the Godhead reaching out to humanity and taking up humanity into itself."[123] The core of the life of God is the communion of the Trinity. The *perichoresis* of interpenetrating love and self-giving between the Father, Son and Spirit is the very communion into which we are invited as members of the Church.

Congar underlines that it is the witness of revelation that gives us the courage to make such a daring assertion. He demonstrates how this plan of the Trinity to share their life with us runs through the whole of the biblical narrative from the beginning of Genesis that testifies to God's intention to make human beings God's own image (Gn 1: 26). God then makes a covenant with Abraham to give him both an heir and an inheritance. The promise of God of an heir ensures the establishment of a holy race bound to God through this covenant where God provides God's people with land, their inheritance. In Christ, these promises reach their climax, where the "land" becomes the "Kingdom of God," the place where God's life is shared to the fullness with God's people because it is here that God reigns.[124] The creation of a new people of God, defined no longer by human blood lines, but by the blood of the new covenant is brought to its culmination in the Church where all who accept the Spirit of Christ become the adopted sons and daughters of God (Rm 8: 14-17).

The creation of relationship within the Church through adoptive kinship has a striking similarity with the adoptive kinship practiced in traditional African communities. The Church confers an identity on each of its members as sons and daughters of God which enables its members to

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[123] Ibid, 49.
[124] Ibid, 49.

identify with each other as brothers and sisters. In contrast to traditional African communities, this adoptive kinship is open to all. Indeed the Church has an avowed vocation to include all of humanity in this new family of God. In an African context, the dominant model of kinship is undergirded by bloodline relationships – adoptive kinship is an exceptional extension of such a model. The ontological bonds that undergird Christian kinship are defined by the new self that is created in Christ (Eph 2: 13-16). This theme will be further explored under the heading of the sacramental dimensions of communion in the Church. However, it is worth noting here that the new self in Christ is to be considered as an appropriation of the identity that binds all of humanity into one family, namely the *imago dei*. The revelation we have received in the person of Jesus Christ allows us to name the image of God in which we are all created (Gn 1: 26-27) as the image of Christ. It is in this sense that the movements of creation and redemption are revealed to be one single movement of God the Father conforming humanity to the image of his Son. It is also in this sense that we can assert the truly universal mission of the Church as laboring to bring about the explicit appropriation of the communion that we all already implicitly share.

4.3.2 Communion as an Eschatological Promise

Jean-Marie Tillard begins his reflections on the Church by noting the temptation to locate its beginnings in the little community of disciples that Jesus surrounds himself with during his public ministry. Such a position fails to take account of the radical change that Jesus' resurrection and the descent of the Holy Spirit produces in the disciples. It is only in the light of the paschal mystery and on the occasion of Pentecost that there is a realization amongst the disciples of an "ecclesial being" that binds them together. Prior to this, Tillard notes, discipleship was more about each

disciples own personal attraction to and relationship with Jesus of Nazareth.[125] It is this relationship with Jesus of Nazareth that we have characterized as "binary" and dealt with in chapter three. We noted how such a relationship was fundamental for the conversion of the self and the instauration of a new self, but ultimately insufficient to lead the new self to the actualization of its complete potential. We might also note the transition from talking about relationship with Jesus in terms of friendship in the gospels to talking about relationship to Christ in terms of kinship in the other New Testament writings, particularly in the Pauline corpus. It is true that Jesus demonstrates an incredible ability to enter into relationship with whomsoever should cross his path. In most cases, the gratuity of Jesus' way of relating imparts a new lease of life to those who encounter him. They are subsequently sent on their way to share this new way of being with others. The story of the healing of demoniac of the Gerasenes (Mk. 5: 1-20) is a good example of such an encounter. As yet there is no solidly defined community into which such people can be integrated in order to nourish and further develop this new way of being. Even if such people were to join Jesus' band of disciples, it is necessary that we note the exclusivity of this band as being confined to members of the house of Israel. Prior to Pentecost, the community is still very much a "selective community," that is not yet open to all.

