

KARL RAHNER'S PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

A STUDY OF KARL RAHNER'S  
PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION AS PRESENTED  
IN HIS WORK, HÖRER DES WORTES

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SCOPE AND PURPOSE: This thesis is a detailed and systematic study of Karl Rahner's philosophy of religion as it is developed and presented in his book, Hörer des Wortes. Special attention is directed to Rahner's conception of the proper relationship between philosophy of religion and theology, and to Rahner's emphasis upon the importance of human history in attempting to work out his philosophy of religion.

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## INTRODUCTION

In 1937 at the University of Innsbruck, Austria, Karl Rahner gave a series of fifteen lectures on the subject of philosophy of religion.<sup>1</sup> These lectures were later organized as a book and published in 1941 under the title Hörer des Wortes. The second German edition of the text, revised by Johannes B. Metz, was published at Munich in 1963.<sup>2</sup> In his preface to the second edition of Hörer des Wortes Metz explains that two factors contributed to a general failure, particularly on the part of Catholic and Protestant thinkers, to appreciate the importance of Rahner's work in relation to the debate on philosophy of religion. First, war raged on the European continent at the time of the text's original publication; secondly, Hörer des Wortes went out of print soon after its original publication.

After the Second World War Karl Rahner's work became internationally known chiefly through the publication

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<sup>1</sup>Herbert Vorgrimler, Karl Rahner, trans. Edward Quinn (London: Burns & Oates Ltd., 1965), p. 17.

<sup>2</sup>Karl Rahner, Hörer des Wortes, (2nd ed.; München: Kösel-Verlag, 1963). An English translation of the second edition was published in 1968. Karl Rahner, Hearers of the Word, trans. Michael Richards (2nd ed.; New York: Herder & Herder, 1968).

and translation of his many theological studies. A number of these theological essays were gathered together to comprise the first volume of Rahner's Schriften zur Theologie, published in German in 1954 and in English translation in 1961.<sup>3</sup> The regular appearance of sequential volumes of the Theological Investigations, along with the publications of Johannes B. Metz' revised re-editions of both Geist in Welt<sup>4</sup> and Hörer des Wortes, have stimulated a growing appreciation of Karl Rahner's thought within theological and academic communities throughout Europe and North America.

This thesis has been undertaken as an attempt to contribute to the appreciation of Karl Rahner's thought through a detailed study of Rahner's philosophy of religion as it is developed and presented in Hearers of the Word. For a complete assessment and full appreciation of the overall character of Rahner's thought, it is important to have a clear understanding of the subject matter of Hearers of the Word; the work occupies a central position within the corpus of Rahner's philosophical and theological writings

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<sup>3</sup>Karl Rahner, Schriften zur Theologie, I, (Einsiedeln, Zürich, Köln: Benziger Verlag, 1954). ET., Theological Investigations, I, trans. Cornelius Ernst (Baltimore: Helicon Press Inc., 1961).

<sup>4</sup>Karl Rahner, Geist in Welt, (2nd ed.; Munich: Kösel-Verlag, 1957). All references in this thesis are to the English translation. Karl Rahner, Spirit in the World, trans. William Dych (2nd ed.; New York: Herder & Herder, 1968).

because it sets the highly formalized metaphysics of finite knowledge presented in Spirit in the World, into relation with his later investigations of the correspondence between Christian doctrines and a possible theological anthropology. The synthesis achieved in Hearers of the Word nourishes and sustains Rahner's continuing effort to show the essential relevance of traditional theological concerns for the practical, historical existence of man.

The work itself requires detailed study because of the inherent complexity of its thought-content. Rahner develops his philosophy of religion from the standpoint of a somewhat distinctive account of the relationship between philosophy of religion and theology. It is important to have Rahner's initial account of this relationship clearly presented because it provides the unifying context within which the actual stages of his philosophy of religion are progressively elaborated. The analysis itself falls into two divisions of general ontology and metaphysical anthropology; the stages within the development of each division are structured in such a way that each proposition of general ontology yields a concurrent and complementary proposition of metaphysical anthropology.

In order to organize this thesis as a systematic study, a sketch outlining the basic stages in the development of the work and their place within the work as a



whole will be presented in the first chapter. In correspondence with this general outline, the second chapter of the thesis will focus upon the basic point of departure for Rahner's metaphysics (man's necessary question about being), and will proceed with an examination of the first stage in Rahner's analysis of this fundamental starting-point.

Apart from its importance within the context of the development of Rahner's own thought, Hearers of the Word merits detailed study because it opens up interesting perspectives with regard to the general areas of Catholic fundamental theology, Christian philosophy, and Protestant philosophy of religion. Rahner understands his philosophy of religion as a resolution of certain crucial problems that have arisen in each of these areas. The way in which the problematic of Hearers of the Word relates to these three areas of thought will be described in the first chapter of the thesis; the nature of Rahner's resolution of the problems that arise in each of the areas will be discussed in the fifth and concluding chapter of the thesis. Here, a short discussion of the most distinctive feature of Rahner's philosophy of religion will help to indicate the position of Hearers of the Word with regard to previous attempts to understand religion philosophically.

Karl Rahner takes a firm and definite stand in

opposition to all forms of "rationalist and enlightened" philosophy of religion that are doubtful of "an historically founded structure of man's existence."<sup>5</sup> In order to describe this opposition more fully Rahner refers to the eighteenth century German philosopher, G. E. Lessing, as a typical exponent of such "rationalist and enlightened philosophy." Lessing argued that "necessary truths of reason"--truths that are fundamental for the existence and salvation of man--could not be founded on historical facts; as a corollary, he maintained that "accidental truths of history" could not serve as foundations for the formation and transformation of moral and metaphysical concepts.<sup>6</sup> Contrary to Lessing, Rahner argues that man is obliged, by virtue of his nature, to concern himself with such "historical facts;" not only do historical facts and events provide the occasion for the formation and transformation of man's moral and metaphysical concepts, but it is also possible that through them the truths necessary for man's salvation are communicated.

Although Lessing maintained that the essential components of religion are natural, in the sense that they

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<sup>5</sup>Karl Rahner, Hearers of the Word, p. 21.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 21. For Lessing's distinction see G. E. Lessing, "On the Proof of the Spirit and Power," Lessing's Theological Writings, trans. Henry Chadwick (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1956), p. 55.

are "immediately derived from God through each individual's reason,"<sup>7</sup> he also realized that because of man's social nature, the essential elements of the "religion of nature" are always interwoven with historical factors and events.<sup>8</sup> However, the attempt to base religion upon historical events presented Lessing with a dilemma: between "accidental truths of history" and "necessary truths of reason" there stood an impasse, an "ugly broad ditch."<sup>9</sup> Rahner does not attempt to bridge Lessing's ditch by immediately proving that particular historical facts, such as the fate of Christ for instance, are essential truths necessary for man's salvation; rather he attempts to substantiate his position by giving a philosophical account that explains why man must concern himself with historical truths in the first place.<sup>10</sup>

In Hearers of the Word then, Karl Rahner wants to prove that human existence is rooted in history and that man's spiritual existence is necessarily inter-woven with historical events. An attempt to reconcile human

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<sup>7</sup>G. E. Lessing, "On the Origin of Revealed Religion," in Lessing's Theological Writings, trans. Henry Chadwick (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1956), p. 104.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., pp. 104-105.

<sup>9</sup>G. E. Lessing, "On the Proof of the Spirit and Power," Lessing's Theological Writings, p. 55.

<sup>10</sup>Rahner, Hearers of the Word, p. 21.

transcendence with the historical structure of human existence occupies a central position in the development of this proof. The third and particularly fourth chapters of this thesis are concerned with the way in which Rahner attempts to achieve this crucial reconciliation.

Since the study presented in this thesis focuses exclusively upon Hearers of the Word, it is important to situate the work within the context of the general development of Karl Rahner's thought. I have already stated that the work occupies a mediating position between Rahner's first, major philosophical work, Spirit in the World and his later writings that attempt to develop a theological anthropology. In the remainder of this introduction an effort is made to gain a wider perspective on Hearers of the Word through a brief discussion of the development of Rahner's thought.

In this discussion I attempt to avoid an unrepresentative periodization of Rahner's intellectual activity into three distinct periods of metaphysics, philosophy of religion and theology. Such a rigid division would be unrepresentative because many of the theological essays that appear in the first few volumes of Theological Investigations were originally published in periodicals and journals before Rahner delivered the lectures that were to become Hearers of the Word; some of the essays in the very

first volume of Theological Investigations were written even before Rahner began working toward his degree in philosophy at Freiburg in 1934.<sup>11</sup> Early in his intellectual life as a Jesuit Rahner was educated in patristic theology and the history of dogma; moreover, he published articles dealing with Origen and Bonaventure before actually beginning his thesis on Thomas Aquinas' metaphysics of knowledge at Freiburg.<sup>12</sup> While this original thesis was rejected as a dissertation, it was eventually published with the title Geist in Welt in 1934.

Subsequent to his studies in philosophy, though, there is a general development in the central concerns of Rahner's thought from the metaphysics of human knowledge, through philosophy of religion to theological anthropology. In tracing this development I will attempt to emphasize the basic unity and coherence of Rahner's metaphysical and theological thought. Although Rahner does maintain that there is a distinction between metaphysical and theological modes of conceptualization, I think that I can truthfully say that all of Rahner's intellectual activity is grounded in the continuity of a single, unified enquiry into the diverse dimensions of the relationships between man and God.

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<sup>11</sup>Rahner, Theological Investigations, I, p. xxi.

<sup>12</sup>H. Vorgrimler, Karl Rahner, pp. 26-27.

Spirit in the World is concerned with the possibility of metaphysics in man's situation as a knowing spirit in the world of physical reality; in that work Rahner attempts to show that man is able to reach beyond the physical reality accessible to his immediate experience to gain knowledge of things beyond that physical reality, such as universal essences.<sup>13</sup> A brief consideration of the nature of this endeavour, and the spirit in which it was developed, will help to reveal the distinctive character of Rahner's metaphysics when viewed in terms of the general history of philosophy.

Rather than a merely historical representation of axioms in Thomist metaphysics, Spirit in the World is a philosophical engagement with and elaboration upon the actual content of St. Thomas Aquinas' account of human knowledge. In his interpretation of Thomas, Rahner attempts to systematize a metaphysics of finite, human knowledge. This systematization is developed in two major movements. First of all, after a short introductory interpretation of Summa Theologiae Ia, q.84, a.7, Rahner proceeds to focus intensively upon the doctrine of the "conversion of the intellect to the phantasm," a doctrine that occupies a central position in the Thomistic metaphysics of knowledge.

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<sup>13</sup>Rahner, Spirit in the World, p. liii.

Rahner understands this doctrine to mean basically that sense intuition and intellectual thought are united in the act of human knowledge in such a way that, while material things are the proper objects of human knowledge, the human intellect has the power to reach beyond or transcend them. In a second major movement Rahner explores the relationship of this doctrine to the whole of Thomistic metaphysics in order to show how the radical unity of sensible intuition and transcendence in human knowledge allows man eventually to know of spiritual realities beyond the physical world.

In his preface to the second edition of Spirit in the World Rahner acknowledged that his work was indebted to the spirit of both Pierre Rousselot's and Joseph Maréchal's interpretations of Thomas Aquinas.<sup>14</sup> Generally stated, both Rousselot and Maréchal attempted to interpret Thomas' thought by bringing it into confrontation with problems of modern philosophy. With Maréchal specifically, the confrontation took the form of a comparison between Aquinas and Immanuel Kant issuing in an attempt "to justify a combination of the content of the traditional Thomistic

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. xlvi. Rahner frequently refers to P. Rousselot's book, L'intellectualisme de Saint Thomas, 2nd ed. (Paris: 1924) and particularly to Joseph Maréchal's Le point de départ de la métaphysique, V, 1st ed. (Louvain: 1926), in footnotes throughout the text.

metaphysics with the transcendental method of Kant."<sup>15</sup>

The effects of a similar confrontation between Aquinas and Kant are discernible in Spirit in the World. For Rahner, as with Maréchal, the attempt to systematize a metaphysics of human knowledge on the basis of traditional Thomist metaphysics involves, in the last analysis, a transcendental mode of reflection. In his introduction to the first edition of the book Rahner acknowledged that his interpretation of Thomas was conditioned to a large extent by the nature and problems of modern philosophy, particularly German philosophy from Kant to Heidegger.<sup>16</sup> It is

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<sup>15</sup>Francis P. Fiorenza, "Karl Rahner and the Kantian Problematic," in K. Rahner, Spirit in the World, p. xxi.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. lii. "If in this sense the reader gets the impression that an interpretation of St. Thomas is at work here which has its origin in modern philosophy, the author does not consider that such a criticism points to a defect, but rather to a merit of the book."

Although Rahner further explained that the limited scope of Spirit in the World "did not permit an explicit, detailed confrontation of modern philosophy from Kant to Heidegger with Thomas," he admitted that his interpretation of Thomas' thought contained important points of contact with the thought of both philosophers. (p. lii)

In this matter, Francis P. Fiorenza's introductory essay included in the English translation of the second edition of Spirit in the World, "Karl Rahner and the Kantian Problematic," is very helpful for pointing out the points of contact between Rahner's thought and the critical and transcendental philosophy of Immanuel Kant. Of particular interest is Fiorenza's discussion of the difference between Maréchal's and Rahner's reception of Kant, specifically with regard to the different ways in which they establish the metaphysical significance of judgement. Fiorenza maintains that the difference results from Rahner's assimilation of Heidegger's insights concerning the circular



this objective context that accounts for the presence of what Rahner refers to as "Kantian-sounding expressions" in Spirit in the World.<sup>17</sup>

Yet Rahner emphasized that his concern was not to perform a critique of knowledge in the neo-Kantian sense; rather, he was engaged in an attempt to systematize a Thomist metaphysics of knowledge. However, because Kant limited the range of theoretical reason to the objects of spatio-temporal experience and thereby denied "the possibility of rational theology and special metaphysics,"<sup>18</sup> Kant's critique of knowledge stood as an implicit obstacle for Rahner's task. To respond to the Kantian problematic,

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structure of human knowledge. (pp. xxxvii - xliii.)

The style of thought associated with Maréchal and Rahner has a peculiar character when considered in terms of the general history of philosophy; Karl Lehmann writes:

Le domaine particulier qui s'ouvre entre le «réalisme» traditionnel et la pensée «transcendentale» moderne, donne, au point de vue philosophique, un moyen terme difficilement déterminable entre les fronts philosophiques habituels. Cette manière de penser est relativement étrangère à la philosophie scolastique traditionnelle et à la réflexion moderne de la philosophie transcendentale, d'autant qu'elle ne veille pas en même temps à définir la situation particulière qu'elle occupe au point de vue de l'histoire de la philosophie.

Karl Lehmann, "Karl Rahner," trans. M. Hayaux, in Bilan de la théologie du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle, collected by Robert Vander Gucht and Herbert Vorgrimler, (Paris: Casterman, 1970), II, p. 854.

<sup>17</sup>Spirit in the World, p. liii.

<sup>18</sup>F. Fiorenza, "Karl Rahner and the Kantian Problematic," in K. Rahner, Spirit in the World, p. xxxvi.

Rahner engaged in a kind of transcendental reflection in order to give an explicit account of the conditions of the possibility of metaphysics for the finite, human knower.<sup>19</sup> For Rahner though, the question about the possibility of metaphysics is not a question that somehow precedes metaphysical enquiry itself, as a matter for an altogether separate theory of knowledge.<sup>20</sup> Rather, transcendental reflection upon the conditions of the possibility of metaphysics is understood as an intrinsic movement implicitly belonging to metaphysical enquiry itself, even though such reflection does not constitute the thematization of metaphysics as a whole.

Therefore, in his systematization of the Thomist

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<sup>19</sup>Karl Rahner, Spirit in the World, p. 58

It is not possible here to compare the thought of Rahner and Kant on the nature of transcendental reflection. While Rahner maintains, in Spirit in the World, that Thomistic metaphysics involves transcendental reflection, he does not explicitly compare his own understanding of the transcendental method of questioning in philosophy with that of Kant. A succinct statement about the nature of transcendental investigation is given by Rahner himself in a later essay called "Theology and Anthropology." "A transcendental investigation examines an issue according to the necessary conditions given by the possibility of knowledge and action on the part of the subject himself." Karl Rahner, "Theology and Anthropology," Theological Investigations IX, (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), p. 29. Otto Muck includes a brief discussion of Rahner's use of the transcendental method in his book, The Transcendental Method, trans. William D. Seidensticker (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968).

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., pp. 18-19.

metaphysics of finite knowledge, Rahner understands himself to have given an account of the conditions under which metaphysical knowledge is possible for man, even though man's only intuition is sense intuition. At the conclusion of Spirit in the World Rahner declares that for St. Thomas "metaphysics does not consist in the vision of a metaphysical object, perhaps of being as such, but in the transcendental reflection upon that which is affirmed implicitly and simultaneously in the knowledge of the world, in the affirmation of physics."<sup>21</sup> Briefly stated, Rahner concludes that every act of human knowledge of the physical world contains an implicit affirmation of absolute being on the part of the knowing subject, and it is this basic affirmation that transcendental reflection renders thematically explicit.

In opposition to Kant, and in correspondence with the conclusion of Maréchal, Rahner affirms that there is an identity between the structures of human knowledge, explicated by transcendental reflection, and the being of physical reality. He maintains that a kind of "noetic hylomorphism" corresponds to the "ontological hylomorphism" of existent objects so that there is a "thoroughgoing determination of knowing by being;"<sup>22</sup> that is, corresponding to the

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<sup>21</sup>K. Rahner, Spirit in the World, p. 398.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. liii.

synthesis of form and matter in known objects (ontological hylomorphism), there is a "hylomorphic" structure in human knowledge - man can only know of universal forms or essences through the sensible confrontation with material, existent things. According to Rahner, then, an implicit unity of knowing and being opens up the possibility of metaphysical knowledge for human beings.

The general spirit of Rahner's interpretation of Thomas Aquinas places him within the trend of Catholic thought that has been referred to as "Maréchal Thomism"<sup>23</sup> or "Transcendental Thomism."<sup>24</sup> However, as Francis P. Fiorenza observes, the distinctive orientation of Rahner's thought to theology differentiates him from other students of Maréchal. "Whereas most of Maréchal's followers have carried on their dialogue within the discipline of philosophy, Rahner has seen that a philosophical and existential theology is the only adequate horizon for a dialogue with modern philosophies and their emphasis on history."<sup>25</sup>

Hearers of the Word occupies an important transitional

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<sup>23</sup>Gerald A. McCool, "The Philosophy of the Human Person in Karl Rahner's Philosophy," in Theological Studies, XXII, (1961), p. 539.

<sup>24</sup>Donceel in Joseph Maréchal, A Maréchal Reader, trans. and ed. Joseph Donceel (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), p. xii.

<sup>25</sup>F. Fiorenza, loc. cit., p. xliv.

position in the movement of Rahner's thought into the horizon of philosophical and existential theology.

