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RAHNER'S THEOLOGY OF GRACE AND HUMAN DIGNITY

STL THESIS

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**In memory of my mom, *Andréa Haba*,
for the greater glory of the faithful and
absolute God who called her (my mom) into
everlasting life on *December 19, 2022*.**

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Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	0
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER I. GOD’S SELF-COMMUNICATION AND HUMANNESS	3
I.1. GOD’S SELF-COMMUNICATION AS FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLE	3
I.1.1. God’s Self-Communication to the Whole Creation	4
I.1.2. God’s Self-Communication to Human Beings	5
I.2. NATURE AND GRACE (GRACED HUMANITY)	9
I.2.1. Origin and Context	10
I.2.2. Rahner’s Unifying Conception of Grace	14
I.3. HUMAN TRANSCENDENCE AND FREEDOM	18
I.3.1. Human Transcendence	19
I.3.2. Human Freedom.....	28
CHAPTER II. THE SUBJECT’S TRANSCENDENTAL EXPERIENCE OF GRACE AND HUMANITY’S CONCRETE HISTORY	32
II.1. TRANSCENDENTAL EXPERIENCE.....	32
I.1.1. Transcendental Experience of Grace	33
II.1.2. Rahner’s Transcendental Method	35
II.1.3. Metz’s Main Critique Against Rahner’s Transcendental Method	36
II.1.4. Adequacy of Rahner’s Transcendental Method.....	38
II.2. INTERPERSONAL ASPECT	50
II.3. HISTORICAL ENGAGEMENT	52
CHAPTER III. POSSIBLE CONCRETE USE OF RAHNER’S THEOLOGY OF GRACE FOR HUMAN DIGNITY TODAY	55
III.1. THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL RELEVANCE OF SYMBOL FOR THE RAHNERIAN THEOLOGY OF GRACE.....	55
III.2. HUMANITY’S ADEQUATE RESPONSE TO GOD AND HUMAN FLOURISHING	57
III.2.1. Love and Rahner’s Conception of Self, God, and Others.....	61
III.3. UNCREATED GRACE FOR HUMAN DIGNITY	68
III.3.1. Graced Humanity Beyond Racism	71
III.3.2. Graced Humanity <i>Versus</i> Women’s Marginalization.....	76
CONCLUSION	93
BIBLIOGRAPHY	97

INTRODUCTION

Can Rahner's theology of grace help to address the concrete anthropological issues of racism and women's marginalization? This paper argues that Rahner's theology of grace is useful for promoting human dignity.

Rahner's theology has been subject to many critiques, especially with regard to its historicity. Johannes Baptist Metz is one of the most pertinent who criticizes Rahner's approach of starting by analyzing the subject's transcendental experience of self and God.¹ He considers it the weakness of Rahner's thought because, for him, such an approach does not take history seriously.² Therefore, the question about the adequacy of Rahner's starting point arises. The crucial point of this critique is that it puts into question the utility of Rahner's theology for concrete human persons in history. Thus, I aim to demonstrate that Rahner's method does touch history and consequently establish that his theology of grace is useful for concrete human persons.

Though the critiques addressed to Rahner concern his whole theology, I chose, among other topics, Rahner's theology of grace. The reason for my choice is that grace, as presented by Rahner, is the primordial, impregnating, and permanent constituent of human life. Thus, I consider Rahner's thought on grace as the adequate ground for any theological reflection, especially in theological anthropology. Most importantly, an adequate ground for promoting human dignity. The basis of such appreciation is that Rahner conceives God and God's self-communication as the "quasi-formal cause" of all created beings, especially human beings.³ Thus, God's self-communication is the fundamental principle of Rahner's theological reflection. Humans can

¹ James Matthew Ashley, *Interruptions: Mysticism, Politics, and Theology in the Work of Johann Baptist Metz*, Studies in Spirituality and Theology 4 (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), 83.

² Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology*, Translated by James Matthew Ashley (New York: Crossroad Pub. Co, 2007), 153.

³ Karl Rahner, "Some Implications of the Scholastic Concept of Uncreated Grace," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 1, trans. by C Ernest (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 330.

experience God and reflect on that experience only because of God, who freely communicates Godself to them and thus graciously bestowed on them the capacity for such experience and reflection. Without God, no knowledge and thought about God is possible.

The quintessence of Rahner's theology of grace for human beings is that God graces their humanity. "As the event of God's free and forgiving self-communication,"⁴ a human being can know herself and others only in God.⁵ Most crucially, God's elevating self-communication divinizes humanity. By this gracious gift, every human person has inalienable dignity.

Chapter one introduces Rahner's theology of grace. We will develop God's self-communication as the principle of that theology. In virtue of the inseparability of theology and anthropology for Rahner, understanding God's self-communication will necessitate the development of transcendence and freedom as its main anthropological results.

Chapter two will sustain the holistic character of Rahner's approach. The main argument is that though transcendental, the experience of grace is always mediated by concrete realities.⁶ Therefore, one's adequate answer to God necessitates a commitment to the other persons one meets in her transcendental experience (love of God and love of neighbor).

Finally, chapter three provides concrete historical content to all the thesis and its arguments. There, we will give more substantial content to our thesis on the utility of Rahner's theology of grace for promoting human dignity. We will use the core elements of that theology to address the issues of racism and women's marginalization.

⁴ Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 116.

⁵ Karl Rahner, "Experience of Self and Experience of God," in *Theological Investigations* vol. 13, (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1960), 125.

⁶ Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 53.

CHAPTER I. GOD'S SELF-COMMUNICATION AND HUMANNESS

This first chapter of our reflection introduces Rahner's transcendental theology of grace. We will discuss God's self-communication as the principle of Rahner's theology of grace and, above all, as the condition of our humanness. Understanding this principle will necessitate reflecting on transcendence and freedom as its main anthropological results under the inseparability of theology and anthropology for Rahner's thought.

Thus, in reflecting on that principle, this chapter will lay the foundation of the transcendental experience of grace, which will be the reflection at stake in the second chapter. Moreover, this first chapter also already provides the essential elements on which we will base the arguments of our third chapter for promoting human dignity through Rahner's theology of grace. The main sections in this chapter correspond to God's self-communication as a fundamental principle, the relationship between nature and grace, and human transcendence and freedom.

I.1. God's Self-Communication as Fundamental Principle

God's self-communication is the principle of Rahner's theology of grace and his systematic theological reflection, no matter the angle he focuses. Indeed, the world and all the beings it contains are the results of that self-communication. Thus, any thought on the world is supposed to start and end in God, its source, and its fulfillment. Further, any anthropological reflection should start from God's self-offering as humankind's ontological (substantial/essential) constituent.⁷ Furthermore, it should ultimately end with the unique Being in whom humanity reaches its fulfillment: God. Finally, and definitively, any theological reflection should start from the very act

⁷ The word ontological is an adjective related to the nature of a being. In the above case, grace (God's self-communication) is a *supernatural* feature constituent of human being.

of God's self-communication, without which even the intuition for such thinking would not be possible. All this is coherently due to the wholistic character of this divine self-communication.

I.1.1. God's Self-Communication to the Whole Creation

God's self-communication is creative because creatures came into existence out of it. God is the Creator of all thing that exists. It is Godself that caused the whole creation. Therefore, God's self-communication is the "quasi-formal cause" of all existing beings⁸ because God conceived and created them. This affirmation is not pantheistic. Among other possible reasons, the prefix "quasi" used by Rahner can be understood as a means to prevent or avoid a pantheistic interpretation of God as the "formal cause" of creatures. A pantheistic interpretation conflates God and God's creatures. In reality, creatures remain finite created beings while God is an infinite, uncreated being. It means that though created beings originated from God's self-giving, they are not God.⁹ Instead, they are its (God's self-giving) graced effects. Consequently, all the creatures point to God, their Creator: they express or "symbolize" God's presence outside the divine realm. They participate in God's nature¹⁰ while remaining creatures distinct from God, their Creator. Thus, far from pantheism, the divine self-communication to all creatures means that without exclusion, every created being is a canal of God's revelation: we encounter God's presence in all creatures because they cannot exist in isolation from grace. This divine presence in creatures elevates them

⁸ Cf. Karl Rahner, "Some Implications of the Scholastic Concept of Uncreated Grace," in *Theological Investigations*, vol.1, trans. C. Ernest (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 330.

⁹ Thus, creatures are from God's own being (Godself), but they do not have a divine essence, they are not divine beings. They rather participate in God's being or essence. Another reason for Rahner's use of the "quasi" is the following: Contrary to an artist, God creates out of nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*) with the use of nothing (no instruments). See Richard Lennan, *Tilling the Church: Theology for an Unfinished Project* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press Academic, 2022), 43–44.

¹⁰ Cf. Karl Rahner, "Nature and Grace," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 1, trans. K Smyth (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 177.

beyond their natural/created range to the extent that every created being deserves respect. Therefore, “we are called to respect creation and its inherent laws.”¹¹

However, because of our particular interest in promoting human dignity, it is wise to focus on God’s self-communication to human beings to emphasize its anthropological insight.

I.1.2. God’s Self-Communication to Human Beings

As the title of this first chapter indicates, the principal aim is to demonstrate God’s self-communication as the analogical essence of our humanity and not a mere physical accidental element of who we are.¹² We pursue this aim without ignoring/neglecting the gratuity of grace. God freely created and elevated our humanity above its created/natural level. If God is the “quasi-formal cause” of all beings, what is the anthropological particularity of God’s self-communication?

The answer to this question fundamentally lies in Rahner’s intention to point out God’s self-communication as humankind’s innermost constituent.¹³ Rahner particularly understands God’s self-communication as God’s *ontological* (substantial/essential) self-communication because this divine self-communication brought about humanity and elevated it. God freely emptied Godself and gratuitously offered God’s being as that which constitutes the being of humankind.¹⁴ It is precisely in this sense that our humanity is graced. Here, it is wise to understand the idea of God’s being as the gracious constituent of humankind in the light of Christ’s humanity as the prototype of humankind. Indeed, God (in the immanent Trinitarian perspective) foremostly emptied and offered Godself to Christ (without losing Godself).¹⁵ And Christ, as the source of creation (the act

¹¹ Francis, “Encyclical on Care for Our Common Home *Laudato Si*” (May 24, 2015) § 69, at The Holy See, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.pdf.

¹² Cf. Rahner, “Nature and Grace,” 177.

¹³ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 116.

¹⁴ See Rahner, “Nature and Grace,” 177.

¹⁵ Karl Rahner, “Theos in the New Testament,” in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 1, trans. Cornelius Ernest (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 146.

of creation is a Trinitarian act),¹⁶ emptied himself for humanity. It follows that God's gift of God's being as the constitution of our being is a derivation of God's emptying Godself to Christ.

In Rahner's understanding, the ontological self-communication of God to human beings is so *unobjectified* and *un-reified* that it cannot be deposited in front of human beings as a thing because, as the innermost constituent of humankind, it is a spiritual self-communication.¹⁷ Therefore, even in a historical consideration, this essential divine self-communication cannot be analyzed as an object or something separated from a human being. This view will serve as a crucial element in the second chapter, where the historicity of the human transcendental experience of grace will be at stake.

But still, the question about the anthropological particularity of this divine self-communication is not yet correctly answered. In the first subsection, we already mentioned the same self-communication of God as the "quasi-formal cause" of all existing beings, not only human beings. Considering that assertion, we cannot point out God's self-communication as a constituent peculiar to humanity.

Analyzing the above Rahnerian intention can help us get closer to our question's answer. The identification of the anthropological particularity of God's self-communication appears more clearly in the title of the fourth chapter of Rahner's *Foundations of Christian Faith*, in which he reflects on the topic: "Man [Humankind] as the Event of God's Free and Forgiving Self-Communication." Indeed, the word "forgiving" already indicates that the object of such self-communication is a responsible being because guilt, as the consequence responsible decision or action, precedes forgiveness. It cannot be said of a being unfree or irresponsible to receive forgiveness. To be guilty, and so disposed of for forgiveness presupposes freedom of action and

¹⁶ Rahner, "Nature and Grace," 175.

¹⁷ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 116.

one's consciousness of their guilt. Non-human beings cannot be referred to as such in this perspective. Thus, Rahner's particular intention for human beings corresponds to the Christian anthropological thought in which humankind "is the event of a free, unmerited and forgiving, and absolute self-communication of God."¹⁸ This intention fits Rahner's conviction of the inseparable relationship between theology (God) and anthropology (human beings). But though this conviction is correct, other questions arise when God's self-communication is considered a forgiving grace: if it is conceived as forgiving, what about the original self-communication to the creation where human beings had not yet offended God with freedom and responsibility? Is not the forgiving self-communication a reduction of grace to Christ's justifying grace (medieval) or created grace (neo-scholastic) as the pre-Rahnerian viewpoints on grace were? An attempt to answer these questions will help us understand Rahner's conception of God's self-communication.

In Rahner's thought, God's self-communication seems to have at least a twofold sense. To understand the two meanings, we can analyze the adjectives used in the above Rahnerian citation.

The first sense is the original and universal one. It goes with the adjective *unmerited*: God's self-communication is unmerited because it is not an obligation to be reclaimed by its recipients. Thus, its unmerited aspect implies no action from its recipients. In this sense, it is the original self-communication in which none of its recipients (all that exists) acted for such grace. The adjective *free* reinforces this first sense of God's self-communication, for it happened only because of God's freedom. Such self-communication is prior to any religious belief: it is offered to everyone. However, Christian belief does not exclude it. Instead, it rightly takes it as the ground of the Christian conception of grace.

¹⁸ See the beginning of chapter IV of *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 116.

The second sense corresponds to the Christian one. It fits with the adjective *forgiving*: God's self-communication is forgiving because of guilt which "blinds" us. This understanding is based on the Christian conception of humankind as initially and permanently co-determined by others' and personal guilt.¹⁹ Here, we must remember that guilt is not in the sense of original sin to which Christ, the source and climax of God's incarnated grace of salvation and revelation,²⁰ would have responded.²¹ Instead, guilt is one's "closing oneself to this offer of God's absolute self-communication."²² Therefore, guilt is related to one's own free sinful actions. Thus, its distinction from the original sin is that a person is not accountable for the original sin but rather affected by it. In contrast, a person is accountable for their free sinful actions. In this sense, we can shortly say that the original sin is an effect of others' free evil actions on one,²³ while guilt is associated with one's free sinful action. However, both blind us and their overcoming require God's gratuitous assistance. Therefore, and because of this necessity of God's aid, the forgiving self-communication neither contradicts nor cancels the first sense of God's self-communication (unmerited). Indeed, though the forgiving self-communication of God requires one's freedom (to respond "Yes" or "No" to it), it remains a grace and so is unmerited because the freedom itself and the possibility of one's response are also because of God who is the *a priori* and *sine qua non-condition* of all these.

Ultimately, these two senses have to be understood and held in a united and absolute sense: the *absoluteness* of God's self-communication does not allow us to cancel or reduce any of these senses to the other. Thus, even in the Christian message, we involve its original (universal and

¹⁹ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 90–115.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 117.

²¹ Rahner, "Nature and Grace," 175–77. Rahner does not understand Christ's incarnation merely as God's response to human sin. For him, both "the order of grace and the Incarnation derive from God's free grace." Thus, even without Adam sin, the Incarnation would happen and "enable us to reach a deeper understanding of the immanent Trinity."

²² Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 93.

²³ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 122.

permanent) aspect and unite it with the actual (Christian and permanent) sense without overlooking any of them precisely because of the absoluteness of this divine self-communication to humanity.

Further, the anthropological particularity of the divine self-communication resides in some characteristics of the beings (non-human and human) that resulted from it. Though they all came into existence out of God's self-communication, not all existing beings have the same existential characteristics. Therefore, beyond the above Christian understanding, we can consider some existential (determinant/essential characteristic of human beings/human existence) features peculiar to humankind to point out the anthropological particularity of God's self-communication to all creatures. The third section of this chapter is precisely reserved for two main existentials of humankind.

The entire section argues that neither Godself nor God's creatures could be the object of knowledge if God did not communicate Godself to creation. Therefore, it becomes self-evident that God's self-communication is the fundamental principle for all that exists and all possibility of knowledge of whatever exists. According to the Christian message, this self-communication of God is the foundation of our humanness in two absolute inclusive senses: (1) universal unmerited self-communication of God, and (2) Christian forgiving self-communication of God.

God's self-communication to human beings as their innermost constituent is the ground of the inseparability of human nature from the divine grace by which human nature is ontologically constituted. Thus, the following section will reflect on the relationship between nature and grace to show how God graces our humanity.

I.2. Nature and Grace (Graced Humanity)

The relationship between nature and grace is one of the most controversial topics in the Church. The debate on it is so vast that the academic restriction on this paper's number of pages does not

allow us to present an exhaustive historical survey on it. Instead, we will just point out the origin of that debate and the context in which Rahner's thought emerged.

I.2.1. Origin and Context

The debate on the relationship between nature and grace started in the patristic era. The classic Christian understanding of human nature was based on the biblical story of the creation as good and the fall of Adam (Genesis 1-3), who is "the scriptural ideal type of 'human nature.'" ²⁴ Consequently, the debate about the relationship of nature with grace has been gravitating around the "before" and "after" fall nature of Adam.

Before the fifth century, the common belief was that human nature was originally created good and bestowed with grace by God's Spirit/breath of life. God breathed God into human nostrils (the "before" fall nature), but, unfortunately, this nature has been depraved from grace after the fall of Adam (the "after" fall nature).

The problem started in the fifth century (A.D. 411) with Pelagius' viewpoint on human nature, which questioned the above common belief. The "original sin" was the term used to describe Adam's fall that affected the whole human race. Pelagius' controversial view was then that "the sin of Adam injured himself alone and not the human race."²⁵ This Pelagian view implies that grace is so intrinsic to human nature that even the sin of Adam did not affect it. Augustine reacted in the same year (A.D 411), stating that "human nature has no intrinsic and inalienable power to do salvific good."²⁶ Therefore, the debate started about the relationship between nature and grace. It lasted from that moment to the twentieth century.

²⁴ Peter Crafts Hodgson and Robert Harlen King, eds., *Christian Theology: An Introduction to Its Traditions and Tasks*, 2nd ed., rev.enl (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 168.

²⁵ John Ferguson, *Pelagius: A Historical and Theological Study* (New York: AMS Press, 1978), 51.

²⁶ J. Patout Burns, *Theological Anthropology, Sources of Early Christian Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 13.

The context in which Rahner's reflection on this topic emerged corresponds to the neo-scholastic period of the twentieth century, where the debate on grace rose again. At the end of the nineteenth century, the Church recognized the contribution of Aquinas' thought.²⁷ More significantly, Aquinas' works were appreciated as confirmed with the Church's teaching and restored as the model of the Christian philosophy.²⁸ It was, therefore, the revival of Thomism. This period corresponds to when the Church seemed to reduce grace to the created grace.²⁹ Her preoccupation with the sacrament's validity revealed that grace is rare and that one gets it at a specific moment of life, e.g., through sacraments correctly administered. For instance, grace is like water. We control it through a system that we can call a *shower-faucet system*.³⁰ To be efficient, its recipient has to be under the shower in the correct position so that once the faucet is open, the water may fall on her/him. One must turn the faucet in the appropriate direction. Water use must be at a corresponding time, namely when one needs to take a bath. And after satisfaction, we turn the faucet and close the water until the time water is needed again.³¹ In other words, the Church only confirms the validity of grace if all the requirements are strictly fulfilled, and the sacrament is appropriately performed. This view on the validity of sacramental grace showed that the extrinsic conception (see Augustine's above definition of human nature) of grace influenced

²⁷ The Church's 19th (from 1878) century teaching relied on Saint Thomas Aquinas' thought as follows: "During the pontificate of Leo XIII [1878-1903], the doctrines of St. Thomas were promulgated by the Holy See in every way possible. In his great encyclicals on social problems, government, human liberty, the religious question, Sacred Scripture, Catholic Action, and education, Leo XIII employed the teaching of St. Thomas to solve modern problems." See James A Weisheipl, "The Revival of Thomism: An Historical Survey," Dominican Central Archives, accessed April 27, 2023, <http://www.domcentral.org/study/revival.htm>. Precision added on the period of Leo XIII' pontificate.

²⁸ Cf. Leo XIII, Encyclical on the Restoration of Christian Philosophy *Aeterni Patris*, (4 August 1879), at The Holy See, https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hfl-xiii_enc_04081879_aeterni-patris.html.

