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MENIGHETSFAKULTET

SURRENDER TO LIFE

A Systematic Theological Analysis of Human Kenosis in Karl Rahner's
Thoughts, with Reference to Ignatian Spirituality

Ingvild Røsok

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Supervisor: Professor Jan-Olav Henriksen

NORWEGIAN SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

Preface

This year with Karl Rahner has come to an end. It has been a great pleasure and a privilege to work with this thesis and in particular to get to know the works of Karl Rahner. It is with a humble heart that I have accomplished the challenge of dealing with his texts, and I do hope that my work gives him the honour he ought to have. His way of integrating the academic and the spiritual has been most inspiring for my own journey.

I could not have finished this thesis without help and support; practically, intellectually and spiritually. First, I want to give thanks to my supervisor, Professor Jan-Olav Henriksen. His way of guiding me through this year has been one of encouragement and convincing trust that I could do this. His immediate responses gave me the assurance of not being alone, but still being the only one to have responsibility. I needed both.

Second, I am most grateful for my husband, Rolf. His love and support has never failed, and he has been more than patient with my long periods being “mentally absent”. With his technical skills he ensured a proper layout for this thesis.

I am deeply thankful to my friend Kenneth J. Hughes SJ who suggested working with Karl Rahner in the first place. He has been following my work from a physical distance, but still has been present in spirit, in prayer and by encouraging e-mails. The last one to be mentioned and thanked is Professor Svein Rise who provided concrete suggestions regarding Rahner and his material when I asked for help in the very first preparation for the thesis.

Inspired by Ignatius and *finding God in all things*, I see the people mentioned as gifts coming from God; as well as the passion, strength, enjoyment and skills needed to accomplish my study and this thesis.

All honour and my deepest gratitude go to Him.

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List of Abbreviations

CC	Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner
HW	Hearer of the Word
ExIL	The Exercises in: St Ignatius of Loyola
LJLN	The Love of Jesus and the Love of Neighbor
SE	Rahner: Spiritual Exercises
SzT	Schriften zur Theologie
TI	Theological Investigation

Introduction

This thesis deals with the central theme of the following of Christ. The focus is on a specific and fundamental part of this following, related to the term *kenosis*. To explore the Christian origin of that term one has to turn to the great mystery of our faith: the historical event of God becoming human. In the letter to the Philippians there is a hymn describing the descent of Jesus Christ, saying that he “Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but *made himself nothing* taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.”¹

The words “made himself nothing” refers to the term of *kenosis*; describing how Jesus renounced the divine position in order to become human. *Kenosis* stems from the Greek verb κενωω which means to empty oneself.² Jesus demonstrated throughout his life a humble and obedient attitude, leading him all the way to the Cross. This attitude can properly be called a *kenotic attitude*. In the introductory words of the hymn St Paul encourages the readers to *attain the same attitude as Christ*.³ This appeal is the starting point of this thesis, where the theme of *kenosis* will be explored by analysing texts of Karl Rahner.

The research question goes as follows:

How do the transcendental theology and the Ignatian spirituality of Karl Rahner contribute to an understanding of kenosis as a following of Christ?

The key phrases *transcendental* theology and *Ignatian* spirituality will be presented further in the introductory chapters of respectively part I and part II of the thesis. The choice of using Karl Rahner as the primary source of the thesis opens the possibilities to inquire into the issue of *kenosis* from several aspects; such as ontological, mystical, spiritual and ethical. Besides, the thought of a human *kenosis* has never been examined with Karl Rahner, which opens the possibility of providing new research.⁴ As will be seen, Karl Rahner employs a variety of

¹ Phil.2:6-7; *The Holy Bible*, New International Version. The last part of the hymn correspondently describes the ascent and glory of Christ.

²The definition according to the *Lexicon of Bauer*, 537: “...of divestiture of position or prestige: of Christ who gave up the appearance of divinity and took on the form of a slave”.

³ *Ibid.* v. 5

⁴ The results of searches on key-terms in Freiburg Library’s database for secondary literature on Karl Rahner: one essay on kenotic Christology, and one dissertation on renunciation (1971), besides Brian F. Linnane’s essay “Dying with Christ”. Universitätsbibliothek Freiburg, ”Karl Rahner Sekundärliteratur”. <http://dspace.ub.uni-freiburg.de/handle/25/2>

terms describing the attitude St Paul is pointing at. He approaches the theme both within theological and spiritual writings. To understand *kenosis* as a following of Christ thus requires a search for the connection between the disciplines of theology and spirituality. Another important factor is the relation of anthropology to Christology, which is fundamental in the theology of Karl Rahner. I will examine this relation in order to develop a theoretical foundation for a spiritual and practical understanding of the human *kenosis*. A further presentation of Karl Rahner and the material for this thesis will be given after the following look at five sub questions providing the course throughout the research.

The context given in the letter to the Philippians gives reason to ask why the *kenosis* of Christ is an example to be followed, and how a human *kenosis* is to be understood. Karl Rahner's transcendental theology has the human being as the starting point. A research founded on this theology requires an understanding of his anthropology, and so the *first* sub question will be: *What are the existential conditions for a human kenosis?* The human Jesus also lived under these conditions; I therefore search the connection of anthropology and Christology by asking: *How does the kenosis of Jesus Christ affect the human being ontologically?* Does Rahner by his transcendental theology provide a key to understand how the human being in its constitution is destined for *kenosis*?

This leads to a *third* question: Insofar as a human being is called to follow Christ in his *kenosis*, *what is the character of kenosis?* An answer to this will be given in two steps: the Christology of Rahner demonstrates the *kenotic attitudes* of Jesus Christ to be followed, while the Ignatian spirituality points at different ways of being submissive to the will of God.

When approaching spirituality in part II, the question to be investigated is why and how one might attain the attitude referred to by St Paul, here denoted as a *kenotic attitude*. Karl Rahner claims that it is possible to have an immediate experience of God in daily life and in prayer.⁵ This *fourth* question is thus related to *experience*: *What is eliciting a desire for kenosis?* In ordinary thinking it seems contradictory to have a desire for something that implies renunciation or self-denying. To approach this question, I will look at the role of *prayer* by examining some of the Ignatian *Exercises*, and at the central concept of *love* in the writings of Karl Rahner. The Ignatian *Exercises* is a set of meditations and prayers intended to help persons coming to a decision regarding how to follow Christ. In what way do those *Exercises*

⁵ This will be treated in chap. 5.

motivate or elicit a desire for *kenosis*, and how is *kenosis* reflected in Karl Rahner's interpretation of *the Exercises*?

In the *fifth* and last sub question I ask: *What is the material structure of following Christ?* By asking so, the intention is to look at some ethical aspects of *kenosis*. Is the experiential character of Rahner's approach mystical rather than ethical, individualistic rather than social? Does he regard *kenosis* to be universal, or is it the decisive following that rightly can be denoted as *kenotic*? When approaching these questions, the dialectic of Rahner's theology becomes clear, which will further be treated in the discussion at the end of the thesis.

Reasons and Background

There is more than one reason for choosing *kenosis* as the theme for this thesis. The following of Christ is one of the most central issues when it comes to Christian life and ethics, but it has often been restricted to the discipline of spirituality or pastoral theology. Hans Urs von Balthasar once said that the most serious division in the history of theology was the separation of theology from spirituality.⁶ Throughout the Middle Age, the Scholastic period and the later Enlightenment, the division between the disciplines escalated. The latest century has provided some attempts at reunion, though there is still a long way to go. Karl Rahner is one of the theologians providing profound academic research without omitting the spirituality. Our time still needs his writings, and it is important to continue a work according to his 'spirit'. This thesis is one way of demonstrating that spirituality and theology belong together, enriching each other's discipline.

The more personal interest in the theme of *kenosis* emerged early in the studies from a fascination of the mystery of Incarnation and the attitude of humble love shown in the descent of Christ. Anthropological questions have also caused a lot of engagement, which led to the idea of investigating *kenosis* anthropologically. Before and during the studies I have been involved in retreat work and Ignatian spirituality. For this reason I wanted the research to include this spirituality, which was possible by turning to the works of Karl Rahner. The concern of a reunion of spirituality and theology also has relevance for the concrete work with spirituality at retreats and in the Church; where I see a need for a more profound rootedness in theology.

⁶ This is according to a lecture in Spirituality given by Paul Murray OP at MF, August 20th, 2010.

A third reason for raising the theme of *kenosis* as a following of Christ is related to a need for our contemporary time to focus on the radical challenges given in the appeal of St Paul to the Philippians. Of course, his appeal corresponds with the words of Jesus, saying that following him is to take up the cross every day.⁷ The individualistic tendency of contemporary time often results in an increasing demand for being immediately satisfied. Self-denying is too easily connected only with the negative sides, as for instance related to oppression. In this context the message of renunciation and a readiness for suffering is met with scepticism. Even within Christian communities one rarely speaks of the paradoxes implied in Jesus' word that life is found when you are ready to lose it for his sake.⁸ But a Christian culture avoiding the cross risks losing its salt.⁹ In this thesis we will see that a radical following is a risk of another category; but providing a life embedded and empowered by the promises of the grace of God.

To summarize, the intentions of this thesis are to develop a theological framework that enables actualizing the motive of the following of Christ, and to demonstrate the positive elements and the true life coming out of a healthy, Christian understanding of *kenosis*. The title *Surrender to Life* is chosen according to this intention. We will see that for Karl Rahner, self-surrender belongs to the very essence of the human being, actualizing the fullness of human nature.¹⁰ Karl Rahner, being the major source of investigation in this thesis, is capable of providing both the theological and the spiritual material needed. It seems adequate to provide a brief biography of Karl Rahner, followed by some notes on the limits of this thesis and its material.

Karl Rahner, Jesuit and Theologian

Karl Rahner was born in Freiburg in 1904, being the middle child of seven in a thoroughly Catholic family.¹¹ He entered the Jesuit community after graduating from secondary school, and there he got his formation according to Ignatian spirituality. The formation included philosophical and theological studies in Austria, Holland and Germany.¹² Although his career started with having his doctoral dissertation rejected, he soon became one of the leading

⁷ Matt. 10:38-39; Mark.8:34-35, Luke 9:23-24

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ "In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple. Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again?" Luke 14:33-34a.

¹⁰ Cf. chap. 3.6 and 4

¹¹ *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, ed. Declan Marmion and Mary E. Hines (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 2. Abbr.: CC

¹² Ibid.

theologians after the World War II.¹³ Leo O’ Donovan comments on his influence: “In a remarkable way his thought combined depth and sensitivity, witness to Christian tradition and awareness of faith’s new situation, a powerful appreciation of human suffering and an unvanquished hope for its redemption. He became at once a theologian among theologians and a pastor among pastors.”¹⁴ This position led him to be one of the experts at Vatican Council II, contributing to several important reforms. His visions and concern for the Church caused later an increasing fear for tendencies towards a pre-Conciliar mentality.¹⁵

It is not possible to refer briefly to the works of Rahner without omitting several influential components. The published works amount to more than 3500 and contain philosophical, theological and pastoral writings, prayers and lexicon works. His writings, being “immense in both depth and breadth”, often demonstrate how “his reflective theology lives from his experiential faith”.¹⁶ This is perhaps most obvious in the publications on spiritual writings, where prayers and reflections reveal a deep and honest struggling with faith and experience. According to his pupil and friend, Herbert Vorgrimler, those writings are “the key to Karl Rahner, the man and the theologian, for they are also theology...”¹⁷

Rahner’s *transcendental method* is developed throughout his two major philosophical works: *Spirit of the World* and *Hearer of the Word*.¹⁸ As we will see, the concern is to reflect on the conditions for the human being’s possibility of relating to God, while “the more theological work works out the consequences of this relationship in the concrete circumstances of life”.¹⁹ The *theological works* are dealing with all sorts of matters related to the life as a Christian and to actual matters in the Church. Most of these writings take form as essays; collected and published in the 23 volumes *Theological Investigations*. Even the apparently “systematic” presentation in *Foundation of Christian Faith* is based on lectures given to students, later reworked for publication.²⁰

¹³ The dissertation was published and became his foundational philosophical work: *Spirit in the World*, trans. William Dych (New York: Continuum, 1994).

¹⁴ Leo J. O’ Donovan: *A World of Grace: an introduction to the themes and foundations of Karl Rahner’s theology*, ed. Leo J. O’ Donovan (Washington DC: University Press 1995) Preface ix.

¹⁵ CC, 4.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Herbert Vorgrimler: *Understanding Karl Rahner: an Introduction to his Life and Thoughts* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1986) , 2.

¹⁸ CC, 3-4.

¹⁹ Ibid., 3

²⁰ Karl Rahner: *Foundations of Christian Faith: an Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, trans. William V. Dych (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1978), preface xiii.

The Ignatian influence of Rahner's writings will be treated in part II of this thesis. It is in particular one essay on Ignatius of Loyola that reveals the debt he acknowledges to Ignatius.²¹ We will later see that some commentators question this influence. Others regard this essay to show how "the mystical dimension he identifies in Ignatius presumably underlies his own spirituality." There is however no doubt that there is a mystical dimension in Rahner's writings, coming forth in his frequent return to the experience of God. Thus, one of his most famous statements goes: "The Christian of the future will be a mystic or he will not exist at all".²² He thinks, contrary to the neo-scholastic understanding of his time, that grace can be experienced.²³ The central theme of God's self-communication to the human being and his conviction of the universal experience of this, leave him open to critique. This we will see in our last discussion. The following paragraph will say more about Karl Rahner's writings, related to the material chosen for this thesis.

Material and Limits

The research question already denotes some of the limits of this work: it is the specific understanding of *kenosis* as the following of Christ that is to be investigated here, as it appears in the works of Rahner. Although there will be some reflections on ethical implications, it is the *existential character* and the *attitudes* of kenosis that is given priority. Reflections on the spirituality of kenosis are limited to the Ignatian tradition and some specific reflections related to Rahner's transcendental theology. Furthermore, since this is a systematic-theological analysis, there are several aspects of kenosis that will not be treated at all. Of those can be mentioned the historical understanding, including different mystical approaches to kenosis, besides implications related to questions within psychology and philosophy. When it comes to the works of Karl Rahner, they admittedly rely on a certain philosophical basis. I acknowledge this basis without making account for it in any details, relating mostly to his theological and spiritual writings.²⁴

Using Karl Rahner as the primary source gives as many challenges as possibilities. His writings are very rich, but not systematic. The style is often ad hoc, which is why most of his

²¹ CC, 5. The essay mentioned is: Karl Rahner: "Ignatius of Loyola Speaks to a Modern Jesuit" in *Ignatius of Loyola*, ed. Paul Imhof, trans. Rosaleen Ockenden (London: Collins, 1979).

²² Karl Rahner: *Theological Investigations* Vol. 1-23, Pdf-version (Limerick: Mary Immaculate Collage) 19.7; *Schriften zur Theologie* Vol. 1-16 (Einsiedeln: Benziger Verlag, 1962-1984), vol.14,161.

²³ CC, 5.

²⁴ There is also a reason to question the emphasis of his early, philosophical works. Karen Kilby argues for the possibility of a nonfoundationalist reading of Rahner. A debate on this is also without the scope of this thesis. I allow myself, however, to focus mostly on his theological and spiritual writings. Karen Kilby: *Karl Rahner, Theology and Philosophy* (London/New York: Routledge, 2004).

works are presented as essays; sometimes ending with more questions than answers. Four books are chosen as primary sources, supplemented by a number of essays. The main sources in the first part of the thesis are *Hearer of the Word* and *Foundations of Christian Faith*²⁵. In the second part Rahner's interpretation of *the Exercises – Spiritual Exercises* – must be seen as the main source together with *The Love of Jesus and the Love of Neighbor*.²⁶ Several essays are used; the list of those is provided in the Bibliography. Due to Rahner's special strategy of work, it is often within the essays one can find concrete answers to specific questions. They are too important not to be taken into account, but on the other hand a thesis like this must delimit the amount. The risk in choosing only a few essays is of course to ignore others. On the other hand, delimiting is a way of keeping focus on the chosen issue. I can for this reason not claim to account for all the aspects of particular questions, but still the material chosen is broad enough to come to a thorough conclusion on the research question.

Among the secondary literature consulted, three authors should be mentioned in particular. Philip Endean offers a profound research on *Karl Rahner and Ignatian Spirituality* that is most helpful for the second part of my thesis.²⁷ Brian F. Linnane is, as far as I know, the only English-written research on Rahner with a similar topic, though not directly on kenosis.²⁸ His doctoral dissertation *Rahnerian Christology as an anthropological foundation for a theocentric ethic* is an important source for specific parts of this thesis, together with his article "Dying with Christ". Furthermore, Marmion's article "Rahner and his Critics: Revisiting the Dialogue" is a helpful guide to the critics of Rahner, used in the closing discussion.²⁹ For other secondary literature, supportive and critical, I refer to the list in the Bibliography.

²⁵ Karl Rahner: *Hearer of the Word*, trans. Joseph Donceel, ed. Andrew Tallon (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1994). Abbr.: *HW*.

²⁶ Karl Rahner: *Spiritual Exercises*, trans. Kenneth Baker (London: Sheed and Ward Ltd, 1967) Abbr.: *SE*; *The Love of Jesus and the Love of Neighbor*, trans. Robert Barr (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1983). Abbr.: *LJLN*

²⁷ Philip Endean: *Karl Rahner and Ignatian Spirituality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

²⁸ I have not found any published work on Rahner and human kenosis at all. This unpublished dissertation of Linnane treats the question of a theocentric ethics, where Rahner's understanding of dying with Christ is central. The published article referred to is based on parts of the dissertation. Linnane, Brian F: "Rahnerian Christology as an Anthropological Foundation for a Theocentric Ethic", Ph.D diss., (Yale University, 1994.); "Dying with Christ: Rahner's Ethics of Discipleship", *The Journal of Religion* 81, no. 2 (April 2001).

²⁹ Declan Marmion: "Karl Rahner and his Critics: Revisiting the Dialogue", *Australian EJournal of Theology*, (Feb. 2005 Issue 4), http://dlibrary.acu.edu.au/research/theology/ejournal/aejt_4/marmion.htm (Accessed August 23, 2010).

Linguistic notes

Karl Rahner is often regarded to be complicated, and one of the reasons seems to be the way he uses language. His rather lengthy sequences do not always allow for full quotations, which regrettably leads to quotations breaking up the often poetic style of Rahner. Though sometimes complicated, Rahner's language is very rich. Hence, he describes central terms with a variety of words. The most obvious term to mention is the different ways of expressing *kenosis*: surrender, self-surrendering, abandon, renounce, self-denying or “dying with Christ” – *they all are synonymous to the term kenosis*. Although there are nuances and shifts of emphasis, it is not possible to distinguish those words in Rahner's writings. On the other hand, Rahner sometimes uses *one* term in different ways, as with the central term *transcendental*, which is challenging when interpreting his texts. For this reason, the different meanings of this particular term will be explored separately.

My thesis is based on English translations of Rahner's works. Due to different translators, both British and American, some words are spelled differently in quotations than in my text that follows the British standard. Some varieties might also occur in ways of translating Rahnerian terms. A technical note regarding *Theological Investigations*: this is an electronic source without adequate page references. For this reason, every cited passage has an additional reference to volume and page according to the German edition *Schriften zur Theologie*.

Several decades ago, when most of Rahner's writings occurred, there was not the same attention given to inclusive language. I follow this non-inclusive language in all quotations, but am altering to inclusive language when it comes to my own texts. Where he writes “man”, I use “human being” and neuter pronouns. The exception is references to God, where I consequently follow Rahner, using “he”. This is not an expression of denoting God as male rather than female, but is a choice of convenience, making the language more fluent.

The Way Forward

As already indicated, I intend with this thesis to traverse the lines of systematic theology and theological spirituality. With my theme of *kenosis* this is both convenient and necessary. It requires investigating both Rahnerian Christology and anthropology as a basis for the spirituality of the human *kenosis*. There is of course a challenge of keeping the focus; both

anthropology and Christology have several central aspects that cannot be treated here. Likewise, the spirituality of *kenosis* is restricted to *parts* of the Ignatian spirituality.

The thesis is presented in two parts according to the disciplines of theology and spirituality. Due to the source of Karl Rahner, there is a need of a thorough presentation of his transcendental theology, which will be given in the first part. Here I will proceed from *making account for* the anthropology and Christology, to *analyse and reflect on* their mutual interconnection.

Though the second part treats *kenosis* mainly from a spiritual point of view, the transcendental thinking of Rahner will continue to influence the material and analysis throughout the whole thesis. This is in line with the material of Rahner; one does not find any absolute distinctions between theology and spirituality in his writings. I will benefit in this when *analysing* the material of part II; letting the two disciplines mutually enlighten each other.

The way forward starts out with a brief chapter investigating the term “transcendental”, in order to clarify how the term is understood in the theology of Karl Rahner. In *chapter 2*, called theological anthropology, we will follow Karl Rahner’s understanding of the constitution of the human being. What is it to be a subject and *what are the existential conditions for a human kenosis*? Karl Rahner talks about God as the Absolute being, communicating himself in the depths of human beings. Thus the concept of God’s self-communication is for Rahner deeply related to a transcendental theology, which implies that we in this section also will look briefly at the relationship of nature to grace.

In *chapter 3* we turn to Christology, mainly focusing on the human life of Jesus. Based on the understanding from the previous chapter, this one continues to look at the Christ-event from an evolutionary point of view. Karl Rahner sees Jesus as the climax of this evolution, being the one who fulfils the nature of the human being. By studying Jesus’ self-consciousness we will see that Jesus was living under the same conditions as other human beings. He was nevertheless unique, and in the section called Incarnation and the Human we will have a closer look at what this means for humanity in general. In the second part of this chapter, we will come closer to the concrete basis for understanding the attitudes involved in *kenosis*, according to our question for *the character of kenosis*. This is done by searching for *kenosis* in the life of Jesus Christ, before treating the obvious *kenotic* act involved in his death.

The two main chapters of anthropology and Christology are followed by a reflection offered in *chapter 4*. I will discuss how the relationship of anthropology and Christology can be seen as the framework needed for understanding kenosis anthropologically, and thus come to a preliminary answer to the second sub-question: *How does the kenosis of Jesus Christ affect the human being ontologically?*

In part II with the heading “Spirituality”, I will begin in *chapter 5* by examining how Karl Rahner understands religious experience, or said with his term: the immediate experience of God. Experience is a key-term in spirituality, and it is a key to understanding the theology of Karl Rahner as well. Furthermore, the next chapters to follow take their material from Ignatian spirituality, whose main thought is to “find God in all things”. *Chapter 6* is a brief introduction to this spirituality in general and a presentation of three chosen Ignatian Exercises, which I call “*three keys to kenosis*”. These exercises demonstrate that following Christ is the central theme of the whole process of *the Exercises*. Then, in *chapter 7* we will explore more thoroughly how Karl Rahner interprets the concerns of Ignatius regarding these particular exercises. We will look for the elements pointing at *the character of kenosis*, and will see that Rahner in some reflections draws on his transcendental theology as well. For Rahner it is important to point to the costs of following Christ. One has to take up the cross of Christ, which means *a readiness for kenosis*. Searching the will of God is another crucial element of those exercises. During these chapters we will find answers to the third and fourth sub-questions: *What is the character of kenosis*, and *what is eliciting a desire for kenosis?*

The last and well-known prayer of *the Exercises* is called “The Contemplation for Attaining Love”. For the last part of *chapter 7* we continue to explore Karl Rahner’s understanding of love; first the concept of “the Unity of the Love of God and the Love of Neighbor”, before turning to the surrendering nature of love.

The themes of love are bridging the chapters on Ignatian spirituality with the following chapter concerning what *kenosis* looks like in practice. *Chapter 8* thus treats *the structure of following Christ*, corresponding to my last sub question. There we will see that Karl Rahner only hesitantly recommends guidelines for the concrete following of Christ, because according to how he understands the essence of the following of Christ, one cannot equate following with imitating. Still, he gives examples on issues and attitudes that Christians ought to consider, which he presents as different ways of living in communion. I present some of these examples and ask how they can be seen as a practicing of *kenosis*, or whether they

rather are expressions of ordinary human social engagement? This question opens the discussion on how to see the connection of the transcendental and the categorical with Rahner. At the end of chapter 8 I also present what Rahner in an essay calls Genuine Renunciation; categorizing this within the framework of the Evangelical Counsels. I ask how this can be united with his view on the universal call of surrendering. These questions are followed up in the reflection on the spirituality of *kenosis* given in *chapter 9*. Here the strands from part II are summoned, and I reflect on how Ignatian spirituality is one way of understanding the seemingly tension between the transcendental and the categorical in Rahner's theology.

The discussion in *chapter 10* takes into account some critical voices raised against Karl Rahner and his theology. There are four chosen issues framing this discussion. The first concerns the question whether the theology of Rahner is anthropocentric rather than theocentric. I turn to Brian F. Linnane who in his dissertation compares the theocentric ethics of James Gustafson and Karl Rahner. The second issue is about the transcendental and the categorical with Rahner, now treated in a broader sense, in dialogue with two former friends of Rahner: von Balthasar and J.B. Metz. Then we will meet Molnar's severe critique of Karl Rahner's trust in the experience of God, which leads to a dialogue with G. Lindbeck and D. Marmion on how this critique can be met. The last issue concerns the central theme of love; some of Rahner's commentators disagree with his way of interpreting the double commandment of love, thinking that he fails by not giving primacy to the love for God. W. Jeanrond does, on the other hand, regard Rahner's theology of love to be diverse and rich. In *chapter 11*, I sum up the most important results of this research. Taking into account the critique from the previous chapter, I argue that Karl Rahner's transcendental theology and Ignatian spirituality provide a rich and challenging contribution to an understanding of the human *kenosis*.

As the thesis proceeds, it demonstrates that the appeal of St Paul is still living. The transcendental theology of Karl Rahner ensures an optimistic belief in the possibilities for the human being to relate to God. It is through a surrendering to "the incomprehensible mystery" of God that the human being reaches its fullness. Jesus Christ has fully revealed this through his life and death. Through a personal and loving relationship to him there grows a desire for *kenosis* – the radical way of following him.

PART ONE – THEOLOGY

The first part of this thesis aims at developing a theological framework for understanding the connection of Christ's *kenosis* and human *kenosis*. This requires a presentation of the main thoughts both of Rahner's theological anthropology and his Christology, which will show how deeply connected they are. According to Rahner himself, "Christology is the beginning and the end of anthropology".³⁰ Like Rahner, I take the human being as a starting point, presenting some specific aspects of Rahner's anthropology in chapter 2.³¹ One main issue will be to look at the necessary conditions for the human being to be able to hear and receive the word of God, which is fundamental to understand the *existential conditions for a human kenosis* and for the Incarnation as well.³² While turning to Christology in chapter 3, I will explore how Rahner's transcendental approach to Christology accounts for a universal meaning to the life and death of Christ. More aspects of the Incarnation will be considered further. How does Rahner interpret this kenotic act, and *how does it affect the human being ontologically?* While treating the kenotic attitudes of Jesus Christ, I deal with the question: *What is the character of kenosis?* Emphases are given to obedience and self-surrender, before looking at *death* as a key to understand *kenosis* with Rahner.