Consequently, we must locate the birth of the Church in the event of Pentecost. Tillard notes how the gift of the Holy Spirit bonds the group of disciples into a community of "solidarity, *koinônia*, prayer, faith and sharing," aspects that are all clearly attested to in Luke's frequent summaries in the book of Acts: "(2: 42-47, 4: 32-35, 5: 12-16)."[126] Tillard underlines how this

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[125] Jean-Marie Tillard, Eglise d'églises: l'ecclésiologie de communion, Cogitatio fidei, 143 (Paris: Cerf, 1987) 17.
[126] Ibid, 19.

community cannot just be considered to be a group of people gathered together by a common desire to live generously. The Church is from the very beginning gathered together by an eschatological promise of which it sees itself as the first fruits. This promise concerns the destiny of the whole human community and can be summed up in one word: communion. He cites the Fathers of the Church who considered the events associated with Pentecost as a reversal of the dispersion of all peoples that is symbolized in the story of Babel (Gn. 11: 1-9).[127] The deity substitutes the one common language of all humanity for many different languages in order to humble the sinful pride of a people that had become obsessed with the power of a united human race, symbolized by the construction of a tower that pierced the heavens. Pentecost represents the healing of such division without the suppression of diversity as those assembled from different lands are all able to hear the apostolic witness to the Resurrection in their own language. It is this beginning of the reunification of the human race into one communion that represents the inauguration of the "last days," prophesied by Joel (3: 1-5) and referenced by Peter in his speech to the people on the day of Pentecost (Ac 2:17).[128] Pentecost thus breaks open the heretofore selective quality of the Church and foreshadows the opening up of the Church to the pagans that will be recounted in the later chapters of Acts. In this way the Church becomes a community that is truly universal and open to all.

Tillard underlines that it is only against the background of the vast horizon of hope for the reunification of the whole of humanity that the Church's true nature emerges. Tillard's reference to the vast horizon of hope echoes Rahner's infinite horizon of transcendence that we referenced

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[127] Ibid, 21.
[128] Ibid, 21-22.

in chapter two. The only community that would adequately accommodate the identity construction of an individual with an infinite horizon would be a community that was oriented towards a similarly infinite horizon. In fact, it is the Church that makes explicit the nature of this infinite vocation by helping the individual realize that the boundlessness to which he is called is not exhausted through a mere binary relationship with God, but must include communion with all of humanity, indeed with the whole of creation. "Anyone who says "I love God" and hates his brother is a liar" (Jn 4: 20). Conversely, the Church's witness also exposes as inadequate the claim of any human community that purports to offer its individual members complete fulfilment through the constitution of a purely human community without any reference to the transcendent. It is such a claim that is symbolically vitiated in the story of the tower of Babel.

4.3.3 The Sacramental foundations of Communion: Baptism and Eucharist

We have already outlined in chapter two how any claim that attempts to fashion the actualization of the individual self in a clear, objectifiable and precise manner is not doing justice to the mystery that this vocation truly holds. We demonstrated how the individual must remain in a liminal space, refusing to let the realm of the categorical name and encompass the totality of her identity. She must do this in order to remain open to having the mystery of her being gradually revealed to herself through relationship with others and with God. Here we might go a step further, enlightened somewhat by an African anthropology, and claim that the individual is too small a unit to hold or contain the mystery of who she is. Part of remaining in this liminal space is a willingness to entrust the definition of who one is to the community.

In order to flesh out how exactly the community that is the Church holds the identity of the individual, we shall have recourse to Rahner's theology of the symbol that we outlined in chapter

two. The individual faces a challenge to make sense of the disparate and multi-form experiences of her life and draw them into a coherent unity. Rahner conceives of this "plurality of being" as emanating from the original unity that is God because the nature of being is to express itself. Notwithstanding the ability of consistent reflection on one's life to bring a person to some measure of coherence and unity, ultimately a person must surrender the plurality of her being into the hands of God to allow God to bring about this unity of coherence at the level of the realized person. In this chapter, we can now go a step further and advance the hypothesis that one aspect of this surrender should be the willingness to trust that the Church is God's privileged means of bringing about this unity of coherence. In other words, the individual is called to entrust her identity, her self, with all its disparate, and perhaps even contradictory aspects into the hands of the community that is the Church. As the community that bears the mystery of the unity in diversity of the Trinity, the Church is ideally placed to hold in its hands the plurality of being of the individual and lead it surely along its pilgrim way to the ultimate unity of God. The Church, in its turn is called to gather into itself the plurality of being of all its diverse members and then surrender into the hands of God this multiplicity of diverse beings in order for God to bring about its ultimate unity. There is thus a cascading flow of surrender from the individual into the Church and then from the Church into the mystery that is God. The Church knows that it is but a fragile and flawed bearer of this mystery, as St. Paul says "we hold this treasure in pots of earthenware, so that the immensity of the power is God's and not our own" (2 Cor 4:7). In recognizing her own fragility and having recourse to the power of God in this vulnerability, the Church teaches the individual to do the same. Paradoxically, through its acceptance of its own vulnerability, the Church provides the individual with the stability she needs to remain in the liminal space of

