

The Doctrine of the Trinity  
according to Karl Rahner

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Respectfully submitted to  
the designated faculty and administrators  
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Dedication

With respect and love for my wife, Grace –

To Darlene Connelly for her dedication and persistence –

To Dr. Gregory Daley for his motivational comments –

And to Fr. Karl Rahner for allowing me to touch the Holy Mystery.

## Abbreviations

AC – Clement H. Crock, The Apostles Creed, (London: B. Herder, 1938).

AH – Peter Brown, Augustine of Hippo, (California: University of California Press, 1967).

CA – Richard P. McBrien, Catholicism, (San Francisco: Harper Press, 1994).

CC – The Catechism of the Catholic Church, (New York: Catholic Book Publishing CO., 1994).

CD – The New Catholic Dictionary, (New York: The Universal Knowledge Foundation, 1929).

CE – The Catholic Encyclopedia, 15 Vols., (New York: The Encyclopedia Press, Inc., 1914).

CF – Karl Rahner, The Content of Faith, (New York: Crossroad, 1999).

CK – Edited by DeClan Marmion and Mary E. Hines, The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

DT – Saint Augustine, De Trinitate, (New York: New City Press, 1991).

FC – Karl Rahner, Foundations of Christian Faith, (London: Darton, Longman & Todd/New York: Seabury, 1978).

GF – Karl Rahner, Grace in Freedom, (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969).

GT – Ted Peters, God as Trinity: Realationality and Temptrality in Divine Life, (Louisville, Kentucky: John Knox Press, 1993).

HB – The Catholic Edition of The Holy Bible, NRSV, (Tennessee: Catholic Bible Press, 1993).

- HW – Karl Rahner, Hearers of the Word, (London: Sheed and Ward/New York: Herder and Herder, 1969).
- ID – Edited by Paul Imhof and Hubert Biallowons, Karl Rahner in Dialogue: Conversations and Interviews 1965 -1882, Translation edited by Harvey D. Egan (New York: Crossroad, 1986).
- IR – An autobiographical interview with Meinold Krauss, Karl Rahner: I Remember, (New York: Crossroad, 1985).
- JC – Walter Kasper, Jesus the Christ, (Burns and Oates Ltd, UK, 1976).
- KR – William Dych, Rahner, (London: Continuum, 2000).
- ME – Harvey D. Egan, S.J., Karl Rahner: The Mystic of Everyday Life, (New York: Crossroad, 1998).
- NG – Karl Rahner, Nature and Grace, (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1964).
- PH – Phillip Hughes, A Popular History of the Catholic Church, (New York: MacMillian Publishing, 1962).
- RR – Gerald A. McCool, A Rahner Reader, (New York: Seabury, 1975).
- SE – Karl Rahner, Spiritual Exercises, (New York: Herder and Herder, 1965).
- SM – Karl Rahner with Cornelius Ernst and Kevin Symth (eds), Sacramentum Mundi: An Encyclopedia of Theology, 6 Vols, (London: Burns and Oates/ New York: Sheed and Ward, 1968 – 1970).
- ST – Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, (Maryland: Christian Classics, 1991).
- STR – Francis Schussler Fiorenza and John P. Galvin, editors, Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives, Vol. 1, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991).
- SW – Karl Rahner, Spirit in the World, (London: Sheed and Ward/New York: Herder and Herder, 1968).

- TA – Dorothee Solle, Thinking about God, (London: SCM Press LTD., 1990).
- TC – William G. Rusch, editor, The Trinitarian Controversy, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980).
- TD – Karl Rahner, On the Theology of Death, (New York: Herder and Herder, 1961).
- TF – Douglas John Hall, Thinking the Faith, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress 1989).
- TG – Walter Kasper, The God of Jesus Christ, (New York: Crossroad, 1991).
- TGC – Mary Ann Fatula, The Triune God of Christian Faith, (Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1990).
- TI – Karl Rahner, Theological Investigations, 22 Vols., (London: Darton, Longman and Todd/ New York/ Crossroad, 1961 – 1991).
- TM – Nina Rosenstand, The Moral of the Story, (New York: McGraw Hill, 2000).
- TT – Karl Rahner, The Trinity, (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970).
- UK – Herbert Vorgrimler, Understanding Karl Rahner: An Introduction to His Life and Thought, (New York: Crossroad, 1986).
- WG – Leo J. O’Donovan, A World of Grace: An Introduction to the Themes and Foundations of Karl Rahner’s Theology, (New York: Crossroad, 1981).
- WS – Karl Rahner, Faith in a Wintry Season: Conversations and Interviews with Karl Rahner in the Last Years of His Life, editors, Paul Imbrof and Hubert Biallowons, translated and edited, Harvey Egan, (New York: Crossroad, 1990).

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## Introduction

The intent of this dissertation is to interpret Karl Rahner's understanding of the Trinity. The position adopted does not consider any direct abrogation of this central mystery of Christianity by Rahner. Rather, the view proffered suggests that Karl Rahner's trinitarian thought was conceived to augment the general comprehension of the doctrine. My work will focus on his nuanced perceptions of the Trinity. It will not imply that Rahner had developed a personal radical version of the Trinity surreptitiously concealed and/or available only to those clandestine few who might apprehend his abstruse ruminations. This monograph will demonstrate a pastoral component deep within the savant. His was a concern for those whom he termed, 'the average christian'. Those, who because of inadequate pedagogy, would either conclude that the Trinity was a tritheism or an unnecessary scholion in Church dogma.

In accordance with the above disquietude, the penultimate intention of my work is to elicit Karl Rahner's trinitarian position more intelligibly for the contemporary Christian. While in so doing, I will fulfill the ministerial requirement for the Doctor of Theology per the prescript of the Graduate Theological Foundation. Simultaneously knowing that I am in congruence with Karl Rahner's pastoral and academic mode.

The significance of my dissertation on a profoundly personal level, therefore, permits me to resonate with Rahnerian insights. However, more cherished is the internalization within my head and heart toward a conviction, a moment, when the Holy Mystery commissions me to share this deposit of knowledge and love with others.

Prior to establishing the title of this treatise, my experience had revealed that the synergy between the term Trinity and the name, Karl Rahner, provided many astute colleagues with an ominous and obfuscated perception. Akin to the name 'Einstein' in the area of quantum physics, many are wont to avoid abstruse thinking being comfortable with liminal reckonings. My work desires to challenge this errant premise, and with no sense of ego, provide a less than banal exposition of Rahner's trinitarian elucidations. Clearly this journey will be arduous but simultaneously exhilarating. Hence, the purpose of this work is always to examine the inexhaustible doctrine of the Trinity as posited by the limited notions of Karl Rahner.

The dissertation will unfold by being teased out in four essential chapters. While each chapter is briefly profiled below, the gist of my work unpacks the doctrine of the Trinity according to Karl Rahner. Consequently, only individuals and elements germane to his trinitarian formulations and interpretations will be considered. These are essential to an explicit understanding of the scope of the man and his work. The corpus of my text will avoid unnecessary inference. However, adjacent information engaging the fabric of the dissertation and casting relevant doctrinal data is both inescapable and obligatory.

Hence, this first chapter is an introduction to the dissertation. Here, a brief overview of the intention of my work is reified. Further, within this initial chapter, I will discuss the person of Karl Rahner based upon multiple insights from those closest to him. The dissertation will delve into the philosophical, spiritual and theological influences and personages that, early on, channeled his imagination. Included, but not exclusive of this prestigious cadre, are Thomas Aquinas, Martin Heidegger, Joseph Marechal and Ignatius of Loyola. Further, in this chapter, I will consider Karl Rahner's place in Christian theology. Although, not the schema of this

dissertation, this treatment is appropriate since he is arguably the most important Roman Catholic theologian of the twentieth century. It is my personal contention that Rahner along with Karl Barth, may possibly be considered the most acute Christian thinkers of the past several decades.

The second chapter will be an overview of the doctrine of the Trinity. Here, I will treat the developmental historicity of Christian theology as focused on '*de Deo trino*'. The consideration will include Patristic and Counciliar statements which have formed contemporary trinitarian dogma. While never escaping the reality and beauty of the Trinity, this approach will contextualize the core mystery of Christianity. The immediate consequence of such a framing out will prepare the reader for those Rahnerian elements and trinitarian nuances that are the essence of this dissertation. Much of this work will be deduced from the pre-Vatican II Catholic Encyclopedia and adapted accordingly.

Specificity, is the shema of the third chapter. At this juncture, my work will consider Karl Rahner's trinitarian language and methodology. Here, an account of that which is distinctly Rahnerian will be enunciated and serve as the axial moment of this monograph. This chapter will delineate Rahner's foundational formula in his development of a trinitarian theology. The examination is a consideration fundamental to his conception of the economic and immanent Trinity. For Karl Rahner it was axiomatic that the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity and that the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity. The dissertation will demonstrate that it is from this cardinal maxim that Rahnerian theology of the triune God is actualized and evolves. Hence, the dual self-communications of the Father in both Word and Spirit become a necessary corollary eventuating from this axiom. Therefore, scholarship insists that all implications of the above must be incorporated within the third chapter.

The fourth chapter and concluding chapter is designed as an excursus providing my interpretation of the trinitarian doctrine according to Karl Rahner. It will engage in an explanation of the salience of this holy mystery for the contemporary church. Further, this chapter will express Rahner's consideration regarding the triune God in a more intelligible language for the '*moyen Chretien*'. Here the crux of the necessary and requisite ministerial component for the Doctor of Theology degree is fashioned. The complex academic and technical trinitarian terminology of the Reverend Doctor Rahner will be contoured in an effort to make more comprehensible the sacred enigma as posited by this astute Roman Catholic theologian. Hence, the ministerial work within the scholarship of this dissertation is the educative process moving toward a moment of illumination for any Christian concerned with the Trinity and the dimensions of articulation as expressed by Rahner. The intent of my work is never to confound but always to clarify. Consequently, while this dissertation insists on abstraction within the cognitive domain of Rahner's trinitarian exposition. It is augmented by the catechesis of the affective domain which viscerally yearns to enlighten the assiduous and faith-filled student of the triune God.

A brief conclusion which summarizes the dissertation will follow Chapter four. Here, an abridged account of the salient motifs examined throughout this document will be reviewed. Cogent reflection upon Rahner's trinitarian propositions is a requirement of this concise summation.



Chapter I  
Section I

Karl Rahner: a concise biographical adumbration

One of the most influential Roman Catholic theologians of the twentieth century, Karl Rahner concedes that as a child he was raised “in a normal middle class Christian family.”<sup>1</sup>

His father, Professor Karl Rahner Sr. (1868 – 1934) held the rather prestigious post of assistant principal at the teacher’s college in Freiburg. While, Karl’s mother, Luise Trescher Rahner (1875 – 1976) nurtured the seven family children. In order to supplement the modest Rahner income both parents took on additional responsibilities. While Professor Rahner tutored local students Luise Rahner applied herself to neighborhood child care. A consequence of this eastern Black Forest work ethic resulted in enough financial stability to provide each of the seven children with a university education.

Karl, the middle child, born in Freiburg im Breisgau, Germany on March 5, 1904, experienced few childhood problems. Although he did endure the typical obligatory elementary and secondary school education. Karl “described himself as an average pupil who found classes somewhat boring.”<sup>2</sup> However, early on he recognized that his family “was in one way or another clearly Catholic and Christian at that.”<sup>3</sup>

It would be errant to downplay the role of Karl’s mother, Luise, since history contends that she was not only brilliant but also courageous and quite religious. She may be considered the kedge in the Catholic identity of the family, Rahner.<sup>4</sup> Karl’s brother, Hugo Rahner, his elder by four years entered the Society of Jesus in January, 1919. it is intriguing that neither Karl’s personal monographs nor the secondary literature tend to espouse any substantive evidence of Hugo’s vocational decision which would clearly effect the younger brother, Karl. “I would say that that certainly made my decision easier somehow. But I don’t attribute great significance to my brother’s example for my decision.”<sup>5</sup>

Karl’s intent to enter the Jesuit community was presented to his parents by a rather discouraging religion teacher. The educator, Dr. Meinrad Vogelbacher, considered that, “Karl isn’t suited for that. He’s too withdrawn and grumpy. He should become something else.”<sup>6</sup> As a counterpoint to the above remark, Herbert Vorgrimler, student and colleague of Rahner ruminates, “...”Rahner’s teacher of religion, Dr. Meinrad Vogelbacher, certainly played a part in his decision to become a priest and theologian. As I, too, had Vogelbacher... twenty years later, I can confirm Rahner’s judgments that he was a very intelligent, educated, reasonable, if somewhat shy teacher who had studied at the Germanicum in Rome... Vogelbacher will have been able to arouse an interest in a philosophical form of theology in the introspective Karl Rahner. Rahner could not work out exactly in his old age why he wanted in particular to become a Jesuit. The example of his brother Hugo certainly made his decision easier; but they never talked about it, since Alemannian Germans do not speak much about such things, even with brothers they especially like.”<sup>7</sup>

Hence, perhaps the young Rahner's vocational discernment provides an omen envisaging his inchoate determination to architectonically discover unity in diversity. This dissertation will show that he moved toward a single truth amongst many legitimately structured options. Karl possessed "a grumpy charm"<sup>8</sup> with a pastoral inclination. He was ordained a Roman Catholic priest of the Society of Jesus by Cardinal Michael Faulhaber on July 26, 1932 in Munich.

While not necessarily or directly influenced toward a priestly vocation by Hugo, Karl did collaborate on a publication of mutual interest with his elder brother. Hugo's ability as a patristic scholar of some repute would converge with Karl's 1936 doctoral dissertation on theology. Both the brothers shared a common nexus in their fascination with the historical and mystical ruminations of the early church fathers. The young Rahner had become passionate regarding a mystagogical notion discovered in "the fathers". It was a profound, almost eerie, consideration in which the Church was flowing from the wound inflicted on the pierced side of the crucified Christ. This motif intrigued Karl and became the impetus for his theological doctoral dissertation. Rahner's dissertation was entitled, The origin of the Church as a Second Eve from the Side of Christ the Second Adam: An Investigation of the Typological Significance of John 19:34. Since this passage had historically presented a hermeneutical theme of interest to early Church fathers, the Rahner brothers collaborated on their only unified manuscript in 1939. Asceticism and Mysticism in the Patristic Period was their scholarly historical consideration of the Catholic Church's early notions from Origen to the mystics of the high Middle Ages<sup>9</sup> with a vision toward Her future. Karl Rahner did possess a proclivity for historical theology especially as it could be related to the contemporary Christian. While reasonably comfortable with the co-authored tome of 1939, Karl trivialized his doctoral dissertation by saying, "I had also written a small, lousy, but at least, according to the standards of the time, adequate theological dissertation."<sup>10</sup>

Whatever the inspiration, Karl Rahner's biography shows that he officially entered the novitiate of the Society of Jesus in April, 1922. He was eighteen years of age. Two years later, Karl would take vows and begin the traditional Jesuit academic formation in the study of philosophy. Karl would also passionately experience the profound Jesuit cultivation in one's personal spirituality, a theology which invited limited disputation and the Ignatian concept of finding God in all things.

His coursework was taught in Latin, and Karl excelled in the language, as part of the Jesuit model and his personal skill he was required to teach two years of Latin within the Juniorate of the Jesuit order.<sup>11</sup> This facility would serve him well in the future.

In 1937, "kerygmatic theology", a new theology of preaching was in vogue at Innsbruck. Ironically, Rahner's brother, Hugo, was a major proponent of this theological format which introduced a pastoral preaching component into the abstruse scholastic theology. Rome abruptly censured this kerygmatic theology wishing to keep the minds of seminarians focused on the traditional Thomistic propositions.

Since Karl desired to reach the average Christian, he was equally concerned that teaching two theological approaches would obfuscate both the preacher and the congregation. He states in his Theological Investigations, "but in fact the strictest theology, that most passionately devoted to reality alone and ever on the alert for new questions, the most scientific theology, is itself in the long run the most kerygmatic."<sup>12</sup> Rahner, felt that scholastic theology lacked a pastoral quality. Rahner's comments share

not only his philosophy of education but also his theological approach for the duration of his teaching career.<sup>13</sup>

Due to the Nazi annexation of Austria by Germany in 1938, Rahner would be forced to leave Innsbruck. He would weather the balance of the war serving in the Viennese Pastoral Office and as a parish priest in the village of Mariakirchen. These positions, supplemented by his concern for a substantially less manualist approach to scholasticism, helped to hone Karl's pastoral side. Few realize the Rahnerian inclination to pastor. Former student, fellow Jesuit and Rahner biographer, Harvey D. Egan, S.J. has remarked that, "one of the most absurd statements I ever read about Rahner's theology was that there was nothing priestly, kerygmatic, or pastoral about it. It should be said of him that his theology is supremely pastoral and its major focus: '*Salus animarum suprema lex*' (The salvation of souls is the supreme law.)"<sup>14</sup> Egan would later indicate that Rahner, encouraged by former student, Johann Baptist Metz, produced his noted pastoral thesis "that love of neighbor is love of God."

By 1948, the Innsbruck theological faculty was reorganized. The Second World War now concluded, Rahner began to produce a prodigious amount of scholarship. His work would include the massive Theological Investigations. The editing of several volumes of the Enchiridion Symbolorum for Denzinger. The co-editing of Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche (ten volumes for Herder and company). The six volume Sacramentum Mundi, the Concise Theological Dictionary, the Handbook of Pastoral Theology (five volumes) and the Christian Faith in Modern Society (thirty volumes) were all part of Rahner's theological enterprise. In addition to this prolific amount of work, Rahner also produced Mysterium Salutis (five volumes), eight works on Quaestiones Disputatae, the Concilium journal (with Edward Schillebeeckx) and twenty four pastoral articles entitled Sendung und Gnade.<sup>15</sup>

Notwithstanding his copious amount of abstract writing one wonders if it was prompted by a profoundly pastoral responsibility. Karl Rahner admits to being possessed by pastoral inspiration. A decade of weekly preaching at Innsbruck, parish ministry in Lower Bavaria during the Second World War and his active involvement with the pastoral institute in Vienna are testament to his care for the average person. "In short, both from a personal, existential concern, but also from such an understanding of pastoral needs, I hope and I think my theology was never really "art for art's sake" in the way that was usual in scholarly theology, at least dogmatic theology, before my time...and as a result of a certain spirituality, of what compelled me in a present and existential way, and of pastoral or ministerial work, I did see, I believe new and important tasks that were also posed for a systematic, speculative theology."<sup>16</sup>

One also becomes aware of a mystical component in the theology of Karl Rahner. He visualized a mysticism of the everyday life. This mystic event, innate in all persons, is brought forth from one's experience of God. Rahner contends, "that we do need to work out a theology of mysticism that leads to a religious experience which indeed many suppose that they could never discover by themselves, a theology of mysticism which can be imparted in such a way that each one can become his own teacher of mysticism."<sup>17</sup>

The mystical project of which he speaks and writes needs be worked out in the context of an inseparable fusion to our God. However, there is a requisite pastoral commitment... "that it must be made intelligible to people, that they have an implicit but true knowledge of God – perhaps not reflected upon and not verbalized; or better

expressed, they have a genuine experience of God ultimately rooted in their spiritual existence, in their transcendentality in their personality or whatever you want to call it.”<sup>18</sup> In this context one can sense that Rahner views all human experience to tend toward the mystical. It is an a priori requirement for being human and possessing the capacity for encountering the Holy Mystery. Further, he suggests that one engages the mystical on a daily basis through the common situations found in everyday life. “We weave the fabric of our eternal lives out of the humdrum days.”<sup>19</sup> This mysticism of one’s everyday life involves even the banal activities of our personal habits. Eating and drinking, talking and walking, sleeping and thinking are each part of life’s daily mysticism.

Chronologically moving forward, during late October of 1962, Rahner was appointed a *peritus* for the newly opened Second Vatican Council. His work as a theological expert offered Rahner an exposure to a variety of conciliar discussions. Interestingly, both Rahner and the current Pope, Benedict XVI, Joseph Ratzinger, designed a conflated text on scripture and tradition for the German bishop’s conference. The following month, Pope John XXIII, asked for new work to be done on the area of divine revelation. This papal mandate would advance the venue for the Council to review and revise all texts previously prepared by Rome.<sup>20</sup> Rahner’s meeting and conversations within the conciliary consortia as well as his outside presentations in public discourse would extend Karl’s growing reputation as a theologian of enormous influence.

Concurrently, the chair of Christianity and Philosophy of Religion at the University of Munich, formerly held by the scholarly Romano Guardini, was vacated. Rahner was offered this post by Guardini and accepted it in March of 1964. He remained for three years, then opting for the position of professor of dogmatic theology at the University of Munich in April, 1967. The teaching of theology rather than chairing the philosophy department was the arena where Rahner’s ministerial heart would be most happy.

The next four years, despite failing strength, were devoted to teaching, advising and writing. At age sixty-eight, Karl Rahner officially retired from teaching to continue a life of lecture and scholarship until his death at Innsbruck on March 10, 1984. He was eighty years of age.

Chapter I  
Section II

The Ignatian Influence

History indicates that Aquinas, Heidegger, Marechal and Rousselot efficaciously impacted Karl Rahner's thought. However the man and his theology were more profoundly influenced by Ignatius of Loyola and his Spiritual Exercises. These exercises are penetrating reflections and meditations upon various aspects of the life of Christ. Rahner has shared that the Ignatian spirituality which had developed from his seminary formation and continued throughout his life was more important than all the philosophy and theology that he had ever experienced.<sup>21</sup> "He admits that even his decision to enter the Jesuit Order was not absolutely momentous for him until he experienced deeply its Ignatian spirituality."<sup>22</sup> During his sixty two years within the Society of Jesus, Karl Rahner participated in two thirty day and a yearly eight day retreat predicated on St. Ignatius' Exercises. These Exercises invite the exercitant into a realm of spirituality, mysticism and pastoral concern. "The final, radical, naked immediacy to God... which Ignatius sets as his goal"<sup>23</sup> is to occur during this contemplative experience.

Rahner always moved toward an anthropocentrically developed and theocentric methodology. A Christian anthropology was essential to his theological project. Consequently, the attractivity of Ignatius whose "emphasis upon the subject, interiority, the subject striving for self-reflection, self-responsibility and salvation"<sup>24</sup> influenced Rahner. He viewed Ignatius "as the *modern par excellence*."<sup>25</sup>

Rahner never considered Ignatius' prayer ("Take and Receive") or his Spiritual Exercises to be the mere pious platitudes of a holy man. He comments on the influence of Ignatius, "my own theological thinking, sprang from the practice of the Ignatian Exercises and so in fact was fashioned in the light of reflection on the effective operation of the Spirit."<sup>26</sup> Further, it is the contention of Jesuit scholar and former student of Karl Rahner, Harvey D. Egan, S.J. "that Ignatius was considered (by Rahner) as the first existentialist. That Ignatius mentions freedom before memory, understanding and will...this deeply impressed Rahner. Thus, reflection upon the theological implications of the Ignatian Exercises may account for Rahner's shift from an emphasis upon knowledge in his earlier writings to one upon freedom in his later works. Rahner understands the human person as a self-conscious and free being, as one endowed with the capability to co-create with God the way one will be for all eternity."<sup>27</sup> The human person has been provided the freedom to accept or reject God's grace. Grace being conceived in this context as God's self-communication.

Karl Rahner's theology begins with the experience God. This point of theological origin for Rahner is a consequence of the Ignatian spirituality and Exercises. "...the Exercises are concerned with something else, something more fundamental. It is a matter of letting the creator and the creature, as Ignatius says, deal directly with each other. Ignatius presupposes as both possible and actual and experience of God which, however many objectivized, verbalized moments or preparations or instrumental helps are included, is not identical with a verbalized, conceptual knowledge of God. In the Exercises, Ignatius wants to lead one to nothing else besides this experience. Why and how something like this is bound to an immediate encounter with Jesus, why those two

things mutually condition each other – namely, experience of God and immediate encounter with Jesus, which is something other than taking a mere historical interest in Jesus – that I cannot explain in greater detail here.”<sup>28</sup> “I am convinced that such an immediacy between God and the human person (we need not say Creator and creature) is of greater significance today than ever before.”<sup>29</sup>

I would argue that Ignatius and his Exercises are the very essence of Rahner’s theology rooted within the experience of the trinitarian God. Since a consequence of Ignatian spirituality is the awareness of one’s humanity as well a vivified encounter with God’s grace. Further, as Rahner has professed, his other philosophical and theological influences pale in comparison with the effect upon him by Ignatius. Hence, this dissertation considers the Jesuit founder as having the ultimate influence on Karl Rahner and therefore holistically effecting his thought. This is because Ignatius possessed a mysticism engulfed and emersed within the Trinity. Rahner grasped this Trinitarian revelation and contended that since being human is being graced one experiences the ever-greater God who reveals Godself historically and unconditionally while loving each individual in the most profound manner. These “persons” of Father, Son and Holy Spirit are not abstruse phenomena but rather the triune Holy Mystery continuously communicating Godself. I would contend that this is the quintessence of Rahnerian theology.

Rahner’s theology like Ignatius’ Exercises often possesses a mystagogical function. One experiences God as the triune self-communication of holy Mystery, divine personal revelation and a love more intimate than self love.<sup>30</sup> “Ignatius’ influence clarifies why most of Rahner’s theology evokes the experience of God’s self-communication through Christ in the Spirit.”<sup>31</sup> Further, this God is the ever-greater-Other to whom one’s very being must be fully opened. This complete openness of the human person, designated by Rahner as ‘spirit in the world,’ allows for a transcendent situation whereby one’s very being evidences both itself and God within the daily events of one’s life. Here, in these everyday encounters and because the human person has experienced a deified knowledge and love one mystically becomes a question to oneself. God is ever present to the human person and conversely this human person has an innate need for God. Rahnerian theology embraces Ignatian spirituality at this juncture. The answer to the question of oneself is both revealed and found only in the holy-ever-present-to-our-being-mystery-called God.<sup>32</sup>

Rahner vivified his experience to God, which I would argue, was persuaded by Jesuit formation and Ignatian spirituality. God remains The Holy Mystery whose divine offer is a free and perpetual self-communication to the human person. The person, somewhat bound by the activity of the existential moment, can in freedom transcend the question of self. However, one is required to engage a logic whereby God is encountered not only in one’s daily locomotions but also in the very silence which is a mode of God’s speech.<sup>33</sup>

I would maintain that Karl Rahner was a mystical speculative theologian tacitly imbued with Ignatian anagogy. A consequence of one’s profuse episodes with the ineffable Holy Mystery is a profoundly intense understanding of one’s own being. Hence, the Ignatian axiom of “finding God in all things” permits one to engage in a transcendental unfolding not only of the experience of God but also of oneself. One plumbs the depths of one’s mystical autobiography. The individual human person,

considered by Ignatius and Rahner, unpacks a Christian anthropology subsumed under the Trinitarian enterprise. “This Trinitarian way was essential to the attitude of the life of St. Ignatius; it was the basis of his piety, and we meet it at every turn in his Spiritual Exercises.”<sup>34</sup> Rahner further informs us that, “The final conquest of humanity’s present difficulties is basically capable of being attained only by the final, loving and hoping capitulation of the person into the incomprehensible mystery that we call God.”<sup>35</sup> One now detects a pastoral Karl Rahner being developed by Ignatian spirituality. Ignatius uses the term ‘*indiferencia*’ for a sense of Christian piety and surrender which tacitly acquiesces to the reality of detachment from all ways to God since God is always greater than any means or desire to possess God. Yet, precisely because Ignatius is a mystic, he views this ‘*indiferencia*’ as a movement toward the calm surrender of ‘seeking God in all things’. Rahnerian thought considers the first proposition as a presupposition of the second. For his notion is that Ignatian Trinitarian mysticism speaks to joy in the world. A blooming where one is planted. True to the influence of Ignatius upon Rahner’s theology, he avers that, “Ignatius is concerned only with the God above the whole world, but he knows that this God, precisely because he is really above the whole world and not merely the dialectical antithesis to the whole world, is also to be found in the world, when his sovereign will bids us enter the way of the world.”<sup>36</sup> Hence to both Ignatius and Rahner, God is in the world because God transcends the world.