Hearers of the Word continues the transcendental reflection on the a priori conditions of human knowledge begun in Spirit in the World,<sup>26</sup> but the principles of the metaphysics of finite knowledge are developed in relation to a theological datum - revelation.<sup>27</sup> To demonstrate

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<sup>26</sup> Otto Muck writes that in Hearers of the Word "the metaphysics of knowledge in Geist in Welt is restructured into an anthropology of man before God which represents man as someone who, because of an openness with respect to being, through which his knowledge and the experience of his intellectual life is made possible, is radically related to God, whether God speaks to him or not." The Transcendental Method, p. 187. It is true that, in Hearers of the Word, Rahner affirms that man is radically related to God whether or not God speaks to him. However, Hearers of the Word is primarily concerned with bringing to light, through a metaphysical anthropology, the way in which this radical relation renders man capable of hearing a revelation from God. While God can freely choose not to reveal himself of course, man is always directed by virtue of his own nature towards the historical contingency of a revelation. Cf. Hearers... p. 16.

<sup>27</sup> While the idea of revelation, in the sense of God's free self-revelation to man, is presupposed from the outset in Hearers of the Word, the work is not concerned with the actual content of God's self-revelation, considered as the source for the articulation of Christian doctrines or dogmas. Rather, the work attempts to set forth the foundations which rationally account for the possibility of a revelation from God to man. Commenting on the form of thought in Hearers of the Word, Karl Lehmann writes:

Cette forme de pensée présume donc la facticité d'une réalité et cependant suspend en quelque sorte son caractère de présupposition pour se poser devant le tribunal de la raison la question du fondement qui légitime sa manière d'être: on peut à juste titre lui donner le nom d'explication «transcendentale»

Karl Lehmann, "Karl Rahner," Bilan de la théologie, p. 852.

fully the basic philosophical continuity between Spirit in the World and Hearers of the Word would necessitate a detailed comparison of the substance of both works; throughout Hearers of the Word Rahner develops his analysis from the same position that he established as the proper metaphysical starting point in the second part of Spirit in the World - "questioning man, who as such is already with being in its totality."<sup>28</sup> However, because a detailed comparison is beyond the scope of this introduction, the continuity between the two works will be considered in a formal sense, in terms of the consistency of transcendental questioning operative in both works.

Formally, Hearers of the Word is an enquiry into the general subject, philosophy of religion, undertaken with a view towards establishing a philosophy of religion as the "ontology of the 'potentia oboedientialis' for revelation."<sup>29</sup> Initially Rahner begins by attempting to discern the nature of the relationship between the two sciences, philosophy of religion and theology. Rahner wants to understand the relationship in terms of the common metaphysical ground that sets philosophy of religion and theology into relation, without dissolving the distinctiveness of both as separate

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<sup>28</sup>Rahner, Spirit in the World, p. 61.

<sup>29</sup>Rahner, Hearers of the Word, p. 3.

sciences. As mentioned previously in this introduction, it will be the specific concern of the first chapter of this thesis to clarify more precisely Rahner's understanding of the relations between philosophy of religion, metaphysics and theology.

However, after the general context is outlined, the enquiry unfolds as a process of transcendental investigation that seeks to discover the conditions which make it possible for man, as a personality knowing and acting in freedom, to be concerned with and to know of a revelation proceeding from the free God. The examination of these conditions yields components of a metaphysical anthropology. By formulating such a metaphysical anthropology, Rahner attempts to show that man is open to a possible revelation from God appearing within the dimension of human history. This openness has its basis in the synthesis of transcendence and historicity actually realized in man.

While Hearers of the Word is understood as a work in philosophy of religion, Rahner takes great care to point out that because it is concerned with a possible revelation from God, the philosophy of religion developed in Hearers of the Word is held open to theology by an intrinsic self-limitation. The actual content of a revelation from God cannot be determined or deduced solely from the necessary conditions of the possibility for the reception

of such a revelation on the part of man. For Rahner, it is the task of theology to be concerned with the reality and the full content of a revelation that is actually received. However, in the conclusion of Hearers of the Word Rahner explains that his philosophy of religion is identical to what he regards as "fundamental-theological anthropology": it is anthropological in its concern with man and it is oriented to theology since man is understood as "the creature who has to attend in freedom, within his history, to a possible message from the free God."<sup>30</sup>

In many of Karl Rahner's later writings, elements of the transcendental and metaphysical anthropology developed in Hearers of the Word re-appear in an explicitly theological perspective. Gerald A. McCool describes the basic continuity of Rahner's major works in terms of the centrality of transcendental anthropology:

Transcendental anthropology, the discovery of the a priori metaphysical conditions of possibility for the knowing and willing activity of man, the incarnate spirit, had formed the central core of the philosophical speculation concerning the metaphysical structure of man and its relation to a possible divine revelation in Geist in Welt and Hörer des Wortes. Transcendental anthropology and the metaphysical conclusions drawn from its reflection on the intellectual and volitional activity of the incarnate human person also constitute one of the most obvious threads of unity running through the disparate series of occasional essays which make

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<sup>30</sup>Rahner, Hearers of the Word, p. 169.



up the three volumes of Schriften zur Theologie.<sup>31</sup>

The essays concerning the problem of nature and grace in Theological Investigations<sup>32</sup> are, among others, attempts to examine, in the light of faith, the constitution of man as determined by the actually existent self-revelation of God.

While transcendental anthropology has a considerable influence on the character of Rahner's theological studies, it is important to observe that because theology originally issues from the actual hearing of God's self-revelation, transcendental investigation can have only a restricted applicability within the domain of theology.

In Volume VI of the theological encyclopedia Sacramentum Mundi, Rahner introduces the concept of "transcendental theology" and he comments upon the extent to which the transcendental method can be legitimately used within a theological perspective.<sup>33</sup> Generally, "transcendental theology" consists of a transcendental investigation of

<sup>31</sup>Gerald A. McCool, "The Philosophy of the Human Person in Karl Rahner's Theology," Theological Studies, XXII (1961), p. 538.

<sup>32</sup>Karl Rahner, "Concerning the Relationship Between Nature and Grace," Theological Investigations, I, pp. 297-318. Karl Rahner, "Nature and Grace," Theological Investigations, IV, trans. Kevin Smyth (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1966), pp. 165-188.

<sup>33</sup>Karl Rahner, "Transcendental Theology," Sacramentum Mundi (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), VI, pp. 287-289.

the a priori conditions of knowledge in the human subject, with regard to actually existent revelation and the truths of faith.<sup>34</sup>

Rahner acknowledges that the concept itself is modelled on the analogy of transcendental philosophy; however, he maintains that "transcendental theology" does not consist of a simple application of transcendental philosophy to theological subjects. Rather, in its basic intention and purpose, "transcendental theology" is genuinely theological. In an article titled, "L'Avenir de la théologie," Rahner calls for a more intensive development of such a "transcendental theology" and he explains that:

... l'approche qui est propre à une théologie transcendantale est authentiquement théologique. En effet, la théologie s'enquiert du salut de l'homme en tant que celui-ci consiste en la communication de Dieu par lui-même, et proprement de rien d'autre ... Mais comprendre ainsi cette réalité du salut, c'est la comprendre de façon transcendantale, c'est-à-dire en relation avec le sujet transcendantal, lequel est transcendantal

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 287. Paul Surlis, commenting on Rahner's conception of "transcendental theology," writes:

It is obvious that the use of the word a priori in this context does not mean that in theology for example one deduces truths of faith from the structures of human consciousness: the truths of faith are first known from faith and revelation; the transcendental question simply asks concerning the structures of human consciousness which make reception of such truth possible, due allowance being made for the role of faith and the necessity of grace. Paul Surlis, "Rahner and Lonergan on Method in Theology," Irish Theological Quarterly, XXXIX (1972), p. 195.

<<par nature>>. <sup>35</sup>

In his later theological writings then, Rahner tends to use the word "transcendental" in a wide sense; in its theological use "the word 'transcendental' comprises all theological considerations which start from man as a being whose situation is transcendence, who reflects transcendently on this his being."<sup>36</sup>

While he acknowledges that "transcendental theology" cannot presume to encompass the whole of theology, Rahner maintains that its importance lies in the fact that without such transcendental reflection in theology, "historical facts cannot be shown to be existentiell, that is to affect man's salvation."<sup>37</sup> In opposition to a dry, dogmatic positivism that would confine dogmatic theology within the limits of assembling and systematizing official Church teachings, Rahner argues for a greater union or synthesis between dogmatic theology and transcendental-theological anthropology. It is Rahner's contention that an effective synthesis between the two domains would allow theological expressions to be formulated in such a way that they can

<sup>35</sup>Karl Rahner, "L'Avenir de la théologie," trans. A. Sohler, in Bilan de la théologie..., p. 921.

<sup>36</sup>Rahner, "Transcendental Theology," Sac. Mundi, VI, p. 289. In Schriften zur Theologie, IX, there is included a lengthy essay dealing with the question of method in theology, "Überlegungen zur Methode der Theologie," pp. 79-126.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 288.

be brought into intimate connection with the self-understanding men derive from their own experience.

Before starting the actual analysis of Hearers of the Word it is necessary to comment briefly on the status of the text used in this thesis. It was mentioned at the outset that the second German edition of Hörer des Wortes was edited and revised in 1963 by a colleague and former student of Karl Rahner's, Johannes B. Metz. The analysis in the thesis is based upon the English translation of Metz' revised edition of Hörer des Wortes by Michael Richards, published in 1969 by Herder & Herder, New York. For the most part Richards' translation is quoted throughout the thesis; however, because there are certain inconsistencies and errors in Richards' translation, I have included page references to the German edition throughout the footnotes to the thesis. In places where I discovered Richards' translation to be inadequate, I have given my own English translation in the text of the thesis and quoted the original German passage in full in the footnotes. Here I should mention that the French translation of Hörer des Wortes by Joseph Hofbeck, L'Homme à l'écoute du Verbe,<sup>38</sup> proved to be very helpful in studying the text; not only did it provide a valuable check on the English translation, but it also gave an important perspective on the extent to

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<sup>38</sup>Karl Rahner, L'Homme à l'écoute du Verbe, trans. by Joseph Hofbeck (Paris, Maison Mame, 1968).

which J. B. Metz modified the original German edition.

L'Homme à l'écoute du Verbe is a comparative translation of the original German edition published in 1941, and Metz' revised German edition; in the text Hofbeck includes within square brackets the sections of the original edition that were subsequently modified or omitted by Metz, and he differentiates between the original footnotes and the numerous footnotes added in the second edition by Metz. In his revision of the original German edition Metz added many footnotes that seem to qualify the argument in the actual text itself. For the most part the additional footnotes refer to later writings, by Rahner and by Metz himself, that directly develop or indirectly relate to the particular subject under discussion.

Although this will only become fully apparent in the analysis to follow, it is interesting to note that many of Metz' footnotes expand upon the substance of the actual text where the subject under discussion relates to the problem of the relationship between "nature and grace." In the text itself Rahner attempts to restrict his analysis to a metaphysics of the "natural," knowing man; in the footnotes Metz continually qualifies the perspective by introducing elements that derive from the knowledge of man gained in the light of Christian revelation. While in the text Rahner's primary concern is to determine the extent to which man is open, in his spiritual transcendence,

to a possible divine revelation, Metz continually reminds the reader that in the actual hearing of revelation, man's spiritual transcendence is elevated and illuminated by grace. In his footnotes then, Metz' primary concern is to show the difference between a philosophical and theological perspective in a way that is consistent with Rahner's later, more explicitly theological development of portions of the analysis presented in Hearers of the Word. As the following chapter will demonstrate, it is important to keep the distinction between a philosophical and theological perspective in mind when dealing with Hearers of the Word.

## CHAPTER I

### THE PROBLEM OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION AND THEOLOGY

In the first major section of Hearers of the Word<sup>1</sup> Rahner sets forth the purpose and theme of the work, and moves to secure a preliminary definition of the problematic standing at the centre of the work. Basically, the purpose of the work as a whole is to provide a foundation for a philosophy of religion understood as "the ontology of the potentia oboedientialis for revelation".<sup>2</sup> As the title of the book indicates, the main theme of the work is man as a hearer of the Word of God. The problematic that Rahner must confront before attempting to develop his theme from the standpoint of philosophy of religion centers upon the question of the relationship between philosophy of religion and theology. By considering the implications this question has for his attempt to found a philosophy of religion, Rahner prepares the general context within which his theme can be properly situated and developed.

In this chapter I will first engage in a detailed consideration of the general context presented in the

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<sup>1</sup>Rahner, "The Enquiry", Hearers of the Word, pp. 3-27.  
"Die Fragestellung", Hörer des Wortes, pp. 15-44.

<sup>2</sup>Hearers. . . , p. 3. Hörer. . . , p. 15.

introductory section of Hearers of the Word and then I will briefly outline the subsequent stages in Rahner's attempt to establish a philosophy of religion. As stated previously,<sup>3</sup> it is particularly important to study this context closely in order to gauge the achievement and full significance of the work.

A close analysis shows three general movements or steps in the introductory chapters. Rahner initially proceeds in a general fashion by comparing and contrasting the philosophy of religion, as an individual science, with another seemingly related science, theology. This initial step involves him in a question of scientific theory in general -- the question about the ground of the relationship between any two sciences. The determination of this ground constitutes the first movement of the introduction. However, it soon becomes evident that the relationship between the two specific sciences under consideration is particularly problematic. Rahner's attempt to determine adequately the nature of the relationship between philosophy of religion and theology becomes entangled in crucial difficulties when he takes into account the unique character of each, as individual sciences. The recognition of this problematical relationship initiates a second step in the introduction; Rahner is obliged to determine in advance the possible scope

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<sup>3</sup>See above on p. 4.



of his philosophy of religion and to seek a more precise definition of his general theme. Finally, in the third general movement, Rahner widens his perspective somewhat by relating his own task in Hearers of the Word to certain problems that arise in the areas of Catholic fundamental theology, "Christian philosophy", and contemporary Protestant philosophy of religion.<sup>4</sup>

The relationship between philosophy of religion and theology is sought first of all in terms of general scientific theory and for Rahner, questions about the theory of science must pertain to a unified fundamental science -- metaphysics. While each separate science has its own basic principles in accordance with which it examines and defines its subject matter, the individual sciences are not entirely self-constituting. The multiplicity of heterogeneous principles has a unifying ground in metaphysics. In attempting to discern the relationship between philosophy of religion and theology then, Rahner is not attempting to outline the lines upon which a relationship could be constructed; rather, he is seeking the unity of a common, a priori metaphysical ground that originally places the two sciences into a definite relationship, even though each "science" has its

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<sup>4</sup>The whole of the second chapter, "The Subject in Relation to Kindred Questions" ("Das Thema im Verhältnis zu verwandten Fragestellungen"), corresponds to what is here designated as the third general movement.

own unique theoretical foundation set within this common ground.<sup>5</sup>

In addition, it is important to observe that for Rahner, a question about general scientific theory is not merely an idle concern of speculative curiosity; rather, in its thrust, a question pertaining to the theory of science has deep implications for human existence. It puts the nature of man himself into question. The question has this existential dimension because in seeking basic foundations, it asks about the nature of science as a specifically human activity. The search for the foundations of a science demands consideration of the necessity with which science occurs in human existence; therefore, a question pertaining to the theory of science is at the same time implicitly, at the level of foundations, a metaphysical question about the essence of man. In terms of general scientific theory then, Rahner has determined that the problem of the relationship between philosophy of religion and theology is "the metaphysical question about the one ground upon which each science in its own way is constituted originally, and so it is also the question about the nature of man as the existent being who must of necessity

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<sup>5</sup>Hearers. . . , p. 6. Hörrer. . . , p. 18.

practice these sciences."<sup>6</sup>

However, this preliminary statement of the question becomes problematical in itself once the nature of the particular sciences under examination is considered; an attempt to bring his provisional knowledge of the nature of both sciences within the general formula of scientific theory constitutes Rahner's second movement in the introduction. The issue becomes complicated as soon as Rahner takes into account both the classical Catholic understanding of philosophy of religion and the distinctive origin of theology.

For Catholic-scholastic philosophy, philosophy of religion consists of "the knowledge which man on his own is able to acquire of the correct relationship of man to God as Absolute."<sup>7</sup> For Catholic philosophy in general, apart from revelation and through metaphysical reflection, God can be known by man only as the absolute ground of existent beings and of the knowledge of being. In this sense then, philosophy of religion is itself an integral component of ontology in general and of metaphysics. For Rahner's own purposes this implies that his attempt to

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<sup>6</sup>"Die Frage nach dem Verhältnis von Theologie und Religionsphilosophie ist somit die metaphysische Frage nach dem einen Grund, aus dem heraus beide je für sich erstmals sich konstituieren, und ist damit auch die Frage nach dem Wesen des Menschen als des Seienden, das diese Wissenschaften notwendig treibt." Hörer. . . , p. 19. Hearers. . . , p. 7.

<sup>7</sup>Hearers. . . , p. 7. Hörer. . . , pp. 19-20.

discover the foundation of philosophy of religion in metaphysics involves a question about the constitution of metaphysics as a human activity: why does man engage in metaphysical reflection and how can human metaphysics reach up to a knowledge of God?

On the other hand, theology seems beyond the scope of any scientific-theoretical foundation because in its essence theology is not a science constituted by man alone. In its original nature "theology is always the self-illuminating hearing of the revelation of God himself, which proceeds from God's free decree, through his own word."<sup>8</sup> Theology originally results from and is constituted by God's own free activity of self-revelation; upon this act man's hearing depends. Although Rahner maintains that once heard, the word of God can and should become the object of man's systematic thought, still, he recognizes that theology is not like other sciences because "the revelation of God cannot be given a foundation by man, neither in its actuality or necessity nor in its inner essence."<sup>9</sup>

It seems that the original formulation of the problem was entirely ill-conceived. How can there possibly be a common metaphysical ground that relates philosophy of religion and theology when, by their very natures, the two seem

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<sup>8</sup>Hearers . . . , p. 8. Hörer. . . , p. 21

<sup>9</sup>Hearers . . . , p. 9. Hörer. . . , p. 22.

so distinct? On the one hand theology, as the "genuine listening" to the self-attesting word of God addressed to man in historical events,<sup>10</sup> has a dignity and autonomy that is independent of metaphysics. On the other hand philosophy of religion, insofar as it is identical to metaphysics, seems to be essentially "supra-temporal" and "trans-historical": it seems to "institute a religion which is fundamentally independent of historical event."<sup>11</sup> It would appear then that the only relationship between philosophy of religion and theology is one of hostility. By determining the correct relationship of man to God independently of historical, revelatory events, philosophy of religion either renders superfluous a theology that is dependent on revelation; or, at best, philosophy of religion will understand such a theology merely to be concerned with the historical manifestations of the relations between man and God that are already pre-determined in philosophy of religion itself.

Rahner's task is to determine how this paradoxical and seemingly hostile relationship between the two can be resolved in a way that brings out the inner affinity between them and does justice to their distinctiveness as individual sciences. In order to attempt such a resolution, Rahner must first mark out proleptically the general boundaries

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<sup>10</sup>Hearers. . . , pp. 12-13. Hörer. . . , p. 26.

<sup>11</sup>Hearers. . . , p. 13. Hörer. . . , p. 26.

within which such a resolution might possibly be achieved.