allowing her identity to be continually shaped by God, the community and others. We shall now proceed to a more detailed analysis of how our shared identity in Christ is the locus for the coherence of both our personal and ecclesial identities.

In chapter three we explored how the mystery of who I am is always held in relationship with the other. The other person holds a part of the mystery of who I am. If I am in relationship with many different people, then the mystery of who I am is dispersed over these numerous relationships. This is the phenomenon that Leo Apostel identified within an African community where the individual possesses "many distinct internal centers of personality."[129] Given this centrifugal sense of self, the question arises as to what gives coherence to this multitude of centers of personality dispersed over a whole range of differing relationships that I have as an individual. It is our contention that the individual person is too fragile an entity to assume the task of creating this coherence all for herself. The locus of this coherence must therefore be outside of the individual. The only logical place for such a principle of coherence to lie is in the place that unites all the various people I am in relationship with: the community. Such a proposition could end up radically undermining the autonomy and independence of the individual, unless it were discovered to be the case that this same principle of coherence that constitutes the "collective spirit" of the community is also the spirit that animates my own deepest identity. The only principle that is at once the deepest core of an individual's new self as well as being the core coherence of the community of the Church is the person of Christ.

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[129] Leo Apostel, *African Philosophy: Myth or Reality*, (Gent: E.Story-Scientitia, 1981) 36.

This coalescing of the both the self and the ecclesial community around the person of Christ means that the Church has an incredible power to confer an identity on the individual. While it is true that without the Church, the individual may come to some inchoate knowledge of the deepest ground of his being that is Christ, he is unable to articulate the shape and contours of this being in any precise way. The Church, as the community that is the privileged bearer of the knowledge of Christ, is therefore in a position to reveal to the individual the inner depths of his own being. The Church, in conferring the identity of "being in Christ" or "Christian" on the individual is not imposing an identity that is in any way external to the person. In chapter one we described Charles Taylor's observations concerning the process of recognition that has become increasingly fragile in post-modern society. This is because it is conducted by an individual in a highly select group of significant others. The individual also often expects this group of significant others to simply rubber-stamp his chosen identity with little or no space for the members of this group to contribute the construction of this identity. The Church offers a far more robust process of recognition. Not only does it confirm and acknowledge the grace already present in the individual's unique way of being as a valid expression of "being in Christ" it also offers to the individual a path to deepening this expression through his ethical, spiritual and sacramental practice. The identity that the Church confers on the individual is far from being a rigid "one-size-fits-all" role. The Church freely acknowledges the different roles and identities present in the Church and therefore both supports individual originality.

It is for this reason that the image of the body of Christ constitutes a particularly apt metaphor for the Church. In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul's comparison of the Christian community to a body follows immediately after his discourse on the variety of spiritual gifts of the Spirit (1

Cor 12: 4-11), and how each unique gift is necessary for the building up of the community, just as each different part of the body is necessary for the smooth functioning of the whole body (1 Cor 12: 12-30). It is important to note here that it is not the Church that simply unilaterally assigns someone a particular role to be a prophet, teacher, apostle. Rather, the community will first seek to discern the gifts that a particular individual has been endowed with as an expression of their life in Christ and then confirm or recognize those gifts by the conferral of particular ministries within the Church. It is in this sense that the process of recognition of identity is far more robust than that which was described in chapter one. Belonging and individual uniqueness are thus articulated in the process of dialogical discernment and confirmation.