## Concluding remarks concerning Ignatius' mystical and spiritual influences on Karl Rahner

I would argue that Ignatian mysticism and spirituality indisputably compenetrates the infrastructure of Karl Rahner's architectonic corpus of Trinitarian theology. Consequently, it needs be afforded "the" prominent station within the hierarchy of import convicting Rahnerian thought. Rahner's theological enterprise must subsist with Ignatian mysticism and spirituality at its foundation. This postulate is substantiated by the above secondary literature and monographical citations. It is as though the project of Ignatius' doctrine has been woven throughout the tapestry of Rahner's theology. One envisions the grafting of this fifteenth century mystic's spirituality onto the twentieth century systematic and speculative theological devoir of Karl Rahner. Illustrative of the above metaphor would be Ignatius' mystic trinitarian perception of God as creator and savior united with the co-creative human person in the world's redemption.

Further, I hold that precedent for Rahner's nascent ruminations on the economic and immanent Trinity can find a palable location within Ignatius. Certainly, I would suggest that the historically documented travels and travails of Karl Rahner, as demonstrated in the initial segment of this chapter, serve to identify his Ignatian '*indiferencia*' and 'the seeing of God in all things'.

Rahner's dissertation and his first publishings illustrate a fascination with the mystics. He is undeviating in his presentation of the founder of the Society of Jesus. "We may now state that Ignatius was really a mystic. There can be no doubt about that. With this bare statement we must be satisfied."<sup>37</sup>

It appears unrealistic to separate Karl Rahner from the Ignatian mystical experience. One may conclude that both Rahner and Ignatius are impelled to recognize that all human experience tends toward the mystical. However, this remark positions that state of the question in reference to Ignatius' influence on Rahner's mystico-spiritual notion of the Trinity.

It is sufficient to indicate, for this moment, that the spirituality and mysticism of Ignatius is manifested in Rahnerian Trinitarian formulations reflective of the following assertion. The Holy Mystery mystically offers through a mystic interaction the mystery of the triune God to the mystery of the human person. The Holy Mystery is found in all things by its self communication to the free human person who in contemplation and praxis encounters the world and consequently experiences the triune God.



Chapter I  
Section III

Martin Heidegger's influence on Karl Rahner

Martin Heidegger (1889 – 1976) who had studied philosophy at the University of Freiburg, was the student of the department chairperson Edmund Husserl. Husserl was a Jew and consequently was poised for indictment by Nazi leadership during this period in European history. He was terminated by the University of Freiburg in an effort to avoid political unrest within the institution and its philosophy department. Heidegger, accepted the post as new department chairperson in philosophy at Freiburg. Concurrently, Heidegger joined the Nazi party in order to maintain his newly acquired position. However, most historians seem to indicate that Heidegger never attempted to abrogate Nazi ideology during World War II. Rahner may have felt that Heidegger's thought was assuming too much Nazism. This assumption possibly combined with the counter approach viewing Heidegger as apolitical perhaps created enough ferment to compel the rejection of Heidegger as Rahner's dissertation director in lieu of the choice of Martin Honecker. However, one can not begin to discount the august channel of influence provided to Rahner by two years of surreptitious study under Heidegger. "I learned something about thinking itself from him, about how to think...how to read texts in a new way, to ask what is behind the text, to see connections...he taught us the courage to question anew so much of the tradition...he helped in the struggle to incorporate modern philosophy into today's Christian theology."<sup>38</sup>

A significant example of Heidegger's influence on Rahner's thought is readily observed in the implications of the existential experience. Existential is a term applied by Martin Heidegger to designate a characteristic of human existence or 'being-in-the-world'.<sup>39</sup> For Rahner, these characteristics or existentials refer to the human person as "transcendent, free, historical and threatened by sin and guilt."<sup>40</sup>

Heidegger's notion of humanity reflects the view that there is no distinction between the person and the world. Hence, there is no subjectivity or objectivity for the human person. One is one's own experience of the world from birth to death. The uniqueness of being human consists in one's experience of a one's personal existence – one exists for and with one's self in the world. Hence, Heidegger's preference was to refer to the human person as a, "Being-there." Unlike other living things, only "Being theres" are cognizant of their own death. This recognition is constant and is ascribed the phrase, by Heidegger, as one's "Being-toward-death." However, "Being theres" are consistent in that that are always involved with the stuff of their lives, their existence. One is continually absorbed within one's own life experiences. Angst, or anxiety occurs for "Being-theres" when they lose sight of their personal reality and are compelled to make a life choice with only limited knowledge regarding the future. Heidegger believed "Being theres" must be authentic, non-dependent on the opinion of others or the daily banal stuff of one's life. In this authenticity, one becomes very self reflective and self aware and expects the unexpected. "Being-theres" are required to see their life as continuous process.<sup>41</sup> The existent is cast into the world and possesses sufficient freedom, despite angst and world experiences to determine her or his own ethos. If a

“Being-there” is vigilant in personal authenticity then a certain liberation can be experienced even in the traumatic situations of life.

I maintain that Rahner’s four semesters of study with Heidegger would influence the avid pupil’s concept of the human existent. However, in Rahnerian theology, “it is the experience of the human and its involvement with the alterity of the other which orients his theology...the quotidian encounter with the exteriority of the other person, and ultimately The Other par excellence.....for Rahner, the orientation toward the other is expressed in terms of being...”<sup>42</sup> This may be the rationale for Rahner’s close friend and student Harvey Egan to refer to him as the ‘mystical theologian of everyday life.’<sup>43</sup> “Rahner’s theological point of departure is God’s self communication to the human person...{Rahner} considers the experience of God to be a human existential that is, an aspect of the human being precisely as human”<sup>44</sup> The above illustration of the Heidegger and Rahner moment regarding the existential underscores a degree of influence of the teacher on his pupil. Rahner, of course, will move forward in this existential enterprise ultimately viewing God’s grace as self communicative, the necessary crux of existence for the human person. Grace, for Rahner, is a universal existential not vitiated by any human experience. He finds God in the pedestrian encounters of daily life. One begins to comprehend the nexus between philosophy and theology for Rahner. I would further contend that the Heideggerian treatment of the existential was subsumed by Karl Rahner into a more comprehensive notion, and incipient theological anthropology.

As proposed above, Heidegger was deeply concerned with the notion of the human being. He applies the term, “*Dasein*”, Being-there, to the human being. This ‘there’ is the everyday world filled as it is with situations, circumstances and objects. The *Dasein* is grounded in the reality of this world, a being-in-the-world.

Rahner reconciles a degree of Heidegger’s *Dasein* synthesizing the concept within a Christian interpretation.<sup>45</sup> Rahnerian thought tends to consider the human as “a transcendent being insofar as all of his knowledge and all his conscious activity is grounded in a pre-apprehension (*Vorgriff*) of being as such, in an unthematic but ever present knowledge of the infinity of reality.”<sup>46</sup> Rahner is adapting from Heidegger both an ontological and epistemic consideration of the human being. He employs a proposition borrowed from his scholastic philosophical education. Although the knowing subject is finite it is competent to apprehend the conception of infinity.<sup>47</sup> However, a consequence of the subject’s finitude requires that this conception be generated externally. Rahner nuances this position by indicating that “the ground of thinking is external to thinking, nonetheless it cannot be grasped conceptually in a manner internal to thinking. It remains at some level unthinkable.”<sup>48</sup> This recognition of ‘the ground of thinking’ was introduced by Heidegger to Rahner who designates it as “a mystery”, “a secret ingredient.”<sup>49</sup> Nonetheless, Rahner, understands this arcane ground of thinking as a human experience which in a theological format is actually a transcendent experience. Hence, if indeed, the Holy Mystery is concluded to be the ground of every contingent condition of human freedom and human life (including *Dasein*); if a human being’s thinking in some enigmatic manner both opens and transcends the human being to the experience of God; then, one must ask if Rahner is affecting human facticity. Is Heidegger’s ‘being-in-the-world’ influencing Rahner’s theological conception of the human being toward an epistemological transcendentalism? If this is the situation, and I believe it is, Rahner’s incipient anthropocentric theology was developing under

Heidegger's tutelage. While Heidegger considers the human person as 'being-in-the-world' Rahner's theological augmentation perceives a paradigm of the human person as 'Spirit in the World.' A consequence of this Rahnerian position is an understanding that the intellect of the human being has the capacity to think about, experience and seek God 'in all things.' Of course, in all of this, Rahner never abrogates the basic theocentric articulation. All flows from the holy initiative of the triune God whose self communication in Christ through the Spirit is gratuitously proffered.

To recapitulate, Rahner sees the human being as spirit, however, this spirit encounters the world. "This spirit denotes the human force which reaches beyond the world and recognizes the metaphysical. The world denotes the reality which is accessible to the immediate experience of human beings...there exists a unity of the two."<sup>50</sup> Further, Rahner reflects, "Man is spirit in the world...the goal of the human spirit, Being itself, which also extends beyond the world."<sup>51</sup>

The human person is also that being which is listening for the word of God. The being that awaits God's self-communication. The being which hears beyond itself to God's revelation within human history. The literature shares yet another Rahnerian reflection on the nature of humanity in relation to itself and God. "Man is the being of receptive spirituality who stands in freedom before the free God of a possible revelation, which, if it comes, takes place in his history in the world."<sup>52</sup> For Rahner,, "human thought can reach that far. To perceive the word and expound it is no longer a matter for the philosophy of religion but the task of theology."<sup>53</sup>

While Heidegger's influence is palpable, the corpus of Rahner's thought is discovered in the free relation of Being "*in se*" to the human being. Hence, Rahner recognized the significance of the fundamental philosophical problem of Being. However, I would argue, that he was even more keenly aware of the fundamental theological problem of God in contemporary Christianity. He conflates the two critical issues in the following lengthy autobiographical disclosure. "My aim is to be a theologian who says that God is the most important reality there is, that we exist for him, to leap out of our own domain of existence into the abyss of the incomprehensibility of God. It is obvious that a theologian has to say that it is the 'human being' who related ultimately to God, must forget self for God. In this sense one can never do theology anthropocentrically enough. A basic reason for this is that God clearly does not figure as some individual object in our own world, not even as the most sublime thing in the universe. Rather, God is the absolute, the unconditional, on which we depend, but who does not depend on us in anything like the same way; the one to be worshiped, the one to whom we must unreservedly surrender ourselves with Jesus, the crucified. That is really the most fundamental human problem. And the most fundamental problem today is that most people ordinarily do not see things that way."<sup>54</sup>

### Some concluding remarks concerning Martin Heidegger's influence on Karl Rahner's thought

In the two years following his ordination to the Roman Catholic priesthood, Karl Rahner assiduously studied philosophy under Martin Heidegger. Rahner considered Heidegger a kind of philosophical mystagogue. His pedagogical style employed the careful examination of texts in an effort to glean new perspectives. Heidegger, as detailed above, was fascinated with the study of Being. He did not focus his work on the question of God. However, Rahner has suggested that while nothing of a doctrinal nature was apprehended from him, "a style of thinking and investigating"<sup>55</sup> was culled out of his lectures and seminars. Specifically, Rahner believed that he had learned from Heidegger a novel rubric in which one might deduce a synthesis from the careful analysis of dogmatic propositions. This synthetic approach would allow one to truncate doctrinal considerations into cardinal principles. The consequences of this methodology would result in "an internal, coherent body of dogmatic truth being established."<sup>56</sup>

The literature indicates and I would posit, that the Heideggerian experience for Rahner found its significance in the idea of the existential reality of the human being immersed in the world. One senses a nascent perception of the economic Trinity developing. Rahner is quite direct, "I would say that Heidegger hardly influenced my specifically theological questions, because Heidegger never wrote anything about them. In my manner of thinking, in the courage to question anew so much in the tradition considered self evident, in the struggle to incorporate modern philosophy into today's Christian theology, here I have certainly learned something from Heidegger and will always be thankful to him."<sup>57</sup>

## Chapter I

### Section IV

#### Joseph Marechal, Transcendental Thomism and Karl Rahner

The French Jesuit Pierre Rousselot (1878 – 1915) and the Belgian Jesuit Joseph Marechal (1878 – 1944) both influence Karl Rahner’s interpretation of Thomas Aquinas. Consequently, Rahner was better prepared to study Heidegger as a result of reading both these Jesuit philosophers. However, it was Marechal who provided Rahner with a unique philosophical notion. For Marechal was writing on the opportunity to correlate traditional Roman Catholic neo-scholasticism with modern philosophy while attempting to respect both positions. Rahner, a learned Thomist, was profoundly interested in Marechal’s agenda. He has indicated that credit be given to Joseph Marechal for providing his first real philosophical insight.<sup>58</sup> Rahner commented that, “what is needed is a trusting colloquium between traditional scholastic philosophy and modern philosophy. This is necessary if, on the one hand, we are to be of our time and speak the language that people today must speak if they are to understand themselves and others. On the other hand, we do not want to lose the true riches of tradition.”<sup>59</sup>

Marechal brought direction in Rahner’s pursuit to better understand Heidegger. Additionally, he expanded Rahner’s Thomistic horizons beyond the traditional manualism of scholastic philosophy.<sup>60</sup> Joseph Marechal was the determined philosophical advocate of an enterprise known as transcendental Thomism. A penultimate focus for Marechal would be the “turn to the subject” which articulated the real significance of the human person’s experience. Of particular concern for Marechal, and eventually Karl Rahner, would be the human mystical experience of God. A nascent philosophical transcendental method was in process which would allow for the possibility to consider the necessary components for the human person to will an object while also to possess knowledge of the object.<sup>61</sup>

The ‘turn to the subject’ within the venue of transcendental Thomism was critical to Rahner. This term is used in transcendental philosophy to acknowledge the necessity of concentration on the subject as knower. Rahner was concerned with the “objectivity of knowledge and its mediation through the senses, on the element of ‘*a posteriori* realism’ in Aquinas. He also wanted to do justice to the subjective and ‘*a priori*’ elements whose roots he also found in Thomas, but were further developed in transcendental philosophy.”<sup>62</sup>

Rahner fleshed out Aquinas through this novel lens and found it more engaging for his theology than the archaic interpretations posited in scholasticism. Joseph Marechal’s influence provides a version of a dynamic human knower. A knower whose determination extends and stretches itself beyond the known object toward “an unlimited horizon.”<sup>63</sup> Rahner fixed on this transcendental “beyond” and equates it to Aquinas’ notion of the “excessus of knowledge.” While one exists in the world it is as “spirit in the world”. One is not bound either by the historical moment or the world. Indeed, the human person is futuristic, ever striving for “the More”. “In the single experience, then we are simultaneously present to and in touch with the world of objective realities, with

ourselves as knower and with this longer, unlimited horizon in what Rahner calls the transcendental element in our experience.”<sup>64</sup>

Rahner’s theological articulation within this transcendental schema speaks to the human capacity to know the triune God. It allows for the reality of a knower to encounter divine revelation. In this sense, one possesses a transcendental component not solely embedded in the empirical. Since the human person is “spirit in the world and in history”, according to Rahner one can experience the triune God in all things. For Karl Rahner it is critical to illustrate that, “when faith and theology speak of God and His revelation, its language has meaning in the context of our experiences and makes sense in that context.”<sup>65</sup>

I would contend that both Rahner and Marechal initially identify the human experience, it becomes present to objective reality, then present to oneself as the knower, then present to a “more”, an unlimited horizon and finally one enters into a transcendental moment with the original experience.

Rahner would contend that the human person is absolutely oriented toward God. In fact, the nature of the person is to strive to know God. In this sense, God, as Aquinas taught, is the formal object of the study of theology. Therefore, theology itself needs be anthropocentric. Things known of the person are also known of God. The converse is also the case. Hence the transcendental philosophical method leads to a transcendental anthropology which understands that God alone is “the Transcendent”. While the human person transcends itself and moves toward a knowledge of God as teleos. The ‘*a priori*’ condition for the person to arrive at this knowledge of God, per Rahner, is grace. This grace is the “presence of God in the knowing subject. In other words, the human person is capable of transcending himself or herself in the knowledge of God, to whom his or her whole life is oriented, because God is already present in the person as the transcendent force or condition which makes such knowledge possible.”<sup>66</sup> A consequential understanding which results from this transcendental Thomistic method regards “the return to the human person as subject” moving toward God within the framework of history. God is at the center of one’s existence and we transcend ourselves in an effort to know this God. Transcendental Thomism, of which Rahner was the dominant theological advocate, considers God as central to the definition of human existence.<sup>67</sup>

Rahner’s reading of Marechal and careful study of Aquinas crafts his method in terms of both study transcendental philosophy and transcendental theology. Rahner’s remarks found at the conclusion of this section will further address this issue.

Methodologically, Rahner begins by acknowledging a transcendental element in God’s revelation of Godself. God is not only the formal object of theology but also the most profound encounter known to the human person. Rahner re-examines the traditional scholastic approach as he posits in Foundations of Christian Faith: “the original knowledge of God is not the kind of knowledge in which one grasps an object which happens to present itself directly or indirectly from outside. It has rather the character of a transcendental experience. Insofar as this subjective, non-objective luminosity of the subject in its transcendence is always oriented towards the holy mystery, the knowledge of God is always present unthematically and without name, and not just when we speak of it.”<sup>68</sup>

Rahner’s conception of transcendental Thomism recognizes that God’s free gift of grace to the human person as knower is revelatory in a profoundly new formal object, a

new horizon. Every person's very being is presented the fundamental option to transcend the overtly empirical and mystagogically and freely know and love God both in one's personal history as well as the history of all humanity. "God's self-communication of grace and revelation are present at least unthematically in all human knowledge and freedom and are accepted or rejected in all human choices."<sup>69</sup>

The term "transcendental" refers here to a metahistorical, a priori disposition of the human person, who asks after the question of being, and who thereby experiences him or her-self as being with an unlimited horizon, open to the mystery of God."<sup>70</sup> It follows that, in a transcendental Thomistic approach, one of the assumptions is that being human implies a relationship with the Absolute Other, who although incomprehensible, gratuitously provides a divine offer. Richard McBrien, has defined Transcendental Thomism as "that twentieth century approach to theology which is rooted in the principle that God is already present to life as a principle that renders all life open to becoming something more than it is already".<sup>71</sup>

Joseph Marechal was the principal philosophical proponent of transcendental Thomism. Karl Rahner was to become its principal theologian. For Rahner, like Aquinas, God is the formal object of theology. As proposed above, the Rahnerian treatment suggests the human person is oriented toward God. When one considers anthropology one needs also consider theology. Hence, a transcendental anthropology, illustrates God as The Transcendent. It sees humanity surpassing the corporeal and being transcendent to the extent that one is oriented beyond the self and to the Holy Mystery of the Other.

This "new theology" of which Marechal and Rousselot were deeply involved, impelled Rahner's interpretation of Aquinas toward being more contemporary in both the philosophy and the experience within the daily life of humanity. In neo-scholastic thought, revelation has been understood as purely extrinsic to human experience. Rahner is concerned to demonstrate through his transcendental method that revelation, which is in the first place God's own self communication, is experienced unthematically as the awareness of unlimited being against which we experience all our limited categorial knowing.<sup>72</sup>

As referenced above God is the Transcendent, supernatural existential which graciously allows for the human person to know and fundamentally opt for acceptance of Godself as, "the Absolute Other".<sup>73</sup> The categorial, for Rahner, is contrasted with the transcendental. It "represents the concrete, historical aspect of human reality."<sup>74</sup> Thus, within the scope of transcendental philosophy the knower is considered the subject of analysis or examination. A 'turn to the subject' for Rahner, Marechal and Rousselot does not abrogate the concern for the object of knowing. "While continuing to insist on the objectivity of knowledge and its mediation through the senses, on the element of posteriori 'realism' in Aquinas, [Rahner] also wanted to do justice to the subjective and a priori elements whose roots he also found in Thomas, but which were further developed in transcendental philosophy."<sup>75</sup> I would suggest that Rahner was discovering an epistemology which would aid his theological project more suitably than traditional scholasticism.

Further, the influence of Joseph Marechal advances for Rahner, a richer understanding of the human person as knower. This knower possesses an explosive urge to move from the object of knowing toward an infinite horizon. One's universe of sense

and human experience is circumscribed and operates within this vast horizon. One experiences 'beyond and more' than the universe that sense perception allows.



## Some concluding remarks on Karl Rahner's transcendental project and the influence of Joseph Marechal

Rahner's comments on Marechal are of interest. "Certainly, while Marechal influenced me, it cannot be said that my philosophical ideas were completely and adequately determined by him."<sup>76</sup> However, Rahner provides a varying account at a later date. "Discovering Marechal was a major breakthrough for me; it expanded my horizons somewhat beyond the scholastic philosophy of the manuals."<sup>77</sup> I would suggest that Rahner is attempting to clarify both the distinction and the nexus between transcendental philosophy and theology. "The term 'transcendental philosophy' was adopted to designate the investigation of the conditions of philosophical and scientific knowledge and has been used...to describe every effort of radical re-thinking to give philosophy an absolute foundation and analyze its relationship to scientific knowledge...the term 'transcendental' is in contrast to the usage of the scholastic Aristotelian tradition of the Middle Ages...the central endeavor of all transcendental philosophy must be to return to the element which certifies and justifies all knowledge...hence, the object of transcendental philosophy is neither being nor thought, neither the subject nor the object, but the actual unity of consciousness and being given in each act of knowing."<sup>78</sup>

Further, Rahner remarks on transcendental theology. "The principle of a transcendental theology is genuinely theological. Since theology deals with man's salvation (inasmuch as it consists of God's self-communication) and really with nothing else, its subject matter is the perfect totality of man; man is the 'subject'...hence salvation can be understood only as that of the subject as such...to understand the reality or realities in this way is to grasp them transcendently, that is, as related to the transcendental subject-which is such 'by nature' and as so constituted is radicalized by grace...when grace is then appealed to as the necessary condition for hearing the word of God as God's, a condition of possibility in the subject himself is examined and one which belongs strictly to theology. This is transcendental theology...If a transcendental philosophy were to claim absolutely to be the sole and non-derivate grounding of human existence, a 'positive' religion of revelation, in a history of salvation embracing as such the existence of man and salvation as a totality, would be excluded from the start."<sup>79</sup>

In the above lengthy but clarifying remarks one can realize that Rahner's turn to the subject is not a rejection of all general or particular objects. The human person's freedom and knowledge are transcendent in that they occur within history in the action of willing and knowing. Since, the person is spirit in the world, one does not evade this world but through grace can know it and choose to transcend oneself toward an unlimited, new horizon.

The anthropocentric transcendental constituent is graced by God's revelatory process toward a theocentricity. Again, since the subject is innately oriented toward God (the Transcendent), what transcendental theology says regarding the human person it also says of God. However, I would contend that Rahner recognizes the correlation between transcendental Thomism and human history. The subject person freely exists in a transcendental encounter with the new horizon ensconced in human history. This history is not merely the playing out of one's life but also the salvific revelation history communicated through God's Word and Spirit. In this thesis lies the fundamental option for the human person as free subject knower to acknowledge the divine offer of grace and

accept an existential relationship with the triune God. As Joseph Marechal had suggested 'the turn to the subject' articulates the significance of the human person's experience. For Karl Rahner, the transcendental moment is the human person's experience of the triune God in all things.

Perhaps one of Karl Rahner's most significant contributions to Christian theology was his adaption of this "transcendental analysis" to comprehend the manner in which the Trinity manifests itself within human history. As Rahner studied the idealist, Immanuel Kant, he realized that focusing on the conditions in the human subject that make knowing possible was more significant than concentrating on the objects of human knowledge. This Kantian influence encouraged Rahner's reading of Joseph Marechal. Marechal was modifying Kant's transcendentalism in order to avoid what he apprehended to be the specious concept of subjectivism. He would then apply this Kantian method to the more objective philosophy of Thomism, dominant within Roman Catholicism since the thirteenth century. The reader should recall that the eighteenth century rationalist, David Hume, argued from a position whereby metaphysical and religious concepts were beyond the limit of sense perception and therefore superceded verifiable human knowledge. Kant, Marechal and soon Karl Rahner would negate this presupposition.

A consequence of this abrogation of Hume would be Rahner's first major publication, Spirit in the World. Here Rahner demonstrates that Thomism's epistemology could be understood within the scope of the transcendental method. Indeed, Rahner demonstrates that the human spirit, though acting in the sensory world, is essentially a thrust toward the ultimate transcendent reality, the Trinity. Further, this relatively new transcendental theology proposed a method to integrate into Roman Catholic thought a distinctive character of modern philosophy.

The core of this method attracted Rahner since it begins with the human person as the subject of inquiry as well as the subject of knowing. Rahner believed that this transcendental method brought forth what was already implicit in the content and method of traditional Catholic theology, particularly Thomism. For transcendental theology is anthropological in its reflection on what the human person as subject is and does. It investigates the conditions of the real person in the real world exercising real human actions. Inquiring, understanding, evaluating, analyzing, choosing, desiring, and loving are all aspects of human activity. The human person performs these very human operations innately. Rahner would posit that, philosophically per Kant, Marechal and Heidegger, the natural object of the human person's spirit is being. However, theologically Rahner would contend that each human person is a subject made for God. God is humanity's ultimate horizon. Therefore, it is not truly possible to speak of the human person without also speaking of God. This is further concretized in God's Trinitarian self-communicative process by means of revelation and grace. God is not distant to the human person as subject but freely elects a divine offer of Godself. In a Trinitarian determination, God through the process of on going creation, the communication and revelation by the incarnate Logos and by the activities of fellowship of the Spirit in the economy of salvation history perichoretically allows the person as subject to "be" completely and fully human. This encounter or experience can be considered the sacred gift, the philanthropic grace of the incomprehensible Holy Mystery permitting the human person to transcend self and strive toward the triune God. Rahner,

would further contend that whether the person is aware of this transcendental movement is unimportant. It truly exists even without human acknowledgment.

This illustration of the gift of grace is an existential integral to the essence of being human. “But since God did not have to create human beings for this purpose and end, this existential is properly called a ‘supernatural existential’. This means that it is part of human nature only because of God’s free and gratuitous disposition of this nature. He could have created it otherwise, as what Rahner calls pure nature.”<sup>80</sup> Hence, one can observe both Martin Heidegger’s and Joseph Marechal’s thought inducing Rahner to respond in a contemporary manner toward the relationship of the existential and God’s offer of grace. The supernatural existential is the reified manner whereby the nature of the human person as both creation and existent occurs only because of this creative resolution of God. More on this treatment of the supernatural existential will be considered later in this dissertation. For the moment, it is apparent that Rahner is concurring with traditional views on nature and grace. Further, Rahner is unpacking these secular and sacred philosophical concepts as of result of his exposure to Heidegger and Marechal.

It is significant for the purpose of this dissertation to conclude this section with an instance from Rahner’s Trinitarian transcendental theology. “If theology shows clearly that the ‘Trinity of the economy’ and the ‘immanent’ Trinity are identical, and that the latter is revealed through the former, the importance of a transcendental philosophy for theology becomes apparent, and such philosophy, when exercising this function, becomes a transcendental theology. For if the revelation of the mystery of God’s self-communication is supposed, and it is seen that God is always the unoriginated and hence the permanently incomprehensible, even when imparting himself, a ‘transcendental’ deduction demonstrates that this self-communication of God necessarily comes to a man as transcendence and as history, in a unity and distinction of both elements. Then the revelation of God’s self-communication is seen to contain what implicitly we call the economic and immanent Trinity of God.”<sup>81</sup>

Chapter 1  
Section V

Various Citations illustrating Karl Rahner's place in Christian Theology

The following brief account of Karl Rahner's place in Christian theology will be a summary gleaned from some who knew him well and others who have demonstrated scholarly interest in his work. The intention here is for the reader to conclude that Rahner has been one of the most influential Roman Catholic Christian theologians of the twentieth century.

During my study at Christ Church, Oxford, in 2005 the great Anglican theologian, John Macquarrie, shared with me that, "Karl Rahner's ideas, particularly on the Trinity, have influenced me more than any other Christian thinker."<sup>82</sup>

Johann Baptist Metz has stated, "Rahner's life work has succeeded in bringing together what has long been separated, indeed set at variance: his work had brought to an end the schism between theology and life history, it has related doctrine and life, the mystical and the everyday, in the context of the irreducible complexity and anonymity of our postmodern situation."<sup>83</sup> Metz further commented on Rahner's theological project not as criticism but rather rescue. "Rahner wanted to rescue the abiding, and, in his view, indispensable elements in the context of the church's doctrine of faith."<sup>84</sup>

Rahner has influenced Christian thought through more than 1600 publications, his service as a *peritus* at Vatican II, his deep concern for the pastoral as displayed within the academic venue, and the immense number of awards and honoraria distinguishing his work.