The fact that theology has a unique origin dependent on God's own free activity does not entirely preclude the possibility of establishing a metaphysical foundation that is, in a sense, preparatory to theology. A metaphysical analysis could deal with the "hearing of the word of God by man and this only with regard to the a priori capacity to hear a revelation which might conceivably proceed from God."<sup>12</sup> It is through such a metaphysical analysis that Rahner attempts to found a philosophy of religion as "the ontology of the potentia oboedientialis for revelation". For Rahner's purposes the phrase 'potentia oboedientialis' stands for the potency on the part of man to be obedient to or to hear a revelation from God; in this restricted sense, then, the phrase designates the "a priori capacity" on the part of man to hear a possible divine revelation.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Hearers . . . , p. 9. Hörer . . . , p. 22.

<sup>13</sup>Hearers . . . , p. 22. Hörer . . . , p. 37. It is important to note the qualification Rahner attaches to his use of the phrase 'potentia oboedientialis' in this context. Rahner takes care to point out that he is not dealing with a "potentia oboedientialis for supernatural grace as the ontological elevation of man to share in the life of God, but only with the potentia oboedientialis to hear a possible speech of God which, should it take place, takes place at least to begin with also in the realm of natural perception. . . ." In making this qualification Rahner attempts to keep his analysis restricted to this "natural" perspective of man.

It is interesting to observe that Metz in turn qualifies the very distinction that Rahner makes in the

The philosophy of religion that Rahner attempts to develop is concerned with a theological subject -- revelation -- but only in an indirect way; it attempts to discern and to demonstrate, through a metaphysical anthropology, the possibility of man's hearing a message from God. Insofar as it is concerned with the knowledge of God that man is able to attain on his own, in terms of general ontology and apart from revelation and the "light of faith", philosophy of religion preserves its independence from theology. However, insofar as it stands as a "pre-theological foundation for theology", philosophy of religion must take care not to violate the distinctiveness of theology. "The philosophy of religion, if it is to leave inviolate the interior autonomy and historicity of theology, must not be primarily the construction of natural religion; it cannot be allowed to trace lines that theology merely follows up

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text. Metz remarks that the two 'potencies', for grace and for word-revelation, are not finally distinguishable in the last analysis because "the imparting of grace itself is always of itself the basic mode of revelation itself. . . ." Hearers . . . , p. 22, n. 6. Hörer. . . , p. 37, n. 6.

In Sacramentum Mundi, Vol. 5, Rahner himself distinguishes between the general use of the phrase and its specific use: "in a very general sense /potentia oboedientialis/ means the capacity of the creature, obediently accepting the disposition and action of God, to receive a determination for which the creature is not 'in potency' in such a way that this determination is 'due' to it. . . . The concept is used above all to define more precisely in the supernatural order (of grace) the relation between nature and grace. Nature is a potentia oboedientialis for the supernatural grace, which, as self-communication of God, is in no way owed to the creature." p. 65.

and fills out more fully."<sup>14</sup>

While it might seem that theology has already placed limits on the possible scope of Rahner's philosophy of religion, Rahner himself understands these limits to be inherent in the nature of philosophy of religion itself. Because God cannot be unequivocally defined by human metaphysics, philosophy of religion cannot pre-judge the possible ways in which God might choose to deal with man, and therefore it cannot construct an account of religion that is completely self-contained. For Rahner, philosophy of religion must "make room" for a possible theology because "in terms of its own essence it must leave to the God who may conceivably reveal himself in history the constitution and definition of religion, or at least place all of its propositions under the reservation of such a possibility."<sup>15</sup>

Rather than imposing a strictly negative limit upon the scope of philosophy of religion, by keeping in mind the nature of theology Rahner gains an insight into the nature of his own task:

. . . metaphysics which in itself is already philosophy of religion must be of such a kind as to recognize God as the free and the unknown, and to conceive of man as a being who is historical on the basis of his transcendental subjectivity,

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<sup>14</sup>Hearers. . . , p. 13. Hörer. . . , p. 27.

<sup>15</sup>Hearers. . . , pp. 13-14. Hörer. . . , p. 27.



and to direct man in his historicity to his own history, commanding him to seek, within his history, a possible revelation proceeding from this free, unknown God.<sup>16</sup>

By anticipating the limits and scope of a possible philosophy of religion then, Rahner outlines in a preliminary way the metaphysical foundation that must be established if the problem of the relationship between philosophy of religion and theology is to be resolved.

While Rahner's approach in the introductory chapter is quite complicated, he succeeds in defining his central problem and the problems surrounding it, and he gains a provisional view of how an adequate resolution to this problematic must be formulated. Rahner's task in Hearers of the Word is to determine whether or not a metaphysical foundation can be established for a philosophy of religion that is at the same time able to serve as a legitimate pre-theological foundation for theology. For Rahner, then, the relationship between philosophy of religion and theology is to be forged by means of a metaphysical anthropology developed in correspondence with an enquiry into being in general.

Before outlining the steps in the metaphysical analysis itself, it is necessary to see how Rahner understands his own task in comparison with certain other

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<sup>16</sup>Hearers. . . , p. 14. Hörer. . . , pp. 27-28.

approaches to the relationship between philosophy of religion and theology. In the third movement of the introduction, Rahner further clarifies the nature of his own project, and gives an indication of its importance, by relating his subject to three different perspectives: Catholic fundamental theology, "Christian philosophy", and types of Protestant philosophy of religion. It is in this wider context that Rahner states his opposition to any form of "rationalist and enlightened" philosophy of religion that stands indifferent to the historical structure of human existence. Since the nature of Rahner's opposition has already been discussed in the introduction to this thesis,<sup>17</sup> it is not necessary to repeat that discussion here. Rather, I will briefly describe the comparisons that Rahner presents and proceed to formulate a general outline of the subsequent chapters in the thesis, in correspondence with the stages in the analysis in Hearers of the Word.

Catholic fundamental theology "comprises the scientific substantiation of the fact of the revelation of God

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<sup>17</sup>See pages 3-5 in the "Introduction". The reasons for Rahner's opposition follow from the account of the problematical relationship between philosophy of religion and theology given above. Insofar as it is characteristic of rationalist philosophy (such as Lessing's) to doubt the importance of historical events, such philosophy is either indifferent to theology, or it inevitably violates the autonomy of theology by attempting to construct a self-contained "natural" religion.

in Jesus Christ."<sup>18</sup> Assuming the existence of a personal, supernatural God to be already demonstrated by special metaphysics, fundamental theology usually proceeds by demonstrating, first, that a revelation on the part of God is possible, and, second, that God did in fact reveal himself in Jesus Christ. Rahner maintains that in its customary procedure fundamental theology does not sufficiently account for the relationship between the knowledge of God that man is capable of through his "natural" reason and the knowledge of God that man stands capable of receiving as the content of revelation. Moreover, fundamental theology does not explicitly show how man, by his very nature, is ordained or "disposed" toward a possible divine revelation; nor does it attempt to show that man must listen for a possible revelation from God occurring in the midst of human history. In relation to these lacunae in fundamental theology, Rahner finds himself obliged to cover the ground that fundamental theology leaves for the most part in obscurity, in order to develop his philosophy of religion.

Secondly, with regard to the question of a possible "Christian philosophy", Rahner maintains that a truly Christian philosophy will conceive of man as a being "who

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<sup>18</sup>Hearers. . . , p. 17. Hörer. . . , p. 31. For a brief sketch of Catholic fundamental theology see Sacramentum Mundi, Vol. II, "Fundamental Theology", Heinrich Fries, pp. 368-372.

stands ready to receive a revelation."<sup>19</sup> A Christian philosophy need not be merely conceived as a rational system that has the content of revelation as a negative norm preserving the system from error, and as a positive norm directing philosophy into new areas of enquiry. For Rahner such a conception is misguided because it tends to "overlook the qualitative difference between philosophical and theological conceptual structure"<sup>20</sup> and thereby threatens the independence of both philosophy and theology.

Rather, a philosophy is Christian if it preserves its own independent conceptual structure, without at the same time severing its original relatedness and reference to theology by attempting to set itself up as the complete explanation of human existence. It is evident that Rahner understands his own task to be in harmony with the development of a legitimately Christian philosophy. By attempting to produce a metaphysical analysis of man as the being who stands ready to receive a revelation, Rahner is engaged in a strictly philosophical enquiry; however, by virtue of the very theme of the enquiry itself, Rahner's philosophy is open to and oriented towards a Christian theology.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Hearers. . . , p. 23. Hörer. . . , p. 38.

<sup>20</sup>Hearers. . . , p. 24. Hörer. . . , pp. 39-40.

<sup>21</sup>In an interesting inversion of Hegel's conception of the relationship between philosophy and religion, Rahner suggests that a Christian philosophy is related to theology

Finally, Rahner clarifies his own purpose in Hearers of the Word by discussing what he regards as the two predominant "types"<sup>22</sup> of modern Protestant philosophy of religion.

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in the threefold sense of the Hegelian aufgehoben werden -- abrogation, elevation and preservation. By placing man in the attitude of listening for revelation, a Christian philosophy abrogates its own proper function. With the reception of a revelation that has already occurred, a Christian philosophy is fulfilled and elevated on the higher plane of theology. Moreover, the possibility of hearing a revelation is not exhausted but is still genuinely preserved in theology's attentiveness to an actually occurring revelation. Hearers. . . , p. 24. Hörer. . . , p. 40.

<sup>22</sup>In his re-edition of the text J. B. Metz explains in a footnote that since the "typification" is merely a provisional means of comparison undertaken simply to clarify Rahner's theme, no historical examples of the two types are introduced. (Hearers. . . , p. 26, n. 8. Hörer. . . , p. 42, n. 8.) However, the comparative French translation of the two editions indicates that in the first edition at least, Rahner understood the first type to be characteristic of the religious thought deriving from Schleiermacher and Ritschl. The second type designated the kind of philosophy of religion implicit in the dialectical theology of Barth and Brunner. See L'homme à l'écoute du Verbe, p. 60.

Furthermore, it is interesting to note that Rahner originally stated that the first approach, deriving from Schleiermacher and Ritschl, attempted to infiltrate Catholic theology with "Modernism" and still survives in the "history of religion school's" approach to Christianity. The "Modernist" movement arose toward the end of the nineteenth century and was represented in the writings of Joseph Loisy and George Tyrell, among others. Generally, as the label indicates, the "Modernist" movement attempted to adapt Catholicism to modern thought even at the risk of disrupting the continuity of the Church's past teaching and institutional forms. Specifically, the "Modernists" prompted a crisis centred around the concept of revelation. The official hierarchy of the Catholic Church maintained that the "Modernists" threatened the transcendent origin and permanent validity of revealed truth by teaching that revelation is man's acquired consciousness of his relationship to God. After a few strong papal decrees and encyclicals were issued warning of the dangers of "Modernism", and after a number of

In the first type the content of religion manifest in experience, cult and doctrine is understood as the objectification of an indigenously human, religious subjectivity. For the second type of Protestant philosophy of religion, the content of religion originates from the word of God, but the word of God is understood in a basically negative sense, as the totally unexpected "judgement of all that is finite and human."<sup>23</sup> Rahner holds that the second approach is basically like the first because in both, revelation appears only as the "Korrelat" of man himself. In effect the difference between the two types lies in the qualification of this basic form of the relationship between man and God. In the first approach God is understood positively as the meaning, as the radical interiority of man himself, while in the second type God is understood through his revelation as the "dialectically necessary correlative of that which is radically ungodly in man."<sup>24</sup> Between these two

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the modernist thinkers were excommunicated, the crisis was eventually settled at the immediate, practical level. Yet a host of exegetical, historical and philosophical difficulties that the "Modernists" attempted to confront were still left unresolved on the level of theory. In Hearers of the Word and in many of his later theological essays, Rahner has grappled with and attempted to resolve the very real problems that contributed to the growth of the "Modernist" movement, without succumbing to the errors of "Modernism". See in particular Rahner's essay, "Observations on the Concept of Revelation", in Revelation and Tradition, (Montreal: Palm Publishers, 1966), pp. 9-25.

<sup>23</sup>Hearers. . . , p. 25. Hörer. . . , p. 41.

<sup>24</sup>Hearers. . . , p. 26. Hörer. . . , pp. 41-42.

extremes Rahner's task is to demonstrate the extent to which man has a positive openness for a revelation from God, without thereby limiting or anticipating the possible content of a free revelation from God. The positive openness for revelation must be understood as part of man's essential constitution; yet, the content of revelation cannot appear merely as the objective expression or necessary complement of man's openness. In the following outline, the way in which Rahner attempts to resolve this dilemma will be indicated in a preliminary fashion.

On the basis of his initial discussion Rahner determined that behind the question about the relationship between philosophy of religion and theology there stands the fundamental question as to the self-establishment of metaphysics. In order to develop a philosophy of religion as an analytic of man's attentiveness to a possible verbal revelation from God, Rahner is first of all obliged to secure a proper metaphysical foundation. As in Spirit in the World, Rahner locates the irreducible starting point for metaphysical enquiry in the question of being -- the question that occurs of necessity in human existence. A vision of the self-establishment of metaphysics is gained by attending to the conditions that are already implicitly presupposed and affirmed in this irreducible starting point; by reflecting upon these conditions Rahner attempts to bring forth for thought, or to thematize, the "concrete metaphysics" of

human existence.

At the beginning of the analysis in Hearers of the Word, Rahner distinguishes three related "aspects" of the one question about being. First, the question asks about being in general, or the unity rather than the sum of beings. Secondly, it is a genuine question that must be asked by finite human beings. Finally, the third aspect of the original question considers the manner in which the question is posed; the question must be asked in such a way that being is distinguished from individual existent beings.<sup>21</sup> Because each aspect of the original question has in itself important implications for Rahner's task, the metaphysical analysis unfolds in three sequential stages. As a whole, the structure of the analysis is fluid rather than rigid because each separate stage is initiated through a return to the original question; however, each stage develops a different perspective by emphasizing a particular aspect of the original question of being.

Formally then, it is evident that the structure of the analysis is quite complex; in addition, the movement within the individual stages further complicates matters. Within each stage of the analysis Rahner moves from the level of general ontology to metaphysical anthropology to philosophy of religion. First of all, by a process of

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<sup>21</sup>Hearers. . . , p. 36. Hörer. . . , p. 53.



transcendental deduction, Rahner attempts to uncover the conditions and presuppositions that are implicitly contained in the question about being under each of its aspects. Through this process of deduction Rahner explicates and establishes a basic principle of general ontology. Because each principle of general ontology has important implications for an understanding of the being of man himself, Rahner further deduces a principle for an ontology of man. For each stage of the metaphysical analysis, then, there is a second movement of deduction whereby Rahner sets forth propositions that constitute the basis of a "metaphysical anthropology". Finally, by synthesizing the conclusions of the first two movements, Rahner is able to formulate his philosophy of religion as "the ontology of the potentia oboedientialis for revelation."

In order to indicate the division and content of the next three chapters of the thesis, it is helpful to fill in the formal outline sketched in the two preceding paragraphs with a brief account of the substance of each stage in Rahner's analysis. In the next three chapters I will examine the argument in each of the three stages.

In the first stage Rahner discusses the most basic pre-conditions for the possibility of revelation; in the following (second) chapter I will examine the development of the first propositions of general ontology and metaphysical anthropology, and I will show the meaning these

propositions have for Rahner's philosophy of religion. On the level of general ontology Rahner determines that being is essentially "presence-to-self". Being is "luminous" or knowable in the degree to which an existent being "has" being. With regard to man, Rahner deduces that man is essentially "spirit" or unlimited openness for being. In terms of philosophy of religion these discoveries mean that all reality including God can be the possible subject of a revelation, and that man is always already oriented towards the absolute being of God. Furthermore, because man's transcendence towards being is of unlimited breadth, man's openness does not constitute an a priori determination of the content of a possible revelation.

The third chapter of the thesis is concerned with the insights Rahner develops in his analysis of the second aspect of the question of being. The fact that the question about the meaning of being must be asked by human beings indicates the problematality of man's understanding of being. An examination of this problematality discloses both the finitude of human beings and the freedom of God facing finite beings. In terms of general ontology, absolute being is hidden from finite human beings; God, as absolute being, is free to reveal himself in the manner which He chooses. At the same time, however, in the very midst of the problematical nature of man's understanding of being, there presides an enduring and necessary affirmation

of absolute being on the part of man himself. Rahner develops this insight to show that in the midst of man's transcendence towards being in general, there is a definite character of willfulness and of free choice. For metaphysical anthropology this means that the actual form of man's transcendence depends on a free decision on the part of man himself. The position that a man takes with regard to finite goods and the way in which he formulates certain values and desires have a definite influence upon the manner in which he relates to the absolute goodness of God. For his philosophy of religion Rahner concludes that God is the "hidden" or unknown being facing man's unlimited transcendence. While God is free to reveal himself to or conceal himself from man, this does not mean that man himself merely waits in a vague neutrality before the presence of an unknown God; rather, at the very heart of the finite spirit's openness towards the free God of a possible revelation there always occurs a free decision that definitely affects man's relationship to God.

The fourth chapter of the thesis deals with the grounds for Rahner's claim that the "place" of a possible revelation from God to man is human history. It is particularly difficult to provide an adequate summary of the third and final stage in the over-all analysis because Rahner's argument is not only very complex, but it is also extremely compact. Fundamentally, though, Rahner seeks to determine

more precisely the specific character of man's transcendence towards being. In order to do this, he concentrates upon the originally receptive character of human cognition. The analysis in the third stage focuses upon the fact that man enquires about being by distinguishing between being and existent being. Through a regression to the ontological conditions which account for this necessary distinction, Rahner deduces that man is constituted as a "material essence". From this point, and on the basis of a very compact analysis of man's "materiality", Rahner proceeds to develop what amounts to an "ontology of human historicality". Basically, Rahner's contention is that man's transcendence towards being in general is historically mediated; that is, man is only able to know being through historical encounter with inner-worldly, materially existent beings. In a further, very important movement of the analysis, Rahner maintains that the focus of this distinction between being and existent being is the human word. It is through the human word that the being of inner-worldly, material things becomes conceptually known by man; furthermore, it is through the human word that knowledge of other-worldly, non-corporeal beings (especially the absolute being, God) can be conceptually revealed to man. In terms of philosophy of religion, Rahner's final conclusion is that man is obliged to listen in his history for a possible revelation from God, occurring in human words.

Having completed a sketch of the following three chapters of this thesis, in terms of their correspondence with the sequential stages of the analysis in Hearers of the Word, it is necessary to begin the work of detailed study. The first stage of Rahner's metaphysics, which we will now turn to examine in detail, is primarily concerned with the themes, "luminosity" of being and human spirituality.

## CHAPTER II

### THE "LUMINOSITY" OF BEING AND THE FINITE SPIRIT

Because Rahner has argued that the question about the foundation of philosophy of religion is fundamentally a question about the self-establishment of metaphysics, it is necessary to consider how he first determines and justifies the starting point for his metaphysics. As indicated in the preceding sketch, it is through a process of reflection upon this basic starting point that Rahner works to secure a foundation for his philosophy of religion. In the second major section of Hearers of the Word Rahner first attempts to show how the question about being, which necessarily occurs in human existence, constitutes the starting point of metaphysics; then, Rahner shows how the essence of man himself is drawn into the metaphysical analysis of this basic question.