The last chapter of part I will summarize and discuss the connections found between Rahner's anthropology and Christology, which is to be the framework for understanding *kenosis* anthropologically. In what way can the *kenotic* acts and attitudes of Christ be the foundation and guiding principle for Christian discipleship?

Before investigating the different aspects of Rahner's transcendental theology and Christology, it is necessary to clarify the diverse meanings of the key term transcendental. Hence, the following chapter starts out defining the Rahnerian use of that term.

³⁰ *TI* 1.5: "Current Problems in Christology"; *SzT* 1, 205

³¹ He usually starts with presenting the anthropology, as in *FCF*.

³² Rahner argues why he is treating Christology under the heading of Theological anthropology: Christology more easily avoids the appearance, otherwise not easily avoidable, of the mythological and the miraculous, when the Incarnation of the Logos ... is seen as the supreme realization of that fundamental relationship which prevails between God and the spiritual creation in general. *TI* 1.2; *SzT* 2, 38 n.1.

1. The Term Transcendental

While reading Rahner, one cannot avoid meeting the term transcendental in various combinations. He talks for instance about transcendental conditions, transcendental experiences, human transcendental and transcendental revelation. For those familiar with Kant and his famous term transcendental, Rahner's different combinations and use easily can be misunderstood.³³ To understand the different meanings of all such phrases, it is necessary to make distinctions regarding Rahner's own ways of employing the term, and also to be aware of the way in which others employ it of him. In the following I will sort out some of the different ways of understanding the term, both the traditional, Kantian way, and the more specific Rahnerian ways.

As mentioned earlier, the word "transcend" means to surpass, to go beyond or above. Thus one might expect "transcendental" to relate directly to that which goes beyond something. However, in the tradition coming from Immanuel Kant, the term has little or nothing to do with that. He introduced another meaning that has been exceedingly influential, where he relates the word to a distinct way of understanding knowledge. He would call the knowledge transcendental "which is occupied not so much with objects as with the mode of our knowledge of objects insofar as this mode of knowledge is to be possible a priori."³⁴ In that way the term refers to an investigation of the subject's constitution, of what comes before the knowing. He then goes further by transferring the term to those things which are discovered in such an investigation. Those things are said to be the a priori conditions of the possibility of human experience, known as the transcendental conditions of the possibility of experience. It is worthwhile noticing that Kant's purpose for such an investigation of knowledge is to delimit what cannot be known. When he sometimes uses the term transcendent, it has the opposite meaning, and it is always used in a negative sense: "If... one properly understands the transcendental conditions of the possibility of experience, and the role they play, then one will know that no 'transcendent' knowledge, no knowledge going beyond experience, beyond space and time, is possible."³⁵ Considering the immense influence of Kant on this term, the critics and discussions on Rahner's combination of e.g. "transcendental experience" is understandable.³⁶ In Kantian understanding, those words cannot belong together without

³³ I follow Karen Kilby: *Karl Rahner – Theology and Philosophy*, 32-37.

³⁴ Kant quoted in Kilby, 33.

³⁵ Kilby, 34.

³⁶ Wolfhart Pannenberg: *Systematic Theology Vol. I*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (London/New York: T & T Clark International, 2004), 114 note 166.

sounding like a contradiction. So how are we to understand Rahner and his way of using the term in so many combinations?

To simplify it, one can say that Rahner employs the term in two ways. First, he actually does employ the term in a Kantian way, to talk of investigation and the results of such investigation.³⁷ Second, he employs the term in the way one could naturally suppose – in the meaning of that which goes beyond something. In that sense he can talk about the transcendental experience, meaning those experiences that transcend and reach beyond particular, finite objects. What characterizes Rahner, then, is to combine those understandings. “According to Rahner if one undertakes a transcendental investigation in the broadly Kantian sense, then, pace Kant, what one will discover is precisely that our experience has a transcendental dimension...in the non-Kantian sense.”³⁸ Another way to put this is to say that Rahner employs the term transcendental both in a formal sense and in a material sense. The former is when he refers to the conditions of the possibility of experience (or action, knowledge), as with Kant, only somewhat broader. The latter is referring to our inner movement or openness that reaches out beyond all finite.

In spite of all efforts to categorize the ways Rahner employs this term, there will always be a need of precaution while reading and interpreting his texts. In his discussions of transcendental theology, he often shifts without warning from one meaning to another.³⁹ During the following chapters I will for that reason pay attention to these distinctions when interpreting Rahner’s texts. When now turning to his theological anthropology, I will first follow his formal, *transcendental inquiry* into the human subject, which will lead to a closer look at the material, *transcendental experience* of the human being.

2. Theological Anthropology

In his essay “Theology and Anthropology”, Rahner argues for an anthropological change in contemporary theology.⁴⁰ I will start out by presenting some of those arguments as a foundation to understand both his stress on the transcendental term and consequently on

³⁷ E.g.: “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.” *TI* 9.2: “Theology and Anthropology”; *SzT* 8, 44. As Kilby notes in her comment, this is Kantian only in a broad sense. Rahner adds action to knowledge as one condition of the possibility of experience. Kilby, 138.

³⁸ Kilby, 33.

³⁹ Kilby, 35.

⁴⁰ *TI* 9.2: “Theology and Anthropology”.

anthropology. Then, the first step to understand *kenosis* with Rahner is to investigate the *existential conditions for a human kenosis*. We have to understand how Rahner looks at the human being as such, its conditions and possibility of hearing the Word of God and to *respond* adequately, since *kenosis* as following Christ is to be seen as a responding act. In this thesis there is neither place nor need to go into the philosophical arguments treating ontological and epistemological questions. However, some basic terms will be briefly presented in the section *Human being as Person and Subject*. Then we will learn more about the transcendental aspect in *Human Being as Transcendent* and by having a closer look at Rahner's concept of *Vorgriff*. Another important aspect within Rahner's anthropology is the concepts of *Freedom and Responsibility*, which will give a relevant perspective on the conditions for *kenosis* as a free and responding act. The last part of this section will deal with what Rahner calls *God's Self-communication*, leading to the chapter on Christology that shows God's ultimate giving of himself in Christ.

2.1. Reasons for a Transcendental Theology

It might be seen as a contradiction letting anthropology be the starting point of theology, since theology ought to be theocentric and not anthropocentric. A transcendental theology is necessarily "anthropocentric" because it implies both an investigation of the human being's conditions of having knowledge of God, and at the same time a transcendent openness reaching beyond itself.⁴¹ But according to Rahner there is a necessary connection, not a contradiction, between anthropology and theology: "As soon as man is understood as the being that is absolutely transcendent in respect of God, 'anthropocentricity' and 'theocentricity' in theology are not opposites but strictly one and the same thing, seen from two sides. Neither of the two aspects can be comprehended at all without the other."⁴²

Equally, this transcendental investigation of the human being's conditions must not be seen as opposed to the material content of the theological object in question.⁴³ Neither can this content be deduced from the subject's transcendental conditions; instead the two aspects have to be seen together. In Christology, for instance, one has to understand both the human being

⁴¹ Cf. chap.1.2.

⁴² *TI* 9.2; *SzT* 8, 44.

⁴³ In *Hearer of the Word* one main issue is to explain why it is so: "It will be our task to show how there belongs to our essential makeup a positive openness for an eventual revelation of God, therefore for theology, without admitting that the content of this revelation is only the objective correlate of this openness and may be determined by it." *HW*, 19.

as being *a priori* oriented towards God – searching the salvation, and at the same time this human being has to be confronted with Jesus Christ as the historic Saviour.⁴⁴ “One finds that in theology the *a priori* character of the subject and the *a posteriori* qualities of the historical object enjoy an exclusive and unique relationship.”⁴⁵

Rahner further mentions three main reasons why such an anthropological approach of theology is *necessary*. The first is given by the nature of the case, the second relates to the contemporary situation and the third has, most of all, apologetic reasons. We will have a closer look at the first one, before briefly mentioning the two others.

When studying theology, it is according to the nature of the field that we also deal with questions about the relationship of God with his Creature. We have to do with the interrelation of the objective and the subjective side of knowledge, and the person studying is the very subject of this relationship. Theology also has to deal with the philosophical foundation of its questions. In theology “... every question concerning any object whatever also formally implies the question of the knowing subject.”⁴⁶ Rahner does not indicate, however, that the content of faith is to be found within the human being. His concern is to find in the human being the *possibility of receiving revelation* as the Word from God. For him, revelation is about salvation, and therefore theology is essentially salvation theology.⁴⁷ Theology is related to the essence of the human being and its future salvation. And “only those things can belong to human’s salvation which, when lacking, injure his being and wholeness.”⁴⁸ That is why it is of utmost importance to understand not only the content of revelation, but also the human being’s possibilities of receiving revelation and to respond to it. In that way *receiving* is the presupposition for any knowledge of revelation and so Rahner says that “the most objective reality of salvation is at the same time necessarily the most subjective: the direct relationship of the subject with God through God himself.”⁴⁹ Everything of significance for salvation must be illuminated by referring it back to the transcendental being, without *deducing* the significance *from* the transcendental being. We will later see that Rahner defines abandonment to be the essence of the human being.⁵⁰ According to the

⁴⁴ Rahner prefers to call this “an orientation towards the absolute Saviour”, see chap. 3.2

⁴⁵ *TI* 9.2; *SzT* 8, 45.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁵⁰ See chap. 3.3.

argumentation above it thus follows that abandoning, one of the many words denoting *kenosis*, is related to the salvation of the human being.

The contemporary situation is for Rahner related to the challenge followed by philosophy's transcendental anthropological change of direction since e.g. Descartes, Kant and German Idealism - and up to modern Phenomenology, Existentialism and Fundamental Ontology.⁵¹ Theology of today has to meet the challenges coming from modern philosophy without allowing it to become a hindrance to seeing the specific Christian of this epoch of modern culture. In this way Rahner highlights the need of speaking of God in ways corresponding to the needs of time.

To meet this challenge Rahner tries to find a basis from an apologetic point of view. It is not sufficient to refer to dogmas and verbal proclamation; people of today are not compelled by words appealing to the fact of revelation.⁵² They need to see the connection between dogma and their own life. Theology of today thus has to elucidate this *correspondence of dogma and human experience*. Such connection is possible, in Rahner's view, because the human being's "nature" is "constitutively an inner moment of the reality or dynamism of grace".⁵³ To understand more of this, we have to continue exploring how Rahner understands this "nature" of the human being.

2.2. Human Being as Person and Subject

In *Foundation of Christian Faith*, after the first chapter of introduction, Rahner starts out with what he reckons to be the presupposition for the intelligibility of Christianity. His concern is as presented above: we have to understand what a *human being is* in order to see the meaning of revelation, the redemption – the message. All assertions of Christianity imply that the human being is *person* and *subject*, and hence our understanding of Christianity has to include an explicit meaning of these concepts.⁵⁴

Rahner appeals to our experience when explaining what a person is, and he counts on the "good will" of the hearer (or reader), because the word contains more than they signify.⁵⁵ As

⁵¹ *TI* 9.2, *SzT* 8, 56.

⁵² *TI* 9.2; *SzT* 8, 59.

⁵³ Anne Carr: "Theology and Experience in the Thought of Karl Rahner" in *The Journal of Religion* 53, (1973 No.3), 371.

⁵⁴ *FCF*, 26.

⁵⁵ Anne Carr: "Starting with the Human" in: *A world of Grace*, 19.

human beings we all have a great variety of experiences that are forming our personhood, and there are different sciences investigating all the influential parts of our lives. Rahner goes beyond all these particular experiences and sciences to search the basic experience that expresses the totality of our being. This is the experience of subjectivity, an “experience so profound and yet so constant that it can remain unnoticed in our lives.”⁵⁶ What, then, does this experience consist of? It is about the feeling of self-possession and responsibility. The human being could want to shift the responsibility for itself and its experiences to something outside of self, but he or she cannot avoid the fact that it is *he/she* who owns the experience, and that *he/she* is the one to perform whatever he/she does, knowingly and willingly.⁵⁷ To be subject implies an awareness of the totality of life through all these different experiences.

“Subjectivity is there, co-present in all individual experience as its prior ground, although it eludes the exact definitions which we can give to the particular parts of our experience.”⁵⁸ Through it all, the person possesses itself in a conscious returning to itself. He/she knows to be the being that owns the life as a whole, and this is what Rahner calls *self-presence*.⁵⁹ In this self-presence lies an important aspect of *kenosis*. According to Rahner it is only by a total surrendering to God that one really returns to self: “...such radical self-discovery of the subject is possible in the unconditional surrender to the mystery which we call God – a surrender which comprehends the whole of existence.”⁶⁰ We will return to the relationship of surrendering and the coming to self throughout the thesis.

To know oneself as a subject is also to relate to the world in which one exists, in detaching oneself from other objects. “We exist in the world as spiritual beings because our existence is not completely absorbed or immersed in the world, for we retain and possess ourselves in this capacity for self-presence.”⁶¹ Notwithstanding the natural and genetic boundaries to the world, we are not entirely determined by it, but due to our self-possession we know ourselves to be both free and responsible. Because we are free and self-conscious; we so to speak exist beyond the world and its causes, and thus transcend it.⁶²

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ *FCF*, 30.

⁵⁸ Carr in: *A world of Grace*, 20.

⁵⁹ *HW*, 28.

⁶⁰ *TI* 17.8; *SzT* 12, 437.

⁶¹ William W. Dych: “Theology in a New Key” in *A World of Grace*, 5.

⁶² Ibid., 6.

Thus, according to Rahner, to be “person” implies self-possession of the subject in a conscious and free relationship to the totality of life.⁶³ To possess oneself is to detach oneself from other objects and in freedom be able to *transcend* the world. In the following section, we will explore further the essential Rahnerian understanding of the human being as transcendent.

2.3. Human Being as Transcendent

Rahner is of the opinion that transcendence is present in every ordinary experience because human beings can place everything into a question.⁶⁴ This radical questioning belongs to its basic makeup; the human being *has to* ask questions about itself.⁶⁵ But whenever a question finds its answer, another matter of question occurs. Rahner therefore states that the human being *is* a question, as shown here in his characteristic, poetic language: “Man is not the unquestioning and unquestioned infinity of reality. He is the question which rises up before him, empty, but really and inescapably, and which can never be settled and never adequately answered by him.”⁶⁶

To *be* a question, then, is to always search beyond ourselves in a search for the answers we will never be able to find by ourselves. We ask about ourselves due to the consciousness of subjectivity. The questioning is thus connected with the awareness that the subject is more than the sum of each single explanation.⁶⁷ We are always and necessarily searching for the ground of our being. This is, according to Rahner, due to a consciousness of human’s origin: “Man experiences himself precisely as subject and person insofar as he becomes conscious of himself as the product of what is radically foreign to him.”⁶⁸ However, this consciousness is not complete. If it were, the questions would have been superfluous.⁶⁹ But the human being continues to ask questions about his or her origin, the meaning of life and about being as such. Even the fact that sciences as anthropology and psychology exist, signifies our need of exploring into our selves.

⁶³ *FCF*, 30.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁶⁵ *HW*, 40.

⁶⁶ *FCF*, 32.

⁶⁷ *FCF*, 31.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁶⁹ *HW*, 40.

Rahner sees the need for questioning as both a sign of the self-presence and of the human being's finiteness: "When we feel that we have to inquire about being, we show the finiteness of our spirit in such a way, however, that the question itself reveals that being is, of itself, self-presence, luminosity, the original unity of knowing and being."⁷⁰

This passage introduces some more terms which might need further clarification. The most important to this thesis is "the finiteness of our spirit".⁷¹ This phrase gives two important characteristics of the human being: a human being is *finite*, and a human being is *spirit*. We will soon return to an understanding of the human being as spirit. Regarding finiteness, we saw above how this is shown by our everlasting questioning. Of course we are also confronted by this finiteness both in spirit and body in many situations during our daily life. We fail in relationships, we compete at work, we get tired and we are well aware of the limit of our lifetime. However, in acknowledging these limitations, we open ourselves to search for the ground of our being, by asking about origin and meaning.

This openness is a necessary condition for the possibility of revelation:

...human nature must possess an openness for the utterance of ultimate being in the luminous word. This openness is an *a priori* presupposition for the possibility of hearing such a word... To say it in one word, the human person is spirit. The transcendence toward being as such constitutes the basic makeup of human beings.⁷²

Rahner is here claiming that transcendence is a basic element of our constitution; hence it is not something we can choose or not choose to posit. However, it is fully possible, and not unusual, to overlook or to evade this transcendental experience. As with the experience of subjectivity, the transcendental experience is not an experience alongside other experiences, but rather an element within all other experiences. By not being a particular experience, it is easily overlooked. There are several reasons why people more or less consciously evade this experience of transcendence. Most people do this by living at a distance from themselves by being occupied with concrete matters in the world which they can control. Some people leave the ultimate question in silence, or they suppress it out of despair.⁷³

Two other elements from the passage quoted above are significant for understanding the importance of the term transcendence with Rahner.

⁷⁰ *HW*, 40.

⁷¹ The phrase "unity of knowing and being" refers to Rahner's interpretation of Thomistic metaphysics in *Hearer of the Word*, chap. II. "Knowing, in its original nature, is the self-presence of being... For Thomas, to know is an activity by which the knower returns into itself, resulting, therefore, in a self-presence". *HW*, 33.

⁷² *HW*, 41.

⁷³ *FCF*, 32-33.

Firstly, he claims that the transcendence, the openness is an “*a priori* presupposition for the possibility of hearing such a word”. One main issue in Rahner’s transcendental theology is to establish an understanding of the possibility of hearing “the word” – to be able to receive revelation. *Hearing* the word is the first presupposition for responding and relating to God. For this reason it is also the presupposition for *kenosis*, because *kenosis* is a responding act.

Secondly, Rahner is also suggesting that the transcendence has a specific direction; it is “transcendence toward being as such”. This is based on his understanding of *being*, as developed in *Hearer of the Word*.⁷⁴ In his theological writings, Rahner transfers these concepts of “absolute being” or “ultimate being” more directly to the Christian concept of God. While grasping our finiteness, we become aware of, and search for the infinite and absolute being that might encompass our finite being. The transcendental experience is thus to be seen as a necessary openness towards God as the ground of our being, a basic, but often unthematic experience.⁷⁵ We have already mentioned the surrender to this mystery as one aspect of *kenosis*. It corresponds, as we will see, to the transcendental and often unthematic experience of relating to God - the ground of our being.⁷⁶ Rahner explains the human conditions that make this possible, by employing the term “Vorgriff”.

2.4. Vorgriff

Rahner’s concept of Vorgriff is controversial and not easily translated into one single word. I choose the translation pre-apprehension, as used in *Foundation of Christian Faith*, though somewhat hesitantly.⁷⁷ There is no reason to account for the actual dispute here; the point is to get to know the basic meaning of the concept, to better see how Rahner understands human beings as oriented towards God.

The point for Rahner seems to be to explain *why* the human being is to be seen as transcendental. How is human nature constituted and on what is it grounded? He says that the human being is transcendent “*insofar* as all of his knowledge and all of his conscious activity

⁷⁴ *Hörer des Wortes*, published in 1941 follows closely upon *Geist in Welt* from 1939. Rahner developed in these books a new understanding of Thomas Aquinas’ conception of our relationship to the Absolute. He was influenced both by Joseph Maréchal’s interpretation of Aquinas and the terminology from Martin Heidegger. Cf. Translator’s preface in *HW*, vi.

⁷⁵ “Transcendence strictly as such knows only God and nothing else... Transcendence exists only by opening itself beyond itself, and, to put it in biblical language, it is in its origin and from the very beginning the experience of being known by God himself”. *FCF*, 58.

⁷⁶ See chap. 5, 8.2.2, 9.

⁷⁷ In the reputable English version of *Hearer of the Word*, (by Donceel), the editor accounts in detail for the difficulties of translating Vorgriff. He regards “anticipation” to be the safest translation. See *HW* intro., xiv.

is grounded in a pre-apprehension (*Vorgriff*) of ‘being’ as such.”⁷⁸ It is important to stress the ‘pre’ in the term, because this is something unthematic within the subject, the underlying condition for having knowledge about the infinite reality and of being.⁷⁹ To be conscious of being as such is the presupposition for the human’s self-presence and its reaching out for the infinite, and as such it is a presupposition for *kenosis*. Without a consciousness of being and the transcendent openness described above, there would be no conditions in the human being for the kenotic act. The surrendering implied in *kenosis* presupposes an understanding that the human being and its pre-apprehension are grounded on something other than itself.

On what is this pre-apprehension grounded, from where does the consciousness of being come? Rahner argues that it does not give any sense to claim, as someone does, that consciousness of being is grounded in nothingness. “Nothingness cannot be the term of this pre-apprehension, cannot be what draws and moves and sets in motion that reality which man experiences as his real life and not as nothingness.”⁸⁰ On the contrary, there has to be someone or something that causes this movement towards the infinite horizon. According to Rahner, this movement is caused by what he calls ‘being in an absolute sense’. This is about the “infinite horizon of being making itself manifest”.⁸¹ In other words, God is manifesting himself in the depths of the subject, causing awareness of its being and of being as such. When a human being experiences itself as a subject, it is nevertheless not in the sense of *absolute* subject, but in the sense of *receiving* being. To receive being is to receive *grace*, Rahner says.⁸² In this way, he is directly referring the constitution of the subject to God. In *Hearer of the Word* he states firmly: “The *Vorgriff* aims at God”.⁸³ Hence, pre-apprehension is the condition that makes it possible to reach out for God, because through the pre-apprehension we continually transcend everything toward pure being.⁸⁴ Seeing pre-apprehension from this point of view, it can hardly be distinguished from the term *transcendental*, other than as coming prior to the transcendental experience, as a *given* power to come to oneself and live the life in a free relationship with God.⁸⁵

⁷⁸ *FCF*, 33, first emphasis added, next by author.

⁷⁹ On *Vorgriff* as ‘knowledge’, see *HW*, 47ff.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* In *Hearer of the Word* he refers among others to Heidegger who says: “the transcendence which serves as the basis for man’s existence goes towards nothingness.” Cf. *HW*, 49ff.

⁸¹ *FCF*, 34.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *HW*, 51.

⁸⁴ *HW*, 53.

⁸⁵ Rahner elaborates the notion from several other aspects, relating it to thomistic metaphysics and epistemology. *HW*, 46-52.

2.5. Freedom and Responsibility

The subject of freedom and responsibility is with Rahner once again linked with his understanding of the human person as transcendent. We have seen that to be subject is coming to oneself, which implies an experience of being consigned. This corresponds with the experience of being responsible and free.⁸⁶ To recognize oneself as consigned is an acknowledgement of being the one who owns its life in its totality. Thus, Rahner states that “... in reality freedom is first of all the subject’s being responsible for himself, so that freedom in its fundamental nature has to do with the subject as such as a whole. In real freedom the subject always intends himself, understands and posits himself. Ultimately he does not do *something*, but does *himself*.”⁸⁷

Rahner calls this a transcendental freedom, which signifies that we have to see this freedom as being constitutive to the subject; it belongs to the existentials of human existence.⁸⁸ Freedom, then, does not consist in a particular faculty alongside of others; it is not possible to inquire or reflect into the freedom of one person without ending in ambiguity. A person’s existentials cannot be objectified, which is why freedom in its origin remains hidden to itself.⁸⁹ That does not mean, however, that freedom is not actualized categorically in time and space: “This free action is not something which would take place only in the hidden depths of a person, outside the world and outside of history. But man’s freedom, therefore, still continues to be one freedom because it is a transcendental characteristic of the one subject as such.”⁹⁰

Rahner thus distinguishes between freedom in its origin and freedom originated; the latter refers to what is actualized “in its concrete Incarnation in the world”.⁹¹ Antecedent to the actualization is the transcendental freedom, the essence of subjective freedom, as a condition that makes the acts possible. There is nevertheless a unity of freedom between the transcendental freedom and the categorical choices and acts performed. The supreme act of freedom is the self-actualizing of the subject itself.⁹² This is simultaneously and paradoxically the act of *giving oneself over* to the mysterious, incomprehensible one, as we saw when we related *kenosis* to self-presence.⁹³ Rahner calls this act the *fundamental option*, a term that designates that in all situations there is an option for saying yes or no to that mystery toward

⁸⁶ *FCF*, 35.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁸⁹ *FCF*, 37.

⁹⁰ *FCF*, 38.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 95.

⁹³ See chap. 2.2.

which we are drawn.⁹⁴ A yes to that mystery is in Rahnerian thought a *surrendering* to the mystery. This is to be distinguished from freedom of choice, which is the product and expression of the fundamental option. “Acts produced by free choice are morally good insofar as they are fitting expressions of fundamental option as love.”⁹⁵ In part II, the ethical implications of this will be elaborated further when treating the transcendental constitution of love and its consequences.⁹⁶ For now we will continue to explore how the human being is constituted to be the event of God’s self-communication. This will conclude our chapter on theological anthropology and answer the first sub question: *What are the existential conditions for a human kenosis?*

2.6. Human Being as the Event of God’s Self-communication

“We are now coming to the innermost centre of the Christian understanding of existence when we say: Man is the event of a free, unmerited and forgiving, and absolute self-communication of God”.⁹⁷ I find these words of Rahner to be the best introduction of what is probably the most central notion within his fundamental theology. The phrase “God’s self-communication” is totally penetrating *Foundation of Christian Faith* and several of his essays. In what follows I will point out a few specific aspects of this phrase and its application to the concept of *kenosis*.

First, it has to be clear that Rahner with God’s self-communication is referring to an *ontological* reality, corresponding to the essence of a human being. God is really making himself a constitutive element of humans when “communicating” himself. Thus, we are not dealing with an objectified communication or anything communicated *about* God.⁹⁸ What is communicated “is really God in his own being and in this way it is a communication for the sake of knowing and possessing God in immediate vision and love.”⁹⁹ Another way of expressing this with Rahner is by the term *uncreated grace* which serves to denote the gratuitous, inner experience of receiving God’s grace.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁴ From: “Glossary”, *A world of Grace*, 191.

⁹⁵ J. F. Bresnahan: “An Ethics of Faith” in *A world of Grace*, 177.

⁹⁶ See chap. 7.3.1 and chap. 8.

⁹⁷ *FCF*, 116.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 116-117.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 117-118.

¹⁰⁰ *CC*, xv. Whether and if this experience can be distinguished from other experiences is debated. Seen related to the transcendental constitution of the human being, it is to be compared with the awareness of being a subject.