Friend, former student and successor to Karl Rahner as professor of Dogmatics at the University of Munster, Herbert Vorgrimler, has shared. "The man in Rahner's theology who investigates the theological heritage is not a brilliant interesting personality but the average middle-class person from central Europe, the person Rahner understood himself to be."<sup>85</sup> Rahner's theology follows from a place where the average Christian can encounter the incomprehensible holy mystery.

As demonstrated above, Karl Rahner's position on the human person graced with an orientation to God, is at the core of his theology.

Feminist theologian, Anne Carr, has claimed, "Rahner's work proceeded methodologically as a 'theological anthropology' .....this starting point is a feminist imperative, recognizing the necessity of bringing women's experience to bear in critical fashion on the construction of Christian theology"<sup>86</sup> ...Carr also follows an important nuance in Rahner's 'turn to the subject', in that, like Rahner, she finds human experience to be a starting point for the various systematic treatises. Human experience also serves, for Carr and Rahner, as the foundation "for understanding the more fundamental theological horizon of God's incomprehensibility."<sup>87</sup>

Certainly, during the period surrounding Vatican II, "Rahner's theology of freedom and advocacy of free speech within the Church was seen as opening the windows of the Church to let in the fresh air of modernity," according to Francis Schussler Fiorenza.<sup>88</sup>

Elizabeth Johnson's study of the theology of Mary takes up Rahner's claim that Mary is 'entirely one of us' as an invitation to reconstruct the figure of Mary of Nazareth

as a historical person, and to present her Spirit-filled life in a way that ‘would integrate Mary back into theology’ ...Johnson’s feminist critique...fully exploits Rahner’s theology of grace and his anthropology of human freedom and self determination.”<sup>89</sup>

It is Catherine Mowry Lacugna’s recommendation that reconceiving the Trinitarian doctrine was a necessity and Rahner’s notion that God’s nature is to self-communicate has been a profound point of departure.<sup>90</sup>

Liberation theologian, Leonardo Boff, respects Rahner’s Trinitarian definition of ‘person’ as ‘a distinct manner of subsisting’. Boff concurs with the usage of this word person (*persona*) because he believes it is equivalent to *hypostasis*. The concept of the person is critical to an effective liberation theology.<sup>91</sup>

According to the brilliant Tübingen scholar, Walter Kasper, “the first wave of modern Christological thought ...began when Karl Rahner’s article on Chalcedon...set the tone.”<sup>92</sup>

Karl Rahner and Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI) agreed on using “the theology of the word as a starting point for the definition of priestly ministry.” This theory is presented by Avery Dulles.<sup>93</sup>

In yet another context, Richard P. McBrien, suggests, “the most prominent critic of the Church’s exclusion of women from the priesthood was the late Jesuit theologian, Karl Rahner(d. 1984).”<sup>94</sup>

Rahner’s concept regarding “the anonymous Christian” presents his theory that any human person can totally commit to Christ as God without either knowledge of Christian doctrine or direct faith in Christ. This comes as a result of the grace and revelation provided by Christ, the Mediator of all humanity.<sup>95</sup> Support for this theory has been found in the work of scholars like Boston College Systematic and Mystical Theology Professor Dr. Harvey D. Egan, S.J. Egan’s doctoral work was directed by Karl Rahner and he has written a biographical legacy of his tutor.

Renowned theologians with adroit thinking and immense discipleship from Friedrich Schleiermacher to Paul Tillich have positioned the Trinity symbolically to assist the faithful’s thought in a more acute understanding of God. Scholars of this repute have also indirectly helped to reveal Rahner’s place in Christian theology. Since his was a conception of a real Trinity of persons at the core of Christian faith.<sup>96</sup> This Rahnerian Trinitarian approach is in line with orthodox Roman Catholic Christian theologians of the twentieth century.

I would concede that, the reader can ascertain from the insightful comments of these theologians, that Karl Rahner was not only a humble dogmatician but his theology was systematic to the extent of its effect on a plethora of diverse and pronounced Christian thinkers.

Chapter I  
Endnotes

1. IR, p. 24
2. KR, p. 4
3. IR, p. 26
4. ME, p. 19
5. IR, p. 36
6. Ibid., p. 26
7. UK, p. 50
8. IR, p. 32
9. Ibid., p. 53
10. ME, p. 23
11. IR, p. 38
12. TI, Vol. I, p. 7
13. KR, p. 8
14. ME, pp.27 &28
15. KR, pp. 10 & 11
16. ID, pp. 192&193
17. TI, Vol. VII., p. 13
18. WS, p. 115
19. TI, Vol. XIX, pp. 167 – 177
20. KR, p. 13
21. ID, p. 191
22. WS, p. 96
23. ID, p. 180
24. ME, p. 30
25. Ibid.
26. TI, Vol. XVI, X
27. ME, p. 32
28. ID, p. 175
29. Ibid., p. 176
30. ME, p.37
31. Ibid.
32. CF, p. 18
33. TI, Vol. XVI, p. 135
34. SE, p. 16
35. ID, p. 179
36. RR. p. 316
37. TI, Vol. III, p. 280
38. IR, p. 45
39. TM, p. 394
40. CK, p. XIII
41. TM, pp. 393 – 396
42. CK, p. 216
43. ME, p. 55

44. Ibid.
45. CK, p. 216
46. FC, p. 33
47. CK, p. 219
48. Ibid., p. 217
49. FC, p. 35
50. UK, p. 62
51. HW, p. 203
52. Ibid., p. 209
53. UK, p. 62
54. ID, pp. 267 & 268
55. Ibid., p. 13
56. Ibid.
57. IR, p. 46
58. IR, p. 46
59. ID, p. 14
60. Ibid., p. 255
61. KC, p. 305
62. KR, p. 42
63. F.C. pp. 19 & 20
64. KR, p. 43
65. Ibid.
66. CA, p. 146
67. Ibid., p. 148
68. FC, p. 21
69. KR, p. 45
70. KC, p. XV
71. CA, p. 1253
72. CK, pp. 5 & 6
73. Ibid., p. XIII
74. Ibid., pp. 5 & 6
75. KR, pp. 42 & 43
76. ID, p. 13
77. Ibid., p. 255
78. S.M., Vol. #6, p. 282
79. Ibid., p. 287
80. KR, pp. 36 & 37
81. S.M., Vol. #6, p. 288
82. John Macquarrie in Conversation with the author following a plenary lecture delivered August 1, 2005
83. J.B. Metz, A Passion for God, (New York, Paulist, 1998). P. 103
84. UK, p. 21
85. Ibid., p. 22
86. CK, pp. 265 & 266
87. Ibid.
88. Ibid., p. 65

89. Ibid., p. 273
90. GT, p. 124
91. Ibid., p. 35
92. JC, p. 17
93. Avery Dulles, Models of the Church, (Image Book Co., New York, New York, 1987). p. 173
94. Richard P. McBrien, 101 Questions on the Church (Paulist Press, New York, New York, 2003). p. 77
95. ME, pp. 140 & 141
96. TGCF, p. 77



## Chapter Two: The Roman Catholic Trinitarian Dogma

The designation articulated to endeavor a human comprehension and expression of the ineffable yet central dogma of the Roman Catholicism has been entitled the Trinity. It is the axiological moment that is indicative of the unity of three distinct *hypostases* (persons) in the one sacred mystery referred to as God. The profound Roman Catholic Tradition presents these three distinct but not separate persons as God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. These three divine persons subsist as the only one God although each is absolutely God and yet absolutely distinct from one another.<sup>1</sup> It is either expressed directly or obviously clearly implied by current acceptable Roman Catholic creedal pronouncements that while the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is God,<sup>2</sup> there is no tritheism here but only one God.

The Roman Catholic Magisterium presents the Son as begotten of the Father by an eternal generation, while the Holy Spirit proceeds by an eternal procession from the Father and the Son. Yet, regardless of the difference as to origin, these three divine *hypostases* are co-eternal and co-equal: all alike are uncreated and omnipotent.<sup>3</sup>

The Catechism of the Catholic Church proffers further penetration into the absolute significance of this enigmatic Trinitarian dogma. “The mystery of the Most Holy Trinity is the central mystery of Christian faith and life. It is the mystery of God in himself. It is therefore the source of all other mysteries of faith, the light that enlightens them. It is the most fundamental and essential teaching in the hierarchy of the truths of faith. The whole history of salvation is identical with the history of the way and the means by which the one true God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, reveals himself to men and reconciles and unites those who turn away from sin.”<sup>4</sup>

The Roman Catholic Tradition, thought its Magisterium teaches that this (Trinity) is the revelation regarding God’s nature, which Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came upon Earth to deliver to the entire world: and which the same Tradition proposes to all humanity as the foundation of the Roman Catholic Church’s entire dogmatic system. In order to avert any tritheistic notion, the Roman Catholic Church has pronounced the absolute, eternal indivisibility of the One God. The authority of the Lateran Council (1215) asserts and declares the direct creedal formula: “We believe and confess without reservation that there is only one true God, eternal, infinite (*immensus*) and unchangeable, incomprehensible, almighty, and ineffable, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, three persons, indeed, but one essence, substance or nature entirely simple.”<sup>5</sup>

However, Scripture provides no specific appellation by which the three Divine Persons are denoted directly as the Trinity. The Greek term, *trias*, is found in the work of Theophilus of Antioch (@ 180 C.E.) and it is likely that Tertullian initiated the usage of the derivative, *trinitas*, (@ 200 C.E.) “the Trinity of God [ Father] His Word and His Wisdom”<sup>6</sup> in a triune unicity. Interestingly, we find mystery within our venture to locate the very commencement of the term used for two millennia to express the sacred Trinitarian mystery. Yet Roman Catholic theology insists that, however or wherever the nomenclature developed, it is the most fundamental and essential teaching and a revealed truth. All salvation history is identical with the Trinitarian revelation to humanity.<sup>7</sup> Further, Roman Catholicism would generally define mystery as “a reality imbued with

the hidden presence of God. The term is most akin to sacrament. It also refers to the plan of God for our salvation, as disclosed historically in Christ.”<sup>8</sup> Roman Catholic logic insists that a dogma so enigmatic must presuppose a divine revelation. If the reader, on the most elementary level, will comprehend revelation as the free articulation of Godself to humanity, a basic Trinitarian doctrine can be seen to develop within Roman Catholicism.

As a consequence, Christology and pneumatology can be considered obvious “components” of this Trinitarian moment. Here again, human articulation abandons a satisfactory exposition of the reality. For at this juncture the implication suggested could be that the missions and sendings of the second and third Trinitarian divine persons is epiphenomenal to the economy of the Trinity.

However, the treaties *de Deo uno* and *de Deo Trino* are a revelation that was protective of the monotheistic ideology inspired by the Old Testament. Simultaneously the affect of Greek philosophical thought also produced implications on this Trinitarian belief. Early heretical teachings, anathematized by the Roman Catholic Church, actually helped formulate the dogma. Roman Catholicism, for example, had the need to refute the specious interpretation that the second Trinitarian person was subordinate to the Father. A contingent issue was the necessity to discredit the concept that the three divine persons were modes of God’s self-disclosure but were not distinct. Hence, while subordinationism allowed for Trinitarian distinction of the divine persons the unity of these hypostases was eschewed. The heresy of Modalism did allow for a Trinitarian unity but abnegated the distinction of each of the divine persons.

The current Nicene Creed, professed in the Roman Catholic liturgy of the Mass, is the formula resulting from the above exemplified heretical positions. The thought of St. Athanasius and the Cappadocian Fathers (Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory of Nazianzas) in rebutting there heresies strengthened the development of the Trinitarian articulation. Although, the first Nicene Council (325) professed the *homoousios* doctrine pronouncing the Son as the same substance with the Father, little consideration was directed to the person of the Holy Spirit. The Trinitarian development moves as the issue is finalized in 1439 by the Council of Florence. “The Holy Spirit is eternally from Father and Son; He has his nature and subsistence at once (*simul*) from the Father and Son. He proceeds eternally from both as from one principle and through one spiration...And, since the Father has through generation given to the only-begotten Son everything that belongs to the Father, except being Father, the Son also has eternally from the Father, from whom he is eternally born, that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Son.”<sup>9</sup>

The reader needs to understand that it is tendentious for Roman Catholic theology to consider the Trinity from two perspectives. The Trinity of God within Godself, the interior of the divine life, is referred to as the immanent Trinity. The economic Trinity is the Trinity whereby God reveals and communicates to the world through the salvific design to redeem and heal humanity. These are not “two ontologically distinct trinities but only one Trinitarian mystery of God that may be considered under two aspect.”<sup>10</sup> It is by means of the economic Trinity that the immanent Trinity is revealed to humanity. However, the immanent Trinity “illustrates the whole *oikonomia*” (economic Trinity).<sup>11</sup> these realities of the one Holy Trinity distinguish who God is within human history. Yet, once again, even incontestable logic is confounded by our human perplexity at precise articulation. Roman Catholicism dogmatically insists, with faith and reason, that there

exists only one Trinity which is both immanent and economic this *fides et ratio* is the result of God's communication. Without the grace of the free revelation and self communication of God regarding the mystery of the Trinity humanity would be categorically frustrated in any attempt at faithfully perceiving and theologically articulating this dogma. "For all human words stand dumb before the absolute mystery of God."<sup>12</sup>

This gracious Trinitarian revelation is the grand expose' of God's complete self understood by Roman Catholics to be revealed through Jesus the Christ. Indeed, it is the incarnate *Logos* who reveals God as Father in relation to his sonship while the Son is revealed in relation to his Father. In 325 A.D. the Council of Nicaea professed and pronounced the Son's consubstantiality with the Father. This dogma was further expressed by the Council of Constantinople (381 A.D.) through its explicit formulation of the Nicene Creed.<sup>13</sup>

The Roman Catholic trinitarian dogma further affirms that both the Father and the Son are revealed by the Spirit. Conversely, it is both the Father and the Son who send the Holy Spirit as advocate, healer, soul of the Church to Jesus' disciples. The Holy Spirit is "thus revealed as another divine person with Jesus and the Father...the sending of the person of the Spirit after Jesus' glorification reveals in its fullness the mystery of the Holy Trinity."<sup>14</sup>

As a result of the consubstantial unity Roman Catholicism professes not a tritheistic Godhead of three gods, but the unicity and distinction of but one triune God. The reality is that each divine person absolutely "possesses" its own Godliness but is wholly and completely God. Again, this enigmatic dogma further declares the categorical distinction of each divine person from one another even within their absolute unicity. The Roman Catholic Magisterium professes with full certitude that these divine persons are not modalities (Modalism) of the Godhead. They are eternally and consummately the one true God in perfect unity and distinction.

The dogma moves forward to articulate the reality of the relatively that each *hypostasis* eternally possesses to one another. "In the relational names of the persons, the Father is related to the Son, the Son to the Father, and the Holy Spirit to both. While they are called three persons, in view of their relations, we believe in one nature or substance."<sup>15</sup> Thus the Roman Catholic Trinitarian dogma holds a unity of the persons, a distinction of the persons and a relationship of the persons. It simultaneously and assiduously contends that each Trinitarian member is wholly in each other Trinitarian member. The persons arrive out of relations, their distinction lies in their relationship. Within the grammar of the Trinity, "a person means a relationship subsisting in God's nature. Such a relationship differs from God's substance only conceptually; really opposed to and therefore really distinct from the relationship reciprocal to it. And this is why God, though one substance, is three persons."<sup>16</sup> This entire divine economy, all the events and manifestations by which the one God reveals and communicates Godself, "is the common work of three divine persons."<sup>17</sup>

I would proffer the reader a penetrating exposition of the Roman Catholic Trinitarian dogma acquired from the Athanasian Creed to assist this chapter of my dissertation.

"...And the Catholic Faith is this, that we worship one God in Trinity and in Unity. Neither confounding the Persons, nor dividing the substance. For there is one Person of

the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost is uncreated. The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, and the Holy Ghost incomprehensible. The Father eternal, The Son eternal and the Holy Ghost eternal and yet they are not Three Eternals but One Eternal. As also there are not Three Uncreated, nor Three Incomprehensibles, but One Uncreated, and One Incomprehensible. So likewise the Father is Almighty, the Son Almighty, and the Holy Ghost Almighty. And yet they are not Three Almighties but One Almighty. So the Father is God, the Son is God and the Holy Ghost is God. And yet they are not Three Gods, but One God. So likewise the Father is Lord, the Son Lord, and the Holy Ghost Lord. And yet not Three Lords but One Lord. For, like as we are compelled by the Christian verity to acknowledge every Person by Himself to be God and Lord, so we are forbidden by the Catholic Religion to say, there may be Three Gods or Three Lords. The Father is made of none, neither created nor begotten. The Holy Ghost is of the Father, and of the Son: neither made, nor created, nor begotten, but proceeding. So there is One Father, not Three Fathers; One Son, not Three Sons; One Holy Ghost, not Three Holy Ghosts. And in this Trinity none is afore or after the Other. None is greater or less than another, but the whole Three Persons are Co-eternal together, and Co-equal. So that in all things, as is aforesaid, the Unity in Trinity, and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshipped. He therefore that will be saved, must think of the Trinity.”<sup>18</sup>

One needs consider the accepted Roman Catholic creeds to be a constituent of its Trinitarian Tradition. However, it is the conciliar pronouncements that have historically refined and, hence, determined the official dogma. Specifically, invested in refining the creedal formulations were the Fourth Lateral Council (1215) and the Council of Florence (1442). These councils finalized the Council of Nicaea (325). But it appears that both the Tradition and the Councils have been effectuated by Scripture. Although, scholarship continues to provide insight regarding novel Scriptural Trinitarian references a development model as clearly substantiated within the Old Testament is at best quite modest. I would contend that there exists no distinct intimation, no incarnated nuances no direct assertion, no specific declaration within the Old Testament that would be compelling enough for Orthodox Roman Catholics to conclude that God is absolutely triune. It is obvious that God as Father is frequently and vividly referenced. There also exists the reality that the Trinity is linked with creation and therefore presents a serious implication found by some in the book of Genesis. Further, Christians in general are cognizant of the belief that both Testaments are illuminative of one another. In spite of these doctrinal realities and theologumena it is the Gospel revelations as well as Pauline proclamations that present Jesus as the Christ and the second divine person. A problem is genuinely encountered, within the Old Testament, when scholarship moves forward to an honest, specific and precise indication of a Third Trinitarian Person. Although mention is clearly made of the “spirit of the Lord”, there is nothing to show that this spirit is distinct or a distinct person from the creator God. “Since revelation and salvation come in historical form it cannot be expected that the Trinity of God should have been explicitly revealed in the Old Testament.”<sup>19</sup> It may be possible to infer a triadic approach to the execution and perpetuation of the One God’s Creation. This could be interpreted as an action involving each Trinitarian person within the Old Testament. The Catechism of the Catholic Church is quite specific in its declaration that the “Old Testament suggests and the New Covenant reveals the creative action of the Son and the Spirit, inseparably one

with that of the Father.”<sup>20</sup> An argument might conceivably be posited that the Old Testament authors of Genesis 1:2-3 or Psalm 33 and Psalm 104 were inspired to illustrate full Trinitarian creativity in their writings however, this would be post facto.

Derived from the fertile mind of St. Irenaeus the following summation is gleaned from The Catechism of the Catholic Church. “There exists but one God...he is the Father, God, the Creator, the author, the giver of order. He made all things by himself that is, by his Word and his Wisdom,....by the Son and the Spirit: who, so to speak, are ‘his hands.’”<sup>21</sup> However, it is really an excursus into the Gospel that provides this historicity and the incipient Trinitarian formulation. The baptismal commission located in Matthew (28:14) appears as the culmination of a Trinitarian conception. One may further conjecture that the Gospel authors are determinedly gradual in evidencing three distinct divine persons. This is possible in order not to unbalance the monotheistic theology circumscribed by the polytheism prevalent in the Middle East. On a more mundane level, is it not possible that the Christ, the God-Man, could readily observe his disciples lack of insight and frequent astonishment regarding their relation with him as God’s Son? Hence, is it conceivable the Gospel writers show Jesus’ pedagogical method to introduce the Trinity by means of a gradual integration which would be more palatable for the minds and hearts of his followers? I am convinced that each of these theories contains some validity but we can never be certain. It is apparent, however, that some of the New Testament letters, I Cor. 6:11, Gal. 3:10-14, Heb. 10:29 and even I Pet. 1:2, share precreedal Trinitarian suggestions. For purposes of this dissertation, it matters little whether Pauline and Petrine literature predates the evangelists. The Trinity is being revealed most especially within the New Testament. The Magisterium now has divine revelation to support future consideration and formulations.

Clearly, it is Jesus teaching his disciples to recognize within him, the eternal Son of God, one with the Father. As his earthly ministry moves to conclusion, he assures them that the Father will send an advocate, a healer, a counselor, another divine person, the Holy Spirit, to continue his work. After, Jesus’ resurrection, he revealed the doctrine more explicitly, bidding each of his contingents to go and teach all nations, “baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19). The force of this passage strengthens the dogmatic conception of the reality of the Trinitarian Tradition in Roman Catholicism. If one is to accept the revelation of the Trinity to be initially communicated in Scripture than it is clear, from the above citation, that “the Father” and “the Son” are distinct persons. Certainly, this is apodictic since the terms and/or titles are mutually exclusive. I would further contend that the inclusion of the name and title of the Holy Spirit within the same series is evidence of a move from a binatarian to a Trinitarian recognition. This is further determined by the author’s use of the conjunction “and” connecting each name with the other. Hence, we find in the New Testament a real and distinct third divine person co-equivalent with the Father and the Son. The unveiling of this revelatory New Testament selection excludes the possible supposition that the disciples understood the Holy Spirit not as a distinct person, but as God viewed in God’s action on God’s creation.<sup>22</sup> The phrase “in the name” helps to inaugurate the separation of the divine persons and purposes the essential nature of their unicity. This is established since the Hebrew application of the divine name was definitively representative of God. One to whom the name was invested possessed incredible authority. The one whose name was employed endemically held the very

supernatural powers of God. The nexus of the Hebrew and Roman Catholic traditions would suggest that it is unlikely that the phrase “in the name of” should be spoken, were not all the persons mentioned equally divine.<sup>23</sup>

The New Testament composers were inspired to carefully wordsmith those passages expressly designed to adeptly delineate the specific divinity of an individual Trinitarian person. John’s testimony (Chap. 10:29) is illustrative in exhibiting the Christ’s teaching regarding his absolute unity of essence with his Father. “I and the Father are one.” Few statements could demonstrate more clarity.

Other traditional New Testament Trinitarian formulations are available within the non-evangelistic writings of St. Paul. Paul authors a kind of doxology ( II Cor. 13:13) “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.” The very construction of Paul’s verbiage is his endeavor to profess to the early church that a real distinction exists among the three divine persons. Further, Paul, an apostle of both praxis and doctrine, implies a trifold unity and a singular distinction of the hypostases within the economy and history of human salvation. He crafts a brilliant expose’ of the correlation between each Trinitarian person and each human person. “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone.” (I Cor. 12:4-11).

To recapitulate, the Roman Catholic Tradition finds very ineffectual and supine evidence of the Trinitarian dogma explicitly introduced within the Old Testament. It may be possible to concede a truncated spiritual trinitarian intimation in terms of “the Creator.” However, the Magisterium of the Roman Catholic Church, finds proof-texts within the New Testament to authenticate that the Trinitarian dogma is expressly revealed. While the entire dogma by its nature is obtruse it is further obfuscated by the real procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son. Yet even this dogmatic formulation contains substantial affirmation in the Johannine presentation (Chapters 14-17) of Jesus’ final discourse to his disciples.

At this juncture, I wish to remind the reader of the genuinely prodigious amount of speculative and practical orthodox theological insight that exists regarding the expression of the Trinity. My focus has been and will continue to be a purist accounting of the actual Roman Catholic orthodox dogma as taught to the contemporary Roman Catholic within the scope of the current Magisterium. My intent is not a debate or a commentary on the most recent Trinitarian theories. Of course, this is not to vitiate creative Trinitarian perceptivity. However, a necessary pursuit of this dissertation is a reasonably developed Trinitarian framework created in this second chapter to prepare the reader for chapter three, Karl Rahner’s nuances regarding the central mystery of the Roman Catholic faith. It should be evident from what has been presented to the reader thus far that God is personified mystery. The Trinity is the personification of absolute existence, absolute truth and absolute mystery.<sup>24</sup> The First Vatican Council (1869 – 1870) explains the term mystery in theology as a truth which humanity is not merely incapable of discovering apart from divine revelation, but which, remains hidden by the veil of faith even when revealed.<sup>25</sup> Human understanding of the Holy Mystery of the Triune God is absolutely limited, even when taken on faith, unless it receives God’s revelation. Roman Catholicism has frequently turned to the use of analogy to aid human comprehension. The Tradition shows that it is possible to develop a representative

conception which liminally expresses the Trinitarian mystery. However, the human intellect suffers from the ineptitude to grasp the fullness manifested in the various enigmatic elements of the overall concept. This Trinitarian mystery is the sublime archetype of the reality of mystery. Yet even with the profound communication proffered through revelation since the Trinity is absolute mystery, our anemic intelligence can not apprehend its depth. Hence, the divine persons are not fractiles of One God, nor are they a triarchy of the Divine Being, neither are the three *hypostases* coalesced forming the one Supreme Being.

However, due to the free self communication by God in Word and Wisdom, the human person is capable of a circumscribed penetration into the enigmatic fringes of the dogma through a sacred combination of reason and revelation. Hence, the Roman Catholic Church posits a Trinitarian notion involving the one Trinity which we articulate in terms of both *theologia* and *oikonomia*. This Tradition teaches that we are capable of distinguishing between God within Godself and God within the world. Yet even this reference to the Trinity is filled with mystery. The Roman Catholic Magisterium does hold that while the Holy Trinitarian mystery is ineffable, it can be determined, through the graces of revelation and reason, to be consubstantial, hypostatically distinct and relational. Of course, these concepts are the limit situations bounded by human articulation of infinite Trinitarian phenomena. Whatever the terminology or access to revelation the human mind was not created to have a comprehensive understanding of the absolute holy mystery of the Trinity. However, it is sufficient for Roman Catholicism to utilize faith and reason, Scriptural revelation and the divinely inspired Magisterium to assimilate this dogma within the limits of finite cognition. This is why the mystery is unpacked a tad more by the magisterial doctrine of *circumincession* or *perichoresis*. These Latin and Greek terms suggest the profound dynamism and infinite happiness of the triune God who dwells within Godself. Hence, while each Trinitarian member is absolutely distinct each also relationally participates in the activity of being of the inseparable triune God.<sup>26</sup> The mystery illuminates itself to a degree and yet is thoroughly elusive. So the Trinity continues as absolute holy mystery despite meticulous articulation in terminology by the Roman Catholic Church to endow the finitude of the human intellect some expressions to penetrate the infinite and totally Other. After all the reasoning and discourse and Counciliar pronouncements, we, like St. Augustine are still stuck in the same mud.<sup>27</sup> Hence, while Roman Catholic pedagogy insists that the divine economy is done by each Trinitarian person the contradistinction of the “eternal present” of the immanent triune God obfuscates our human thought even on an elementary level. For how can the Trinity act in human history if the Trinity for all eternity acts within the history of the world? This eternal divine action occurs beyond our conception of chronological time. Why does the God who is love permit evil? How does the one consubstantial Trinitarian nature allow for the human and divine natures of the second divine person? How can Christian catechesis present the human person as made in God’s image while simultaneously assuring the community that God is more unlike us than like us? These questions are rudimentary yet incredibly profound. They embellish the reality of the mystery of the Trinity while compelling Roman Catholics to reflect upon their faith for answers rather than semantics and sophistries. One can only conclude with the Catholic Catechism that, “the Trinity is a mystery of faith in the strict sense...hidden in God...God has left traces...but God’s inmost Being as Holy Trinity is a mystery

inaccessible to reason alone....”<sup>28</sup> Despite the declaration that the Trinity is an ineffable and holy mystery God’s self-communication is made tenable in human history through the *oikonomia*. The divine enunciation provided to Moses on St. Sinai, the tetragrammaton YHWH, not only establishes that God’s essence is existence but also reveals a free covenantal action between the continuous Creator and the created universe.<sup>29</sup> The transcendental attribute of the Trinity is not at odds with its simultaneous immanence. The triune God has freely determined, per Roman Catholicism, to initiate a holy, mysterious and eternal involvement with the world. Humanity stands in a sense of puzzled awe as to why the Trinitarian God moved in this direction. Hence, while we experience the Holy Mystery as a distinction of inseparable *hypostases*, in absolute unity and in utter relationality with one another this absolute mystery further presents the conundrum as to God’s free choice to enter and act within human history. We approach the sacred beginnings of a Trinitarian theology which is anthropological. Anthropologically the Tradition had endeavored to capture some of the mystery through our gift of reason by apophatic (negative theology) and cataphatic (positive theological theologoumena) analogies. The poverty of our language while restrictive does allow Roman Catholicism to respond without doltish silence to the Trinitarian formula. Hence, while we can never vet for accuracy with *fides and ratio sola* our humble penetrations accommodate belief by means of Trinitarian grace and revelation.