In all of our activities as humans living in the world, we acknowledge that other humans, non-human animals, and things exist in the world along with us; although we are aware that human and non-human individuals do not exist in exactly the same way, still we acknowledge the fact that both humans and non-humans are in the world. Even if we regard non-human things only as the material for human labour and other humans solely as means for, or

obstacles to the furtherance of our own aims, nevertheless we do acknowledge that other humans and non-humans exist together with us. At certain crucial times -- with the death of a close friend or relative, in a mood of deep anxiety, or in a moment of sudden vulnerability, for instance -- we may be prompted to question about the meaning and purpose of human existence, of existence in general. Perhaps it is only in occasions such as these that we radically confront and explicitly pose the question about the meaning of being.

According to Rahner, however, the question about being does not only occur at certain crucial periods or particularly intense moments of a man's personal experience; actually, the question belongs more fundamentally to the existence of man because it occurs continually and necessarily throughout human life. Similarly, the question of being does not occur only when men enquire into the ultimate reasons that explain all reality and give meaning to human existence; this question is implicitly asked and answered whenever men plan for and decide upon the course of their future lives. At an even more basic level, its necessity is shown in the fact that the question about being is implicitly posed and answered in a man's knowledge of and judgement about human and non-human beings. In this sense Rahner maintains that all men already practice metaphysics by virtue of their knowledge of their own existence

and the existence of other individual beings. Even a man who ignores or completely rejects the question about being has given it an answer of some kind: he has declared it to be meaningless or without importance, and in effect he has already engaged in metaphysics.<sup>1</sup>

Because of its necessity in man's existence, the question about being constitutes the self-sufficient starting point for human metaphysics. In order to set out from this irreducible starting point and proceed with his metaphysical enquiry, Rahner is obliged to give the question an explicit conceptual form. The question, "what is the being of existent being itself?",<sup>2</sup> expresses the fundamental question about being as a formal metaphysical question, inaugurating a process of metaphysical enquiry.

In its express conceptual form the metaphysical question stands out as the reflexive articulation of the

<sup>1</sup>Hearers. . . , p. 33. Hörer. . . , p. 50.

<sup>2</sup>"Ausgangspunkt der Metaphysik ist somit die Frage, was das Sein des Seienden selbst sei. . . ." Hörer. . . , p. 50. Richards translates the question as: "what is the being of that which is itself?". Hearers. . . , p. 34.

Translating the German "Seienden" as "existent being" is completely consistent with all aspects that Rahner distinguishes in the original formulation of the question. The phrase indicates that the "being" asked about is being in its unity and totality, insofar as it belongs (analogically) to all that exists. Also, the phrase "existent being" indicates that the "ontological difference" -- the distinction between being and existing beings, which constitutes the third aspect of the question -- is already expressed in the original formulation of the question.



fundamental question about being that pervades the ground of human existence; it repeats this question in such a way that it is elevated and brought forth for thought.<sup>3</sup> The question does not ask about any particular existent being; rather its scope is much wider because it asks about the being of any and all existent beings, or being in general. The question "what is the being of existent being itself?" indicates that man, by virtue of the necessary occurrence of the question of being in human existence, is already in some way present before being in its totality. Being

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<sup>3</sup>In Spirit in the World Rahner stated that the metaphysical question is precisely "the thematization, the explicit, conceptually formulated repetition of the question which man necessarily exists as: the question about being in its totality. The metaphysical question as transcendental question is this pervasive question about being itself raised to conceptual form." p. 58.

Emmerich Coreth, a colleague of Rahner's, has extended and developed Rahner's basic ideas on the question as the starting point of metaphysics in an attempt to formulate an explicit account of the procedures and principles of the "transcendental method" in metaphysics. For Coreth, as for Rahner, the attempt to establish and develop metaphysics necessarily involves transcendental reflection upon the conditions of the possibility of metaphysical knowledge. In its basic form and general conclusions Coreth's thought is very similar to Rahner's; however, Coreth attempts to found metaphysics as a legitimate science by identifying it with a specific method. For Coreth "the transcendental method" is the only proper method for conducting metaphysical enquiry. See Emmerich Coreth, Metaphysics, trans. and ed. by Joseph Donceel, (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968). pp. 31-44.

Coreth differs from Rahner in this regard for in both of his major metaphysical works Rahner does not emphasize, nor does he show any pre-occupation with, methodological procedure; as indicated in the introduction, it is only very recently that Rahner has begun to explicitly write about "method" in philosophy and theology.

in general is present to man in the form of that inescapable question about being.

Furthermore, because the question enquires about being in its totality, then by inclusion the being of man himself is asked about through this very question: "the question about being and the question about man who  $\surd$ does the questioning $\surd$  form an original and constantly whole unity."<sup>4</sup> For Rahner then, human metaphysics is necessarily and at the same time, an analytic of man.

Rahner begins to develop the analysis by examining the question itself. In its explicit conceptual form, the question already expresses and affirms a provisional knowledge about being in general. Despite the fact that this provisional knowledge is expressed in the form of a question, it is evident at the very outset that being in general is at least able-to-be-known, for it is impossible to ask a question about something that is totally unknowable. Here, Rahner deduces what stands for him as a fundamental determination of the being of existent being, "knowability" (Erkennbarkeit): "the first metaphysical question, the most general question about being, already places the fundamental knowability of all existent being in

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<sup>4</sup>Hearers. . . , p. 36. Hörer. . . , p. 53.

its being."<sup>5</sup>

Two related conclusions are further deduced by Rahner from this insight gained in his examination of the initial question. Because the being of all existent beings in general has already been determined as knowable, it follows at once that every existent being is knowable to some extent; each existent being is therefore the possible object of a cognition. Furthermore, because knowability has been affirmed as an "ontological determination" (ontologische Bestimmung)<sup>6</sup> presiding in existent being itself, every existent being has an essential reference to a possible cognition, and therefore to a possible knowing subject. For this essential relation to be possible, the being of every existent being and the knowing of that same being must belong together in a fundamental unity.

At this point in the analysis Rahner introduces the pivotal insight that he achieved with such great detail in Spirit in the World, the original unity of being and knowing. For Rahner, the inner ordination of each existent being to a possible cognition is only conceivable under the condition that the being of each existent being

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<sup>5</sup>"Die erste metaphysische Frage, die allgemeinste Seinsfrage, ist schon die Setzung der grundsätzlichen >>Erkennbarkeit<< alles Seienden in seinem Sein." Hörer. . . , p. 56. Hearers. . . , p. 38.

<sup>6</sup>Hörer. . . , p. 56. Hearers. . . , p. 39.

and the knowing of it form an original unity: "being and knowing form an original unity, that is to say, the knowing relationship to itself belongs to the essence of the being of existent beings."<sup>7</sup> This insight into the essence of being as knowing and being known in an original unity stands as the first principle of Rahner's general ontology; Rahner designates this original unity as the "being-present-to-itself" or the "luminosity" (Gelichtetheit) of being.<sup>8</sup> The principle deduced from the examination

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<sup>7</sup>"Sein und Erkennen bilden eine ursprüngliche Einheit, das heißt, zum Wesen des Seins der Seienden gehört die erkennende Bezogenheit auf sich selbst;" Hörer. . . , p. 57. Hearers. . . , p. 39.

<sup>8</sup>Hörer. . . , p. 57. Hearers. . . , p. 39. It should be noted that this principle also furnishes Rahner with an original concept of knowledge; for Rahner knowledge is originally "self-possession" of the "self-luminosity" (subjectivity) of being. For each existent being, then, knowledge is originally a being-present-to-itself. Although this will only become fully evident later on in the thesis, it is already apparent that, in terms of a metaphysical analysis of man, Rahner's particular problem is to determine how man can have knowledge of another existent being standing over against him.

Also, it should be mentioned that at this point in the text, Rahner briefly points out the correspondence of his first principle with the principles of Thomist ontology. With this digression, however, he introduces no elements into the analysis that he does not develop in greater detail later; throughout all three stages of the analysis Rahner continues to demonstrate the consistency of his thought with Thomist metaphysics. At certain points in the thesis, the correspondence Rahner establishes with Thomist metaphysics will be considered more explicitly.

of the original metaphysical question stands as the precondition for the possibility that all existent beings are basically knowable in their being.

With the deduction of this principle, however, Rahner confronts a problem. There seems to be an inconsistency between the principle and the source from which it was originally deduced, the metaphysical question about being in general. If the essence of being is knowing and being known in an original unity, then it would seem that the essence of all existent beings virtually constitutes an a priori identity of knowing and being known. If this is so, then why is it that man in fact asks about being? Why doesn't man already and essentially have an exhaustive knowledge of the object of his question?

In responding to this problem Rahner turns back to consider the equivocal character of the affirmation of the "knowability" of being implicitly contained in the original metaphysical question. By returning to consider the equivocal nature of this affirmation about being in general on the part of the human questioner, Rahner introduces the analogy of "having being" into his concept of the essence of being. This qualification serves to clarify the meaning of Rahner's first principle of general ontology and allows him to ward off any extreme, or "debased"

idealistic interpretation of that principle.<sup>9</sup> Also, by explicitly introducing the presence of the questioning subject into the analysis, this movement facilitates the transition to an explicit analysis of man.

The apparent contradiction between the first principle of general ontology and the source from which it was deduced poses a dilemma. On the one hand, man, as the being who in the first place asks the question about being, must "possess" the being to which the first principle of general ontology applies. The being of man himself was included in the question about being in general and in this sense, then, man "has" being; as a knowing subject man is to some extent present-to-himself of "luminous". However, as the enquirer, man "'cannot be' the being about which he enquires because otherwise, according to this very proposition, he would have to be in unquestioning identity with this very being about which he enquires."<sup>10</sup> To this

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<sup>9</sup>In the second German edition Rahner makes it clear that the precise meaning of his proposition affirming the unity of knowing and being excludes any pantheistic, or "debased" idealistic interpretation. Hörer. . . , p. 63. Hearers. . . , p. 45. As the French translation shows, it is evident that originally, Rahner explicitly differentiated his proposition from the fundamental thesis of German Idealism, "qui trouve son point culminant en Hegel: << L'être et le connaître sont identiques >>." Rahner understood this panentheistic thesis of German Idealism to contain both a profound truth and a fatal error. See L'Homme à l'écoute du Verbe, p. 91.

<sup>10</sup>Hearers. . . , p. 46. Hörer. . . , p. 64.

extent then, Rahner maintains that man, as the questioning being, is "not-being" (Nicht-Sein).

In recognition of this paradoxical duality on the part of man himself, it is evident that being (as being-present-to-self) cannot be attributed to existent beings in the sense of an undifferentiated identity. Rahner is obliged to modify his original insight into the essence of being (as knowing and being known in an original unity), in order to include this element of differentiation. The original proposition is thereby transformed into a formal schema:

. . . the degree of being-present-to-itself, of self-luminosity ("subjectivity") is correspondent to the manner of potency-of-being, to the manner in which being arrives to an existent being as understanding of being and in which therefore this existent being "has" being. And inversely, the degree of "having being" manifests itself in the degree in which the existent being in question is able to return to itself, in the degree in which it is possible for the existent being to be reflected in itself, to be illumined for itself and in this sense then, to have itself before itself.<sup>11</sup>

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11. . . . der Grad des Bei-sich-seins, der Selbstgelichtetheit (>>Subjektivität<<) entsprechend ist der Weise der Seinsmächtigkeit, der Weise, in der Sein einem Seienden als Seinsverständnis zukommt und in der deshalb dieses Seiende Sein >>hat<<. Und umgekehrt: der Grad der >>Seinshabe<< manifestiert sich in dem Grad, in dem das betreffende Seiende zu sich selbst zurückzukehren vermag, in dem es ihm möglich ist, in sich selber reflektiert, für sich selbst gelichtet zu sein und sich in diesem Sinne vor sich selbst zu haben." Hörer. . . , p. 65.  
Hearers. . . , p. 47.

In a footnote to the German edition Metz indicates

Basically, the analogy of "having being" presented here means that the "knowability" of being in general varies according to the degree in which it is possible for existent beings to be present to themselves. There is a unity of knowing and being known only in the variable degrees to which existent beings are able to arrive at knowledge of being, and in this sense to "have" being. Although the original principle about the essence of being seems now to be somewhat formal and indeterminate, still Rahner has been able to deduce and to affirm that being in general is knowable to some extent, and that the knowability of each existent being is set within its manner of

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that, after deliberation with Rahner, the phrase "having being" (Seinshabe) was chosen to develop an interpretation of the Thomist analogia entis for a particular reason: to prevent an objectivistic and hypostatical misunderstanding of the meaning of "being" in this context. It is not being itself that is said to be analogical in this context; rather, the arising ("Aufgang") of the difference between being and existent beings in self-relationship is said to be analogical. Although this is a very complex matter, it seems to me that Metz and Rahner are attempting to avoid any suggestion that "being" has been implicitly hypostatized in the movement of the analysis from the original question about being in general. Throughout the analysis "being" in general remains to some extent "unknown and innerly unfixable" (innerlich unfestlegbar ist) with regard to its own formal concept. The analogy of "having being" indicates that being in general is knowable only to the extent to which each existent being is able to be present to itself; the knowability of being in general is a variable quantity, then, because each existent being's understanding of being varies according to its capacity to return to itself. See Hörner. . . , p. 65, n. 1. Hearers. . . , p. 47, n. 1.



having being. In terms of general ontology and taken together, these conclusions stand as a basic presupposition for the possibility of revelation: only if the being of all existent beings is basically knowable or "logos" from the very start "can the incarnate Logos utter in words what lies hidden in the depths of God."<sup>12</sup>

In order to determine the extent to which being in general is actually "knowable" by man, Rahner turns to consider how man's implicit understanding of being (already given with the necessary question about being) is related to his everyday thought, speech and action in the world. Specifically, Rahner attempts to show how this implicit knowledge of being is operative in man's power of judgement, the power which marks him out as "spirit in the world".

The power of judgement is intimately bound up with man's ability to be present to himself in knowledge because it is through judgement that man returns to himself as the knowing subject, distinct from and standing over against the object of his knowledge. By accomplishing this complete return to himself in thought and judgement, man gains a position that is independent of the known object and he is thereby able to act freely upon that object. For Rahner, it is through the power of judgement that man "turns the environment of his physical-biological life into the object

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<sup>12</sup>Hearers. . . , p. 52. Hörer. . . , p. 70.

of his activity, into his world."<sup>13</sup>

Once again the analysis unfolds as a process of transcendental deduction; here, however, Rahner seeks the condition of the possibility of man's "subjectivity", of man's ability to return to himself in judgement. First of all, Rahner examines what actually occurs in the process of judgement; here he introduces the Thomist notion of "abstraction", for it is the ability to abstract that makes possible a conscious "self-possession" on the part of man. Then Rahner attempts to uncover the transcendental condition for the possibility of abstraction; in other words he seeks the a priori condition, presupposed by the knowing subject, which makes every act of knowledge and abstraction possible.

In its most general form judgement consists in man's grasping of any particular thing as a thing of this or that specific sort. In judgement, any particular thing presented through the senses<sup>14</sup> is brought to the level of

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<sup>13</sup>Hearers. . . , p. 54. Hörer. . . , p. 72.

<sup>14</sup>While in this portion of the analysis the emphasis falls upon man's ability to achieve a complete return to himself in knowledge (reditio completa in seipsum), it is important to be aware that for Rahner this ability to return to himself is but one constitutive factor in man's knowledge. The other constitutive element consists in man's confrontation with sensible things (conversio intellectus ad phantasmata). Taken together, the confrontation with sensible things and abstraction are two constitutive moments of a single, unified act of knowing. Later, in the third stage of the analysis, Rahner develops a detailed

conceptual knowledge and recognized as a particular object under a general or universal concept. At the level of conceptual knowledge, man separates himself from the sensibly received thing and becomes an independent knowing subject distinct from the particular object of his judgement.

In a Thomist metaphysics of knowledge this ability to recognize a particular object under a universal concept is called "abstraction". Abstraction refers primarily to the process whereby man comes to recognize a "whatness" (Washeit ; forma or quidditas in scholastic terminology), or a universal concept, as limited in a particular thing. This "whatness" or quiddity is known to be unlimited in itself; that is, it can be ascribed to many possible things.

In this context then, the search for the condition of the possibility of man's subjectivity becomes an attempt to determine how abstraction is possible. How is it possible for man to abstract, from his sensible experience of

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metaphysical analysis of sensibility; here he is focusing upon man's subjectivity.

Also, this is an appropriate place to refer to certain remarks that Metz later makes with regard to the restricted starting point for this particular process of transcendental deduction. While the deduction here unfolds as a process of reflection upon man's experience of an objective world of things, Metz adds that another deduction could be made from the experience of a "communal world" of persons. See Hörer. . . , p. 88, n. 13; Hearers. . . , p. 68, n. 13.

a particular thing, a universal concept that is itself applicable to many possible things, even though this concept is first known through its limitation in a particular thing?

As a minimal condition of the possibility of abstraction, Rahner first deduces that before the actual knowledge of any particular object, the knowing subject must be oriented to something "more" than the particular thing given to the senses. In order to have knowledge of a particular thing as an object that is a limitation of a universal concept, it is necessary that the act which grasps the particular sensible thing also reaches beyond it towards something more; conversely, in order to know the universal concept as in itself unlimited, and applicable to further possible objects, the knowing subject must somehow already comprehend the whole field of possible objectivity. For Rahner, this something "more" and the field of possible objectivity constitute a unity:

This "more" can only be the already mentioned being as the horizon and founding ground of possible objects and of their encounter. Namely, it is not itself one "object" "alongside" others, but it is the very opening up of the absolute breadth of possible objectivity in general.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>"Dieses >>Mehr<< kann nur jenes schon gennante Sein als Horizont und gründender Grund möglicher Gegenstände und ihrer Begegnung sein. Es nämlich ist selbst nie ein >>Gegenstand<< >>neben<< anderen, ist aber die Eröffnung der absoluten Weite möglicher Gegenständlichkeit überhaupt." Hörer. . . , p. 78. Hearers. . . , p. 59.

Rahner designates this reaching out beyond the particular thing on the part of the knowing subject as the "pre-apprehension" of being in general ("Vorgriff. . . auf Sein").<sup>16</sup> It is this "pre-apprehension", or transcending comprehension of the totality of possible objects, that stands as the condition of the possibility of abstraction and therefore of man's subjectivity.

Basically Rahner is arguing that the abstraction of a universal concept from the experience of a sensible thing must be understood within the context of a dynamic orientation of the knowing subject which sets the sensible thing against the horizon of possible objectivity, against the horizon of being in general. Through the "pre-apprehension" of being on the part of the knowing subject, the particular thing is already set within the horizon of being in general; it is known as limited because it does not entirely "fill up" this unlimited horizon of

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<sup>16</sup>Hörer. . . , p. 78. Richards translates the word "Vorgriff" as "pre-concept". See Hearers. . . , p. 59.

Although it is difficult to gain an exact English equivalent for the German word, it seems to me that "pre-apprehension" is better suited to portray the active sense intended in the German. The translation "pre-apprehension" is given in William Dych's translation of the second German edition of Spirit in the World: "this transcending apprehension of further possibilities, through which the form possessed in a concretion in sensibility is apprehended as limited and so is abstracted, we call 'pre-apprehension' ('Vorgriff')," (p. 142). In Hofbeck's French translation "Vorgriff" is rendered as "l'anticipation".

of being in general.