²⁹ The created grace is "the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in a special way in souls" [Denzinger, 290]; it is the grace of justification and sanctification of the sinner [Council of Trent, *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, Trans. H. J. Schroeder, O.P. (Lond.: Herder Book Co., 1941), 33–35. See also Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 172].

³⁰ Some people prefer to call it the door model.

³¹ This illustration is inspired by Professor Richard Lennan's explanation of the topic (Richard Lennan is currently a professor of systematic theology in the School of Theology and Ministry at Boston College. He is interested, among other areas, in the theology and spirituality of Karl Rahner).

it. And worse, it insinuates that grace is mastered/confined/controlled by human beings. It consequently insinuates that grace is rare. In breve, grace is outside of us, but we have total control over it by stocking and managing it since we use it at a particular moment.

With the valorization of Thomism and the Church's emphasis on created grace, the twentieth scholars (especially the Thomists) were inclined to develop Aquinas' thought. Henry de Lubac is one of the great Thomistic theologians of this post-Thomistic revival. His thought on the supernatural character of grace was the point of departure to a new debate on grace.³² His position was a reaction to some Thomists who, according to him (de Lubac), did not understand Aquinas' thoughts on grace. The thought that the neo-Thomists were supporting at that moment was the one of Cajetan. Thus, to understand de Lubac, we need to present Cajetan's Thomistic theology of grace briefly.

Thomas de Vio Cajetan (1469-1534) had committed to revalorizing Aquinas' thought of the gratuity of grace and his distinction between "what is due to human by nature and what accrues to him by free supernatural addition."³³ From Cajetan's understanding of Aquinas' "*desiderium naturale*" (natural desire), there is a "pure nature" to which grace is added for the beatific vision. Indeed, Aquinas' idea is that human being has a natural desire which is fulfilled only in the beatific vision of God. For Cajetan, this view means that this natural desire for the supernatural is a grace that cannot be intrinsically imparted in human nature. Otherwise, God has the obligation of fulfilling this desire because God would be the one who put that desire in human nature. To avoid such an intrinsic viewpoint, Cajetan prefers to conceive the doctrine of "pure nature."³⁴ He did not have bad intentions as a Church's authority (Bishop and Cardinal). He was trying to guarantee the

³² Cf. Henri de Lubac, *Surnaturel: Etudes Historiques*. Paris: Aubier, 1946.

³³ John Milbank, *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Renewed Split in Modern Catholic Theology*, Second edition (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 18.

³⁴ Peter Leithart, "Natural and Supernatural," *Theopolis* (blog), October 30, 2013, <https://theopolisinstitute.com/natural-and-supernatural/>. Access 4/19/2023.

gratuitous character of grace. Thus, for him, grace is *extrinsic* to “pure nature” so that God may gratuitously grace nature to reach the beatific vision. It is against this view of “pure nature” that de Lubac stands.

Henri de Lubac (1896–1991) considers Cajetan’s thought as a misunderstanding of Aquinas.³⁵ For him, instead of “pure nature,” there is a created nature with a created spirit. But the created spirit is so radically imparted by grace that it renders our nature able to reach the fulfillment of the natural desire.³⁶ The problem with this view is grace’s gratuity: it presents grace as a natural component of us. Therefore, there were two groups: neo-Thomists (extrinsic grace) and the radical Thomists (intrinsic grace), having Cajetan and de Lubac as their respective pioneers.

The extrinsic theologians of grace argue that human nature is totally independent of God’s grace. Grace is an external gift added to human nature once one receives it. Cajetan’s idea of “pure nature” goes with this extrinsic position. In my view, this conception is the most problematic one because it denies God’s self-communication as grace. Indeed, though it avoids any closeness to the Pelagian idea, which insinuates that grace is intrinsic to human nature (merited grace), the extrinsic character of grace (unmerited grace) breaks the relationship between human beings and God. The question is: are we left to ourselves without grace until we get grace (created grace) added to our nature? Did God just create us and abandon us to our own? I do not think so. “What God commences, God continues.”³⁷ If God created us out of love through God’s self-emptying, God could not abandon us. We are not the results of production who do not have any need from their author to work. We always depend on God and remain open to God as our “ever Creator”³⁸

³⁵ Henri de Lubac, *Augustinianism and Modern Theology*, trans. Lancelot Sheppard (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), 118–63.

³⁶ Cf. Lubac, Henri de. *The Mystery of the Supernatural*. Translated by Rosemary Sheed. New York: Herder and Herder, 1967.

³⁷ Lennan, *Tilling the Church*, 43.

³⁸ Cf. Karl Rahner, “Being Open to God as Ever Creator,” in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 7, trans. David Bourke (New York: Herder and Herder, 1961), 25.

so that God remains involved in our life.³⁹ Thus, God keeps sustaining our existence through God's hidden but constant intervention.

For the protagonists of the intrinsic viewpoint, grace is part of human nature and who we are. Thus, we naturally possess grace in us. This conception is quite close to the truth but insinuates that such possession is a human right or due. Therefore, it overlooks or even denies the gratuitous character of grace in human beings.

Rahner (1904-1984) precisely stands for overcoming the rarity of grace (which is the consequence of the Church's reduction of grace to the created grace) and the dualism of extrinsic and extrinsic viewpoints on grace.

I.2.2. Rahner's Unifying Conception of Grace

In the light of the Christian understanding of God as the being who does not need anything else to exist and so was not obliged to make creatures, the ground of Rahner's theology of grace and even of his whole theology is God's free and loving initiative. God willed to give existence to all beings, especially humans (out of God's creative self-communication) and chose to communicate Godself. In rightly considering God's free and loving initiative as the motif of grace, Rahner adequately overcomes what the reduction of grace to created grace insinuated: human control over grace. Grace is under God's free loving initiative and control, not human beings.

In other words, God's self-communication is the fundamental principle of Rahner's theology in that grace is offered because of God's free and loving initiative. Thus, God's freedom and love form the axiom of that fundamental principle, God's self-communication. It means that in his approach, Rahner does not start his theology of grace with the recipients of grace. Instead, he makes a distinction that I highly appreciate because of its methodological necessity. To end up

³⁹ Lennan, *Tilling the Church*, 44–45.

with an adequate understanding of reality, one must necessarily start their quest with the origin of that reality. This approach is what Rahner did: while his predecessors started by human beings as deprived of grace by original sin (Augustine), as not affected by original sin and so naturally in possession of grace (Pelagius), and as intrinsically or extrinsically graced (Radical and Neo-scholastics), Rahner begins with the cause of grace itself: Godself. And this cause is not in the sense of a cause also caused by another cause: God is the absolute cause (the quasi-formal cause⁴⁰). And to cause effects, the absolute cause (God) is moved by nothing else than God's freedom and love. From this axiom, Rahner begins in his explanation of grace: God's free and loving self-communication. To my mind, the motif of the movement of the cause is convincing because it avoids the problem of external influence on God. Further, to start with, the Absolute cause transcends the aporia of the indefinite chain of causes. This very Rahnerian approach opened the possibility of uncreated prior to the created grace in which Rahner's predecessors' confined grace.

1.2.2.1. Uncreated Grace and Created Grace

Since it is out of God's creative self-communication that everything is made, it follows that it is impossible to conceive any single creature without implicitly referring to grace: there is no creation outside of grace.⁴¹ Here is precisely the reason for Rahner's conception of grace as uncreated.

Uncreated grace is the grace that fills all the creation: every being, especially human beings, has grace permanently. Consequently, grace is not a rare reality in human life. Here, we have the first aspect of Rahner's unifying conception: nature related to grace. Why is Rahner presenting grace as something that is not rare? The emphasis on the non-rarity of grace is an effort to overcome the above issue related to the Church's conception of grace as created: the rarity of

⁴⁰ See Rahner, "Some Implications of the Scholastic Concept of Uncreated Grace," 330.

⁴¹ Karl Rahner, "On the Theology of Worship," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 19 (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 143.

grace. Therefore, in Rahner's understanding of grace, the importance of the presence of God's Spirit in human beings (as we announced above) is that God's Spirit is permanently (not rarely) present to the extent that every single human person has access to grace as gratuitously offered.

Created grace refers to the actualization of the uncreated grace⁴²: the consequent specific concretization of the uncreated grace. For instance, created grace can be understood in terms of the sacraments as the particular events of the uncreated grace.

The above Rahnerian understanding of grace as uncreated and created already reveals that Rahner's project is to build a bridge between the extrinsic and intrinsic positions that had been animating the debate from the classic to the neo-scholastic theologians. For Rahner, grace is not extrinsic because grace is not added to our human nature. On the contrary, it is gratuitously permanent to human beings: grace, as the self-communication of God, is the innermost constitutive element of who we are.⁴³ This approach to grace is the crucial message for Rahner's project on the universality of grace. Since we came into existence out of God's self-communication, no human is isolated from grace. Nobody is deprived of grace as it was communicated to us in God's original free and loving self-communication. It remains permanently proposed to us. Grace is our "innermost constituent." Does it mean that grace is intrinsic to us? Not at all. For Rahner, again, grace is not intrinsic, at least in the following sense.

To affirm that grace is imparted to us⁴⁴ does not necessarily mean that it is *naturally* or *meritedly* intrinsic to us. Grace is *supernatural and unmerited*.⁴⁵ We have to take its mode of transmission and its gratuity seriously. The mode of transmission is the "quasi-formal causality," which does not allow our nature to be separated from Godself-giving: our nature is always graced

⁴² Rahner, "Some Implications of the Scholastic Concept of Uncreated Grace," 341.

⁴³ Ibid., *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 116.

⁴⁴ Ibid., "On the Theology of Worship," 143.

⁴⁵ Ibid., *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 127.

by Godself. Its gratuity does not allow us to claim a right to it. God freely and gratuitously offered grace (Godself) to us out of God's love. Thus, grace is in us as a gift that God freely willed to provide us without any merit on our part. In other words, grace is not intrinsic to our nature because grace is not due to our merit. It remains a gift and maintains its gratuitous character: grace is always given to us. Here is precisely where the axiom of "God's freedom and initiative," as discussed above, makes sense. Indeed, God was and is not obligated to grace us. It is by God's free love that God decided to grace us. Here we have the second aspect of Rahner's unifying conception: Rahner brought together the two opposite positions in keeping their merits, challenging and overcoming their limits.⁴⁶ He adequately overturned what was or could constitute an implicit/insinuated error in each position to make it fit well with the Church's belief. How is this adequacy to the Church's faith relevant for concrete humans? How does it contribute to our understanding of humanness?

The rarity of grace isolates the unreligious and/or unbaptized people from grace. Thus, the primordially of grace contributes to our understanding of humanness in pointing out that every single human being, regardless of their access to created grace, is fundamentally human because of the inescapable character of grace for human beings gratuitously graced through Godself-offering to humanity.

Ultimately, Rahner's unifying thought on grace and nature seems to be summarized in his following words:

In the last resort, the world as 'nature' is not plain and obvious reality, totally involved with itself, to which grace is added (so to speak) subsequently as the result of a kind of secondary decision of God; from the outset God is lovingly seeking in freedom to bestow himself and, because he [God] so wills in freedom, because he [God] wills grace, he [God] must create a 'nature' to which he [God] can impart himself as free love. Nature is, because grace has to be. From the outset, as ground of nature, grace is

⁴⁶ Among other writings related to the topic (Nature and grace), we can find Rahner's overcoming of the limits of his predecessor's thoughts in the following articles: Rahner, Karl. "Concerning the Relationship between Nature and Grace." In *Theological Investigations*, vol. 1. Translated by C Ernest. New York: Crossroad, 1982: 297–317; Rahner, Karl. "Some Implications of the Scholastic Concept of Uncreated Grace." In *Theological Investigations*, vol. 1. Translated by C Ernest. New York: Crossroad, 1982: 319–46; Rahner, Karl. "Nature and Grace." In *Theological Investigations*, vol. 4. Translated by K Smyth. New York: Crossroad, 1982: 165–88.

the innermost centre of this nature. Consequently, nature is never actually purely and simply secular; it is always nature graciously endowed with God himself.⁴⁷

From my viewpoint, this Rahnerian understanding of grace is more accurate because it adequately involves all the positive elements of his predecessors' thoughts for a balanced account of grace. Therefore, Rahner has the merit of unifying his predecessors' positions and giving grace its total value while remaining faithful to the Church's teaching. For this reason, I find Rahner's reflection as creativity in fidelity. Indeed, Rahner transposes the Church's insinuated rarity of grace to the primordially and permanence of grace and takes de Lubac's idea that there is no "pure nature." But, then, he keeps Cajetan's idea of the gratuitousness of grace. The great lesson we can draw from this initiative of unifying despite the controversy between his predecessors is this: it helps us adequately manage the dualistic views of our time; it helps us conceive all our contemporary dualistic views (based on our differences) in terms of a unity-in-difference. With goodwill, a mutual understanding helps to reach a consensus that pushes us beyond our limits for better views.

Our graced humanity is grounded on God's unmerited self-offering as the "innermost constitutive element of men and women."⁴⁸ This "innermost constitutive" is explicit through two great capacities unmeritedly reserved to human beings: transcendence and freedom, which are intelligibly acceptable also by unbelievers and non-Christians as peculiar to humans.

I.3. Human Transcendence and Freedom

This last section of our first chapter precisely identifies the two main human qualities we apprehended in the above analysis of Rahner's intended definition of God's self-communication.

(1) Transcendence: our capacity to experience the ontological self-communication of God to us. We experience it fundamentally through unthematical experience. (2) Freedom: our capacity to

⁴⁷ Rahner, "On the Theology of Worship," 143. Let us be precise in this quotation: the concept "world as nature" is an inclusive expression of any creature, namely human beings.

⁴⁸ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 116. Gender inclusion made.

respond to God. We consider these two faculties acceptable even by non-Christians as peculiar to human beings. Though theologically oriented, they have a universal character.

I.3.1. Human Transcendence

Here it is crucial to start by noticing that humankind is finite contrary to the Absolute transcendent (God). But the human mental system is a transcendent structure. Human transcendence is to be understood in the light of this structure: we are open to “everything and anything, whatever can come to expression can be at least a question for him [her].”⁴⁹ In this sense, a person’s answer to a question about something can also be questioned by the person for eventual answers and so on in an infinite way.⁵⁰ Thus for Rahner, our capacity to endlessly question beyond our finiteness is a transcendent aspect of our graced nature.⁵¹ This Rahnerian perception of human finiteness is a crucial understanding that helps overcome human empirical determinism. Indeed, through and beyond the experience of our finiteness, we reveal ourselves as “transcendent beings” because of the *infinite* horizon of questioning to which such experience opens us. In other words, the endless horizon of questioning pushes us beyond our limits. It is “an horizon which recedes further and further the more answers man [humankind] can discover.”⁵²

I appreciate this account of transcendence as an adequate thought for our secular and rational world. Indeed, it is the fruit of Rahner’s use of philosophy in theology. The term transcendence is a philosophical concept that refers to a reality beyond this material world.⁵³ Rahner uses it to explain the human capacity to know beyond the world through worldly experiences and to

⁴⁹ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 32. Gender inclusion made.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁵¹ Of course, nature is not isolated from grace (God’s self-communication) from which we unmeritedly are constituted of such capacity.

⁵² Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 32. This idea of infinity beyond the finiteness will also serve as the key to understanding human freedom before God, without whom we cannot assume and transcend the limit of our mere subjective and social freedom.

⁵³ Ideas in Plato’s philosophy, Absolute Being in Aristotle’s thought, God in the Augustine’s philosophy, etc.

illustrate our absolute openness *to* and orientation *toward* the absolute Being (unbelievers) or God (believers). Thus, the logical utility of philosophy renders intelligible Rahner's theology.⁵⁴ In fact, Rahner's account of one's experience of transcendence does not primarily refer to Christians. Instead, it involves any human person: without ignoring or neglecting the possibility for a person to evade that transcendental experience of endless questioning,⁵⁵ Rahner posits this capacity across the whole human race. Further, the object of endless questioning is not exclusively or directly about a religious reality. Instead, it is about "everything and anything." The unbeliever can experience it without adhering to a religion. Rahner does not immediately point out God as the ultimate answer to one's endless questioning. Otherwise, the endlessness of questioning would be impossible. Once we reach God, we get the absolute answer to all that is questionable, even though the absolute answer itself (God) will remain incomprehensible (God is a mystery). Instead, Rahner refers to the answer as a non-absolute answer so that such an answer may also be questionable for eventual non-absolute answers. These endless questions and answers imply the necessity of an absolute answer. Consequently, we realize that we never get satisfaction in our natural endless questioning unless we transcend the natural realities we face. To transcend the limitations of our finite and determined nature, we necessarily need to find the answer to the question of who we are in a being who is above us. Therefore, passing from the natural to the supernatural level becomes meaningful. The point is that one gets a satisfying answer to one's existential questions in God alone: God is the ultimate and absolute answer to the questions one asks about oneself.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Cf. Karen Kilby, *Karl Rahner: Theology and Philosophy* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2004), 70.

⁵⁵ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 32.

⁵⁶ Cf. Marcel Uwineza, "The Human Person Is the Question to Which God Is the Answer: Humanity in the Theology of Karl Rahner," *The Way*, 57/2 (April 2018): 80.

All these observations on Rahner's basic approach to transcendence prove that his genuine connection of philosophy to theology is relevant to our time. Indeed, Rahner wants to make the Christian theological message of our humanness accessible and credible to non-Christians.

However, Rahner's understanding of humankind as a transcendental being emphasizes its spiritual dimension without overlooking its corporeity. Indeed, he affirms that humankind is:

The spirit who experiences himself [herself] as spirit in that he [she] does not experience himself [herself] as *pure* spirit. Man [humankind] is not the questioning and unquestioned infinity of reality. He [she] is the question that rises up before him, empty, but really and inescapably, and which can never be settled and never adequately answered by him [her].⁵⁷

The emphasis on the spiritual aspect explains human transcendentality, not in a way that reduces humankind to its spiritual dimension. Rahner underlines the questioning capacity of human beings: as an intellectual activity, questioning is fundamentally spiritual and subjective. As spiritual or intellectual faculty, transcendence is constitutive of human nature in such a way that even in concrete or practical experiences, one simultaneously experiences it (transcendence) if one's concrete/practical experiences are adequate. In any concrete experience, one will always need to question the realities of the experience and even the process of that experience to find a meaning for it or, at least, to try to find its purpose. That very act of questioning things during one's concrete experience is an act that justifies one's transcendence. This Rahnerian use of reason in the illustration of human orientation toward God is influenced – among others – by Thomas Aquinas' thought in a way that he wrote an article on his recognition of the latter's importance.⁵⁸

Saint Thomas defines humans as rational beings and concludes that only humans are God's image because of their rational capacity.⁵⁹ To avoid any contradiction with the ongoing scientific

⁵⁷ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 32. Gender inclusion made.

⁵⁸ See Rahner, Karl. "On Recognizing the Importance of Thomas Aquinas." In *Theological Investigations*, vol. 13. Translated by David Bourke. New York: The Seabury Press, 1975: 3–12.

⁵⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 93, arts 1-4, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province. Micro Book Studio., accessed January 21, 2023, <http://www.microbookstudio.com>.

data, which constantly tries to reveal animals' intelligence and rationality, we consider reason or intelligence as the capacity for endless existential questioning. The act of endless questioning in which the subject questions himself/herself is peculiar to human beings. Human beings are the only ones among God's creatures capable of self-questioning about their origin, identity, life, and destiny. Therefore, it is self-evident that transcendence as endless questioning about self and the surrounding realities/things is fundamentally and peculiarly human.

In one of the above paragraphs, we pointed out Rahner's use of philosophy to illustrate our absolute openness *to* and orientation *toward* God. One concept that corroborates this statement is the use of *Vorgriff*, which is the pre-apprehension of being.⁶⁰ In the above Rahner's citation, it is said that the spirit (human spirit) "is not the questioning and unquestioned infinity of reality." Therefore, the question we can ask is: what or who, then, is that infinity of reality? This infinity of reality is the "being" who is pre-apprehended. The subject of the transcendental experience pre-apprehends this "being" beyond the multiple finite beings/objects/realities that she/he questions and behind the infinite horizon (of our objective objects of such experience). Thus, this "being" backgrounds and encompasses our experience of knowledge: this being is our horizon.