Yet as consequence of God’s “desire” to reveal the Trinity our circumscribed human reason has been defied through gracious inspiration to codify creedal formulations. These formulae have become, for Roman Catholics, significant components of their liturgical practices. As referenced above, the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed is prayerfully recited each Sunday during the apex of Roman Catholic liturgical practice, the Mass.

While the Athanasian, Apostles and Nicene Creeds express Roman Catholic Tradition regarding the revealed Trinitarian mystery and although divinely inspired in conciliar discourse they remain a penultimate attempt because of human finitude. This does not demean the Roman Catholic Tradition or Magisterium nor the human intellect but we are plebian, at best, in the elucidation of the absolute, holy Mystery.

Prayer, as the enunciation of Roman Catholic faith assuages any frustration caused by ignorance or vanity. In an age of materialism and since the time of the Enlightenment humanity is adverse to an inability that frustrates the deciphering of the inexplicable. However, through liturgical forms or expressions Roman Catholics acquiesce in faith to their deficiency to possess full comprehension and clear articulation of the Trinitarian mystery. Yet, the need for worship is a compelling gift and the sacraments of initiation each invoke the Father, Son and Holy Spirit either to reject Satan or confirm the recipient’s spiritual strength. The doxology prayed at each Mass clearly expresses the Trinitarian dogma. The Tradition contends that “the apostolic Church expressed and handed on her faith in brief formulae.”<sup>30</sup> In one sense these doxologies and creedal statements constitute the “oldest Roman Catechism.”<sup>31</sup> Hence, I contend, there exists within the Roman Catholic theological psyche a sacred desire to connect with each Trinitarian member. And in spite of our inadequacies, we receive sufficient divine grace to formulate a prayerful tradition which engages both an historical development and current expression of this Roman Catholic belief in a triune God. When we “say the



Credo with faith this is to enter into communion with God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.”<sup>32</sup>

It is the amalgamation of the Trinitarian perceptions cultivated by Latin and Greek theology which renders the current Roman Catholic dogmatic persuasion. The thought as St. Augustine fixed the Western focus on the one God whose divine essence was to be considered prior to the trinity of *hypostases*. His intent was to initially affirm God’s unicity then expeditiously assert the equality and distinctions of each divine person. He posited a *circumincession* whereby the external operations of God are the result of the entire Trinity, therefore, are not to be imputed, except by appropriation, upon only one divine person. He starts with one divine nature and moves to an explanation which refuses to divide it. Augustine supported his exposition of *de Deo uno* and *de Deo Trino* by the popular analogy correlating the two processions within the godhead with the internal acts of thinking and willing found in the human mind. He remains the architect of the psychological theory of the Trinity.<sup>33</sup>

The Cappodocians of the Greek Eastern Church provided significant insight onto the current Roman Catholic understanding of the Trinity. However, unlike Augustine, they engender a radically different theological position toward the nature of God. Greek Trinitarian thought was fixed primarily on the Three *distinct Persons*. The Father as the originate and source of all is appropriately entitled *Theos*. The Son, who proceeds directly from the Father by means of eternal generation can therefore also be called God. The Holy Spirit is also called God and proceeds from the Father through the Son. The Eastern mind was more directed to a disposition of the logic of the Personalities being considered prior to the divine Nature of The One God. Hence, the Greek *perichoresis*, very similar to the Latin *circumincession*, is brought into conception. This position is analogous to the state of one’s human nature possessed by a given human person but which can only truly be conceived as possessed by and dependent upon that specific individual human person. Comparably the Divine Nature belongs to the three divine *hypostases* and really cannot be conceived independently of Them.<sup>34</sup>

The Greeks, like the Latins, worked to preserve the unicity of and co-equality the Divine Essence. At The First Council of Nicea (325 A.D.) ninety percent of the bishops involved represented the East, and anathematized Arius. The Arian position held considerable strength and denied the divinity of Christ. It taught a lack of consubstantiality on the part of the Son with the unoriginate Father.<sup>35</sup> Hence, the Nicene Creed currently professed during the solemnity of the Roman Catholic liturgy of the Mass prayerfully affirms that the Son is one in being with the Father. As a consequence of Eastern and Western discourse the absolute consubstantiality of each Trinitarian Person is asserted. The Son and the Spirit are viewed as co-equal with the Father but also considered the Wisdom and the Sanctity of this same Father. In one sense, the Second and the Third divine Persons while absolutely co-equal with the unoriginate First Person are also “powers” of the Father. However, while human powers are accidental faculties of an individual these are perfections in the Trinity and are each dogmatically considered subsistent *hypostases*. It is apodictic that the absolute unity of their nature implies both a unity of their will and unity of their action. Hence, it is from the Greeks that the Trinitarian understanding of the Three Persons each exercising a distinct function is confirmed in the Western mind expressed in the Nicene Creed. However, in order to maintain the doctrine of Trinitarian consubstantiability Greek thought discloses a

*perichoresis*, the reciprocal compenetration of the Three divine Persons within one another. This is a metaphor which indicates the dynamism and eternal joyful love of each divine person “dancing around” while indwelling within the triune God.<sup>36</sup> The Greeks supported the notion that in the Trinity, the essence, the will and the action are but one.<sup>37</sup>

Essentially it is the Arian heresy that conjoins much of the Trinitarian theology of the East and the West. The Arian position maintained a logic related to Aristotle’s delineation of substance and accidents. If the Trinity is three substances a tritheism is the result. However, if the Trinity is three accidents modalism is the only acceptable conclusion. The Son and the Spirit would be less than the Father in every way. Gregory of Nazianzus resolves this conundrum by insisting that the Trinitarian members are absolutely distinguished as a consequence of their mutual relation to each other. “Aquinas later draws upon this insight to show nature which is to be life and goodness itself. But who each person is, is sheer relation to each other, in a way absolutely unknown to our own experience.”<sup>38</sup>

There heresy of Arianism, which held that the Christ was mysteriously superior to humanity but categorically inferior to God the Father, infers that humanity was never redeemed. As a result of the Council of Nicea’s (325) solemn declaration, “the Son does not “emanate” from the Father’s will, as a creature...the Son is begotten not made...of the same substance (*homoousios*) as the Father. For the first time, the Church moved officially from biblical to speculative categories to define it’s faith...the Eusebians preferred to say...that the Son is ‘like’ (*homoiousios*) the Father...the efforts of Athanasius and Hilary of Poitiers the *homoousian* and the *homoiousian* parties were relatively reconciled...the agreement was sealed at the Council of Alexandria (362), from which emerged a new orthodox formula: ‘one substance, three Persons.’”<sup>39</sup>

The Roman Catholic Church considers the distinction of the divine persons to be the product of their relations. It is the effort of the Cappodocians which finalize the consubstantiality of the Holy Spirit with the Son and the Father. As referenced above, the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed was sanctioned and henceforth professed as an obligatory pronouncement by the Council of Constantinople (381). As a consequence of both Greek and Latin Trinitarian assessments the current dogma of Roman Catholicism features the revelation of two processions in God: generation (The Son) and spiration (The Holy Spirit). The processions are the reason for the relationships amongst the Persons. In God there exist four relations: paternity, filiation, active, and passive spiration. While active spiration applies to the Son’s generation, the Holy Spirit originates by passive spiration, hence the Spirit proceeds and is not begotten. The subsistent relations are relatively opposed to one another, and are thus *hypostases* with the titles of: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And while these *hypostases* mutually indwell they are an absolute unity of essence. As stated above, Trinitarian theology refers to this property as a *circumcession* or *perichoresis*.<sup>40</sup>

The great Dominican Thomas Aquinas (1224 – 1274) stood on the shoulders of Aristotle and Augustine in his Trinitarian analysis. His thought resonates throughout Roman Catholicism and continues to be taught in Roman Catholic seminaries. Aquinas’ deft mind examined three essential components necessary to contextualize the Trinitarian mystery. As a member of the Latin Rite, he first typically speaks of God’s nature which is pure existence. In this sense God’s existence is more intense, infinitely full and active and absolutely more profound than human existence. This fact is true of all God’s

attributes – whatever God has, God is to it's absolute fullness.<sup>44</sup> From this point of departure, Aquinas moves to his explanation of the processions and missions.

In absolute oneness with God's nature are God's divine knowing and loving. These, Aquinas states, are not the mere activities possessed by humanity. Rather, knowing and loving are the Son and the Holy Spirit perichoretically within the Father and each other.<sup>42</sup> We receive the Son and Holy Spirit in their mission activity which eternally proceeds from the very gracious Trinitarian nature. Consequently, all humanity is permitted to enter relationship with the Triune God "precisely because the divine persons are sheer subsistent relations to one another."<sup>43</sup> Each Trinitarian member is a person in absolute relation to each other Trinitarian member. Each *hypostases* is complete individuality as well as radical distinction but in an infinite and eternal giving to one another, the ultimate love triangle. Yet despite the reality of three distinct persons there is a paradox in that only one self-consciousness can exist since the triune God is One. It is a self-consciousness which emanates from the reality of God's One nature and is communal to the persons. This is the method in which Aquinas spoke of the Trinity. It continues as current Roman Catholic Trinitarian theology.

"Inseparable in what they are, the divine persons are also inseparable in what they do. But within the single divine operation each shows forth what is proper to him in the Trinity, especially in the divine missions of the Son's Incarnation and the gift of the Holy Spirit."<sup>44</sup>

The reader is now better prepared to engage a more precise discursus regarding Karl Rahner's disclosures and Trinitarian nuances. Necessarily the above chapter has often been rather thick and abstruse. I have used various Roman Catholic sources, as the endnotes will attest, to articulate the Holy Mystery in a more cogent manner. This is the universe into which Rahner had intentionally stepped. The following chapter on the Trinity will demonstrate both his rigorous academic notions as well as the pastoral purpose behind his inclinations. Always keeping the average Christian at the forefront of his penetrations into the Trinity. Rahner invites one to examine the formidable dogma with him. In this reflection on chapter two and in preparation for the next chapter, Roman Catholicism needs admit that in the final analysis the Trinitarian dogma and mystery establish that "God lives as the mystery of love among persons. If we are created in the image of this God, and if our destiny is to live forever with this God and with God's beloved creatures, then our Christian vocation is to create these forms and structures of life in the 'household', or dwelling place of God and of God's creatures together, that best enable us to live as Christ lived, to show forth the Spirit of God, and ultimately to be deified."<sup>45</sup>

Chapter II  
Endnotes

1. SM, Vol. 6, p. 306
2. A clear and early example is the Athanasian Creed
3. CE, Vol. XV, p. 47
4. CC, #234, p. 62
5. CE, Vol. XV, p. 47
6. Ibid.
7. CC, #234, p.62
8. CA, p. 1245
9. CC, #236, p. 65
10. STR, pp. 174 & 175
11. CC, #236, p. 62
12. TGCF, p. 29
13. CC, #240 – 242 pp. 63 & 64
14. Ibid., #234 & 244 p. 64
15. Ibid., #254 – 255 pp. 66 & 67
16. ST, Vol. VII, #1
17. CC, #258, p. 68
18. CE, Vol. II, pp. 33 & 34
19. SM, Vol. 6, p. 295
20. CC, #292, p. 295
21. CC, p. 76
22. CE, Vol. XV, p. 47
23. Ibid.
24. CC, #2:13 217, pp. 58 & 59
25. CA, p. 244 & p. 316
26. TGCF, pp. 69 &70
27. The Confessions of St. Augustine, Book VI, Chapter II
28. CC, #237, p. 63
29. STR, p. 156
30. CC, #186, p. 49
31. Ibid., #196, p. 53
32. Ibid., #197, p. 53
33. CE, Vol. XV, p. 55
34. Ibid., p. 53
35. CD, Vol. I, p. 708
36. Fatula, p. 68
37. CE, Vol. XV, pp. 52 – 55
38. Fatula, p. 68
39. CA, p. 327
40. Ibid., p. 330
41. ST, I, pp. 3 – 26
42. ST, I, pp. 27 – 38
43. TGCF, p. 70

44. CC, #267, p. 70
45. GFU, p. 378

Chapter Three:  
The Trinity according to Karl Rahner  
Section One: Preface

There are, three major discourses on Trinitarian theology written by Karl Rahner. His work in 1967 advanced an article of nearly ninety pages entitled, The Threefold God as Transcendental Ground of Salvation History. In 1970, Rahner was published in two Trinitarian articles for volume six of the English version of *Sacramentum Mundi*. Later that year he produced a book entitled, The Trinity, adapted from his work on the German text of *Sacramentum Mundi*. It is from The Trinity, his only book on the Holy Triune Mystery, that this chapter has been derived.

Chapter Three:  
The Trinity according to Karl Rahner  
Section Two: The Method and Structure of the Treatise  
“On the Triune God”

Karl Rahner commences his writing on, The Trinity with the proposition that in recent theological history there has been very limited movement toward a future developmental understanding of this core dogma. His intent is not to abrogate the liminal work on the doctrine by current religious literature and theologians but rather to permit the Trinity “to become a reality in the life of the faithful.”<sup>1</sup> However, as recently as Vatican II (1962 – 1965) the Trinity had been discussed in a sense of biblicism and the history of salvation. Rahner contends that such a biblicism cannot solely produce a revised conception of the average textbook Trinitarian theology.<sup>2</sup> It becomes readily apparent that for Rahner the manualist approach toward Trinitarian comprehension leaves the average Christian bereft. He provokes serious thought in his articulation concerning the opinion that in their daily life most Christians are quite monotheistic. He states that, “should the doctrine of the Trinity have to be dropped as false, the major part of religious literature could well remain virtually unchanged.”<sup>3</sup>

Rahner’s concern expands as he indicates that the incarnation is considered by most Christians redundantly as the act of God becoming a man. There seems to be little profound internalizing of the penetrating reality that the person who became a man is the *Logos* of God. One feels that “the Christian’s idea of the incarnation would not have to change at all if there were no Trinity.”<sup>4</sup> This feeling is the result of a belief held by the average Christian that God would still have become human person. This thought has been provided pedagogically by a textbook consideration of the incarnation which promotes more the abstract idea that a divine *hypostasis* become a man. It falls short of the more specific and precise understanding of the meaning of the reality that the *Logos*, as *Logos*, as absolutely distinct from the other Trinitarian divine persons became man.<sup>5</sup> It is as though the average Christian has been taught that any of the divine persons could have been incarnated. Hence, the faithful learn very little regarding the significant character and natures of the second person within the Trinity. It appears as a mere scholia.

In regarding Rahner’s Trinitarian enterprise, one engages a feeling that the Holy Mystery of the Trinity is not an epiphenomenal event secondarily given to either Christology or pneumatology. This double helix type notion has, perhaps, vitiated the average Christian’s conception of and need for the Trinity in the quotidian experiences of life. Rahner’s thought on this matter will be taken up in more detail later within this dissertation.

Rahner considers it untenable that the Trinitarian doctrine provides inadequate focus on the redemptive reality which “comes from the incarnate Word, not simply the God-man.”<sup>6</sup> There appears a supposition in Christian religious literature that either of the other divine persons could have offered adequate satisfaction to the God as Father.

One consequence of this supposition Rahner feels is that the doctrine of grace becomes monotheistic but not Trinitarian. If this grace has been merited by Christ, as Roman Catholics have been taught, it is observed as the grace not of the Word as *Logos*

but rather of the God-man. One might then consider, in the supralapsarian sense, that the reacquiring of lost grace to be the grace of God, “not the grace of the Word, much less of the Word who is to become man. Thus the treatise of grace is not much of a theological or religious introduction into the mystery of the triune God.”<sup>7</sup>

In addition to his concern for a relatively debilitated doctrine of grace a similar anti-trinitarian timidity demonstrates, according to Rahner, little involvement of the Trinity within the doctrines of the sacraments, eschatology and even creation. Thus it is unfortunate at best to realize that the Trinitarian treatise “occupies a rather isolated position in the total dogmatic system.”<sup>8</sup> In the textbook theology, a formalistic manualist approach, the doctrine is rather ill conceived and once dealt with does not frequently re-occur.

For Karl Rahner it is not preposterous to indicate that the doctrine of the Trinity has been presented as self-contained with little to do with humanity. His method is always to begin with the human person as subject. Our being has been designed to conceive of the reality that human involvement with the Trinity can know some details as a result of revelation. Rahner contends that there needs to be a clarification of the human relationship with the Trinity not based solely on the appropriations. He might ask, how can humanity experience any beatification if we do not recognize a clear relationship between ourselves and the triune God? Or is this Holy Mystery so far removed from us in our present theology that we consequently lack knowledge even of ourselves and our understanding of salvation?

Having presented his earliest Trinitarian concerns Rahner presses forward to the importance of the problem of the relation between the treatises “On the One God” and “On the Triune God” and the order in which they have been presented in textbook theology. The prevalent method has come from Thomas Aquinas whose consideration is “not God the Father as the unoriginate origin of divinity and reality, but as the essence common to all three persons.”<sup>9</sup> A consequence of this discourse is an isolation from and a cavalier concern for the Trinity by the religious thinker. Rahner suggests that it is unfortunately believed by many in the theological academy that whatever is of relevance to humanity about God has already been developed in the treatise, On the One God. This is due primarily to a subtle Augustinian division, whereby “the doctor of grace” begins with the concept of one God and then proceeds to the tri-personal God.

The Western Church of the middle ages adopted this thesis on the one God to proceed the discourse on the triune God. The real problem develops almost apodictically, since the current Roman Catholic approach seems to be “justified by the unicity of the divine essence...the treatise (on the one divinity) becomes quite philosophical and abstract and refers hardly at all to salvation history. It speaks of the necessary metaphysical properties of God, and not very explicitly of God as experienced in salvation history in his free relations to his creatures.”<sup>10</sup> However, the Augustinian-Western notion created a false sense of logic which appeared incontestable and was supposedly and necessarily prior to the Trinitarian treatise, suggests Rahner. It is extremely self-enclosed regarding the three persons. Even the pronounced Augustinian psychological model of the analogy of the Trinity in essence, procession, relation and relative subsistence does not completely satisfy.<sup>11</sup> This results from Augustine’s attempt to take the philosophical concepts of the human understanding regarding knowledge and love and transfer the essence of these to



the divine persons of the *Logos* and the Spirit of love. Yet this model has been an accepted theologumenon since Augustine's writing of his *De Trinitate*.

It has been traditional Roman Catholic procedure to sequentially study the treatise *de Deo Uno* prior to the treatise *de Deo Trino*. Rahner believes that this separation does not show itself in the history of revelation. He feels that Christians are compelled to become oblivious to the "unity and connection"<sup>12</sup> of the two treatises when exposed to this structure and method. Further, he contends, that we negate the real possibilities of helpful Trinitarian notions which could be discovered within other religious traditions, as well as, the Old Testament and philosophical enterprises. One senses that Rahner considers it dangerous thinking for Roman Catholicism to limit our knowledge of dogma by excluding "Trinitarian allusions or analogies."<sup>13</sup> from outside historical sources. This method thrives on a de-emphasis of doctrinal considerations existings ad extra of Roman Catholicism.

"The isolation of the treatise of the Trinity has to be wrong."<sup>14</sup> Rahner affirms that of necessity there is a primordial and profound relationship between the Trinity and humanity. The holy mystery of the Trinity must necessarily be demonstrated as mystery *in se* and as the mystery of salvation in every dogmatic treatise. The axiological moment which, for Rahner, is "the basic thesis"<sup>15</sup> connecting the treatises while establishing the Trinity as the salvific mystery is expressed by him accordingly: "The 'economic' Trinity is the immanent Trinity and the 'immanent' Trinity is the 'economic' Trinity."<sup>16</sup> The accuracy of this potent statement will be considered by Karl Rahner later in this chapter. However, his determination is to move forward and toward the development of a systematic Trinitarian dogmatic presentation. The implications of which include magisterial acceptance, an assistance for Scriptural hermeneutics regarding this Trinity, the opportunity to enlighten the average Christian concerning the necessary and real presence of the Trinity in one's faith life and finally to enhance the interpretation of grace as substantially more than a cavalier mental relation between the Trinity and humanity.

However, before advancing into a systematic account of the Trinity Rahner provides some additional observations. It is within the purview of Roman Catholic doctrine to indicate that the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity. "Jesus is not simply God in general, but the Son. The Second divine person, God's *Logos* is man, and only he is man. Hence there is at least one 'mission', one presence in the world, one reality in salvation history which is not merely appropriated to some divine person, but which is proper to him."<sup>17</sup> This reality eventuates "outside the intra-divine life in the world itself."<sup>18</sup> Here one finds the incarnate *Logos* acting directly in human history. This is not the same action as that of any other Trinitarian member. For Rahner labels two statements as literally being false. The first is the attempt to indicate that there is absolutely nothing in the *oikonomia* which cannot be stated equally of the entire Trinity as well as each divine person specifically. The second error is the consideration that any doctrine regarding the Trinity which involves each *hypostasis* both generally as well as explicitly can refer singularly of divine *ad intra* occurrences. However, says Rahner, the following Trinitarian statement is a truism: "that no adequate distinction can be made between the doctrine of the Trinity and the doctrine of the economy of salvation."<sup>19</sup>

Rahner demonstrates three theological obfuscations which negatively impact the above considerations. It is significant for him to dispel these particular locutions in his effort to provide an enhanced yet tenable Trinitarian thesis.

The initial concern occurs as one examines the hypostatic union from a purely dogmatic perspective. “We should not even envisage the possibility of taking the statement about the hypostatic union as a paradigm for similar statements which would likewise open the Trinity towards the world, and thus lead to the thesis of an identity between the economic and immanent Trinity.”<sup>20</sup> The rationale behind Rahner’s declaration flows out of the reality that when speaking of the incarnation one observes the reality that in God there is only one essence unless we are in a consideration of the distinctions and relationships which indicates the reality of the divine persons. We first consider the one nature and then the personalities. Hence, as a result of the hypostatic union only the incarnate *Logos*, a distinct but fully united *hypostasis*, has his appropriate association to the history of the world and the economy of salvation. Since, there exists but one *Logos* related hypostatic function; Rahner comments “that from the truth of the incarnation no general principle can be derived except that it is possible for other divine persons also to enter into a hypostatic union.”<sup>21</sup> To eliminate confusion, Rahner is distinguishing between a hypostatically special relation and a hypostatic unitive relation. One can not simply assume that the term person as applied to Christ’s hypostatic union would be identical if applied to the other Trinitarian members. “*Hypostasis* and hypostatic function can only be verbally distinguished in the incarnation.”<sup>22</sup> One can consider that a result of Christ’s unique natures, this hypostatic union, revealed and communicated to humanity may in fact differ from a hypostatic union of the Holy Spirit with the world. It is possible that the Holy Spirit may self-communicate without becoming a genuine human person. Rahner proposes that, in principle, the incarnation “may be considered a dogmatically certain ‘instance’ for a (theoretically at least not impossible) economic relation, proper to each person, of the divine persons to the world. Such a relation entails the possibility of a real communication, in salvation history, of the whole Trinity as such to the world, therefore the identity of the economic and the immanent Trinity. This is especially true since a conception does not imply that these three not-appropriated relations of the three persons to the world stand independently near each other. It may very well mean that the threefold God as threefold possesses in his divine self-communication ‘one’ relationship to creation, but precisely a relationship which refers him as threefold, each person in his own way, to the world.”<sup>23</sup> “For nothing will be impossible with God.”<sup>24</sup> However the possibility must be considered plausible as opposed to a contradiction in terms. I would contend that the above “possibility” distorts both the Trinitarian distinctions and their relationships as well as debilitates the missions of the divine personalities. This is contradictory to God’s nature.

Rahner follows this economic theological Trinitarian obfuscation with another concern which vitiates a cogent Trinitarian dogmatic persuasion. This second disquietude results from the *Logos*’ incarnation and this *Logos*’ relation with the immanent Trinity. For, if one succumbs to a notion that each divine person adapts a hypostatic unity with creation, it is apodictic that the *Logos*’ incarnation reveals virtually nothing about this *Logos* and his natures in relation to his divinity and humanity. Of course, while we view God as “the Supreme Being” how is Roman Catholicism to be certain of the distinction of each of the three divine persons? We become lost in the immanence of the immanent Trinity. Since there “would be no difference in our experience if some other divine person constituted the subsistence of this human reality.”<sup>25</sup> If this were the case, the experience of the Son as Son in salvation history

would provide us with a view of the Trinity not *per se* but through verbal suggestions. If other divine Trinitarian members could do what was distinct to the *Logos* then Roman Catholics miss the opportunity for revelation and communication of this profound manifestation within the immanent Trinity.

Rahner considers to be false any premise that each divine person might become human. Initially, he explains that it is not demonstrated by the earliest Roman Catholic Tradition. The fact has always been that the Father, the Unoriginate, “reveals and appears precisely by sending his Word into the world. The Word is, by definition, immanent in the divinity and active in the world, and as such the Father’s revelation. A revelation of the Father without the *Logos* and his incarnation would be like speaking without words.”<sup>26</sup>

For Rahner, it is illogical to deduce that since one divine person became human each other divine person can be likewise. For tenability of this particular deduction needs rest on two presuppositions. First, “that ‘*hypostasis*’ is in God a univocal concept with respect to the divine persons.”<sup>27</sup> Secondly, the experience of a person being a unique person varies and permits ambiguous definitions even within Rahner’s understanding of these three divine persons. Hence, he contends that for these two presuppositions the first is untrue and the second nondemonstrable.

However, the thesis regarding the possibility that every divine person could become man is potent. Rahner posits that should it be completely pronounced and accepted the nexus which occurs between “mission and the intra-trinitarian life”<sup>28</sup> would be truncated. He uses the sonship of the Son to illustrate the point that there would be no need of rectification should another divine person assume this function. We would know very little about the triune God gracing the world. We would verge on upsetting Scripture and settling for a manualist theological pedagogy. Rahner, categorically rejects this thesis holding fast to revelation which unveils that the only one who reveals to humanity the triune God as a result of this second person’s absolute exclusivity in being is “the” *Logos* of the Father.