To explain more precisely what Rahner means by God's self-communication, we have to return to the transcendental experience of human beings as described above. We saw that the transcendental experience of the human being is oriented towards God as the *ground and origin of its being*. But on the other hand a human being is radically different from God, which means that his/her origin in God and the difference from God has to be seen as a unity forming his/her existence. The self-communication of God means according to this unity that God is present not only in the mode of distant presence as the term of transcendence, but he is present even in the mode of *closeness*: "...[The] event of immediacy to God as man's fulfillment is prepared for in such a way that we must say of man here and now that he participates in God's being; that he has been given the divine Spirit who fathoms the depths of God; that he is already God's son here and now, and what he already is must only become manifest."¹⁰¹ To see how this concerns our issue of *kenosis*, we have to take one more step: insofar as *kenosis* is seen as surrender to God, it is crucial that *God is there* – in the depths of the human being – as an ever present offer. To surrender is to empty oneself in order to let this other be encompassing the whole of one's existence. This requires a radical closeness of the one to which one is surrendering. That closeness is for Rahner becoming absolute in his convincing belief in God's self-communication. We will see below that the absoluteness of this offer is due to the history of Jesus Christ. First we will investigate other central aspects related to God's self-communication, terms we need to know for further treatment of *kenosis*.

The divine Spirit that Rahner claims as given to the human being is of course totally unmerited due to the receiver. It is a gift, an offer. The ontological character of God's self-communication will according to Rahner have divinizing effects in the human being, which must nevertheless be understood as finite and created.¹⁰² We are thus dealing with the relationship between grace and nature, which for Rahner also has to be seen related to his transcendental theology. Without going in detail, I will look briefly at this relationship, following John P. Galvin's way of explaining the rather technical terms involved.¹⁰³

God's self-communication, his grace, is a universal offer to humans, making a relationship with them possible. This relationship has to be based on a mutual freedom. But as human beings we owe our existence to God, we are totally dependent on him. Rahner resolves this

More on this in John P. Galvin: "The Invitation of Grace" in *A World of Grace*, 70ff. The experience of God is discussed further in chap.5.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 120.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ John P. Galvin: "The Invitation of Grace" in *A world of Grace*, 71.

dilemma by introducing the notion of the *supernatural existential*.¹⁰⁴ The term supernatural means that “this existential, unlike others, is not given automatically with human nature”.¹⁰⁵ It is thus not linked directly to the theology of creation, but rather expresses God’s gratuitous gift offered in freedom. It corresponds to the term uncreated grace as mentioned above. Rahner explains how this grace is related to our nature by drawing on the traditional concept of *obediential potency*. In the nature of the human being there is potency for receiving God’s gift which is not a faculty alongside others, but which is the essence of its being. This openness to God would have been there even if the divine self-communication did not occur.¹⁰⁶

And, since the obediential potency for grace is precisely human nature as such, *God’s free fulfilment of this capacity* through his self-gift automatically becomes the most central factor in human existence. “Divinization” and “humanization” are not alternatives between which we could choose; in the actual world in which we live, they are one and the same goal of our existence.¹⁰⁷

We see in this passage how human nature rightly is constituted to receive a potential gift of God, but that it is the free act of God that fulfils this capacity. By connecting human nature that closely to God’s grace, Rahner’s view on the human being’s potency for “divinization” is very optimistic, and as we later will see, it causes several questions that have to be met.

During this chapter we have seen that Rahner understands the human being to be a priori oriented towards the infinite horizon. The pre-apprehension aims at God, and it is by *surrendering* to this mystery that the radical self-actualization of the subject finds place. *The conditions for a human kenosis* lie in this constitution of the human nature and in the dynamic interplay of its necessary openness toward God and the free offer of God’s self-communication. Because God wants to give himself in love, he created the human from the outset to be the one that in its transcendence is able to receive this love and come to a fulfilment of its existence.¹⁰⁸ Nothing expresses this love more concretely than the event where God himself became man incarnated in Jesus Christ. In the next chapter we will follow some of Rahner’s thoughts concerning that event and see how it has *affected human nature*.

¹⁰⁴ Note the difference in Rahner’s use of “existential” and existentiell”: The first refers to “an element in man’s ontological constitution precisely as a human being” and the second refers to “the free, personal and subjective appropriation and actualization of something which can also be spoken of in abstract theory or objective concepts without such a subjective and personal realization”. *FCF*, 16, transl. note.

¹⁰⁵ Galvin in *A World of Grace*, 72.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, emphasis added.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

3. Transcendental Christology

In the following, aspects of Rahner's Christology relevant for this thesis will be presented. I will first and foremost pay attention to the Incarnation as the climax of history and to the humanity of Jesus Christ. By doing it this way, I admittedly omit aspects that are most central to Rahner's Christology, such as the death and resurrection of Christ and the aspects of soteriology.¹⁰⁹ It is important, though, to keep in mind that the chosen aspects presuppose an understanding of, and faith in, the risen Christ.¹¹⁰ The limited focus is in order to keep focus on the human kenosis and how this concept is connected with Christology.

I will introduce this chapter by presenting a brief summary of how Rahner develops his transcendental Christology. This overview serves to connect his Christology with his anthropology and to understand the intentions of the sections to come; of which the first will be on *Christology in View of Evolution of the World*. We will get an idea of the historical climax of the event of Christ, and see how Rahner explains that the act of one person can have universal significance, affecting the very nature of the human being. Then attention is given to the *Incarnation* with a specific focus on the *human* nature of Jesus. In this first part of the chapter we thus follow the question: *How does the kenosis of Jesus Christ affect the human being ontologically?* In the last part of the chapter, the quest for the *character of kenosis* is focused. We will investigate Rahner's understanding of the human *consciousness* of Jesus and see how the relationship as Son to the Father was marked by *obedience and self-surrender*. These attitudes marking the humanity of Jesus culminated in the *kenotic* act of death. We will in the end of the chapter see that Rahner's theology of death and his metaphor "*dying with Christ*" will provide an important key to *kenosis* as a following of Christ.

3.1. Reflections on a Transcendental Christology

During the previous chapter we got an idea of Rahner's *transcendental* anthropology. When the term transcendental is applied to Christology, the starting point is similar, namely the inescapable experiences of the human being.¹¹¹ The presupposition for his Christology is the transcendental experience of the human being in *mutual* conditioning with the historical element. The transcendental element is for Rahner always an intrinsic condition of the historic

¹⁰⁹ Some aspects of the death are treated below, see chap. 3.6.

¹¹⁰ Christianity and all subsequent theology are borne of the resurrection event, cf. 1.Kor. 15:14. Rahner's Christology is no exception from this tradition.

¹¹¹ *FCF*, 208. In this section I follow *FCF*, 208-211.

element itself. The history and life of Jesus Christ has an appeal to human beings who at least unthematically are oriented towards God's self-communication.

Let us have a brief look at Rahner's five points for developing a transcendental Christology: *First*, he points to the presupposition already mentioned: an anthropology that understands the human being as a transcendental existence oriented towards the mystery that we call God. This corresponds to what has been presented above.¹¹²

Secondly, Rahner understands the human being as someone who dares to hope that "his existence is borne by this all-pervasive mystery ... [and] that this mystery gives itself as the fulfilment of the highest claim of existence".¹¹³ Through this hope it participates in the infinite itself.

Thirdly, a transcendental Christology understands that in the unity of transcendentality and historicity (as mentioned above) the self-communication of God and the hope for it are necessarily mediated historically. God can, and has, revealed himself categorically. He is first of all revealing himself "in the mode of *promise* as the ongoing transcendence of the categorical..."¹¹⁴

Fourthly, the act of hope searches in history for the self-promise of God, the irrevocable promise that will bring the world to its fulfilment.

Fifthly, such a categorical offer of God has to be a human being, who freely surrenders every inner-worldly future in death. If an offer of God is to be irreversible and victorious, it has to be accepted freely by the subject being this offer. Furthermore, it presupposes a unity of the world which implies that an individual destiny as such has an exemplary significance for the world, as will be shown in the following section.

3.2. Christology within an Evolutionary View on the World

When writing about Christology seen from an evolutionary point of view, Rahner draws up a bigger picture, in an effort to see the event of Christ as a result of a historical evolution of the creature.¹¹⁵ He depicts a cosmology that is drawn from matter to spirit in an increasing

¹¹² See chap. 2.3.

¹¹³ *FCF*, 209.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 210.

¹¹⁵ Rahner's concern is to meet the contemporary need for relating the doctrine of Incarnation with the modern understanding of the doctrine of evolution. He stresses that the doctrine of Incarnation in no way can be "deduced as a necessary consequence and as a demanded extension of the evolutionary view of the world". Faith and revelation must not be reduced to theological rationalism. *TI* 5.8: "Christology within an Evolutionary View of the world"; *SzT* 5, 183.

openness for the absolute being and thus with a possible receptivity for God's self-communication. I will sketch out the lines of this picture, without going into the more detailed argumentation.¹¹⁶ The idea from this section forms the basis for understanding the next section about the Incarnation and the human. The two sections will together provide an answer on the second sub question: *How does the kenosis of Jesus Christ affect the human being ontologically?*

In his reflections on this topic, Rahner starts out by showing that, in line with the Christian confession; God is the Creator of both heaven and earth. This implies, he says, that matter and spirit not only have the same origin, but they manifest an "inner similarity and commonality ... which forms a *single world*".¹¹⁷ This commonality is seen most clearly in the unity of the human being. It is only from the self-realization of the single person that we know what spirit and matter are. And as we have seen, to be spirit is to become conscious of itself by being oriented towards the absolute, infinite reality.¹¹⁸ This orientation has "the character of being taken possession of, and of being drawn into the infinite mystery. It is only in the loving *acceptance* of this mystery... we can genuinely undergo this process."¹¹⁹ The experiencing of this essential unity of matter and spirit, then, is conditioned on an acceptance of the given reality which the human being is drawn into by the transcendence of the self. Only insofar as he/she is present to himself or herself is he/she *spirit*, and *matter* is the condition making this possible. By being confronted in time and space by the concrete otherness, the human being is estranged from himself/herself and in that way being brought to himself/herself.

This reciprocal conditioning of matter and spirit has a history, says Rahner. When trying to catch this history, it is important to maintain that within the mutual relationship between matter and spirit there is also a difference that can be seen from a *temporal* point of view. It belongs to the intrinsic nature of the relationship that matter develops towards spirit. Rahner explains this by the terms *becoming* and *active self-transcendence*.

Rahner sees the nature and structure of becoming related to a human's freedom and responsibility. By its responsible actions the human being is gradually fulfilling itself, achieving a greater fullness of being; he/she is becoming *more*. This has to be seen as an effect of what was already there, and "...to be taken seriously it must be understood as real

¹¹⁶ Here I follow *Foundation of Christian Faith* VI.1, 178ff.

¹¹⁷ *FCF* 181-182.

¹¹⁸ See chap. 2.3.

¹¹⁹ *FCF*, 183, emphasis added.

self-transcendence, as surpassing oneself, as emptiness actively achieving its own fullness.”¹²⁰ However, since emptiness cannot be the source of fullness, this becoming through self-transcendence is to be understood as taking place by the power of the absolute fullness of being. “... This fullness of being is to be understood as so *intrinsic* to the finite existence moving towards its fullness that this finite existent is empowered to achieve a real and *active* self-transcendence, and it does not simply receive this new reality passively as something caused only by God.”¹²¹ Rahner does not see any contradiction in this, because what is intrinsic is not part of the human’s essence, but is within the power of God. This corresponds with “what is called theologically ‘God’s preservation of and cooperation with’ creatures”.¹²²

This conceptual principle of becoming is confirmed by the more exact history of the world discovered by natural sciences, which increasingly has come to see the interconnection between the history of matter, life and human beings. The fact that the higher order embraces the lower is by Rahner seen as a “prelude” to the self-transcendence unfolding its own reality and order: “... [W]hat is merely material is a prelude in its own dimension to the higher dimension of life... and this is a prelude to spirit in a progressive approximation to the boundary to be surpassed to self-transcendence.”¹²³ Within this history of evolution, the movement from matter to spirit, the human being exists and manifests the development by the unity of matter and spirit which becomes conscious through its self-presence. The development of nature continues in the human being and will find its goal with and in the free history of the human being as spirit. “Because man is not only a spirit who observes nature, but is also a part of it..., his history is ... an active transformation of the material world itself. And it is only *through action* that man and nature reach their single and common goal.”¹²⁴ Since *the world is one and matter and spirit are one*, there is also one common goal which is to be seen exactly in the transcendence of the human being. This transcendence is directed to the infinite mystery, to the fullness of absolute being - towards God. The empowering of this transcendence is due to God’s self-communication, by which the world might reach its final goal.¹²⁵

¹²⁰ Ibid., 184.

¹²¹ Ibid., 185.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid., 186.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 187, emphasis added.

¹²⁵ “We are presupposing, then, that the goal of the world is God’s self-communication to it, and that the entire dynamism which God has implanted in the process by which the world comes to be in self-transcendence ... is already directed to this self-communication and its acceptance by the world.” *FCF*, 192.

How, then, is the historical event of Jesus Christ to be understood in view of this evolution, *and how does this event affect ontologically human nature?* To answer this question, two more points need to be mentioned.

Firstly, we have to see that God's self-communication is addressed to a free history of the human race. "It can take place only in a free acceptance by free subjects, and indeed in a common history."¹²⁶ *Acceptance* is what we call justification – which is equal with *surrendering* to God – while rejection is on the other hand called disbelief or sin.¹²⁷

Secondly, we need an introduction to Rahner's notion of an *Absolute saviour*. The reason for introducing the idea of an absolute saviour is to establish and explain the origin of God's self-communication towards human beings. If there should be a breakthrough of this communication, it had to be as a historical, tangible event. Rahner says: "We are applying this title to that historical person who appears in time and space and signifies the beginning of the absolute self-communication of God which is moving to its goal, that beginning which indicates that this self-communication for everyone has taken place irrevocably and has been victoriously inaugurated."¹²⁸

That historical person is of course referring to Jesus Christ. When Rahner here is talking about "*the beginning of the absolute self-communication of God*" it is not to be understood in a temporal sense. He sees this event as a climax of the process of God's self-communication that happened *within the total history* of the human race. Through this event is God's self-communication made absolute; irrevocable but not yet concluded. Because Rahner sees this event as a moment within the whole, single history of the world, which dynamism is driven forward by the power of its goal, he can state:

Insofar as a historical movement lives by virtue of its end even in its beginnings, because the real essence of its dynamism is the desire for the goal, it is completely legitimate to understand the whole movement of God's self-communication to the human race to be borne by this savior even when it is taking place temporally prior to the event of its irrevocable coming to be in the savior.¹²⁹

To sum up, we can say that a Christology seen from an evolutionary point of view is to understand the Christ-event as the climax or the central axis, *affecting human nature* both

¹²⁶ Ibid., 193.

¹²⁷ With Rahner, sin is first and foremost linked to rejection of God's self-communication and only insofar as this is a conscious, thematic and free decision. Cf. *FCF*, 112-115.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 193.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 194.

prior to and after the event itself. The history is borne by this future, Rahner says.¹³⁰ For the world, and for human beings to be reached by God's self-communication, there had to be a historical person in which this communication was fully accepted and actualized. That is why Rahner denotes this historical person as Absolute saviour.

With this approach, Rahner has situated himself within a "Christology from below".¹³¹ By doing so, he shows how *the Christ-event has affected human nature*. In the next sections I will do some more reflections following the same line, looking more specifically at the relationship of Incarnation to human nature.

3.3. The Incarnation and the Human

The meaning of Rahner's saying "Christology is the beginning and end of anthropology", reaches its fullness when it comes to the mystery of the Incarnation, which he regards to be the most important of all things for Christians to talk about.¹³² I see this as an indication of the almost impossible, but nevertheless important task of trying to grasp some of the depths hidden in this mystery. In this section we will look at some specific aspects of the Incarnation, in order to deepen the understanding of how this event modified human nature. By doing so, we continue to ask: *How does the kenosis of Jesus Christ affect the human being ontologically?*

One reminder before investigating further: When talking about Incarnation in our specific context, we have to bear in mind that it was by *emptying himself* Jesus became human. Thus, when talking of Incarnation we are also referring to the *kenosis of Jesus Christ*.

In *Foundation of Christian Faith*, Rahner describes further the relationship between the human transcendence and the *hypostatic union*; the technical phrase used to express the radical union of God and human in Christ.¹³³ Rahner emphasizes the human side of the hypostatic union, and elaborates the view that the self-transcendence towards the immediacy of God had to take place in at least one person to have *universal significance*. That happened through the Incarnation, when in the person of Jesus, the absolute immediacy of God was actualized. Thus, he states: "The Incarnation cannot be understood as the end and the goal of

¹³⁰ Ibid., 195.

¹³¹ Rahner argues that Christology from below is necessary, but that it has to be seen as objectively identical with a more traditional Christology from above, since the absolute event of salvation had to be lived out as God's own history, his own reality. *FCF*, 300-301.

¹³² *TI* 4.4 : "On the Theology of the Incarnation" ; *SzT* 4, 137.

¹³³ *FCF*, 198-203.

the world's reality without having recourse to the theory that the Incarnation itself is already an intrinsic moment and a *condition for the universal bestowal of grace* to spiritual creatures."¹³⁴ The self-communication of God – the universal bestowal of grace – is thus deeply connected with the *kenosis* of Jesus Christ.

Incarnation is not to be understood as only a higher stage of the hierarchy of the world, without meaning or effect for the “lower” stages. Rahner understands the history of God's self-communication to the world as *a unity* of the event of the Incarnation and the transcendence of the whole spiritual world into God. There is an intrinsic relationship between the Incarnation and the bestowal of grace to the rest of the world, the latter being conditioned by the first: “Grace in all of us and hypostatic union in the one Jesus Christ can only be understood together, and as a unity they signify the one free decision of God for a supernatural order of salvation, for his self-communication. In Christ the self-communication of God takes place basically to all men.”¹³⁵

This has to be seen as an unsurpassable and definitive offer and acceptance of God's self-communication. The offer “...is not only established by God, but it is God himself.”¹³⁶ The hypostatic union is rightly unique, because since his humanity is being graced absolutely, he is the one expressing God's absolute gift to the world. Jesus Christ is distinguished from us by this fact that he himself is the offer, and we ourselves are the recipients of God's offer to us. But the union between the one offering and the offer itself is then to be understood as a union between the human reality and God.

To further grasp the notion of Incarnation and its essential significance for human beings, I choose to focus on what Rahner says about the expression “God became man” by relating that to what he says about *the assumption of the human*, since both aspects will have relevance to the connection searched for in this thesis.

To reflect upon the statement “God became man” is to move beyond the mere historical question of the history of Jesus Christ; it is to enter the mystery of mysteries. Rahner frequently turns to language of mystery while talking about the Incarnation. In “the mystery of ‘God becoming man...lies the center of the reality from out of which we Christians live,

¹³⁴ *FCF*, 199, emphasis added.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 201.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 202.

and which we believe.”¹³⁷ In dealing with the question of what the expression means, he presupposes the traditional teaching and dogmas of the Church as a point of departure for what he calls a “rethinking” to try to come to an understanding of this incomprehensible mystery.¹³⁸ Not surprisingly, Rahner starts out by paying attention to the predicate of the saying: “What does it mean that the Word of God became *man*? ... Do we understand that?”¹³⁹ Neither in *Foundation of Christian Faith* nor in the essay “On the Theology of the Incarnation” does he elaborate the notion in philosophical terms or with exact definitions.¹⁴⁰ He understands the human being to be indefinable; the closest he comes to a definition is to say that “man is the indefinability come to consciousness of itself”.¹⁴¹ This is in line with his thinking on the concepts of person and subject as presented above. However, he prefers in this context to talk about the human being as mystery: “In his *essence*, in his nature, therefore, man himself is the mystery, not because he is in himself the infinite fullness of the mystery which concerns him, which fullness is inexhaustible, but because his real essence, in his original ground, in his nature he is the poor, but nevertheless conscious orientation to this fullness.”¹⁴²

The mystery of the human being is related to the transcendental experience, the feeling of being finite, but still moving towards the infinite, in search for the ground of its being. According to Rahner, *the mere existence* of humans is constituted by the acceptance or rejection of this mystery. The necessity of the decision of accepting or rejection is *the act* of existence, and the nature of transcendence is what “brings our existence and God’s existence together, both as mystery”.¹⁴³ To accept oneself as mystery is to realize our human nature to be “the poor, questioning and in itself empty orientation towards the abiding mystery whom we call God...”¹⁴⁴ The Incarnation as the ultimate fulfilment of human transcendence is the one historical event that links human beings (as mystery) to God, the incomprehensible one himself, because in Jesus Christ God assumes human nature as his own, as Rahner says in this passage:

If this indefinable nature, whose limit, that is, its “definition”, is this unlimited orientation towards the infinite mystery of fullness, is assumed by God as *his own*

¹³⁷ *FCF*, 213.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 214.

¹³⁹ *TI* 4.4; *SzT* 4, 139.

¹⁴⁰ I here refer to how he treats the subject related to Christology in *FCF*, chapter VI.

¹⁴¹ Cf. *TI* 4.4 and *FCF*, 216.

¹⁴² *FCF*, 216.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 217.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

reality, then it has reached the very point towards which it is always moving by virtue of its essence. It is its very *meaning*, and not just an accidental side activity which it could also do without, to be given away and to be handed over, to be that being who realizes himself and *finds himself by losing himself* once and for all in the incomprehensible.¹⁴⁵

In this passage I see three points highlighting the issue of this chapter. The *first* one is that Rahner shows how the Incarnation is to be understood from a transcendental point of view, and reversely how the Incarnation explains the orientation of the human being. As we have seen, it is of the very nature of humans to be oriented towards the infinite, and through Christ this orientation finds its fulfilment.

Secondly, the word “assumed” is significant to understand the event related to human nature as a whole. When human nature is assumed by God in the hypostatic union, it reaches in that very person the fullness of its goal. It corresponds with the saying in Ephesians about Christ who “fills everything in every way”.¹⁴⁶ When seen from the perspective of the unity of Christ and the world, we can talk about it as the redemption of the world.¹⁴⁷ There had to be one single, historic event where the void question that a human being is finds its answer and thus also the fulfilment of its essence. The assumption of human nature also means that the reality of God is communicated to what is assumed, in theology expressed as *Communicatio idiomatum*. There exists an interexchange of properties of the divine and the human in Jesus Christ.¹⁴⁸ Rahner is, however, cautious of how to understand this term. He is warning of a simplifying employment of this term, there is a danger of seeing the humanity only as a livery of the divine.¹⁴⁹ He repeatedly stresses that God really became human, which means that he *creates by emptying* himself. Rahner understands the whole of *human reality to be created by the very fact that Christ has assumed it as his own*.¹⁵⁰ This is another way of expressing what is referred to earlier about the Christ-event seen from an evolutionary point of view and the self-communication of God reaching its climax. Due to Christ, *the human being’s nature is*

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., emphasis added

¹⁴⁶ Eph. 1:23.

¹⁴⁷ *TI* 1.5; *SzT* 1, 176ff, 213ff.

¹⁴⁸ “The *communicatio idiomatum* is based on the oneness of person subsisting in the two natures of Jesus Christ. Hence it can be used as long as both the subject and the predicate of a sentence stand for the person of Jesus Christ, or present a common subject of predication. For in this case we simply affirm that He ,Who subsists in the Divine nature and possesses certain Divine properties, is the same as He Who subsists in the human nature and possesses certain human properties.” <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04169a.htm> , 14.4.10

¹⁴⁹ *TI* 1.5; *SzT* 1, 200ff.

¹⁵⁰ *FCF*, 222. Rahner refers to Augustine saying that God “assumes by creating” and also “create by assuming”.

modified to be able to enter a new relationship and union with God.¹⁵¹ The parallel can thus analogously be drawn between what happened ontologically in the Hypostatic Union and the bestowal of grace on humanity in general. “In us too there can grow a unity of the divine and the human, ‘without confusion and without separation’.”¹⁵² To investigate this further would require a thorough research of how Rahner understands created and uncreated grace, which is out of the scope of this thesis.¹⁵³ Of importance here is to see how the assumption of human nature results in a *new relationship* between God and his created world.

Thirdly, this paragraph is pointing towards a self-surrendering of the human being. Human nature has a *potentiality for surrendering* into the abiding mystery, which we already have met as the “obediential potency”.¹⁵⁴ The words “*finds himself by losing himself*” echo the words of Jesus talking about the costs of following him.¹⁵⁵ Rahner sees this abandonment not only to be the meaning, but the *real essence of the human being’s nature*: “The Incarnation of God is the unique and *highest* instance of the actualization of the essence of human reality, which consists in this: that man is insofar as he abandons himself to the absolute mystery whom we call God.”¹⁵⁶ In other words: *to be is to abandon oneself*. If it is the real essence of the human being to abandon oneself, then *kenosis* is to be seen as a fulfilment of the human nature. We have in this chapter seen that Jesus Christ actualized and fulfilled human nature, enabling it to be in union with God. As this was accomplished by the kenosis of Jesus Christ, it also demonstrates that human *kenosis* is the way to follow; it is a *Surrender to Life*.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵¹ Harvey D. Egan refers to Rahner who talks about the metaphysical modification of man brought about by Jesus: “Because the Word became flesh, lived, died and rose, He became in his very humanity what he had always been in His divinity, the very heart of the universe, the innermost center of creation, We, therefore, experience ourselves and our world differently than if God had not become man to live, die and rise. Both the supernatural existensial and this ‘christic’ existensial are objective, metaphysical modifications of man which have affected his consciousness.” Harvey D. Egan: *The Spiritual Exercises and the Ignatian Mystical Horizon* (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Resources, 1976), 39.

¹⁵² Endean, 14, referring to Rahner in *TI*, 17.1.

¹⁵³ Cf. *TI* 1.10 “Some implications of the Scholastic concept of Uncreated Grace”. Here Rahner discusses the relationship between created and uncreated grace, the ontological presuppositions and the consequences of supernatural grace, drawing parallels with the Hypostatic Union. He calls the bestowal of grace an ontological union.

¹⁵⁴ “Potentia Oboedientialis: refers to the disposition of a person to receive and accept the gift of God’s self-communication, which leads to the fulfillment of his or her spiritual nature.” *CC*, glossary xiv. It belongs to the nature of the term to be connected with obedience as well. Rahner connects the term directly with emptying oneself. *FCF*, 218.

¹⁵⁵ Mark. 8:35/Matt. 10:39. It is an open question whether these radical words of Jesus are to be seen as limited to the sending of the first disciples. Cf. Hans Kvalbein : *Jesus – hvem var han? Hva ville han?* (Oslo: Luther Forlag, 2008), 241 ff.

¹⁵⁶ *FCF*, 218.

¹⁵⁷ In a lengthy note in the essay “On the Theology of Incarnation” Rahner explains how he understands the nature of this act of self-surrendering, ending the note with: “The ‘existential’ self-dedication which is accomplished in the human spiritual nature of Christ corresponds in intensity to the basic act as which the nature

Human nature is modified, enabled to follow the *kenotic* way that leads to a union with God. In this way the analysis of Karl Rahner's Christology has answered the question: *How does the kenosis of Jesus Christ affect the human being ontologically.*

The abandoning, this emptying of itself required from Jesus an attitude of absolute obedience, an aspect that will be further treated below.¹⁵⁸ Hence, insofar as the *obediential* potency is the essence of the human being, and insofar as *abandonment* is its essence, we need to look and learn from the one who fully lived this out in his relationship to the Father. The following sections thus deal with how Rahner understands Christ's self-consciousness and how *kenosis* characterizes the life and death of Jesus.