It is significant that Congar begins his own reflection on the Mystical body of Christ with the citation from Galatians 2:20 "I am alive; or rather, not I, it is Christ that lives in me." For Congar, the "Mystical body of Christ becomes a reality once our life belongs to Christ." [130] Once a person consents to make Christ's life his own, then locating the coherence of his life in the body of Christ can no longer be considered as an affront to his own liberty or individuality. We have seen how for Rahner, this choice to make Christ's life one's own is simply an appropriation of the deepest truth of our beings, for Christ is "the *permanent openness* of our finite being to the living God of infinite, eternal life."[131] We also noted that it is only when we consent to surrender to the mystery that inhabits us that Christ fully becomes our life. Rahner avers that "the nature which surrenders itself to the mystery of the fullness belongs so little to itself that it becomes the nature of God

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[130] Yves Congar, *The Mystery of the Church; Studies.*, 2d rev. ed.. (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1965) 75.
[131] Karl Rahner, "The Eternal Significance of the Humanity of Jesus for Our Relationship with God," *Theological Investigations*, (vol. 3), trans. K.H. and B. Kruger, (New York: Crossroad, 1982) 44.

himself."[132] In the Body of Christ I discover that my true nature, my deepest self does not belong completely to me.

It is for this reason that the pain of "ontological loneliness" referenced by Mary Rousseau is so keenly felt. In chapter three we dealt with the impulse of the individual to "be the other." We examined two different responses to this identification with the other: the first which seeks to acquire the being of the other by effectively eliminating the other, and the second which seeks to share in the being of the other through altruistic love. Both these responses are an attempt to heal our basic ontological loneliness by establishing a connection to the other for which we experience a primordial yearning. However, even the deepest bond of altruistic love cannot completely overcome my own ontological loneliness. I still remain fundamentally separate from the other I long to be one with. It is here that we need to recognize the singularity of the bond that the Christian has to the person of Christ for the unsurpassable sense of identification and belonging to the other that it brings about. In the words of Paul, "it is Christ that lives in me."

The process of identification with the other reaches its climax in the sacrament of baptism, as St Paul avers: "since every one of you that has been baptized has been clothed in Christ" (Ga 3:27). Our longing to be one with the other attains its fulfilment through baptism into the very person of Christ. This mystery could only come about after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is perhaps also in this sense that his death was in some way necessary, that through the power of his spirit we may all share in his life. It is in this regard that René Girard's insight (that is further developed by James Alison) into the scapegoating mechanism that underlies the Christian

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[132] Karl Rahner, "On the Meaning of the Incarnation," *Theological Investigations* (vol. 4), trans. K Smyth (New York: Crossroad, 1984) 109-110.

paschal mystery is particularly striking. Christ's death on the cross enables us all to pass-over from the mode of an antagonistic appropriation of the being of the other to a beneficent appropriation of the being of the other. The crucifixion was at one and the same time our attempt to violently appropriate the being of Jesus as well as Jesus' voluntary self-giving that invites us to receive his being in gratuitous mimesis.

The individual's baptism into the new life of Christ is then what permits us to be bonded to one another with a bond of intense identification and belonging: "for in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body" (1 Cor 12:13). This mystery of communion is then celebrated and strengthened in the sacrament of the Eucharist. The Eucharistic synaxis constitutes the people of God who gather around the table of the Lord to receive the one bread and the one cup as the Body of Christ. *Lumen Gentium* notes that "Really sharing in the body of the Lord in the breaking of the eucharistic bread, we are taken up into communion with him and with one another. 'Because the bread is one, we, though many, are one body, all of us who partake of the one bread' (1 Cor 10: 17)" (LG 7). *Sacrosanctum Concilium* draws our attention to the fact that the liturgy is a "foretaste of the heavenly liturgy…toward which we journey as pilgrims" (SC 8). In other words, the communion we experience at the Eucharist is a foretaste of the eschatological communion with God and with one another that the whole human race is called to. In the liturgy we are bonded together as a community of one mind, heart and action. We celebrate the joy of being alike, one and all, with no thought to asserting our individuality. Indeed, any assertion of individual uniqueness during the Eucharist leads to a travesty of the liturgy. The liturgy is the school *par* excellence of beneficent mimesis of the self-giving of Jesus Christ to the Father.