The notion of pre-apprehension (*Vorgriff*) is a concept borrowed by Rahner from Heidegger but genuinely updated to the Christian belief of God as the ultimate goal of humanity in our natural quest for knowledge. Indeed, Heidegger uses the word *Vorgriff* to point out the "fore-conception" that the *Dasein* has of the Being. But what is the *Dasein*? It is a German term that refers to existence. Heidegger uses it as the "there is" of Being.⁶¹ We grasp the literal meaning of the concept by breaking it up into *Da-sein*: "Being-there." Since without its application to an entity or

⁶⁰ Karl Rahner, *Hearers of the World*, trans. Michael Richards (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), 142; Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 33.

⁶¹ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward S. Robinson (New York: Harper Perennial/Modern Thought, 2008), 26.

entities, Being remains a general and abstract concept, Heidegger rightly points out the significance of the concrete identification of Being. In this perspective, the *Dasein* is the categorical (definite) identification of Being. And since the question of Being is the matter at stake, the *Dasein* becomes thus “the primary example to be *interrogated* in the question of Being.”⁶² In this process, the *Dasein* (concrete human being) understands herself as a being open to many possibilities, which implies her “potentiality-for-Being”: this is so because, for Heidegger, human understanding has in itself the existential structure that he (Heidegger) calls *projection*. The *Dasein* projects herself upon many possibilities to understand herself as a being.⁶³ When the *Dasein* understands her being as possibilities, he understands Being itself as the totality of possibilities because it is that general Being who grounds the possibilities of the beings. The means for the *Dasein* to appropriate its understanding of Being is what Heidegger calls the “Temporal Interpretation of Being: the working-out of possibilities projected in understanding,” not an acquiring of information about Being.⁶⁴ Therefore, what precedes that interpretation is a pre-apprehension of that totality of possibilities, which the *Dasein* grasps in advance as the ground of its interpretation. Definitively, the Heideggerian *Vorgriff* is the *fore-conception* of the totality of possibilities. Thus, the interpretation of self-understanding of the *Dasein* is grounded on something that the *Dasein* grasps in advance – in a *fore-conception*.⁶⁵

Rahner follows Heidegger’s way of proceeding: the subject is the concrete being from whom he (Rahner) starts his reflection. We can say that Heidegger’s *Dasein* helps Rahner to shift from Being itself as starting point to the subject as a point of departure. Thus, the question of Being starts with the self-questioning for the self-knowledge of a concrete human being (subject). In the

⁶² Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 28.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 182–84.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 188–89.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 191.

process of self-understanding, the subject discovers herself as a transcendental being in the sense that she is open to an infinity of possibilities.⁶⁶ This infinity of possibilities has a ground that the subject perceives. Therefore, the *Vorgriff* is, for Rahner, the “pre-apprehension of being” as the infinite horizon of reality that grounds human intellectual and conscious activity in unthematic knowledge.⁶⁷ Rahner uses this concept (*Vorgriff*) in the Thomistic sense for Christian thought. He based his reflection on Aquinas’ *excessus* (excess). Indeed, Aquinas also has the idea of “pre-apprehension” of things for human understanding. For him (Aquinas), “it is impossible for our intellect to understand anything actually, except by turning to the phantasms.”⁶⁸ Firstly, Rahner applies this Thomistic view on human understanding to the pre-apprehension as he understood from Heidegger. He (Rahner) affirms that “there are no concepts without perception, and even the most abstract metaphysical language works with images, analogies, and representations, with a ‘conversion to the phantasm,’ as Thomas Aquinas would say.”⁶⁹ Thus, the pre-apprehension pointed out by Heidegger, that pre-apprehension itself is not possible without the use of images (phantasm): the *fore-conception* (Heidegger) depends on phantasm (Rahner based on Thomas). The epistemological point is that without our senses, we cannot know. Pre-apprehension is impossible without using one’s corporal organs to provide her with these phantasms. Secondly, Rahner uses Aquinas’ *excessus* (excess) to genuinely update the *Vorgriff* in favor of the Christian view. Indeed, while Heidegger’s thought on the *Dasein*’s self-knowledge points ultimately to death as the absolute possibility (of possibilities) toward which the *Dasein* journeys,⁷⁰ Rahner points out God as the totality of possibilities towards which the subject moves.⁷¹ The pre-apprehension of

⁶⁶ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 31–32.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁶⁸ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 84, a 7. Phantasms = images

⁶⁹ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 164.

⁷⁰ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 289, 294, and 309.

⁷¹ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 33–34 and 129.

God as the horizon of possibilities is possible despite the lack of God's corresponding image among the categorical objects of our world. Aquinas' *excessus* helps Rahner to underline such possibility: for Aquinas, the fact that we know God "as the cause," we know God by way of excess.⁷² The meaning of knowing God by excess is to know God by going beyond the limit of human reason. God is the cause of everything that our minds can understand. Thus, based on what we know about things, we can know God by transcending these things. We exceed the created things by comparing God to them by superlative comparison: for instance, God is the supreme God⁷³ compared to good things. The things to which we compare God are the things through which we observe the senses' epistemological principle (necessity). Going from those sensible things to knowing God is the theological principle that creatures symbolize God. Thus, still with our above example, the goodness of tangible things expresses God's supreme goodness. It means that beyond the multiple beings we experience in this world, there is a greater Being that grounds everything. Our movement toward this reality beyond the multiples beings is precisely the sense of human transcendence: to be open to more than what we experience in the sensible world. Thus, the excess help us transcend sensible realities and reach God, whom they symbolize.

That view is an excellent point in Rahner's thought on humankind as a transcendental being. It is the key to a shift from the "pre-apprehension of Being" to the pre-apprehension of God. Based on the "excess," God is the being pre-apprehended in the knower's mind. Thus, God is our horizon. As our horizon, God is the ground of knowledge, the *sine qua non* condition by which we can know objectively. Indeed, "the pre-apprehension as such does not attain to an object. By its very essence, it is one of the conditions of the possibility of an objective knowledge."⁷⁴

⁷² Aquinas, *ST*, I, q. 84, a 7, ad3.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, *S T*, I, q.6, a.2, ad3.

⁷⁴ Karl Rahner, *Spirit in the World*, trans. William Dych (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), 143.

One of the best illustrations I got in my quest to understand Rahner's conception of the *Vorgriff* in the light of God as our horizon comes from Father Harvey D. Egan (Emeritus Professor of Systematic and Mystical Theology at Boston College). He compares the movement of the human spirit for knowing and loving with the movement of a person navigating the ocean on a ship. "If you are on a ship in the middle of the ocean, the horizon keeps moving away. God is the ambiance, the ground of all knowing and loving," he wrote to me. This illustration fits well with Rahner's perception of the pre-apprehension as "the movement of the spirit towards the whole of its possible objects."⁷⁵ In the vast horizon, the spirit keeps moving toward the reality that constitutes the source of its attraction. In this perspective, the human spirit is restless, so to speak, in Augustinian terms. Unless it is hindered by evasion, it never stops moving until it finally reaches the only reality in which it finds the real and absolute answer to its questions and self-fulfillment.

Therefore, the point is that human transcendental movement is not nonsense. On the contrary, it is oriented toward a Being who makes sense of everything. Thus, Rahner affirms that "pre-apprehension cannot reach out into 'nothing' (...), nor can it perhaps reach out to another object in such a way that along with this object, it would not be conscious at all."⁷⁶ Hence, humanity's endless questioning ends in God, its origin, ground, and *telos*. This end is the knower's fulfilment.

To sustain humanity's capacity of transcendence through the subject's endless questioning is a kind of valuing humanity, especially in our world. Indeed, since the event of the "*cogito ergo sum*," rational activity is conceived as one's self-realization. By explaining the Christian message about humankind as *capax Dei* because of humans' transcendental capacity to reach God through the endless questioning of the objects and realities of everyday life, Rahner adapts his explanation to the modern world influenced by rationality and makes it favorable to the Christian message of

⁷⁵ Rahner, *Spirit in the World*, 145.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

God as humanity's ultimate goal. Making God's Christian message intelligible reinforces the Church's emphasis on respecting human dignity. Every human person is graced *by* and so capable *of* God. Therefore, each human person, whether converted or not to any religion, keeps in their innermost nature God's grace of ability of endless questioning for self-realization. This view does not contradict the Christic dimension of grace and human divinization because Christ "is both the unique summit and the ultimate basis of God's relationship to his [God's] creation,"⁷⁷ which humankind is. Grace's permanence in every person is enough for everybody to deserve respect. Furthermore, the idea of the natural human capacity to know God through transcendental experience already posits the ground of the universality of grace and salvation.

Though Rahner's approach is inclusive, his reflection ultimately points to God. He starts with the subject's capacity for endless questioning, a capacity that is constitutive to every human being. In this way, when he (Rahner) later ends with God as the ultimate goal of the subject, any human being sees his coherency and understands the point of his reflection. Thus, the theological insight of his thought is that the very capacity of endless questioning is an inescapable gift from God's antecedent self-offering prior to one's response.⁷⁸ Therefore, any human person possesses what was gratuitously bestowed in the innermost nature of humanity. This gift is permanently present in God's "actual self-offering" to everybody.

The experience of transcendence is the freest experience of one's existence: due to its inner, unthematic, and subjective character, it can never be hindered unless one hinders or tries to hinder it through an evasive life (which itself is an act of freedom). In the very act of transcendence, one exercises one's freedom most originally. Thus, transcendence opens the door to true freedom to

⁷⁷ Karl Rahner, "The Eternal Significance of the Humanity of Jesus for Our Relationship with God," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 3, trans. K-H&B Kruger (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 43.

⁷⁸ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 128–29.

be exercised. Rahner points out the relationship between transcendence and freedom by affirming that “true freedom is born from the transcendence of man [humankind].”⁷⁹

I.3.2. Human Freedom

Though the human person is a historical subject who exercises it, freedom is not primarily considered in Rahner’s understanding as an empirical reality. To understand freedom as an “empirical datum” in its original sense would insinuate its confinement to the particular categorical experience in which it is exercised.⁸⁰ Freedom exercised concretely is indeed more than freedom in potency. Still, to lay down the ground of its universal character as a constitutive capacity of humankind, it is better to define it as a transcendental reality. Indeed, when we base freedom on empirical/categorical experience, we face the difficulty of reaching real freedom. For instance, “empirical psychology must always relate one phenomenon to another and so obviously cannot discover any freedom.”⁸¹ Therefore, Rahner prefers to base freedom on our transcendental experience through which, one comes to know herself/himself as responsible and free for herself/himself for the first time. Thus, in its “first and original instance,” freedom is not “a particular” historical reality⁸² but a transcendental ontological constituent of humankind. Since the ontological component of human beings is due to the *ontological* self-giving of God to humanity, freedom is the consequence of God’s self-communication to humankind.

Without excluding the subject’s categorical dimension, Rahner’s conception of freedom in its original sense corresponds to the “transcendental freedom.” He explains it as follows:

Freedom is experienced when a subject as such experiences himself [herself], and hence precisely not when he [she] is objectified in a subsequent scientific reflection. When the subject experiences himself [herself] as subject, and hence as the existent which through its transcendence has an original and indissoluble unity and self-presence before being, and when this subject experiences his [her] action as

⁷⁹ Karl Rahner, “True Freedom,” in *Grace in Freedom* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1969), 226.

⁸⁰ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 35.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 35–36.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 35.

subjective action, although it cannot be made reflexive in the same way, then responsibility and freedom in an original sense are experienced in the depths of one's existence.⁸³

The quintessence of this quotation is that from self-questioning, which is an activity prior to thematical reflection, one comes to know oneself as a subject capable of free action. In this instance, this capacity of free action is a capacity to decide about oneself. This decision is before the consequent free action that will or should follow. Such a decision is a transcendental activity because it is a spiritual exercise of freedom: freedom of decision. This decision comes from discovering oneself as a free agent capable of deciding and acting. The self-discovery as a free agent able to decide and act and the free decision that follows is fundamentally transcendent. Transcendental freedom is, therefore, the cornerstone of categorical freedom. I am not free if I cannot decide by myself but just undergo external forces. In my view, the constraint of external forces is a reason for considering this Rahnerian conception of freedom as a crucial help for concrete freedom. It constitutes the power that strengthens empirical freedom as the below example from Viktor Emil Frankl illustrates.

Frankl was an Austrian psychiatrist of the twentieth century. He went through a deadly suffering experience in the concentration camp of Auschwitz during the Second World War. From that sad and challenging experience, he developed logotherapy as psychotherapy to help depressed people find the meaning of their lives. He wrote the book for this purpose titled *Man's Search for Meaning*. In this book, he narrates the experience of suffering he and other people went through. From that terrible situation, he ultimately points out that "Man [human] *can* preserve a vestige of spiritual freedom, of independence of mind, even in such terrible conditions of psychic and physical stress."⁸⁴ One of the examples he gives in his book is that some men used to walk through

⁸³ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 37-38.

⁸⁴ Viktor Emil Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, Rev. and updated (New York: Pocket Books, 1984), 86.

the camp's huts, comforting others and giving them their last piece of bread. Frankl considers such high free and human action as "sufficient proof that everything can be taken from a man [human] but one thing: the last of the human freedom – to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way."⁸⁵ Thus, despite the external constraint of suffering, torture, and hunger, their decision and action proved that they were more than what they suffered. They were genuinely human despite the dehumanizing suffering they were undergoing. Their spiritual freedom expressed in their concrete action for others corroborated their humanness. Therefore, we can affirm with conviction that human freedom is fundamentally transcendental and that it is in transcendental freedom that humans are permanently free.

However, since humankind is not only a transcendental being but also and at the same time, a historical subject, "the transcendental freedom (...) cannot ultimately remain hidden in an interior disposition, at least nor for a genuine anthropology which sees man [humankind] in the concrete and as a real unity."⁸⁶ Therefore, we will need to present also freedom as mediated by historical and social realities in the third chapter. That presentation will help us see how even in the interdependent situation of freedom in history, freedom remains authentic only considering its transcendental origin: Godself. Indeed, for a person to be human she/he must freely respond to God in such a way that no matter the person's response (yes or no), that very decision remains the expression of the person's freedom. However, due to the necessity of human fulfillment in God, one's response must be a "yes." That will be the subject of one of the third chapter's sections.

The reflection in this first chapter reveals that, as a fundamental principle, God's self-communication establishes an inseparable link between theology and anthropology. The creative divine self-communication deposits God as the "quasi-formal cause" of every creature. As

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 36.

elevating, God's self-communication is a free and forgiving divine offering to human beings as their "innermost constitutive element." Therefore, human beings differ from other creatures because it implies human responsibility. As both creative and elevating, God's self-communication to humanity builds an inescapable and unbreakable unity between nature (human beings) and grace (God). Therefore, one realizes herself and reaches her fulfillment in God alone. This self-realization is a daily process accomplished through the experience of self, others, and God via the endless questioning of realities. It is peculiar to human beings (including unbelievers) because they alone can endlessly question their origin, identity, life, and final destiny. This endless questioning is what Rahner calls transcendence. One experiences transcendence through one's multiple historical experiences of life. It helps one surpass her limits (especially her empirical determinism) and opens her to freedom. With freedom, one can decide about oneself and act. Therefore, one expresses one's humanness through the assumption of transcendence and freedom, which are the existential characteristics that justify the ontological superiority of human beings to things.⁸⁷

The graced humanity implies that "a relationship to God is essential to human nature."⁸⁸ God-given transcendence and freedom are the means for that relationship, which one originally lives in the unthematic experience of her life. The unthematic and so transcendental experience of God (grace) is precisely the subject of the second chapter of our reflection.

⁸⁷ Karl Rahner, ed., "Existence," in *Encyclopedia of Theology: The Concise Sacramentum Mundi* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 494; Declan Marmion and Mary E. Hines, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, Cambridge Companions to Religion (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), xiii.

⁸⁸ Hodgson and King, *Christian Theology*, 167.

CHAPTER II. THE SUBJECT'S TRANSCENDENTAL EXPERIENCE OF GRACE AND HUMANITY'S CONCRETE HISTORY

This second chapter of our reflection defends the holistic aspect of Rahner's approach. The main argument here is that Rahner's theology does support a historical view of humanity and is not an abstraction. Though transcendental, the experience of grace is always mediated by concrete realities.⁸⁹ An adequate response to God necessitates a commitment to the other persons one meets in the world. Indeed, Rahner equates a person's love of God and the person's love of neighbor.⁹⁰ Thus, this chapter aims to demonstrate that Rahner's approach touches concrete human persons and helps them commit to others in society.

To understand what the human transcendental experience of grace means and the historical component of this experience, we will discuss three main sections: Transcendental experience, Interpersonal aspect, and Historical Engagement.

II.1. Transcendental Experience

Rahner's account of human transcendental experience is fundamentally based on his understanding of human existential, a peculiar characteristic of human existence: transcendence, as God's gift, is a capacity proper to human beings. Indeed, existentials are the ontological characteristics of human existence that distinguish them from other creatures.⁹¹ For Rahner, a human person is a "transcendental subject – which is such 'by nature' and so constituted is radicalized by grace."⁹² Our everyday life of knowing and loving is an experience of transcendence: our questions about life, our worry about the situation of our world, our encounter with others, our hope for the future, etc., all these moments are filled with transcendence. Thus, the "transcendental experience of

⁸⁹ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 35–37.

⁹⁰ Karl Rahner, "Reflections on the Unity of the Love of Neighbour and the Love of God," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 6, trans. Karl-H. and Boniface Kruger (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1961), 234.

⁹¹ Essential and peculiar characteristics of human beings in their worldly existence.

⁹² Rahner, "Transcendental Theology," in *Encyclopedia of Theology: The Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, ed., 1748.

human transcendence is not the experience of some definite, particular objective thing which is experienced alongside of other objects. It is rather a basic mode of being which is prior to and permeates every objective experience.”⁹³ To permeate means to be spread or present in every part of reality. Thus, the transcendental experience is present *in* and simultaneous *to* every single objective experience of human existence. And this is so because transcendence is a constitutive characteristic of human existence. Consequently, analyzing of this transcendental experience of human transcendence requires an appropriate method. Therefore, that method is shaped according to the unthematic character of this experience. The point is that Rahner’s approach is “so determined by the content of his thought that its meaning is clear only when it is elucidated within that context.”⁹⁴ In this section, we will explain the transcendental experience of grace itself, discuss the methodology that the analysis of such experience requires, and affirm/defend Rahner for adopting that method despite the main critique against it.

I.1.1. Transcendental Experience of Grace

The transcendental experience is an experience of knowing and willing that pushes a human person to will and decide or act without feeling or expecting any desire for benefit or satisfaction but only motivated by the desire to do good. Thus, the transcendental experience is an experience that moves a human person towards the good. It is transcendental because it occurs in the innermost core of human conscience, in the depths of a human being, to the extent that one cannot properly explain it.⁹⁵ It becomes a transcendental experience *of grace* when the human spirit, in this inner

⁹³ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 34.

⁹⁴ Anne E. Carr, *The Theological Method of Karl Rahner*, Dissertation Series - American Academy of Religion; No. 19 (Missoula, Mont: Published by Scholars Press for the American Academy of Religion, 1977), 4–5.

⁹⁵ Karl Rahner, “Reflections on the Experience of Grace,” in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 3, trans. Karl-H. and Boniface Kruger (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1967), 86.

experience, is carried by God's Spirit: the person lets herself go through the movement of the Holy Spirit.⁹⁶

The universal character of this experience is that the Holy Spirit is offered universally and works in everybody who disposes herself of this Spirit. But moreover, the experience of grace is transcendental because:

It is the experience that the spirit is more than merely a part of this temporal world; the experience that man's [humankind's] meaning is not exhausted by the meaning and fortune of this world; the experience of the adventure and confidence of taking the plunge, an experience which no longer has any reason which can be demonstrated or which is taken from the success of this world.⁹⁷

Thus, though it occurs in this world and through concrete realities, the experience of grace is an experience by which we transcend this world. It is a spiritual experience sustained by a supernatural force (Holy Spirit) that helps us understand that the meaning of human life is not limited to the sense and value of this world but that we find this meaning also and, above all, beyond this world.

Because this transcendental experience of grace points to the meaning of human life, a person experiences grace in her transcendental (unthematical endless questioning) quest for self-knowledge and self-realization. It follows that the unthematic experience of grace made through one's pursuit of self-knowledge is called the transcendental experience of grace. Furthermore, it means that the process through which a person experiences her capacity of transcendence is an operation that is inseparable from the person's experience of grace: every human experience implies grace. Therefore, "Rahner can explain the operation of grace in terms of an analysis of human self-transcendence,"⁹⁸ an analysis that consequently requires a transcendental method.