3.4. The Self-consciousness of Christ

When Rahner in *Foundation of Christian Faith* turns to what he calls "The Empirical Concrete Structure of the Life of Jesus", he restricts himself from detailed exegesis and historical research.¹⁵⁹ He presents more fundamental reflections on Jesus' self-consciousness and how this relates to his message, deeds and death. How Jesus understands himself prior to the resurrection is relevant to see why he is to be the model to follow.

To explain how Jesus experienced the immediate presence of God – *visio immediata* – Rahner refers to thomistic metaphysics of knowledge.¹⁶⁰ In chapter 2.2 we dealt with the concept of person and subject, which is the starting point for Rahner's arguing: To be a person means to be present to oneself. This has to be applied on the hypostatic union as well. As we have seen, the hypostatic union involves an assumption of human nature by Christ. "... [A]ccording to the axiom of thomistic metaphysics of knowledge, this highest ontological determination of the created reality of Christ ..., must of necessity be conscious of itself."¹⁶¹ This means that the *visio immediata* is an intrinsic element of the Hypostatic Union itself. That is not to be conceived, however, as a concrete vision of the divine being present before the inner mind as an object. It is to be seen as grounded *in the root of its nature*, like the awareness or

assumed by the Logos was created by God as assumed: from the point of view of the nature, this substantial acceptance is substantial self-dedication." *TI* 4.4; *SzT* 4, 142.

¹⁵⁸ See chap. 3.5.

¹⁵⁹ *FCF*, 246ff. The same is to be said of the essays referred to in this section.

¹⁶⁰ The following is from *TI* 5.9: "Dogmatic Reflections on the Knowledge and Self-consciousness of Jesus Christ"; *SzT* 5, 234ff.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*; *SzT* 5, 234.

attunement of every spiritual subject – being present without objectifying, reflecting or interpreting it. Rahner explains:

This direct presence to God belongs to the nature of a spiritual person as the ground which is ... the permanent basis for all other spiritual activities ... It would then be possible to say – and it would be more understandable – that this is also precisely the way in which we must conceive the direct and personal presence of the Logos to the human soul of Christ.¹⁶²

The self-consciousness of Jesus is, according to this theory, not something unique compared to other spiritual persons. It stood at a created distance from God in freedom, obedience and in worship, like every other human consciousness.¹⁶³ Furthermore, it follows the structure of the created nature which demands a “genuinely human spiritual history and development of the man Jesus”.¹⁶⁴ His consciousness was gradually realized during his historical life, thus the expressed articulation of the state of direct presence to God followed this development.¹⁶⁵ As he was coming to himself more and more, he simultaneously forgot himself even more, proclaiming God’s kingdom and his salvation, giving himself over to God and his will, as will be shown in the following section.¹⁶⁶

3.5. Kenosis in the Life of Jesus: Obedience and Self-surrender

In the previous section we saw how the self-consciousness of Christ implied an understanding of the relationship to his Father marked by complete openness to God which was increasingly leading to *losing himself* to the Father. This leads us towards an understanding of how to understand *kenosis*; according to the sub question: *What is the character of kenosis?* In the following I will argue why the attitude shown in the life of Jesus as expressed through the transcendental theology of Rahner rightly is called a ‘*kenotic attitude*’. While Rahner rarely, if ever, speaks about *kenosis* as an attitude, he is still saying quite a lot about the issue. Leo O’Donovan, one of Rahner’s commentators, denotes *kenosis a paradigm of Rahner’s writings*:

The paradigm, though I do not recall a text where Rahner explicitly notes this, is the kenosis (self-emptying) of Christ as described by St. Paul in the hymn of Philippians 2:5-11. To intimate the dynamics of this experience of self-domination, Rahner strained language to its limits, ringing changes on a range of words at once ordinary

¹⁶² Ibid.; *SzT* 5, 239.

¹⁶³ *FCF*, 249.

¹⁶⁴ *TI* 5.9; *SzT* 5, 239.

¹⁶⁵ Rahner elaborates how this is related with the disputed term “infused knowledge”. Cf. *TI* 5.9; *SzT* 5, 242ff.

¹⁶⁶ *FCF*, 251.

and poetic. He spoke of our giving ourselves to God, of surrendering ourselves, of giving or risking ourselves away, of denying ourselves, of no longer really disposing of ourselves, of letting oneself go, of no longer belonging to oneself.¹⁶⁷

All the different words used by Rahner correspond to different aspects of *the kenotic attitude* shown in the life and death of Jesus Christ. We are not yet asking about how this is to be transposed to (or expected of) the followers, but will for now have a look at *obedience* and *self-surrender* as two significant, *kenotic* characteristics of Jesus in relation to the Father.

Obedience is with Rahner closely linked with the unity of wills between God and the human person.¹⁶⁸ Some brief comments are offered here to indicate the relation with *kenosis* in the life of Jesus. All talk about obedience presupposes self-consciousness and openness towards the needs or the will of the other. Jesus knew himself to be sent of God, being the Absolute saviour and as such the mediator of God's grace to the world.¹⁶⁹ However, he had to accomplish the mission in freedom and in obedience to the will of God. In *Foundation of Christian Faith*, Rahner speaks about this while referring to what he calls an "ontological Christology". To this ontological Christology belongs, besides Jesus' self-consciousness, the issues of his will, his obedience and surrendering. Rahner says:

The man Jesus exists in a unity of wills with the Father which permeates his whole reality totally and from the outset, in an 'obedience' from out of which he orients his whole human reality; he is someone who continually accepts himself from the Father and who in all of the dimensions of his existence has always given himself over to the Father totally; in this surrender he is able to accomplish due to God what we are not able to accomplish; he is someone whose 'basic constitution' as the original unity of being and consciousness is to have his origins in God radically and completely, and to be given over to God radically and completely.¹⁷⁰

Denoting the obedience and the surrender within an ontological Christology serves to show more clearly the connection between "categorical" and "transcendental" Christology.¹⁷¹ In the next chapter we will discuss further the importance of this for understanding the connection between Christology and anthropology. The quote above echoes what we so far have learned

¹⁶⁷ Leo J. O'Donovan: "On reading Rahner in a New Century" in: *Finding God in All Things*, ed. Mark Bosco and David Stagaman (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), 141. I have omitted his parentheses of the German terms. In this part of his essay, Father O'Donovan treats the influence of Ignatian spirituality to Rahner.

¹⁶⁸ It has to be noted that in the material chosen for this thesis Rahner does not treat obedience separately, but he does often return to the term in connection with Christology and especially when it comes to the death of Jesus. See e.g. *TI* 1.5: "Current problems in Christology", *TI* 3.4: "Reflections of the Theology of Renunciation" and *TI* 3.11: "The Eucharist and Suffering".

¹⁶⁹ *FCF*, 254.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁷¹ *FCF*, 303.

about transcendental theology, and points at what I call the *kenotic* attitude of Jesus, uttered as obedience to the will of God and leading to the absolute self-surrender.

The surrendering of Jesus is seen by the way he completely is giving himself over to the Father by accepting himself in his finitude. I take this to be seen in connection with *kenosis* as expressed in Phil. 2, related to his pre-existence and Incarnation. During the historical development as a spiritual being, he grasps more and more of his divine origin, but he freely and repeatedly gives it away. The surrendering is the “coming to itself”; he is truly finding himself by losing himself. His will is so united with the will of God that it according to Rahner “permeates his whole reality”.¹⁷² As we know, this unity of wills leads Jesus to the bitter end of his death. When Rahner uses the term “accomplish” here, it indicates, however, that this surrendering, this emptying, was freely accepted and something he did actively choose.¹⁷³ When turning to Ignatian spirituality, we will see that a unity of wills is one of the attitudes searched for during the process of *the Exercises*.¹⁷⁴

The relationship of Jesus to God was surely unique, but he was living this out as a human person within the conditions given to all of us. Rahner sees his way of living to be unique, but “nevertheless considered to be exemplary for other men in their relationship to God. He experienced his new and unique ‘relationship of sonship’ to the ‘Father’ as significant for all men by the fact that in this relationship God’s closeness to all men has now come to be in a new and irrevocable way.”¹⁷⁵ When such a closeness of God in Jesus is actualized by obedience and surrendering, the question remains whether following his example implies the same category of surrendering and emptying of oneself for the followers. Both the obedience and the surrendering of Jesus were accomplished totally when he freely gave himself over to the death, and Rahner accordingly expresses discipleship and following as a “dying with Christ”.¹⁷⁶ What does he mean by that, and how is that related to the closeness of God? To this topic we turn in the next section.

¹⁷² Cf. quotation above.

¹⁷³ As will be seen in the next section, the act of self-surrender (and obedience) is sustained by grace. The question is raised if such acts are to be seen as a mere disposition of the human being. Rahner does however claim a unity of disposition and act. “The decision to affirm or reject Absolute Being can only be realized in the context of a categorical, concrete human act. There can, then, be no choice between disposition and act. For Rahner, an ethics of disposition necessarily requires an ethics of accomplishment.” Brian F. Linnane: “Dying with Christ”, 245. See also chap. 8.2.1.

¹⁷⁴ See chap. 7.2.2

¹⁷⁵ *FCF*, 248.

¹⁷⁶ E.g. in *TI* 18.10: “Following the Crucified”.

3.6. Death as Kenosis

The death of Jesus is significant seen from several aspects. The most obvious in Christian teaching is the soteriological function, which is clearly pointed out by Rahner, too.¹⁷⁷ Important as that is, it has to be left out here, in order to look more directly on how Rahner sees the death of Jesus as something to be *followed* both in life and in physical death. “The Christian, every Christian at all times, follows Jesus by *dying* with him; following Jesus has its ultimate truth and reality and universality in the following of the Crucified.”¹⁷⁸ Rahner is in this way claiming that the truth of following Jesus has to be seen as participating in his death. Since dying is the ultimate way of surrendering it is also an important aspect of *kenosis*.

To understand Rahner’s focusing on death as a following of Christ, we have to recall how he thinks about the transcendental structure of the human being as presented so far. To be human is to be ‘dependent’ on the Absolute Mystery that is the ground of our being, which demands a response of acceptance or rejection.¹⁷⁹ The ultimate point of such a decision lies in the moment of physical death, but Rahner argues that the experience of death cannot be restricted to one singular moment or even a few moments: “...dying must be recognized as an event that is taking place throughout the whole of life, even though at all times with varying intensity and with a fresh application of the freedom that accepts death in life or protests against it.”¹⁸⁰ The acceptance or rebellion with regard to death is simultaneously reflecting the person’s acceptance or rejection of God as the Mystery which is the very source and ground of his being.¹⁸¹ To understand death as an ongoing experience demanding a response gives light to the surrendering as a fundamental option, of giving oneself over to the absolute unknown, beyond our control. An acceptance of this situation is to “entrust itself to the nameless incomprehensibility that we call God”, especially since death is to be seen as an experience of the utter darkness and devastation.¹⁸² Nevertheless, it is not until we have reached this point, at which our lives and our experience have been “reduced absolutely to nil that the *true life* begins for us”, Rahner says.¹⁸³ And this is possible because when we in death are confronted with the most radical question of all, it is given an answer in the death of Jesus. As he by the Incarnation assumed human nature, he took *our* death upon himself by dying, made it his own

¹⁷⁷ E.g. *FCF*, 283ff.

¹⁷⁸ *TI* 18.10; *CzT* 13, 192.

¹⁷⁹ Linnane: “Dying with Christ”, 231, n. 108.

¹⁸⁰ *TI* 18.14 “Christian Dying”, *SzT* 13, 271-272.

¹⁸¹ Linnane: “Dying with Christ”, 231, n. 108.

¹⁸² *TI* 18.10; *SzT* 13, 197.

¹⁸³ *TI* 7.11 “The Scandal of Death”; *SzT* 7, 143, emphasis added.

and redeemed it in the victory of resurrection.¹⁸⁴ That is why our surrendering truly is *surrender to life*. In his surrendering, Jesus is modelling how we as human beings are to relate to our finiteness and ultimately to our death. As a human person his death was taking place under the same conditions as ours. He experienced the total darkness, the forsakenness, but abandoned himself in acceptance and trust in God.

According to Rahner, the significance of the death of Jesus is not due to his *moral achievement* of obedience or love, but rather

...this redemption came about by the very fact that death as manifestation of sin, as the visibility of the emptiness and hopelessness of this sin, as domain of eternal darkness and God-forsakenness, was *accepted* in faith, hope, and love, and *transformed* in the midst of desolation and loneliness into the manifestation of the obedient surrender of the whole person to the incomprehensibility of the holy God. All this must always be kept in mind, if the dying of the justified person with Christ in grace is to be rightly understood.¹⁸⁵

Rahner sees *acceptance of the finite* existence and the *self-surrender* to be the decisive point rather than a moral achievement. The significance of the death of Christ could thus be seen from two perspectives: both as the climax of God's self-communication – his given grace – and as an acceptance of this grace by the obedient surrendering, which is exemplifying the *kenotic* attitude leading to life. Through acceptance of death the hopelessness and the eternal darkness were transformed to hope given in grace. Rahner attempts by this approach to understand the “dying with Christ” in light of the *nature of grace*.

Grace consists fundamentally in God's self-communication to enable man in freedom by faith, hope, and love to accept the immediacy to God that is offered to him. Since and insofar as grace makes God purely and simply the immediate goal, content, and condition of the possibility of an immediate relationship to God, grace and its free acceptance always imply a self-abandonment, a self-transcendence above all finite realities....In that sense, in every act sustained by grace toward God's immediacy there is an element of *self-surrendering*, ‘*renouncing*’, becoming free...¹⁸⁶

Rahner is here connecting the free, personal act of self-surrendering with God's self-communication in a dynamic co-operation.¹⁸⁷ The act is sustained by grace which enables the person to accept the immediacy of God that will imply the actualization of self-transcendence. When Jesus was emptying himself totally to the will of the Father, he was doing this in a total openness to the grace given by the Father.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.; *SzT* 7, 144.

¹⁸⁵ *TI* 18.14, emphasis added; *SzT* 13, 301.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., emphasis added.

¹⁸⁷ This corresponds with the active self-transcendence, see chap. 3.2.

There is a question, however, how this surrender to death is to be understood: Does the person experience utterly abandonment in this surrendering, or is it a surrender already being embraced by God's love and the promise of salvation? Brian F. Linnane notes in the article "Dying with Christ" that Rahner is not always consistent regarding this. He is referring to an essay of Rahner, called "Following the Crucified".¹⁸⁸ In his dealing with the acceptance of the cross, Rahner states that in such situations acceptance or trust cannot easily be distinguished from the despair. This serves, Linnane says, "to emphasize the genuine devastation of death, whether experienced as moments of disintegration during a subject's history or its actual, physical death".¹⁸⁹ When Rahner in his conclusion on the other hand writes of accepting the cross as accepting the "twilight as [the] promise of eternal Christmas full of light", Linnane takes this to be an unfortunate misstep. In Rahner's conclusion "the promise of salvation is too easily recognized", he says.¹⁹⁰ It does not correspond with what Rahner says earlier when referring to the forsakenness in the death of Jesus at the Cross:

In the concreteness of his death it becomes only too clear that everything fell away from him, even the perceptible security of the closeness of God's love, and in this trackless dark there prevailed silently only the mystery that in itself and in its freedom has no name and to which he nevertheless calmly surrendered himself as to eternal love and not to the hell of futility. In that sense his death is the same as ours.¹⁹¹

Instead of seeing Rahner's conclusion as a misstep, I suggest that we see the different statements as an expression of the ambiguity involved with the act itself. The *experience* of physical death will at least and necessarily be filled with contradictions. According to Rahner, God's grace is always and already there as an offer, sustaining every positive act, including the surrender to death.¹⁹² But confronted with the darkness and the unknown the line between trust and despair is fading into one experience, devastating but still deeply clinging to the promise given. Rahner also makes it clear that we must not assume that "grace and its realization are present only and insofar as 'renunciation' (to the point of extinction) is imposed on man."¹⁹³ God's self-communication is present to all people, whether it becomes thematic or not. It is there as an offer, and an acceptance of this offer will imply degrees of

¹⁸⁸ Cf. *TI* 18.10.

¹⁸⁹ Linnane "Dying with Christ", 244.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁹¹ *TI* 18.10; *SzT* 13, 198.

¹⁹² Rahner correspondently regards the act of self-surrendering to Jesus to be "illuminated by a final, secret light, humbly received as Jesus received it in his abandonment when he said 'Father'". On this, see Love as Unconditional Self-abandonment, chap. 7.3.2.

¹⁹³ *TI* 18.14; *SzT* 13, 302.

self-surrendering.¹⁹⁴ Accepting his cross does in the concrete daily life mean patience sustained by faith in the midst of suffering, in the inevitable disappointments coming during life.¹⁹⁵ He calls those daily life experiences for “dying in instalments”:

...In all these brief moments of dying in instalments we are faced with the question of how we are to cope with them: whether we merely protest, merely despair ..., and cling all the more desperately and absolutely to what has not yet been taken from us, *or* whether we *abandon* with resignation what is taken from us, *accept* twilight as promise of an eternal Christmas full of light, regard slight breakdowns as events of grace. If in this second way... we *take the cross on* ourselves daily, we are accomplishing part of the following of the Crucified, we are practicing faith and loving hope in which death is accepted as the advent of eternal life and the following of Jesus, the Crucified, reaches its completion.¹⁹⁶

This quotation is summing up how Rahner understands “dying with Christ” as the way of following Jesus. Life consists of all those moments of decisions in which we might choose to abandon ourselves into the mystery of God. This implies a readiness or affirmation of death which has the nature of reconciling “the permanent dialectic in us between doing and enduring in powerlessness.”¹⁹⁷ This readiness for death is the *kenotic* attitude that in its self-surrendering is receiving the grace of God to live with this *permanent dialectic* referred to by Rahner. During this chapter we have seen that Rahner’s Christology provides an answer to how the *kenosis of Christ affects the human being ontologically*, and also some indications of the *character of kenosis*. How to attain the qualities involved and what this way may look like for the follower, will be the subject of part II of this thesis. Before that, I will sum up and reflect on the relatedness of anthropology to Christology.

4. The Interconnection of Christology and Anthropology

The following reflection on the relationship of anthropology to Christology has two intentions. First, it will gather together some threads of the thesis so far; second, it will show how these strands function as a basis for our further investigation of *kenosis* as the following of Christ. This will be done by reflecting more specifically on the ontological implications of the Incarnation.

¹⁹⁴ *FCF*, 98. I take these precautions also to be an expression of Rahner’s concern for what he calls the anonymous Christians. See also *FCF*, 57ff and *TI* 6.23: “Anonymous Christians”.

¹⁹⁵ *TI* 18.10; *SzT* 13, 194.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, emphasis added; *SzT* 13, 203.

¹⁹⁷ *FCF*, 297.

What Rahner says about the nature of the human being and its relationship with God can very roughly be said in one sentence: *The human being is constituted to receive God's self-communication.*¹⁹⁸ It belongs to human nature to be oriented towards the infinite horizon of being, because in the depths of its own finite being it is grounded and embraced by God – the absolute being. Accepting him as the ground of being implies a *surrendering* to this incomprehensible mystery, whether thematically or not. Rahner insists that abandonment belongs to the essence of the human nature, as expressed above: *to be is to abandon oneself.*¹⁹⁹ This becomes clear in the event of Incarnation. To recall a previous quotation of Rahner: “Incarnation is the *highest* instance of the actualization of the essence of human reality, which consists in this: that *man is* insofar as he abandons himself to the absolute mystery whom we call God.”²⁰⁰ What does it actually mean that abandoning oneself is the essence of the human being, and why is this so closely connected to the Incarnation?

The answer to this is to be found in the deep mystery denoted as the ‘assumption of human nature’. Rahner sees in this assumption a fulfilment of human nature, a climax of the development towards Spirit.²⁰¹ If the Christ-event has actualized the fulfilment of human nature, then there is a subversive and ontological change that has taken place. The human being’s potency for communion with God is radically changed, which is expressed also in the notion of *obediential potency.*²⁰² Although Rahner sees this potency as belonging to the constitution of human nature independent of the divine self-communication, it has been actualized in the Hypostatic Union²⁰³ The question remains whether human nature by this event has been modified to the extent that there is an increase of receptivity and longing for God than if the assumption of human nature had not happened. Or is it rather the external, categorical *knowledge* of this happening that causes the change for human nature? Certainly, as humans we depend on the categorical event and of the historical knowledge to actualize the potency that is there as an offer. But with the ontological consequences that Rahner is pointing at, and with the universality of this offer, I find reasons to state that we can find in the human being a radical ontological change, caused by the assumption of human nature by Jesus Christ. How this change is actually and concretely *experienced* in the individual, is

¹⁹⁸ In Rahner’s words: “God establishes creatures by his creative power insofar as he establishes them from out of nothing in their own no-divine reality as the *grammar of God’s possible self-expression*”, *FCF*, 223.

¹⁹⁹ See chap. 3.3.

²⁰⁰ *FCF*, 218, emphasis added.

²⁰¹ See chap. 3.2.

²⁰² Since Rahner sees the Christ-event as having effect on all humanity, independent on time, the change may not be experienced as empirically bounded to one specific moment in history.

²⁰³ See chap. 2.6.

another question that cannot be answered here. I prefer, however, to see it as an empowerment of the inner being, drawing the subject in the direction of itself, where *God* abides. This is a coming to be in its essence. Then *abandoning is a process of becoming*, and in this process something in the person has to die. In Christian teaching this is named sinfulness; which is the ego and a false self-centeredness. Besides, the human being has to accept its finiteness; which is to be done in a process of surrendering to the mystery, affirming God's grace as the only possible source of its fulfilment. This is *not* as if God should be the means of a fulfilment, which would be to turn the question upside down.²⁰⁴ Rahner describes this poetically:

When it is a matter of the total and definitive sense of human existence, and when this sense is to be the incomprehensible God, meaning becomes mystery, and we must surrender to it in mute, adoring love in order to approach it. This utterly different, unexpected signification makes no sense that we can see through, grasp, and bring into subjection. This sense is the mystery that closes *us* in its grasp. *Its beatitude is bestowed on us* only when we affirm and love this holy mystery *for its own sake* and not ours, *when we surrender*, and not when we surreptitiously seek to make God a means of our own self-affirmation.²⁰⁵

“[T]he mystery closes *us* in its grasp” – this happens when the human being is drawn into the depths of God himself by the event of Jesus Christ. It is like a circular move of grace, where God creates our openness just to fill it by emptying himself. The only way to sense this *kenotic* act is by participating in the *kenosis* by “surrender to it in mute, adoring love”.

Concretely, this surrender becomes thematic by looking at the life of Jesus. We have seen above how he first emptied himself by becoming human, and then he continued the obedient self-surrender to God throughout life and into the darkest reality of death. If this is pointing at the fulfilment of human nature, then each follower of Christ is to do the same – *empty oneself in love* to God and to his kingdom. This is, as we will see later, to be practiced throughout life both in prayer and in concrete actions towards the neighbour. Radically speaking, the human being has the potency for Hypostatic Union.²⁰⁶ God wants to continue his saving work, and through the encounter with the Gospel, Christians are called to a radical following which can be accomplished only by letting God come close. For God to come close there has to be an “*empty space*” where this potential Union with him might grow and come forth as love for the world.

²⁰⁴ On this, see Linnane : PhD.diss.,194ff. He argues that Rahner's “dying with Christ” is founded in a theocentric ethics.

²⁰⁵ Rahner: *The Love of Jesus and the Love of Neighbor*, 53. First emphasis by author, the next ones added.

²⁰⁶ See chap. 3.3.

The connection of Christology to anthropology should have become even clearer by now. In the following, I will investigate the consequences of Rahner's radical parallel between Incarnation and the human being. What does the following and the "dying with Christ" look like; how might a *kenotic attitude* be attained? We will see that the *experience* of the encounter with Jesus is of importance, and that *love* is one of the keys to understanding the principle of *kenosis*.

PART TWO – SPIRITUALITY

In the first part of this thesis, Karl Rahner's transcendental theology and Christology were presented. The recent summary and reflection focused on Jesus Christ and his absolute surrender to God, an act pointing at the fulfilment of human nature. In this second part of the thesis, attention will be given more specifically to the follower and the potential for attaining a *kenotic* attitude by focusing on the relationship to God in Jesus Christ.

The main approach will be Ignatian spirituality, which according to Rahner himself has been most influential to his work.²⁰⁷ I will start out, however, with bridging the theology and the spirituality by looking at the concept of *Immediate Experience of God* which is highly central in Rahnerian thought and for our issue of *kenosis*. When turning to *Ignatian Spirituality*, there will be offered a brief *Introduction* to the term. Then I will focus on some key passages given in the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius, asking how they can be seen in light of the *kenotic* attitude as described above, which is why I call the section *Three Ignatian Keys to Kenosis*. How is Rahner's theology related to these exercises? In the chapter *Karl Rahner and Ignatian Spirituality*, we will see in what ways his writings in general are related to this spirituality. Then, after treating *Rahner's interpretations on the chosen Exercises*, we will see that for Rahner *the Love of Neighbour and the Love of God* is the unity that is reflecting the *kenotic*, loving attitude of Jesus. This leads to the last question about *the Material Structure of the Following of Christ* – how is the *kenotic* attitude shown in daily life? Before coming to a conclusion on the thesis, four specific issues will be discussed in dialogue with some critics of Rahner. But I start out exploring this field of spirituality by asking: Is it really possible to experience God?

5. Immediate Experience of God

Karl Rahner claims that it is possible to have an immediate experience of God. We will soon learn what that means, which will provide a basis to understand the significance of *The Ignatian Exercises* which will be treated below.

²⁰⁷ Endean, 5. More on this in my chap. 7.1.

Rahner's writings about experiencing God are given in a variety of contexts, sometimes even with seemingly contradictory statements.²⁰⁸ The expression "immediate experience of God" is closely related to Rahner's understanding of *grace*, with many implications that cannot be treated here. We need only to understand the importance Rahner puts on experiencing God and the grace of God, and to see how this is related to the spirituality of *the Exercises*.

5.1. A Subversive Change

To situate Rahner's teaching on experiencing God in a context, it has to be mentioned that his teaching on this was rather subversive. There was traditionally a great scepticism regarding this in Catholic theology, and Rahner is one of those contributing to a change of view on this.²⁰⁹ Rahner himself does not deny that there seems to be a tension between the fact of the unfathomable God, being beyond our world, and the God appearing within our world of categorical experience, but for him the answer is not to conclude that God is beyond experience.²¹⁰ There exists a genuine mediation of immediacy with regard to God, a reality dependent on God's self-gift. The immediacy does not consist, however, in grasping who God *is*; in experiencing God he remains the incomprehensible mystery. As often with Rahner, there are two modalities of the experience of God that need to be held together – the transcendental and the categorical experience.²¹¹

5.2. The Transcendental and the Categorical

The experience of God is for Rahner related to the transcendental condition of the human being. God's grace is a universal offer that makes it possible to experience God even unthematically. We learned above that human beings experience themselves as open to the infinite horizon of being, a Rahnerian term for God. Due to this universal offer and the constitution of the human being as open towards the infinite horizon of being, there is a *transcendental experience* of God. Brian F. Linnane denotes this as the *first modality* of experiencing God's grace, which is corresponding to the fundamental option as described in

²⁰⁸ See Endean, chapters 2, 5, 6.