Although this "pre-apprehension" is a constitutive element in every act of man's knowledge, it does not imply that in an act of knowledge the knowing subject completely transcends and somehow annuls the "liminal" experience of the sensible thing. The "pre-apprehension" of being in general was discovered only as the necessary condition for the conceptual knowledge of particular, limited objects distinct from the knowing subject. Later, with the analysis of human historicity, Rahner returns to draw out the full implications of the fact that man's transcendence with respect to being in general occurs only in and with the sensible encounter of finite, material beings.

Nevertheless, at this point in the first stage, Rahner proceeds in an heuristic fashion<sup>17</sup> with an attempt

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<sup>17</sup>Rahner proceeds heuristically because in order to describe the "pre-apprehension" in greater detail, it is necessary to conceive of it as if it were a typical act of knowledge, having an object to which it is directed. This "pre-apprehension" is therefore thematized and reflected upon as if it were directed towards an object, although the "whither" of the "pre-apprehension" cannot be affirmed as an object because the pre-apprehension was itself discovered as the condition of the possibility of objective encounter.

Rahner begins his argument here by presenting three possible interpretations of the negation that is inherent in the transcendental experience of the limitation of particular things. First, it is possible to absolutize this negation and turn it into the "Nothing", understood as the authentic and every newly to be unconcealed "Truth" of objective encounter. Secondly, it is possible to constantly conceal this negation as that which it is impossible

to determine more precisely the transcendental reference of the "pre-apprehension". Fundamentally, Rahner's argument turns upon the insight that human knowledge, at least to begin with, is related first to existent being and therefore to affirmation ("Ja"). While the "negation" ("Nicht") that is implicit in the transcendental experience of the limitation of particular things at the same time constitutes a recognition of the finitude of particular objects, still Rahner maintains that this negation can be shown to result from an a priori orientation of the knowing subject towards something that is in itself positively unlimited. To stand as the condition of the possibility for the knowledge of the finitude of all possible objects, the "pre-apprehension" must be referred to the in-finitude of being. Rahner goes even further to deduce that the existence of God, as the being of absolute "having being", is already implicitly affirmed by virtue of the unlimited breadth of the "pre-apprehension". Although God is not

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to "thematize". Finally, it is possible to consider this transcendental experience of negation as the way in which "absolute positivity" presents itself by constantly withdrawing itself and thereby drawing the spirit towards itself. Horer. . . , p. 80. Hearers. . . , p. 61.

In the French edition the first interpretation is identified with Heidegger and the second with Kant. See L'Homme à l'écoute du Verbe, pp. 116-118. Rahner himself develops the third interpretation and proceeds to show its consistency with traditional Thomist metaphysics.

presented as an object for the knowing subject, still the "pre-apprehension" must already affirm the existence of a being who has being absolutely. Only on the basis of such affirmation is it possible to recognize the finitude of an actually existent being:

The affirmation of the actual finitude of an existent being demands as the condition of its possibility the affirmation of the existence of an esse absolutum, which affirmation implicitly and already takes place in the pre-apprehension of being in general, and through this pre-apprehension the limitation of the finite existent being is first known as such.<sup>18</sup>

With this deduction, then, Rahner has completed his attempt to discover the extent to which being in general is "knowable" by man: by virtue of the unlimited breadth of the transcendental horizon of man's knowledge, man is absolute "openness" (Offenheit) for both being in general and for the absolute being of God. This fundamental and unlimited "openness" stands as a definite insight into the essence of man, into what man in his existence actually is, because it is implicitly affirmed in all of man's judgements, cognitions and actions. Rahner calls this basic constitution of man "spirituality" (Geistigkeit): "man is spirit, that is, he lives his life in a perpetual

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<sup>18</sup>"Die Bejahung der realen Endlichkeit eines Seienden fordert als Bedingung ihrer Möglichkeit die Bejahung der Existenz eines esse absolutum, die implizit schon geschieht in dem Vorgriff auf Sein überhaupt, durch den die Begrenzung des endlichen Seienden allererst als solche erkannt wird." Hörer. . . . , p. 84. Hearers. . . . , p. 64.



reaching out towards the absolute, in an openness to God."<sup>19</sup>

Rahner maintains that man, insofar as he is considered as the 'addressee' of a possible revelation, offers an a priori, absolutely unlimited horizon within which revelation can first occur; this means that no limitations are set by man himself upon what may possibly be revealed to him. In terms of metaphysical anthropology then, Rahner has discovered that a revelation of God to man can only be conceived to be possible when man is conceived as spirit -- as the "place" ( der Ort ) of transcendence towards being in general.<sup>20</sup>

With this formulation of the first principle of a metaphysical anthropology, Rahner has secured the second component for laying the foundation of his philosophy of religion. In order to show clearly how the two principles of general ontology and metaphysical anthropology are related as constitutive components for Rahner's philosophy of religion, it is helpful briefly to review the somewhat complex movement in the whole first stage of the analysis.

First of all, through an examination of the original metaphysical question itself, Rahner deduced that being in general is already affirmed as "knowable". While the "knowability" of individual existing beings is a variable

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<sup>19</sup>Hearers. . . , p. 66. Hörer. . . , p. 86.

<sup>20</sup>Hörer. . . , p. 87. Hearers. . . , p. 67.

quantity, still the being of all existent beings is to some extent knowable. For Rahner's philosophy of religion this means that the being of any existent being can be the subject of a possible revelation.

Secondly, by considering the extent to which being in general is able to be known by man, Rahner discovered that an active transcendence towards being in general constitutes the condition of the possibility of man's inner-worldly knowledge and activity; this transcendence is the distinctive characteristic of man as spirit in the world. Furthermore, through an important extension of the argument, Rahner demonstrated that the existence of God (as the being who "has" being absolutely) is implicitly affirmed by virtue of the absolute breadth of the transcendental horizon of man's knowledge. For Rahner's philosophy of religion this means that man, as the finite spirit, is "absolute openness" for any possible revelation that might conceivably proceed from the absolute being.

Taken together, then, these principles of ontology and metaphysical anthropology constitute the initial cornerstones for Rahner's philosophy of religion. At the conclusion of the first stage of the general analysis, however, there is an implicit tension between philosophy of religion and theology, a tension that surrounds the concept of revelation. The precise nature of this tension will be explicitly considered in the next chapter.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE FREE "UNKNOWN" AND THE FREE LISTENER

The first stage of the over-all analysis was primarily concerned with the "object" of the enquiry, being in general. Within the perspective of general ontology, Rahner attempted to gain a provisional insight into the essence of being in general. Also, within the perspective of metaphysical anthropology, Rahner attempted to discover the extent to which being in general can be known by man. In the second major stage, which we now have to examine, the analysis is developed primarily in terms of the fact that the question about being must actually be asked by man. Rahner attempts to determine what possible meaning the necessary asking of the question about being can have for ontology in general and for metaphysical anthropology.

To a certain extent the necessity of the question about being has already been dealt with in the first major part of the analysis. Rahner began the initial stage of his analysis by formulating the necessary question about being as an explicitly metaphysical question. Through an examination of what was expressed in the question itself, he was able to deduce that being in general is already affirmed as "knowable", even though the degree to which it is knowable by existent beings varies according to the

degree in which they "have" being. However, in the first stage of the analysis Rahner did not directly consider the ambiguous relationship between the necessity for man to ask the question about being and the necessary affirmation of the "knowability" or "luminosity" of being that is implicitly contained in and with that very question. What does it mean to say that man must affirm the "knowability" of being in general, even in questioning about it? What is the nature of this necessary affirmation and how does it arise in human existence?

Now, in the second stage of the analysis, Rahner intends to gain a more radical understanding of this necessary affirmation by specifically focusing upon the conditions for its occurrence in man's existence. In order to account for this affirmation Rahner is obliged to consider the relationship between knowledge and will; within this context he proceeds to formulate a very intricate account of both the unbounded freedom of the "unknown" God and the freedom of finite man. Fundamentally, Rahner is attempting to show, through the 'language' of transcendental reflection, that man is created by a free, personal God who remains essentially hidden or unknown even in his free act of creation; furthermore, Rahner attempts to show that man, in his creaturely freedom, freely decides and effects the actual manner of his relationship to the absolute being, God. In a metaphysical sense, then, the

"knowability" of being in general ultimately derives from the free, self-luminous act of absolute being in delimiting finite, existing beings. Man affirms this luminosity of being in general by necessarily and willfully affirming his own finite, contingent existence.

The issue at stake in the second stage of the analysis can be seen with greater clarity in terms of the problematical relationship between philosophy of religion and theology described in the preceding chapter of this thesis. At the end of the last chapter it was stated that there is an implicit tension between philosophy of religion and theology with regard to the possible concept of revelation deriving from the principles established as conditions of the possibility of revelation. The precise nature of this tension must now be described in greater detail.

At the conclusion of the first stage, two basic principles emerged as corner-stones for the foundation of Rahner's philosophy of religion. First, the being of all existent being is to some extent knowable and therefore can become the subject of a possible revelation; secondly, as spirit man is absolutely open for being in general and for the absolute being of God, and therefore man has an unlimited capacity to receive a revelation. If taken on their own, however, these two conditions could be understood in such a way that a revelation from God to man would be

fundamentally dependent upon, or anticipated by, the spiritual constitution of man himself. It has already been noted in the first chapter<sup>1</sup> that Rahner must avoid this pitfall in founding his philosophy of religion.

Because being in general is basically "knowable", and because man is absolutely open in his transcendence towards being, a revelation from God could be understood as a mere "temporary aid" furthering man's progressive spiritualization. Revelation could be conceived as simply the first stage in a philosophical transformation of man's consciousness into absolute consciousness -- a transformation wherein the finite spirit becomes necessarily and conceptually aware of its unity with the infinite Spirit.<sup>2</sup> Within this perspective though, the content of revelation would be basically interchangeable with knowledge that either derives from, or depends upon, the a priori constitution of man himself. With this interpretation, then, philosophy would encroach upon and conflict with theology:

<sup>1</sup>See Chapter One above, pp. 40-42.

<sup>2</sup>Hearers. . . , p. 72. Hörer. . . , p. 92. The French edition shows that Rahner originally saw Hegel's philosophy to be representative of such an interpretation: "La révélation ne serait qu'un état pré-philosophique, elle serait, pour parler avec Hegel, seulement ce savoir de l'esprit absolu, qui apparaît dans l'homme au stade de la représentation, mais qui se transforme nécessairement en un savoir absolu, où, sous la forme du concept, l'esprit fini devient conscient de son unité avec l'esprit infini." L'Homme à l'écoute du Verbe, pp. 133-134.

"revelation would be an act of the God of the philosophers but not of the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob."<sup>3</sup>

Rahner also mentions two other possible interpretations of the conditions set out in the first stage. On the one hand, the absolute transcendence of the finite spirit could be understood as enabling man to reach a stage where he might achieve a mystical or "ecstatic" union with the infinitude of absolute being. In this interpretation though, a free and positive revelation from God to man would be unnecessary because man could already, by virtue of his own spiritual constitution, attain full knowledge of the infinitude of absolute being in the mode of ecstatic union. Alternatively, the dynamic movement of the finite spirit in its "pre-apprehension" of infinite being could be thought to require nothing less than the direct vision of God, the visio beatifica, as the ultimate and final fulfillment of man's own spirituality.<sup>4</sup> In this

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<sup>3</sup>Hearers. . . , p. 72. Hörer. . . , p. 92.

<sup>4</sup>Rahner claims that it is impossible to prove that the beatific vision is the "goal" of man's spiritual transcendence on the basis of his deduction of the absolute breadth of the transcendental horizon of man's knowledge: the absolute breadth of the finite spirit's transcendence was only affirmed as the condition for the objective knowledge of a finite, existent being. The transcendence of the finite spirit has its proper fulfillment in such objective knowledge itself. Hearers. . . , p. 80. Hörer. . . , pp. 101-102. Here, Rahner is not denying the possibility of the beatific vision itself; rather, he is simply saying that it cannot be proven as a possibility within a philosophy of religion.

interpretation then, revelation could no longer be conceived as a free act of self-disclosure on the part of God, because the direct vision of God is already "owed" to man by virtue of his own spiritual constitution; in this sense, the absolute being would be already and necessarily manifest.

In order to avoid these possible misinterpretations, Rahner has to show that even though the finite spirit has an absolute transcendence towards the infinitude of being, still, the absolute being remains concealed, not only because of the finitude of man, but also because of the very nature of God. Rahner has to show that facing the finite spirit, God is in himself, essentially the free and unknown.

Initially, it might seem that God, as the infinite being, is already sufficiently unknown since the infinitude of being is only implicitly affirmed by man as the condition of the possibility for objective knowledge of finite, particular beings. Rahner has already stated that the absolute breadth of the "pre-apprehension" does not produce a positive, objective representation of the infinitude of absolute being; in this sense then, the absolute being remains to some extent "hidden" from the finite, questioning spirit. In this situation a positive self-revelation proceeding from the absolute being to man is indeed possible. However, it is still not clear in this context



whether or not the "hiddenness" of absolute being is merely a consequence of man's temporary "blindness", a consequence of the fact that man may not yet have reached the fulfillment of his own spiritual development. On these terms alone it is still conceivable that the absolute being might be always and already manifest.

In order to establish, in a philosophy of religion, the possibility of a free self-disclosure on the part of God, Rahner has to show that God, as the absolute being, is the free "unknown" facing man. He attempts to show this by reverting to a detailed analysis of the problematical character of man's actual questioning about being. Only when the possibility of revelation as the free, positive self-disclosure of God has been established in a philosophy of religion, can the fundamental autonomy and distinctiveness of theology be preserved over against philosophy.<sup>5</sup>

The problematical character of man's understanding of being centers upon this paradox: the question about being which necessarily occurs in man's existence already carries with it a necessary affirmation of the "knowability"

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<sup>5</sup>"Erst eine Offenbarung solcher Art aber begründet religionsphilosophisch die grundsätzliche Eigenständigkeit und Andersartigkeit von Theologie gegenüber jeder Philosophie, und erst die Einsicht in diesem Sachverhalt >hebt< Religionsphilosophie in mögliche Theologie >auf<." Hörer. . . , p. 105. Hearers. . . , p. 83.

of being in general. For Rahner, this reciprocal and necessary relationship between the questionability of being and the "knowability" of being issues from a single source -- man's act of assuming his own existence. Man can only ask questions about being and affirm the luminosity of being in general insofar as he already, necessarily affirms and assumes his own finite being:

In man there occurs, in his self-subsistence and in the objectivity of his knowing and acting, a necessary relationship to himself. He must necessarily be present to himself, affirm himself, posit himself. Under the power of this necessity he questions about being in general, and insofar as he questions, in the necessity of assuming his being, he knows about being in general: he affirms the luminosity of being and his own transcendence towards being in general and thus stands before God.<sup>6</sup>

The fact that man necessarily questions about being reveals the finitude and contingency of man's own being; still, in order to question about being and gain knowledge of being in general, man necessarily and unconditionally affirms his own existence in and in spite of its contingency

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<sup>6</sup>"Im Menschen geschieht in seiner In-sich-selber-Ständigkeit und in der Gegenständlichkeit seines Erkennens und Handelns ein notwendiges Verhalten zu sich selbst. Er muß notwendig bei sich sein, sich bejahen, sich setzen. In Kraft dieser Notwendigkeit fragt er nach Sein überhaupt, und sofern er in dieser Notwendigkeit der Übernahme seines Seins fragt, weiß er von Sein überhaupt: Er bejaht die Gelichtetheit von Sein und seine eigene Transzendenz auf Sein überhaupt und steht so vor Gott." Hörer. . . , p. 108. Hearers. . . , p. 86.

and finitude.<sup>7</sup>

Basically, Rahner is attempting to show that at the very foundation of man's existence, in the previously mentioned conjunction of contingency and necessity, we meet man's will. At the very heart of man's transcendence towards being, there is a willful act of self-positing and self-affirmation whereby man resolutely takes possession of his own finite existence. Man's will with regard to himself is therefore the inner condition of his questioning about being, and of his ability to know about being in general. The relationship between will and knowledge is such that the opening up of being in general for man's knowledge is originally effected through the will as an

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<sup>7</sup>"Insofar as he must question, [man] affirms his own contingent finitude; insofar as he must question, he affirms this, his own contingency, necessarily. And in necessarily affirming this, he affirms his existence in, and in spite of its contingency as unconditional, as absolute."

"Insofern er fragen muß, bejaht er seine eigene kontingente Endlichkeit; insofern er fragen muß, bejaht er diese seine Kontingenz notwendig. Und indem er sie notwendig bejaht, bejaht er sein Dasein in und trotz seiner Kontingenz als unbedingt, als absolut." Hörer. . . , p. 108.

In his translation of this passage Richards omits the parallel construction in the first sentence. See Hearers. . . , p. 86. Basically, Rahner is arguing here that in the midst of his openness to being in general, man stands confronted with the contingency of his own finite existence -- a contingency which he must necessarily affirm as inescapably given, and in this sense as absolute.

inner moment of man's conscious taking possession of his own existence.

However, it is evident that man's necessary affirmation of his own existence is a very paradoxical phenomenon. For Rahner this affirmation has the character of an absolute necessity: man's affirmation of his own contingent existence is "unavoidably" (unausweichlich) necessary and in this sense an "absoluteness" (Absolutheit) is revealed in the contingency itself.<sup>8</sup> How is this to be understood?

The reason or ground for this absolutely necessary affirmation cannot be found in the fact of man's existence itself because it is an affirmation of the contingency and finitude of man's being. To conceive of this absolute necessity as grounded in man's existence itself would amount to an absolutization of the finite. Furthermore, while the reason for this necessary affirmation may seem strange and unintelligible at first, to designate the

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<sup>8</sup>Hörer. . . , p. 108. Hearers. . . , p. 86. The argument in this portion of the analysis is extremely difficult to follow, particularly since Rahner does not always clearly indicate in each context whether the will of man is referred to, or the will of God. Rahner locates "will", in its general metaphysical meaning, in the "occurrence" of the "absolute-positing of an accidentality". "In der Absolutsetzung eines Zufälligen aber erfährt sich Wille." Hörer. . . , p. 109. For Rahner man necessarily and willfully posits his own accidental existence, because his existence is willfully posited, or created by the absolute being of God.

ground of this absolute affirmation as radically unintelligible in itself, would contradict the fact that the "knowability" of being in general is originally opened up and affirmed in this very affirmation.

For Rahner the finitude of man's being is only intelligible when it is recognized in itself as a delimitation of the infinitude of absolute being; the ground for man's necessary affirmation of his own finite being is only intelligible when man is understood to be absolutely posited by a free will. In other words, it is only intelligible when man is understood to have been created by God. The fact that man necessarily and willfully affirms his own contingent existence is the "echo" of the fact that his existence has already been established, affirmed and sustained in its contingency by a free, willful act of delimitation on the part of the absolute being.