⁹⁶ Rahner, "Reflections on the Experience of Grace," 87-89.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 88.

⁹⁸ Roger Haight, *The Experience and Language of Grace* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 121.

II.1.2. Rahner's Transcendental Method

Since we will need to refer to Rahner's method in discussing the main critique against it, our aim in this subsection is to understand his method. Thus, a brief presentation of this method will be sufficient.

Rahner's transcendental method consists in analyzing humanity's transcendental experience of self and, thereby, of God. His approach is anthropological and theological because, for him, we can never fully understand who we are unless we refer to God. Though the subject's experience of self and transcendence does not exclude the categorical dimension of the person's everyday experiences, Rahner thinks that the analysis of this transcendental experience should be the starting point of the method. Rahner starts with the subject rather than the question of being itself. But what is analyzed in this subject is her question of being for self-knowledge and realization. Therefore, the analysis of the subject's question about being is Rahner's methodological starting point. In this perspective, Rahner's method is not an abstraction because it is a concrete subject's question of being that is analyzed, not being itself. Thus, Rahner's transcendental method consists not in excluding people's historical conditions but in starting with the analysis of that transcendental experience which the historical realities (the world, human persons, etc.) mediate.

However, several critiques have been made against Rahner's transcendental approach. We will only put Rahner in dialogue with his friend and student Metz, whose critique we consider, with Rahner himself, to be the most important.⁹⁹

⁹⁹ Actually, Metz's critique is the only criticism that Rahner takes very seriously. See James J. Bacik, *Apologetics and the Eclipse of Mystery: Mystagogy According to Karl Rahner* (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980), ix.

II.1.3. Metz's Main Critique Against Rahner's Transcendental Method

Metz's main critique against Rahner's transcendental approach is that it does not take seriously human persons' concrete history, especially their historical suffering.¹⁰⁰ Although this Metzian critique is not a random thought, I believe it does not render justice to Rahner. Metz's observation is that even in Rahner's theology, the catastrophe of Auschwitz, a concrete human suffering, was not mentioned.¹⁰¹

From that observation, Metz started adopting a critical view of the transcendental method in general and Rahner's transcendental theology in particular. He ended up rejecting Rahner's approach of starting his theological-anthropological reflection by the analysis of human's question of being (*Seinsfrage*). For him, the human concrete historical situation, especially the suffering situation (*Leidensfrage*), is the starting point¹⁰² of the theological-anthropological reflection because of the following reason:

Whenever a person tries to ascertain in critical reflection the specific possibilities of his [her] being, as soon as he [she] tries to come to an understanding of himself that is truly his own (*eigentlich*: authentic), he [she] will find that he has always taken up ground prior to any such action of self-reflection. This ground is the historical situation in which a person always finds herself [himself], from which she [he] can never extricate herself in order to find some realm of 'pure' subjective, free of heteronomous influences.¹⁰³

This quotation reveals that for Metz, the historical situation is the *a priori* condition of any transcendental experience because it is from that situation that one can exercise a subjective ontological reflection. Consequently, any reflection to understand human beings must start from

¹⁰⁰ Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 153.

¹⁰¹ Johann Baptist Metz and Jürgen Moltmann, *Faith and the Future: Essays on Theology, Solidarity, and Modernity*, Concilium Series (Maryknoll, N.Y.: London, England: Orbis Books; SCM Press, 1995), 40.

¹⁰² Roger Dick Johns, *Man in the World: The Political Theology of Johannes Baptist Metz*, Dissertation Series - American Academy of Religion; No. 16 (Missoula, Mont: Published by Scholars Press for the American Academy of Religion, 1976), 74.

¹⁰³ See Metz, "Theologische und metaphysische Ordnung," 3-4, as quoted by Ashley, *Interruptions*, 65.

the historical situation of human persons. This is a view that focuses on specific or particular historical contexts.

About Metz's view on the transcendental method, James Matthew Ashley affirms that "a careful transcendental analysis of human knowing shows more clearly and consistently that for humans the truth of being *is* known truly intellectually-conceptually, but known only mediately and analogically. Ontological [spiritual] truth cannot be achieved apart from ontic [factual] truth. ... There is no knowing without a turning to the sensible image."¹⁰⁴ Thus, in self-knowledge through the transcendental experience, one necessarily refers to the factual or material realities that incarnate the intellectual or spiritual. One wants to know who one *is* (ontologically), but one only gets access to that knowledge through the reference to concrete human beings. Human knowledge involves both historical/categorical (Metz's approach) and transcendental (Rahner's) dimensions. Therefore, Ashley's affirmation seems favorable to the involving character of Rahner's method.

For Roger Dick Johns, Rahner's methodology contains three stages:

The first step is the grounding of his concept of man as spirit in 'the transcendence of knowing toward Being.' Secondly, he interprets the potential of each person for attaining existence as the possibility of 'hearing' God's revelation. The third step emphasizes human historicity by explaining that God's word is revealed in history through a human word.¹⁰⁵

Again, it appears in John's view that Rahner's transcendental theology involves the historical aspect of human experience. Of course, the stages of Rahner's transcendental methodology do not exclude the human categorical dimension. But Rahner simply wants to point out the fact that all the everyday historical experiences of the subject are inseparable from the transcendence. Rahner's approach requires the categorical dimension of human experience, but transcendence impregnates all the person's specific categorical experiences.

¹⁰⁴ Ashley, *Interruptions*, 61.

¹⁰⁵ Roger Dick Johns, *Man in the World: The Theology of Johannes Baptist Metz* (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press for the American Academy of Religion, 1976), 52.

Rahner's reaction to Metz's critique goes in the same sense of the twofold dimension of the method he (Rahner) adopts in his theological reflection because he states: "It has always been clear in my theology that a 'transcendental experience' (of God and grace) is always mediated through a categorical experience in history, in interpersonal relationships, and in society."¹⁰⁶

I agree with all the above reactions because they are correct and sustain the twofold dimension of Rahner's theological method. I further believe that it is even good to emphasize the adequacy of Rahner's starting point by explicitly pointing out that (1) to start by the analysis of the subject's question about being is the accurate method because it helps understand history itself, (2) it is not because the method is transcendental that it does not take seriously human history. In fact, the methodological concern that Metz's critique raised is the adequate starting point in theological-anthropological reflection. But Rahner's method unites transcendental and categorical dimensions of the subject. Consequently, it cannot be said that it does not take seriously human history because the subject is always both a historical (concrete subject living in the world) and transcendental (but open to what transcends the world) subject in such a way that to start with the subject's transcendental experience is to simultaneously start with her categorical experiences.

II.1.4. Adequacy of Rahner's Transcendental Method

This fourth subsection is to sustain my statement about the adequacy of Rahner's approach. For this reason, I will discuss the historical context of Rahner's thought to argue that his method was a response to the issues of his time. But it has to be clear that Rahner willed a solution that goes beyond his time and serves any specific or particular issue: Rahner proposes a method that can be applied to every human situation. And this is so precisely because of the universal character of his

¹⁰⁶ James J. Bacik, *Apologetics and the Eclipse of Mystery: Mystagogy According to Karl Rahner* (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980), x.

thought, which is not confined to a particular categorical experience. Further, I will put Rahner in dialogue with Metz concerning the critique of the latter against Rahner's method.

II.1.4.1. Justifying Rahner's Method by the Context of His Thought

The so-called transcendental theology of Rahner emerged in the context of the Roman Catholic Church of the first half of the twentieth century: a period mainly characterized by secularity and rationality/intellectuality that called for a rational and more modest response from the Church through the intelligibility of her theological thought.¹⁰⁷ Further, that intellectual context had another significant problem related to the human capacity to know God. It is a context in which human is denied the ability to know God intellectually. Kant is the German protagonist of such denial. This denial is: though human intellect can "give rise to the transcendental idea," it cannot prove God's existence because "there is no basis for assuming an object corresponding to the transcendental idea or idea of a necessary being. There is no way to prove the existence of God."¹⁰⁸ This denial denotes a spiritual or religious crisis due to materialism and empiricism. It is a context where materialism is exclusively elected as the necessary paradigm and empiricism as the accurate method of human knowing. As the only existing reality, the material was considered more important than spiritual values, and sense experience was the only method of human knowledge. Furthermore, Rahner's thought corresponds to the context where despite pluralism, the Church's teaching on salvation insinuated a reduction of God's grace and salvation to Christians.

Based on this context and its issues, Rahner's use of the transcendental method aimed at (1) proposing an intelligible account of Christian faith; (2) indicating that God is the absolute and primordial ground of any human experience: the transcendent grounds the contingent; (3)

¹⁰⁷ Anne E. Carr, *The Theological Method of Karl Rahner*, 7ff.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 16; See also, Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith, Reissued edition (Basingstoke, Hampshire New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 514ff.

surpassing Kant's idea of human incapacity to know God: "for Rahner, knowledge is not confined to the realm of possible empirical experience; it simultaneously transcends the 'world' of sense experience to a dim but real knowledge of absolute being itself."¹⁰⁹ Thus, one can know God through the transcendental experience; (4) establishing a dialectical unity between knowing and being: "The question one asks, indeed the question one is, indicates a knowledge of and presence to being in the one who questions"¹¹⁰; (5) shifting from a mere abstract conception of the human being to its twofold dimension of transcendence and history: for Rahner, humankind is not a "pure spirit," but a historical spirit which realizes herself in history: it is in history that one lives the transcendental experience of self and God to realize oneself in the world.

II.1.4.2. Justifying Rahner's Method Beyond the Context of His Thought

Here, we start the reflection by insisting on people's crisis of spirituality from the times of Rahner up to now. Materialism narrows human reflection/understanding of reality to *concretism*: the tendency to reduce the value/importance of reality to its concreteness to the detriment of its spiritual significance. Consequently, it affects our approach. We should approach reality in both its concrete and trans-concrete (beyond concreteness) aspects. Rahner's approach stands for such necessity. To illustrate the need for this approach, we will put him (Rahner) in dialogue with Metz.

I reaffirm my view that starting theological anthropology with the analysis of the subject's question about being for self-knowledge is the most appropriate way, as Rahner did. Rahner's *Seinsfrage* is a real help for materialism and concretism. To my mind, it is the seed and compass (guide or leitmotiv) of Metz's political theology. We already mentioned above that the transcendental experience of grace occurs in one's quest for self-knowledge and leads to selflessness. Thus, in stating here that the *Seinsfrage* (question for being or self-knowledge) is the

¹⁰⁹ Anne E. Carr, *The Theological Method of Karl Rahner*, 16.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 17.

seed of human suffering, I mean this: suffering coming from one's sinful attitudes and actions against others is the result of one's failure to take seriously the *Seinsfrage* or one's evasion from the transcendental experience through which one faces this question. When one adequately experiences transcendence, which is the quest for self-understanding, one realizes oneself as a being necessarily related to others. Thereby she sees others not as objects or means for egoistic realization but as subjects who deserve their own realization. Therefore, one becomes aware of the necessity of co-realization with others. The *Seinsfrage* is its (Metz's political theology's) compass because it is from the experience of grace that one is pushed to political and social commitment for others: with the question of being for self-knowledge, one realizes oneself as the event of God's love. Thus, one is moved to respond to God's love by love. As Rahner rightly points out, the love for God that fills one from such an experience of self implies one love for others. One's socio-political engagement for others through active love becomes the concrete manifestation of one's love for God.¹¹¹

Indeed, the *Leidensfrage* (the question of massive and systematic suffering in the world) is worthy of our humanity. But to my mind, this massive and systematic suffering is precisely due to our misunderstanding of human beings (self and neighbors): human suffering resulting from moral evil is due to our failure to face and answer the question of being (God, self, and neighbor) adequately. The question of self leads us to know who we are as graced by God. Our graced humanity teaches us the divinized character of every human person, a call to respect human dignity. Thus, a good quest for understanding and addressing people's suffering requires examining our assumption of transcendence. Our understanding of being [beings and Being] is the key to the *Leidensfrage*. It is the root, the "why" of human caused suffering: how we understand

¹¹¹ Cf. Rahner, "Reflections on the Unity of the Love of Neighbour and the Love of God," 247.

self and neighbors opens our minds to why suffering due to moral evil exists and mistreats people. Not all misery in the world indeed results from people's immoral actions. But I emphasize the suffering resulting from people's evil actions precisely in reaction to the main reason for Metz's criticism: the Holocaust, which resulted from people's immoral actions. The Nazis sinfully denied or rejected the humanity of Jewish people: their understanding of humanity was limited to themselves to the detriment of Jews, who became the mere instruments of the Nazis' egoistic self-fulfillment.

To consider the *Seinsfrage* as the key to the *Leidensfrage* is crucial for me because of the reason why the *Seinsfrage* is viewed as an inadequate starting point. The main reason, at least for Metz, is that such an approach does not take history seriously, as we mentioned above. Its historical aspect seems idealistic, not concrete. Indeed, let us remember that despite Metz's admiration for Rahner's theology as the best reflection of his time for the good of people, his (Metz's) disappointment about this theology is Rahner's lack of mentioning the evil of Auschwitz.¹¹² This lack pushed Metz to prefer a theological-anthropological reflection that starts from the *Leidensfrage*.

In my view, to omit to mention concrete historical sufferings is not a question of starting point as such but a problem of inclusion. Fortunately, Rahner's thought involves humanity's history without necessarily pointing out the singular cases of sufferings in the world, especially the one of Auschwitz at stake in Metz's critique. Thus, the fact that Rahner did not mention any particular cases of human suffering does not prove that his theology is void of human history. Rahner's intellectual and pastoral fight for universal salvation is also a historical aspect of his thought. The mutual love that his thought promotes through the love of God and neighbor is a value that

¹¹² Metz and Moltmann, *Faith and the Future*, 40.

constitutes an efficient remedy to the suffering people inflict on each other. Therefore, to start with the analysis of the question about being does not mean that human history is not taken seriously.

Further, though mentioning cases of human suffering can sensitize people and express the author's solidarity with the victims (which is very important in promoting human dignity), it does not remediate the already happened evil itself and its inflicted pain. Nor does it help prevent other eventual evil. Rather, proposing a reflection that raises awareness of who a human is can help avoid immoral actions. To suggest a thought that presents every human person as a being graced with inalienable dignity – as Rahner does through his emphasis on the uncreated grace – is a crucial thought that illuminates our understanding of each person as deserving respect and freedom with all their human rights (to life, to talk, work, etc.). Thus, in my eyes, the socio-political evil results from the sinful denial of the humanness of the victims by their executioners or perpetrators. For instance, the main human sufferings that our humanity underwent throughout the ages can be summarized into the following events: Black slavery (15th-19th centuries)¹¹³, the Holocaust mentioned by Metz (1933-1945), racism and lynching (19th century up to now), women's exploitation and marginalization (present situation), etc.

All of these historical evils of human sufferings are the results of people's failure to adequately answer the question of being: for the first one (Black slavery), White people ended up conceiving human ontology (being) as reduced to *being* White: if you are not White, then you are not human. Instead, you are an animal and consequently deserve to be threatened as an animal or object that can be sold, mistreated, or killed unjustly. Or if you are human at all, then you are less human and are underestimated by the superhumans (White people: White supremacy). Even their (White people's) understanding of the absolute Being (God) as their God was disconnected from the belief

¹¹³ See Jeremy Black, *A Brief History of Slavery: A New Global History* (Philadelphia: Running Press Book Publishers, 2011), 2.

that, as the Creator of all, the same God is also Black people's God. The same sinful denial applies to all the above problems, especially women's marginalization: it is a failure of men to adequately answer the question of being. They ended up with a masculinized and reduced conception of being (Masculine superiority over feminine; the Absolute Being [God] as Masculine: Father), which denies or underestimates women's humanity.¹¹⁴ Consequently, men egoistically consider themselves more human *than* or superior *to* women.

If it is true that human caused suffering is due to our failure to understand being [self, God, and neighbor] and that to understand being is something that depends on our assumption of transcendence, which is the question of being itself, it becomes self-evident that the analysis of the *Seinsfrage* is the adequate starting point for our fight against human sufferings. In the third chapter, Rahner's understanding of being (Self, God, and Neighbor) will precisely help us propose solutions for addressing issues (racism and women marginalization) that resulted from humanity's distortion of being.

To be in solidarity with the victims of the dehumanizing catastrophes of humanity is noble and exalting. We truly recognize this merit of Metz's thought. But to understand well who we are as human beings - and so others- is more humanizing than merely to be in solidarity with the victims: to my mind, we can prevent eventual new victims by understanding who a human person is. Such knowledge is possible if we take the question of understanding our humanity through both the transcendental and historical experience of grace seriously. And this is what Rahner tries to do and invites people to do instead of evading such an experience. His transcendental method is not merely for the sake of ontological reflection but for an ontological revalorization of human persons. Thus, Rahner does not explicitly start with the *Leidensfrage* but surely does so implicitly and works in

¹¹⁴ Let us mention that the belief in God as Father itself is not a problem as such but the oppressive domination and marginalization its occasions.

the direction of Metz's preoccupation. Metz himself recognizes the following merits of Rahner's transcendental theology: its effort for the liberation of the subject, its multi-dimensional character, its adequacy with its time, its concreteness for life, etc.¹¹⁵

In brief, as usual, Rahner does not adopt a dualistic attitude in his thought about transcendence and history. On the contrary, he unifies and presents them as necessary characteristics of any human person. And regarding the agonizing metaphysical method in his time, Rahner went beyond the criticism against metaphysics and tried to show its utility through its acceptable use: metaphysical/transcendental experience, that is, the intellectual movement or activity of the human spirit, does not merely end with the limits of human reason. It helps transcend those limits. Rahner's view is opposite to Kant's position. Indeed, while the latter argues the boundary of the human spirit to know God, Rahner argues that we can go beyond our limit to know God precisely by becoming aware of that limit.¹¹⁶ Transcendence helps us understand and correctly assume history. This statement has somehow been illustrated in the first chapter: through one's transcendental experience, one realizes oneself as a free person. This freedom is properly assumed in history as a responsibility toward others only because of the experience from which one discovered such a characteristic of their identity.

After addressing the question of the starting point with our preferential option for the *Seinsfrage*, we must recognize the mutual necessity of the distinct methods of Rahner and Metz to render justice to each of them. We can proceed in reconsidering the preference of each of these two great theologians for transcendence or history as follows: from both Metz's above statement, which presents history as the ground/*a priori* condition of human transcendence, and Rahner's

¹¹⁵ Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 203–4.

¹¹⁶ Cf. Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 31-34.

above affirmation on the involvement of the categorical experience in human transcendental experience, we can say, with Rahner, that there is no contradiction as such between them, despite their different starting points. It means that both (Rahner and Metz) have a joint agreement which is the twofold condition of human knowledge: transcendence and history. The difference between them is that without excluding any of these dimensions, each of them (Rahner and Metz) emphasizes one aspect as the *a priori* condition of human reflection. Therefore, I dare to assert that transcendence and history are the *co-a priori conditions* of theological-anthropological reflection. And they are *co-a priori conditions* not in a mere juxtaposing way but in a mutual conditioning way.¹¹⁷ Their mutual conditioning is that transcendental experience (Rahner) always happens in history (Metz). On the other hand, categorical experiences (Metz) are never isolated from or can never happen outside the transcendental experience (Rahner). Thus, transcendence and history are distinct, but at the same time, they are one by the fact that they are all human existentials permeating and sustaining each other.

Therefore, a historical or transcendental starting point is just a preferential option that does not contradict the common project of a more humanized world. For this very reason, my option for Rahner's starting point of the *Seinsfrage* is a preference. Such an option is not arbitrary but meaningful and adequate for the reasons below.

From my viewpoint, the foundation of Rahner's theological anthropology on human's transcendental experience of grace is a solid ground because it is based on an unbreakable and inalienable element of human existence. Indeed, as we quoted in the first chapter, nature is "the permanent structure or principle of a being."¹¹⁸ And our nature is God's grace, "the ontological

¹¹⁷ Rahner, "Transcendental Theology," 1749.