²⁰⁹ Cf. Anne Carr, saying: "Rahner has played a significant role in leading Catholic thought into its present open context in which the relevance of human experience to theology has become crucial". Carr in "Theology and Experience in the Thought of Karl Rahner", *The Journal of Religion*, Vol. 53. No.3 (Jul.,1973), 359-376; Brian Cogan : "Theological trends – is there a direct Experience of God", *The Way* Vol. 22 (1982), 122-133.

²¹⁰ *FCF*, 82-83.

²¹¹ Linnane, PhD.diss., 200-201.

chapter 2.5. The *second modality* occurs when this offer is accepted thematically, which also is an effect of the grace given in the first modality:

Only God's self-communication can effect the subject's acceptance of this self communication because the human subject, as created and finite, is unable to appropriate the uncreated and infinite without divine assistance. Similarly, the categorical, historical experiences of moral choice which co-determine, and are co-determined by, the transcendental free affirmation of God and self are enabled by grace.²¹²

It is not always possible to separate these modalities in the subject's experience, they have to be held together – both caused by the grace of God. As will become clear below, both modalities imply different aspects of surrendering. We start out by looking at the hidden experience of God.

5.3. Closeness in Hiddenness

In his famous “spiritual testament”, Rahner lets Ignatius of Loyola speak to the modern Jesuit: “I say simply: I experienced God, the nameless and unfathomable one, silent and yet near, in the triuneness of his turning to me...”²¹³ God can be experienced, not only as the unknown, infinite horizon that is at distance, as something abstract far from our reality. God can come close, he is experienced from within.²¹⁴ By immediate experience, Rahner does not mean an experience similar or alongside other empirical experiences, it is rather to be compared with the experience of being a subject.²¹⁵ In a favourite piece of Rahner, “The Experience of Grace”, he describes how this experience can be hidden in ordinary life-experiences.²¹⁶ During a wide range of questions he appeals to the experience of *being a spirit*, just to conclude that this is the *supernatural*. It is the Holy Spirit at work in us:²¹⁷

Have we ever kept quiet, even though we wanted to defend ourselves when we had been unfairly treated? Have we ever forgiven someone even though we got no thanks for it and our silent forgiveness was taken for granted? ... Have we ever tried to love God when we are no longer being borne on the crest of the wave of enthusiastic feeling, when it is no longer possible to mistake our self, and its vital urges, for God? ... Have we ever been good to someone who did not show the slightest sign of gratitude ...?

²¹² Ibid., 201.

²¹³ Rahner: *Ignatius of Loyola*, 11.

²¹⁴ The immediate experience of God is thus contrasted with the inferential knowledge of God that follows from the experience of created reality. Cf. Endean, 102.

²¹⁵ As described in chap. 2.2.

²¹⁶ It is denoted as “favourite piece” in a comment by Endean, in Rahner: *Spiritual Writings*, ed. Philip Endean (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2004), 77.

²¹⁷ In Rahner's theology *supernatural* denotes “that aspect of God's presence to us that depends only on *grace*, on God's existing for us as a *self-giver* – as opposed to the natural, which could be deduced from God's activity as Creator”, *Spiritual writings*, 79, note 4.

... [O]nce we experience the spirit in this way, we (at least, we as Christians who live in faith) have also already *in fact* experienced the *supernatural*. We have done so perhaps in a very anonymous and inexpressible manner... But we know... in actual fact it is not merely the spirit but the Holy Spirit who is at work in us. Then is the hour of his grace.²¹⁸

In this essay, Rahner shows that experiencing God might very well be unnoticed, coming from the depths of the human being, where God is communicating himself, sustaining our poor attempts of self-giving or love with his infinite love and grace. We see how this corresponds with his transcendental theology. It is worthwhile noticing that even the hidden experience Rahner points at in this passage has the character of an unselfish love of neighbour and of the obedient self-surrender to God that I have denoted as the *kenotic attitude*. The connection between experiencing God and attaining such an attitude will be treated further below.²¹⁹ Before this, we will have a look at how Rahner describes the categorical encounter that might take place when letting God come close.

5.4. Grace and the Mystical

We return for a moment to Rahner's Ignatius. In the first chapter, called The Direct Experience of God, Ignatius' experiences are depicted:

I knew Him clearly in such nearness and grace as is impossible to confound or mistake... God himself: I knew God himself, not simply human words describing him. I knew God and the freedom which is an integral part of him and which can only be known through him and not as the total of finite realities and calculations about them... This experience is grace indeed and basically there is no one to whom it is refused.²²⁰

To know God in such a clear way is an experience far more conscious than the hidden experience depicted above. That does not mean, however, that they are contradictory. The matter may be to let go of scepticism in order for God to come close, or rather to discover that God *is* close. That is the task for the Jesuits of today, says Rahner's Ignatius, urging them to give *the Exercises*.²²¹ As we will see later, *the Exercises* aims at concrete decisions regarding following Christ. This present investigation of the immediacy of God will show that the experiences involved prepare the individual for commitment and *kenosis*.

²¹⁸ *TI* 3.6; *SzT* 3, 106-107. I have shortened the paragraph considerably, regrettably missing the meditative style Rahner has in this piece.

²¹⁹ See chap. 6 and chap. 7, treating *The Exercises*, which by and through experiences with God in prayer aims at a "readiness for kenosis".

²²⁰ Rahner: *Ignatius of Loyola*, 11ff.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 12, 16.

One question is whether Rahner, by emphasizing the meeting of God *himself*, actually claims that God can be met *beyond* words, concepts or categorical objects. This is connected with the concept “consolation without preceding cause” used by Ignatius in *the Exercises*, referring to a state of consolation that is occurring without “any previous perception or understanding of some object”.²²² Rahner understands this as an experience without object, and describes it in this way: “This experience lays hold of the soul completely, opens the soul in a way in which it is clearly not generally open, in ordinary or even in reverent and devout knowledge of God.”²²³

He suggests further that such an immediacy of God is to be seen as a “perception” or “sense” of God, inwardly perceived: “The source itself is perceived; the divine origin of the consolation is not merely inferred, as something distinct from the consolation itself. . . .”²²⁴

Here Rahner talks about experiencing God in terms closer to mysticism than to ‘ordinary’ life experiences. Seen along with his transcendental theology, however, I understand this objectless, mystical experience to be a radical experience of *coming to oneself*, to get in touch with the ground of ones being, and thus related to *kenosis* – corresponding to what we learned in chapter 2.2.²²⁵ In spite of calling this a “perception” of God, Rahner is for theological reasons excluding an interpretation that “would make this a *visio beata immediate* in the doctrinal sense”.²²⁶ For Rahner, God is always the incomprehensible mystery that can never fully be grasped. Besides, it is important to notice how Rahner elsewhere stresses that the immediate experience of God is happening *within our world*, in our categorical reality. That does not make it less mystical, because it necessarily means that God’s grace is embracing our categorical reality.²²⁷ The solution might be found by looking at the historical life of Jesus. The humanity of Jesus functions as the categorical mediator needed for our minds to grasp the mysterious experience of grace, the immediate experience of God.²²⁸ Here we find the

²²² Exercise no.330 in *Saint Ignatius of Loyola, Personal Writings*, translated and edited by Joseph A. Munitiz and Philip Endean. Abbr. *ExIL*

²²³ Rahner: “The Logic of Concrete Individual Knowledge in Ignatius of Loyola” in *The Dynamic Element of the Church* (Freiburg/London: Herder/Burns & Oates, 1964), 153.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 154.

²²⁵ This view finds support in the following: “We are therefore dealing with an experience in which the very centre of the spiritual person as such comes into action and expressly so, experienced as such.” He continues to describe this experience as different from other “pious sentiments in thought and love”. *Ibid.*, 154. Philip Endean disagree with how Rahner interprets Ignatius on this point, and thinks Rahner since this 1956-essay has modified himself on this point: “The key Ignatian experience is one in which the dark contact with God present in all experience emerges into reflective awareness – a contact which cannot be cleanly distinguished from ‘purely natural’ transcendence.” Endean, 133, emphasis added. He discusses this further at p.157ff.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*

²²⁷ Endean, 56.

²²⁸ Cf. *TI* 3.3: “The Eternal Significance of the humanity of Jesus for our relationship with God”.

importance of *the Exercises*: by contemplating the historical life of Jesus they offer a key to become conscious of God's grace. By turning to Ignatian spirituality, we have come to the fourth sub question: *What elicits a desire for kenosis?* Before coming to an answer on that, I will give a brief introduction to Ignatian spirituality.

6. Ignatian Spirituality

In this chapter I will briefly introduce Ignatian spirituality, before paying attention to the Spiritual Exercises by looking at three central exercises which I prefer to call *keys to kenosis*.

6.1. Introduction

“Ignatian spirituality” is a broad and general term referring to modes of prayer introduced by contemporary retreat-giving and to the history and practice of the traditional *Spiritual Exercises*. There is a huge amount of ‘pious’ literature offered on the subject, but not too much of this provides a broader theological reflection.²²⁹ The following introduction will serve to present some notes on the background, to delimit the term as used in our context and to clarify the connection with Karl Rahner, without attempting to present the spirituality as such.

Ignatian spirituality has its origin in the life and writings of Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556), the founder of the Society of Jesus, popularly known as the Jesuits.²³⁰ During his life Ignatius spent a lot of time giving direction to young people, of whom many were confronted with the fundamental choice regarding their state of life. He gradually developed a set of spiritual exercises helping his directees with these fundamental options. These guidelines of prayers are what we today call *the Spiritual Exercises*.²³¹ Philip Endean gives this brief introduction to the themes and purpose for *the Exercises* in contemporary practice:

The aim of the Exercises is to help people order their everyday lives according to God's will, and thus truly to ‘find God in all things’. The process involves a structured programme of imaginative prayer. In the first part, one deepens one's awareness of being a forgiven sinner, and then one spends up to three weeks contemplating the life,

²²⁹ Philip Endean (p. 7) recommends the introduction of David Lonsdale, *Eyes to See, Ears to Hear: an Introduction to Ignatian Spirituality* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1990).

²³⁰ More correctly: he is one of the founders – he does not see himself to be the one founder.

²³¹ My source to the writings of Ignatius is “*Saint Ignatius of Loyola, Personal Writings*”, translated and edited by Joseph A. Munitiz and Philip Endean. In the following I refer to this as “the Exercises”.

death and resurrection of Christ. During the process, one may arrive at decisions about one's own life and conduct, of greater or lesser import.²³²

As Endean indicates, the program is structured into Four Weeks, aiming at an individual decision related to the following of Christ.²³³ While *the Exercises* originally was given to people confronted with their life-time decision, often called the Election, we see today a development towards a freer use of the spirituality as guiding principles for people searching for a deeper relationship with God in their life. Contemporary practice distinguishes between “Ignatian retreats”, often extended for eight or ten days, and what is called “the 30 days” which is the full program of *the Exercises*. Both types are called directed retreats due to the individual daily meeting with a spiritual director. In the days of Karl Rahner those retreats were preached, and that is why we have his talks given on *the Exercises*.²³⁴ In the following presentation and discussion I will mainly refer to Ignatian spirituality as shown in *the Exercises* and interpreted by Rahner.

Given this background, I intend to highlight some specific themes of *the Exercises* by presenting three decisive prayers; which I call *three keys to kenosis*. I am very well aware the limits of doing this, since *the Exercises*' intention and context is to be seen as a complete process, understandable only by practicing.²³⁵ The following is thus not to be seen as some key to understand *the Exercises* as such, but to give an introduction to some themes significant for this thesis.

6.2. Three Ignatian Keys to Kenosis

The decision of choosing the following three passages of *the Exercises* is taken on a reflection based on personal experience; I have found these three exercises to be the highlights of the total process, and they concern the issue of *kenosis* both directly and indirectly.²³⁶ They will demonstrate that *practicing this spirituality will lead to a desire for kenosis*, thus meeting our

²³² Endean, 6-7.

²³³ The Ignatian Wikipedia Site offers an adequate introduction to the methodology and structure of the Exercises: http://en.ignatianwiki.org/Spiritual_Exercises, 30.4.2010

²³⁴ His book *Spiritual Exercises* (abbr. *SE*) is a collection of talks given of him at eight days retreats based on the Exercises. See foreword, *SE* p. 7.

²³⁵ All commentaries and introductions to the Spiritual Exercises take this precaution, so does Rahner:

“Therefore, it is my hope that this book will not be the occasion for the common error that, when a person has read through some theological considerations based on the themes of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, he then knows what the Exercises are, or even worse, thinks that he has already made the Spiritual Exercises.” *SE*, 9.

²³⁶ This is in line with the previous note, which allows me in this connection to benefit from my personal experience of *the Exercises*.

sub question: *What is eliciting a desire for kenosis?* Furthermore, a renowned commentator on *the Exercises*, David L. Fleming SJ, chooses the same passages in one of his presentations of *the Exercises*.²³⁷ Since the material chosen is located in the beginning, in the middle and at the end of *the Exercises*, they will also indicate the purpose and process of *the Exercises*. For now, the comments to these exercises are few and restricted; they serve as an introduction to the themes we will return to below, in dialogue with Rahner's writings. The first passage to which we now turn is from the very beginning of the retreat, as indicated by its title *The First Principle and Foundation*.

6.2.1. The First Principle and Foundation

As a heading of the First Week, Ignatius states the purpose of *the Exercises*, which is “the overcoming of self and the ordering of one's life on the basis of a decision made in freedom from any ill-ordered attachment”.²³⁸ In this way, *the Exercises* is from the outset pointing towards an idea of *giving up* something of *the self*. The further basis for making decisions providing an overcoming of the self is given in *The First Principle and Foundation* which reads as follows:

The human person is created to praise, reverence and serve God Our Lord, and by so doing to save his or her soul. The other things on the face of the earth are created for human beings in order to help them pursue the end for which they are created. It follows from this that one must use other created things in so far as they help towards one's end, and free oneself from them in so far as they are obstacles to one's end. To do this we need to make ourselves indifferent to all created things, provided the matter is subject to our free choice and there is no prohibition. Thus as far as we are concerned, we should not want health more than illness, wealth more than poverty, fame more than disgrace, a long life more than a short one, and similarly for all the rest, but we should desire and choose only what helps us more towards the end for which we are created.²³⁹

This passage has become popularly recognized as an articulate expression of the way Ignatius conceived of the God-person relationship.²⁴⁰ The very purpose for the human being is to relate to God by honouring and serving him. This is to be the guiding principle for any Christian: Is the life I live, the decisions I undertake serving the greater glory of God? Insofar as this is the wanted attitude, it follows that all other created things in the world are of less importance, they are mere means to be used to reach the person's goal. This attitude towards God and

²³⁷ <http://ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-spiritual-exercises/ignatius-three-part-vision/>, 27.4.2010.

Fleming denotes the Exercises as three visions: The vision of life, the vision of work and the vision of Love.

²³⁸ *ExIL*, no. 21, 289

²³⁹ *ExIL*, no. 23, 289

²⁴⁰ [http://en.ignatianwiki.org/Spiritual Exercises](http://en.ignatianwiki.org/Spiritual_Exercises) 30.4.2010.

towards things in the world is called *indifference*, which is seen as a guiding principle for the follower of Christ. This is not at all due to a hostile attitude toward material goods, but rather a principle that aims towards serving God and not oneself, which for Ignatius also implies leading the person to its goal and fulfilment. In the next chapter we will see how Rahner interprets the term indifference in a particular way.

Later in *the Exercises*, Ignatius suggests three ways of making decisions according to the indifferent attitude. If one is making a choice in the third of these ways, one should be free from “any disordered attachment”, free to focus on “the end for which I am created”, finding oneself indifferent, so that “I am not more inclined or attracted to accepting what is put before me than to refusing it, nor to refusing it rather than to accepting it”, but “find myself as in the middle of a balance”.²⁴¹ Then Ignatius suggests that confronted with such choices, one can “ask of God our Lord to be pleased to *move my will and bring to my mind what I ought to do* that is most for His praise and glory” regarding the thing proposed.²⁴² Indifference is thus a conscious attitude appealing to the freedom of the person, but letting the decisions depend on a response from God to the person praying. The intention of this prayer is *a unity of the wills of God and the person* which will serve the superior goal of giving glory to God. This requires of course a conscious “discernment of spirits”; which is why Ignatius offers guidelines for discernment throughout *the Exercises*.²⁴³

This exercise deals with an inner attitude of life that is directed both towards God and towards the concrete daily-life decisions. *In so far as* God’s will for a person is poverty or sickness or any other suffering because this is to serve Him better; then this person should choose that way because it leads the person closer to its end and goal. This might sound quite demanding for the average thinking of today, but could rightly be seen as a *sharing in the obedient, kenotic attitude of Jesus* as described above. Let us now see further how Ignatius relates elections to the following of Christ.

6.2.2. The Call of the King

During the First Week, the retreatant has contemplated on the sin in the world and on the great gifts of God to this world filled with sin. In the Second Week the time has come to contemplate the Incarnation and the earthly life and ministry of Jesus. Before this, in the

²⁴¹ *ExIL*, no. 179-180, 318; Endean, 18 (the last few words), emphasis added.

²⁴² *ExIL*, no.180, 318.

²⁴³ This methodological side of *the Exercises* will be outside the scope of this thesis, but there are some comments on this in chap. 7.2.2.

beginning of the Second Week, Ignatius presents the exercise called “The Call of the King”. He proposes to think about Jesus after the model of a king to whom one owes reverence and *obedience*. This king is a great leader who wants to overcome all the evil of the world – to “conquer the whole world and every enemy”- and he needs followers to help.²⁴⁴ The King poses a challenge: “[A]ll those who want to come with me will have to labour with me, so that by following me in my suffering, they may also follow me into glory.”²⁴⁵ Those responding with love at this challenge are not only asked for bodily commitment, but “by going against their sensuality and their carnal and worldly love [they] will offer greater and more important sacrifices, saying: “...My resolute wish and desire, and my considered determination – on the sole condition that this be for your greater service and praise – is to imitate you in enduring every outrage and all contempt, and utter poverty, both actual and spiritual, if your most holy Majesty wants to choose me and receive me into that life and state.”²⁴⁶

We see how the first passage of indifference is reflected here, too: to imitate the King in suffering and contempt is on the condition that it is according to the will of God, the Majesty. What the concrete following will look like and what election the individual person is to take, is to be clear during the Second Week while contemplating different situations from the life of Jesus. The point at this stage of the process is to attain the right *attitude of desire for following Jesus*, whatever costs required. Is the love of Jesus imposed on the retreatant, does he/she love Jesus to the degree of being *ready to abandon* himself/herself? The person is asked to be willing to surrender himself/herself totally to the will of God. This I take to be the *second key to kenosis*. All the exercises to come after this passage, aspire a profound, personal involvement with the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. When finished all those days and weeks of prayer, the final suggested prayer is the prayer for attaining love, which in my scheme corresponds to the *third key to kenosis*.

6.2.3. Contemplation for Attaining Love

This contemplation is offered as an additional prayer and is thus commonly practiced as a closure of the retreat. While looking back at all the experiences during the previous weeks, the retreatant is recommended to contemplate God’s love and on what might be an adequate response to that love. Ignatius describes God’s love seen from four different aspects, which

²⁴⁴ *ExIL*, no. 95, 304.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁶ *ExIL*, no. 97 and 98, 304.

might be expressed as God gives, God inhabits, God works and God descends.²⁴⁷ The *first* point is to recall how God has created all good things and to consider “with affection how much God Our Lord has done for me” and how it is God’s divine wish to “give me himself”.²⁴⁸ In the *second* contemplation Ignatius tells the retreatant to think of how God is dwelling in all creatures causing growth, and so “how He dwells also in me, giving me life and sensation, and causing me to understand”.²⁴⁹ The *third* aspect to reflect on is “how God works and labours on my behalf in all created things on the face of the earth...”, and the *fourth* point is “to see how all that is good and every gift descends from on high” – which also includes “my limited powers”.²⁵⁰

These contemplations are recalling all the previous experiences of *the Exercises*, and contain several important aspects of Ignatian spirituality which we have to leave out here. I will only point to the very characteristic Ignatian expression of “finding God in all things”. God is not at a distance; God is to be found in all the things of the world, by giving, working and dwelling in all the creatures. To love God is to love his creatures, as we will see later stressed in Rahner’s Ignatian spirituality.²⁵¹ Of more interest now, is the intention of the exercise which is to *raise the desire to respond* with love to God. This love, Ignatius suggests, can be formulated in the following prayer, called “Suscipe”, which means ‘Take and receive’:

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding and my entire will, all that I have and possess.

You gave it all to me; to you Lord I give it all back. All is yours; dispose of it entirely according to your will. Give me the grace to love you, for that is enough for me.²⁵²

To give God everything back, to ask him disposing of one’s liberty, memory, understanding and will – this is obviously and clearly an expression of *emptying oneself*. During this brief presentation of Ignatian spirituality, the intention of raising a desire for a surrendering to the will of God has been obvious; meeting my sub-question of how *to attain a desire for kenosis*. When turning to Rahner and his interpretations of *the Exercises*, this will become even clearer. Before that we will have a brief look at his relationship to Ignatian spirituality.

²⁴⁷ *SE*, 275.

²⁴⁸ *ExIL*, no. 234, 329. Note the phrase “give me himself”, which I regard to be echoed in Rahner’s expression of God’s self-communication.

²⁴⁹ *ExIL*, no. 235, 330.

²⁵⁰ *ExIL*, no. 236-237, 330.

²⁵¹ See chap. 7.2.1.

²⁵² *ExIL*, no. 234, 329.

7. Karl Rahner and Ignatian Spirituality

When turning to the spirituality of Karl Rahner, we will mostly follow Ignatian spirituality, though not always explicitly. In the first section of this chapter I will start out with some preliminary remarks on how Rahner himself commented on the *influence of Ignatian Spirituality* on his works, and whether this corresponds with the material actually given on the topic.²⁵³ After those remarks, I will turn to how *Rahner interprets the Exercises*, here represented by the three *keys to kenosis*. In the last section of this chapter, I will look at another important contribution of Rahner regarding the following of Christ. By establishing the expression *The Unity of the Love of Neighbor and the Love of God*, he offers a transcendental understanding of the double commandment.²⁵⁴ Love is for Rahner an *unconditional abandoning* to the other; his reflections on love might thus deepen our understanding of *kenosis* as a following of Christ.

7.1. Remarks on the Ignatian Influence on Karl Rahner

As a Jesuit, Karl Rahner certainly has been influenced by Ignatian spirituality. During his formation as a priest he met, and practiced, *the Exercises* himself. The fact that he several times offered Ignatian retreats, speaks for itself.²⁵⁵ Nevertheless, it is for theology Karl Rahner is renowned, more than for his “spiritual” books on and with prayers.²⁵⁶ Only late in his life does Rahner speak in public about how Ignatian spirituality had been influencing his life and his writings. This happened in fact *after* this was debated and treated by his biographer and other people commenting on the works of Rahner.²⁵⁷ In the 70’s he published several essays connecting his theology with Ignatian spirituality, and in a speech given at his 80th birthday this spirituality was mentioned as one of four key aspects of his theology.²⁵⁸ The question remains then, whether the earlier works of Rahner reflect this spirituality, at least

²⁵³ An extensive contribution on this subject is offered by Philip Endean: *Karl Rahner and Ignatian Spirituality*.

²⁵⁴ *TI* 6.16: “Reflections on the Unity of the Love of Neighbor and the Love of God” (1965); *LJLN*.

²⁵⁵ *SE*, 7.

²⁵⁶ Of these can be mentioned: *Encounters with Silence*, trans. James M. Damske S.J. (South Bend, Indiana: St. Augustine’s Press, 1999); *Prayer for a Lifetime*, ed. Albert Raffelt (New York: Crossroad, 1984); *Spiritual Writings*, ed. Philip Endean (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2004). The two latter are collections edited and published after his death.

²⁵⁷ Endean, 3ff. According to Endean it was only in the late 1970’s that Rahner became conscious on this crucial influence of Ignatius. He refers to works of Karl Lehmann, Klaus Peter Fischer and Karl Heinz Neufeld.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 4,5. E.g of “Ignatian” essays: *TI* 16.9: “Reflections on a New Task for Fundamental Theology”; *TI* 16.8: “Modern Piety and the Experience of Retreats”; *TI* 17.1: “Christmas in Light of the Exercises”; “The Ignatian Exercises” in *Practice of Faith*; “Ignatius of Loyola Speaks to a Modern Jesuit”, in *Ignatius of Loyola*.

implicitly? Philip Endean's study *Karl Rahner and Ignatian Spirituality* claims that "Rahner's achievement is ultimately rooted in his spirituality", which is why he in the same study "relativizes the importance of his early philosophical works".²⁵⁹ But due to Rahner's presumable late consciousness of this influence, this spirituality is not always obvious to the reader. Besides, his more explicit writings on this spirituality are rather fragmented, given in various genres.²⁶⁰ In this second part of my thesis, I mainly use essays and books where this spirituality is more explicitly stated. There is, however, interest in bringing forth other texts; assuming that they are influenced by the same spirituality, if so only indirectly. When for instance dealing with the understanding of love, we will profit by turning to sources that are not typical of Ignatian character. However, the primary source, to which we now return, is Karl Rahner's commentary on the *Spiritual Exercises*, where we will look at how he interprets my chosen passages, the so-called *keys to kenosis*.

7.2. Rahner's Approach to 'the Three Keys to Kenosis'

In chapter 6.2, I established the term *Ignatian keys to kenosis* by choosing three Ignatian Exercises; inquiring how they might be seen in light of kenosis as a following of Christ. We now return to those three exercises, in order to find out how Rahner interpreted them, once more with the intention of finding some keys to *kenosis* in his comments. The first exercise is *The Principle and Foundation*, from now on denoted as the *Foundation*. The sources are mainly talks given on retreats, later published as *Spiritual Exercises*.²⁶¹

7.2.1. Rahner on the Principle and Foundation

Before going in detail on commenting on the exercise, Rahner notes that the Foundation concerns *existential appropriation*, which has to be seen as a state of becoming – lasting all of life. Then he pays attention to two aspects of the exercise.

First, Rahner points to the phrase *The Other Things* of this world towards which one is to attain the right attitude. These things are not only possessions, but relationships, one's activity, and even the very nature of one's person. It is a process of freeing the self from the

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 7. Endean shows, however, that Rahner also draws on other spiritual sources, such as the Church Fathers and Bonaventura. Endean, 21ff, 24ff.

²⁶⁰ Endean is nevertheless reluctant to admit that Ignatius was the most significant source of Rahner's theology, moreover he states: "We must also acknowledge that Rahner's attempts at serious Ignatian exegesis are both few and flawed. Ibid., 239.