Karl Rahner’s third theological obfuscation regarding his fundamental axiom stating that the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity and vice versa involves the identity of the economic and immanent *Logos*. Rahner proposes a delicate scenario whereby the human nature of the *Logos* is a separate nature, a concept which is not fully the incarnate *Logos*. Consequently, one can assume that due to this human nature the actions in the world of this *Logos* are his deeds and accomplishments. However, this scenario presents to believers virtually nothing about the incarnate *Logos per se*. One only observes some human performing some superhuman tasks. Consequently, per Rahner, “the human as such would not show us the *Logos* as such.”<sup>29</sup> A being, not Trinitarian is then evidenced to humanity. This hypothetical scenario does not permit one to view the *Logos* as actuating beyond his “his intra-divine inaccessibility and show himself though his humanity and in his humanity...when we glimpse the humanity of Christ as such, except at most his abstract formal subjectivity.”<sup>30</sup> Rahner affirms that there is a much more essential and intimate relation between the *Logos* and Christ’s assumed human nature. Human nature is created and empowered by the Father as a result of the *Logos* who as the Word reveals to all humanity the gratuitous self-communication of the unoriginate Originator. This human nature is verified because of the *Logos per se*. “Man is possible because the exteriorization of the *Logos* is possible....what Jesus is and does as man

reveals the *Logos* himself...it is the reality of the *Logos* as our salvation amidst us...here the *Logos* with God and the *Logos* with us, the immanent and the economic *Logos*, are strictly the same.”<sup>31</sup>

In an effort to tessellate his method and structure regarding his treatise on the Triune God, Karl Rahner moves forward to consider God’s threefold relation to humanity in the order of grace. The supposition posited as accurate, by Rahner, states that “each one of the divine persons communicates himself to man in gratuitous grace in his own personal particularity and diversity.”<sup>32</sup> Hence God’s Trinitarian communication to humanity in grace (indwelt and uncreated and self-communicated) is a personal, individual communication. It is a free act whereby each Trinitarian member within their unique “personality” self-communicates in common as a result of their mutual relations. Per Rahner, a divine person cannot self-communicate other than in and through the other persons. Were this not the case, humanity may experience three unicities but not one Trinity. The reality for Rahner is that one God subsists and communicates in the distinct but relative manners of subsisting and communicating. This apposite definition of the Trinity exposes the reader to the reality that the three divine persons relate to all human persons in a free, gratuitous and threefold uniqueness which is identical to the manner in which the immanent Trinity communicates within itself. “Any other kind of communication would be unable to communicate that which is here communicated, the divine persons, since these persons do not differ from their own way of communicating themselves.”<sup>33</sup> Consequently, what is Rahner’s apprehension of the nexus between the immanent and economic Trinity? The Triune and only God deigns to communicate by means of Word and Love, Godself through the absolute mystery of self-utterance and Love revealed to humanity by Jesus Christ. God does not just fractly dispense Godself but freely and completely bestows all that this God is to us. There is, per Rahner, a tri-communication of Godself. Godself self gift absolutely maintains God’s fullness of God’s attributes. It is this gratuitous self-communication which, in fact, allows within the believer an act of reciprocal love.

Rahner, believes that we should not consider this triune self-communication as a “merely verbal unfolding of a communication which in itself contains no distinctions.”<sup>34</sup> The threefold distinctions really exist even in the communicative process. The three divine persons, especially in this order of grace, are truly distinct and as such must possess the double mediation by the Word and the Holy Spirit whereby God communicates Godself as God really is. Therefore, for Rahner, “the testimony of faith tells that the economic self-communication of God is truly and really threefold.”<sup>35</sup>

Rahner continues to unpack the methodological importance of his basic thesis. Is the methodology of this systematic presentation appropriate or spurious? How is the Trinitarian dogma affected by his axiom? To answer these questions Rahner begins by developing a conception of the Trinity as both a salvific experience and an experience of grace. If one considers the Trinitarian dogma in salvation history through Jesus and the Holy Spirit one finds the immanent Trinity already established within them. The Trinity is no longer merely a doctrinal statement but rather a stark reality that is involved with humanity. The effect is not simply the result of revelation, tradition or magisterial pronouncements but rather these sources of the Roman Catholic faith speak because the Trinity is genuinely related to all humanity. These Trinitarian statements, “are made because the grace we have received and the glory we expect cannot wholly become

manifest if we are not told about this mystery. Thus the two mysteries, that of our grace and that of God in himself, constitutes one and the same abysmal mystery.”<sup>36</sup>

Conceptually, the forefront of the Trinitarian dogma, is this living focus on the salvific experience in relation to humanity. As a result, humanity can relate in relative comprehensibility to this grace and Holy Mystery. Rahner insists that if one rejects the basic Trinitarian thesis than one can only have a concept provided in “verbal revelation as opposed to God’s salvific activity in us.”<sup>37</sup> In this untenable situation, the treatise becomes more abstruse with accoutremental Scriptural proof texts and semantic sophistries. The system seems forced into a method which continually complicates itself.

However, per Rahner, the Trinitarian dogma can best be understood only in direct reference to the history of salvation and of grace. This is humanity’s experience of both Jesus and the Holy Spirit. In their relations and functions with the human person the Trinity is most accurately made known to and essentially “belongs” to the world. Consequently, affirms Rahner, “there never should be a treatise on the Trinity in which the doctrine of the ‘missions’ is at best only appended on a relatively unimportant and additional scholion.”<sup>38</sup> Hence, for Karl Rahner the most appropriate manner for Roman Catholicism to perceive the immanent Trinity is by means of the missions of Christ and his Spirit as observed in salvation history. This then is Rahner’s theological method when considering the dogma of the Trinity. It is relevant in adopting this method that it is not bereft of an interpretation of the historicity of Trinitarian revelation.

One of Rahner’s elucidations indicates that, despite general modern theological opinion, the Old Testament does circumspectly reveal some concept of a divine trinity. For it is evident that the Father manifested himself through the Word and the Spirit. We find this in creation, psalmic and sapiential literature. However it is the covenant that reveals the full presence of all Trinitarian members as God communicates God’s utter immediacy to God’s people through the Word in the Spirit. These two entities are not the Father but rather they introduce and historically continue to reveal him. Rahner concludes that if the above is true there can be only two possible conclusions. First, the Word and his Holy Spirit as merely created mediators vanish, as did the ancient prophets, before the omnipotence of the one holy God. Second, the better position is that “these two ‘mediations’ persist, revealing themselves as truly divine, hence as God himself in unity with, yet distinct from the God of revelation, in a unity and a distinction which belong therefore to God himself...in this sense we must admit an authentic secret prehistory of the revelation of the Trinity in the Old Testament...this nobody can wholly deny.”<sup>39</sup>

Although, Rahner is cognizant of the inaccurate perception of the Trinity by the average Christian. Some of this obfuscation is due to misunderstandings in Trinitarian terminology and can lead to a nescient tritheism. His contention is that a genuine danger exists when one considers the Triune God but considers that this same God possesses “three distinct consciousnesses, spiritual vitalities and centers of activity.”<sup>40</sup> The danger is propelled initially by the understanding of “person”, which Rahner claims, is found in Trinitarian treatises as being based on human experience and philosophical inquiry unconnected to the revelation and history of this dogmatic belief. Further, the concept of person is then administered to the notion of God and additionally complicated with an explication evidencing that this one God is three persons. Moreover, the obstruse manualist theological treatises then present the relation of the unicity and triple

personality in God while attempting to provide the appropriate dogmatic interpretation of these three persons for the average Christian. Thus, insists Rahner, “it is rather implicitly and belatedly that the required modifications and distinctions are made in the concept of person with which we set out on our spiritual odyssey upon the sea of God’s mystery.”<sup>41</sup> Rahner’s, point focuses on our rationale in using the term persons for the Trinitarian members when our modern definitions compel us to delineate from this term that which once appeared appropriate and accurate. It becomes natural then, after a period, to “glide probably into a false and basically tritheistic conception, as we think of the three persons as of three different personalities with different centers of activity.”<sup>42</sup> Rahner expresses some grief in wondering why the dogma did not from its inception postulate a term more adaptable to change and with less disorientation. Hence, per Rahner, Karl Barth has tended to conceive of the term “person” as completely lacking in precision for the theological mind. “Historically from the time of the Sabellian heresy ‘person’ has developed into a perception of the existent as ‘Ego’ which is in contrast through its uniqueness to all other persons both in autonomy and distinctly individual freedom.”<sup>43</sup>

Rahner eventually acquiesces to the stark reality that a change in the term which has been used and relatively understood for over 1500 years could be more devisive and less creatively demonstrable. However, if we revert to Rahner’s methodological treatment of the economic Trinity there is no requirement to begin the treatise with the concept of person *per se*. Our departure can be reserved to the Father as self revealed in the *oikonomia* of salvation and mediated to humanity by his Word in the Holy Spirit. “We may show these distinctions of ‘God for us’ are also those of ‘God in himself’. Next we explain that this reality which is threefold in itself is called ‘three personality’ and in this context the concept of ‘person’ implies nothing more than what our starting point has derived from the testimony of Scriptures...this would not take care of...the non-theological concept of person nowadays...but the difficulties and dangers of tritheistic misunderstandings would be reduced.”<sup>44</sup>

Within his previously advanced theological method, Rahner’s approach tends to illustrate a new relationship between the treatises, “On the One God” and “On the Triune God”. Their initial correlation is not so easily distinguished. This is somewhat the case since the actual meaning of the treatise “on the one God” is concerned with not only “God’s essence and unicity, but of the unity of the three divine persons, of the unity of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, and not merely the unicity of the divinity.”<sup>45</sup> For at this juncture one considers the Trinity most appropriately within the scope of mediated unity as opposed to the unmediated unicity of the one God’s essence. Therefore Rahner holds, that if theology were to regard the unmediated unicity as merely a “oneness” then this theology would be remiss in not recognizing that we have also entered into the scope of the one God’s tri-unity. But as a result of the entitlement of this treatise not being “On the One Divinity”, according to Rahner, this makes impossible a real disjuncture of these two treatises, especially in the sequence used in the theology of his day (circa 1970).

Now while his method and point of departure in this Trinitarian enterprise is, per Rahner, properly performed certain additional remarks are necessary. Clearly the Trinity is and will always be a mystery. One’s experience of the beatific vision according to Rahner, will not make the mystery comprehensible.<sup>46</sup> This statement is not designed to vitiate human capability for we are a transcendent sort oriented toward God. Rather, it is an assurance that humanity comes to its ultimate self understanding when it is cognizant

that God self communicates in Christ and his Spirit to the human person. Rahner asserts that “the mystery of the Trinity is the last mystery of our own reality, and that is experienced precisely in this reality.”<sup>47</sup>

Rahner further provides an analytical maxim for the entire Trinitarian treatise. “The Trinity is a mystery whose paradoxical character is precluded in the paradoxical character of man’s existence.”<sup>48</sup> Hence, it is futile to attempt to subjugate the Trinitarian mystery by means of pernicious and supine arguments which appease the mind without genuinely effectuating acute substance. Rahner is adamant in his indication that when a truism concerning the Trinity is “correctly understood and translated into our life...[it] points quite naturally toward real life, as lived in faith and in grace, in which the mystery of the triune God himself holds sway and which is not simply constituted by its conceptual objectivation.”<sup>49</sup>

Rahner concludes his method and structure of the treatise on the triune God by affirming that what he has shared about the doctrine of the “missions” is by its nature the point of departure for the Roman Catholic Trinitarian dogma. This is certain since the reality of salvation history compels our awareness of the Trinity as a result of the historical entrance of the Word and Spirit freely given by the Father. However, this needs be, per Rahner, not a tacit presupposition but rather the legitimate initial position of the Trinitarian treatise. Again Rahner interprets his theological method. First, we begin the correct presentation by showing “that the economic Trinity is also already the immanent Trinity, and not merely presuppose this tacitly or add it as an afterthought.”<sup>50</sup> Then, we need consider whether a more legitimate and profound comprehension can be fleshed out by a psychological interpretation of the Trinity. This, however, can only be demonstrated if it is made clear how the entire Trinitarian doctrine can develop from and conclude within the domain of this interpreted viewpoint. Utilization of this method will eventuate future developmental understandings of this core dogma.

Chapter Three:  
The Trinity according to Karl Rahner  
Section Three: The Main Lines of Official Trinitarian Doctrine

Karl Rahner initiates this precinct of his Trinitarian exposition with a precipitous admonition. He is concerned that the Roman Catholic official magisterial pronouncements on the Trinity be evidenced in a cogent and systematic method. One can conjecture that Rahner envisions a fallowness in referencing the Denzinger texts, which seem to abrogate a systematization that is completely magisterially inclusive in the elements of Scripture, liturgy, predication, other traditions and religious life.<sup>51</sup>

While these texts serve a purpose, however, we must be vigilant in the recognition that a cavalier memorization of the dogma does not necessarily provide the theology underwhich true faith occurs. The Magisterial dogma regarding the Trinity needs be the only point of reference and departure. Consequently, Rahner proposes a method which initially employs faithful and focused reflection on the specific promulgations by this Magisterium. For systematic Trinitarian theology to be consistent this is a mandatory beginning which accommodates an examination of these texts.

Logic insists that Rahner's first treatment require an analysis of the Trinity as Absolute Mystery. The First Vatican Council proclaims that the mysteries within God cannot be comprehended by the human intellect without the Deity's revelation. The ineffable Trinity is the ultimate dogma exemplifying this principle. Rahner asserts that "the dogma of the Trinity is an 'absolute mystery' which we do not understand even after it has been revealed."<sup>52</sup> Further, Vatican I continues its pronouncement on the rationale for determining a mystery as being an absolute mystery (DS 3016 and DS 3275). Rahner interprets for his reader that this specific Counciliar statement is somewhat nebulous with the exception of its antithetical view of daily empirical knowledge and/or a "rational-conceptual intelligibility."<sup>53</sup> Thus, mystery in this realm is not science per se which has a tendency to vitiate our experience of the Holy Mystery that we know to be eternally and veritably true. For the believer, in the epistemological sense, the revelation of "the incomprehensible God is both Trinity and mystery."<sup>54</sup> However, the Trinity is not only an absolute, unfathomable mystery it abysmally and absolutely augments the entire meaning and our knowledge of this term, mystery. From this theological perspective, Rahner's attribution of God's incomprehensibility (taught by the Magisterium) can be accepted within the most profound human understanding of a sacramental belief in the Trinity as mystery and therefore from an absolute perspective. The reality stands with Vatican I and Karl Rahner that human knowledge can never, even within eternal life, grasp the absolute mystery of the Trinity. It's absoluteness transcends humanity's most luminous conceptualizations.

Rahner examines epiphenomenal causes due to the liminal explanations provided by ecclesiastical documentation which further complicate the Trinitarian mystery. He settles on the necessary and employed concepts of "person" and "essence". His contention centers around the notion that these critical terms are not more thoroughly explicated by the Magisterium because the Roman Catholic Church has presumed that their conceptual meaning is distinguished in light of their use in total context. We have been taught both by history and doctrinal pronouncements that the conception of the one God who is one in nature or essence or substance is given to humanity in three persons. However, the



mystery may possibly become a tad more unpacked with a clarification of the above declarations. Hence, Rahner moves forward into an elucidation of the function of these basic concepts as a logical explanation of Trinitarian reality. Cavalier focus on the terms “person” and “essence” provides one with no new knowledge either empirically or from the Roman Catholic faith. His disposition affirms that neither the context nor the historicity of the expressions “essence and person” indicates an explanation which is logical or ontic or both. When Rahner speaks of a logical explanation of a statement, he means that the “explanation which makes the statement in question clear, that is, more precise, less liable to be misunderstood. A logical explanation clarifies the statement independently of anything else.”<sup>55</sup> It never borrows from one situation to logically explain another. Therefore, every idea used to explicate the statement is always and solely deduced from that very statement in an *a priori* method *per se*.

In relation to the above, Rahner considers the ontic explanation as “one that takes into account another state of affairs, in such a way that this helps us to understand what is to be explained...it avoids misunderstandings by listing the cause of something, the exact and concrete way in which something comes about.”<sup>56</sup> Apodictically, one realizes that the logical explanation is comprehensible specifically in reference to the necessarily required statement’s description. For the ontic explanation the opposite is the case since it is not reliant upon the necessity for a thing to be clarified or explicated. The ontic explanation exists in the necessity to be drawn from another situation.

The distinctions above are significant for Rahner. His method asks do the terms substance and essence give both a logical and an ontic explanation? For it is important to establish whether these concepts are indeed dogmatic with their objective being solely logical and not ontic. Rahner’s assertion is that the two terms find ecclesial determination within the logical explanation. They explain precisely that which is in need of explanation.

Rahner’s rationale to dwell on this matter of contention is that these concepts protect the Trinitarian dogma of the Roman Catholic Church against subordinationalistic, modalistic and tritheistic tendencies. “This safeguard function itself shows that these two concepts, rather than directly representing for us the thing which is meant, refer us to the dark mystery of God.”<sup>57</sup> Further, these concepts indicate that in this dogma they logically explain their inception. God is real and found through God’s Word and God’s Wisdom. Hence, God as Godself self-communicates to humanity not in a modalism produced by our intellectual distinctions but as God in Godself. Hence, Rahner reverts to his original axiomatic position. “The economic Trinity for us first known and first revealed, that it is the ‘immanent’ Trinity and that of it we can know with dogmatic certitude only what has been revealed about the former.”<sup>58</sup>

In actuality, the concepts of “essence” and “substance” while, historically accepted may possibly be reconstituted by other more relevant and revelatory terminology. This, Rahner believes would be no easy task since the theologian must move within the parameters of the Magisterium and into a more theo-philosophical-scientific venue. Even more arduous is a possible replacement for the concept of “person” in the Trinitarian dogma. Rahner, concedes, that the history and meaning of the term has continued to develop beyond ecclesiastical formulae. The contemporary mind conceives of person (or 3 persons) “as centers of consciousness and activity, which leads to a heretical misunderstanding of the dogma.”<sup>59</sup> It is not out of the state of the question to consider a

future time when the concept of person is kerygmatically insufficient to avoid a tritheistic Trinitarian notion for the average Christian. Rahner, contends that it is obligatory for the theologian to meticulously review the term “person” in an effort to examine and perhaps unpack a possibly new but precisely appropriate term which is dogmatically acceptable. This task would be ongoing as anthropology, psychology, sociology and theology will continue to gain applicable insights into the contemporary view of the person. Rahner, believes that with a more distinct explanation of a “better adapted meaning, such a word may be more precise and easily understood, hence kerygmatically more useful than the word ‘person’”. The systematic presentation of the doctrine of the Trinity must at least give some thought to this kind of problem.”<sup>60</sup>

Given the above concerns, Rahner presents the Roman Catholic Trinitarian dogma employing the concepts of “essence” and “person”. He begins with the confession regarding the Father whereby the Roman Catholic Church “confesses one almighty God who appears to her as the active Lord of salvation history and as creator of all finite reality (DS 125, 150), and confesses him as the ‘Father’ (DS 1-5 and not 6!; also 10-17, 19, 21ff; 25, 27-30, 36, 40 ff; 44, 46, 48 50 f; 55, 60 f; 64, 71, 125, 139, 250, 470, 1862).”<sup>61</sup> While it is certainly appropriate and systematic to begin the official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church with the Father, Rahner suggests that he could also begin by means of the Trinitarian confession. As long as that confession is intent upon illustrating the definitive reality of salvation. However, since historically the revelation of the Trinitarian unity and distinction has been gradually unfolded, starting with the Father is creedally and Magisterially valid.

In the Old Testament, because of the time-line of revelation, the God known as the Lord can be assumed to be the Father. Specifically, this God is absolutely unoriginated and the principle without a principle. One discovers more clearly this Father in the New Testament revelations of salvation history through the missions of his Son and his Holy Spirit. Hence, the Father is truly known as Father when the Son becomes fully known to humanity. “Then we understand also that he acts and can act only in the unity with the Son and the Holy Spirit (who spoke through the prophets)”.<sup>62</sup> However, in the pre-trinitarian revelation of the Old Testament the God who is known to his covenantal people is the Father.

Roman Catholic Christology bespeaks of the Son as Son of “the Father.” Humanity is economically considered to be the ungenerated daughters and sons of this same Father and the spiritually related sisters and brothers of this self same Son. The Father of the Son is seen as the “generating principle, as source, origin and principle of the whole godhead (DS 490, 525, 3326).”<sup>63</sup>

Hence, as Rahner considers the Son in this Trinitarian exposition based on dogmatic assertions the Father, has only one generated Son. This Son is begotten by the Father, is uncreated and exists through the Father’s communication. This communication is essential to the Father and thus the Son is infinitely communicated to by the Father entirely other than the Father’s fatherliness. Hence, the Son is co-equal, co-eternal, consubstantial with the Father and relates as Son or *Logos*, the self expressive revelation of the Father in the economy of salvation. This economic historic salvific moment illuminates the Son’s immanence with the Father and within the entire Trinity. (DS 40, 55, 173, 144, 147, 178, 250 ff., 427, 502 f., 852, 3326).<sup>64</sup>

While the consubstantiality of the second divine person is pronounced with dogmatic certitude, Rahner feels that Jesus was aware of his special “sonship” with the Father knowing it was different from that of humanity in general. Simultaneously, he admonishes theologians not to move quickly from a point of departure of Jesus’ self realization (as found in the Synoptic Gospels) directly into his recognition of being the eternally generated *Logos*. It appears that Jesus understood that he alone is the Trinitarian Son of the Father. However, Jesus’ view of his own sonship may possibly be more intricate in his mind than the ontological doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church generally teaches. In other words, does Jesus mean more by the term “son” than the dogma of the Son shows us? We embark into a precipitous domain when we consider hypostatically the Son’s human characteristics while fully cognizant of his immanence within the Trinity. We need be very cautious when speaking of the historical Jesus and the incarnate *Logos*. Rahner is quite clear in positing that Jesus “knew himself as the concrete man, as “the Son” as such-but, in a unique way, in the sense that through him, as the ‘absolute bringer of salvation’...the Father, his will, his salvation, his pardon, his kingdom ‘are there’ in absolute and final proximity, that they are communicated to us.”<sup>65</sup> The Father’s “thereness” is radically communicated by the Son for humanity to acknowledge and receive. “The Son is the economic (historical) self-communication of the Father.”<sup>66</sup> Hence, Rahner compels the reader to see that not only is there an economic and immanent component found in the Trinity the self-same is also essential to each Trinitarian person. The procession of the Son presents two realities in simultaneity. Initially, Jesus is economically the “free self-communication of the divine reality...as the ‘absolute bringer of salvation.’”<sup>67</sup> Secondly, the Son’s procession from the Father immanently self-communicates the free self-expression of the Father eternally to humanity. Rahner maintains that in this sense the immanent self-communication is more comprehensible as a result of the economic self-communication.<sup>68</sup> The Father, in his “thereness” self-communicates in absolute freedom and perfection. His self-expression singularizes himself from his very self-communication. Since this free self-communication is expressed through the *Logos*, is there possibly an internal diversification within the Father himself? But, Scripture, Tradition and the Magisterium demonstrate that Jesus understood himself in a special ploclivity as the only Son of the Father and in relation to humankind. But this, affirms Rahner, “would be impossible if he were simply the Father making himself present and giving himself in a human reality.”<sup>69</sup> The uncontestable fact for Roman Catholicism is that Jesus is revealed as and actually is the one and only immanent Son of the Father. This declaration further substantiates the authenticity of the elucidation that the immanent Trinity is illustrated as a consequence of the economic Trinity.

Rahner logically next considers God as the Spirit within the Trinitarian dogma. He begins his remarks by presenting fundamental Magisterial declarations on the Holy Spirit. For example, “the gift of the Father through the Son (DS 570, 1522, 1529f., 1561, 1690, 3330), in which he communicates himself to us in immediate proximity and through which he causes us to accept this self-communication is the ‘Spirit’ of the Father and the Son.”<sup>70</sup> Therefore this Spirit as God’s self-communication is God. Consequently, although distinct from either the Father or the Son, this third person is indeed of the absolutely exact essence of both. His procession is from the Father “and” the Son as the result of their eternal communication. The Holy Spirit precisely proceeds from the Father

through the Son. However, this Spirit is not begotten as is the Son yet is co-equal and consubstantial and absolutely God. If Roman Catholicism were errantly to consider the Holy Spirit as begotten then it is possible to argue for a misapprehension whereby the Father communicates a “dual Sonship.” This is not the teaching. Nor does Roman Catholicism open the way for a modalism whereby the Holy Spirit is merely a relation of the Son to humanity. Neither is this third Trinitarian person, who is completely God, a type of Sabellianism whereby the Holy Spirit is apprehended as the manner or mode in which the Father shows himself to the world.

Clearly, the Holy Spirit, absolutely God and gift of the Father and Son is apophatically described as not unoriginate and not begotten. This divine person proceeds (is in an eternal procession) from both the Father and the Son. This Holy Spirit is the mutual holy and eternally act of love between the Father and the Son. In this sense the Holy Spirit “originates voluntarily (DS 573, 3326, 3331).”<sup>71</sup>

Rahner next treats more exhaustively the Roman Catholic understanding of the procession of the Holy Spirit. Here the point of departure is the incipient acceptance of the gracious faith experience which enlightens humanity to the reality that the Father positively and completely communicates himself in both love and forgiveness and this is done though the procession and mission of his Holy Spirit. Although it is the Father who freely offers this self-communication and completely holds it in existence as a supernatural existential. One can conclude from this that the Holy Spirit is indeed in every way wholly and without exaggeration true God. Hence, although the Father is infinite giver and the Son infinite mediator, their distinction has no detrimental impact on the Holy Spirit. Rahner contends that this reality of the divine persons is demonstrated by “our fundamental Trinitarian axiom, through the fact that the concrete Christ distinguishes this gift from himself not only with respect to God (the Father) but also with respect to those who receive the Spirit.”<sup>72</sup>

Moving forward to the relations within the Trinity, Rahner explains that there exists a “relatively distinct” status among the Father, Son and Spirit. By the phrase relatively distinct, he means, that the distinction of the three divine persons is neither composed of a situation or circumstance that allows for a distinction to subsist prior to their mutual relationships. Nor, as well, may any such prior distinction exist as the foundation of the Trinitarian members. Since this type of distinction would simultaneously augment the one divinity while consequently negating its absolute infinity and unity.<sup>73</sup> Rahner views relation amongst the three persons as a logical (versus ontological) explanation. Lacking an ontological explanation, therefore this fundamental relational Trinitarian concept does not receive any additional insight allowing it to become more comprehensible. Its rationale is inclined to defend the dogma against a modalism or tritheism by an accepted formula. For one to initially grasp the use of the term relation, no ontological explanation is necessary. Obviously, it is in the illustration of the relationality of the three divine persons that the Roman Catholic Church draws only a degree of assistance in combating the logical question of the existence of three absolutely distinct persons in God each of whom possesses real unity with the one essence of this God. Rahner, contends that the argument from relationality is insufficient to completely satisfy this conundrum. “This appeal wishes only to show negatively and defensively that the basic difficulty-how two things which are identical with a third are not identical with each other-cannot, in the present case, be shown to be insuperable.”<sup>74</sup> Historically, the negative approach to the

above issue has been a complicated explication which presents further concerns. Hence, if three realities are in fact identical with one another then an incongruence cannot be demonstrated when one is confronted by two opposed relations, which we contend are identical with God's essence, an absolute reality. The relations in God are virtually distinct from the essence and this is sufficient to have them not really be identical with each other, even though they must be identical with the divine essence. The problem is aroused by the fact that either this virtual distinction is only a mental composition or if it is indeed real then a duality needs exist in the distinct realities. We move from a Trinity to a quaternity. One is compelled to recognize the fact that essence and person in God may be a solution only if a distinction is not evidenced between two absolute realities but rather "a virtual distinction between an absolute and a relative reality."<sup>75</sup> Despite the above modest and obfuscated semantic argument, the relationality of the persons does provide a certain level of substance to the discord. Rahner suggests that initially one may contend that "if every relation is really identical with God's absolute essence, the persons are distinct only through their *esse ad* (their being relative to) and the three opposed relative *esse ad* are of the same perfection."<sup>76</sup> If the position is assumed that a given divine person does not hold the identical perfection of both other persons because that person is not in possession of the established perceptions of the other two then one discovers an untenable understanding. Rahner acknowledges that, in general, Roman Catholic theologians disagree on this issue but all are tendentious in their concurrence that "in God the relation is real only through its identity with the real divine essence. For these reasons, each person is as perfect as the others."<sup>77</sup> Rahner enumerates three cogent assumptions regarding the previously considered "principle of compared identity". First, he is concerned with the concepts of nature and person possessing a formal identity within the Trinitarian dogma. He observes no discrepancy between the notated axiom and the dogmatic assertion. The issue rests on the principle of contradiction since the axiom states that two realities identical with a third are identical with one another.

Second, Rahner indicates that in the situation of two absolute realities being identical with a third absolute reality their identity is a given. Since, they are each absolute realities there is no differentiation when their existence and comprehensibility as absolute, not relative, is established amongst one another.