Our imitation of one another and of Christ in the liturgy gives us a strong sense of belonging without erasing our individuality. This is because the Eucharist sends us out into the world, each on our individual paths to evangelize the world and share this new way of being, each in our own unique way, each within our own unique communities of belonging. This is the sense in which the Eucharist is the source and summit (SC 10) of our lives as Christians. Our gathering for the Eucharist is the source of our impulse to go out again and share with others the joy and salvation that we have found in communion with one another and with God. The individual members of the Church belong to many other different communities that make up the various facets of social, economic and political life. Each of these communities are all after their own manner striving to be a realization of some common good. In order to achieve this good, they are all regulated by interactions that lie along a spectrum ranging from contractual to altruistic relations. The level of altruism present in their interactions will determine how selective they are in their relations. The mission of the Christian members in their midst is to help their respective communities move towards more altruistic forms of relationship both amongst themselves and towards outsiders. The Christian members of these communities should help the other members recognize that their own common good is intimately bound up with the common good of all people and indeed, all creation. In this way, these communities will be helped to become more open to others and more in the image of the communion of the Trinity.

The Eucharist is also the summit of our spiritual practice, because, having sent us out, it then calls us back to celebrate the communion that God has already achieved in the world and in the Church. We see here how the Church is called to a similar dynamic of a polarity of presence to self and presence to others as it makes its pilgrim journey here on earth. This polarity of presence

should also encourage and strengthen the bonds of solidarity both between the faithful themselves and between the faithful and those who do not belong to the Christian community. St. Paul is very insistent on the ethical demands that the Lord's supper calls us to when he admonishes the Corinthians for failing to live as one united Body of all the believers (1 Cor 12: 20-22).

It is possible to conceive of the Church as following a very similar trajectory as that which we have laid out for the self. In chapter two, we saw how Rahner demonstrates that the gift of the self emerges as an intermediate reality from the existential supernatural at the seminal level and is drawn into completion in God at the level of the realized person. The self thus originates from God and journeys towards God. It is stretched out between these two poles of God's utter transcendence. Similarly, at the seminal level of the Church stands the communion of the Trinity, while at the realized level stands the vision of Paul where all that has been subjected to Christ is subsequently presented to the Father so that God might "be all in all" (1 Cor 15: 28). Stretched in between these two poles of perfect communion stands the Church, the concrete realization of God's will for the reunification and reconciliation of all creation. Just as the "intermediate reality" of the self will always be a partial, incomplete and at times aberrant realization of the promise of unity contained at the seminal level, so is the Church a partial, incomplete and at times flawed realization of the unity of the Trinity.

In taking this position, however, it is important to underline the sacramental nature of the Church herself. The model of the Church as a sacrament of salvation to the world was a key theme of the Second Vatican Council (LG 1, 9, 48). It is in the light of this new understanding of the Church advanced by the Council that Rahner is able to assert that the grace of salvation that is mediated

by the Church is not simply circumscribed by its visible boundaries. He is persuaded that in some way the Church has a concrete salvific mission that is universal. This is not to be understood as a goal to be achieved in the distant future. Rather, Rahner posits that the grace that is experienced within the visible bounds of the Church is a sacramental manifestation of the grace that is also present outside its explicitly concrete and historical structures. Rahner concludes that for this reason we must affirm that the Church's reality surpasses more than just the sum of the individuals who constitute its members.[133] We might recall that Menkiti made a similar affirmation about an African traditional community.[134] In the case of the Church, the surplus of meaning created by the gathering of the members of the community speaks to the inextricably intertwined nature of the Church's human and divine elements. Just as the individual cannot parse out the human and transcendently divine elements of his own self, neither can the Church. For this reason it is important to affirm the Church as a sacrament of God's salvation in the world and not merely a flawed sign of God's saving work.

Nevertheless, the observation that the communion of the Church may be deficient and at times even flawed highlights an important lacuna in our study of the Church. Thus far we have presented the Church in its spiritual and mystical dimensions. Our considerations have focused on an ideal realization of the life of the Trinity here on earth in the institution that is the Church. In the words of Joseph Komonchak, such a presentation of the Church's communion risks evaporating it "into a nebulous fellow feeling… or into a purely spiritual or eschatological ideal

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[133] Karl Rahner, "The New Image of the Church," *Theological Investigations* (vol 10), trans. D. Bourke, (New York: Crossroad, 1977) 13-15.
[134] Menkiti, 179.

with no historical form or force."[135] The concrete historical manifestations of the life of the Trinity in the reality that is the Church will always fall short of both the spiritual and eschatological ideal.