²⁶¹ See note 234. It follows from this that the book offers a spiritual approach rather than academic.

ego. “That which remains is the ‘peak of the soul’, that is, the free self-surrendering person posited by God.”²⁶² But these “other things” are not something simply to be eliminated, because as human beings we are in need of them even in regards to our relationship to God. The things are in themselves good insofar as they serve the goal for which we are created, that is “to praise, reverence and serve God”. But, due to the fact of sin, we are easily disturbed in the objective *order* of the things. According to Rahner, it is only after having a positive experience of these things that it becomes possible for a person to properly give them up without resentment.²⁶³ Then he/she will realize that what is given up is coming back in a glorious manner. The one who can give things up in the right way becomes not poorer, but richer, Rahner says, before pointing to the Christological structure:

In Christ everything has been taken over, but also called to the cross and to death, and only by passing through both of these destined for glory. ... In death the sinful identification of myself with the other things is completely dissolved, but also through death the proper, positive relationship to them becomes possible, so that they are able to attain their “glorification”.²⁶⁴

In this way, Rahner connects the concrete attitude towards all “the other things” with what we saw above concerning “dying with Christ”. As in death, we day by day have to leave behind every single thing which is our life, *or* use it for the glory of God. This is an on-going process of perfection, practicing day by day how to relate rightly to things in the world, using them and leaving them becoming two aspects of the same thing.²⁶⁵ This requires a specific distance to the things, which is Rahner’s *second* point of the Foundation:

“*Indifference* is a kind of removal or distance away from things that makes true vision possible and is required for a proper decision.”²⁶⁶ With these opening words Rahner points right to the heart of the Ignatian term *indifference*. Since a proper decision is the aim of *the Exercises*, the attitude of indifference is a crucial part of this prayer and an on-going exercise through life. Rahner argues that taking free decisions is not something given at one moment of our lives, because through life we are filled with prejudices or pre-decisions forming our next steps. Indifference has to be practiced during a process, to be appropriated and integrated, until it enters “into the nerves and the very marrow of the bones”.²⁶⁷ Rahner is

²⁶² *SE*, 19.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, 20.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 21.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 23.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 24.

very clear about the challenge herein. It demands an existential distance from things that enables the person to be freed from the prejudices and to act according to this. This *active indifference* implies taking responsibility for how the “other things” are used or left behind. But because we actually love these “things” we can never arrive at a perfect distance from them or from the world. Therefore, we have to rely on God. “This active indifference is surrounded and protected by man’s humble *handing over of himself* to God’s good pleasure”.²⁶⁸ This handing over corresponds to the free act of *self-surrendering* that is sustained by grace as described in chapter 3.6. This is what we are called to in the exercise of the Foundation, and in any event throughout our lives, in order to free ourselves from prejudices and by God’s grace make decisions according to his will.

Indifference, Freedom and Hypostatic Union

So far we have seen how Rahner in *Spiritual Exercises* describes indifference most of all as a *practice of attitude*. In a short essay found in *Theological Investigation* he takes another interesting approach, seen from the view of transcendental theology.²⁶⁹ Here he compares indifference with the freedom St Paul speaks of as the liberating grace coming from God, which “radically transforms our transcendental nature, directing it towards himself.” This freedom liberates us from “the other things” which otherwise tend to enslave us. There is a unity of indifference and freedom, he says: “Indifference and freedom, seen as one and the same thing, signify the infinite and open space in which *God becomes the event we encounter* in our existence – *God himself*, not God represented by anything finite.”²⁷⁰

What I find interesting here, is the fact that Rahner refers to the unity of freedom and indifference as an *event*. The further context shows that he speaks of the sort of consolation experience as referred to above as “consolation without preceding cause”.²⁷¹ Experiencing this will lead to concrete decisions based on divine freedom:

In this way Ignatian choice is, in unadulterated and undivided unity, the place at which divine freedom, the consolation of indifference and our earthly decision in freedom for something specific are simultaneously consummated. In Ignatius himself the mystery of this unity in the existential logic of decision may remain largely unexplained and continue to be a nuzzling problem for theologians and philosophers. But it seems to

²⁶⁸ Ibid., emphasis added.

²⁶⁹ *TI* 17.1 : “Christmas in the light of the Exercises”

²⁷⁰ Ibid., emphasis added; *SzT* 12, 330.

²⁷¹ See chap. 5

me all the same that in Ignatius Loyola we find that the experience of such unity is possible and is actually achieved.²⁷²

When using words as event, experience and consolation, I understand Rahner to speak of moments given on special occasions, which might for instance occur while contemplating *the Exercises*. However, this is not an experience that gives *certain knowledge*: “this encountered event can only be the continuing object of our own wavering hope”.²⁷³ The question whether one by immediate experiencing of God might have certain knowledge is debated, both when it comes to understanding Ignatius (as Rahner refers to himself), and the Ignatian writings of Rahner.²⁷⁴ This is related to several themes that cannot be treated here, involving both epistemology and theology. Regarding *the Exercises* the discussion in particular goes on the “Ignatian Choice” as Rahner here is referring to. Mainly, it is a matter of *discernment*. Because searching the will of God is a matter of *giving up one’s own will*, the matter of discernment is of interest for our topic. Some questions and brief reflections might indicate the issue without permitting me to go in detail.

Is it possible for God to communicate his will to the human being without previous cause, as in objectless prayer? Most critics claim that our knowledge of him and of his will is bound to categorical objects due to our perception.²⁷⁵ Is it at all possible to discern the will of God out of an experience, and if so, can the decision coming out of that be really free? The first presupposition is that God really can be experienced – as we have treated above.²⁷⁶ Then, the impulses evoked in that experience have to be discerned from other impulses. In Ignatian Spirituality this is done by what Rahner calls “the experimental test of consolation”.²⁷⁷ Very roughly said, it is based on testing the feelings during and after the experience, asking whether the impulses lead to greater peace, hope or love towards God.²⁷⁸ But then, it might occur that the concrete circumstances might change and alter the freedom of choice; one might for

²⁷² *TI* 17.1; *SzT* 12, 331.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*; *SzT* 12, 330.

²⁷⁴ Philip Endean goes in detail on these questions in *Karl Rahner and Ignatian Spirituality*, 215ff. He is of the opinion that Rahner never faced this question directly.

²⁷⁵ For this, see Egan, chap. II, 31-62. In the foreword of this book Rahner says: “The discussion about this “consolation without previous cause” seems to be the most important part of the book.” He regards such consolation not to be a “singular mystical phenomenon open only to a select few, but as the foundation and highpoint of ‘normal’ Christian life.” Egan, xv. Endean finds Rahner’s view on this problematic, see 139-140.

²⁷⁶ *Ref.* chap. 5

²⁷⁷ Rahner, *The Dynamic Element in the Church*, 155.

²⁷⁸ Cf. *ExIL* no. 316, 317. For more on this, see i.e. David Lonsdale: *Eyes to see, Ears to Hear* (New York: Orbis Books, 2000), 95ff.

instance decide entering an order, only to be refused by the responsible superior.²⁷⁹ For this reason Philip Endean argues for a distinction between the immediate experience, which fosters a *desire*, and on the other hand, the actions or decisions coming *after* the experience.²⁸⁰ He illustrates this with the story of the prodigal son. In this story it was the change of mind; the desire to come home, that was the crucial moment, not the practical outcome.²⁸¹ If the decision forms a *unity* with the experience, as Rahner indicates, one might easily doubt the experience when the decision turns out to be false; and so God's self-presence may be undermined. While there is disagreement on how to interpret the moment of decision, Endean's suggestion of *desire* as a crucial turning-point is not contradictory to Rahner's understanding. I take Rahner's concept of the unity of indifference and freedom to be a concern of transcending the human will to become free to take a proper decision. Attaining *indifference* is a preparing and a basis for attaining a desire to serve God and his will, which in this context is to be seen as *attaining a desire for kenosis*. To do the will of God requires a self-surrender and a letting go of egoistic desires.

At the end of his essay, Rahner's transcendental approach is further demonstrated. Here the unity of freedom and indifference is compared with the Christmas-event, that is, with the hypostatic union. "Christmas is the supreme instance of this unity of transcendence and concrete freedom, though of course it is unique, unsurpassable and exemplary." We have previously seen that Rahner thinks of hypostatic union to be in principle the same as the bestowal of grace.²⁸² In this essay about indifference and freedom, he once more states that as human beings we all have the potentiality for this hypostatic union: This potentiality is to "interpret and fulfill itself in the experience of that mysterious unity of indifferent freedom and specific decision".²⁸³ Although Rahner through this essay has been indicating the 'event' of such an experience, he concludes with the 'practice':

All the same, we may say that the practice of Ignatian indifference, as the freedom which loses itself willingly in the mysteriousness of God, and the finding a home in the specific existence uniquely given to every one of us, allows that unadulterated and undivided unity to grow in us. We then find God in that unity, even in the down-to-earth triviality of our everyday life; and we cease to be the slaves of that triviality.²⁸⁴

²⁷⁹ Endean, 216.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 218.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 217.

²⁸² Cf. chap.3.3, note 151 and 152.

²⁸³ *TI* 17.1; *SzT* 12, 332-33.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

By concluding in this way, Rahner bridges the way of immediate experience with the way of practice, the spirituality with the theology and the transcendental with the categorical.²⁸⁵ The way of practicing is for Rahner to *lose oneself* in the mystery that is God. Attaining indifference is a lifelong practice of self-surrendering, but experiencing *events of consolation* is increasing the hope and as such they function as *motivation* for continuing on the way leading to this growing unity of freedom and indifference – which is the way of *kenosis*. Both the practice and the consolation is sustained by grace, we only might let it happen.

7.2.2. Rahner on the Call of the King

While *the Foundation* is placed at the beginning of the “four weeks”, *The Call of the King* is given in the beginning of the second week. As mentioned above, the retreatant has now spent one week contemplating the sin of the world contrasting God’s good gifts. As Rahner expresses it – the retreatant is by now “supposed to have become mistrustful of his former life, and he is supposed to have aroused within himself the will to make a decision”.²⁸⁶ This exercise has to be seen in the light of aiming at a concrete decision related to how to follow Christ. But at this stage it is still not concrete: “The result of this meditation should be an unconditioned readiness to make the choice God is asking.”²⁸⁷ The goal of the Exercise is to “*produce a definitive readiness to follow Christ*, and it explicitly includes the choice of the difficult, the laborious, the humble, and the poor as essential elements of this following.”²⁸⁸

With these preliminary words Rahner points at the seriousness implied in the call of this exercise. One has to be aware of the costs of following Christ, the King. If one wants to share the victory, one has to pay the cost and be ready to share the suffering as well. There is no reason to refer to the details of Rahner’s interpretation here. With the focus of looking for *kenosis*, his conclusion is of greater relevance. Here he points at the last part of the exercise where Ignatius suggests the prayer called *Suscipe*.²⁸⁹ In this prayer the retreatant should express the desire to imitate Christ whatever sufferings required, as long as it is according to the will of God. Ignatius is “clear as crystal” about the suffering implied in the following, Rahner says.²⁹⁰ It is a question of *willingness* to be drawn into the labour of “conquering the world” and it is a matter of *openness* towards the coming of the Kingdom of God. To become

²⁸⁵ Transcendental here understood in the typical Rahnerian way, see chap. 1.

²⁸⁶ *SE*, 126.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 127.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 128, emphasis added.

²⁸⁹ See above chap. 6.2.3.

²⁹⁰ *SE*, 133.

a part of this, one also has to be ready for suffering, even death. This does not yet mean a concrete mission or a uniformed vocation. What Ignatius clearly indicates is the “direction my choice should follow, since he speaks of insults, injuries, poverty, and so forth”.²⁹¹ All this is *provided* that He is actually calling in this direction, because the matter is right to the end to search for the will of God. However, the question at stake is the *readiness*. At this point of *the Exercises* “*the readiness for the kenosis of the Lord Jesus Christ*” should be revealed.²⁹² “Anyone who hesitates here should really give up the retreat right now”, Rahner says.²⁹³

It is remarkable that Rahner at this crucial point of decision uses the word *kenosis* as expressing the radical following of Jesus Christ. To be ready for this *kenosis* means to be prepared to go wherever God wants you to go, taking the risk of possible suffering and even death. We have seen how important the term *indifference* is within Ignatian spirituality. I propose that Rahner’s “*readiness for the kenosis*” has to be seen in light of the indifference. This could be illustrated by looking at the dialogue between Jesus and Peter after the resurrection.²⁹⁴ Without doing an exegesis of this well-known story, there are some words in the dialogue that might enlighten this *readiness for kenosis*. After having denied Jesus three times, Peter is now challenged by Jesus: Do you love me? Three times Peter confirms his love and his willingness to follow and serve Jesus. Then Jesus clearly expresses the costs, proclaiming: “I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go”.²⁹⁵ According to St John, Jesus is indicating the kind of death Peter will suffer. Tradition tells us that Peter ended his life by martyrdom during the persecutions of Nero.²⁹⁶ If interpreted allegorically, the dialogue may illustrate that following Jesus implies a change of attitude, a *surrendering of one’s will*. Becoming a mature, radical follower means to give up following one’s own wants and wishes. This might even lead concretely to death, *if that is serving God’s greater glory*. To be ready for *kenosis* is to attain an attitude that seeks the will of God without any “guarantees”. A radical surrendering like this leads to some questions. *One* is whether the subject of this surrendering has the guarantee of being embraced by God’s love. In chapter 3.6, while

²⁹¹ Ibid., 134.

²⁹² Ibid., emphasis added.

²⁹³ Ibid.

²⁹⁴ John 21:15ff. Some of the following is inspired by a homily of p. Jesper Fich, at the feast of St. Peter and St. Paul – Stella Matutina, Kokkedal 2010.

²⁹⁵ Ibid. v. 18.

²⁹⁶ <http://www.katolsk.no/biografi/peter.htm>

treating “*death as kenosis*”, we discussed this related to the surrender to death, concluding that according to the transcendental theology of Rahner, one is always embedded by the grace of God. Seen like this, the risk of *kenosis* is to let go of what we might call the ego, but not of one’s deepest identity. Since God, according to Rahner, is the real ground of our being, a letting go of one’s will is to trust that beyond or beneath that will, is God’s grace, causing the person to discover the fullness of its being.²⁹⁷ If that happens, then the will of God and the subject’s will are becoming *one will*. Searching God’s will is actually identical with finding oneself - by losing oneself. That does not go without fighting against the ego and the forces of sin, pulling the person in the opposite direction. Only by *experiencing* God and his grace is that struggle possible, step by step, a view I take to be supported by Rahner’s theology of grace. *God is there*, before and throughout the act of surrendering.

The decisive question from Jesus to Peter was about love. Without true love there will be no *readiness for kenosis*. For the rest of this chapter we will follow Rahner and his interpretation of the last ‘key’ to *kenosis*; here *love* is seen as the expected response to the gifts coming from God and the only starting point for *kenosis* as a following of Christ.

7.2.3. Rahner on Contemplation for Attaining Love

The ‘Contemplation for Attaining Love’ sums up the whole process of *the Exercises*. Hence, in this contemplation many strands come together; a fact also reflected in Rahner’s comments on this exercise.²⁹⁸ In light of the character of his *Spiritual Exercises*, based on talks at retreats now coming to an end, the focus on looking back is understandable. I will omit most of his comments referring to other Exercises, only pointing at some of the strands given. In this section the matter is to see how the love described is linked with the commitment that is emerging from contemplating the life and death of Jesus Christ, while the *nature* of this love is to be described in more detail in the next sections; held together with Rahner’s transcendental theology.

The goal of this exercise is according to Rahner the goal of the entire retreat. The contemplation on love is in fact the result of the election, and this love should according to

²⁹⁷ “The ‘fulness’ is not to be pieced together from the sum total of particular finite possibilities, but lies ahead of us as the one, whole, ‘absolute’ future, which in Christian terms we are accustomed to call ‘God’ He is ready to give himself to us if we succeed in ‘letting go’”. *TI* 9.15: “Self-realisation and taking up one’s Cross”; *SzT* 8, 324.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 270.

Rahner “say something to us that surpasses every philosophical or theological speculation.”²⁹⁹ The love spoken of here is “the love of *surrender* to God and Christ.” Rahner compares it with other exercises, emphasizing the element of self-*humbling* and stretching beyond the intellect.³⁰⁰ This love should according to the exercise be *attained by contemplating* things in the world, coming from God.³⁰¹ But finding God in a seemingly cruel world depends on *meeting* him, Rahner says: “Finding God in all things and experiencing the transparence [sic!] of things toward God is accomplished only by the person who meets this God at that point where he descended into utter darkness and abandonment: on the cross of Jesus Christ!”³⁰²

Rahner here connects the Ignatian principle of “finding God in all things” with the descent of God in the world, the event of Incarnation. The life and the Cross of Jesus have been most central during the four weeks. By entering the world, Jesus truly demonstrated God’s love, becoming a servant. The love that is asked for in this contemplation can only be attained by accepting the truth of Christ, sharing his mission. Only by meeting him, being involved personally with his life, is it possible to find God and his love in this world. *The Exercises* provides such an engagement without necessarily terminating in “an abstract metaphysical eros of God, but in a service which is added to God’s work in the world”.³⁰³ The nature of *the Exercises* is to experience God by *involving oneself in Jesus’ life*, but the outcome and the goal is to find him in this world, *doing his will* in and for the world. As Jesus entered and loved the world, his followers attain the same love in this very world, too: “The love of the ‘finding God in all things’ is certainly aware of a tender, chaste immediacy of the God it seeks and clings to in the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, or better, therefore, St. Ignatius does not ignore the world. For it can always be a means to God.”³⁰⁴

There is a well balanced dynamic in this principle. While being aware of the immediacy of God, it is nevertheless linked to this world. The closeness of God implies on the one hand tenderness, and on the other suffering and *abandonment*. For that reason, this contemplation is according to Rahner closely linked to *The Call of the King*: “The love we have concerned

²⁹⁹ Ibid., 271.

³⁰⁰ Ibid., emphasis added.

³⁰¹ See above, chap. 6.2.3.

³⁰² *SE*, 272.

³⁰³ Ibid.

³⁰⁴ Ibid., 273.

ourselves about during the whole retreat contains the unconditioned desire to begin with God to save the world, and to take it with us to God even if we must die in the process.”³⁰⁵

The passion of the exercise is reflected in these words of Rahner. The love implies an urgent *desire* to serve God that might even lead to death. According to Rahner, a specific *commitment* is thus required of the follower. After describing in detail different aspects of the love of God presented in Ignatius’ exercise, he points to the “finding God in all things” as the common element.³⁰⁶ But in order to really experience Him in all things, an “ultimate commitment ... is necessary”, he says.³⁰⁷ I find this statement somewhat ambivalent. Rahner here seems to insinuate that such a commitment is a presupposition of experiencing God; or at least of experiencing him ‘in all things’. In chapter 5 we noticed how the experience of God can be hidden in daily life experiences, and we have learnt how strongly Rahner emphasizes God’s self-communication as the very ground of every single human being. Later we also will learn how he understands the transcendental constitution of love to be an act elevated by the grace of God.³⁰⁸ Considering these observations, the commitment referred to here has to be seen as something different or something more than what is required for the ordinary awareness of God coming close. In the reflections of chapter 9 this will be discussed further. Looking at the question in light of this specific exercise, the love expressed can nevertheless be understood as a radicalized following which requires even a *readiness for death* – or for *kenosis*, as elaborated in the previous section. But such radical love could never be accomplished without first coming from God. The readiness for *kenosis* is in fact emerging from God’s own love. The person is on the other hand free to accept this or not. I see a *conscious openness* to be the conditions for letting a commitment grow into unconditional love, and find this to be in line with Rahner’s thinking in spite of some ambivalence in the quote referred to above.³⁰⁹ When a person is ready for this commitment, he/she also is ready to *give everything back* to God, as formulated in the ‘Suscipe’. According to Rahner this person will then “possess God, not in opposition to the world, but as the only One who gives

³⁰⁵ Ibid., 274.

³⁰⁶ Ibid., on those aspects, see chap. 6.2.3.

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

³⁰⁸ Chapter 7.3.1

³⁰⁹ Rahner is absolutely clear that our love is a respond to God’s love: “Clearly, when we take on this loving relationship to Jesus, it is basically not we who seize the initiative, for we are ever but the respondents to this love, those who answer – those to whom God’s love has come in advance, whom it has ‘prevented’, anticipated. It is God’s love which makes our love possible at all.” *LJLN*, 38-39.

value and dignity to the world”.³¹⁰ To possess God is expressed by an unconditional, unselfish love serving others. This is the way of following Christ.

Throughout this chapter we have followed Rahner’s *Spiritual Exercises*, looking for *keys to the theme of kenosis*. The purpose of *the Exercises* is for Rahner explicitly to come to a decision regarding following Christ. This following demands a readiness for suffering and self-surrendering as a *participating of the kenosis of Jesus Christ*. By contemplating Jesus’ life one gets involved with God’s descending in the world, and may experience him in all things. Due to his participating in the world, manifested in the history of Jesus Christ, we are able to find him in all things insofar as we commit ourselves to him. Hence, these chapters have demonstrated that practicing Ignatian Spirituality is a way of *attaining the desire for kenosis*, growing out of the loving relationship to Jesus Christ. But *our love for Him* has to be manifested in this world in the love of neighbour. To this we turn in the following sections.

7.3. The Love of God and the Love of Neighbour

Karl Rahner seems to be genuinely concerned with the Christian practice of love. He sees the urgency for seeking a deeper understanding of the connection between the love of God and the love of neighbour, and considers *caritas* to be more than a mere moral act or a commandment to be followed.³¹¹ In this chapter we will follow some of his arguments regarding the radical *unity* of the love of God and the love of neighbour. By means of his transcendental theology he explains the nature of love; thus providing an *ontological basis* for the *act of surrendering* to a total self-commitment to the other in love. This basis must become clear before proceeding towards the last question about the material structure of the following of Christ.

7.3.1. The Transcendental Constitution of Love

Love of neighbour is often seen as a secondary act or a mere consequence of the love of God. This could, according to Rahner, failingly lead to an understanding of charity as something that loses itself in the depths of the love of God. It is important to see that these two aspects of love “does not exist and cannot be understood or exercised without the other, and that two names have really to be given to the same reality if we are to summon up its one mystery”.³¹²

³¹⁰ *SE*, 277.

³¹¹ *TI* 6.16 “Reflections of the Unity of the Love of Neighbour and the Love of God”.

³¹² *TI* 6.16; *SzT* 6, 278.

In the effort to grasp this mystery, Rahner explores the *nature of love*. In doing so, he points to the need of distinguishing between love as an explicit mode of action and what he calls the “unconceptualised transcendental horizon of action”:³¹³

The transcendental horizon is, on the one hand, the subjective possibility for the individual object to show itself at all; it is, as it were, the system of co-ordinates within which the classified object is given its place and which makes it comprehensible. On the other hand, the transcendental horizon is that which is itself given only in the encounter with the object of a concretely historical experience.³¹⁴

We have earlier seen how Rahner understands the transcendental structure of the human being, and how the infinite horizon is both the ground and the fulfilment of its being.³¹⁵ Here he points to the twofold dimension of this transcendental horizon. While the structure of the subject makes it possible to classify and comprehend the objects, it is simultaneously dependent on those objects. Without the encounter of *the other* no transcendental experience will come to be. Love is grounded in this encounter of the other, and is as such “the all-embracing act of man which gives meaning, direction and measure to everything else”.³¹⁶ The love of the other is thus the fulfilment of the transcendental nature of man and is according to Rahner even an act of salvation – insofar as the person is open to the immediacy of God and his grace. Here we once more have to return to the notion *sustained by grace*. As God in his self-communication is the ground of the human being, his grace is empowering the act of love in the depths of its being. Rahner regards *this basic* act to be “elevated supernaturally by a self-communication of God in uncreated grace ... Hence the one basic human act, where it takes place positively, is the love of neighbour understood as *caritas*, i.e. as a love of neighbour whose movement is directed towards the God of eternal life.”³¹⁷

Seen in this way, the transcendental structure of the human being implies an openness towards the other that is caused by God’s self-communication. The movement towards the neighbour is simultaneously a movement towards God, thematically or not. There is, however, always the freedom of rejecting or accepting God’s self-communication, which in the encounter of the other is expressed respectively as hatred or love of neighbour. There is nevertheless an

³¹³ Ibid.

³¹⁴ Ibid., *SzT* 6, 284.

³¹⁵ See chap. 2.3, 2.6

³¹⁶ *TI* 6.16; *SzT* 6, 288. This has to be understood in light of the free self-disposal of the subject, where knowledge “attains its proper and full nature only in the act of freedom and therefore must lose and yet keep itself in freedom in order to be completely itself, it has a fully human significance only once it is integrated into freedom, i.e. into the loving communication with the Thou.”

³¹⁷ *TI* 6.16; *SzT* 6, 288.

ontological necessity of the unity of the love of God and the love of neighbour, because the explicit act of the love of neighbour is grounded in the primary act of the love of God. Rahner therefore states:

The love of God unreflectedly, but really and always intends God in supernatural transcendental in the love of neighbour as such, and even the explicit love of God is still borne by that opening in trusting love to the whole of reality which takes place in the love of neighbour. It is radically true, i.e. by an ontological and not merely ‘moral’ or psychological necessity, that whoever does not love the brother whom he ‘sees’, also cannot love God whom he does not see, and that one can love God whom one does not see only *by loving one’s visible brother lovingly*.³¹⁸

Rahner is here referring to the biblical sayings about the double commandment of love, concluding that these statements have to be seen as more than having a “moral or psychological necessity”.³¹⁹ By starting, as always, with the human being, he finds the ontological connection between the concrete act of love towards our neighbour and the primary act of loving God. Even the explicit act of loving God is borne by the love that takes place in the encounter with *the other*. This is so because “the *original* experience of God ... is always given in a ‘worldly’ experience. This, however, is only present originally and totally in the communication with a ‘Thou’”.³²⁰

With this ontological basis of the unity of the love of neighbour and the love of God, we will now turn to the act of love seen as an act of unconditional self-abandonment grounded in the person Jesus Christ.

7.3.2. Love as Unconditional Self-abandonment

Is it possible at all to love unconditionally? In Rahner’s book *The Love of Jesus and the Love of Neighbor*, this question is answered by means of Christology. The starting point for Rahner in this little book is to meet the conditions required for Christians to legitimate a personal relationship to Jesus.³²¹ We will not follow his apologetic purpose; but use his reflections to see how *love is as an act of kenosis*. In Jesus Christ *the unity of love*, as described above, was fully realized. His self-surrender to God was concretely borne by his act of love towards the people for whose sake he willingly died. We have been reflecting on what this surrendering implies for people following him. Certainly, the desire to follow Jesus grows out of a personal

³¹⁸ Ibid., *SzT* 6, 295.

³¹⁹ Rahner has earlier in the essay presented the biblical material on this matter. In this actual quoting he refers to 1. John 4:20.

³²⁰ *ST* 6.16; *SzT* 6, 294.

³²¹ *LJLN*, 15-16.

relationship with him, through a love for him. What then does it mean to love Jesus? We will in the following see how Rahner reflects on this. He explains the general character of love as something that is reaching out for unconditionality and radical self-surrender, existing in spite of the obvious *risks of love*.³²² Let us begin by looking at those risks.