Third, per Rahner, the situation becomes different if the two opposed relations are presented. Here they are required to be completely distinct from each other. Yet both have an intelligibility that disallows them to co-exist with the absolute reality with which they are supposedly to be really identical. Here, these relations possess no distinction according to their absoluteness as such, rather it subsists by means of their opposition *per se*. "That which is absolute possesses, as it were, its content in itself, whereas that which is relative is constituted by its relatedness to another, and in the case of real relative opposition by its necessary distinction from the opposed relation to which it refers."<sup>78</sup> Therefore, one can presuppose that two opposed relations can, in fact, be identical with an absolute. When one deduces this presupposition the Trinitarian dogma is freed from the "principle of compared identity" as previously referenced. Since the strength of this principle is a consequence of "the principle of contradiction". The extremely rare occurrence of the violation of the above may eventuate if any absolute reality could posit two other really identical absolutes in kind, then these two absolutes could be identical. It is impossible for these absolute realities to be really distinct and avoid the principle of

contradiction. However, in the situation whereby an “absolute is really identical with two opposed relatives, this real identity does not yet imply a formal identity of the two opposed relatives. Their real identity cannot be apodictically demonstrated from the formal principle of contradiction.”<sup>79</sup> Hence, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are identical being one in essence and distinct in relations with each other. Rahner credits both St. Anselm and the Council of Florence with formulating the insight that “in God everything is one except where there is relative opposition (DS 1330).”<sup>80</sup> These opposed relations are additionally identical with the processions by which the Father communicates to the Son and both of these relations communicate to the Holy Spirit. In this sense the very nature of the one God is communicated in its essence by the Son, the Spirit or by both. The Roman Catholic Church considers the three Trinitarian members as *hypostases* or subsistencies. Doctrinal definition of these terms is quite nebulous, per Rahner. Hence in order to begin a comprehension in a theological venue one needs to focus on the one God, as three distinct ways of givenness and then three relative ways of subsisting. In other words, Rahner is back to a discussion of the basic axiom regarding first the economy and next the immanence of the triune God. The immanence becomes more comprehensible in light of the economy since it exhibits the necessary and essential triune manner in which the one God is forever given. Of course if the economic point of departure here indicates that “the Son and Spirit are manners of givenness of the Father, this must not be taken as contradicting what is meant by ‘*subsistence*’ and ‘*hypostasis*’”.<sup>81</sup> For clearly the Father gives himself in both the Son and Spirit (in his economy) and that the same Father is himself (in his immanence) the giver to this Son and Spirit of his essence. But since the Father is absolutely the unoriginate origin he possesses his own way of givenness different than the other two Trinitarian members yet not in fact preceding his relation to either of them. Hence the *hypostasis* referred to as the Father has subsistency in his own way of being (or existing). The same holds true for the other two *hypostases* which are entitled as well by the term “persons.” According to Rahner, the Roman Catholic Church basically uses the words *hypostasis* and person synonymously. However, he admonishes the reader that a consideration of personal self-consciousness must be treated cautiously in this venue. In one sense, consciousness of each Trinitarian person does not belong to this discussion. This is the case since the term does not offer clarity to God’s overall essence. The three persons would need be explained in terms of an individual, personal self-consciousness. “But there exists in God only one power, one will, only one self-presence, a unique activity, a unique beatitude...hence self-awareness is not a moment which distinguishes the divine ‘persons’ one from the other, even though each divine ‘person’ as concrete, possesses a self-consciousness.”<sup>82</sup> Hence, the Trinity is not three subjectivities. Rather, the one God subsists in three distinct manners of subsisting. Hence, the reader can employ the terms *hypostasis*, subsistency and person with a profound but colloquial theological parlance in reference to the Trinity.

Assertions regarding the three divine persons promotes one’s treatment of their “appropriations”. Each person is God yet each has the divine essence in a manner consistent with their unique possession of the Godhead. Although articulation is at best modest in this area, Rahner following Roman Catholic dogmatic statements allows for an understanding that what activity is explicitly attributed to one person is implicitly attributed to the other. “In this sense only ‘appropriated’ to the one person...the reason

for this preference lies in a certain ‘affinity’ of this outward activity with the peculiar nature of the divine person in question (DS 573, 3326.)”<sup>83</sup> Additionally, an *ad extra* activity held in Trinitarian communion although appropriated directly to one divine person is held by each person in that person’s particularly unique manner. Rahner contends that this *ad extra* threefold style of the subsistence “of this activity is both intrinsic and necessary for its existence as it is necessary and essential for the divine essence to subsist as threefold.”<sup>84</sup> Rahner moves forward on the appropriations suggesting, along with his Church that, it is the result of the supreme efficient causality whereby God’s exterior relations abide in commonality. Hence, a unique relation is appropriated to one specific Trinitarian *hypostasis*. However, when dealing with God’s self-communication in a quasi-formal manner not involving direct efficient causality Rahner acknowledges that it is this method which indicates that a given divine person maintains its unique and appropriate relation to a given finite reality distinct from the Godhead. Rahner concludes his remarks and the mainline declarations of the Roman Catholic Church by distinguishing between “essential” and “notional” Trinitarian concepts. First he defines the essential realities of the Trinity as “all that which is given with and stated with the divine essence.”<sup>85</sup> Statements falling into this category may include attributes of God and all Trinitarian members as being omnipotent, omnibenevolent or omniscient. These characteristics of the one divine essence are pronounced of the Godhead.

When Rahner speaks of “notional” Trinitarian realities he is treating “all that which refers to the persons in their distinction.”<sup>86</sup> Hence, the following sequential taxonomies belong to the Trinity from this notional perspective. Initially, the Church considers a two processional approach. A procession exists from the Father and a procession exists from the Father through his Son. This is the begetting of the Son and the spiration of the Holy Spirit. It occurs as an expression (utterance) of the Father and a procession of the Spirit from both the Father and the Son. Secondly, the Church professes and Rahner acknowledges the three person-constituting relations of origin which is accepted with the processions since relative opposition (as discussed above) is an implication of their distinctions. One distinguishes the innascibility of the Father as begetter of the Son, the generation of the Son from the Father and the active spiration of the Spirit by the Father and the Son from the three person-constituting relations of origin. Therefore, one observes the unoriginated Father, the originated Son and the origin of the Holy Spirit being actively spirated from the Father and the Son.

The sequence continues to include a four, not person-constituting relation. There exists in the one God four activities considered to be notional. Two of these active relations are active and passive begetting (the former produces the latter is produced.) The other two relational activities are active and passive spiration.

Further, regarding the unbegotten distinguishing notional activities of the Father as a divine person, Rahner acknowledges that the Roman Catholic Church asserts a totality of five. These are “unoriginatedness, fatherhood, sonship, active spiration, and being spirated.”<sup>87</sup>

The above encountered essential and notional statements provide one with an understanding that the persons are designated by their processions and their relative oppositions. Rahner, once again, accepts Roman Catholic dogma regarding the existence of the three divine persons within one another. This has doctrinally been referred to as

*perichoresis* or *circumincession*. Hence, Rahner reinforces Roman Catholic teaching when he indicates that “the Son is from all eternity in the Father and the Father is from all eternity in the Son, and so on (DS 112f., 115, 1331).”<sup>88</sup>

Rahner observes that it is necessary to present a systematic conception of the economic Trinity. He contends that in order to begin this Trinitarian presentation with the basic axiom one needs rigid clarity on the meaning of the economic Trinity which is, in fact, the immanent Trinity. Generally, one should realize that the history of salvation provides the ultimate point of departure. For here one finds both genuine Christology as well as the development of the doctrine of grace. However, one must be cautious not to treat revelation from Scripture and/or the history of salvation as the argument for or against a discussion of the Trinity being logically prior to an analysis of Christology or the doctrine of grace. Therefore, Rahner believes that it is obligatory to conceptualize in a systematic method the economic Trinity. Consequently, Rahner considers the inner relation between the ways in which God communicates Godself. He begins by treating the economic Trinity which involves “the two distinct yet related ways of the free gratuitous self-communication of God to the spiritual creature in Jesus Christ and in the ‘Spirit’”.<sup>89</sup> Using a biblical theological perspective, Rahner speaks of God as the absolute unoriginate who as Father self-communicates energetically. The Father God’s self-communication is a positive attribute which is unoriginated and does not diminish the Father’s divine aseity. But the question arises, how then do we comprehend the one self-communication of God within the two manners of self communication, that being, the distinct yet related Son and the Spirit? Rahner believes that Roman Catholicism is not acutely cognizant of this concern. “It accepts the incarnation and the descent of the Spirit as two facticities connected by a rather extrinsic bond.”<sup>90</sup> Roman Catholic Trinitarian theology seems to presuppose that any of the three *hypostases* could have become human. Furthermore, that the Holy Spirit may act within history without the incarnation of the *Logos*. In this mode of conception one loses the one self-communication of God in a quagmire of a weakly connected relationality. Yet, Rahner acknowledges the truth to be a disoriented soteriology as well as a confused hypostatic function of the Son and the Spirit.<sup>91</sup>

Hence, Rahner avoids this conundrum by beginning at an antithetical presumption. As God freely self-communicates Godself, the Son by the nature of his hypostatic function must be the soteriological incarnate *Logos* of the Father. It is by the spirit’s essential and historical hypostatic function that the universe acknowledges this self-communication. There can be no other way. Since the absolutely free and singular self-communication is contained within the reality of “two complementary aspects...the incarnation and the descent of God’s Spirit are free, even though the connection between these two moments is necessary.”<sup>93</sup> The reality of the Trinitarian dogma supposes that in an absolutely free occurrence the *Logos* became man and the Spirit unfolds this experience as a result of the free self-communication of God. Rahner considers how the two moments may be more clearly comprehended as the one self-communication of God and consequently, one economic Trinity. It appears that it is his concern not to vitiate the divine distinctions of the Son and the Spirit by sanctioning a position that admits their hypostatic functions could be readily interchanged. Rahner realizes that this Trinity is a mystery but he has a compulsion to show the contemporary Christian that it is not a myth. Hence, he delves deeper into the concept of God’s self-communication. This has been



shown to be God's absolutely free choice to establish a relationship with humanity. Rahner presents an even more profound examination of God's self-communication. He indicates that "once we presuppose this concept of the self-communication of God, it reveals to us a fourfold group of aspects: (a) Origin-Future; (b) History-Transcendence; (c) Invitation-Acceptance; (d) Knowledge-Love. We must explain each of these double aspects...consider the inner unity of the first members...as contrasted with that of the second...if we succeed...we shall understand that the one self-communication of God occurs in two basic ways which belong together."<sup>93</sup>

Rahner admonishes theologians not to recognize in these four aspects of God's self-communication any suggestion of modalism. His initial rationale for this premise demonstrates that we are considering, at this juncture, self-communication. Therefore, one cannot eliminate the one who is addressed in this specific communicative process. This self-communication of God while mystery is also the absolute reality that this God fully enters into the existential circumstance of humanity. In no way does this complete engagement with the human person debilitate either God's essence nor is humanity an *a priori* impediment to this self-communication.

Secondly, Rahner contends that creation itself is clearly involved with the creative agency of the one God and allows for "the possibility of constituting the addressee."<sup>94</sup> Hence, from our human perspective we need realize that the *Logos* of the Father is not merely a hypostatic function addressed to us amongst several other possible hypostatic functions. The Father's free self-communication through his Son is addressed specifically and purposefully to all humanity. The human nature of the person of the Son assumes a receiver who is also a human person. This is not happenstance nor a necessity on God's part but it does imply that in God's free choice to self-communicate the recipient of God's self-communication needs to be a spiritual-personal being. The axiom that things which are received are received according to the mode of the receiver seems quite applicable in this context. Rahner admits that the self-communication of God to angels is not an identical situation since the God-man did not freely chose to become an angel. Here, one would be confronted with a mythical representation of the incarnation (God becoming human flesh/person) by the contemporary Christian thinker. Consequently, it is only the human personal subject as the addressee of God's free self-communication who has been innately created for this profound and most gracious reception. The very nature of the human person addressed by this self-communication of God as communicated possesses an origin and a future. This addressee begins with God's free willingness to self-communicate to the spiritual-personal human being. Yet "this beginning or origin aims at a future (the total communication of God), which should not be considered as that which develops naturally from the beginning, but as something which, despite the latter's finalization toward the future, stands opposed to the beginning as the other moment of something radically new, something separated by a real history of freedom."<sup>95</sup> These initial double aspects of God's self communication are more comprehensible if one respects the free choice by the communicator as well as the history of the communicatee. In no way is there an incipient modalism or a derogation of either participant in this communicative process. The second coupling of God's self-communicating aspects, per Karl Raher, is history and transcendence. In this venue God freely determines to engage humanity in its fullness since God is its origin and future. Rahner determines a real distinction yet interconnectivity between history and

transcendence of humanity in relation to God's self communication. It is located between an *a priori* and *a posteriori* knowledge and freedom. The manner in which knowledge and action existentially depend upon the provider suggest a liminal experience toward their object. This does not hint at a overwhelming experience of transcendence which, if that were the situation, would tip the scale toward transcendence. Transcendence in this relation between God and humanity also possesses a genuine history. The unification of history and transcendence provides, in even their distinction, a reference to God. Neither aspect is solely to be considered a replacement for the experience of God's self-communication with humanity.

Transcendence is discovered in its historical object not in vague mystery or mysticism as directed by God to the human person. "At any rate we may say: if there occurs a self-communication of God to historical man, who is still becoming, it can occur only in this unifying duality of history and transcendence which man is."<sup>96</sup> Hence, if the free human person is that spiritual-personal being which is communicated to by God in both origin and future, in history and transcendence, then, the aspect of God's offer and acceptance must essentially follow. Rahner contends quite directly that, "we do not deny thereby but rather affirm that the very acceptance of a divine self-communication through the power and act of freedom is one more moment of the self-communication of God, who gives himself in such a way that his self-donation is accepted in freedom."<sup>97</sup>

The aspects coupling as knowledge and love are the fourth suggested by Rahner in fully characterizing God's self-communication. Here, Rahner maintains that there are only two intra-trinitarian processions. One may assume these to be knowledge and love in the Trinity which is both economic and immanent and actually are the Son and the Spirit. As directed to humanity Rahner states that, "Knowledge and love in their duality describe the reality of man. Hence a self-communication of God to man must present itself to man as a self-communication of absolute truth and absolute love."<sup>98</sup> Again, these absolutes of truth and love are clearly the processions of the Son and the Spirit in their missions to the human person.

Rahner moves forward in his thought by treating the inner unity of these coupled aspects of God's self-communication to humanity. He desires to demonstrate that the one self-communication of God can be held as one theological position with four coupling aspects which can be unified. Thereby, evidencing only two manners of the one self-communication which are distinct and categorically distinguishable from one another. Rahner maintains that certain of the aspects are obviously united. Origin and History are certainly in unity with one another. Since these two are willed by God and offered in God's self-communication, therefore, humanity throughout its history has the freedom (as the addressee) to receive this gracious gift. Rahner believes that this divine communicative self offer is the origin of both the world and its history. This origin or beginning moves toward the newness of our future which is itself historic and not simply a natural time-lined evolution which ends the beginning. "If the proffering of God to the world is a real offer, to historic men, then, it has taken place definitively and irrevocably only when it is historically there in the 'absolute bringer of salvation', when the proffering of divine self-communication not only constitutes a world as addressee of its offer, but posits itself irrevocably as historical."<sup>99</sup> Christologically, this account in history is regarded by Roman Catholicism as the incarnation.

Rahner poses the question as to why does truth or knowledge show itself in the divine self-communication of the three, above referenced moments, origin-history and offer? Why would truth or knowledge not be more acceptable in the opposite moments of future-transcendence and acceptance? Why would truth or knowledge possess an innate historical inclination moreso than the concept of love? Rahner answers these questions by indicating that truth is not merely comprehension of a given situation. Rather, he maintains that truth “consists first in letting our own personal essence come to the fore, positing oneself without dissimulation, accepting oneself and letting this authentic nature come to the fore in truth also in the presence of others.”<sup>100</sup> This, for Rahner is the act of truth. One allows oneself to be free and fully opened to others in a commitment driven by fidelity. Consequently, one “does” truth. The deed, as Rahner calls it, which one does and awaits acceptance.

Transferring these ideas to God’s self-communication toward humanity we better apprehend the reality that this divine revelation is truth. It possesses a beginning (an origin) is divinely offered and accepted by the addressee in history. It is indeed real, it is indeed true and it is indeed faithful, it is indeed history. Yet this divine self-communication based on truth needs be received by the human person in a free love reception. Hence, this divine self-communication must be able to be freely accepted by the spiritual-personal addressee. Humanity must have the radical capacity in freedom of choice to lovingly opt for this truth and knowledge which “present” God’s self-communication.

The comprehension of the unification of the four opposed moments is obtruse. This is the result of deliberation on the presupposed concept of the self-communication of God in the four moments of future-transcendence-acceptance-love. Rahner acknowledges that for one to comprehend the unity of future and transcendence may be fairly reasonable. Since in a consideration of the future he is not thinking of a situation or event which will appear but rather “as a modality of God’s self-communication it means ‘God’ insofar as, communicated and accepted, he gives himself to man as the latter’s consummation.”<sup>101</sup> Hence, transcendence is to be, per Rahner, within the future where God gives Godself to humanity. This transcendence is the possibility of an absolute future and also the gracious event of acceptance of the offered absolute future. This acceptance is the result of God permitting the human person to be both the addressee and the recipient. It is clearly grace as the self-communication of God offered to humanity. The free choice to accept this grace is also provided by God and does not impinge on human freedom. However, implicit within God’s self-communication is the human desire for acceptance and this allows Rahner to perceive of the unification of transcendence and the future in acceptance. Rahner concludes that it is genuinely arduous to eschew this transcendent-future-acceptance reality as personalized in love. However, God’s self-communication “wills itself absolutely and creates the possibility of its acceptance and this acceptance itself, is precisely what is meant by love. It is the specifically divine ‘case’ of love, because it creates its own acceptance and because this love is the freely offered and accepted self-communication of the ‘person’.”<sup>102</sup>

As suggested above, Rahner confirms that there exists within the one divine self-communication two fundamental modalities: truth and love. One must realize that this self-communication is truth occurring in human history and love which moves this history into the absolute future. Yet, Rahner contends that history and transcendence

toward the absolute future are in opposition. This is the manner in which these two modalities of the one self-communication are, in fact, distinct. However, history as manifested in truth “can be perceived only in the horizon of transcendence toward God’s absolute future; this absolute future is irrevocably promised as love by the fact that this promise is established in concrete history (of the ‘absolute bringer of salvation’).”<sup>103</sup> In this sense the two modalities are neither separate nor combined merely by God’s mandate. They actually establish the single self-communication of God which takes on the arrangement of “truth in history, of origin and offer, of love in transcendence toward the freely accepted absolute future.”<sup>104</sup> Relative to the above position Rahner formulates another axiomatic statement: “the divine self-communication occurs in unity and distinction in history (of the truth) and in the spirit (of love).”<sup>105</sup> Consequently, both modalities relate to each other but they are indeed distinguishable realities.

Thus, in the preceding analysis Rahner has presented his concept of the economic Trinity. His next undertaking is to demonstrate a transition from this economic to the immanent Trinity especially within the official purview of Roman Catholicism. Rahner has made clear that God’s self-communication exists *in se* and is differentiated both in history and spirit, in truth and in love. These manners of do not merely occur as a transcendental experience in the mind of the created being. For if this were the situation, then God is not really present to humanity but fluctuating between a creaturely representation of the divine and periodic transcendental associations with this God. Naturally, that which is created, both the creature of Jesus and created grace, do effect God’s self-communication and are expounded upon by various Christologies and pneumatologies. However, Rahner insists that “if there is to be a real self-communication and not mere creation, this creaturely reality is, at any rate, not mediating in the sense of some substitute, but as a consequence of the self-communication (and as a previous condition brought about by itself).”<sup>106</sup> Rahner argues that in the event created reality was to intermediate God’s self-communication one may discover only a communicative experience in general not a “self”-communication in particular. For God then becomes “the giver, not the gift itself, he would ‘give himself’ only to the extent that he communicates a gift distinct from himself.”<sup>107</sup> However the reality of the humanity of Christ and created grace involved in God’s self-communication is a result of God’s free self-communicative decision. It has no direct bearing on the creature and the creator perspective in the full communication of Godself to humanity by means of the two processions. Rahner further suggests that the economic Trinity is grounded in the immanent Trinity. He proposes a method to articulate this position. First, he contends that a difference exists between God as God really is in self (as Father, Son and Holy Spirit) and the result of this, that being the God who chooses in freedom to communicate Godself to humanity. Apodictically, it follows that the Trinity in its immanence communicates as God its economy, which must be the immanent Trinity and hence this immanent Trinity must be the condition of the self-communicative movement in God.

Secondly, Rahner observes a double self-communication of the Father whereby the Father communicates himself but remains distinct from the Father’s word and the one who humanity receives. Rahner, is aware of the real distinction between God as communicator, God communicating and God as the one communicated. This is the divine essence of the one God who can be realized as economic within Trinitarian immanence.

Thirdly, there is, contends Rahner, a bonding among the three distinct yet relational *hypostases* involved in the communicative experience which must exist. They are one in being, consubstantial, co-equal and therefore absolutely relative. However, this relationality is not a fulfilling demonstration to resolve all concerns regarding an explication of the Trinity. The relations are quite significant but Rahner is insistent that “an apologetics of the ‘immanent’ Trinity should not start from the false assumption that a lifeless self-identity without any mediation is the most perfect way of being of the absolute existent. Afterwards, it will then claim that in God the distinction is ‘only’ relative, and thus try to remove the difficulty brought about by an assumption which amounted to a false initial conception of God’s simplicity.”<sup>108</sup>

This leads Rahner to a weighty treatment of the concept of person within the Trinitarian dogma. His attempt is to maintain a systematic method while accommodating the appropriate terminology within an accurate Roman Catholic context. He begins by developing some formal terminological difficulties. Rahner contends that the concept of person, unused by early Fathers as well as the New Testament, is not “absolutely constitutive of our knowledge in faith about Father, Son and Spirit as the one God. This faith can exist without reference to this concept.”<sup>109</sup> The concept itself possesses a suggestion to make general that which is absolutely specific. The statement that in God there are three persons is vague and calculates that which is uncalculable. The fact is there is only one Godhead and nothing mathematically can produce more by conjoining through addition. Obviously, the distinction and unique individual relations when considered transcend into numbers that do not suggest multiplicity but rather show the one God as truly three individuals perichoretically involved yet as Father, Son and Spirit. However, it is Rahner’s contention that as a concrete concept “person in contrast with personality (subsistence, subsistentia), means not formally the distinction as such, but those who are distinct. But ours is a case where we should speak of three persons, yet not think of three who are distinct as multiplied also in their essence, as we may do without any difficulty in other instances, e.g., when we speak of ‘three individuals’.”<sup>110</sup>

Rahner is concerned with the linguistic use of the term three persons. He desires clarity to the extent that this usage is never an increasing of the essence of God. For when there is a consideration of the person in modern parlance it includes one being with a rational nature. However the Trinity is one in nature and not a confluence of three persons each with an individual nature. Our comprehension of three persons is appropriately understood as we focus on the initial experience revealed in the history of salvation. From this true perspective we experience as one God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Rahner holds that “when we generalize and say that we experience ‘three’ persons we do so subsequently to our experience...generalization is, at least at first, a logical explanation, not some new extra knowledge not included in the original experience...it serves only to remove a modalistic misunderstanding of our experience.”<sup>111</sup>

This concept of three persons when spoken of the members of the Trinity and in the modern parlance of the term is a concern for Rahner. Current thought naturally considers three persons as three separate and distinct entities consisting of unique spiritual centers of activity as well as three subjectivities and liberties. However, this is not God, who is absolutely one in essence and self-presence. Additionally, this is not the one God since in the Father, the *Logos* is the one self-utterance. Further, Rahner contends, “there is no

properly mutual love between Father and Son, for this would presuppose two acts...there is loving self-acceptance of the Father and Son...and this gives rise to the distinction.”<sup>112</sup> This distinction is seen in knowledge and in love. Obviously, God is clearly self-aware of the three persons and each person has knowledge of self and the other two Trinitarian persons. Hence, there exists in the one God a genuine knowledge of Trinitarian consciousness and objectivity. However, in no way, insists Rahner, do three consciousnesses co-exist, rather God’s one consciousness exists in a threefold manner. This one consciousness is shared by each Trinitarian member in that member’s specific manner. There can be no triple consciousness in the triune God who subsists in this threefold manner. Hence the personality of the subsistence is distinct but not the result of a distinction of individual separate conscious subjectivities. While the distinctness is conscious it is conscious of the only one absolute consciousness and not a multiplicity of three individual subjectivities. This is a consequence of the reality that within God “all knowledge is original, there is in him no receptive knowledge nor (essentially) and difference between a subject conscious for himself and an object of this consciousness.”<sup>113</sup> This is in opposition to the human person where there is a dissimilarity between being conscious and being known. The human person’s subjective presence in the act of knowing is different than the human person’s objective delineation of what is known. This is not the case with God. Yet this is not to imply that the Trinity, according to Rahner, possesses three consciousnesses one for each person. They are each conscious of each other but they do not hold each other as objects of knowledge. “Thus we conclude that the three subjects are aware of each other through one consciousness which is possessed in a different way by the three of them.”<sup>114</sup>

Thus, Rahner’s concern for the changing interpretation of the term person. Respecting Roman Catholic traditional pronouncements, he feels his Church must be open to a less autarchic view of humanity’s historical evolution especially since the person is more than merely an ecclesial entity. Hence, person was once considered directly a unique subsistence with a rational nature. The contemporary conception of the person also includes the reality of a profound spiritual subjectivity. When applying this modern thinking to the Trinitarian persons the theologian becomes engaged in a precipitous circumstance. Since the Roman Catholic magisterium uses the concept of person today and has historically rendered this rather confusing terminology most appropriate the contemporary theologian must endeavor to work within the system creatively yet canonically. However, Rahner is adamant in his encouragement of theologians to continue to shape acceptable terminology which is necessary, appropriately licit and does not vitiate Roman Catholic Trinitarian dogmatics.

Hence, what are other expressions that would clearly and theologically explain a magisterially acceptable concept of person? Rahner begins again by means of his basic axiom. “The one self-communication of God occurs in three different manners of given-ness, in which the one God is given concretely for us in himself, and not vicariously by other realities through their transcendental relation to God. God is the concrete God in each of these manners of given-ness-which, of course, refer to each other relatively, without modalistically coinciding.”<sup>115</sup> In order to convert this explanation into the reality of the Trinity as being immanent, Rahner remarks that: “the one God subsists in three distinct manners of subsisting.”<sup>116</sup> In this statement Rahner is explaining not the persons as distinct in God but rather the unique personality of the one God. This concrete reality

of God while, involved with humanity in various manners is always the Absolute One who meets us thus. This Raherian concept of meeting-us-thus “must always be conceived as belonging to God in and for himself. The single ‘person’ in God would then be: God as existing and meeting us in this determined distinct manner of subsisting.”<sup>117</sup> This phrase distinct manner of subsisting require additional clarification. Rahner uses the expression because he feels it corresponds with the orthodox language of theology. Subsistence is more comprehensible when one examines one’s personal existence. Here “we encounter the concrete, irreducible, immutable and irreplaceable priority and finality of this experience. This-three is what subsists.”<sup>118</sup> Consequently the basic axiom regarding the Trinity is verified. For unless one has experience of the Trinitarian members in the history of salvation, one cannot begin to comprehend “their subsisting distinctly as the one God.”<sup>119</sup>

The declaration “manner” presents some concern for Rahner as well. Obviously, one must avoid the term “mode” when speaking of Trinitarian subsistence. Manner, like all concepts attempting to explicate a quality in God is an analogy. The use of the expression “person”, while accepted by Roman Catholicism, is still vague and abstract in terms of the Trinitarian unity. The “distinct manners of subsisting” does afford a better suggestion of trifold personal unity in God than does the phrase “three persons”. One must realize, however, that the term manner is not a modality, a consequence of the real substance of the one God. God is triune and of necessity distinct yet absolutely related in these manners of subsistence. They are the real Trinity and this Trinity does not exist prior to these manners of subsisting. Hence, contends Rahner, we have Father, Son and Holy Spirit as the one real God who is not an abstract concept. However, Rahner persists indicating that the term “manner” like “procession” or even “relation” unavoidably contains some element of obfuscation. One is cautioned not to conceive of any of the above expressions as eventuating a concept of three subjectivities in God. Even if the phrase “distinct manner of subsisting” is a notion which may not provide the most clear understanding of the threefold unity, the fact is human language is limited in articulation of the real concepts of procession, person and relation. Unless for the consideration of person one focuses only, on the previously mentioned current usage of this word and therefore a triple provision which, in modern usage, views the one God as a distinct subject. “Compared with the word ‘personality’, the expression ‘distinct manners of subsisting’ has the advantage of not as easily insinuating as ‘three persons’ the multiplication of the essence and of the subjectivity.”<sup>120</sup>

Rahner confirms the concept of distinct manners of subsisting by itemizing basic Trinitarian statements without the use of the term person. The following are his related assertions:

- “the one God subsists in three distinct manners of subsisting;
- the manners of subsisting of Father, Son, and Spirit are distinct as relations of opposition; hence these ‘three’ are not the same one;
- the Father, Son and Spirit are the one God each in a different manner of subsisting and in this sense we may ‘count’ three in God;
- God is ‘threefold’ through his manners of subsisting;

- God as subsisting in a determined manner of subsisting (such as Father) is ‘somebody else’ than God subsisting in another manner of subsisting, but he is not ‘something else’;-
  - the manner of subsisting is distinct through its relative opposition to one another; it is real through its identity with the divine essence;
  - the one and the same divine essence subsists in each of the three distinct manners of subsisting;
  - hence ‘he who’ subsists in one of such manners of subsisting is truly God.”<sup>121</sup>
- Rahner contends that the above well crafted summary of the distinct manners of subsisting is an equivalent and acceptable substitute for the word person. However, this does not in any way require us to surrender the notion or the historicity of the word person in our Trinitarian (and Thomistic) dogmatics. The two expressions are able to assist one another without adding confusion to the dogma or the Trinitarian theologian. Here God’s unity is protected and a tritheism is avoided.