¹¹⁸ Declan Marmion and Mary E. Hines, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, Cambridge Companions to Religion (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), xiv.

constitutive” element of who we are. Therefore, for our concrete situation to be well understood and properly faced, we need to understand who we are, as I said above. And that quest of knowing who we are cannot directly start from a mere historical concrete situation isolated from our inner question of that very situation. We are made in such a way that we cannot experience our concrete existence without the involvement of our transcendence as its ground and guide and vice-versa. Our transcendental experience is always in the concrete situation of loving or hating our neighbor. We can never shut off our transcendence during our categorical experiences. Whenever we are questioning even the concrete situation of our life, we are already experiencing transcendence. For in Rahner’s mind, our question about being is implied in every question and, therefore, in the question of our historical situation.¹¹⁹

However, Metz’s remark remains pertinent because experiencing transcendence in the questioning about our concrete situation seems, in Metz’s mind, to be different from experiencing transcendence in the search for being. But precisely, here is where Metz apparently misunderstands Rahner. For Rahner, even in questioning our concrete situation, we implicitly question being. Because in examining our historical situation, our quest aims to understand why we are going through such a situation to improve or overcome it if necessary. And this very questioning about the “why” is already, in Rahner’s view, the experience of transcendence. It is appropriately through the mediation of that very concrete situation that we experience our transcendence at that moment.

Further, we can never reach an adequate answer to our historical situation unless we realize that we should have started from the absolute origin of ourselves and our concrete situation itself. This view is far from mere abstract speculation. If we take ourselves seriously as the result of God’s loving and free self-communication, it will become clear in our mind that we will never

¹¹⁹ Carr, *The Theological Method of Karl Rahner*, 25.

start our journey toward the understanding of our situation, whatever ontic or ontological, unless we know who we are as the “event of God’s self-communication.” An effect cannot be adequately understood and mastered unless its cause is known. At least, its cause should be apprehended, if not “pre-apprehended.”¹²⁰ Such apprehension or pre-apprehension is always the keystone to piercing the mystery of our historical situation. Thus, ourselves, our historical situation, and the world in which we live – all these – are the effects of God (their quasi-formal cause). Consequently, we can never correctly understand them (these effects) unless our quest for understanding them is grounded (consciously or “anonymously”) in Godself. We can have the possibility to positively change our situation only if we know who we are and the permanent vocation addressed to us by the one from whom we gratuitously receive our existence: whenever we start any investigation for our historical fulfillment, we implicitly start a quest about being (ourselves, others, and Godself).

Suppose we are right that Metz misunderstands Rahner; his (Metz’s) misunderstanding can be perceived through his (Metz’s) view on the “human quest for being” and his understanding of the human person. His methodological option of starting the theological-anthropological reflection by analyzing the “concrete situation of man’s [human’s] being-in-the-world”¹²¹ is based on his views on those two elements: (1) He considers as an “abstract” approach “human quest for being and “Being itself” from which Rahner’s opts to start.¹²² (2) He “views man’s *a priori* constitution in terms of shared being in a shared world.”¹²³ It means that being in a relationship with other human beings and with the world are the characteristics Metz considers as the *a priori* constitution of humankind. And as such, Metz’s approach is crucial because it emphasizes the concreteness of one’s experience of God.

¹²⁰ Cf. Rahner, *Spirit in the World*, 143; Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 33.

¹²¹ Roger Dick Johns, *Man in the World: The Political Theology of Johannes Baptist Metz*, 74.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 80.

However, Rahner's *a priori* constitution of humankind seems more accurate to me. Indeed, Rahner views man's *a priori* constitution in terms of Godself-offering, God's grace/Godself.¹²⁴ And this is more accurate for me in consideration of Rahner's fundamental principle of every being and entity (world and human beings) that exist as the result of God's self-giving. This principle testifies to the Church's teaching of God as the Creator of the world and humanity. Thus, even the elements of Metz's *a priori* constitution of mankind (shared-being and shared-world) are also from God's self-giving or the effects of God's grace. Consequently, they have God as their *a priori* constitution. I do not deny the importance of the "practical primacy" of history that Charles Taylor rightly supports compared to the "metaphysical primacy" of God.¹²⁵ My emphasis on God as the *a priori* constitution of history and human beings holds its justification in the fundamental principle of God's self-communication that grounds the whole theological-anthropological reflection. For this reason, it sounds more reasonable to keep Rahner's starting point. And starting with the human question of being is simultaneous to beginning with "human's concrete history" because *human history*, which involves that "concrete history," is not merely empirical history¹²⁶: "humanity's concrete history" is only one dimension of the *whole* "*human history*." Based on this holistic view of human history as a history in and beyond the world (history of man as the unity of matter and spirit), human beings' concrete and transcendental experiences are never separated. Therefore, we can support with conviction that Rahner's transcendental approach necessarily and simultaneously touches concrete human situations.

¹²⁴ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 116.

¹²⁵ For the importance of the practical primacy, see the following writings of Taylor. *Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989; "A Catholic Modernity?" In *Dilemmas and Connections*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011: 167-187; and "Disenchantment-Reenchantment." In *Dilemmas and Connections*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011: 287-302.

¹²⁶ Karl Rahner and Gerald A. McCool, *A Rahner Reader* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 48.

Ultimately, we state that as long as Rahner's so-called "abstract approach" involves one's concrete historical engagement, there is no need to change his starting point. What matters is its impact on one's life in the "shared-world." Thus, to begin from the human concrete historical situation is just one possibility; to start with one's transcendental experience is another. The most important thing is the concrete historical engagement of a person in the process of one's experience of transcendence (grace). And for me, Rahner's approach – however it may be qualified as "transcendental or abstract" – always involves such engagement in terms of one's commitment.

In developing all the above subsections, our aim was not merely to defend Rahner's approach. Instead, we aimed to demonstrate its adequacy. The context of his thought and the necessity of the human question about being has been discussed as the reason for adopting such an approach. However, we need to consider the interpersonal aspect of the subject's transcendental experience as part of this experience to corroborate the involvement of history in such an experience.

II.2. Interpersonal Aspect

Though Rahner conceives the transcendental experience of self as an individual, he affirms that the "only way in which man [human] achieves self-realization is through encounters with his fellow man [human], a fellow who is rendered present to his experience in knowledge and love in the course of his personal life."¹²⁷ Therefore, this experience has an interpersonal aspect.

If Rahner's above affirmation is taken seriously, then the subject's quest for being has to be understood holistically, with the interpersonal relationship as its component. Indeed, if oneself-realization occurs through one's transcendental experience of grace and of God, and if one's encounter with one's fellow humans is the only way through which one realizes oneself, it follows

¹²⁷ Karl Rahner, "Experience of Self and Experience of God," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 3, trans. David Bourke (New York: Seabury, 1975), 127; See also Karl Rahner, "Reflections on the Unity of the Love of Neighbour and the Love of God," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 6, trans. Karl-H. and Boniface Kruger (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1961), 243.

that the interpersonal relationships that emerge from such encounter constitute a dimension of the transcendental experience itself. If it is true that thinking ensures me of my existence and if it is true that I exist only because others exist,¹²⁸ then I dare to say that I experience transcendence only because the others exist and condition my own existence by theirs. Consequently, my identity requires recognition by others.¹²⁹

Therefore, we can affirm with conviction that in Rahner's perspective, the subject who experiences grace relates to concrete human persons. The others already exist in the very moment of the subject's experience. They are co-existent with her and mediate this experience not as mediating objects but as persons with their inalienable dignity. Consequently, there is a co-realization¹³⁰ of subjects through each or a subject's transcendental experience of grace.

Rahner conceives a human person as "both an individual personal subject and at the same time a social being."¹³¹ His account avoids any reducing insinuation of a human person. On the one hand, he avoids reducing the individual to the community. On the other hand, he highlights the impossibility of being a person without others.¹³² Thus, when Rahner starts his anthropological reflection on the subject's experience of transcendence, he wants this transcendence to be "the condition of possibility for a subject being present to himself [herself] and just as basically and originally being present to another *subject*. But for a subject present to himself to affirm freely vis-à-vis another subject means ultimately to love."¹³³ Definitively, the subject's transcendental experience of grace leads her to love other people through concrete engagement.

¹²⁸ Theo Sundermeier, *The Individual and Community in African Traditional Religions* (Hamburg: Lit, 1998), 17.

¹²⁹ Cf. Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1992), 45.

¹³⁰ Cf. Bernard Joseph Francis Lonergan, "The Mediation of Christ in Prayer," in *Philosophical and Theological Papers, 1958-1964*, ed. Robert C. Croken, Frederick E. Crowe, and Robert M. Doran, *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan 6* (Toronto Buffalo London: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 174-82.

¹³¹ Rahner, "Person," in *Encyclopedia of Theology: The Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, ed., 1224.

¹³² Cf. Rahner, "Person," 1224. Gender inclusion made.

¹³³ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 65. Gender inclusion made.

II.3. Historical Engagement

From the experience of grace, the subject commits herself in time and space to the members of her community and contributes to the world's transformation for the well-being of the people with whom she shares a common life in a single sphere of human existence.¹³⁴ In this way, the subject manifests the fruit of her experience of grace through historical engagement. Indeed, the experience of grace "determines all the historical dimensions of man [humankind] as subject."¹³⁵ Once one realizes oneself and others as essentially graced persons, one's vision and attitudes toward others positively change. One's love for others in society is the leitmotif of such attitudes: love pushes a person to moral actions. This love, as we said, is the fruit of our experience of grace, an experience from which we henceforth know ourselves to be graced-human persons. Who we are as humans becomes manifest through what we do: our actions confirm our identity. In this sense, a person's love of neighbor expresses her genuine humanity: the person's self-understanding becomes actual in the act of loving communication with others.¹³⁶ Thus, through the experience of grace, one's concrete life is the moment of free, responsible decision about particular things to do here and now and hence about oneself and others.¹³⁷ Since one's actions confirm who one is, one expresses oneself as a graced person through them. Therefore, when Rahner argues that the transcendental quest of being is for one's self-realization, he means that one's self-realization aimed at the transcendental experience is only possible through one's moral actions in society.

Further, in addition to helping us prevent new victims of our immoral actions, our understanding of who a human being *is* through the transcendental experience of grace will also

¹³⁴ Karl Rahner, "The Function of the Church as a Critic of Society," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 12, trans. David Bourke (New York: The Seabury Press, 1974), 238.

¹³⁵ Rahner, "Person," 1222.

¹³⁶ Karl Rahner, "Reflections on the Unity of the Love of Neighbour and the Love of God," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 6, trans. Karl-H. and Boniface Kruger (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1961), 242.

¹³⁷ Rahner, "Person," 1222.

help us re-humanize those who are already the victims of our egoistic conception of humanity. Metz's "solidarity with the victims" stands for such re-humanization. Here is where Rahner's "transcendental theology" and Metz's political theology appear more relevant in their mutual complementarity. Thus, we get a more accurate and complete approach when we unify Rahner and Metz by reconsidering the aspect that each of them emphasizes.¹³⁸

The discussion in our second chapter was about the dialectic of transcendence and history. We argued that though it starts by analyzing the subject's transcendental experience of grace, Rahner's approach does not exclude human history. Rahner only emphasizes the intangible aspect of this experience to posit a solid ground of human existence and experiences. Indeed, transcendence penetrates all empirical experiences. A person's transcendental experience of grace is the experience through which the Holy Spirit leads the person to selflessness and will for good. It leads one to commit herself to others. Therefore, we consider Metz's critique of Rahner's method as a call to emphasize the concrete human situation. There is no contradiction between Rahner's *transcendental* and Metz's *historical* approaches: transcendence and history are the twofold moments of each of their methods, with each other's preferential emphasis on one of them. Consequently, there is no need to change Rahner's starting point of the subject's quest for self-knowledge. Instead, I think that such an approach, if appropriately assumed, might help us not only face the issue of human suffering but, more crucially, prevent or at least diminish suffering. In short, the transcendental experience of grace involves human history because it necessitates the subject's relationship with others, inspires concrete decisions and leads to genuine behavior and

¹³⁸ In the last chapter of our reflection, more factual content will be given and developed about one's relationship with others and one's moral actions in society through dignifying or humanizing attitudes and actions.

actions as the subject's concrete commitment. Thus, the approach through which Rahner analyses this experience is holistic and tries to balance transcendence/history and spirituality/praxis.¹³⁹

Fortunately, Rahner's transcendental theology of grace remains useful for our contemporary world. We just have to use it contextually and adequately to address/engage the issues of our time. We can do so by applying the core elements of Rahner's thought to concrete contemporary problems. This application is what we will do in the third and last chapter to promote human dignity by suggesting solutions to racism and women's marginalization.

¹³⁹ Gustavo Gutiérrez et al., *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation*, 2. print (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973), 3–13.

CHAPTER III. POSSIBLE CONCRETE USE OF RAHNER'S THEOLOGY OF GRACE FOR HUMAN DIGNITY TODAY

This last chapter of our reflection applies our thesis to racism and women's marginalization. Since, for Rahner, every theology needs to be a theology of symbol to be complete and understandable,¹⁴⁰ we will first discuss the relevance of a symbol to Rahner's theology of grace. Then, we will apply the main points argued from chapters 1 and 2 up to the first section of this third chapter. For this reason, we will use some Rahnerian key ideas to corroborate our thesis that *Rahner's theology of grace is useful for promoting human dignity*. Those key ideas are the following: human beings as God's symbols, the universality and inalienability of uncreated grace, freedom as self-disposal/commitment, and the unity of love of God and love of neighbor. Thus, we will use these core elements as the framework of our defense of human dignity.

In the second chapter of our reflection, we announced that Rahner's understanding of self, God, and neighbor would help us, in this third chapter, propose solutions for addressing the issues of racism and women's marginalization. Therefore, these three elements will be crucial objects of our reflection throughout the following sections: The Anthropological Relevance of Symbol to the Rahnerian Theology of Grace, Humanity's Adequate Response to God and Human Flourishing, and Uncreated Grace for Human Dignity.

III.1. The Anthropological Relevance of Symbol for the Rahnerian Theology of Grace

In the first chapter, we maintained that human beings symbolize God's presence outside the divine realm in the sense of their participation in God's being. In this last chapter, we highlight the symbol's significance in Rahner's theology of grace. From this perspective, we will briefly analyze Rahner's conception of a symbol to grasp its anthropological implications.

¹⁴⁰ See Karl Rahner, "The Theology of the Symbol," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 4, trans. K Smyth (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 235.

From a general viewpoint, Rahner's conception of the symbol is that "all beings are by their nature symbolic because they necessarily 'express' themselves to attain their own nature."¹⁴¹ For me, we can draw an anthropological relevance from this general symbolism if we apply it to human beings. Indeed, as argued in the first chapter, Rahner rightly thinks that God's divinizing self-communication graces human nature. Thus, as God's symbols, human beings share the "*analogia entis*" with God.¹⁴² In this perspective, when we consider Rahner's above statement of the symbol, we can deduce that in analogically sharing God's being, the self-realization of human beings in God is what they aim or are called to attain. Of course, this is not to be understood as a conflation of God (the divine) to humans (the human). Instead, it means that human beings have been gratuitously bestowed with the capacity to analogically share in God's own being. We want to point out that human beings are God's real symbols, not God's mere signs.¹⁴³ Further, human beings also analogically share with God's essence because "symbol strictly speaking (symbolic reality) is the self-realization of a being in the other, which is constitutive of its essence."¹⁴⁴ Indeed, if God's free self-communication is the innermost constitutive element of human beings,¹⁴⁵ then we can affirm that human beings analogically share in God's essence. The ultimate point of this symbolism of essence is this: if God's free self-communication is the innermost constitutive element of human beings,¹⁴⁶ and if a symbol corresponds to "the self-realization of a being in the other, which is constitutive of its essence," then it becomes evident that the self-realization of a human being is possible only in God.

¹⁴¹ Rahner, "The Theology of the Symbol," 224.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 235.

¹⁴³ See the definition of "Realsymbol" in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, xv.

¹⁴⁴ Rahner, "The Theology of the Symbol," 234.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 116.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*

However, we have to recognize the ambiguity of this symbolism because of the clear distinction and the requirement that we do not confuse the divine and human natures and essences. Therefore, we need a prototype of humanity as the reality that Godself communication creates. In this sense, Christ's humanity is the reality that expresses this view of a human person as God's symbol in its perfect way. Indeed, Christ is "the absolute symbol of God in the world, filled as nothing else can be with what is symbolized."¹⁴⁷ Whoever sees Him sees the Father (John 14:9). He does not share the Father's nature and essence in an analogical way as we do. In symbolizing God in the world, he shares God's true nature and essence. At the same time, he remains truly human. Thus, there is a perfect communication of the divine to the human in him. The consequent anthropological relevance of that perfect communication is the divinization of our humanity. The God-human divinizes human beings.

Human beings as God's real symbols and the divinized human nature are the two core elements that we can retain from Rahner's conception of symbol in the theological-anthropological sense. As other core elements discussed in the first two chapters, these two elements will sustain our argument for the promotion of human dignity.

All the above points to the self-realization of the human person *in* God. And since this self-realization requires one's adequate response to God, let us properly discuss this adequate response to show its utility for human dignity.

III.2. Humanity's Adequate Response to God and Human Flourishing

In the first chapter, we discussed the experience of human transcendence and freedom as the experience of God's grace. Here, we want to illustrate a person's adequate response to that grace for self-realization. It means that, though the Christian anthropological message is that God's self-

¹⁴⁷ Rahner, "The Theology of the Symbol," 236.

giving is our unmerited constituent, we must not and cannot “deny that our own historical situation is such that we have the obligation if, indeed, we are historical beings, to listen to this message, and to agree with it or reject it explicitly and responsibly.”¹⁴⁸ Thus, to accept or reject God’s self-giving to us is a person’s response to God. However, human flourishing, for which God offers such a gracious gift, is possible only if one’s response is adequate. And since one’s response to God is the expression of one’s freedom, we want to give now factual content to a person’s assumption of freedom as promised in the first chapter.

We remind that the transcendental experience of freedom is the result of the self-communication of God to humankind and that one discovers oneself as a free person through the transcendental experience of self. Since this self-communication of God to humanity is the essential constituent of human beings, it becomes self-evident that a person’s rejection of God is the self-rejection/denial of the person. Such a rejection is opposed to who we are as relational beings.¹⁴⁹ Since this denial is an act of freedom, Rahner affirms “the real possibility of an absolute contradiction in freedom.”¹⁵⁰ The person is only free if she disposes herself to God. And since freedom is for the fulfillment/realization of a person, it follows that the self-disposal of a person to God is precisely the fulfillment of that person.

God is not a hindrance to our freedom: “The nearer one comes to him, the more real one becomes; the more he [God] grows in and before one, the more independent one becomes oneself.”¹⁵¹ It means that we do not lose our freedom in depending on God. Our humanity is not diminished by God when we accept God in disposing ourselves to God. Instead, we become really free and human by depending on God. We authenticate our freedom by giving it its original

¹⁴⁸ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 117.

¹⁴⁹ The next subsection will elaborate the understanding of self as a relational being.

¹⁵⁰ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 99.

¹⁵¹ Karl Rahner, “The Eternal Significance of the Humanity of Jesus for Our Relationship with God,” in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 3, trans. K-H & B Kruger (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 40.

essence. If freedom is a permanent constituent of our human nature,¹⁵² and if our freedom is a gift resulting from God's free and forgiving self-offering to us (as we demonstrated in the first chapter), it means that it is only in disposing ourselves to God that we remain or become fully free human persons. Therefore, it becomes clear that human flourishing is possible only in terms of humans' relation to God through humans' disposal of self to God, who communicates Godself to them first. This self-disposal to God is a response to that self-communication of God to us. It (the self-disposal of humans to God) corresponds to human flourishing because the aim of that self-communication of God is precisely for our own fulfillment.¹⁵³ What concrete content is there for this self-disposal to God? The following paragraphs are an attempt to answer this crucial question.

One's self-disposal to God has its social aspect, which is based on the universality of uncreated grace. As always offered to humanity, grace is our common gift from God. It means that all people (regardless of social status, skin color, age, country, ethnic group, etc.) share the same graced nature of humanity. Consequently, our communion with other people corresponds to our fulfillment. This shared graced human nature is crucial to the extent that it relates us to everybody beyond our differences. Once those who do not believe in God or are not Christian adopt attitudes and accomplish actions that dignify our common graced humanity, they precisely achieve their fulfillment through those attitudes and actions. In the same way, the believers' decision to freely dispose themselves to God is an inner decision that needs an external manifestation in the social environment. Therefore, one's self-disposal to one's neighbor, who is God's image, precisely constitutes the social and interpersonal dimension of one's self-disposal to God. And this is not contrary to one's own freedom. In the same way that one's self-disposal to God does not hinder

¹⁵² Karl Rahner, "Theology of Freedom," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 6, trans. K-H & B Kruger (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 184.