In this perspective, then, Rahner has deduced that man is able to gain knowledge of being in general, and that man is able to know of the existence of a being who "has" being absolutely, because such knowledge is originally grounded in the freely-willed establishment of finite being by the absolute being himself. As the questioning spirit, man has an absolute transcendence towards the absolute being of God who appears as the free power standing over against the finite: "God is the Whither of

the pre-apprehension of human spirit, but he is that precisely in that he appears as the free power over against the finite."<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, Rahner goes on to state that God discloses himself to the finite spirit as a free and powerful person: the "personality" (Personalität) of God is shown in the "self-opening" ( Sicheröffnen ) of absolute being before man's transcendence.

Even though the absolute being is known as a free, independent person through man's necessary question about being, Rahner asserts that this knowledge of God allows the "known" to remain in himself as the essentially unknown. "On account of freedom, a person is disclosed only through the deliberate act of the person himself who is to be known."<sup>10</sup> In this situation, then, man is capable of receiving a possible free revelation of God that goes beyond and fulfills the knowledge of God's existence that is accessible to man by virtue of his own ontological constitution.

Within the perspective of general ontology then,

<sup>9</sup>"Gott ist das Woraufhin des Vorgriffs des menschlichen Geistes, aber er ist es gerade dadurch, daß er als die freie Macht erscheint gegenüber dem Endlichen." Hörer. . . , p. 111. Hearers. . . , p. 89.

<sup>10</sup>Hearers. . . , p. 89. Hörer. . . , p. 112. In a later article, "The Concept of Mystery in Catholic Theology", Rahner develops certain elements of the analysis here in an attempt to gain a primordial concept of the "holy mystery" of God. Theological Investigations, IV, pp. 36-60.

Rahner has established that the infinitude of absolute being is the ground of the finite being of man and therefore of man's openness to being in general: the absolute being is necessarily affirmed as the "ground" of finite, creaturely being in such a way that this absolute being is affirmed as a free and powerful Person, who may undertake further free activity towards man. In short, this absolute being is implicitly affirmed as the God of a possible, positive revelation. Furthermore, because God's activity is essentially free, any further act of self-revelation must exceed the disclosure of being which has already and effectively begun with the creation of the finite, transcending spirit. In other words, the revelatory activity of God is not calculable or predictable in terms of the basic, spiritual constitution of man.

In a metaphysical sense, a kind of revelation necessarily occurs by virtue of the fact that the finite spirit constantly and essentially stands in the presence of a personal God -- a God who freely chooses either to speak, or to remain silent. Rahner maintains that because of this very necessity, the finite spirit must reckon with a possible revelation (in the theological sense) occurring as the free and positive self-disclosure of God's own "hidden" essence.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Hearers. . . , p. 93. Hörer. . . , p. 116. Because the "hiddenness" of absolute being must be understood

With the deduction of the "hiddenness" of absolute being and the freedom of God facing finite being, Rahner has established the second basic component of his philosophy of religion, in continuity with general ontology. By establishing the necessary condition for the possibility of a free act of self-revelation from God to man, Rahner has resolved the tension between philosophy of religion and theology that implicitly remained at the end of the first stage of the analysis.

In addition, with his deduction of the freedom of God, Rahner has already gained an insight into the historical character of God's revelatory activity. However, before giving a detailed consideration of the "historicality" ( Geschichtlichkeit ) of revelation, it is necessary to

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as deriving from a free decision on the part of God himself, and not from the "blindness" of the finite spirit, then God must be understood as choosing to reveal his existence to the finite spirit even through his silence and keeping to himself. God's keeping to himself is a kind of revelation in that it is the way in which he lets himself be known within the unlimited transcendental horizon of man's knowledge. (See Chapter II, p. 68, n. 19). While in this way, God's silence is his self-revelation in a 'privative' sense, still this does not mean that God's silence is a deprivation of man's own spiritual constitution. Man has no inherent claim upon God's speech and can reach the fulfillment of his own spirituality by "hearkening" to God's very silence. From man's perspective a metaphysical knowledge of the existence of God can be reached through "remotio", through the process of moving beyond (in thought) the finitude recognized in finite beings.

In its theological meaning, however, revelation is not the free decision of God to disclose himself or to keep silent; rather, it is the positive disclosure of his "hidden essence", through his own speech, to man.



examine the development of the second principle of metaphysical anthropology. To complete the second stage of the over-all analysis, Rahner turns to consider the implications that man's necessary and willful affirmation of his own existence has for a metaphysical anthropology.

The movement from general ontology to metaphysical anthropology is mediated through a further consideration of the "knowability" of being in general, affirmed with the metaphysical question about being. In the previous section it was shown that for man, the "knowability" of being in general is originally opened up with man's absolutely necessary affirmation of his own existence; furthermore, it was shown that the condition of the possibility of this very affirmation is that man exists as a free delimitation of absolute being, as the creature of God. From these two conclusions Rahner proceeds to develop a deeper account of the essence of human knowledge.

First of all, he shows that each and every finite existent being is "knowable" only insofar as it is grasped as having its ground, or its cause ("Grund"), in the absolute being of God.<sup>12</sup> Secondly, Rahner goes on to demonstrate that the fundamental "comprehensibility" (Begreifbarkeit) of all finite existing beings ultimately derives from the self-luminous act of love on God's part, in

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<sup>12</sup>Hörer. . . , p. 121. Hearers. . . , p. 97.

creating finite being -- an act whereby God, in his loving will, freely grants the gift of being. Through this extension of the analysis, then, Rahner arrives at a deeper conception of knowledge: ". . . love appears as the lamp of the knowledge of the finite, and because we know the infinite only through the finite, [also] as the light of our knowledge in general. In its ultimate essence knowledge is but the bright radiance of love."<sup>13</sup> Here Rahner concludes that, with the affirmation of the "knowability" of being at the root of man's existence, and because man's relationship to himself implies a relationship to God, there is an implicit love of God on the part of man. In this sense man's transcendence towards being is at the same time a reaching out of finite love towards God.

From this point Rahner turns to repeat the deduction of man's transcendence towards being in general presented in the first stage of the analysis. This deduction is repeated in order to show that, since will and knowledge are related in such a fundamental reciprocity, man's transcendence towards absolute being is at the same time a transcendence towards the absolute good.

Because knowledge and will are essentially related as reciprocal factors in man's transcendence towards being,

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<sup>13</sup>Hearers. . . , p. 100. Hörer. . . , p. 124.

particular finite beings are not only conceived as objects of a knowing subject; they are likewise grasped as possible ends of "willful conduct" (willentliches Verhalten), of an "evaluating attitude" (wertende Stellungnahme).<sup>14</sup> In this way, then, finite beings are envisioned as good and being itself is disclosed as having worth. From this point Rahner argues that the necessary condition for the possibility of comprehending finite good is that the finite spirit is transcendent towards the absolute good, which is the absolute being of God. Furthermore, because particular finite goods are also grasped in their finitude as possible objects of man's willful activity, then man is free with respect to these finite goods.

However, in affirming any good at all the "evaluating" spirit is subject to a necessity and, in this sense, man is not free. This affirmation belongs to the necessary conditions of his openness to good in general. Implicitly, then, man's necessary affirmation of his own existence is at the same time a necessary (and to this extent an unfree) affirmation of the "right order of the good",<sup>15</sup> which is actually the true order of the love of God.

From this observation, though, Rahner goes one step further to argue that the relationship between

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<sup>14</sup>Hörer. . . , p. 127. Hearers. . . , p. 103.

<sup>15</sup>Hearers. . . , p. 104. Hörer. . . , p. 129.

knowledge and will for the finite spirit is such that man can freely relate to the very conditions of the possibility of his openness to good in general. Man is free to decide upon and to act in accordance with his own "order of good". While man constantly and necessarily affirms the true order of good by virtue of his own ontological constitution, still man has the power freely to set down the laws governing his own knowledge and activity in relation to finite goods. Moreover, by making the conditions of his necessary openness to good in general into the objects of a reflective knowledge, man is free to decide against these conditions; for example, he is free to hate God.

In light of these factors then, Rahner maintains that "the free decision about a particular good. . . reacts so to speak upon the occurrence at the ground of man's being, of the openness to the right order of good itself."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>"ES ist vielmehr so, daß die freie Entscheidung über das einzelne Gute (zu der auch die Entscheidung über das durch die Reflexion auf die apriorische wertende Subjektivität gegenständlich gemachte absolute Gute gehört) gleichsam zurückwirkt auf die im Grunde des Daseins geschehende Offenheit auf die rechte Ordnung des Guten selbst." Hörer. . . , p. 129. Hearers. . . , p. 105.

The insights presented in this particular portion of the analysis have been extensively developed in some of Rahner's later writings. See for instance, "On the Question of a Formal Existential-Ethics", in Theological Investigations, II, pp. . . . , and "Atheism and Implicit Christianity", in Theological Investigations, IX, pp. 145-164.

Because a free decision about a particular good is ultimately a decision about and formulation of the person himself, then man does not merely perform good or evil actions; by himself a man either becomes good, by freely positing anew the right order of the good, or he becomes evil, by freely positing an order that contradicts the true order of the good.

Because of human freedom, it is evident that the actual manner of man's openness towards God is dependent on the moral self-determination of man. For Rahner the necessary love of God is never simply given in a "purely" interior fashion in free-acting man; rather, this necessary love of God is always intermingled, either in a proportionate or in an oppositional manner, in an "historical synthesis" (geschichtlichen Synthesis) with the freely posited order of love set down by man himself.<sup>17</sup> In this sense, then, even the knowledge of God that is accessible to man through metaphysical reflection is always determined from the very start by the way in which man freely loves and values things that are present to him in his everyday activity. Also, man is capable of actually hearing a message from the free God in the precise way in which it is addressed by God to him, only if he has not already restricted the horizon of his openness to the absolute being

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<sup>17</sup>Hörer. . . , p. 130. Hearers. . . , pp. 105-106.

through a perverted love.<sup>18</sup>

With the analysis of the freedom of God and the freedom of man, Rahner has gained a preliminary insight into the "place" ( der Ort ) of a possible revelation from God; the precise nature of this insight, and how it relates to the third aspect of the original question about being, will be discussed in the introduction to the next chapter. Since the second stage of the over-all analysis is complete, it is helpful to review the conclusions in order to put the general movement of thought into focus.

By examining the problematical character of the original metaphysical question about being, Rahner was able to deduce that God, the being of absolute "having being", is essentially "hidden" and free facing the finite spirit. For his philosophy of religion, then, Rahner has set forth the necessary, ontological condition for the possibility of a revelation understood as the freely-willed act of self-disclosure on the part of God.

Secondly, by thematizing the intimate relationship between will and knowledge for man, Rahner proceeded to show that the way in which a man freely relates towards finite beings (and thereby forms his own order of good) has a definite effect upon his relationship to the absolute being (who is the absolute good). For Rahner's philosophy

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<sup>18</sup>Hörer. . . , p. 133. Hearers. . . , p. 108.

of religion this means that man is the existing being who stands in free love before the God of a possible revelation.

The final stage of the over-all analysis is concerned with the question, where is that concrete place in human existence, the place at which man himself must actually stand, if he wants to hear a possible revelation from God?

## CHAPTER IV

### THE "PLACE" OF A POSSIBLE REVELATION

Before immediately proceeding with a detailed consideration of the movement of thought in the third stage of the analysis, it is necessary to clearly understand the context within which the analysis actually unfolds. It has already been indicated, in the conclusion to the last chapter, that Rahner's intention in the final stage of the analysis is to determine the "place" of a possible revelation from God. To put it more directly, Rahner attempts to locate the "place" where man himself must stand and the "place" where a revelation from God must occur if man in the fully human mode of his existence is to be capable of hearing such a revelation. To anticipate here, the basic contention of the third stage of the analysis (and of Rahner's philosophy of religion taken as a whole) is that a free revelation from God to man must occur through the human "word" and in human history if man as man is to be capable of hearing God's message.

To a certain extent Rahner has already indicated that from man's perspective, the "place" of a possible revelation is the transcendence of the spirit towards being in general. In the first stage of his analysis, Rahner established for his philosophy of religion that



man is capable of receiving a revelation from God because of his fundamental spirituality: even as a finite spirit man is absolutely "open" to the absolute being of God through his transcendence towards being in general. Having established this, Rahner maintained that because of man's fundamental spiritual "openness", no a priori limits are set upon the "content" of a possible revelation from God, by man himself. In a brief introduction to the final stage of his analysis Rahner points out that as long as God does not directly reveal himself to man (as to the spirit who is absolutely "open" to absolute being), man must reckon with the possibility of a revelation from God occurring through the "word"; here "word" is understood initially as a "representative sign" (eines vertretenden Zeichens) of one who is not given directly in his own self.<sup>1</sup> In this sense then, Rahner maintains that, by virtue of his absolute "openness", man is capable of receiving any possible categorical revelation from God occurring through the "word" (in the sense given above).

However, the spiritual transcendence of man towards being in general has not yet been grasped in its "specifically human characteristic" (in ihrer spezifisch menschlichen Eigentümlichkeit). In order to give a clear and unambiguous account of the "place" of a possible revelation

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<sup>1</sup>Hörer. . . , p. 141. Hearers. . . , p. 114.

from the fully human perspective, Rahner must determine the specifically human quality of the transcendence of the spirit towards being in general. Rahner's general task in the third stage of the analysis is to demonstrate the fully human mode of this transcendence towards being. In other words, he has to demonstrate the actual way in which man is spirit. In order to do this Rahner has to complete his account of human knowledge by explicitly considering the fact that man is only able to achieve a complete return to himself in knowledge through the confrontation with sensible, material things. By explicitly considering the originally receptive character of human knowledge, Rahner thereby gains a more complete account of the essence of man himself.

While the foregoing summary is sufficient to indicate the general nature of Rahner's task in the final stage of his analysis, it still doesn't provide a clear vision of the specific purpose of the analysis in the third stage. In order to understand fully the primary issue under consideration it is necessary first to see the relationship between the freedom of God and the "place" of a possible revelation. In the conclusion to the last chapter it was stated that an insight into the "place" of a possible revelation had already been gained with the deduction of the freedom of God. Now, this statement must be explained.

In a general metaphysical sense, a certain

"historicality" ( Geschichtlichkeit ) is intrinsically associated with a possible revelation because, even as the essentially "unknown", God stands before man as the free actor, as the Person who has not yet exhausted all the possibilities of his freedom with "the free positing" ( die freie Setzung ) of man as a finite being.<sup>2</sup> For Rahner a free action is, in an essential sense, an historical action. In the broadest, metaphysical understanding of the word, "history" ( Geschichte ) is the realm (in a 'topological' sense) or the place of free actions. "History" is there, wherever there is free positing:

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<sup>2</sup>Hörer. . . , p. 143. Hearers. . . , p. 116.

To clarify matters here, it is important to note that the historical character of a possible revelation from the free God to man must be understood within the context of God's activity towards man. Later, Rahner points out that the actual "creative positing" ( die erschaffende Setzung ) of man by God is "pre-historical" ( vorgeschichtlich ); while this too must be understood as a free act, it is pre-historical in the sense that in creating finite beings, God acted "without partner" ( ohne Gegenspieler ) and only with himself. See Hörer. . . , p. 194; Hearers. . . , p. 157.

However, as the argument above will show, since a revelation from God to man must be understood as a new, free act of self-disclosure (which is likewise a "free-positing") on God's own part, in company with man, then, in the general metaphysical sense, a definite historical character belongs intrinsically to God's own revelatory activity. In this sense then, a "divine historicality" ( göttliche Geschichtlichkeit ) is associated with a possible revelation from God. As the following paragraphs will show, however, Rahner's primary concern is with the "human historicality" ( menschliche Geschichtlichkeit ) of a possible revelation; he proceeds to develop a more detailed account of what constitutes truly human history.

It is happening ["Geschehen"] that cannot be deduced and calculated from a general preceding cause. Such a free non-derivable happening is always a unique, unrepeatable something, to be understood in terms of itself alone.<sup>3</sup>

An historical event stands distinct from a natural event because it is basically a free and unique action, rather than a case that can be accounted for in terms of general laws. Because a possible revelation from God to man must be understood as an essentially free action on the part of God himself, then a definite historical character is intrinsically associated with God's own revelatory activity -- revelation shows itself, even from God's perspective, as an historical event.

With this brief discussion, then, Rahner has gained a preliminary insight into the "historicality" of a possible revelation from God. However, this insight does not by itself provide him with a sufficiently clear view of the "place" where man must be if he is to hear a possible revelation. The general metaphysical concept of history sketched above does not provide Rahner with an adequate conception of the constitution of human history, and this is what he sets out to gain in the third stage of his analysis. Rahner attempts to show that the "place" of a possible revelation for man, necessarily lies within human history.

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<sup>3</sup>Hearers. . . , p. 116. Hörer. . . , p. 144.

In the third movement of his over-all analysis, then, Rahner must show how transcendence and history are inter-related, how man's reference to history is an "inner moment" (ein inneres Moment) of his very spirituality. The specific purpose of the final stage of the analysis, then, is to show that it is as an historical being that man is spirit and that "the place of man's transcendence is always also an historical place".<sup>4</sup> For Rahner, man's

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<sup>4</sup>"Der Mensch ist als geschichtliches Wesen Geist. Der Ort seiner Transzendenz ist immer auch ein geschichtlicher Ort." Hörer. . . , p. 143. The section within which this passage occurs is omitted in Richards' translation.

It should be mentioned that in his brief introduction to the third stage of his analysis, Rahner explicitly differentiates his own perspective from previous attempts to determine the "place" of a possible revelation, through philosophy of religion. By emphasizing that man is spirit precisely as an historical being, Rahner wants to emphasize that the place of a possible revelation for man cannot be conceived as the pure interiority of the spirit. Because man's transcendence towards being in general (which renders him absolutely open to God) is always only operative, so to speak, through historical encounter, then the place of a possible revelation from man's perspective must be human history.

In this way, then, Rahner attempts to avoid the basic error of all "modernist" philosophies of religion. It has already been observed that for Rahner, this basic error consists in regarding a possible revelation, or a given historical revelation, as the "objective correlate" of man's natural and unhistorical, religious structure: either man's religious structure is conceived in such a way that the "content" of a possible revelation is already determinable in an a priori fashion (this Rahner avoids by showing that while man is absolutely open to God, and capable of receiving a revelation, this openness is such that no a priori limits are placed upon what God can reveal); or the content of a given revelation is critically

spirituality and his "historicality" must be thought together as constitutive elements of human history.

The search for the specific "place" of a possible revelation is therefore formulated as an enquiry into the character of man's transcendence. In order to begin this enquiry, Rahner turns again to the place where man's transcendence towards being originally shows itself -- he turns back to the general question about being. The final stage of the over-all analysis once more takes its point of departure from the initial metaphysical question, "what is the being of existent being itself?", but, now the emphasis is upon the necessity for man to distinguish between being and existent being. Whereas in the first stage Rahner was concerned primarily with the "object" of the question, being in general, the analysis in the third stage turns around so to speak, and concentrates upon the

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measured by, and adapted to, man's very own religious structure (this Rahner attempts to avoid by showing that while man's structure is such that a revelation must occur in human history and in human words, if man is to hear it, still God himself is essentially free either to reveal himself or not to reveal himself). Furthermore, Rahner maintains that a free revelation, should it occur in human history, is understandable only in terms of itself. See Hörer. . . , p. 139. Hearers. . . , p. 113. See also Chapter I above, pp. 33-40.