Rahner moves further in his treatment by considering the problem that exists with the traditional psychological doctrine of the Trinity. In actuality, this attempt while an acceptable theologoumena is not officially pronounced doctrinally by the Roman Catholic Church. One needs consider God as a Spirit having a self-presence, knowledge and love. This trifold distinct manner of subsisting is real in God but our metaphysics of the spirit indicates only two exercises existing that of knowledge and of love. However, we find in God only two processions of self-communication, the *Logos* conjoined with the Father’s knowledge and the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son in infinitely divine love. It is difficult at best to comprehend the two self-communicative emanations in God while our awareness of the Trinity indicates generation, spiration and the real presence of the unoriginate Father demonstrating three distinct manners of subsistence. This is problematic within the analogy of the classical psychological doctrine.

Further, Rahner argues, there is “no model from human psychology for the doctrine of the Trinity (a model known already before the doctrine of the Trinity), to explain why divine knowledge, as absolute primordial self-presence, necessarily means the distinct manner of subsisting of that which is ‘uttered’.”<sup>122</sup> What seems to eventuate is a questionable model of human knowledge and love derived from the Trinity. Since this model demonstrates human finitude it is not completely appropriate to articulate it as a cogent analogy for the triune God. One cannot necessarily and directly speak of the Trinitarian knowledge and love proceeding or emanating from the Father as completed by the *Logos* in a formal manner. “We cannot say, therefore, that the Father knows through the Word; rather he says the Word because he knows.”<sup>123</sup> Hence, this is a circular logic at work here which uses the psychological paradigm to explicate some level of Trinitarian clarity but relies foremost on a human illustration in an *a priori* manner. Additionally, Rahner suggests some methodological difficulties in this classic approach to a Trinitarian doctrinal analogy. The origin of the immanent Trinity is not clarified. This is further complicated says Rahner, by a lack of focus on the economic Trinity. There is no genuine explanation as to the dual



processions of God's self-communication in knowledge and in love. One is unable to comprehend the rationale behind these distinct manners of God's self-communication as being known prior to our abstractions about the economic aspect of the immanent Trinity. Rahner queries whether it is possible to produce an appropriate model for the psychological Trinitarian doctrine by means of abstract analogies of human psychology and its actions in the world and within the human person. Certainly, humanity cannot begin to elicit the transcendent nature, the historical involvement, the absolute love nor the real truth all fully present in the reality of the holy mystery of the divine Trinity.

In concluding his treatise on The Trinity, Karl Rahner emphasizes that while scholastic theology has been rather arid it has also produced profound conceptual subtleness. He contends that he has chosen, in his only book completely dedicated to the Trinity, to work in an unsystematic fashion. However, Rahner insists that his basic axiom represents compelling Trinitarian theology. From the basic axiom, it becomes apparent that "Christology and the doctrine of grace are, strictly speaking doctrine of the Trinity. They are its two main chapters about either divine procession or mission ('immanent' and 'economic')." <sup>124</sup> In an effort to comprehend this relationship one needs fully realize that in Christology the *Logos* alone became human and in this he is absolutely not randomly eternally confirmed. Simultaneously, pneumatology needs be comprehended as a doctrine of grace demonstrating a Trinitarian interrelation.

Rahner finalizes his work by indicating that "nothing that the Bible or revelation or kerygmatic necessity invited us to say about the Trinity was overlooked..." <sup>125</sup>

We now proceed to the final chapter, the intent of which is to explain Karl Rahner's Trinitarian nuances in a more intelligible manner for the average Christian.

Chapter III  
Endnotes

1. TT, p. 10
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., pp. 10 & 11
4. Ibid., p. 11
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., p. 12
7. Ibid., p. 13
8. Ibid., p. 14
9. Ibid., p. 16
10. Ibid., pp. 17 & 18
11. Ibid., p. 19
12. Ibid., p. 20
13. Ibid., p. 21
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid., p. 22
17. Ibid p. 23
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid., p. 24
20. Ibid., p. 25
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid., p. 27
23. Ibid pp. 27 & 28
24. The Gospel of Luke, I:37
25. TT, p. 28
26. Ibid., p. 29
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid., p. 30
29. Ibid., p. 32
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid., p. 33
32. Ibid., p. 35
33. Ibid., p. 36
34. Ibid., p. 37
35. Ibid., p. 38
36. Ibid., p. 39
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid., p. 40
39. Ibid., p. 42
40. Ibid., p. 43
41. Ibid.
42. Ibid.
43. Ibid., p. 44

44. Ibid., 45
45. Ibid., 46
46. Ibid.
47. Ibid., p. 47
48. Ibid.
49. Ibid., p. 48
50. Ibid.
51. Ibid., p. 49
52. Ibid., p. 50
53. Ibid.
54. Ibid., p. 51
55. Ibid., p. 53
56. Ibid.
57. Ibid., p. 55
58. Ibid.
59. Ibid., p. 57
60. Ibid.
61. Ibid., p. 58
62. Ibid., p. 60
63. Ibid., p. 61
64. Ibid.
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67. Ibid. p. 64
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69. Ibid., p. 65
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71. Ibid., p. 67
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75. Ibid., p. 70
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78. Ibid. p.72
79. Ibid.
80. Ibid., 73
81. Ibid., 74
82. Ibid., 75
83. Ibid., 77
84. Ibid
85. Ibid., p. 78
86. Ibid.
87. Ibid., p. 79
88. Ibid
89. Ibid., p. 83

90. Ibid., p. 85
91. Ibid., p. 86
92. Ibid.
93. Ibid., p. 88
94. Ibid., p. 89
95. Ibid., p. 91
96. Ibid., p. 92
97. Ibid., p. 93
98. Ibid., p. 94
99. Ibid., p. 95
100. Ibid., p. 96
101. Ibid., p. 97
102. Ibid., p. 98
103. Ibid.
104. Ibid.
105. Ibid., p. 99
106. Ibid., p. 101
107. Ibid.
108. Ibid., p. 103
109. Ibid., p. 104
110. Ibid., p. 105
111. Ibid., 106
112. Ibid.
113. Ibid., p. 107
114. Ibid.
115. Ibid., p. 109
116. Ibid.
117. Ibid., p. 110
118. Ibid.
119. Ibid., p. 111
120. Ibid., p. 113
121. Ibid., p. 114
122. Ibid., p. 117
123. Ibid., p. 118
124. Ibid., p. 120
125. Ibid.

Chapter Four:  
The Doctrine of the Trinity according to Karl Rahner

an attempt to consider Rahner's Trinitarian nuances in more intelligible language for the average Christian

Preface

The previous chapter of this dissertation devoted itself to the only book on the Trinity written by the prolific Karl Rahner. History indicates that in 1967 Rahner authored an eighty page article entitled, "The Threefold God as Transcendental Ground of Salvation History" for volume II of Salvation History before Christ. This unit was part of the Mystery of Salvation: Outline of a dogmatic Theology Based on Salvation History. Within the next two years Rahner wrote within Sacramentum Mundi two brief segments on the Trinity in the German language. These commentaries were eventually translated into the English version of Sacramentum Mundi: Volume VI.<sup>1</sup> His sole Trinitarian book The Trinity, used exclusively as the primary research monograph of this dissertation was published in 1970 and became the English version of Rahner's German work The Threefold God. Clearly, I have chosen The Trinity as my seminal source not only because of its succinct representation of Rahner's concerns regarding the doctrine but also the implications of the significance of its exclusivity compel one to deduce that here is his preeminent treatment of the central dogma of Roman Catholic theology.

This final chapter is my attempt to clarify Rahner's work as generated by the savant in The Trinity. Hence, this chapter moves forward as the gate keeping moment to provide a reasonable explanation of Rahner's thought as he shared it with the world nearly forty years ago. The ministerial hope (which always implies some level of risk) is that within much more colloquial jargon I am able to present The Trinity in a manner which is reasonably comprehensible for Karl Rahner's preferred persons those he called, "the average Christian."<sup>2</sup>

SECTION II: THE STATE OF THE QUESTION

There is a sense, as I read Rahner's The Trinity, that he was a pastor trapped in the body of a systematic theologian. This is one reason why Rahner is so insistent upon a method to treat the economic Trinity as his point of departure. The way that the average Christian discovers the Holy Mystery is within the history of salvation. This is critical to Rahner's structure and diffuse methodology<sup>3</sup> since he genuinely believed the Trinity to be the central mystery of all mysteries within Christianity. This needs be taught and developed in the believer who has too often been captured in an undeveloped moment. It is the result of an arid manualist (textbook Trinitarian pedagogy) and a biblicism which is limited in its ability to proffer a contemporary presentation.<sup>4</sup>

From his perspective of the pastor, Karl Rahner, was deeply concerned that his faithful do not succumb to an acutely monotheistic conception of God. The God of Roman Catholicism is triune and distinct in person but not separate yet one in being. He taught that were the Trinitarian reality to be eliminated there would be little implication on the religious literature affecting the minds and hearts of the Christian faithful.<sup>5</sup> There is a

sense, in reading Karl Rahner, that we can only speak of God as triune. He never presents this attestation directly in The Trinity, however, he does minimally seek a nexus between the two treatises, On the One God and On the Triune God. If Rahner's "average Christian" is only monotheistically oriented, that human person grows stymied at the fullness of the Holy Reality.

One can readily become a supine Christian, focused only on the Father (Creator) or the Son (Redeemer) or the Holy Spirit (the Advocate). The pastoral blends with the academic and the mystic as Rahner seeks to share some profound insights into the threefold Godhead. While most of us look on having "heard" of the Trinitarian disposition in the distinction of persons with absolute relationality. Christians have had some exposure to concepts like the unoriginate originator, the processions, the missions. However, what is the meaning within human articulation for those sitting in the pews on Sunday mornings. This was Rahner's concern as he teaches in The Trinity. Implicit in his Trinitarian work is the influence of Ignatius of Loyola and the absolute need for the human person (Rahner's congregation) to find God in all things. Rahner further understands and presents his anthropocentric/ theocentric work within the scope of a level of the existential. Rahner had taken from Martin Heidegger the general notion of those very human characteristics with which we all exist as being-in-the-world. However, through Rahner's lens these distinguishing features (existentials) of the human person standing before the Holy Mystery are related to our transcendent being (spirit-in-the-world). We are victimized by sin and guilt but we are also free and historically oriented.<sup>6</sup> We desire to transcend ourselves to experience the Trinity on the highest levels of human knowledge and human love. We are moved toward the Trinity by the grace provided to us by the Trinity. Here one finds the influence of Joseph Marechal on Rahner's Trinitarian nuances. Rahner, like Marechal, felt the need to appropriately blend traditional Scholasticism with contemporary philosophy. This conflated the two genres into a transcendental Thomism. The triune God is the formal object of theology. Human persons are oriented, by their very nature, toward this God. As such when we consider God we are also reflecting upon ourselves. Conversely, when we reflect upon ourselves we are reflecting upon the Triune God. The Trinity is the Transcendent yet we are driven to engage this Trinitarian God. Hence, the human person is moved by the Triune God's self-communication (grace) toward the Trinity as its beginning and ultimate destination. It is the grace of the Trinity which permits this human condition to exist. Hence, while the Trinity is the Transcendent, humanity has been given the propensity to transcend itself through love and knowledge in a kind of transcendental anthropology. It is who we are in our theocentric relationship. This is at the heart of Rahner's transcendental Thomism.<sup>7</sup>

With this in mind, one can sense a frustration on Rahner's part, with the notion that Catholic/Christians are not exposed to a deeper understanding of the economy and immanence of the Trinity. This is especially frustrating for Rahner since we are oriented toward the Trinity as the Transcendent, the sustainer of life and our teleological destiny! For most Christians their genuine desire is to develop and enhance a relationship with Jesus Christ. Certainly, this is an exemplary objective and worthy of lifelong pursuit. However, what Rahner shares with his average Christians is the reality that they have not been taught thoroughly about the second person of the Trinity. He is not fully realized to be the only *Logos* of the Father, the utterance of God, the self-communication of the

unoriginate Originator. Rahner is prompting the Catholic/Christian world to fully realize that the God-Man is not merely a cavalier notion. The awesome nature of the absolutely free act of incarnation by God appears to be a concept that has been taken for granted. This is so much the case that Rahner held that if the dogma of the Trinity were relinquished there would be no affect on the average Christian's idea of the incarnation.<sup>8</sup> This would follow as a result of misunderstanding that any divine person could become man. This type of Christology vitiates not only the distinction of the *Logos* from each other divine person but also debilitates the Trinitarian doctrine. As stated in the previous chapter, Rahner's contention was that only the utterance of God, the divine second person, the *Logos*, could become incarnate with redemptive purpose. Clearly this self-revelation of the Father is more than a super-man.

It is through Christ who is always present with his Spirit that the economy of revelation and salvation is revealed. Inaccuracy regarding Christology and/or pneumatology effects the average Christian's understanding (and perhaps, belief in) the Trinity. Once we dismiss or are unable to consider that the incarnate *Logos* is much more than the one-of-the-three-chosen to become the God-Man a new dimension is revealed. For, as Rahner holds, only this incarnate *Logos* in freedom is the single divine person who could offer complete concession for human sin. It is through this grace of the *Logos* of God that the mission to incarnately redeem and self-communicate the entire Trinity is absolutely and appropriately provided.

It is an appropriate adjunct to mention that Rahner did not feel that there is no possibility of any Trinitarian person to self-communicate to humanity. All members are revealed and do communicate themselves but they do not do this by means of a direct incarnation. They may theoretically engage humanity in some method which could be incarnational but not redemptive in the fullness of a human person. However, we are dealing here with profound conjecture, since each divine person is distinctly that specific divine person and draws this distinction from absolute relativity to the others. Consequently, it is virtually impossible based on our finitude to project how a divine person who is not distinctly the *Logos* might allocate into human historicity an act as the bringer of salvation.<sup>9</sup>

Rahner's point is that although the Trinity is the central mystery of all Christian faith and the source from which all other theological mystery is drawn it has been isolated in the overall dogmatic schema. The Trinitarian doctrine, in the textbook tradition, is considered after the treatise on the One God and is thereafter infrequently referenced. Christians, Roman Catholics in particular, are provided a rather confusing examination of the Triune God after studying something of the nature and attributes of the One God. It is in this sense that Rahner felt that detail about the Trinity was somewhat relegated to a treatise of additional remarks about God. This pedagogical method seemed inopportune for a clear perspective demonstrating the genuine existential relationship between the human person and God as Trinity. The understanding of an anthropological theology is debilitated. Further, a theological anthropology is reduced to appropriating certain divine activities with specific divine persons bordering on a tritheism. It follows that the reality of *perichoresis* (*circumincession*) is rarely considered. The consequence is rather obvious for the average Christian. The Father is simply the Creator, the Son is simply the redeemer and the Spirit is the consoler. While these statements are true, Rahner was asking, then what is meant by the Trinity?<sup>10</sup> Christian Trinitarian timidity is leading us

either to a tritheistic notion or a monotheism which exaggerates the second divine person.<sup>11</sup>

Whether one agrees that the influential Augustine of Hippo attempted to systematically present God as One followed by his *De Trinitate* is, today, virtually insignificant. The Rahnerian enterprise was disappointed, as I read it, that substantial Trinitarian scholarship has not demonstrably conjoined the two treatises in 1700 years. Roman Catholicism, in particular, has been submitted to abstruse metaphysical properties of God. A liminal amount, Magisterially, has been taught regarding the triune God who has freely elected to self-communicate in the experience of salvation history to all humanity. Even Augustine's classic psychological model as a Trinitarian analogy is inadequate. How does the average Christian comprehend this paradigm when considering essence and procession, distinction and relation within the schema of relative subsistence? The discovery that one possesses a mind, a will and self love appears as relevant to the state of the question as the metaphor of God as a three leaf clover!

Although Rahner was respectful of Augustine's conception<sup>12</sup> he believed the nexus between the two treatises was unidentified. Consequently, the average Christian is obfuscated. As a savant of the future although grounded in the present Rahner realized that much Trinitarian insight could be drawn from other faith traditions. This was not being seriously considered in pre-Vatican II theological formation and that is generally the experience which the contemporary Roman Catholicism continues to maintain. Rahner's question was also his contention that the Trinity has been made a remote concept. This disturbed him since he held the Trinity as a mystery within itself but also the mystery of human salvation. The Trinity, for Rahner, was at the core of all other theological mysteries. In an effort to emphasize this reality, Rahner proposes the now lauded axiom, the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity and the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity.<sup>13</sup>

It was from this point of departure that, I believe, Rahner could see a genuine connection of the two treatises. Further, it was his Trinitarian theological method. He was demonstrating for the average Christian that the movement from the identity of the economic Trinity makes known to humanity the immanent Trinity (the Holy Mystery *in se*). Obviously, Rahner holds to the reality of only one Trinity, however, he believed that it (the Triune God) is revealed in salvation history in two ways conforming their identity. They are one and the same absolute Trinity as well as Rahner's methodological principle to initiate his Trinitarian nuances of the Holy Mystery of the One God.<sup>14</sup> I conclude that it was Rahner's pastoral and academic concern for his average audience which drove his thinking to stay within the Magisterial and Scriptural perimeters in order to enhance the faith life of this average Christian. Clearly, he wanted the Christian, especially the Roman Catholic, world to understand the actual graced relationship between the Trinity and each human person. For Rahner, this was so much more than a pious platitude or a cavalier mental relation.

Prior to evidencing a systematic approach to his elucidations, Rahner considered the axiom in relation to Jesus. He knew that as the divine *Logos*, only the second divine person was free to become incarnate. Consequently, both logic and theology cooperate in the true perception that at least one mission emanates from the Father into the economy of salvation history. This "mission", for the mind of Rahner, was not a mere appropriation but was actually and absolutely proper to him. While this mission of the



incarnate *Logos* eventuates as unpressured by humanity, it is of absolutely no necessity on the part of the Triune God and is in no way compelled to be determined by human history, nevertheless it did occur in space and time. It is the moment of the *Kairos* in conjunction with the *Kronos*. The perfect timing, so to speak, by the Holy Mystery of the One God who is Triune. Yet, it is only this divine utterance who has the distinct mission to become the incarnational Word of God. One begins to hear Rahner opine that we are unable to discover an appropriate differentiation between the dogma of the Trinity and the doctrine of the economy of the salvation of the world.<sup>15</sup> Rahner did admonish theologians to articulately promote the truism that in speaking of the hypostatic union it is possible that God as God could enter into some type of hypostatic event from the situation of any divine person.<sup>16</sup> However, with this caveat Rahner delineates the difference between a hypostatic special function and a hypostatic unitive relation. The average Christian cannot merely take for granted that the hypostatic union of the natures of the Christ would be unequivocally the same if directed to the other persons of the Triune God. Does not the Holy Spirit self-communicate profoundly within the head and heart of each human person without becoming an authentic human person? This was Rahner's point. So, Rahner believed that it is theoretically not out of the state of the question for an economic relation to occur as proper to each Trinitarian member. Here there could be the possible real self-communication of any divine person to the history of salvation. In one sense Christians believe that this is the reality of their faith. However, Rahner is cautious not to imply that the non-appropriated relations of the persons in salvation history would have no affect upon their immanent distinctions and absolute relations.<sup>17</sup> Hence, "the mission" of the second divine person, the incarnate *Logos*, the utterance of the Father, is to act in the history of salvation as the one and only redeemer. If there were any other case then the free incarnation of Jesus Christ it would reveal virtually nothing about him as the incarnate *Logos per se*. Wherein would lie his unique role and the purpose of his fully divine and fully human natures? Further, what is the affect upon our Trinitarian conception if Christians would experience no difference in their belief system as any divine person took on the reality of being the human/divine savior of the world? Only pedagogical suggestions might consider the *Logos*' distinction but what affect would these suggestions have upon the revelation and communication by God as Trinity. Rahner, has said that a revelation of the Unoriginate Father without the Word (*Logos*) is similar to a person actually speaking without words.<sup>18</sup> While all things are possible with God, from a Rahnerian perspective and in the finitude of our human perception it is undemonstrable and scripturally unfounded that any divine person could become the redeemer.

Rahner was deeply concerned that Christians might assume that the actions of Christ tell all that is necessary to understand the incarnate *Logos per se*. Rahner was considering a correlative with his basic axiom whereby the economic *Logos* is the immanent *Logos* and vice versa. The *Logos* is not merely any human being accomplishing superhuman achievements. For Rahner has stated "the human as such would not show us the *Logos* as such."<sup>19</sup> There existed in the Trinitarian work of Rahner a more profound correlation between the *Logos per se* and the freely assumed human nature of Jesus the Christ. The *Logos* with the Father and the *Logos* with humanity is identical according to Rahner.

Moving forward, Rahner embraced the notion that each divine person communicates to humanity freely and by means of that person's specific particularity and diversity. However, Rahner also held that each divine person does not self-communicate other than in and through the other persons. There was for Rahner an economic and immanent sense of *perichoresis* (*circumincession*). Otherwise, humanity would experience three unicities but not the Trinity which is one in nature, substance and being. Hence Rahner's contention was that the one God subsists and self-communicates by means of three distinct but relative manners of subsisting and communicating. The implication is that the three divine persons relate to the world in the same manner in which they relate within and amongst themselves. Once again, Rahner was attending to the reality that the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity and the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity. This was, for Rahner, true of the Trinity as well as axiomatic for each individual divine person. Consequently, Rahner maintained that a tri-communication of Godself is freely provided to humanity. However, Rahner admonished that believers must not think of this tri-self-communication as simply a verbal presenting of God's communication *sans* distinctions. The three divine persons are absolutely related but also absolutely distinct, per Rahner. The Word and the Spirit are the double mediation whereby the Father communicates God as God is. This economic self-communication is completely, realistically, genuinely and truly threefold.<sup>20</sup>

The reader can observe that Rahner considered a perception of the Triune God as a salvific experience as well as an experience of grace. Salvation history illustrates both the Christ and the Spirit as revealing the immanent Trinity within them. Rahner's tendency was to understand the Trinity not only dogmatically but also as the threefold God acting within the entire world. In a profound sense Rahner was witnessing to a dual mystery. One is that of the grace provided to beings-in-the-world in order to realize the truth of the Triune God. The second is the penetrating effect of God's grace upon both believer and non-believer. For Rahner, this duality is one and the same "abysmal mystery."<sup>21</sup> If one were to reject this mystical Trinitarian experience then one, per Rahner, at best might hold only a verbal belief in lieu of the actual salvific action of God within humanity. For Rahner, this would be an untoward position forcing abstruse semantics and a theological method which complicates itself. Hence, the better comprehension of the Trinity, for Rahner, was direct reference to both the history of salvation and grace. The experience of Jesus and the Holy Spirit are this direct point of reference. They continually make the Trinity known to the world. The doctrine of "the missions" can never be considered as merely a relatively significant addition to the Trinitarian dogma, per Rahner. Following the Son and the Spirit are the best way to follow Rahner's theological Trinitarian method. The Old Testament itself in its liminal revelation through Creation, sapiential and psalmic literature shares the earliest manifestation of the Father (as well as the Son and Spirit). Although, it is the Old Covenant unveiling in the New Covenant where God is fully communicated as triune by the Son and the Spirit. They reveal themselves as divine in unity yet distinction but persistently point to the Father, as Unoriginate Originator. This was the thinking of Karl Rahner.

Dovetailing the preceding considerations was Rahner's concern that the average Christian may be confused by Trinitarian terminology. Rahner felt that most Christians in the pew would perceive the Trinity as three distinct consciousnesses or three distinct

centers of activity. This thinking would be the consequence of the outdated textbook teaching on an understanding of the term person. Rahner knew that our human experience of personhood would vitiate our notion of three divine persons, the One Holy Mystery of God. He realized that the terminology and concept of person was inadequate for application to the Trinitarian persons. Philosophy, psychology and sociology in the ever processing modern era have seriously impacted the Nicene view of the person. Although Rahner ultimately did acquiesce to the usage of the term primarily because of its historical theological significance he hoped for a new term to be developed by future theologians. As of this writing the Roman Catholic Church has not provide better terminology. Consequently, as Rahner predicted the average Christian stands at the precipice of a tritheism.

While the average Christian is confounded by the appropriate meaning of a divine person she/he is also frustrated, per Rahner, by the effect of the two treatises, On the One God and On the Triune God. This was detailed in the previous section but Rahner always felt that some direct nexus in the actual teaching of the two treatises must be established. He did not find this in either his Jesuit training nor did it appear to him to exist as recently as 1970. The issue exists for current Roman Catholic/Christian theology and needs be addressed. As it stands the two treaties force the average Christian, who is rarely exposed today to much study on the nature of God, to move in a disoriented direction toward either an untenable monotheism or a tritheistic notion.

For Rahner, “the Trinitarian thesis” must begin with a methodology which demonstrates the reality in salvation history of the missions of the Word and Spirit as gratuitously sent by the Father. We then see in this economic Trinity the immanent Trinity and the immanent Trinity as the economic Trinity. For Rahner this axiomatic point of departure in Trinitarian methodology was critical in understanding, within our finitude, this central doctrine.<sup>22</sup> The doctrine which dogmatically should be accepted by the Magisterium and both pastorally and academically taught to the average Christian by means of revised manuals.

Rahner treated the Trinity as Absolute Mystery. He himself was considered by many a mystic, one who dwelt in religious mystery. Rahner maintained that while we must attempt penetration within our finitude and limited articulation we will never fully comprehend the Trinity even after its revelation in this world or the next. This fact is also substantiated by the First Vatican Council. The Trinity’s “absoluteness” transcends humanity’s most luminous conceptualizations and conceptualizers. However, Rahner did assert that terms like substance and essence are dogmatically acceptable when referencing the Trinity. He considered ecclesial soundness from the positions of what Rahner called the logical and ontic explanations. The logical, for Rahner, establishes a reasonably comprehensible explanation that is precise as it stands independently eg. (the missions of Son and Spirit). The ontic explanation, is contingent upon the use of another situation to make something plausible eg.(the three-leafed clover analogy). In dealing with the Trinitarian mystery, Rahner was satisfied that the logical explanation provided the necessary ecclesial determination. And although terms like, substance, essence, nature, and being are profoundly mysterious as applied to the Trinity (as well as humanity) they are also reasonably logically explained in a finite manner within the framework of human articulation. Rahner was attempting to avoid any subordinationism or modalism or tritheism in his Trinitarian conception. The above terms avoid the logic

which indicates the oneness of the Triune God despite the fact that God is a dark mystery.<sup>23</sup> The logical explanation more precisely shows the self-communication of the One God not in a modalistic manner but through God's Word and Wisdom. Thus, Rahner concluded that the economic Trinity is first revealed and first known as the immanent Trinity. Humanity can accept what the former reveals of the latter in a logical way with absolute doctrinal certainty. As detailed above, Rahner was concerned but accepted the term "person". However, in 1970 he called upon Roman Catholic theology to appropriate a more logical explanatory terminology which would be Magisterially acceptable. This request has remained unanswered by the Roman Catholic Church. There is little doubt that the average Christian is not being provided a catechizing moment by the confusion of the term person as applied to a Trinitarian member.