The Risk of Love

Looking at different modes of human love, the first thing to come to grips with is that human beings necessarily commit themselves to others. Indeed they must do so, Rahner says.³²³ We saw above how this is according to the principle that it is ultimately in encountering the other that one succeeds in finding oneself. This abandoning to the other is however also characterized by a certain threatening: it always implies the risk of disappointment, of being left behind or discovering that the grounds for love were false.³²⁴ The act of self-commitment to the other has a radical, unconditional quality that is *not* “adequately founded or based on the antecedent grounds of that act”.³²⁵ One must actually venture *more* than these grounds seem to justify. Thus human love always has a degree of ‘threatenedness’, and yet one calmly trusts that the love abides and will be fulfilled. The same applies even for the human relationship to Jesus Christ. One can pursue exegesis and do all types of investigation of his historical life and of how his disciples came to the conviction of his resurrection. But the relationship of love to Jesus is above and beyond all these sciences, Rahner says.³²⁶ There always remains a risk on the side of love. Nevertheless, by means of his transcendental theology he seeks to grasp the mystery of love without evading the mystery itself. His answers are found, as often, combining spiritual experience with academic reflections.

When it comes to *the love for Jesus*, it is important from the very outset to note two observations of Rahner. *First*, this is a love that has to grow and ripen gradually. “The tender interiority of this love, to which it need not be afraid to admit, is the fruit of patience, prayer and ever renewed immersion in Scripture. It is the gift of God’s Spirit”.³²⁷ Once more we see how the individual has to cooperate with God, here concretely expressed by actively praying and being immersed in Scripture. The Ignatian *Exercises* is as we have seen one way of practicing this. *Secondly*, this love of Jesus is not diminishing or constricting our love of

³²² Ibid., 40, 16; *FCF*, 310

³²³ *LJLN*, 16.

³²⁴ Ibid., 17, 40.

³²⁵ Ibid., 17.

³²⁶ Ibid., 18.

³²⁷ Ibid., 24.

neighbour – on the contrary. The two ways of love are mutually dependent on each other, as already expressed in our previous section. How this unity of love is to be expressed will be a matter of further reflection below. Before this we will have a closer look at the specific love for Jesus as a basis for the love of neighbour.

Rahner argues that time and space is no obstacle against experiencing the love for Jesus,³²⁸ and he describes the love as something very real: “I think one can and must love Jesus, in all immediacy and concretion, with a love that transcends space and time, in virtue of the nature of love in general and by the power of The Holy Spirit of God.”³²⁹

To illustrate that this love is more than theory or rationalistic ideas, he refers to a dialogue where the following, remarkable expression is used: “You see, you’re actually only dealing with Jesus when you *throw your arms around him* and realize to the bottom of your being that this is something you can still do today.”³³⁰ To love Jesus is like loving another human being: “We seek him, we think about him, we speak with him, we feel his nearness, we have the perception, the sensation, that our own life is very substantially co-formed through him...”³³¹ The only condition for this to happen is that you *want* to love him and have the *courage* to let it happen. We have been looking at the risk of love, which implies an inevitable need of courage. In our context of *kenosis* I will here remind of the risk of being led where one does not “want” to go, as exemplified earlier with Peter.³³² That seems to require a lot of courage which I however take to be something that will grow and ripen alongside the love for Jesus. It is thus important to note that Rahner speaks of the courage *to let it happen* – by power of the Holy Spirit. Surrendering is both *motivated by*, and *expressed through* love, which is why Rahner denotes love as “Total Surrender”.

A Love of Total Surrender

Rahner repeatedly refers to the unconditional love for Jesus; a love of total surrender. By loving Jesus, one seeks to share his destiny, and the person doing this *surrenders himself or herself to Jesus’ destiny of death*. This is according to Rahner not to be seen as an absurdity like the will to damnation is. Surrendering to any other human person could imply that

³²⁸ I see no need of going in detail about this here. For details see *LJLN*, 18-20.

³²⁹ *Ibid.*, 23.

³³⁰ *Ibid.*, emphasis added

³³¹ *Ibid.*, 39.

³³² See chap. 7.2.2.

absurdity, Rahner says.³³³ But the act of surrendering to Jesus is “illuminated by a final, secret light, humbly received as Jesus received it in his abandonment when he said ‘Father’”.³³⁴ This corresponds to the obedient attitude spoken of in chapter 3.5, requiring what Rahner calls the *readiness for kenosis*. The self-surrender to God that we repeatedly have met in Rahner’s writings, is accomplished by faith in and love for Jesus Christ. Those dimensions form a unity: “Unconditional love for Jesus ... and the unconditional self-surrender of the human being to God, which alone can constitute the absoluteness of human existence – are, at bottom, one.”³³⁵

This love requires of course the same divine grace necessary for human beings to love God, expressed by Rahner in this way: “such love can only occur when its vehicle is the power of the unconditionality of God himself.”³³⁶ The *kenotic act* is thus a conscious surrendering made possible by the power of God’s Spirit and uttered as a radical love for Jesus. Rahner calls it an “*ecstatic bursting forth from self* [that] never more permits the human being to return to self”.³³⁷ Though the relationship might be nourished by tenderness and consolation, the focus is not on oneself. We will later discuss the dialectic movement of coming to self versus the “not returning to self” as here expressed.³³⁸ In the following we will learn further how Rahner explains love’s character of unconditionality, which makes the risk of love possible at all. By that we return once more to some of his transcendental reflections.

Unconditional and Definitive Love

We have seen that Rahner describes the love for Jesus in terms of ordinary, human love, and that there is always an element of risk in loving. There is, however, one fundamental difference between the genuine love for Jesus and the love between two persons in general. In contradiction with love in general, love for Jesus is a *definitive* love. To understand this, we have to return to the ‘threatenedness’ of human love. However radical and unconditional human love might *like* to be, it is marked by a reservation, a fear that takes on different modes. It could scarcely be otherwise, Rahner says: “...if such earthly love, out of the will to unconditionality and definitiveness, were to seek to deny this inner sense of threat, it would be

³³³ “... [This] unconditionality [of love] must precisely include a reservation, since no one is permitted to dare to wish to go to hell with another. Such a wish would destroy the basis of this love – destroy its very roots.” *LJLN*, 42. This is discussed further in the following paragraph.

³³⁴ *LJLN*, 45.

³³⁵ *Ibid.*

³³⁶ *Ibid.*, 41.

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, 42.

³³⁸ See chap. 10.1

basically denying its own nature. It would be inauthentic.”³³⁹ The wish to love unconditionally meets its limit because surrendering totally to another person implies the absurd risk of following this person even to hell.³⁴⁰ The only one that really can be loved unconditionally is the one who possesses the divine characteristics found in Jesus Christ. In him, we have “the only one who can be loved with absolute security and reliability... who possesses the purity and unconditionality and who is totally accepted and united with God.”³⁴¹ In his earthly life Jesus abandoned himself to the Father who by raising him from death manifested his acceptance of Jesus’ offer. For that reason a definitive love of Jesus is not only possible, but preferable. We have previously seen that Jesus in the Incarnation assumed human nature as his own; thereby modifying it.³⁴² The question is in what way this applies to human nature in general. Is it not yet possible that love for another human being might be definitive; at least insofar as the person who is to be loved has united himself or herself to God? According to Rahner, Jesus can be loved *anonymously*. He gives a rather brief reflection on this, rightly admitting that it could be explained in more details.³⁴³ On the one hand, he confirms that it is only with and through Jesus we have the absolute affirmation of God’s irreversible love for the world. If then, one loves a human being as someone in radical union with God, either the reservation prevails *or* the love will be absolute, but existing under the condition that God has “embraced and assumed this loved person in the absolute affirmation he has bestowed upon Jesus (and upon him alone).”³⁴⁴ The problem remains that in this life one can never be certain of this affirmation. On the other hand, such unconditional human love can still be experienced, Rahner says:

Where love can really abandon all reservations, definitively and with absolute assurance, where love can really live out to the last its most proper, most original nature as unconditional self-giving and surrender to the other, there Jesus is “co-loved” as the Ground of this love – even where the blessed Name is as yet altogether unknown to the one who loves.³⁴⁵

As I see it, Rahner here points to both his concept of neighbour love and the assumption of human nature by the Incarnation. Loving one’s neighbour is no more constricted or conditioned, since Jesus Christ by the Incarnation has assumed human nature. Jesus Christ is

³³⁹ *LJLN*, 40.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 42.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*

³⁴² Cf. note 148 and 151, chap. 3.3

³⁴³ *LJLN*, 44.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.* p. 43.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.* p. 44.

thus the Ground of definitive love, even when this is not known to the one who loves. Without God's irreversible love and Jesus' *kenosis* it would be meaningless and absurd to abandon oneself to another person.³⁴⁶ This provides another aspect of the unity of loving God – or Jesus – and loving your neighbour. It is like seeing the matter from the other side: By loving someone unconditionally, you are actually embraced by the love of Jesus. But then, in what remains the risk that Rahner speaks of? If the act of unconditional love of a human being utterly rests on God's affirmation of Jesus Christ even without being known, what is the risk of love then? Of course there will always be the emotional risk, but as I understand ontological Christology, we are destined to love our neighbour unconditionally. By establishing "anonymous love" Rahner does in my opinion evade the risky element of love, establishing a Christological basis for unconditional love of the neighbour. Jesus Christ has brought God's irreversible love to the world; he is the one who is to be loved and followed radically. The "risk" that remains is the feeling of losing control, giving oneself over to the unknown mystery, while the whole act of love is borne by grace, marked by a promise of everlasting life.

In this section we have seen how Rahner elaborates the double commandment of love, not to be accomplished only morally, but seen as a necessary constitution of the human being. Ignatian Spirituality focuses on participating in Jesus' life for many reasons. By getting involved personally with him, the love for him will grow and ripen, making the follower ready to follow him more radically, seeking the will of God. *Love is to be seen both as the basic character of kenosis and the way to attaining a kenotic attitude.* While Rahner prefers to speak about this in transcendental and rather abstract terms, there are some texts providing a certain structure of this following, as will be seen in the following chapter and the next.

8. The Practice of the Following of Christ

In the following I will look for Rahner's view on the practice of the following of Christ, corresponding to my last sub question: *What is the material structure of the following of Christ?*

The following sections are restricted to some general suggestions on what the following of Christ might look like, since Rahner never equates the following with concrete guidelines or

³⁴⁶ For Rahner this is related to the concept of Anonymous Christians, which is out of the scope of this thesis. On this, cf. *FCF*, 311ff and *TI* 6.23.

moral law. Moreover, his texts on this go in different directions, presumably dependent on the context of audience and various starting-points. For this reason, some reflections on apparent tensions will be discussed during the unfolding of this chapter.

I will start out by repeating briefly the essence of the following of Christ, according to Rahner's treatment in *Spiritual Exercises*.³⁴⁷ Then I will follow his thoughts on the consequences of the unity of the love of God and the love of neighbour. We will see that Rahner employs the term *communion* to denote the practice of loving one's neighbour and some concrete examples on *consequences* will be presented after having also discussed the relatedness of *disposition towards act*. At the end of the chapter the question is posed whether *renunciation*, the radical following, is a call given to every Christian.

8.1. The Essence of the Following of Christ

Before starting on the more concrete ways of the following of Christ, it might be clarifying to repeat what Rahner takes to be the essence and the formal structure of this following.

When Karl Rahner speaks about the following of Christ he has ontological Christology as a starting point. Jesus Christ is “the ultimate reason why every man exists” and he made it possible for God to “undertake the adventure of His love outside of Himself”.³⁴⁸ As we saw in chapter 3.2, Jesus Christ is the fulfilment of human nature, but on the other hand the humanity is also “the fullness of Christ”. God depends on human beings in order to bring his love out to the people. Since Jesus Christ is the one who is manifesting God and his inner life to the world, it is by a personal entering into the life of him that we also will have the vision of God, which is ultimately the grace God wants to give. Grace is “a concrete assimilation to Christ and participating in His life. Therefore, ontologically and not just morally, it is the *grace of Christ*.”³⁴⁹ Through the grace of Christ we enter the Trinitarian life of God, but this “really only takes place when we are drawn into the concrete historical life of Jesus as it is present to us now.”³⁵⁰ This requires a conscious following, letting his life pattern our lives. But Rahner does not understand the following as a mere imitation of the historical life of Jesus. He says: “The true following of Christ, therefore, which is *a life with Him*, consists in allowing the inner structure of His life to work itself out in new and different personal

³⁴⁷ *SE*, 114 ff.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 114.

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 115.

³⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 116.

situations. Only when we really carry on His life *in our own way*, and not by trying to produce a literal copy, is the following of Christ worth living...³⁵¹

Rahner's concern is to relate the following ontologically to Jesus Christ in a way that involves personal engagement, decisions and responsibility. No rules or laws can actually contain the mystery and the depths of the life with Christ that is unfolding in the individual following him. Neither is it a matter of "narcissistic introversion that seeks only to develop its own being"; rather the following consists in radical *obedience*.³⁵² The personal way of following Christ in obedience requires courage to be oneself, to rely on the personal decisions and balance this over against subordination to authority. In this dynamic lies according to Rahner the very realization that "constitutes the loftiness of our Christian existence."³⁵³ Due to this stress on finding the individual way of the following, Rahner is very cautious about giving guidelines. In the framework of *the Exercises* he points at features of Jesus' life as signposts, like his humble attitude and perseverance of the daily-life's struggle.³⁵⁴ Most of all, the following has to be seen as related to *love* – which means that we have to relate the following to how Rahner understands *the unity of the love* of God and the love of neighbour. Based on this understanding, as presented above, we will now turn to what Rahner sees to be the consequences of that unity.³⁵⁵

8.2. Living in Communion

According to Rahner, it is not possible to love God without loving the neighbour, and on the other hand "only one who ultimately loves God (whether he or she is reflexively aware of this or not is another matter) can manage unconditionally to abandon himself or herself to another person."³⁵⁶ Genuine love is to abandon oneself to *the other*; that is to God *and* to the neighbour. This love finds several ways of expressions and in the essay *Who are your Brother and Sister* Rahner concretizes this within the common term *communion*.³⁵⁷ Living in communion as brothers and sisters means to practice the love of neighbour as a reflection of our love for God, not as a practical test on this love. God is naturally the source of this love, and by genuinely opening themselves to their neighbour, people receive the possibility to go

³⁵¹ Ibid., 119, emphasis added.

³⁵² Ibid.

³⁵³ Ibid., 120ff.

³⁵⁴ This is presented in *SE*, 121-123. I regard these attitudes to be sufficiently treated above, i.e. chap. 3.5.

³⁵⁵ See ch.7.3.1.

³⁵⁶ *LJLN*, 71.

³⁵⁷ Ibid., part III.

forth from themselves and thus love God.³⁵⁸ This might still sound rather abstract, and we will soon come to some examples, after having considered the relationship between one's disposition and the concrete act of love.

8.2.1. The Unity of Disposition and Act

During this thesis I have established the notion “*kenotic attitude*”, and on the other hand the term “*kenotic act*” has also been used. The emphasis has so far been on attaining the attitude, for instance the ‘*readiness for kenosis*’; and we have seen that attaining this is growing out of the relationship with Jesus. Those attitudes would in anthropology be called *dispositions*, while the *act* is the concrete accomplishment that can be defined and delimited. The disposition can on the other hand not be adequately grasped and fixed for reflection, but is nevertheless manifested and concretized in the act. There is thus a unity of disposition and act, they may neither be separated nor identified.³⁵⁹

Some critique has been raised against Rahner due to what someone finds to be an abstract or deficient ethics. Brian F. Linnane discusses this, referring to Jean Porter:

Porter ... has argued that the ethical implications of Rahner's theological anthropology are deficient because, in her view, Rahner's understanding of the transcendental dimensions of neighbor love is unable to generate examples of paradigmatic, categorical behaviors consistent with this account of love. Thus Porter claims that it is an esoteric endeavor, largely irrelevant to living a Christian life.³⁶⁰

Linnane answers rightly that Rahner is always cautious and tentative about making connections between “the love characteristic of dying with Christ ... and paradigmatic behaviors”.³⁶¹ Rahner's emphasis on the unity of disposition and act strengthens the view that for him there is no way of living in communion without a love manifested in concrete acts. With an unflinching belief in the uniqueness of God's call to the individual and the trust that this has to be related to ever new situations, he hesitates to describe those acts paradigmatically. Hence, in “Who are your Brother and Sister”, his concretizing is related to an analysis of the historical situation of the Church today.³⁶² Based on that analysis, he gives a lot of examples on what he finds to be adequate expressions of the love of neighbour. In the following a few of those examples will be presented.

³⁵⁸ Ibid., 71-72.

³⁵⁹ Ibid., 72-73.

³⁶⁰ Linnane: “Dying with Christ”, 241.

³⁶¹ Ibid., 242.

³⁶² *LJLN*, 75ff.

8.2.2. Consequences

With this section we have come to the concretization of what the following of Christ might look like. Before saying anything of the consequences of ‘living in communion’, which is Rahner’s term of neighbourly love, he defines the needs within and outside the Church of today.³⁶³ He points among other things at the change towards openness and intercommunication that has found place in the last century, increasingly in the last decades. The Roman Catholic worldwide Church, which is the explicit context of Rahner, has to face ever new challenges in this situation.

Rahner first addresses the Church, saying that “there is still a great deal to be done in the area of *equal rights* for all of our brothers and sisters in one Church, and we still have a long way to go before we shall have dismantled a *Western supremacy* throughout the Church.”³⁶⁴

Searching for oneness in the Church is according to Rahner only possible if the communion of brothers and sisters, “devoid of any paternalistic arrogance, is willing to accord an equality of rights to all members of the Church.”³⁶⁵ Another consequence coming out of the world-situation is the increasing pluralism due to different cultures and opinions meeting in the one Church. “A thousand things in the Church do not suit us. This is perfectly plain. But why should they have to suit us?” If one seeks to live in communion, one has to deal with this, and the only way for Rahner is to show a *reciprocal tolerance* towards each other.³⁶⁶

Rahner continues pointing at common challenges for a living communion, he mentions among several things the tasks of mission, political responsibility and the need for meeting new ideologies without automatically turning conservative. Then he addresses the local community and how people increasingly are getting lonely in an anonymous guided society. He also regrets the lack of expressed enthusiasm in our profession and belief; finding the religious muteness of our time to be “basically senseless”.³⁶⁷ Being a witness, sharing our belief must be done “in such a way that our discourse will have some measure of intention to be understood by and be relevant to our nonbelieving fellow human beings.”³⁶⁸

³⁶³ Ibid., “today” refers to the period when this was written; that part of this book was first published in 1980.

³⁶⁴ Ibid., 78, emphasis added.

³⁶⁵ Ibid., 79.

³⁶⁶ Ibid., 86-87.

³⁶⁷ Ibid., 88-95.

³⁶⁸ Ibid., 96.

These are a few of the tasks concretely addressed to be among “things that need to be done where spirituality and love of neighbour meet in the midst of daily living”.

The important question in the context of this thesis is: Can these things rightly be categorized within our notion of *kenosis*? Are they part of the self-surrendering and dying with Christ or do they rather belong to the sphere of “human love”? But is it possible at all to make any distinction between acts motivated by love for Christ and ordinary, human love? According to Rahner’s theology of the unity of the love of God and the love of neighbour, this cannot be separated.

In chapter 5 we saw that ordinary daily life might be filled with experiences of the Spirit, even unnoticed by the subject itself. Let us recall how Rahner looks at such ordinary experiences as *surrendering*. In an essay called “A Spirituality of Calling”, Rahner writes about *vocation to earthly ordinariness*. He sees all divine vocations to be summonses that “complement the descent of the eternal God into flesh.”³⁶⁹ Every Christian is *called* by God to earthly ordinariness, which means

to believe in the light shining in the darkness, to *actualize love* that seems to go unrewarded and unrequited, to enter into the *solidarity with the poor* and the “shortchanged” - ... Only through the performance of this task as *a mission to “those below”* does the Christian really accomplish his or her radical surrender to God’s incomprehensibility as a beatifying surrender through faith, hope and love. Otherwise he or she remains locked up in the prison of his or her own selfishness. After all, the path of the spiritual life is a path that cannot bypass the cross of Jesus Christ.³⁷⁰

Not only does Rahner value ordinariness, engagement for the poor or fighting for equal rights; he sees those ordinary tasks to be a divine call and the “only” way to radical surrendering. This quotation may function as a tentative answer for now; but the seeming tension of the transcendental and the categorical way of surrendering will be discussed further both in the reflections of the spirituality of *kenosis*, and in the closing discussion of the thesis. Before we do this, we will look at a very concrete and explicit way of living out *kenosis*, a way that Rahner calls the essence of renunciation.

³⁶⁹ Rahner: “A Spirituality of Calling” in *The Practice of Faith: A Handbook of Contemporary Spirituality*, ed. Karl Lehmann and Albert Raffelt (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1983), 207.

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, emphasis added.

8.3. Genuine Renunciation

In his essay “Reflections on the Theology of Renunciation” Rahner defines the theology of renunciation as belonging within the framework of a theology of the Evangelical Counsels – which concretely refers to the religious vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience.³⁷¹ As we will see, Rahner regards that specific state of life to be the only genuine sign of renunciation. After having studied several other aspects of *kenosis* with Rahner, I find this concrete aspect to be rather surprising. How does this fit with the theology of love and with Ignatian spirituality, his repeatedly appeal to radical surrender and abandonment? This is to be discussed when we have looked closer at his reflections on renunciation as presented in the essay mentioned above.³⁷²

Renunciation as discussed in Rahner’s essay is distinguished from other kinds of giving-up of goods and from Christian perfection in general. When it comes to Christian Perfection, Rahner speaks of the growth of love and holiness as we saw in the previous chapter. Every Christian has a call for this, and within this each one has to find his or her special vocation. By doing so, their actions of love are elevated by God’s grace, thus bringing God’s supernatural love to the world. For this reason it can be said to have an “*eschatologically* transcendent (supramundane) character...”³⁷³ It is transcendent insofar as it is directed towards God, and it is eschatological insofar as it is in the world (but still dependent on the eschatological event of Christ at the end of time). But since this is a love for the world, it also has to be cosmic (mundane), belonging to the world. However, as actions of love in and for the world, they cannot function as “representations of love as an eschatological fact”, precisely because they are meaningful in the world, Rahner says: “Such actions are more likely to hide this character than proclaim it.”³⁷⁴

As I understand Rahner here, he claims that every action of love that has a “meaning” in the world is not “genuine” renunciation. They belong to the natural order of love, in spite of being elevated by God and therefore also becoming divine. We have to look at the form of renunciation that Rahner classifies within the ‘supernatural order’ to possibly understand this argument.

³⁷¹ TI 3.4.

³⁷² His argumentation is as often rather lengthy and complex; several elements have to be omitted with the risk of losing points of value, i.e. the difference between the transcendence of love happened *sacramentally* or *existentially* (the latter as renunciation within Evangelical Counsels).

³⁷³ TI 3.4; SzT 3, 62.

³⁷⁴ Ibid.

Distinguished from the Christian Perfection that every Christian is called to, we have in the Church those who follow the call to a monastic or priestly life. They renounce values that *cannot* be explained from the standpoint of natural ethics, which is why they are said to belong to the ‘supernatural order’: “Christian renunciation in its real essence sacrifices positive values and goods of this world. Indeed, these values ... are not merely pragmatic and vital ones... but also values ... which have a meaning in themselves.”³⁷⁵

Rahner is here referring to the renunciation of the values of marriage, riches and independence; values that are good in themselves and for that reason nothing “natural” to sacrifice. It does not make any sense; gives no meaning according to a natural ethic to renounce those values. It is important, however, to note that the renunciation is not due to a devaluation of those goods in themselves. If so, the exercise of Christian renunciation would have lost its sense. The only reason for renouncing those values is found in the search for and belief in another, *higher* value, as expressed in the following passage:

If, however, unlike the case of sacrifices with an intramundane meaning and rational basis, this higher value cannot be experienced in its own intrinsic reality but must be believed and hoped for ..., then this renunciation of one value in favour of the other takes on a characteristic proper to Christian renunciation and to it alone: the giving up of a value which can be experienced in favour of a value possessed only by faith and hope...³⁷⁶

The higher value is referring to the expression of the love for God, which for Rahner can function as a visible, eschatological sign only in this supernatural order; that is: as expressed in the Evangelical Counsels. This is not the place to elaborate the theology of the Evangelical Counsels, but rather to understand how Rahner relates its form of renunciation to transcendental theology. A lengthy paragraph may demonstrate this while simultaneously pointing at renunciation as the only visible way of expressing the love for God:

God, as he is in himself and being as *such* the (supernatural) end of man, is to be loved in faith and hope. Hence, man’s existential centre no longer lies in the realm of the tangible and the empirical. Only by supernatural grace is such an attitude ontologically and existentially possible. Hence, this transcendence beyond the natural realm cannot be accomplished by every act ‘from below’ or every act concerned with his essential natural and empirical elements. Every naturally good act, elevated by grace and informed by love, can de facto be a part of the realization of this divine love. But this love does not yet ‘appear’ in its transcendence in the naturally good act, even when this act has in fact been elevated and informed. This transcendence does not become visible in this act, and it is impossible to recognize it from this act. ...Such a

³⁷⁵ Ibid.; *SzT* 3, 64.

³⁷⁶ Ibid., 66.

positive representation of love in its eschatological and transcendent function is absolutely impossible in the moral realm... Is then such a representation utterly impossible? No, it is possible in renunciation.³⁷⁷

Without going in further details on Rahner's arguments, I conclude that Rahner in this essay sees the Evangelical Counsels as the only visible and genuine renunciation also functioning as an eschatological sign. It has to be mentioned, however, that he is moderating this in a rather ambiguous way. Early in his essay, he says on the one hand that "insofar as the realizations of the Evangelical Counsels have their own nature" (which he later demonstrates), the layman does not and should not have the "spirit" of the Evangelical Counsels. On the other hand, he goes on saying that "this does not yet touch the question as to whether every Christian life insofar as it is approaching ever closer to death ... does not and must not necessarily open itself both in spirit and in fact to the Evangelical Counsels, if it wants to be perfect".

Then he concludes his distinctions by now claiming that "there can only be different shifts of emphasis between the different possibilities of the Christian life", before he continues arguing for the Evangelical Counsels as genuine renunciation.³⁷⁸

I presume there are different ways of understanding Rahner on this, dependent on what the starting point is. According to a long tradition of monastic theology within the Catholic Church, it is understandable that Rahner, himself a Jesuit, places renunciation within the framework of the theology of the Evangelical Counsels. And it is not surprising that his arguments follow transcendental theology. What is more surprising is the weight he puts on the arguments, and the conclusion that this is the *only visible and genuine* renunciation. We have been following his texts both during Christology and Spirituality, saying that self-surrender to God is finding one's real essence and that every person is called to follow Christ, bearing his cross. In that light it does not make sense to delimit renunciation as such to a certain state of life. Besides, we have recently been quoting him, claiming that *the only way* to radical surrendering is performing a mission to "those below".³⁷⁹ One question to be raised is whether Rahner actually distinguishes the word *renounce* from abandoning, surrendering and for instance the *readiness for kenosis*? The many quotations of this thesis prove, however, that it is not that simple; he does in fact use those words synonymously. A proper investigation of the theological arguments could probably provide helpful nuances, but this is out of the scope

³⁷⁷ Ibid., 68.