¹⁵³ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 454–55.

one's freedom but authenticates it, we do not lose our liberty in accepting others and disposing of ourselves to them. In this view, the social constraint that apparently limits one's own freedom for other persons in society is not a hindrance as such.

The respect of other persons' freedom in the assumption of our own freedom is to be understood no longer as a constraint but as the door to real freedom. Our self-disposal to others – in respecting their freedom, for instance – guarantees our own freedom. Concretely, the socio-political rules of our cities are for the well-being of all: the common good. In this sense, one's self-disposal to others in society is concretized by the observance of the laws. If one lives one's freedom in a self-centered way without considering the laws that guarantee the freedom of others, one hinders one's own freedom by that very fact. This is illustrated by the sanctions that follow when one transgresses the laws. On the other hand, one guarantees one's own freedom when one remains respectful of the laws for the common well-being of the members of her city.

The authentic motive of one's self-disposal is love. Though no one can escape God's self-offering to humanity, the response to it is always out of one's free love. In fact, it is a loving response to God who loved us first: it is a response to love by love. In other words, one's self-disposal to God as one's adequate response is due to one's love for God. If the self-disposal to God requires one's self-disposal to her fellow human persons, it follows that one's love for God leads to one's love for others. This love is so crucial that even beyond the religious view, love helps for genuine observance of the law in society. The one who loves others in society does not observe the law because of the fear of sanctions. The person's observance of the law is motivated by the love of those for whom she observes the law. Thus, love merits our attention for promoting human dignity in a harmonious relationship.

III.2.1. Love and Rahner's Conception of Self, God, and Others

In the second section of the first chapter, we argued that it is out of God's free love that God communicated Godself to us. In the second section of our second chapter, we said, with Rahner, that love results from one's experience of grace. And through the above previous paragraphs of this second section of this chapter, our discussion of human flourishing necessarily led us to love. Thus, there is no doubt about the importance of love in engaging any difficulties that affect our humanity. Therefore, when we announced, in the second chapter, that Rahner's understanding of self, God, and neighbor will help us propose solutions to address racism and women's marginalization, we highly aimed at love as the value that sustains the relationship between self, God, and neighbor. In the following paragraphs, we will briefly¹⁵⁴ present Rahner's understanding of self, God, and neighbor to point out their common element that helps for a harmonized and humanized world.

The self refers to a subject as a person. And Rahner understands a person as always related to God: a human person is "a being who has to do with God."¹⁵⁵ This relationship is fundamental for a human person's self-understanding because, as we explained in the first chapter, humankind is the event of God's self-communication. Rahner's statement that a human person has to do with God is the coherent consequence of the inescapability of grace from human nature. The second dimension of self-understanding is that a human person "is both an individual personal subject with a unique history of freedom for which no one else can deputize and at the same time a social being who can only have a history in the unity of the one humanity."¹⁵⁶ The *unity of one* humanity is a crucial point for the collective realization of human persons. But it has to be grounded on the

¹⁵⁴ In fact, Rahner's understanding of self, God, and neighbor somehow already appears in all the previous chapters. Thus, we will not need to make a long development of these themes. What is important is the relational character of beings (self, God, and neighbor) they help us understand.

¹⁵⁵ Rahner, "Person," 1221.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 1224.

concrete human persons who form that unity. In brief, Rahner's understanding of self relates to God and other human persons.

God is also understood as relational. Here, we have to point out the trinitarian relationship as a relationship based on one of the three divine persons (the Father) as the starting point of the divine relationship.¹⁵⁷ This starting point is the most adequate one because it grounds the thought on a concrete distinct divine person from whom the common divinity is shared: God the Father. It is the action of a concrete divine person that grounds the divine loving relationship, and then the actions of each divine person justify, sustain, and guarantee the common divinity.¹⁵⁸ The significant point for us is that it is the actions of each one of us as concrete human persons that justify, sustain, and guarantee our common humanity.

Others refer to both the absolute Other (God) and one's fellow human persons. On the hand, the absolute Other (God) is the Creator of human beings. In this sense, the self as a human person's realization is possible only in God. On the other hand, the other corresponds to the subject's fellow human persons. The Christian term for the other is the neighbor. The neighbor is another subject distinct from the self. This other subject is the mediating subject who helps a person understand herself as a subject: "the known personal Thou is the mediation, the 'being-within-oneself' of the subject."¹⁵⁹ But we always have to remember that the other (neighbor) who mediates the self is not less than the self: both are human persons. The other is another subject through whom the self-knowledge and self-realization of a subject in God are categorically possible.

The point of the Rahnerian understanding of self, God, and neighbor is that we are relational beings, just like God, our Creator, is relational. This relation is based on love, which motivates

¹⁵⁷ See Karl Rahner, "Theos in the New Testament," 125–48.

¹⁵⁸ More details will be given on this topic in the paragraphs that follow.

¹⁵⁹ Rahner, "Reflections on the Unity of the Love of Neighbour and the Love of God," 241.

one's self-offering to others so that one may realize and safeguard one's own nature through a co-fulfillment with others in communion. Therefore, love is the cornerstone of our relationship with others. In this perspective, Rahner's understanding of the love of neighbor as the love of God¹⁶⁰ is crucial for our contemporary secularized world in which not everybody is Christian or believes in God. In fact, the Scriptures reveal the love of God and the love of neighbor as two interwoven commandments (see Mt 22:39 and Mk 12:31). But Rahner adequately interprets them as identical loves or the faces of one coin. Consequently, one's love of neighbor is "the primary act of love of God."¹⁶¹ Thus, any person's active love of others— whether the person believes in God or not — is implicitly the expression of the person's natural love of God.

Therefore, the subject's self-disposal to God for self-realization relates to the self-disposal to the neighbor. Consequently, love of God and love of neighbor imply self-disposal to God and neighbor. The adequate explanation of this twofold self-disposal in our secularized world is the following: on the one hand, a Christian or a believer's self-disposal to God for self-realization requires that Christian's or believer's self-disposal to her fellow humans (Christians and non-Christian) in society. We highlight that though God is the goal of one's love for neighbor, the latter is not a mere means to God. The love of neighbor "is itself an act of this love of God itself."¹⁶² On the other hand, we have to understand this dynamism in its reverse (but not contradictory) sense for a non-Christian/unbeliever. The non-believer's self-disposal to others is "anonymously" the person's self-disposal to God. In the same way, her love for others is "anonymously" her love of God. Thus, any moral activity of a non-believer is implicitly the expression of the person's love

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 234.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 246.

¹⁶² Ibid., 236.

and self-disposal to God.¹⁶³ In any of these cases, the love *of* and self-disposal *to* others remain. This is the key to keep in mind when we promote human dignity in today's world.

In this perspective, the flourishing of humanity stressed in the second section is conditioned by mutual love among concrete human persons through the common humanity of believers and unbelievers: the flourishing of a person requires the person's self-offering in love to her fellow humans in such a way that the flourishing is both individual and collective. It is the inalienable and irreducible graced humanity in each one and the whole that flourishes through the concrete historical life of each and all: our active love for others humanizes them and us.

From the Trinitarian perspective of self-disposal, we can learn that this is the key to the flourishing of our shared humanity. The Father communicates his unoriginately divine nature to the two other persons of the Trinity: the Son and the Spirit.¹⁶⁴ This explanation is how Rahner understands God in the New Testament. I highly appreciate it because, contrary to the Latin scholastics, who based their view on the three persons' abstract divinity, Rahner renders the Christian explanation of the Holy Trinity more adequate and intelligible. He points out a concrete person of the Holy Trinity (the Father) as the starting point of the shared divinity. Thus, the unity of the three persons in one divinity becomes possible by the Father's act of communicating his unoriginately divine nature to the Son and the Spirit.

Therefore, although human persons' case is not properly the same, we can analogically state that it is in the self-disposing of each concrete human person to the other persons that our common humanity becomes authentic and reaches its fulfillment. It is not our mere abstract humanity that humanizes us. We have to share that common humanity concretely: self-disposal to other persons.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*,” 239ff.

¹⁶⁴ See Rahner, “Theos in the New Testament,” 128–46.

And this self-disposal's concrete expression is love and respect for others' dignity through moral attitudes and actions that humanize others.

The above explanation does not mean that only the Father disposes himself to the Son and the Holy Spirit. Each of the latter also disposes of self to the others: a mutual self-disposal. But because of the limit of our reflection, we will not develop this mutual self-disposal. Our interest is just to draw profit from one's self-disposal to others for common realization or flourishing. For this reason, we shall be content with the Son's self-disposal to illustrate the historical dimension of the significance of this self-disposal.

Christ is the concrete divine person who humanly revealed the importance of self-giving in interpersonal relationships. His self-disposal is the adequate example we must follow for the realization of our common humanity through self-disposal to others. He disposed himself to both God and the Holy Spirit, who decided to send him on earth for human salvation.¹⁶⁵ Further, he disposed himself to the Father throughout his missionary journey on earth up to the cross: "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23:46). In disposing himself to his Father, he expresses his divine capacity of generous self-offering in the likeness of the Father's generous self-offering to him (eternal generation) and the Holy Spirit (spiration).¹⁶⁶ Thereby, Christ properly assumes and realizes himself as a real divine person: he realized his own divinity. By becoming human, he disposed himself to us by emptying himself for us. Without losing his divinity, he humbled himself for our sake (Cf. Philippians 2). Thus, in giving himself to us for our fulfillment, Christ assumes and realizes himself as a full human being. Christ realized both his divinity and humanity by respectively and simultaneously disposing himself to God and humans.

¹⁶⁵ Saint Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises*, trans. Fleming David L. (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1978), no 102.

¹⁶⁶ Rahner, "Theos in the New Testament," 146.

Although we could not exhaustively discuss Rahner's Trinitarian thought, the above Rahnerian understanding helps us realize that "the Christian faith sees the Trinitarian communion of Father, Son and Holy Spirit as the source of and model for human communion. This communion of persons in one God is marked by profound equality, mutuality, and self-giving in distinctive relationship to one another and to all created reality."¹⁶⁷

In reflecting on one's adequate response to God, the point is that our human flourishing in this world requires the improvement of our relationship with God. It is only in God that we can reach our fulfillment. Since our human flourishing is an urgent necessity on the earth, it becomes crucial to dispose of ourselves to God through our concrete life. We propose this without neglecting that our world is secularized. Thus, the self-disposal to God we propose here is not necessarily in the sense of adhering to a categorical religion. It is one's love and self-disposal to one's fellow human persons. Indeed, we have already mentioned above that this corresponds to the non-believer's "anonymous" self-disposal and love of God.

Further, suppose the graced humanity and human's unthematical experience of grace are well understood. In that case, it is sure that the Holy Spirit works in every human person and directs her to attitudes that humanize others. Precisely, a person's self-disposal to God leads the person to dispose of herself to neighbors. This self-disposal to others helps us transcend the selfishness that grounds our racism and women's marginalization. Indeed, as partners and so subjects, the other deserves respect and consideration. Respect for their dignity is an absolute necessity for the sake of all because we conserve our own dignity only if we respect the dignity of every human person.

Definitively, human flourishing fundamentally lies in the unity-in-difference of self, God, and neighbor. God is the ground of the fulfillment of a person and her neighbors. The neighbor is the

¹⁶⁷ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, "One in Christ Jesus: Toward a Pastoral Response to Women's Concerns," *Origins* 22, no. 29 (December 31, 1992): 496.

subjective mediation of one's experience of God. The only independent being in this threefold relationship is God. Self and neighbor are dependent on God because of what Rahner calls "creatureliness,"¹⁶⁸ whose definition Lennan expresses most clearly as "the enduring dependence of creatures on God."¹⁶⁹ In fact, creatures permanently depend on God to remain authentic. Thus, their dependence on God authenticates and guarantees their freedom. The interhuman relationship of people in their free mutual self-disposal to each other is the concretization of their self-disposal to God. It follows that one's relationship with God and, consequently, with fellow human persons is crucial for promoting human dignity. This promotion passes through a humanizing relationship. Love is the cornerstone on which this relationship is built. And since our message is not merely addressed to Christians and religious believers, it is crucial to take Rahner's equation of love of God and love of neighbor seriously. Thus, we shall remember that the love of neighbor is concomitantly the love of God. In this sense, whoever actively loves others, implicitly loves God and, by doing so, disposes herself to others and implicitly to God.

From my understanding of Rahner's anthropological thought, this humanizing relationship lies in the uncreated grace in virtue of which our humanity is always graced. Indeed, if this humanizing relationship expresses our love of God, who loves us first so that we may love our neighbor, then the love of neighbor is "supported by the loving self-communication of God in the uncreated grace of the Holy Spirit."¹⁷⁰ Thus, the graced humanity is the key to promoting human dignity. As Rahner says, we are graced because of God's uncreated grace, which is never separated from our nature. And because of this inseparability of our human nature from God's uncreated grace, our relationship with God is necessary for our humanness. Further, it is in consideration of the

¹⁶⁸ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 77–78.

¹⁶⁹ Lennan, *Tilling the Church*, 45.

¹⁷⁰ Rahner, "Reflections on the Unity of the Love of Neighbour and the Love of God," 236.

universality of this uncreated grace that, as concrete human persons, we share a common graced humanity. Therefore, it becomes essential to take uncreated grace seriously if we want to promote human dignity inclusively and adequately.

III.3. Uncreated Grace for Human Dignity

Before correctly facing racism and women's marginalization, which affect human dignity, it is good to know what human dignity is in the Rahnerian Christian view. Rahner's first and general meaning of the dignity of a being identifies it (dignity) with the necessary "essential structure" both as already "given" to that being and as a "task" which that beneficiary being has to accomplish.¹⁷¹ I find this first and general meaning adequate and valuable when we apply it to human beings. It is an adequate and useful understanding because it fits what our solution for the overcoming of racism and women's marginalization requires: the consideration of the inalienable character of others' dignity and the consequently required duty of respecting it for the consolidation of one's own dignity by that very task of respecting the dignity of others. Indeed, the "essential structure" of every single and concrete person "demands respect and protection."¹⁷² In this perspective, the dignity of a human person as already given "can never be lost although it can be denied."¹⁷³ A denial that is precisely possible by one's refusal to dispose oneself to God through one self-disposal to others in respecting and protecting their dignity. In fact, since we are proposing Rahner's theology of grace as the solution to promote human dignity, we can see that the dimensions of gift and task we find in Rahner's understanding corroborate well the Church's teaching, which involves grace and human collaboration with it.

¹⁷¹ Karl Rahner, "The Dignity and Freedom of Man," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 2. Translated by K-H Kruger (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 235–36.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 236.

¹⁷³ Daniel T. Pekarske, *Abstracts of Karl Rahner's Theological Investigations 1-23*, Marquette Studies in Theology, no. 31 (Milwaukee, Wis: Marquette University Press, 2002), 48.

The other meanings that Rahner gives to dignity clearly and explicitly point to human dignity. Like the general meaning, all of them are useful for our investigation. But we can contend with some as follow: a). human dignity beyond sexual difference. For Rahner, “the essential dignity of a man [human] consists in the fact that, within a sexually differentiated community in spatio-temporal history, man [woman], by spiritually recognizing himself [herself] and freely identifying himself, can and ought to open himself [herself] (...) to the love in Jesus Christ which communicates God himself [Godself].”¹⁷⁴ This view on human dignity corroborates the historical dimension of Rahner’s thought and goes with what we will propose for addressing our chosen issues: love as the *sine qua non*, genuine, ultimate permeating, and best solution. b) The personal natural human dignity of a person as always related to others. For Rahner, the dignity of a person’s human nature is sustained by the fact that the person as a spirit is always dependent on God, but at the same time, she is free to accept or reject God and others. The person is an individual who is irreducible to the community or someone else. She is concretely situated in history and has a valid existence and an eternal destination and destiny. Therefore, a human person can never be sacrificed in a way that dehumanizes or destroys. But at the same time, the person is a “*community-building person*” in such a way that she reaches only the perfection of her personhood through her openness in love and service for the other persons of her community.¹⁷⁵

The above meanings of human dignity are sufficient for our reflection on human dignity. They touch on what is already said about a human person’s well-being based on her relationship with herself, God, and others. These meanings of human dignity also will sustain what follows.

In the second chapter of our reflection, we tried to demonstrate the adequacy and the concrete historical aspect of Rahner’s theological method. The point was that the analysis of the question

¹⁷⁴ Rahner, “The Dignity and Freedom of Man,” 238. Gender inclusion made.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*,” 239.

about who the human being is helps us understand who we are as human beings. And that it is an adequate starting point for a theological-anthropological reflection. The quintessence of that analysis is that through that crucial question for self-knowledge, we discover ourselves as graced human persons. Now, we want to apply Rahner's thought to our two concrete current historical situations of racism and women's marginalization. Such an application will illustrate our thesis statement about the usefulness of Rahner's theology of grace in promoting human dignity. For this reason, we will consider these core elements of this Rahnerian theology of grace: (1) the question of knowing who a human being is, (2) the inalienability and universality of the uncreated grace [the permanent presence and ongoing communication to all human persons] and consequently our graced humanity, and (3) Godself [giver = gift] as the given divinizing essence or innermost constituent of human nature.

As the fundamental principle of the whole Rahnerian theology (especially of grace), God's self-communication is obviously the basis of the uncreated grace by which every human person gratuitously and inalienably possesses grace. From this understanding, we want to take Rahner's ontological statement of God's self-communication as the ground for the understanding of our humanity which essence is that divine self-communication, an essence that transcends the mere accidental aspects of our humanness. Indeed, "the statement that man as subject is the event of God's self-communication is a statement which refers to absolutely all men [and women], and which expresses an existential of every person."¹⁷⁶ Thus, the statement that humankind "as subject is the event of God's self-communication" is a universal and involving statement that conceives human beings beyond all religious, racial, and sexual differences. It touches the essence of our existence (our humanness guaranteed by God's grace), not its accidents (Black, White, Masculine,

¹⁷⁶ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 127. Gender inclusion added.

Feminine, etc.). For this reason, nobody deserved disrespect, violation of dignity, and underestimation of her humanness. In other words, this divine self-communication dignifies human beings to the extent that nothing and no circumstances can justify racism and women's marginalization. Therefore, if our humanity is graced by the uncreated grace freely offered to all human persons, we can affirm with conviction that our graced humanity is beyond racism.

III.3.1. Graced Humanity Beyond Racism

From our understanding of Rahner's theological anthropology related to grace, we mean by graced humanity the unbreakable unity of grace and human nature in virtue of the *divinizing* self-offering of God to human persons: God's grace is the "essential structure" of human nature as it appears in the above Rahnerian understanding of human dignity. Thus, whenever we talk about humans, we will have in mind that we are talking about human persons created and graced by God in that very act of creation out of God's self-communication to them and also in God's constant self-communication that elevates created human persons above their created nature. This graced humanity is, therefore, the fundamental element on which we base our investigation for the promotion of human dignity. Its divinizing and universal character for human persons allows us to state that our graced humanity stands against racism because of the inseparability of grace from human nature. The inalienability of human dignity is because of the inseparability of this divinizing grace from our nature. In fact, if uncreated grace can never be isolated from us as the essential structure of our nature, then no human person can be denied our common dignity. It is for this reason that racism, which denies or negatively affects the dignity of its victims, is an anthropological problem that we have to face.

I perceive racism as the manifestation of egoistic and erroneous ideology through dehumanizing attitudes and actions whose partisans conceive all other or some other human races as inferior to theirs. Its protagonists' goal is to have social, cultural, political, and economic

dominion over people belonging to the racial groups they conceive as inferior. They justify such dominion precisely by their erroneous and egoistic belief that they are superior to their victims, who consequently deserve “unfair treatment.”¹⁷⁷ This phenomenon has been manifested throughout human history in many different events and places. The worse ones that we can mention are the racism against Black people by White European and American people (slavery, colonization, lynching, and apartheid in South Africa) and the racism against the Jews by Germans (dehumanization and killing of Jews people during the holocaust perpetrated by the Nazis). The first one (racism against Black people) is a persistent phenomenon still occurring in Europe and America.¹⁷⁸ Apart from slavery, other forms of racism against Black people still exist today.