Rahner also held that although it has been historically the case and systematically appropriate for Roman Catholicism to initiate its official teaching with the Father. He suggested that it is possible to begin by way of an overall Trinitarian confession. The requirement being that this appropriate and dogmatically sound confession must focus absolutely upon the definite reality of salvation. However, Rahner also acknowledged that the gradual revelation of the Trinity beginning with the Father has been creedally and Magisterially valid and pronounced for so long that Trinitarian theology may be debilitating the overall zeitgeist by not beginning with the person of the Father. Hence, for Rahner, wisdom dictated that the Father, who is principle without principle, be considered first in orthodox Trinitarian theology.<sup>24</sup> However, humanity comes to know the Father better through the graduated revelation unfolded by the Son and the Spirit.

Rahner understood the Son to be the only divine person who is begotten. The Son is communicated everything by the Father except the Father's fatherliness. In absolutely everyway is the Son co-equal and consubstantial with the Father. The Son illuminates for the average Christian, the Father's immanence and economy.

Rahner admonished theologians to be cautious in their exposition of Jesus' realization of his divinity as incarnate *Logos*. Rahner posited that the historical Jesus knew himself as a human person. However, Jesus also saw himself, contended Rahner, as "the Son" in a unique relationship with the Father. By being the one bringer of salvation to the world he communicates the Father's fullness to humanity. For Rahner, the Son is the radical economic self-communication of the Father.<sup>25</sup> A consequence of this unique Sonship allows humanity to see, per Rahner, that the economic and immanent component of the entire Trinity also exists in each distinct person of the Trinity. The Son is economically the Jesus who is the bringer of salvation while simultaneously the procession who self-communicates the Father to the world.

Moving forward in his Trinitarian exposition Rahner considers the Holy Spirit. For Rahner, it is the Spirit who allows humanity to accept the self-communication of the Father and the Son.<sup>26</sup> The Spirit is God absolutely co-equal and consubstantial with the Father and the Son. The Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son as a consequence of their eternal love and communication. The Spirit is not begotten. There is not a double Sonship within the Trinity. Nor does there exist a kind of modalism whereby the Spirit is a sub-relation to the Son and under the influence of the Son's "sending". The Spirit is neither subordinate nor begotten. The Spirit is in an eternal procession from both the Father and the Son. The Spirit is often viewed as the profound love between the Father and Son herein the Spirit originates voluntarily.<sup>27</sup> The Father completely self-

communicates to the Spirit all of the Father's love and forgiveness. The Spirit's mission, so to speak, is revealing this eternal love and gracious forgiveness to our sinful world. However, in no way is the Spirit less than the Father or the Son. The Spirit is a divine person, gift distinguished, in human articulation, from the Son yet always present and co-equal with the Son in all of the economy of Scripture and the immanence of the Trinity.

Moving forward to the relations within the Trinity, Rahner believed that there is a relative distinction amongst the three divine persons. He meant that their distinction never subsisted before their mutual relationship with one another. He also felt that no distinction could make up the Trinitarian members. In other words, the one divinity could not be stressed over against their absolute unity. Rahner was always trying to prevent a tritheism or a modalistic view of the Triune God in the mind of the average Christian. It was a difficult situation for Rahner, as it is for Roman Catholicism. Since the doctrine speaks to the reality of three absolutely distinct persons in one God each of them in real and absolute unity with the very essence of God. The problem as Rahner viewed it is derived from the notion that the relations in God are distinct from the essence. This is a position which shows the persons as not identical with one another yet they are defined as identical with the divine essence. Hence, perhaps, felt Rahner, that the distinctions are virtual or a mental arrangement. Otherwise if we are dealing with one reality then a duality must exist in the distinct realities. Rahner was moving back to his nemesis of essence and person. These terms can only be helpful to the average Christian if a distinction is not shown between two absolute realities. Rather, suggested Rahner, there may be "a virtual distinction between an absolute and a relative reality".<sup>28</sup> However, Rahner felt that if the relations within the Trinity are genuinely identical with the one God's essence (nature) then the persons are distinct through their relativity. They are co-equal, each is of the same degree of perfection and the relations are real through the identity with the divine essence. This is the position of Roman Catholicism and Karl Rahner. Logic insists that two identical absolute realities identical with a third absolute reality are identical with each other. Hence, in less abstruse verbiage The Father, Son and Spirit are identical. They are one in being, one in essence and distinct in relation to one another as divine persons.

The Holy Mystery, ineffable, as the previous section suggests, requires the average Christian to profoundly consider the One God as three distinct yet absolutely related ways of givenness and subsisting. Rahner returned to the basic axiom-first is revealed the economic then the immanent Trinity. However, both are indeed manifestations of the One and only Triune Godhead. The Trinitarian immanence, per Rahner is illuminated by the Trinitarian economy and vice versa. However, what is indicated by the terms *hypostasis* and subsistence do not contradict the above statement. The Father gives to humanity through the Son and Spirit. They demonstrate in the economy of salvation the Father's immanence. Although the Father, per Rahner, has subsistence in the Father's unique manner. The Father, like the Son and Spirit, is an *hypostasis*. There is one nature in the Holy Mystery but three distinct yet relative *hypostases*. Yet, admonishes Rahner, there are not three individual, personal self-consciousnesses.<sup>29</sup> The Trinity while triune is not three subjectivities, or three rational natures. The One God subsists in three distinct manners of subsisting.

Rahner then considered it necessary to treat the appropriations of the divine persons. Each member of the Trinity is absolutely God. However, each fully possesses the divine

essence in a way that is unique within the Godhead. In this sense Rahner held that the Triune God's exterior relations are appropriated to one specific divine person but also are held in the commonality of the divine essence. Hence, a particular divine person is wholly God and yet that same divine person maintains a unique and appropriate relation to a given finite reality distinct from the Godhead. There exists in God a specific essence that which makes God who God really is. Rahner also spoke of the notional realities of the Trinity. In this notional sense, Rahner was concerned with everything that refers to the divine persons in their distinction.<sup>30</sup> Rahner followed Roman Catholic doctrine in his acceptance of the two processions. One procession comes from the Father the other procession exists from the Father and the Son. Hence, we have the begetting of the Son and the spiration of the Spirit. One eventuates as the utterance of the Father the other as a procession of the love between the Father and Son. However, all three Trinitarian members while One God are also in relative opposition as implied by their appropriations and distinctions.

As Rahner viewed the Trinity he could observe that in the One God there exists four notional activities. Two of these activities are active and passive begetting (the active produces the latter is produced). The other two activities are active and passive spiration. Further, Rahner observed five notional properties of The Father. These five are: unoriginatedness, fatherhood, sonship, active spiration and being spirated.<sup>31</sup> Consequently, these essential and notional realities of the Trinity (see Chapter three) demonstrated to Rahner's mind that the divine persons are designated by their processions as well as their relative oppositions. Unique appropriations are indeed appropriated to each divine member of the One Divine essence. Yet each divine person also exists within one another absolutely. This abstruse reality of the Triune God is referred to as *perichoresis* or *circumincession*. Eternally, God is an absolute complete intermingling of the three divine persons within one another. Rahner was speaking about the immanent Trinity but at the point of appropriational activity the economic Trinity was interwoven.

The history of salvation provided Rahner's point of departure with a more systematic presentation of the economic Trinity. Here Rahner would see Christology and pneumatology developing from the central mystery of Roman Catholicism. Although, Rahner's method does not want to present a mythical time line that might imply that first came the Trinity, then the second person and finally the third person. Human articulation is stymied and scriptural revelation is gradual and Rahner worked well within both venues. When Rahner treated the economic Trinity he realized the dual distinction (which is related) of God's free self communication in the Son and the Spirit. The Father's unoriginated self-communication does not diminish the Father's ability to be just as the Father eternally is (aseity). Rahner believed that a quagmire had developed within Roman Catholicism whereby it is not clear how the one self communication of God could exist by means of two distinct manners of self-communication. This would confuse the average Christian. Rahner felt that his reading of Roman Catholic doctrine presupposed a situation showing a loose extrinsic bond between the incarnation and the descent of the Holy Spirit. Further, he did not agree that any *hypostasis* could have become the incarnate redeemer. Nor did he accept the notion that the Spirit could act in history without the incarnation of the Word of the Father. All the above shows a modest

relationality. Rahner, saw a disoriented soteriology and a confused hypostatic functionality of the Son and the Spirit<sup>32</sup> as a result of this explication of the relations.

Rahner decided to avoid the above confusion by asserting that there can be only one real moment. The Son by the very essence of the Son's hypostatic function has to be the redeeming incarnate Word of his Father. The essence of the Spirit's hypostatic function, per Rahner, is to help the world acknowledge this self-communication. The two are complementary and connected. The Spirit is always present to the world when the Son is acting with humanity. For Rahner, the Spirit opens to the world the experience of the Son. This experience of the Son is the self-communication of God. Consequently, there is only one economic Trinity with three distinct yet relative *hypostases* which reveal the one self-communication of the absolute Holy Mystery of God. This is not a myth for Rahner yet it is mystical, a theological mystery.

In his understanding of the self-communication of God, Rahner envisioned four correlating double aspects. The first was Origin-Future. The second was History-Transcendence. The third being Invitation-Acceptance. The fourth shows itself as Knowledge-Love. In his conception of these dual-aspects, Rahner found no modalism and attempted to demonstrate the one self-communication in two ways that require one another. Rahner was focused on God's method of self-communicating while respecting each of the three divine persons in their appropriated uniqueness, functionality, distinctness and absolute relationality. Humanity is graced to realize that the Father's Word (the *Logos*) is not merely a hypostatic task. The Father in absolute freedom self-communicates through the Son to all humanity. If the one who is addressed is a human receiver then the reception has a more profound meaning. For it is the humanity of the incarnate *Logos* addressing another human person. This is an unfathomable gift since God freely chose to become a human person in order to self-communicate. God did not even choose to do this with the angelic host, per Rahner. Only humanity has been chosen to be the receiver of God's free address of Godself. This is beyond human comprehension. Hence our Origin is also our Future. We are created by God for eternal life with God. God freely engages the human spiritual person in History. We have been infused with Transcendence. We are transcendent beings. We can step out of ourselves to center on the Holy Mystery in every situation of our lives. Humanity, per Rahner is a duality of history and transcendence and we are beings in process of becoming.

It is natural that God's Offer and our Acceptance should follow from our History and Transcendence. God's, self-communication is free and the Human Person is also free. God's self-Offer and our option to Accept in freedom is a gift that elicits an ever more profound desire to self-communicate. Who is Man (Psalm 8) that you have made him little less than God? Finally, the dual coupling aspects of Knowledge and Love completely characterize God's incredible desire to self-communicate to the human person. Per Rahner, Knowledge and Love are the Son and the Spirit revealed in the economic Trinity. Knowledge and Love also show the innate duality within every human being. Hence the absolute Truth, which is the Son and the Absolute Love, which is the Spirit, profoundly demonstrate to humanity in an understandable method God's free self-communicative relation to each of us. The absolutes of Knowledge and Love are the processions of the Son and Spirit in their connected missions to the human person.

Rahner then took these four coupling aspects of the one self-communication of God and asserted that while two manners exist and are distinct and distinguishable they are

also in essential and notional relation to each other. Each of these coupling aspects represents an enlightened view of God's manner of freely communicating Godself to humanity.

The divine revelation for Rahner is absolute Truth. It is Christ who is the Truth and the self-revelation of God. It is Absolute Truth in immanence and Absolute Truth in the economy of salvation, per Rahner. It is the Spirit who reveals this Truth in history by offering him to the world. Hence, the doctrine of grace presupposes a human nature able to accept this Truth in freedom, history and as absolute gift. Conversely, human nature must also presuppose God's grace otherwise the offer can not be accepted. Humanity is the addressee and the recipient of this ineffable choice by God to freely self-communicate. However, as Rahner concluded this proposition, he was quite direct in his indication that this divine offer can only be accepted within the freedom also given to humanity.<sup>33</sup> The Truth (Knowledge) which he spoke of lived in human history and propels us to our Absolute Future. One senses that what Rahner may have been saying is that God self-communicates so that humanity will act on the opportunity to find our destiny with the Trinity in eternally fulfilling contemplation. Hence, the two hypostatic modalities, as described in finite articulation, function to bring humanity to the Absolute Future by means of God's single self-communication.

In terms of the immanent Trinity, Rahner argued that God absolutely and really self-communicates without the need for any intermediaries. God is the giver and the gift. God gives in a unique manner. God, unlike humanity, gives in a triune way. God is not distinct from the gift.<sup>34</sup> The economic Trinity, per Rahner, is grounded in the immanent Trinity. The God that we consider as Triune is really God. The exact same God is the Triune God who communicates to humanity through the Son and Spirit. The immanent Trinity communicates to humanity as the One God its economy. This economic Trinity must be, per Rahner, the immanent Trinity for it is the condition of God's single self-communication. The Father, Rahner also observed, communicates the fatherliness but is absolutely distinct from the Father's Word (*Logos*). Rahner saw a real distinction in God as communicator, God as the one communicating and God as the one communicated. Here, Rahner realized the divine essence. The Holy Mystery who can be simultaneously economic within Trinitarian immanence.

Rahner also conceived of a bonding amongst the three distinct yet relative *hypostases* in the process of communication. Yet, Rahner also believed that in God the distinctions are not merely relative. God is simplicity, unicity, oneness in the most absolute of absolute manners. God is the Absolute existent.

When considering the relative distinctions of the Trinitarian members, Rahner held strong concerns regarding the use of the term persons (see above). He believed that the concept of person was not constitutive of our faith knowledge regarding the Father, Son and Spirit. Rahner felt that Roman Catholicism could exist without the concept of person. For Rahner, there is a difficulty in calculating as three persons the absolutely incalculable. The idea of personhood, for Rahner, was a consideration that moved from a general concept to a specific when speaking of a divine Trinitarian person. There is, felt Rahner, really only one Godhead and no mathematics can possibly add to it or subtract from it. The contemporary average Christian is confounded by these Trinitarian notions and a tritheism could be a wrong but natural response. For Rahner, the irritant of the concept of person for the Trinity was pointing toward three distinct essences or three



distinct and even relative family members. Rahner desired more clarification and better terminology from contemporary theology to vitiate any idea of the use of a term which may imply an increase in the very essence of God. This, for Rahner, became more of a confusing doctrine when considering in current vocabulary a person as one being with one rational nature. However, Rahner knew the Trinity to be one in nature but not one God with three natures. It would only be through the revelation of salvation history and the historical roots and Magisterial acceptance of the term that Rahner would obstinately acquiesce. Rahner was not one to move easily into generalizations. He was adamant in his desire to preserve the average Christian from a modalistic misunderstanding of the doctrine of the Trinity.

As stated above, Rahner (even in 1970) realized that modern usage of the term person had radically changed the perception which existed in the Nicene era. Contemporary psychology considers a human person to be a unique and separate spiritual center of activity with singular subjectivity and liberty. For Rahner, this notion was/is not applicable to the Triune God of Roman Catholicism. God, per Rahner, is absolutely one in essence and self-presence. God is self-aware of the three persons because each is God and each is aware of the other members of the Trinity in its unicity. Each is aware, per Rahner, of self, their distinctness and their absolute and essential relativity. However, Rahner asserted that the three persons do not co-exist as three separate consciousnesses. God is absolutely one consciousness who exists in a threefold manner. This one and only consciousness, per Rahner, is held in common by each of the three divine persons. What Rahner meant is that while the personality of each subsistence is distinct this reality is not a consequence of a distinction of individually separate conscious subjectivities. The distinctness is conscious only of the absolutely one consciousness and not a multiplicity of three individual subjectivities. For God all knowledge, per Rahner, including self-knowledge (self-consciousness) is only original and never receptive.<sup>35</sup> In the human person, however, there is a difference between being known and being conscious. Human knowing, for Rahner, is quite receptive.

Although in the Trinity each person is distinct and conscious of each other divine person. However, since there is but one consciousness in the Triune God Rahner believed that they do not hold each other as objects of knowledge. Since in God there is no difference between a subject conscious for Godself and an object of this consciousness.<sup>36</sup> Rahner concluded that each Trinitarian member is aware of each other through only one consciousness which each divine person possesses in a unique way.

The above Rahnerian elucidations were the consequence of his concern that the average contemporary Christian has a different awareness of the concept of person than did the Church of the previous millennium. A person is a unique subsistence with a rational and free nature and a spiritual component leading to her/his subjectivity.

Attempting to stay within Magisterial teaching, Rahner was encouraging contemporary theologians to establish contemporary terminology which would resonate with the average Christian as well as Roman Catholicism. Rahner saw an opportunity in his basic axiom. He spoke of the one self-communication of God occurring in three different ways of given-ness. Here the one God is given completely for humanity in Godself. This is the reality of our God who in each manner of given-ness is triune, is distinct and relative but neither a modalism or a tritheism. Hence in stating that the one God subsists in three distinct manners of subsisting, Rahner was not focusing on the

persons as distinct but more the absolutely unique personality of the single Godhead. This concrete absolute reality of God engages humanity in various manners but is absolutely eternally the Absolute One who, Rahner felt, meets-us-thus. Hence, for Rahner, God as pure existence and meeting-us-thus demonstrated the reality of this distinct manner of subsisting.<sup>37</sup>

Rahner used the expression distinct manners of subsisting to correspond with the more traditional theological language of his church. What subsists, for Rahner was our profound human experience of the concrete finality of the event of the Holy Mystery. God meets us. God is there for us. This there-for us which meets us and self-communicates is what subsists. Of course, for Rahner, this was best revealed to humanity in salvation history. Here is communicated through divine revelation the three persons subsisting distinctly as the Absolute One God.

For Rahner, the term manner also needed some clarification. Manner is not mode but is a concept that attempts to analogously explain a specific quality in God. Like all human articulation the analogy falls short of the reality but can help to penetrate the profundity.

Rahner believed that better than referring to the Trinity merely as three persons, the distinct manners of subsistence provided a more clear view of the trifold personal unity in the One God. God is triune and is absolutely distinct and absolutely relative in these manners (not modes) of subsistence. This, for Rahner, was the Trinity. This Trinity does not exist prior to these manners of subsisting. God did not exist before God for God's existence is God's essence.

Rahner contended that the Absolute Reality who is God is not an abstraction but assuredly the Father, the Son and the Spirit. However, the term manner, was never meant by Rahner to provide the notion of three subjectivities in the One God who is Triune. If one were to compare the term "personality" with the expression distinct manners of subsisting there is observed a clearer advantage. One does not as readily insinuate that the three divine persons are merely the multiplicity of the divine essence and of the subjectivity.<sup>38</sup>

Rahner felt it appropriate to provide assertions to reinforce his theory on the phrase distinct manners of subsisting in lieu of the term person. They are quoted below:

- "the one God subsists in three distinct manners of subsisting;
- the manners of subsisting of Father, Son and Spirit are distinct as relations of opposition; hence, these 'three' are not the same one;
- the Father, Son and Spirit are the one God each in a different manner of subsisting and in this sense we may 'count' three in God;
- God is 'threefold' through His manners of subsisting;
- God as subsisting in a determined manner of subsisting (such as Father) is 'somebody else' than God subsisting in another manner of subsisting, but He is not 'something else';
- the manner of subsisting is distinct through its relative opposition to one another; it is real through its identity with the divine essence;
- the one and the same divine essence subsists in each of the three distinct manners of subsisting;
- hence 'He who' subsists in one of such manners of subsisting is truly God."<sup>39</sup>

Rahner believed that the above assertions established for the expression “distinct manners of subsisting” were a more suitable and more accurate articulation than the term person. However, he also affirmed that these declarations did not compel Roman Catholicism to eliminate the usage of the phrase divine persons. It was Rahner’s hope that both expressions would assist one another and perhaps spur other theologians to advance less opaque nomenclature.

Rahner also wanted to treat the classic psychological model of the Trinity. Here one considers, from the human analogy, a trinity within God of self-presence, knowledge and love. However, since God is spirit and, per Rahner, classic metaphysics of spirit shows only the ability to know and love this is problematic. There exists only two processions in God. Yet our limited knowledge of the Trinity indicates generation, spiration and the presence of the unoriginate Father. These are indicative of the three distinct manners of subsisting. Additionally, Rahner contended that humanity does not possess a model from our psychology to explain why divine knowledge, as divine self-presence, must be the uttered distinct manner of subsisting.<sup>40</sup> The psychological model, for Rahner, was deficient. The Father does not know by means of the *Logos* (the Word). The Father utters that *Logos* because the Father knows.

In the psychological model, Rahner felt that there was no clarification on the reality of the immanent Trinity. Once again, we are involved with human articulation as a model of the ineffable Holy Mystery. Further there is no real discussion regarding the reality of the economic Trinity. The psychological model seems to place a personal template of the individual human person on the triune, self-communicative God. Rahner argued that it was not possible to demonstrate from human nature the reality of the Transcendent. Nor was it reasonable to consider the historicity, Love and Truth all fully present and given by means of a modest illustration of the psychology of the human being.

Rahner concluded his Trinitarian nuances by acknowledging the unsystematic fashion in which he chose to work. Perhaps, this was a result of his lack of fondness for previous manualist styles poorly developed from the scholastics. In his only monograph genuinely devoted to the Trinity, perhaps Karl Rahner was attempting to stimulate his contemporaries to clarify the abstruse pedagogy that had been taught to the average Christian. Whatever his rationale for limiting his typical systematic approach, Rahner insisted that his basic axiom represented an excellent point of departure for an overlooked Trinitarian theology. He wanted to make clear that, Christology and the doctrine of grace are the Trinitarian dogma. Here was the crux of the divine processions and missions; immanent and economic. Rahner accurately justifies his overall Trinitarian theological method by insisting that he overlooked nothing about the Trinity in Scripture, revelation or kerygma.<sup>41</sup>

One does not enjoy concluding one’s work on a negative comment. This is especially true when one has spent much time in the presence of a mystic, pastor and savant like the great Karl Rahner. However 38 years after the publication of his document on the Trinity and 24 years since his death Roman Catholicism seems to continue in the precise vein which disturbed Karl Rahner.

My experience as a teacher of Roman Catholic catechists has observed a very cavalier understanding or concern for the Trinity as the central doctrine of this faith.

Rahner's legacy appears to be, among the average Christian, a deep respect for a brilliant systematic theologian. However, like other theological intellectuals with a propensity to pastor (minister) the real, average person in the pews, his work seems liminally noticed. While societies and associations respecting and debating Karl Rahner do exist they are exclusive and speak to an elite audience. I believe this was never the desire of the greatest Roman Catholic thinker of the twentieth century. I believe that he saw himself as a common man trying to find the Triune God in all things as did his founding father Ignatius.

In a 1980's cartoon portraying Karl Rahner as a theological atomic physicist the savant gave a summary of the perception of himself, his work and a view toward the future. "I speak about things that no one understands. Beneath me sit the so-called multipliers. They are the ones who are expected to hand on what I say. Beneath them sit the popularizers who spend their time putting what the multipliers say into simple language. Below them, in the pulpit, is an individual popularizer who preaches to the Christian people what needs to be said. Nearby sits Jesus Christ who listens to what is being translated from what I've concocted and he says: 'I don't understand.' That's just the way it is when you're a theology teacher."<sup>42</sup>

Section Three:  
Karl Rahner's Trinitarian perspective and  
Contemporary Roman Catholicism

As I write this dissertation in the year 2007, nearly a quarter century has past since the death of Karl Rahner. The question of his relevancy to the contemporary Roman Catholic (indeed, the average Christian) mind is critical. He will never possess the lasting influence of an Augustine or Aquinas. His "time" seems to have been the decades surrounding Vatican II.

However, the focus of my work has been on Karl Rahner's Trinitarian nuances. Hence, while respected Oxford theologians like Philip Endean ask "is there still life in Rahnerian theology"?<sup>43</sup> The task of this dissertation is to speak only of the insights of Rahner as applied to the Trinity. In this arena, I believe him to continue as a very appropriate animator still capable of arousing contemporary Roman Catholic Trinitarian theology. However, it seems that he is very frequently overlooked from the pulpit. Rahner's detailed attention to his basic axiom, the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity and vice versa, is a meaningfully profound reality. His Ignatian spirituality drove him to see God in all things. The axiom is the academic yet pastoral expression that led Rahner to lead us toward who God is and how the triune God relates to all humanity.

As evidenced in Chapter One, Karl Rahner was always concerned for the human person who existentially possessed an innate desire for God. His study with Heidegger allowed Rahner to elicit a transcendental theological anthropology. Consequently, one will find in Rahner's Trinitarian enterprise God's movement toward the person as well as the human person's appetite for the Trinitarian God. This is why Marechal was so useful to Karl Rahner. He provided a way for Rahner to combine his early scholastic education with a contemporary philosophy of the human person. Rahner unpacked a transcendental Thomism which provided a horizon for the person to experience the triune God not merely in a textbook but as a being-in-the-world. A being in need of the Father's self-communicative moments through the utterance of his Word and His gift of love through His Spirit. Contemporary Roman Catholicism (and Christianity in general) hungers to conceptualize this reality but starves to accept it in the daily routine of seeing God in all things. This is Rahner's gift to us today. My opinion is that most Christians, especially Roman Catholics, are ill-at-ease in accepting this gift.

If we see the importance of the human person, through Rahner, and what the triune God freely yet mysteriously continues to do for us we have a better grasp of Christology, Soteriology and pneumatology. Yet the Trinity never impinges upon our existential gifts of freedom, our history, the reality to opt for sin and experience guilt. These are things innate to human nature through which the Father by means of his Son and Spirit in the silence of Trinitarian theology allows us to be genuine hearers of the Word in the Spirit of the World.

Rahner's perceptions of the action of the Trinity in the daily life of human persons, his presupposition that we can delve more deeply into the relation of the *Logos* and Jesus Christ, his concern for us to see the triune God in all things and his notion that the Trinity is the central dogma of the faith from which all other doctrines flow are all necessary for the contemporary Roman Catholic to internalize. I would argue that Karl Rahner's Trinitarian work has aided some Roman Catholic understanding and can continue to be of

value only if carefully studied and then realistically employed. In this post modern era, we as Roman Catholics have had little concern in using the thought of Augustine, Aquinas, Scotus to strengthen our orthodox arguments. The same should be applied to the twentieth century mind of Karl Rahner especially regarding his Trinitarian insights. Rahner admitted that he loved to teach and retired into teaching during his last years. He will continue to tutor Trinitarian theology as long as we make the effort to attend his academy. Here is a task of all Christian Churches once they have spent the effort to implement Karl Rahner's Trinitarian notions. If this does not occur (and it has not with much vigor in the Roman Catholic world) we will sadly continue to consider the Trinity as an isolated doctrine.

Chapter Four  
Endnotes

1. CC, p. 98
2. TT, p. 11
3. CF, pp. 11 – 17
4. SM, Vol. 6, p. 296
5. TT, p. 11
6. CC, p. xiii
7. CA, p. 145
8. TT, p. 11
9. SM, p. 298 and TT, p. 63
10. TT, pp. 20 – 21
11. Ibid., pp. 10 – 11
12. SM, p. 302 and TT, p. 17
13. TT, p. 22
14. SM, p. 297 – 299
15. TT, p. 24
16. Ibid., p. 25
17. SM, pp. 297 – 298 and TT, pp. 27 – 28
18. TT, p. 29
19. Ibid., p. 22
20. Ibid., p. 38
21. Ibid., p. 39
22. SM, p. 301 and TT, p. 48
23. TT, p. 58
24. SM, p. 308 and TT, p. 61
25. SM, p. 308 and TT, p. 63
26. SM, p. 300 and TT, p. 66
27. TT, p. 67
28. Ibid., p. 70
29. Ibid., p. 75
30. Ibid., p. 78
31. Ibid., p. 79
32. Ibid., p. 86
33. Ibid., p. 98
34. Ibid., p. 101
35. Ibid., p. 107
36. Ibid.
37. SM, p. 302 and TT, p. 110
38. TT, p. 113
39. SM, p. 302 and TT, p. 114
40. TT, p. 117
41. Ibid., p. 120
42. IR, p. 19
43. CC, p. 251

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