As this point, Friedrich Schleiermacher and Rudolf Otto are explicitly mentioned as presenting interpretations which are basically just variations upon this one, crucial error.

nature of man himself as the "subject" who originally and necessarily asks and come to know about being, by distinguishing between being and existent being. In effect, then, the perspectives of general ontology and metaphysical anthropology are brought together by Rahner in an attempt to determine the essence of man himself through an examination of the meaning of this necessary distinction. Basically, Rahner wants to gain a more complete understanding of the "worldliness" of human existence.<sup>5</sup>

Initially Rahner proceeds by stating that the basic pre-supposition of this necessary distinction is the experienced fact that man is a receptive knower: ". . . man is never able to detach himself from a starting point of his whole knowledge which is outside himself. The external origin of all his knowledge must appear in every act of man's knowledge."<sup>6</sup> Although the originally receptive character of man's knowledge was not explicitly analysed in the first stage, the fact that man's knowing has an external starting point was apparent even then, in the analysis of judgement. Rahner first arrived at the notion of the

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<sup>5</sup>The analysis develops in a very compact and at times complex fashion in the third stage; fundamentally, Rahner proceeds to develop the central features of the more extensive and detailed treatment of man's receptive knowledge originally presented in Spirit in the World. See Hörer. . . , p. 154, n. 3 and p. 159, n. 5. Hearers. . . , p. 125, n. 3, and p. 128, n. 5.

<sup>6</sup>Hearers. . . , p. 120. Hörer. . . , p. 148.

"pre-apprehension" of being in general (which in turn became an insight into man's spirituality) through a process of transcendental reflection upon the condition of the possibility for man's "subjectivity", for man's ability to be present to himself as an independent knowing subject distinct from the object of his judgement. The originally receptive character of human knowledge displays itself in the fact that man returns to himself in spiritual self-awareness only through the encounter with things that are "other" than himself, things that become known as particular existent beings. Man's knowledge is always receptive in that it is knowledge through the senses and Rahner attempts to elaborate a metaphysical account of man's sensibility by deducing the ontological pre-conditions for such receptive knowledge. (In the metaphysical sense, "sensibility" is understood in its nature as prior to a possible unfolding into different sense faculties).

In order to set forth the ontological conditions that are necessarily presupposed by the receptivity of human knowledge, in order to discover what this receptivity means in terms of the essence of man himself, Rahner brings forward the schema of the analogy of "having being" which he deduced in the first stage of the analysis: being is being-present-to-itself (knowing and being known in an original unity), in the degree to which an existent being "has" being. From this first principle of general ontology



it is evident that any existent being's first known "object" must be its own being, its own "essence", because knowledge is originally an existent being's presence-to-itself.

However, because of the originally receptive structure of human knowledge, it is evident that the initial "object" of man's knowledge seems to be something "other" than himself. Transposed in terms of ontology, then, man must "have" being in such a way that he is originally, ontologically, present to something "other" than being.

For Rahner, this mysterious something that is "other" than being is "materia". The Thomistic metaphysical principle "materia" designates the empty and indeterminate "substantive possibility" (subjekthafte Möglichkeit) of "having being" which is itself distinct from being, but nevertheless is a real constituent of existent beings in the world.<sup>7</sup> In terms of general ontology then, man's "kind" of being must be such that he is originally actualized as the being of "materia". Man "has" being precisely as a "material essence".

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<sup>7</sup>"This 'other' is thus the substantive possibility of 'having being' which is on the one hand real and really distinct from the being (of the 'actuality'), and yet on the other hand, as pure possibility, is not an existent being that must be cognitively present to itself; that is to say, it is not itself in a state of 'having being'. The being of man is the being of an empty, substantive 'possibility of being' which is really distinct from being. Such 'possibility' of being is called in Thomistic metaphysics 'materia'." Hearers. . . , pp. 123-124. Hörer. . . , pp. 152-153.

In effect Rahner has expounded, in terms of transcendental reflection, the Thomistic theorem that "the human soul is the form of the body" (Anima humana est forma corporis). In this context, then, receptive knowledge is understood to originate from man's ontological constitution as a material or corporeal essence: knowledge through the senses is the kind of knowledge possessed by man as the material or corporeal (existent) being who is present to himself in spiritual self-awareness through the sensible encounter with material "things" that he distinguishes from himself as particular existent beings standing apart from him. For Rahner sensibility, or sense perception, is not to be understood as an independent faculty that operates on its own; rather, sensibility is a faculty of and for the spirit. In man, spirit (which reaches out towards being in general) and sensibility (which immediately intuits "the world", understood in a general sense as "appearance") are related in such a way that man has sense perception as the means of his own spiritual self-realization in the world, and as the 'medium' of his knowledge of being in general. "Man . . . as a receptive spirituality, by his very human nature (anima tabula rasa), requires a [/sense capacity/ as his own necessary means to attain his goal, the comprehension

of being in general."<sup>8</sup>

Before describing in greater detail precisely how man's transcendence towards being in general is mediated through his sensible confrontation with other material "appearances" in the world, it is necessary first to consider in greater detail the meaning of "materia". This is of crucial importance for it is through a further examination of the meaning of "materia" that Rahner formulates an account of human "historicality" and thereby arrives at the conception of man as an essentially historical spirit.

As the empty, indeterminate possibility of "having being", "materia" is not only a real, metaphysical constituent of man's kind of being; it must also be a real constituent of the proper "objects" of man's knowledge. In order to become an "object" of man's receptive knowledge, the "thing" that is known must have the same general ontological structure as man; it must be material in the sense that it too "has" being as a material essence. Rahner relates this to the fact that "materia", as the

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<sup>8</sup>Hearers. . . , p. 129. Hörer. . . , p. 159.

In the sensible encounter with other material "things" in the world, there is a "becoming one with another" in that there is an indifferentiation of subject and object; in judgement, however, the essence of the sensibly received other is abstracted and the other is objectively known as a particular existent being distinct from the knowing subject himself. This process will be more fully described at a later point in the thesis.

real indeterminate possibility of "having being", is the principle of individuation because it is the metaphysical basis of any actualization of a particular existent being.<sup>9</sup> With regard to man's power of judgement, then, with regard to his power to abstract, "materia" is the reason why man distinguishes between being in general and existent beings. Materia is the real metaphysical basis of the distinction that man makes in all of his judgements, the distinction between a "whatness" and an indeterminate "something", between a "form" and its "subject", "between an essence and its 'bearer'" (zwischen einem Wesen und seinem Träger).

From this insight into "materia" as the principle of individuation Rahner goes further to show that "materia" (in the widest sense as "materia prima") is the ground of space and time in general, and the ground of the intrinsic "spatiality" (Räumlichkeit) and "temporality" (Zeitlichkeit) of existent beings. In the widest sense "materia" is the metaphysical basis of the possible plurality of any universal essence. Since a universal essence (itself unlimited) may come to subsist with "materia" as its subject any

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<sup>9</sup>Hörer. . . , pp. 157-158. Hearers. . . , pp. 127-128

"Materia" is the "substantive possibility" of "having being" only in the sense that it is the subiectum, or empty and of itself indeterminate "wherein" (Woran) within which a universal essence becomes realized as the act of matter.

indeterminate number of times, then "materia" is the real metaphysical basis of number and quantity. In other words, it is the principle of the quantitative repetition of the same thing. When "materia" enters as a constitutive element inherent in the essence of a particular existent being, then it is also the basis of the intrinsic "quantitativeness" (Quantumhaftigkeit), or spatiality of that existent being.

Secondly, because a determinate "whatness" or "quiddity" (when it is a co-constituent of a particular existent being) does not completely fill up the entire breadth of its "materia", then a material existent being always inclines towards new possible actualizations of being. Rahner argues that a material existent being has the "integrity" (die Ganzheit) of the actualizations of its possibilities always before itself, as a "future" (als Zukunft) towards which it is constantly in movement. In this context, then, a material existent being is intrinsically temporal; "temporality", in its original meaning, designates "the inner extension" (die innere Erstreckung) of an existent being towards the realized totality of its possibilities.<sup>10</sup>

These further determinations of "materia", as the ground of the possible repetition of a universal essence,

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<sup>10</sup>Hörer. . . , p. 163. Hearers. . . , pp. 131-132.

and as the ground of the intrinsic spatiality and temporality of material existent beings, are very important since they allow Rahner to construct a more complete metaphysical concept of man. First of all, because the essence of man is fundamentally repeatable, then it is evident that each individual man is one, among many. He is fundamentally one of a "species". Rahner takes care to emphasize that this inherent relationship of an individual man to other men is not merely a similarity of kind; rather, it is an essential relatedness to humanity, which only in its totality fully manifests the possibilities given with the essence of any individual man. Moreover, as a material essence, man is not merely set within a spatio-temporal world as if this were simply the stage, or the background of his activity. Man is himself intrinsically temporal: "on the basis of 'materia' as his essential element, he himself fashions space and time as inner moments of his existence."<sup>11</sup>

Rahner brings these further determinations of man, deduced from his essential materiality, into relation with the insight into man's freedom as an independent person, and it is within this context that he proceeds finally

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<sup>11</sup>Auf Grund der materia als seines Wesenselementes bildet er von sich her Raum und Zeit als innere Momente seines Daseins." Hörer. . . , p. 164. Hearers. . . , p. 133.

to present a more complete account of specifically human historicity. In the second stage of his analysis Rahner established that man freely determines the manner of his relationship to God through his own free judgments and actions in relation to other finite beings. This freedom on the part of man, even as it originates in his transcendence as a finite spirit towards God, is an essential constituent of human historicity. However, in recognition of man's constitution as an intrinsically material essence, Rahner emphasizes that historicity in the specifically human sense is only found,

. . . where the act of freedom spreads out within a community of free persons in their diversity, and in a world of space and time. [Human historicity] is there, where intelligible acts of freedom must stretch themselves into space and time in order to come into appearance, where these acts need 'space-time' so that they themselves can be.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>"Aber Geschichtlichkeit im menschlichen Sinne ist doch nur dort, wo die Tat der Freiheit in einem Zusammenfreier Personen in ihrer Vielzahl sich in einer Welt, das heißt in Raum und Zeit, ausbreitet, wo die intelligiblen Taten der Freiheit, um zur "Erscheinung zu kommen, sich in Raum und Zeit erstrecken müssen, wo sie der Raumzeit bedürfen, um selber sein zu können." Hörer. . . , p. 165.  
Hearers. . . , p. 134.

In a certain sense then, the distinction between "divine historicity" (see p. 94, n. 2, above) and human historicity is necessary because of the different "settings" or places of God's freedom and of man's freedom respectively. Because of his materiality, because of the "worldliness" of his existence, man's free acts necessarily extend into space and time in order to realize themselves. In other words man is historical in that his freedom necessarily has a worldly, spatio-temporal setting and

Whereas in the broadest metaphysical sense history is the 'place' of free activity, in the specifically human sense history must be conceived as the realm of the activity of free and independent, but essentially related, persons who necessarily act in space and time in order to realize their freedom, in order to actualize their further possibilities.

When seen in relation to man's spirituality, these determinations of man as a material existent being qualify him as an essentially historical spirit. Man is spirit precisely as an historical essence. In other words, man is open to being in general, and to the absolute being of God, only insofar as he has already entered into the material, spatio-temporal world (understood in a general sense as the surrounding or environmental world -- "Um-welt" -- within which man himself "appears"), which he constitutes as the world of his free, historical activity

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each individual's own life-history is inter-related with the history of other men. Rahner points out that in Thomistic metaphysics "materia" is in the final analysis the principle of time properly so called (der eigentlichen Zeit: time, in the literal meaning of the word).

In this sense, then, Rahner maintains that human historicity is distinct from historicity (in the general metaphysical sense of free action) as this must be conceived in the "aevum" of the angels, or in a certain sense in "the utterly extra-temporal position" (der schlechthin außerzeitlichen Setzung) of the freedom of God. Hörer. . . , p. 167. Hearers. . . , p. 135.



along with other men ("world" is here understood as the communal and historical world -- "Mit-welt" -- of free persons).

Having finally established this concept of specifically human historicity, Rahner attempts to pull together the various facets of his metaphysical anthropology in order to give a clear account of the relationship between the transcendence of man, as an historical spirit, towards being in general, and the originally receptive, sensible character of human knowledge. Upon this basis, Rahner then proceeds with the final movement of the last stage of his over-all analysis in order to show that it is even possible for "other-worldly", immaterial existent beings to become known in terms of worldly "appearance", and through human "words".

It has already been stated that, according to Rahner, sensibility originates as a faculty of the spirit, as a faculty for man's realization of his own spirituality -- openness to being in general. Because man is a finite and receptive (sensate) spirit, then his only access to being in general and thereby to absolute being is through an entry into the world:

. . . the spirit possesses its openness to being in general and also thereby to the absolute being of God, only in and through the fact that it allows for itself, through its entry into materia, an encounter with materially existent beings in space and time. . . . And insofar as an access to

God is given only in the a priori structure of man as spirit, only in his characteristic transcendence, therefore in his return to himself, can we say: Man has the possibility of a return-to-himself that opens being and God to him, only in turning out into the world, as the communal and environing world.<sup>13</sup>

In terms of a complete metaphysics of human knowledge this means that there is a reciprocal relationship between man's transcendental "pre-apprehension" of being in general, and his sensible inter-mingling with intra-mundane "appearance" (Erscheinung). The "pre-apprehension" of being in general has its proper occasion, or its conscious coming-into-action, with the sensible reception of appearances in the world. For the human knower, then, three interdependent moments can be discerned in the one process of conceiving a sensible appearance as an objective, materially existent being: there is (1) the givenness of a sensible appearance which is sensible received and (2) set within the horizon

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13<sup>n</sup>. . . der Geist seine Offenheit auf Sein überhaupt und damit auch auf das absolute Sein Gottes nur dadurch und nur darin besitzt, daß er sich durch sein Eingehen in die materia eine Begegnung des materiellen Seienden in Raum und Zeit einräumt. . . . Und insofern der Ausgang zu Gott nur in der apriorischen Struktur des Menschen als Geist, nur in seiner ihm eigenen Transzendenz gegeben ist, also in einer Einkehr in sich selbst, können wir auch sagen: Der Mensch hat die Möglichkeit einer ihm Sein und darin Gott eröffnenden Einkehr in sich selber nur in der Auskehr in die Welt als Mit- und Umwelt." Horer. . . , p. 174.  
Hearers. . . , p. 141.

of the "pre-apprehension" of being in general and (3) therein conceived as a particular materially existent being, distinct from the knowing subject.

Only through "appearance", then, is being in general opened up for man; but still, being does in fact "appear" in the world because material, existent beings are objectively known by man according to their own "essence", according to the degrees in which they "have" being.<sup>14</sup>

In this context it becomes fully evident that, according to Rahner, man is incapable of achieving a purely intellectual intuition of being that is somehow separate from or independent of sensibility. The "pre-apprehension" of being in general is not to be understood as an innate "idea" of being (or of absolute being), but it is rather the a priori condition for the objective knowledge of an a posteriori, sensibly received appearance. Still, as the preceding stages of the whole analysis have shown, being in general is opened up through the sensible grasping of material, spatio-temporal appearances.

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<sup>14</sup>Hörrer. . . , p. 178. Hearers. . . , p. 145. While the "pre-apprehension" reveals only the "form" of an appearance, and therefore can be known reflectively only as the shaping of the horizon within which the appearance is actually seen, still, the "pre-apprehension" (in the negative, liminal-experience) constantly surpasses the breadth of possible appearance, towards being in general and towards absolute being.

With the "pre-apprehension" which reaches beyond sensible appearance (in the sense that the appearance is received within the dynamic movement of the finite spirit towards being absolutely), the most general structures, or determinations of being in general, are implicitly known. These "transcendental determinations" of being in general have already been thematized to an extent in the first two stages of the analysis: "Being is being-present-to-itself, knowing, luminosity, and being is self-affirmation, will and good."<sup>15</sup>

Yet apart from the disclosure of these determinations of being in general, there still remains the crucial problem as to whether or not a specific, immaterial (and therefore non-appearing) existent being can be known in terms of the specifically human, historical character of man's spiritual transcendence towards being. Can a non-appearing existent being, in its own determinate and unique character, become known by man in terms of intra-mundane appearance?<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>"Sein ist Bei-sich-sein, Erkennen, Gelichtetheit, und Sein ist Selbstbejahung, Wille und Gut." Hörer. . . , p. 182. Hearers. . . , p. 147.

<sup>16</sup>Rahner points out that with the concept of God (as the existent being of absolute "Having being") set out in the very first stage of the analysis, "God" was conceived as the necessary condition of the possibility of any finite existent being and its affirmation. In this way, then, a knowledge of God was gained only as a "function" (the necessary dependence of finite existent being on an absolute

In answering this question Rahner attempts to show how the relationship between the transcendence of the spirit and the encounter with appearance allows all existent beings (even those that are immaterial and "other-worldly") to become known within the horizon of inner-worldly appearance through the human "word". Actually, and most importantly, Rahner wants to show that it is possible for God (the "other-worldly" existent being who "has" being absolutely), should He so will, to reveal His own proper character to man through the means of "appearance". With this final movement of his analysis Rahner concludes that man, by virtue of his ontological constitution, is not only capable of receiving a possible revelation from God, but that he always and essentially listens and searches for a revelation from God occurring in human history and through the human "word".

Even though an existent being that is beyond the world of appearance cannot be given immediately and in

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being) of the world and its existence. In the third stage Rahner attempts to show that it is possible for God, as the absolute being, to reveal himself, in his being and action in such a way that His being and action have not already necessarily been shown by the world of appearance, by means of inner-worldly "appearance". In other words Rahner attempts to demonstrate that "the God of the philosophers" (God as the "principium subjectum" of general ontology) is the God of a possible revelation through human words. Horer. . . , p. 182. Hearers. . . , p. 148.

itself as an "object" of man's receptive, sensible knowledge, Rahner argues that man can arrive at conceptual knowledge of an immaterial existent being in its individuality (according to its mode of "having being"), through "negation" (Verneinung). This mode of knowledge through negation is possible because of the reciprocal, conditioning factors of human knowledge. On the one hand, in the "pre-apprehension" of being in general all possible modes of "having being" -- from the pure possibility of "materia prima" through to the absolute "having being" of God -- are originally encompassed, even if in an empty fashion; on the other hand, determinate degrees of "having being" are immediately and intuitively accessible to man in appearances.<sup>17</sup>

Rahner maintains that if "the limit" (die Grenze) of any particular "having being" is displaced or extended above itself in the direction of the absolute being of God, then an "other-worldly" existent being can be determined in its singularity. It can be conceptualized in a way that is more specific than through the general "transcendental determinations" of all existent being. Even if it is through negation, "other-worldly" existent beings can become known by man, in and through their relationship

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<sup>17</sup>Hörer. . . , p. 186. Hearers. . . , p. 151.

to modes of "having being" that are objectively conceived in man's receptive knowledge of sensible appearances.