The question then arises as to whether these flaws do not undermine the Church's claim to be to be able to offer a real experience of human communion that leads to the fulfilment of its members. It simply will not suffice to point to the Church's divine foundation as guarantor of the ultimate efficacy of the spiritual communion it offers, independent of the actions of its individual members. Komonchak is particularly scathing about "vague acknowledgements that the Church is both human and divine" that use appeals to the transcendent dimensions of the Church "as an ideological smokescreen behind which traditions and authorities, roles and institutions can be preserved from criticism." He maintains that "some constructive effort is needed to indicate how the transcendent and distinctive reality is realized precisely in the human and self-constituting community of actual men and women."[136] Such constructive efforts would seek to articulate the relationship between the spiritual and eschatological communion that the Church preaches and the concrete expressions of solidarity that the Church fosters on a local and universal level. Komonchak also specifies that enquiries need to be made as to the relationship between the communion found within the Church and the communion found in other non-ecclesial communities that are signs of God's will to draw all people into one family.[137] These questions, important as they are, lie beyond the scope of this paper and constitute fruitful horizons for further research.

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[135] Joseph Komonchak, "Concepts of Communion Past and Present," *Christianesimo Nella Storia*, 16 (1995) 339.
[136] Joseph A. Komonchak, Foundations in Ecclesiology (Boston, Mass.]: Boston College, 1995) 149.
[137] Komonchak, "Concepts of Communion," 339.

In conclusion, this chapter has sought to highlight the essential role that community plays in the individual's construction of her sense of self. We have outlined how this role can be considered from two perspectives. The first takes the point of view of the individual who journeys from an appreciation of the enriching virtues of relationship with the other to the realization that the ultimate consummation of such relationships can only occur within the context of a community that is radically open to all people and indeed all of creation. The second perspective affirms the ontological and epistemic priority of the community over the individual and focuses on the ways in which a community leads the individual to fulfilment by conferring on her an identity.

These two perspectives have aided us in our presentation of the Church as the ideal community in which the fulfilment of the individual self might occur. In particular, we have shown how the Church is ideally positioned to respond to the two major challenges that the individual encounters in constructing an identity: namely responding to the infinite horizon that forms the backdrop of the question that a person is to herself, and negotiating the tension between a need for belonging with the desire for individual and original expression. The Church helps the individual respond to the first challenge by helping the individual to name the two poles between which the infinite horizon of her being is stretched. The Church is able to do this because she is the bearer of the mystery of God revealed in Jesus Christ. Accordingly, the Church is able to name the pole of the original unity of the self as the communion of the Trinity and the pole of the ultimate destiny to which the individual is called as the communion of all created things in Christ offered up to the Father in the Spirit. It is in the light of this eschatological promise that the Church reveals to the individual that her desire for a sense of belonging will only find its ultimate fulfilment when she is in communion with all created beings.

Conclusion

We have argued that an authentic sense of self can only come from a willingness to remain in the liminal space of on-going self-construction. This requires an openness that refuses to prematurely fix a sense of self by limiting the horizon of meaning that contribute to our sense of self. The horizon of meaning immediately available to us, over which we have the most power, is evidently the horizon of our own interiority. The ancients approached the depths of our interiority with due respect, realizing that there was an intimate connection between this horizon of meaning and that of the ultimate meaning of the cosmos. From the Christian perspective of Augustine, our interior depths were viewed as the privileged point of access to this meaning of the cosmos, who is God. Our own interiority was thus viewed as sacred ground, where we might discover the truth about ourselves that is God. The Enlightenment severed this connection and eliminated the notion that our identity was something to be discovered. Instead, personal identity became something the individual was free to create for herself. Having severed connections to the meta-narratives of religion and wider society, this individual identity became highly fragile and unstable.

Accordingly, a new source of stability had to be sought, and was found in the objective and fixed sense of self the individual was now able to create with unfettered freedom. Instead of meaning proceeding from being authentic to what was most deeply true in ourselves, meaning now proceeded from constructing a clearly defined sense of who one was. In a sense, authenticity was traded in for subjectivity and control. This position was slightly nuanced by the rise of a postmodern culture that espoused the value of authenticity. This value recovered the ancient idea that our identities were to be discovered within us and not merely created. However, it still

was still an impoverished sense of self, lacking authentic connection both to the divine and to others. Coherence and unity of self were purchased at the expense of limiting one's horizon of meaning to that which one can control, understand and manipulate.