The basic solution to racism¹⁷⁹ is its protagonists’ willingness to take seriously the question of who they are as human beings. From the Rahnerian understanding of self-knowledge, as we have been discussing, that question will surely help the racist to come to the awareness that she can properly understand herself in a reality that is beyond the mere physical aspect of her existence. For a Christian or one who believes in God, this task will be easier than for someone who does not believe in God. Indeed, the Christian or the believer will take God as the horizon of the question about her being, as the Rahnerian analysis of the self-knowledge experience sustains. In this sense, she will ultimately end before God as the very answer to the question of who she is: a being originated by God. In other words, she will realize that she is “the event of God’s self-communication,” which consequently constitute an existential of her being.¹⁸⁰ From this awareness, she will see herself as a divinized human by God’s grace. As a person whose humanity

¹⁷⁷ Chuck Robinson, *Racism* (Philadelphia, PA: Mason Crest, 2017), 11.

¹⁷⁸ See M. Shawn Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being*, Innovations (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 10.

¹⁷⁹ Of course, this question (of who the human being is) the ground of all adequate solution to any anthropological issue, and so also the first solution of women’s marginalization.

¹⁸⁰ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 127.

is graced, she knows herself as a being who is fundamentally in a relationship with God under the grace that graces her humanity. For the one who does not believe in God, her natural capacity to question everything¹⁸¹ will help her realize herself as a being with an unlimited horizon.¹⁸²

Consequently, as we discussed in the first chapter, she will come to the awareness of her transcendence. If she is honest, she will realize that it is not her skin color that sustains her experience through which she realizes herself as a transcendental being but the intellectual faculty of endless questioning about herself. In this perspective, she will not be able to consider any other person as less human merely because of the latter's skin color as long as the other is also *capable* of this experience of endless questioning for self-knowledge and, indeed, *goes* through such an experience. Thus, believers and unbelievers have the capacity of transcendental experience as their supernatural existential: the capacity for communion with God (believer)¹⁸³ or with transcendence (unbeliever), a capacity unmeritedly offered by Godself and so transcends the natural¹⁸⁴ aspect of skin color. Their graced humanity does not allow them to conceive any human being as less human because of the universality and the inseparability of the uncreated grace from their nature. This self-knowledge, which comes from the awareness that we are graced or capable of transcendence, is the fundamental aspect of our identity that corresponds to the above Rahnerian understanding of human dignity as a "giving essential constitutive our nature." As such, it cannot be denied or destroyed by anyone else.

However, in that same understanding of human dignity by Rahner, we find the aspect of human duty: the "essential constitutive" of human nature is a task to be accomplished. Therefore, we have to understand also our humanness as a task that we have to accomplish. And as a task, we have to

¹⁸¹ Which, for Christians, is also God's grace and not natural capacity in the sense of pure natural capacity.

¹⁸² See Anne E. Carr, "Starting with the Human," in *A World of Grace: An Introduction to the Themes and Foundations of Karl Rahner's Theology*, ed. Leo J. O'Donovan (Washington, D.C: Georgetown University Press, 1995), 20.

¹⁸³ Rahner, "The Dignity and Freedom of Man," 240.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 127.

accomplish it (our humanness) as our response to God about what God has already given us. In this perspective, the supernatural existential or the capacity of transcendence is to be understood in terms of our relationship with God or Transcendence. Thus, the supernatural existential or our capacity of transcendence opens the door for more/Transcendent (God). It directs us to a being other than us (God). And in leading us to God (believers) or Transcendence (unbelievers), the supernatural existential established or calls us to establish a relationship with other persons. Indeed, we learn from Rahner that one's love and communion (relationship) with God involves one's love and communion with other human persons. Therefore, others become crucial in the understanding of who we are.

From Rahner's explanation of self-understanding through the experience of transcendence, the following argumentation results: in the experience of transcendence, the self-understanding of a human person is possible only through her fellow human persons.¹⁸⁵ Thus, we understand who we are as persons through others. If we know who we are through our fellow human persons, as Rahner rightly argues, it becomes incoherent to understand the self as superior or more human than others. In contrast, one's understanding of self depends on one's knowledge of others. If we are superior, then others should be superior because our understanding of self as superior relates to who others are. The others are who we are if we come out of ourselves. A concrete formulation of this view is that the racist becomes less human or inferior precisely by conceiving and treating his victims as less human or inferior because who he or she is as human corresponds to who her or his victims are. Consequently, if to be fully human is the real will of the racist, she or he must precisely abandon his or her racist ideology and attitudes or actions to conceive others as full humans. In fact, the racist attitudes and actions does not dehumanize only her victims but

¹⁸⁵ Cf. Rahner, "Experience of Self and Experience of God," 127.

simultaneously the racist herself precisely because such attitudes and actions are not worthy of a genuine human. A person who is fully and genuinely human cannot adopt and accomplish them.

Definitively, Godself as grace offered to humanity is the ground of anti-racism. Because of the offering of Godself to humanity, human nature is graced. The results of that offering are that it renders everybody God's image (*imago Dei*) and bestows in every human person the capacity to be in a relationship with God (*Capax Dei*) whether the person belongs to a religious institution or not. This graced nature is beyond human persons' skin colors: grace, as the innermost constituent of our nature, is our essence. I mean that grace divinizes every human being. This divinized or graced humanity is the essential element of our humanity. To be black or white is just an accidental reality in the sense that it is not meant to and, in fact, cannot affect our graced essence. The skin color does not cancel God's grace in a human person. Thus, no matter the different racial colors, every human person is graced. In the same perspective, Rahner's theology of symbol elevates human beings to the level of the being they symbolize, as mentioned above. This elevation strongly sustains the sacred character of human life. Thus, every single human person (no matter the color of her skin) is a sacred person whose dignity deserves respect and consideration.¹⁸⁶

We successfully respect the dignity of people belonging to racial groups different from ours only by loving them. Therefore, in calling the racists to abandon their racist ideology and attitudes or actions and conceive others as full humans so that they may guarantee their own humanity, what I long for is love. Therefore, love for other people who are racially different from us becomes the ultimate and best solution if we take seriously the question about who we are as human beings.

Racism, as an aberrant conception of our differences in the common humanity, has a parallel misconception (of differences), which is called sexism. The manifestation of the latter corresponds

¹⁸⁶ Of course, this argument of the elevating symbolism involves the case of women: no matter a person's gender, the person is a sacred person. Thus, beyond the sexual difference, women deserve respect and consideration.

to women's marginalization. Thus, to discuss racism without touching on women's marginalization or exploitation is a marginalizing reflection. Therefore, our last subsection will focus on the issue of women's marginalization.

III.3.2. Graced Humanity *Versus* Women's Marginalization

Again, in this last subsection, we keep in mind our above Rahnerian meaning of the graced humanity and consider it to be the basis of our investigation to promote human dignity. Thus, like racism, women's marginalization is also a problem because it also affects human dignity.

Indeed, marginalization is a "process by which a group or individual is denied access to important positions and symbols of economic, religious, or political power within any society."¹⁸⁷ In this sense, the marginalization of women denies women the opportunity to occupy important positions in society's economic, political, and religious institutions. In most of these institutions, this denial is based on men's ideology of superiority over women. This is why we consider it an anthropological problem because it insinuates that women are less human than men or that the latter are more (superior) human than the former. Women's marginalization establishes a hierarchical relationship between men and women, putting the former in a position of decision-making as if men were wiser than women. It is a phenomenon that affects almost all the countries of the world and the Church. Curt Cadorette rightly denounced that "women do not make up half the leadership of any country. Nor do women exercise half of the leadership in the Christian churches, although they almost always represent more than half of its active membership."¹⁸⁸

Many feminists and liberation movements have been fighting against women's marginalization. And "there has been progress over the last decades, but the world is not on track

¹⁸⁷ John Scott, ed., "Marginalization," in *A Dictionary of Sociology*, Fourth edition, Oxford Paperback Reference (Oxford, United Kingdom; New York, NY, United States of America: Oxford University Press, 2014), 438.

¹⁸⁸ C. Cadorette, ed., *Liberation Theology: An Introductory Reader* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1992), 12.

to achieve gender equality by 2030.”¹⁸⁹ Men have not yet reached the level of transcending their ego and genuinely transforming their minds and attitudes for the realization of such equality. In politics, women are still struggling to get access to leadership positions in their cities’ government; in the Church, women’s access to priestly ordination remains impossible.

To propose a solution to this issue in light of Rahner’s thought, we can refer to Genesis 2:18 to point out the significance of others for one’s own life. Our task here is to analyze this passage of the Scripture with emphasis on its value for women. This emphasis is useful for women’s general political and economic responsibilities and clerical functions.

The first aspect of my emphasis is the concept of neighbor. From Genesis 2:18, we want to emphasize a particular understanding of the concept of neighbor in favor of women in the light of Rahner’s thought on God’s creative self-offering for humanity, which we can qualify here as the “original self-offering” of God that brought about human beings. Consequently, this emphasis is on understanding neighbor in its original sense. This understanding is what I call the “original neighbor.” I mean that woman is the “original neighbor” of man in the creation account. Men cannot adequately observe the love of neighbor required by the love of God if they underestimate women. And since this love of neighbor is an inherent condition of the self-fulfillment of a human person in God, men can only reach it “through making a sincere gift of self to women.”¹⁹⁰

Therefore, we can interpret Genesis 2:18 as follows: in deciding to make a helper for man as his partner, after realizing that “it is not good that the man should be alone,” God could make him another man as his helper and partner. In fact, such another man would even look more like the

¹⁸⁹ The United Nations, “Goal 5: Achieve Gender Equality and Empower All Women and Girls,” accessed March 28, 2023, <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/gender-equality/>.

¹⁹⁰ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, “One in Christ Jesus,” 492.

first man¹⁹¹ because he would fit well “the mutual image of gender.”¹⁹² But the fact that God, in God’s impeccable wisdom, decided to create a woman as the man’s partner means that the otherness is more significant when it is not only about another subject but also about another gender. And since it is this other subject distinct from man by another gender that the man himself recognized as a being like him, we affirm with conviction that the gender difference is vital for the man to realize himself. He recognized himself only in the woman, not in any of the creatures that were surrounding him. This self-realization of the man through the presence of the woman recognized by him as the bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh (Genesis 2:23) is an illustration that emphasizes the importance of others in Rahner’s anthropological view on the subject. Indeed, the “only way in which man achieves self-realization is through encounters with his fellow man [human], a fellow who is rendered present to his experience in knowledge and love in the course of his personal life, one, therefore, who is not a thing or a matter, but a man [human].”¹⁹³ Thus, from an equal-gender viewpoint, gender difference is key to the mutual fulfillment of men and women. The point is that men’s identity requires women’s dignified presence. Consequently, men’s androcentric ideologies and underestimating attitudes against women are just the self-denial of men. Men’s genuine humanness requires its recognition in women. The basic solution of taking seriously the question about who we are consequently is useful for the self-understanding of men to be able to understand women as the other of self. Who men are is who women are: *human beings*.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹¹ Indeed, what the verse 20b of Genesis 2 implies is that when the man looked at all the other creatures that he named, he realized that none of them look like him. And so, his preoccupation to which God brought satisfaction by creating another human being was to have a creature that looks like him.

¹⁹² United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, “One in Christ Jesus,” 50.

¹⁹³ Karl Rahner, “The Experience of Self and the Experience of God,” in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 13, trans. D Bourke (New York: Seabury, 1975), 127.

¹⁹⁴ Cf. John Paul, “The Original Unity of Man and Woman,” in *The Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan* (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 1997), 42–45.

Therefore, in light of the above solution to racism, the adequate solution for society, in general, is not primarily external but internal to men: they have to understand themselves in connection to women. Such an understanding is genuine and effective through humanizing attitudes and actions. Laws and movements of protest are truly good, and they do lead to progress in constraining men to respect women's dignity. But as long as the decision does not come from the heart of men as the result of adequate self-questioning, they will always find ways to marginalize women. For proof, the structures of our institutions constitute the means through which men continue to marginalize women despite the multiple laws and protests against this issue. The decision must come from the depth of men's conscience and heart. In carefully listening to their own conscience, which is the experience of grace in the Rahnerian sense (the work of the Holy Spirit in a human person), they will recognize and respect the dignity of women with goodwill, not merely by constraint. But again, love will still be the ultimate solution. In fact, if love is the genuine leitmotiv of one's disposal to others, as we argued above, the experience of grace or listening to one's conscience will fill one's heart with love. This is crucial because erroneous conscience and bad will hinder one from positively changing toward others. Only authentic love can motivate men to respect the dignity of women.

Indeed, from the Christian perspective, an authentic Christian is one who loves others. Love is the virtue that Jesus points out as the characteristic by which the world will recognize one as a Christian: "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). This virtue, Jesus did not merely teach or recommend it to his disciples. He also properly assumed it in his own humanity up to the cross and death for others. In short, love is Christian authenticity. The point of such an authentic identity is to bring a dignified life for others. Christ is precisely the model for that authenticity. The love he expressed on the cross transformed our humanity. It gratuitously grants new life and eternity to our finite humanity: human beings got

new existentials or got their original existentials actualized from the event of the cross: beings-for-life, beings-for-eternity.

For the particular case of the Church, the solution to the issue of women's exclusion from priestly ordination has two phases. Each of the phases of the solution I propose is an attempt to update the Church's view: (1) the revision of the priests' attitudes toward women, and (2) the actualization of the Church's understanding of God's will and the *In-persona Christi*. Before the details on these solutions, it is good to prepare the ground of our solutions by reflecting on the Church's understanding of the sexual differences in comparison to what is said above.

In one of the above paragraphs, we already considered racial and sexual differences to be accidental elements of our existence. We mean that sexual or racial differences are not the essence of our existence. Surely, gender essentialists will not agree with me on this point. Indeed, they conceive gender as an essential, inner, and unchangeable quality that differentiates women from men and vice versa.¹⁹⁵

If we conceive gender essentialism as a paradigm that occasions division among people on the basis of their gender, we can adopt a controversial position that tries to bring people together. In this perspective, Karl Marx's view could be helpful. Indeed, Marx states that "the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of social relations."¹⁹⁶ It means that the essence of our humanity is the relationships between us. Thus, human essence should bind people to each other in relationships that dignify every person beyond gender differences.

¹⁹⁵ Cynthia Vinney, "What Is Gender Essentialism Theory?" *Verywell Mind* (blog), October 27, 2021, 1, <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-gender-essentialism-theory-5203465>.

¹⁹⁶ Karl Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach," *Internet Archive*, (1845), no 6, <https://archive.org/details/karl-marx-theses-on-feuerbach-friedrich-engels-massimo-morigi-repubblicanesimo-g/page/n1/mode/2up>.

But without even opposing gender essentialism and still going in the direction of social harmony aimed by Marx, I think my point is still supported if gender essentialism is well understood. Indeed, unless taken egoistically against women,¹⁹⁷ considering gender as an essential characteristic does not necessarily contradict the humanity or humanness of women that I try to support with my “gender accidentalism,” if we can call it so. I believe that the common element to the essential feminine characteristics and essential masculine characteristics is the humanity or humanness of the members of the group (feminine or masculine) that these particular characteristics defend. My view precisely goes in the direction of the Rahnerian and so Christian belief: humanity is our common essence. Indeed, Rahner recognizes the distinction of the sexes, but he understands these sexes as components of our common human nature.¹⁹⁸ And more importantly, this humanity is graced: God’s self-communication – as the innermost constituent of our nature – graces and divinizes our shared humanity beyond sexual differences. In this sense, the view that skin color is just an accidental reality of our existence also applies to the marginalization of women in the sense that sexual difference does not negatively affect one’s humanity: women are not less human; their femininity does not diminish their dignity.

However, the Church’s view on sexual difference requires our attention. Indeed, the Church states that “in human beings the difference of sex exercises an important influence, much deeper than, for example, ethnic differences: the latter do not affect the human person as intimately as the difference of sex, which is directly ordained both for the communion of persons and for the

¹⁹⁷ The use of gender essentialism to mischievously support men’s superiority over women is precisely what feminists reject. Indeed, “feminists have argued that although there are indeed biological sex differences between men and women, much if not most of the ‘difference’ between men and women, as expressed in gender hierarchies and patterns of inequality, is in fact socially constructed.” See Rosemary Crompton and Clare Lyonette, “The New Gender Essentialism: Domestic and Family ‘choices’ and Their Relation to Attitudes,” *The British Journal of Sociology* 56, no. 4 (December 2005): 601, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-4446.2005.00085.x>.

¹⁹⁸ Karl Rahner, “Position of Women in the New Situation in Which the Church Finds Herself,” in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 8, trans. David Bourke (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1961), 75.

generation of human beings.”¹⁹⁹ This view seems opposed to our above idea on racial and sexual differences as accidental realities of human beings because sex, in the Church’s perspective, intimately affects human persons.

Beyond its apparent opposition, this view does not contradict our view on the accidental aspect of sexual difference. On the contrary, it consolidates it because it sustains the same value supported by our view: the equality of women and men based on their common, inalienable, and irreducible humanity beyond their sexual difference.²⁰⁰ Further, the Church’s view on sexual difference fits well with my point from the analysis of Genesis 1:28. Indeed, from that analysis, I argued that gender difference is more significant in our understanding of otherness, which is crucial for self-recognition and self-realization. Since it is now clear that we have a basic agreement on that matter, the next paragraphs will elaborate on the details of the solutions.

III.3.2.1. Possible Solution to the Church’s Moral Argumentative View

Before reaching the theological level of the Church’s arguments, we can reconsider her moral view on women’s priestly ordination. The Church pointed out the priests’ bad attitudes towards women as the cause of women’s advocacy for ordained priesthood. It means that the Church views women’s desire of the priesthood ordination merely as a reaction due to the letter’s frustration.²⁰¹

This argument is insufficient with regard to many things: on the one hand, the hierarchical inequality in the Church is in itself a cause of women’s frustration. It does not favor the realization

¹⁹⁹ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Inter Insigniores* (15 October, 1976) no 5 §7, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19761015_inter-insigniores_en.html.

²⁰⁰ Cf. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, “One in Christ Jesus,” 493. My emphasis added.

²⁰¹ Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Declaration on the Question of Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood *Inter Insigniores*,” (15 October, 1976) no6, §5, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19761015_inter-insigniores_en.html. ; United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, “One in Christ Jesus: Toward a Pastoral Response to Women’s Concerns,” *Origins* 22, no. 29 (December 31, 1992): 500; and Marguerite Akossi-Mvongo, “The Church We Want: Ecclesia of Women in Africa?,” in *The Church We Want: African Catholics Look to Vatican III*, ed. Agbonkhanmege Orobator (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2016), 245.

of the equal disciples' relationship. On the other hand, some women have a genuine vocation to the ordained priesthood. Therefore, it is clear that the Church's observation is not convincing. However, the call it implies is important and merits consideration. For this reason, the solution to this view is the review of the priests' attitudes toward women. It is obvious that priesthood is a sacramental grace. Therefore, I argue that since any divine grace requires the collaboration of its recipient,²⁰² the call addressed to priests is that they have to adequately collaborate with that grace by assuming the *In-persona Christi* in its fullness.²⁰³ They have to do so through and beyond the eucharistic celebration: in their day-to-day life. It means that they have to respect women not merely in preaching the equality of the latter's dignity with men but in concrete, practical life. Indeed, before and beyond the concrete historical issue of priestly ordination, there is the question of the humanness of both men and women: for "their common humanity is the basis for the fundamental equality between women and men."²⁰⁴ Here also, Rahner's thought for understanding who we are as human beings is crucial. All that we would think, decide, and act upon for humanity is absolutely based on the quest for knowing who we are as human beings. This question remains significant because it is the root of priestly life and attitudes that dignify the faithful, especially the women.

The key value to this and all my solutions is love. Indeed, if the *In-persona Christi* is taken seriously, the deepest meaning of what is actualized in the eucharistic celebration is nothing else than love. Christ offered himself to us through his death to express his greater love for us: "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends" (John 15:13). In celebrating *in person Christi*, it is Christ's love up to death that the priest celebrates. Therefore, the priest must

²⁰² Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I-II, q.111, a.2. See also Council of Trent, *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, 33–34.

²⁰³ The *In-persona Christi* itself is one of the Church's main arguments on which we will come again.