In this context, it is evident that the concept "existent being" is not merely a general and static concept for Rahner; envisioned within the schema of the analogy of "having being", the very concept of "existent being", in itself, is understood in an active sense. It is understood to possess an inner relatedness to the fulfillment of "having being". Because of this inner reference beyond itself, it is possible that through a negative process the concept, "existent being", can itself rise and grow, so to speak, until at a certain point the concept designates an "other-worldly" existent being. However, this process of negatively extending the scope of our receptive knowledge to conceptualize "other-worldly" modes of "having being" always starts from sensibly received appearances. This process is therefore always dependent upon the positive intensity of being (the actual degree of "having being") that is objectively known to exist in a sensibly received appearance.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Hörer. . . , pp. 185-6. Hearers. . . , pp. 150-151.

It is important to note Rahner's emphasis on the fact that, while man is able to conceptualize "other-worldly" existent beings through this negative process, this does not mean that man by himself, through his own power of knowledge, is able to know directly and positively

It has already been stated that because of the relationship between his "pre-apprehension" of being in general and his sensible encounter with inner-worldly appearance, man is able to gain positive and conceptual knowledge of the actual essence of materially existent beings. Man's concepts and words do reveal the actual mode of "having being" of other materially existent beings that "appear" in the world along with him. In fact, each act of conceptual knowledge is historical, in the human sense, because in objectively knowing and judging other existent beings man freely relates to the world. It is through his knowing and acting interrelationship with other existent beings in a communal and environing world that man realizes himself as an historical spirit.

However, the analysis of negation was undertaken in order to demonstrate that even non-appearing, immaterial existent beings are fundamentally determinable, and therefore knowable by means of inner-worldly appearance. While

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the acutal existence, or even the "innermost possibility" of such other-worldly existent beings. Rahner maintains that even though the "pre-apprehension" of being in general opens up the "other-worldly 'field' of ontological possibilities" (dem auferweltlichen >>Feld<< der Seinsmöglichkeiten), yet man on his own is not able to comprehend the actual existence of other-worldly existent beings; Rahner wants to demonstrate that human words can serve as the medium of such positive knowledge if they are heard as spoken by God. Hörer. . . , pp. 188-9. Hearers. . . , p. 153.



man on his own cannot gain objective and positive knowledge of the actual essence of other-worldly existent beings, still, it is possible for them to become known through human concepts, through human words, in an asymptotic and symbolic fashion through negation. In its capacity to conceptualize an other-worldly existent being (without actually representing such a being in itself), the human word is understood as a "conceptual symbol" (begriffliches Zeichen) which is "the bearer" of a concept of an other-worldly existent being obtained from appearance through negation.<sup>19</sup>

Because of this unique 'negative capability' of the human word, because of its capacity to bear a transcendental negation, Rahner argues that the human word can not only reveal the essence of materially existent beings appearing in the world. He maintains that it is inherently capable of serving as the "mode of revelation" (die Weise der Offenbarung) of "other-worldly", immaterial existent beings:

. . . All other-worldly existent beings can fundamentally be presented to man, not simply in their most general ontological determinations but also in their specifically unique characteristics, negatively through that historical appearance which we call 'word', through that word which is in turn, itself, the synthesis of an inner-worldly,

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<sup>19</sup>Hörer. . . , p. 190. Hearers. . . , p. 154.

historical objectivity and a transcendental negation.<sup>20</sup>

For man as an historical spirit, the human word is itself an historical "appearance" that is capable of conceptually symbolizing an other-worldly, non-appearing existent being.

Stated directly, Rahner concludes that the human word is the locus of a possible revelatory encounter with the absolute being, God. Through human words, which are essential elements of human historicity, man can receive a positive categorial disclosure from the free God.

In the second stage of his analysis Rahner established that man, by virtue of his spiritual transcendence, necessarily listens for a possible revelation from the free God. Now, Rahner further maintains that, because of the characteristic structure of human knowledge (a unity of spiritual transcendence and reception of sensible appearance), man necessarily listens for a revelation from the free God occurring through human words. If man in the fully human mode of his knowledge and

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<sup>20</sup>"Alles Überweltliche kann grundsätzlich nicht bloß in seinen allgemeinsten Seinsbestimmungen, sondern auch nach seinen bestimmten Eigentümlichkeiten negativ durch jene geschichtliche Erscheinung, die wir Wort nennen, dem Menschen vorgestellt werden, durch jenes Wort, das selber wieder die Synthesis einer innerweltlichen, geschichtlichen Gegenständlichkeit und einer transzendentalen Verneinung ist." Hörer. . . , p. 192. Hearers. . . , p. 156.

existence is to hear a revelation from God, then such a revelation must come to man through human words.

In making this assertion, though, Rahner takes care to emphasize that it is from man's perspective and in terms of man's constitution as a receptive, sensate spirit, that a revelation proceeding from the free God must occur through human words. The necessity expressed in this argument does not compromise the essential freedom of God, for the content of a possible revelation is not restricted in advance (in an a priori fashion) by arguing that if man is to hear God's message, then it must come through human words. Because the human "word" is capable of bearing, or of mediating a knowledge of any "other-worldly" existent being whatsoever, in 'its' own specific character, then God is free to reveal whatever he chooses through such words.

Furthermore, Rahner claims that God could reveal himself to man "without the assistance" (ohne die Zuhilfenahme) of such a "word" only by altering the unified structure of human knowledge. It is because of this already established structure that man listens for a possible revelation from God occurring through human words:

For so long as man is still not absolutely elevated out of his own ontological constitution, already established by us, then he must still always translate any different revelation into the structure of such a revelation as we have just sought to describe so that it can determine

and shape his normal being and acting -- that is, into a revelation contained in human words.<sup>21</sup>

With the conclusion that man listens for a possible revelation from God occurring in the human "word", the detailed movement of the analysis in the final stage is in effect complete. However, in order to integrate all the various facets and insights of the whole final stage into a coherent statement for his philosophy of religion, Rahner has to bring into correspondence two central factors that were left unrelated in the preceding analysis. He has to unite the insight into the "divine historicity" which is associated with a possible free revelation from God, with his account of specifically human history.

Rahner's basic contention in attempting to unite these factors is that a possible free act of categorial revelation from God to man must occupy a determinate place in human history. It must impinge upon human history at a specific point so that man himself is obliged to turn towards such a place in order to recognize and to hear the word of God. In order to support this contention,

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<sup>21</sup>"Denn solange der Mensch überhaupt noch nicht schlechthin über seine von uns festgestellte Seinsverfassung hinausgehoben ist, muß er immer noch, soll eine solche andersartige Offenbarung sein normales Sein und Handeln bestimmen und formen, eine solche Offenbarung in die umsetzen, deren Struktur wir eben zu zeigen suchten: in eine, die im menschlichen Wort gefaßt wird." Hörer. . . , p. 192. Hearers. . . , p. 156.

Rahner first of all emphasizes that a free act of revelation from God is itself intrinsically historical in the sense that it must be understood (even in its possibility) as a unique act on the part of God himself: ". . . such a free revelation is in itself historical: [it is] the unique, solely self-subsistent act of a free [Person]." <sup>22</sup> Even though man listens and essentially yearns for such a revelation from God, still revelation is not necessary, in the sense that it is "owed" to man. Because of its unique, historical character, a possible free revelation from God to man can only be received and conceived in terms of itself.

In recognition of this inherently unique character of a possible revelation from the free God, in recognition of its "divine historicity", Rahner argues that it must be understood to occur in a "human-historical" (menschlich-geschichtlich) way also, only at a specific point in an individual man's history. In terms of man's ontological constitution it is not possible to suppose that with the reception of a revelation from God, a man must continually and in a miraculous fashion be taken out of his natural mode of thinking and acting; rather, even in terms of an individual man's history, such a free revelation must

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<sup>22</sup>"Hörer. . . , p. 194. Hearers. . . , p. 157.  
See above p. 94, n. 2.

appear only in "the form of a point" (punktförmig) that is not equally or continuously co-existent with all other particular moments of a man's life history.<sup>23</sup>

Moreover, Rahner argues that it need not be supposed that such a revelation must originally occur at a specific point in each man's own history, in order for a man to know it as God's revelation. Rather, men must reckon with the possibility that it could only occur in the history of "destined" (bestimmter) individuals. Because every man is essentially related to the whole of mankind and because each man's own life history is intimately interwoven with the history of other men, then it is only necessary for man to be able to acknowledge that an actual revelation occurred ("sich ereignet hat") at a point in human history. Rahner maintains that the historical character of a possible revelation from God, considered in itself, is such that "revelation must be expected as a spatio-temporal, fixed event within the total history of humanity."<sup>24</sup>

Since man is himself an historical essence precisely in and because of his fundamental "openness" to

<sup>23</sup>Hörer. . . , p. 196. Hearers. . . , p. 159.

<sup>24</sup>" . . . das heißt sie ist zu erwarten als ein raumzeitlich fixiertes Ereignis innerhalb der Gesamtgeschichte der Menschen." Hörer. . . , p. 197. Hearers. . . , p. 159.

being in general, to absolute being, and to a possible revelation from God, then turning towards his history is not simply a casual convenience for man. It is a relationship that is imposed upon him by his specifically human spirituality. In necessarily turning to "appearance" with each act of his knowledge, man acts historically, for it is through "appearance" that being in general becomes ever more fully manifest for the spirit. Indeed, in his openness to being, man is himself the fullest "appearance" in the world; but that which is actually "Man" manifests itself only in the unfolded actuality of possible human beings, in the history of men in general, in the history of humanity.<sup>25</sup>

Because of his own spiritual nature, then, man is always already oriented towards history, and because history is the "place" of a possible revelation from the absolute being, God, then man is essentially that existent being who listens for a possible revelation from God occurring in human history and through human words, as the fulfillment of his own deepest strivings.<sup>26</sup> With this conclusion,

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<sup>25</sup>Hörer. . . , p. 199. Hearers. . . , p. 161.

<sup>26</sup>Because of this essential historicity of man Rahner claims that all "rationalism" which attempts to ground human existence independently of history is therefore to be rejected as "inhuman" and "unspiritual" with regard to the human spirit. Hörer. . . , pp. 198-199. Hearers. . . , p. 160.

Rahner closes the third stage of his analysis with

Rahner's general ontology and metaphysical anthropology finally come together in a philosophy of religion formulated as the "ontology of the 'potentia oboedientialis' for revelation".

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an outline of certain problems that would need to be dealt with further in order to round out fully the entire scope of his philosophy of religion: he briefly suggests an avenue of approach to answer the question as to how a human word, spoken in history, could be recognized as the speech of the "other-worldly" God; also he suggests that a further examination of the historicity of man (with an emphasis on the development of a metaphysical concept of tradition) would be necessary in order to understand how an individual man actually can appropriate an historical event of revelation that is very distant from him, in terms of the "external measure of time." Horer. . . , pp. 200-201. Hearers. . . , pp. 162-163.



## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

Through the course of the analysis as a whole, and particularly in the last portion of the final stage of the analysis, it becomes increasingly evident that the movement of Rahner's thought draws closer and closer towards the 'realm' of theology. Indeed, with the argument that the "place" of a possible revelation must be expected as a special, unique "point" in human history, it seems that theological concerns explicitly tend to surface.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>In his conclusion Rahner does in fact say that if any man is convinced that "it is part of the most essential basic attitude of life to seek the decisive word of God's personal self-revelation in human history", then it would be difficult for him not to finally recognize "the holy Roman Catholic Church as the place of the actual revelation of the living God". Hearers. . . , p. 177. Hörer. . . , p. 218. However, this claim is not presented as a necessary conclusion that logically follows from the actual analysis itself. Rahner makes it clear that the attempt to prove that a revelation from God has in fact occurred in human history, and that the Roman Catholic Church is in fact the historically visible "place" where this revelation from the living God is to be explicitly met with is fundamentally beyond the scope of philosophy of religion. Rahner himself maintains that it is not possible for philosophy of religion to determine by itself whether or not an actual revelation has in fact occurred in man's history.

Initially, Rahner's claim is directed against all attempts, in the modern "history of religions" school, to interpret Christianity as merely one of the numerous phases and forms of religious structure of man. According to

For Rahner, however, this reference ~~of~~ of the analysis to theology is not something that is externally and forcibly imposed subsequent to the final completion of the analysis itself. Rather this reference emerges as a dynamic orientation that is inherent in philosophy of religion itself. This final reference beyond itself to theology manifests the intrinsic relatedness of philosophy of religion, as a fully human science, to its possible fulfillment in theology (which originally depends upon, and issues from God's free act of self-revelation).

As the thematic interpretation of the existential bond ("religio") between God and man, philosophy of religion must attempt to know about both God and man; in other words, it must be formulated in terms of both

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Rahner, such attempts implicitly and a priori rule out the possibility of there being a revelation from the free God at a specifically chosen place in human history. Hearers. . . , p. 178. Hörer. . . , pp. 218-219. (For a further development of this line of thought, see Rahner's interesting discussion of the legitimacy of non-Christian religions in his essay, "Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions", Theological Investigations, V, pp. 115-135.)

Secondly Rahner presents this claim in the form of a challenge to "other forms" of Christianity which tend to renounce the "historical unequivocalness" (geschichtliche Eindeutigkeit) of the word of God by not having the courage to believe that a segment of human history, to the exclusion of other segments, is the exclusive, historically visible "place" of God's revelation to man. Hearers. . . , p. 179. Hörer. . . , p. 220.

general ontology and metaphysical anthropology. For Rahner this metaphysical anthropology, developed in continuity with the principles of general ontology, shows itself to be a preparatory ("pre-theological") theoretical foundation for a possible revealed theology because it recognizes man as that existent being who always and necessarily stands in freedom before the God of a possible revelation.<sup>2</sup> Insofar as philosophy of religion

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<sup>2</sup>Rahner actually argues that the metaphysical anthropology developed in Hearers of the Word, is for the most part identical to what he calls a "fundamental-theological anthropology", because it establishes the conditions of the possibility for man's ability to hear a revelation from God the very conditions that render man open to theology. However, one important factor that would enter into a fully constituted "fundamental-theological anthropology" is the relationship between man's spiritual transcendence and grace: while the unlimited openness and transcendence of the human spirit is a necessary pre-condition for the hearing of a possible revelation, still Rahner maintains that "the actually accomplished condition of hearing a revelation is constituted by God's free grace. Hearers. . . , p. 174. Hörer. . . . , p. 214. It has already been observed in the Introduction (see pp. 24-25) that Rahner intentionally excluded an explicit consideration of the problem of nature and grace in developing his philosophy of religion. The reason for this exclusion derives from Rahner's contention that philosophy of religion, by itself, can offer no grounds for a philosophical proof of the possibility of grace, of the "beatific vision" (see above p. 74), nor of the "supernatural order" in general. (See, Rahner, "The Concept of Mystery in Catholic Theology", Theological Investigations, IV, p. 61).

In many of his later theological writings of course, Rahner explicitly discusses the problem of the relationship between "nature and grace". In fact he explicitly develops the notion of a "supernatural existential" (see Hearers. . . , p. 10, n. 8. Hörer. . . , p. 23, n. 8) to designate the

must finally conceive of man as a finite, historical spirit who is readily open (in an "obediential potency") for a possible categorial-verbal revelation from the free God, a revelation occurring in human history and through human words, then the task of philosophy of religion is realized when it constitutes itself as "the open 'Readiness' for theology" (die offene Bereittheit für Theologie).<sup>3</sup>

However, while philosophy of religion bears an intrinsic relationship to a possible revealed theology, still the intrinsic autonomy of theology (an autonomy that derives from the fact that theology originates from the free and unmerited act of self-disclosure on the part of God himself) is respected and left uncompromised. Rahner has formulated his philosophy of religion in such a way that it consistently avoids an a priori determination of the fact and of the possible content of a free revelation from God to man. Carried out in the rigour of scientific research, philosophy of religion realizes its own proper function in attempting to set forth the conditions of the possibility for the reception, on the part

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fact that God's universal salvific will and his free offer of grace have a definite ontological effect on the human spirit, elevating man to the supernatural order. However, only a fully formulated theological anthropology, informed by actual revelation, could develop an explicit account of the relationship between man's spiritual transcendence and its enlightenment by grace.

<sup>3</sup>Hörer. . . , p. 212. Hearers. . . , p. 173.

of man, of a free revelation proceeding from God to man. Because of the freedom of God facing man, revelation can only become known and actually heard in terms of itself, even though man listens in open anticipation of the free "word" that founds and enlightens his existence.

Furthermore, since the philosophy of religion formulated in Hearers of the Word constitutes such an effective reconciliation of the problematical relationship between philosophy of religion and theology, it is evident that it is capable of offering a resolution to certain tensions and problems that appear in other perspectives that bear upon this problematic. First of all, by demonstrating that man is open to a possible revelation from God because he is an essentially historical spirit, Rahner was able to emphasize a central factor that tends to be overlooked in the usual course of Catholic fundamental theology -- the necessity for man to reckon with his own history in order to discover and to hear the Word that founds and enlightens human existence. Furthermore, by developing a metaphysical analysis of man himself in accordance with principles of a general ontology, Rahner was able to thematize the relationship between the knowledge of God that is accessible to man through metaphysical reflection, and the knowledge of God that is only accessible to man through God's own free self-revelation.

Secondly, with regard to the question about a properly conceived "Christian philosophy", Rahner maintains that his philosophy of religion is both genuinely philosophical and, at the same time, intrinsically Christian. It is philosophical in the sense that it is constructed as a systematic interpretation, using philosophical methods and concepts, of the relationships between man and God. It is intrinsically Christian in the sense that it directs man to the very threshold of theology; in other words, by virtue of its own tendency to "lose" itself in theology, such philosophy of religion does not construct a strictly self-contained "natural religion".

Finally, Rahner sees his philosophy of religion as the original unity and, therefore, as the achieved synthesis of the two extreme "types" of Protestant philosophy of religion. On the one hand, because man is understood as the historical spirit who is positively open for and actually oriented to a possible revelation from God, then revelation is not understood in the negative sense, as the criticism of all that is finite and human. On the other hand, this positive openness on the part of man in no way constitutes an a priori restriction of the content of a possible revelation from God. The essential freedom of God's revelation is preserved because revelation always appears as free and unowed.

Apart from the important perspective Hearers of the Word presents with regard to the perennial problematic surrounding the question about the relationship between philosophy of religion and theology, it is evident that by emphasizing the central position occupied by anthropology in the very midst of this problematic, Rahner was able to establish a crucial focus, a nucleus, for a continuing investigation of both theological and philosophical problems. In his later considerations of the problem of concupiscence, of natural law and formal-existential ethics, of the role of free persons in the Church, and even to an extent in his writings on Christology, Rahner systematically explores the different facets of human experience brought to light in Hearers of the Word. In fact, the insight into the "divine historicity" that is inherently associated with a free revelation from God, and the relationship of this to human history, lies behind many of Rahner's later writings about the development of Christian dogma and the history of theology.

In addition, the deep concern with the problems of man's subjectivity and freedom, addressed in terms of both metaphysical and theological anthropology, has allowed Rahner to develop a strong position that enables him to grapple directly with the problems and concerns of modern philosophy. Because much of the conflict between Christian theology and the many forms of modern atheism centers to

to a great degree upon anthropology, upon the understanding of man, Rahner has seen that a well-developed theological anthropology is a necessity if theology is to be able to widen its horizons and truly speak to men who live in the modern world.



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