Within this immediate sphere of what the individual can control lies relationship with the other. Even in its most extreme forms of individualism, our contemporary age has never completely lost sight of the fact that connection to the other is necessary for a fulfilled life. However, this connection has all too often been sought in an inauthentic manner. Authentic identification requires attaining a delicate balance between proximity to (belonging) and distance from (originality) the other. This thesis has presented a range of ways that the individual can short-circuit this process in order to prematurely access the connection he craves. Firstly, the other can be seen as a competitor whose being is a threat to my own originality. In this instance, stability proceeds from acquiring the being of the other by effectively eliminating the other. Alternatively, one can engage in a friendship of utility, where the other becomes a means to acquiring validation of one's own identity. The process of identification is not seen as a serendipitous by-product of altruistic self-giving to the other. Rather it is commodified and objectified into a process of recognition and validation that is prematurely extracted from the other. In order to ensure maximum control over this process, interaction with others is limited to a small circle of "significant others" who are allowed to have an input into the construction of one's self. The resultant identity, while aiming to be authentic, is nevertheless impoverished because of its contrived and objectified nature.

Having diagnosed the problem within our contemporary Western context as the lack of authentic connection to God and to others, we then demonstrated how a Christian anthropology might

provide a helpful corrective. In chapter two, we used the thought of Karl Rahner to highlight how the horizon of our own interiority and the horizon of God's being are intimately intertwined. The corollary of this observation is that our own identity shares in the mystery of the Godhead and therefore cannot be objectively known. This lack of objective knowledge of our own identity leads to a certain amount of uncertainty that can be destabilizing. This instability of the "intermediary reality" can actually be a positive force in our lives by preventing us from settling for anything less than the infinite being of God as the ultimate locus of our authenticity. Authenticity, therefore is about having the courage to embrace this infinite horizon with all the disparate and even contradictory experiences that it yields. Having cast the net of our beings as wide as possible within the limits of our finitude, the task of authenticity then becomes bringing these disparate experiences to some kind of coherence and unity. Ultimately we must realize that we are incapable to effecting this coherence on our own and are invited to surrender ourselves completely to God and allow God to bring about this unity of our beings. Christ models for us this surrender and is in fact that very condition of possibility for finite creatures like ourselves to receive the fullness of God in this surrender.

Using the Christology of James Alison, we also demonstrated how Christ resolves the second problematic of inauthentic connection to the other. Through the sacrament of baptism, the individual is brought into an intense identification with the person of Christ in a manner that does not, however, erase her unique individual identity. In this relationship, the individual is taught that authentic belonging to the other occurs in a context of mutual self-giving. It is the gratuity of this relationship that brings about a process of conversion. We have described this process of

conversion as one that moves the individual from a distrustful grasping to a trustful openness to the gratuity of life.

However, the formation of this new self in relationship with Christ is only the beginning of a journey towards authentic selfhood. We have shown that binary relationships can never produce the fullness of communion to which each individual is called. The individual self can only find its fullest realization in the community. We have presented the Church as the ideal community to fulfil the individual's aspirations for communion. We have outlined three reasons to support this assertion. Firstly, the Church is the privileged locus where the communion of the Trinity is made manifest in the human community. Secondly, it is bearer of the eschatological promise of God to unite the whole human community into one family. These first two reasons use the light of revelation to articulate for the individual the contours of the infinite horizon of her self-construction. The Church thus provides the individual with a community that is co-extensive with the infinite horizon of the question of her own being. It is this community that gives the individual the courage to remain in the liminal space of identity construction that leads to ultimate authenticity.

Thirdly, the Church's sacramental life not only conforms the individual to the person of Christ but also establishes a bond of kinship with all others who have been brought into the reconciled people of God. Through the sacrament of baptism the individual is brought into the family of God. Through the sacrament of the Eucharist the individual members of the Church constitute the Body of Christ and participate in the communion of the Trinity. The communal celebration of these two sacraments endow the individual with an intense sense of belonging. This configuration to the Body of Christ does not erase the unique identity of the individual. Rather,

the individual continues to be shaped by the mission she receives from the Church to be an agent of this communion in the various other communities that she belongs to. While the communion created here on earth in the Body of Christ is a foretaste of the eschatological communion with the Trinity, the full realization of this communion, and therefore of the authentic self as well, lies in the uniting of the whole of creation in Christ. The truth of how this event will unify all the disparate and sometimes contradictory experiences of the human race must be located in the incomprehensible mystery who is God.

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