²⁰⁴ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, "One in Christ Jesus," 493.

show love to the faithful in the concrete life, especially to women. Here again, we realize that love remains the *sine qua non* solution for the issue of women's marginalization. Rahner's thought on the identity of love of God and love of neighbor is a help for that: the priests' love of God (of Christ whom they represent) and their love of neighbor (women) must be identical and inter-permeating. The love between Christians is fundamental not only from the priest toward others (women) but from every Christian toward her fellow Christians and fellow citizens. But it is insufficient to love women while strictly refusing them an equal hierarchical position. It reveals that the Church teaches the equality of men and women with reservation. With Rahner's support, I dare to say that this teaching is to be without reservation.²⁰⁵ Therefore, it is crucial to reflect on the Church's theological arguments.

III.3.2.2. Possible Solution to the Church's Theological Argumentative View

God's will and the *In-person Christi* are the two main theological arguments that the Church uses. These are not just insufficient but also controversial.

The "*God's will*" argument is that Christ freely and sovereignly chose only men as his apostles. The point for the Church is that Christ was not influenced by his patriarchal culture but only moved by his free will. To justify her thesis, the Church says that, contrary to Christ's Jewish patriarchal culture, his attitude towards women was dignifying.²⁰⁶

My disagreement with this argument is both cultural and theological. Culturally, I think that there was an implicit cultural influence on Jesus' choice for men only.²⁰⁷ One of the examples that

²⁰⁵ Rahner, "Position of Women in the New Situation in Which the Church Finds Herself," 81.

²⁰⁶ John Paul II, "Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*," (15 August, 1988), no 26, at The Holy See, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1988/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_19880815_mulieris-dignitatem.html.

²⁰⁷ As rightly observed by Rahner, the uncertainty of the Church's declaration on the matter, and the Church's herself recognition of cultural influence on some ordinances of Paul on "the behaviour of women;" all these allows us to envisage the possibility of "explaining the practice of Jesus and the Apostles simply by the sociological and cultural conditions of their time." See Karl Rahner, "Women and the Priesthood," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 20, trans. E. Quinn (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 40.

can help us understand that influence is Jesus' reaction to the situation of the adulterous women (John 8:1-11). Jesus could ask the woman's accusers why they did not also bring the man with whom that woman committed the adultery. But he did not do so because he knew the patriarchal cultural mentality of his interlocutors. He knew that the Jewish culture was in men's favor. That is why he adopted a strategy that led them (the accusers) to understand that human beings are the same: *sinners*. Just like the man, who sinned with that woman (who Jesus could not openly denounce in consideration of the cultural context), everybody sins. And we show the result of Jesus' strategy: "They went away, one by one, beginning with the elders." It means that Jesus had a personal way of doing which did not openly attack his patriarchal culture in some situations. Thus, my interpretation is that Christ publicly chose only men as apostles in consideration of his patriarchal culture, but concretely, he involved and respected women. He showed again that men and women are the same: *servants of the Lord*. Indeed, that means that he could choose women if his culture allowed it. My point is that there was a cultural influence that we cannot ignore in our view of God's will. The ordained priesthood was reserved for men because of a patriarchal society. And since this reservation reinforces broader discrimination against women today, it is wise to review this reservation in our current situation of a multicultural society.

Theologically, God's will is not an abstraction from history. Jesus himself is a concrete accomplishment of God's will on earth. Indeed, God has been expressing God's will throughout the ages up to God's Son (Hebrew 1:1-3). The "thy will be done" that Jesus taught us becomes possible if we conceive that the divine will is always done in geographical, cultural, and contextual situations. Therefore, I propose to update our understanding of God's will according to our time: women's priestly ordination is a current pastoral need in some places.²⁰⁸ Thus, women's ordination

²⁰⁸ Cf. Karl Rahner, *The Shape of the Church to Come* (New York: Seabury Press, 1974), 114.

is something that ought to be pursued in the Catholic Church.²⁰⁹ For the continual accomplishment of God's salvific will on earth, God has oriented toward women God's call for more laborers into God's harvest (Cf. Luc 10:2). The divine will to which we have to remain faithful is God's universal salvific will, which permeates and transcends every historical situation. The Church's role of preserving this divine will is possible precisely "by actualizing and unfolding its truth for each successive moment of history."²¹⁰

The *In-persona Christi* argument is that the one who acts on Christ's behalf must be masculine to fit the perfect "mutual image of gender to signify the relationship between the priest and Christ."²¹¹ The Church's point is that since Jesus was male, only men can act on his behalf and that women cannot fit the "mutual image of gender."

This is the most problematic argument of the Church, though it appears logical. In addition to some factual elements which does not fit with it, the great problem of this argument is the reduction of Christ's humanity in the masculine historical Jesus. The factual elements are that Jesus was Jewish and chose only twelve apostles. Suppose only Jesus' historical aspects were to be set up as the criterion for the one who acts *in-persona Christi*. In that case, only Jews should be priests, and the number should be limited to twelve priests for the entire universal Church.²¹² If someone takes the "commissioning of the disciples" (Mt 28:16-20) to justify the fact that we have more than

²⁰⁹ About women's ordination, great progresses have been done in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Episcopal Church in the United Methodist Church (UMC), and the Protestant Church in the US. Yet, Catholic women, as we know, cannot be validly ordained anywhere in the world at present, despite its (women's priestly ordination) current need in some places.

²¹⁰ Karl Rahner, "Revelation," in *Encyclopedia of Theology: The Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, ed. Karl Rahner (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 1466.

²¹¹ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, "One in Christ Jesus: Toward a Pastoral Response to Women's Concerns," *Origins* 22, no. 29 (December 31, 1992): 502; John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem* (15 August 1988) no 26; and Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration on the Question of Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood *Inter Insigniores* (15 October 1976) no 5.

²¹² For Rahner, even "the transition from the concept of the apostle and the Twelve to the concept of the priest (and bishop) in the Declaration is too simple to fit in with our present-day knowledge of the origins, structure and organization of the primitive Church." See Rahner, "Women and the Priesthood," 40.

twelve priests today, my reply would be the following: even the universal mission entrusted to the disciples does not explicitly talk about apostles (corresponding to priests today). It rather talks about disciples: “Go and make disciples of all nations” (Mt 28:19). The point is that in the same way the Church has been able to transcend the historical facts related to Christ and the apostles, she can transcend the factual criterion of the *in-persona Christi*. Thus, I propose the inclusive actualization of the meaning of the *in-persona Christi* as follows.

In the analysis of Genesis 2:18, I argued above that if it is the woman that the man himself recognized as the being who looks like him, it can be said that the gender difference is key for the man to realize himself. I continued the reflection stating that the man recognized himself only in the woman and concluded that men’s genuine humanness requires its recognition in women. From this conclusion, I can say that Christ’s true humanness would need its recognition in women as it is if we consider Christ as the prototype of humanity. Indeed, many passages of the Bible, confirmed by the Church, present Jesus as the prototype of humanity in terms of his preexistence before all humans: the firstborn before all (Romans 8:29; Colossians 1:15, 18; Hebrews 1:6; 12:23; Revelation 1:5). From this view, we can affirm with conviction that humanity is gender involving. So then, if Christ is the prototype of humanity, any person (male or feminine) can symbolize him. In this sense, a woman can get ordained (priest) and fit the symbol of Christ, the prototype of humanity. Therefore, the *In-persona Christi* could be extended to women.

The following argument can be used by one to reject my view: that Christ as the prototype of humanity is abstract or does not fit the ordained priesthood because it is Christ, the historical Jesus, who the priest symbolizes; that this historical Jesus was masculine. My reply would be that history does not cancel transcendence. We learn from Rahner that both always remain unified. In this perspective, the same Christ holds history and transcendence. By that transcendence, he transcends

the definite limit of gender through the involvement of the masculine and the feminine in his humanity.

Further, Rahner's understanding of humanity related to Christ can be a helpful tool for our argument of Christ as the prototype of humanity. For Rahner, "humanity is the self-disclosure of the Logos itself, so that when God, expressing Godself, exteriorizes Godself, that very thing appears which we call the humanity of the Logos."²¹³ If this is the case, then the humanity of the historical Jesus somehow involves both genders. From the same perspective, we can consider Rahner's view of the Church as Christ's symbol. He states: "When we say that the Church is the persisting presence of the Incarnate Word in space and time, we imply at once that it continues the symbolic function of the Logos in the world."²¹⁴ The following consideration can be drawn from this ecclesial statement to sustain the inclusive argument we are holding about the function accomplished by the ordained priests.

The Church, which "continues the symbolic function of the Logos in the world," is considered by the magisterium and the entire faithful to be Christ's bride²¹⁵ (bride corresponds to feminine). Thus, a feminine (Church) continues symbolizing a masculine (Christ). But concerning the specific symbolic function accomplished by the priest, one could say that though theoretically, the feminine Church continues the symbolic function of the masculine Christ, it is the masculine (priests) who perform that symbolic function of the masculine (Christ). Yet, I would say: the fact that the conception of the Church as feminine involves both masculine and feminine persons (the entire faithful) and even does not hinder the masculine component (men) from accomplishing the

²¹³ Rahner, "The Theology of the Symbol," 239.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, " 240.

²¹⁵ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World," (31 May, 2004) no2, at The Holy See, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20040731_collaboration_en.html.

symbolic function of the priesthood, that very fact implies that the masculine Christ can also be symbolized by a feminine. It means that one gender (masculine or feminine) can represent both men and women: i.e., the Church (considered as feminine by the magisterium) represents the whole faithful who are male and female, Christ (a male) represents the entire human persons who are male and female, etc. Here is precisely where our argument of Christ as humanity's prototype makes sense. In this perspective, one Gender (as a representative of humanity) can be symbolized by the two genders (masculine and feminine) as long as that Gender is a unifying reality under its involving/universal character. This view fits with Rahner's understanding of human persons (men and women) as the symbols of God because of their function of participating in the life of God. Indeed, this God, who is Triune in a masculine Father and masculine Son, and the Spirit, is symbolized by both men and women.

More importantly, the anthropological relevance of a symbol for the Rahnerian theology of grace is a crucial tool that goes with the idea of Christ as the prototype of humanity. Indeed, the core message of the "*analogia entis*" that the symbol shares with the being it symbolizes²¹⁶ is that it is the essence of the symbolized being that the symbol analogically shares, not merely the gender of that being. Therefore, human beings share the "*analogia entis*" with God in symbolizing God. Consequently, every human being, especially women, can share the "*analogia entis*" with Christ, regardless of gender. Thus, in consideration of the priesthood as a sacrament (symbol), women can act *in persona Christi*. Here is where our emphasis on humanity as our common essence is important. Our graced humanity is the grace that permeates and transcends differences (primarily biological differences). It unites our differences into one.

²¹⁶ Rahner, "The Theology of the Symbol," 35.

Rahner's viewpoint on women's ordained priesthood is an accurate solution for a concrete pastoral consideration. Regarding women's ordination, Rahner states: "A woman could be considered just as much as a man for leadership of a basic community and therefore could be ordained to the priestly office. Having in mind the society of today and even more tomorrow, I see no reason in principle to give a negative answer to this question."²¹⁷ This view fits well with today's world's fight for equality between men and women regarding leadership, which requires equal discipleship in the Christian sphere. The pastoral aspect of Rahner's views is that he considers the priestly ordination in terms of necessity according to the Church's need in particular places. He conceives "the question of women priests in the light of the needs, necessities, and possibilities of a community which must have a leader."²¹⁸ Rahner is conscious that, though the current situation in some places necessitates the priestly ordination of women, this necessity is not a universal need. Therefore, he proposes what he calls a "relative ordination." What he means by relative ordination is in comparison to the current priestly ordination ("absolute ordination"). Thus, relative ordination is "ordination with assignment to a particular congregation or church."²¹⁹ This relativity is not to be understood as an ordination that would be less than the current priestly ordination. Relativity is rather due to the particularity of the need to which it responds. In this sense, Rahner's proposal goes with what I proposed to actualize the *In-persona Christi*, which is the current priesthood "absolutely" reserved to men. The update of this understanding would bring up the "relative *persona Christi*" if we express it with Rahner's words. Of course, my proposal is not a solution for a particular congregation or church only.

²¹⁷ Ibid., *The Shape of the Church to Come*, 113–14.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 114.

²¹⁹ See the footnotes of Rahner, *The Shape of the Church to Come*, 110.

My proposal is a call to wisely relativize the current understanding of the *In-persona Christi* that sustains today's practice of priestly ordination. This call is for the entire Church because there might have women with a genuine vocation to priestly ordination inspired by God's Spirit. Rahner's proposal is also the same call but for a particular congregation. The most important thing is flexibility through actualizing the current understanding of the *In-persona Christi*, considering our time and the voice of the Spirit talking to us in the present time. Thus, the Church is called "to give women *a share in the apostolate of the hierarchy itself*."²²⁰

The concrete use of Rahner's theology of grace in this last chapter reveals the following. In pursuing the question about who we are as human beings, we reach a self-understanding related to others. Therefore, we cannot be who we are unless we have understood well who others are: created by God like us and also God's symbols. This understanding calls for mutual realization through humanizing and dignifying attitudes and actions in love. Thus, racism, as a negative understanding of others, becomes a conception opposed to our own humanness. In contrast, our positive view of others is a humanizing view of ourselves. Therefore, the fundamental solution to racism is to take seriously the question of knowing who a human being is. With an adequate answer to this question, all racist ideologies disappear, leaving space for the conviction about our common, graced, and divinized humanity. Inner conversion follows, and love becomes the ultimate solution that comes out of the fundamental solution and pushes one to render concrete her understanding of self and others.

Likewise, men are called to seriously pursue the quest for self-knowledge to address women's marginalization. They will come to the truth that their own realization is related to the dignified presence of women. With genuine love beyond all socio-political constraints, men can consider

²²⁰ Rahner, "Position of Women in the New Situation in Which the Church Finds Herself," 84.

women with their full and inalienable dignity. This love will lead them to reconfigure the structures, rules, institutions, etc., to grant women equal political and economic leadership opportunities. Applied to the same issue in the Church, genuine love will be manifested through two things: (1) the priests' loving, respectful, and dignifying attitudes/actions for women. This will be conformity between Christ's ultimate love they celebrate through the Eucharist and their concrete love in daily life. (2) the actualization/update of the understanding of the divine will and the *In-personal Christi* in favor of women both for pastoral need and some women's genuine vocation to ordained priesthood.

CONCLUSION

Rahner's theology of grace is useful for promoting human dignity in the concrete situation of human persons because it: lays the foundation for the respect of human dignity (chapter 1), involves human history, and motivates one's historical commitment to every human being (chapter 2), and applies to the concrete situation of human persons, and thereby helps to address the issues that affect human dignity, especially racism and women's marginalization (chapter 3).

Rahner's theology of grace lays the foundation for respecting human dignity by presenting humanity as graced by God's free and loving self-communication. For Rahner, theology and anthropology are inseparable. Consequently, human nature is not conceived in this theology as pure nature. On the contrary, grace is primordial, inescapable, universal, uncreated, and divinizing for humanity's sake. This divinization is the foundation of the respect that every human person deserves. The elevating self-communication of God is permanent and happens in the concrete history of human beings. Everybody experiences it by the capacity of transcendence God gratuitously bestowed on her. This experience requires one's free response. Here is the key to the motivation that Rahner's theology of grace communicates to its readers.

Rahner's theology of grace motivates commitment in society because it calls and obliges one to confirm her humanness through her free response to Transcendence or God whose loving grace is permanently offered to her. Thus, one is invited to respond to love by love. The following obligation comes from the fact that Rahner equates one's love of God and one's love of neighbor. In loving God as one's adequate response to God's love, one is obliged to love her neighbors. This obligation becomes concrete through self-disposal and commitment to one's neighbors in society. Here is the true meaning of freedom: one's self-disposal and commitment to God and, consequently, to one's fellow humans. Thus, one is fully human by assuming transcendence: the experience of endless questioning about one's origin, identity, life, and final destiny (God), and

freedom: self-disposal and commitment to God and neighbors in love. Thought presented in the Christian framework, the call to respond to God's love is not exclusive. A non-Christian and an unbeliever can implicitly respond to God's love and dispose herself to God through her love and commitment to her fellow citizens. In Rahner's view, one socio-political engagement for others through active love is implicitly one's love for God.²²¹ Thus, the transcendental experience of God and the historical experiences are simultaneous in one's day-to-day life, consciously or not.

The core elements of Rahner's thought that, taken seriously in concrete application, serve as solutions for addressing racism and women's marginalization are the question about who we are as human beings, the inalienability and universality of the uncreated grace and consequently our graced humanity, the transcendence and history, the significance of the symbol, and the equation of the love of God and love of neighbor. The question about who we are leads one to discover herself as a graced person. This identity implies one's relationship with Transcendence (non-Christian and unbelievers) or God (Christians and believers). This is a transcendental experience that occurs in one's historical life. It necessarily posits one's fellow human beings as the ones who mediate this experience. Since the experience aims at one's self-knowledge, it follows that one's adequate understanding of self relates to God and other human persons. The others are who we are when we come out of ourselves, and we are who others are when they come out of themselves. The implication of this for the racist is that it helps one have a dignifying conception of others because the self and others reflect each other. This understanding of self is key for the racist to realize that she/he can conceive herself as fully human only if she/he makes effort to conceive her victims as fully human. If she/he is honest, she/he will change her mind and abandon her racist ideologies against people of the races she/he used to underestimate. In fact, she will realize that it

²²¹ Cf. Rahner, "Reflections on the Unity of the Love of Neighbour and the Love of God," 247.

is not the color of her/his kin that elevates to the experience of endless questioning for self-knowledge. Rather, her/his intellectual faculty: the capacity of transcendence in Rahner's theology. A capacity that even honest unbelievers recognize to be common to human beings. With goodwill and genuine love, the racist will engage in humanizing and dignifying relationships with their victims.

For women's marginalization, the same principles of self-knowledge related to others, the equation of love of God to love of neighbor, and the significance of symbol apply. In the more authentic sense, women are what I call men's "original neighbor." (cf. Genesis 2:18-23). A serious interpretation of Genesis 2:18-23 reveals that men's genuine humanness requires its recognition in women. Men cannot properly identify themselves as human unless they do so in the dignified presence of women. They simultaneously deny or underestimate their own humanity by denning or underestimating women. It means that, from an equal-gender viewpoint, gender difference is key to the self-knowledge and mutual fulfillment of men and women. On the same line, men cannot adequately assume the love of neighbor required by the love of God if they underestimate women. With genuine love, their self-disposal to God passes through their self-disposal and commitment to women. This equal-gender viewpoint is also useful for the institutional Church regarding equal discipleship.

Therefore, to the Church's moral argumentative view on the priests' bad attitudes towards women as the cause of women's reclamation of the ordained priesthood, I state that this argument is not sufficient because (1) the hierarchical inequality itself in the Church is the cause of some priests' condescending attitudes that frustrate women, since it does not allow the equal discipleship; (2) Some women claim the admission of women to the ordained priesthood because they have a genuine vocation for it, not because of priests' condescending or frustrating attitudes. Nevertheless, I sustain the idea that priests have to review their attitudes toward women.

We retain two main theological arguments used by the Church: (1) the selection of twelve apostles among men alone as God's will, and (2) the *in-persona Christi* as necessitating the "mutual image of gender." Regarding the first, I think Christ's choice of men was also implicitly influenced by the Jewish patriarchal culture. Rahner's twofold conception of transcendence and history cannot allow us to conceive God and God's revelation in abstraction from the historical context of the hearers of God's word. Christ's choice for men alone and, at the same time, his dignifying attitudes toward women appear to me as a cultural influence managed with tact by genuine divine love. Today's context differs from Christ's context to the extent that the adequate way is to update our understanding of God's (Christ's) will. Thus, I suggest understanding and accepting that the call for women's ordination is the sign of God's will, which is silently but truly revealed in our contemporary multicultural world.

To the argument that the person who acts *in-persona Christi* must have the same gender as Christ, I propose that the consideration of Christ himself as the prototype of humanity opens the door to gender inclusion: humanity is genders inclusive. Thus, beyond the historical masculinity of Christ, his humanity involves the two genders. Further, Rahner's understanding of humanity as God's symbol is an adequate help. It is about the "*analogia entis*" (the analogy of being): the one who symbolizes God analogically shares with God's being. Thus, one can symbolize Christ without being masculine because it is the analogical being of Christ that the symbolizer shares with Christ, not Christ's gender. Therefore, women can symbolize Christ by acting, as ordained priests, *in-persona Christi*. For this reason, I propose that the Church may actualize her conception of the *in-persona Christi* for the admission of women to the ordained priesthood. This admission will constitute an excellent means for equal discipleship, pastoral need, and some women's genuine vocation for ordained priesthood.

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