³⁷⁸ Ibid., 65.

³⁷⁹ Cf. chap. 8.2.2, note 370.

here. The same is the task of distinguishing the theology of late Rahner from this early essay.³⁸⁰ To come to one preliminary conclusion on this, I suggest stressing the words *visible* and *sign*. In the texts quoted above, we saw how Rahner stressed the fact that moral, good acts or acts of love that are within the natural order cannot function as visible, eschatological signs because they have their value within the world. Only by renouncing worldly, good values do the acts point beyond this world, functioning as eschatological *signs*. The question still remains, in my opinion, whether the Evangelical Counsels as such can be more effective signs than *for instance* when a renowned doctor, perhaps married, gives up a brilliant career to work as a medical volunteer at a hospital in the war zone. In both cases good values are renounced to point to a higher value, and according to Rahner the latter act of love could not be accomplished without also being a love of God – consciously or not.³⁸¹ I see, however, that the religious one in his or her renunciation more clearly has a function as an *ecclesiological* witness.³⁸² The volunteer doctor is not necessarily a sign for the Church, even if he is renouncing worldly good values. Nevertheless, I take the function of an act of *kenosis* to be more fundamental than the function of witnessing; and understand *genuine renunciation* – hidden or visible - as a *fundamental option* possible and necessary for every Christian, independent of the state of life.

Leaving that specific discussion here, I remind us of Rahner's reservations which indicate that his intention is after all not the distinction, but rather to stress the values of chastity, poverty and obedience. Those values are to be found and lived out even outside the Evangelical Counsels. In the following chapter I will sum up and reflect further on the different ways of practicing the spirituality of *kenosis*.

³⁸⁰ This essay is from 1953. The other sources of this thesis are mainly later. In an essay "On Evangelical Counsels" published in 1964, Rahner does not distinguish so clearly between every Christian and the religious ones regarding this, which corresponds to the statements of Vatican II on this (Chapter V, Nos. 39-42; Chapter VI, Nos. 43-47). He still sees the renunciation as a sign that makes God's grace explicit: "But it is in the act of renunciation, and in this *alone*, that the element which specifies this faith, considered as the acceptance of divine grace from above, is made *explicit*" – adding the following in a note: "This renunciation is actualised *especially*, but of course not exclusively, in the evangelical counsels. From this it is clear that this word 'alone' is not intended in any *primary* sense to separate the life of the evangelical counsels from some other Christian way of life; rather it is intended to draw a distinction between the life of the evangelical counsels and other factors which belong to every Christian life. But it must be remembered that it is the factor of renunciation that does in fact characterise the life of the evangelical counsels, even distinguishing it from a life that is lived according to Christian principles 'in the world'". *TI*, 8.9; *SzT* 7, 424-425 (note 2 at p. 424).

³⁸¹ This is according to the transcendental constitution of love, ref. chap. 7.3.1

³⁸² Rahner points at this, too; especially in the 1964-essay, *TI* 8.9.

9. The Spirituality of Kenosis – Summary and Reflection

This chapter serves as a preliminary summary of the second part of this thesis, focusing on the spirituality of *kenosis*. In the end of the chapter I will also reflect on the tension we have pointed to regarding the so called hidden experience of God and the conscious following of Christ.

During this thesis we have met several aspects of *kenosis* understood as the following of Christ. There are two characteristics of the *kenotic attitude* that I prefer to point to and reflect on in this summary. Both can be looked at from the point of view of experience. The first one is the *experience of love*; the second one is the *experience of abandonment*, and the two are utterly intertwined, although love is the source empowering the abandonment.

The starting-point for this thesis has been the *kenosis* of Jesus Christ, and the question of how this *kenosis* is related to the following of Christ. It has become clear that the *kenotic* acts of Jesus were motivated by *love* and *obedience*. We have also become familiar with Rahner's understanding of God's self-communication, how God is the ground and essence of our being. This may be experienced as a hidden experience of God, but in the encounter of Jesus as preached in the Gospel, the experience of God's love becomes thematic. Both categories of experiencing this love require *abandonment*. First, the "coming to self" as we learnt in part I, is to be seen as a self-surrender to the incomprehensible mystery that is God, and is necessarily also an acceptance of his offer.³⁸³ Second, the thematic encountering, exemplified here in part II by *the Exercises*, evokes and requires a *kenotic response*, which corresponds to the experience of abandonment.

"We love because he first loved us."³⁸⁴ God's love is the *kenosis* in Jesus Christ, while *our kenosis is the loving response* to God. I take the experiential encounter of the love of Jesus to be the crucial moment *eliciting a desire and "a readiness for kenosis"*. We have seen that for Rahner it is possible to experience him and love him like we love other human beings.³⁸⁵ The outcome of this encounter is nevertheless a deep mystery. St Paul describes this mystery with the known words: "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me."³⁸⁶

³⁸³ Chap. 2.2.

³⁸⁴ 1.John 4:19.

³⁸⁵ Chap. 7.3.2.

³⁸⁶ Gal. 2:20.

What I mean by a *kenotic response* should have become clear throughout this part of the thesis. The one who decides to follow Christ has to take up one's cross, which implies a self-denying in one way or another. According to Ignatian Spirituality, God gives individual vocations in order to serve him in and for the world. The self-abandoning implies seeking an *indifference* to all things, seeking the will of God.

A self-denying emerging from any other source than love, however, would be a false and destructive denying. For this reason, it is of importance to delimit this renouncing to those acts that are motivated by and related to the love for God. There are several psychological factors to consider that have been totally out of the scope of our thesis; such as for instance false modesty, repression, exploitation or passive acceptance of injustice to oneself. The abandonment Rahner talks about is none of these things. It is on the contrary a call to fullness of the inner self, expressed by love of God and of the neighbour. With Rahner's concept of the transcendental constitution of love, there is neither any way of letting this abandonment to the love of God become purely mystical or interior. The following of Christ demands concrete acts, which have been exemplified in the last sections above. There is, however, a certain tension between the transcendental surrendering and the categorical following of Christ. In the following I will discuss this tension and suggest two ways of understanding this, starting out by roughly sketching out the two "modes" of surrendering.

a) *The Fundamental Surrendering to God's Incomprehensibility*

This I take to be the primary self-surrender, where a person in the depths of its being is searching the ultimate horizon of being – identified by Rahner as God. By this surrendering the person accepts God as the ground of its being. We met this mainly in the first part of the thesis, but even later for instance when learning about the transcendental constitution of love. Hence, this mode of surrendering is closely linked to Rahner's transcendental theology. This category of surrender is something that is going on constantly during life. Like the experience of being a subject, this surrendering is not dependent on conscious reflection. Thus it is *not conditioned* by an explicit commitment; rather the experience is borne by God's self-communication, also called grace. According to Rahner, renunciation is in fact present in the nature of grace, and is as such inescapable.³⁸⁷ This causes *kenotic* acts, acts of love, even without becoming thematic for the subject. Due to the transcendental character of this surrendering, it is to be seen as universal. The Christian, however, is always called to a

³⁸⁷ *TI* 18.14; *SzT* 13, 302.

conscious following that requires commitment *beyond* this self-surrender – but without ever leaving this category behind.

b) The Process of Attaining a Readiness for Kenosis

All Christians are called to follow Christ, which for Rahner means to follow him to the cross. This corresponds to the constant practice of accepting one's finitude, persevering the suffering, searching for God in everything, and utterly surrendering in hope and faith to God in the final death. Ignatian spirituality is for Rahner one way of practicing this way towards *kenosis*; doing *the Exercises* implies a conscious deepening in the life of Jesus, evoking the love and the desire to follow him all the way to death. A *kenosis* like this requires renunciation of the person's own will and commitment to the will of God. It is God's grace, however, that enables the person coming to this commitment – thus the principle of the cooperating between God and the person is maintained. Jesus Christ is not only the model and the motivating source for gaining a *kenotic* attitude; he is even the one making this possible *ontologically*. For this reason *kenosis* is in its essence Christocentric. The fruit of committing oneself to the will of God is to *act* according to this will, expressed as a love for neighbour. According to Ignatian spirituality the concrete vocation is to be sought individually, that is why Rahner hesitates suggesting too paradigmatically how to act. By the unity of the love of God and the love of neighbour he explains why we *ontologically have to* love the neighbour, thus he offers a transcendental explanation here as well.

A certain distinction between the two categories can be found in moments of decision growing out of a personal relationship to Jesus Christ. The hidden and unthematic experience of surrendering becomes thematic when confronted with the Gospel.³⁸⁸ This distinguishing is nevertheless not absolute, since each "level" is sustained by grace whose nature is "renunciation". There are several ways of deepening the understanding of this tension. One possible way is to see it in light of Ignatian Spirituality and the term "finding God in all things".

An Ignatian Interpretation of the Transcendental Experience

A reflection on the Ignatian concept of "finding God in all things", may for our context provide a useful perspective on the dialectic of Rahner's transcendental and categorical

³⁸⁸ "Rahner understands that the encounter with Jesus Christ in the teaching of the Church not only serves to make the individual conscious of his or her own experience of divine self-communication, it also forces the person to make a choice about the grace which has heretofore been experienced unthematically". Linnane, PhD.diss.,77

experience of God. According to the transcendental theology of Rahner, God is there within the human being, at least as an offer, whether the person is aware of him or not. As Rahner says in a prayer: “It is both terrible and comforting to dwell in the inconceivable nearness of God... But we have no choice. God is with us”.³⁸⁹ The transcendental surrendering is something going on at the deepest level of the human being where God's grace is at work. In daily life this grace of God enables the person to act according to this love of God without always noticing what is going on. In the concept of "finding God in all things" there is an invitation to start looking at this daily-life, in *order to notice* this grace. Even, or rather especially, when it comes to the negative feelings like loneliness or suffering, one might then see them as preludes to a possible experience of God.³⁹⁰ If God is really present in all things, then it is no contradiction between how people experience this unthematically and the others being confronted with the challenge of categorical decisions. While the surrendering takes place at different levels, the transcendental dimension of the experience is always there. *The finding* represents the moments where the experience becomes thematic. The more one becomes aware of God in all things, the more one is challenged to follow him radically. It seems to be a "principle of grace" to be drawn towards God's love, and as soon as this becomes thematic, one is also challenged to live according to this grace. “Finding God in all things” will necessarily also mean to find him in the neighbour. Then there is a question, as we treated in chapter 7.2.3, whether surrendering to God is a presupposition for finding in him in all things. I take it to be a gradual process, not linear; a deepening growth and awareness of him going alongside with a lifelong practice of surrendering. D. Marmion offers a list of seven points characterizing the Rahnerian concept of experiencing God.³⁹¹ One of these, he says, is that "religious experience involves gradations - ranging from ordinary experiences of grace to more mystical experiences." I take the surrendering process to have a similar gradation. In Christian teaching the growth is often denoted as the way towards Christian perfection. In the following, we will look briefly at how Rahner sees this perfection. This will provide another way of looking at the transcendental versus the categorical experience of surrender.

³⁸⁹ Rahner: *Prayers for a Lifetime*, ed. Albert Raffelt (New York: Crossroad, 1984), 3.

³⁹⁰ Cf. Declan Marmion: "Karl Rahner and his Critics: Revisiting the Dialogue." *Australian EJournal of Theology*, (February 2005, Issue 4), http://dlibrary.acu.edu.au/research/theology/ejournal/aejt_4/marmion.htm (Accessed August 23, 2010).

³⁹¹ See chap. 10.3.

Gradual Perfection as an Aspect of Surrendering

When we look at Christian Perfection as an aspect of surrendering, we already presuppose that the following is conscious and that there is something like a growth towards perfection. We have already met Rahner, saying that the love for Jesus has to “grow and ripen”, and of course he affirms the biblical principle lying in a growth towards holiness.³⁹² As Jesus was holy, we shall be holy.³⁹³ This requires an increasing consciousness, a purifying of the whole life, both morally and existentially. Rahner discusses this in an essay called “Reflections on the problem of the Gradual Ascent to Christian Perfection”. His main interest here, as the word *problem* indicates, is rejecting the stage-by-stage approach as normally presented in earlier traditions and mystical theology. It is not necessary to expand this here, only to note that Rahner introduces an interesting concept in his conclusion. He suggests “to distinguish between two quite different dimensions of intensity in the case of a human act: one of these is the measure of the greater or lesser depth of an act, while the other measures the intensity and density of the act on a particular personal level.”³⁹⁴ The first indicates the objective level of an act: some experiences, like a toothache, is obviously intense, but still superficial, while an act of selfless love of God has the highest dignity. The second dimension is the subject’s personal depths while acting. Those dimensions are interconnected but have still to be distinguished. In this way Rahner indicates that there is something like different degrees of what he calls *existential depth* in the subject performing the concrete acts. Regrettably, he leaves the topic with more questions than answers - regarding how this is to be recognized and realized.³⁹⁵ My suggestion is that the existential depth of a person is not necessarily directly correlated to the visible act. We learnt earlier of the unity of disposition and act, and I see the dimensions of Rahner in light of this unity. Applied to the following of Christ we have seen that it is possible to do this anonymously, though we as Christians are called to do it explicitly. Simultaneously, the depth of a subject’s radical and conscious following of Christ cannot *only* be measured by visible, moral acts. Consider for example a poor mother raising her children on her own, spending most of her life in an apparently ordinary life, struggling to survive. This rather invisible, ordinary act of self-less love could have the same, or greater, existential depth as for instance the acts performed during a priestly life in public. The priest could

³⁹² Rahner refers to several Scriptures confirming this in the essay “Reflections on the problem of the Gradual Ascent to Christian Perfection”, *TI* 3.1; *SzT*, 12-13.

³⁹³ Ref. 1. Pet.1:15-16.

³⁹⁴ *TI* 3.1; *SzT* 3, 31.

³⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, *SzT* 3, 32.

perform his acts with bitterness, while the mother could suffer for her children – and thus for Christ – with gratitude and love. This I take to be one way of understanding the duality with Rahner concerning the hidden, transcendental experience and the concrete and conscious following. In the broader discussion following, we will see that the tension mentioned here point to a duality typical of his works in general. This is one of four issues to be raised when we now meet a few of Rahner’s critics.

10. Discussion

The following discussion will treat some crucial questions concerning the theology of Rahner. In the first part of the thesis, we met Rahner’s transcendental theology with a focus on the relatedness of Christology to anthropology. In the second part, we sought an understanding of the spirituality of *kenosis*. When now coming towards the end of the thesis, I will seek to see all those perspectives from a distance, taking into account some critical questions raised against some aspects of Rahner’s theology being relevant for our topic. I will do this in dialogue with some of his commentators, some critical and some supportive. This dialogue is strictly delimited; and is in no way an attempt to present a full account of the respective commentator’s concern. Hence, I will structure this discussion according to four chosen issues, presenting the critics subsequently.

The first two issues are related to Rahner’s transcendental “project”, corresponding mainly to the first part of this thesis. I will first ask whether or not Rahner’s starting point in anthropology ends up in anthropocentric ethics and an unhealthy self-centeredness. If so, it would seem to be contradictory to our understanding of the nature of *kenosis*. This discussion is carried out in dialogue with Brian F. Linnane and James F. Gustafson.³⁹⁶ Then I will look more critically at the tension we have observed between the *transcendental and the categorical* in Rahner’s writings. When discussing this further, we will listen to two of Rahner’s friends and critics, Hans Urs von Balthasar and Johann Baptist Metz.³⁹⁷ Then we turn to the spirituality of Rahner, discussing two different aspects of criticism that has been raised. In this thesis, the praxis of *kenosis* has been related to the Ignatian Exercises and the

³⁹⁶ Brian F. Linnane: “Rahnerian Christology as an Anthropological Foundation for a Theocentric Ethic”; James M. Gustafson: *Theology and Ethics* vol.1 (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Publisher, 1981).

³⁹⁷ Hans Urs von Balthasar: *The Moment of Christian Witness* San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994; Johann Baptist Metz: *Faith in History & Society*. (London/New York: Burns & Oates/Seabury Press, 1980).

theology of love. Ignatian spirituality is founded on a belief that it is possible to experience God. George Lindbeck and P.D. Molnar are in various ways critical to Rahner's understanding of experience.³⁹⁸ We will discuss this by also using some supportive reflections of D. Marmion. After this discussion, we turn to Rahner's understanding of love, in particular to his concept of the transcendental constitution of love. Balthasar is one who has criticized this, while Werner G. Jeanrond finds Rahner's theology of love to be "wide ranging and impressive".³⁹⁹ After these four themes of discussion, I will come to a final conclusion on this thesis.

10.1. Kenosis and Anthropocentrism

Karl Rahner is often criticized for having the human being as the starting point for his theology. In chapter 2.1 we briefly touched this issue, saying that a transcendental theology is necessarily "anthropocentric", and we looked at Rahner's reasons for the transcendental approach.

One critical question regarding this is how the nature of *kenosis* is in harmony with the anthropocentric starting-point of Rahner. With the nature of *kenosis* I here understand the self-emptying character of seeking the other and not oneself. Is it not so that Rahner's transcendental theology rather leads to self-centeredness? Not only does Rahner talk about human beings as constituted for receiving the Word of God; he understands the subject as a returning to self, and he draws on parallels between the hypostatic union in Jesus and the universal grace given to all humans.⁴⁰⁰ Furthermore, Ignatian Spirituality focuses on the individual's searching for God through the personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Does not all these turnings to the self run the risk of an anthropocentrism where the surrendering is reduced to something abstract; a devotion that risks to let God be the means of one's own perfection instead of being loved for his own sake?

Brian F. Linnane has in his doctoral dissertation discussed what James M. Gustafson takes to be "the anthropocentric tendencies of traditional Christian theology and ethics."⁴⁰¹ He does so by comparing Gustafson's theocentric perspective with Karl Rahner's approach to theology and

³⁹⁸ George A. Lindbeck: *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (London: SPCK, 1984); P.D. Molnar "Can we know God directly?", *Theological Studies* 46 (1985): 228-261.

³⁹⁹ Werner G. Jeanrond: *A Theology of Love* (T & T Clark International, 2010), 151.

⁴⁰⁰ Cf. chaps. 2.6, 2.2, 3.3, 4.

⁴⁰¹ Linnane, PhD.diss., 1.

ethics; looking at Rahner's epistemology, Christology and the concept of "dying with Christ" that we have learnt to know here as well. Some of his findings are well worth looking at here. It is unfortunately not possible to account for the theology of Gustafson here, only to point to his concern of avoiding an anthropocentrism "based upon the illegitimate assumption that God exists for the exclusive purpose of human well-being". An anthropocentrism like that will in his opinion lead to an "improperly exalting [of] the human person at the expense of God and God's sovereignty."⁴⁰² Linnane's conclusion reveals that he does not regard Gustafson's theocentric ethics to be very successful, he rather points to Karl Rahner as the one providing a better foundation for a theocentric ethic. He admittedly acknowledges that there are tendencies in Rahner toward a "utilitarian anthropocentrism", but he believes that "this tendency in its extreme form is not central to his project and that it can be amended or corrected."⁴⁰³

Karl Rahner's conviction of God as the ground of human's being means that a "coming-to-self" is identical with turning to God. Linnane sees Rahner's concept of transcendental experience to be not only a genuine experience of subjectivity, but rather it also has "the effect of *de-centering* the human knower."⁴⁰⁴ Seen in this way, the transcendental experience of self is opposite to the exalting self-centeredness Gustafson is criticizing.

It is, however, within the concept of "dying with Christ" that Linnane finds the weightiest arguments showing that Rahner's transcendental approach is theocentric rather than anthropocentric:

Dying with Christ, for Rahner, is not primarily about human self-fulfillment or reward. Rather its focus is responding to *God's* will; a will that is not necessarily consistent with human conceptions of well-being. An affirmative response to this divine will is ultimately other-oriented and directed toward sacrificial service, with its truest expression in love of neighbor, which for Rahner is also always love of God.⁴⁰⁵

In this passage we can see how Linnane connects the 'dying with Christ' with the Ignatian principle of seeking God's will. When focusing on the affirmative response to the will of God,

⁴⁰² Ibid., 2

⁴⁰³ Ibid., 101.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid., emphasis added

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid., 6

there is no way of getting self-centred, because this act requires the risk of going far beyond what the human person might want for his own well-being, as we saw above in Ignatian Spirituality. The Ignatian meditations are rightly focusing on the individual's relationship to Jesus Christ, but not as a means for well-being on behalf of others. The deepest concern is the greater glory of God and the self-surrender to his will. According to Linnane, "such a self-surrender finds its focus not on human benefit but on the cross of Christ in all its devastation."⁴⁰⁶

Karl Rahner himself regards anthropocentricity and theocentricity to actually be one and the same thing, seen from two sides.⁴⁰⁷ This corresponds also to how he links anthropology to Christology, which allows us to see *kenosis* not only as a Christological concept, but rather as an exemplifying of the genuine human self-surrender. Thus, dying with Christ is to be seen as the framework for a Christian ethics, which Linnane denotes as a christologically-informed theocentric ethic.⁴⁰⁸ Within this framework is the concept of *kenosis* to be placed, too; and seen from that perspective, I see no contradiction between the transcendental/anthropocentric theology of Rahner and the attitude of *kenosis* required of the follower.

10.2. Transcendental and Categorical - some Critical Comments

The relationship between the transcendental and the categorical is perhaps the most debated question of Rahner's theology. We will in this section look only at two of many aspects, seeking to relate the debate to our theme of the following of Christ. We start out with the critique from Hans Urs von Balthasar, another great Catholic theologian and (former) friend of Karl Rahner.

a) *Hans Urs von Balthasar: the Transcendental Approach Reduces Christian Living to Shallow Humanism*

While studying Rahner throughout this thesis, it has become clear that his concern regarding the relationship of human beings to God has been one of radical optimism. With concepts as the preapprehension of being and the supernatural existential, Rahner accentuates the

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid., 234. Regarding 'devastation', see my discussion with Linnane on the question of being embraced by God's grace or not in the moment of death, chap. 3.6.

⁴⁰⁷ *TI* 9.2; *SzT* 8, 43.

⁴⁰⁸ Linnane, PhD.,diss.,186, 188, 225.

presence of God in and with every human being. This universal approach is highly debated. One outcome of Rahner's transcendental theology is the concept of the anonymous Christian. *Hans Urs von Balthasar* claims that this has very little to do with the message of the Gospel. In his book *Cordula oder der Ernstfall* (Eng.: *The Moment of Christian Witness*) he criticizes Rahner for what he regards to be a too far anthropologically-oriented theology where faith seems to be watered down "to a bland and shallow humanism".⁴⁰⁹ Balthasar thinks that the theology of God's self-communication as universal makes Christ's Cross superfluous: "... the emphasis of the doctrine of an anonymous Christianity ... involves a proportionate devaluation of the theology of the cross and, correspondingly, of the theology of Christian living in terms of the Ernstfall".⁴¹⁰

In this book, the "Ernstfall" represents the decisive moment or the Cross of Christ, which according to him is to be the permanent pattern of Christian discipleship. He is sceptical to "modern" theology, like Rahner's, which he finds too bland to be able to provide a motivation for a radical following of Christ also including a readiness for suffering.⁴¹¹ It is interesting to note this critique of Balthasar; confronting the very issue of our topic. According to what we have seen here, I find his critique to fall short. During this present study we have seen that Rahner's transcendental approach aims at a surrendering that is total, radical and *kenotic*. Taking his starting-point in the human is in my view nothing but a methodological means to explain how God is the goal of every human being, and that through Jesus Christ he has communicated himself in an irreversible way. Balthasar's concern of seeing the Cross as the pattern of discipleship corresponds with Rahner's "dying with Christ" as I have learnt to see it. There is, however, a reason to ask where and how the decisive moment occurs in Rahner's transcendental approach. The transcendental experience of surrendering does not allow any sharp distinction, like for instance a conversion event. But seeing his writings from a broad perspective, and especially within his spiritual writings on *the Exercises*, I take him to clearly be addressing the decisive moment as well. His *readiness for kenosis* is one of these expressions. The appeal goes more in direction of attaining a *kenotic* attitude by searching a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ, than by addressing the following as paradigmatic sets of the moral law. Thus, he once more begins with the human and the transcendental, but with a belief that the work of God's grace is empowering the person to

⁴⁰⁹ Balthasar, 126.

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁴¹¹ Cf. Marmion "Rahner and his critics: revisiting the dialogue", *Australian E-journal of Theology*, feb.2005, issue 4.

categorical, loving acts towards the neighbour. Balthasar represents on the other side an approach "from above", stressing the otherness of God who is to be praised and served. D. Marmion notes in his article about Rahner and his Critics that the work of Balthasar, referred to here, is written in a dark period of his life. Moreover, their disagreement is also to be seen over against their different backgrounds, temperament and training. Balthasar was "more at home with the arts than with the politics, more phenomenological in his theological approach", and hence he thought Rahner's theology was too limited by philosophy and transcendental ideas.⁴¹² The next paragraph shows how another of Rahner's friends confronts another side of the transcendental approach.

b) Johann Baptist Metz: The Transcendental Trick and Privatization of the Christian Message

Karl Rahner's former student, Johann Baptist Metz, also takes the concept of anonymous Christianity as a starting-point, but he has a different concern being relevant for our topic. As the title *Faith in History and Society* indicates, his main concern is the threatening of history, of which I cannot account for here.⁴¹³ But by turning against the transcendental approach of Rahner, he claims that it fails meeting the historical demands, since "the human person 'is always already', whether he or she wants to be or not, with God". He illustrates this by the famous fairy-tale of the hare and the hedgehog.⁴¹⁴ In this story the hedgehog tricks the hare in their race, by placing his wife in the other end of the field before starting running. In this way, the hare loses the race, falling dead to the mark, because the hedgehog was "always already there". Then, by opting for the hare; Metz equates the transcendental approach of Rahner with the hedgehog trick. It is the practical outcome of this "confusion of salvation and Utopia" that is of interest here.⁴¹⁵ He describes the offer of salvation as an invitation and calls for an imitation of Christ:

The inviting logos of Christianity does not in any sense compel. It has a narrative structure with a *radical and liberating intention*. (...) [The] so-called historical crisis of identity of Christianity is not a crisis of the contents of faith, but rather a crisis of the Christian subjects and institutions which deny themselves the practical meaning of those contents, *the imitation of Christ*.⁴¹⁶

According to Metz, the transcendental approach does not take into account the liberating intention of the Gospel and the appeal of imitating Christ. In his view this imitation should

⁴¹² Ibid.

⁴¹³ Metz, 158ff.

⁴¹⁴ Ibid., 160ff.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid., 164.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid., 165, emphasis added.

meet the urgent need for practical actions. Thus, he argues that Rahner's theology never paid enough attention to the societal dimension of the Christian message. Instead, Rahner's transcendental theology seems to focus on the individual and its innate relationship to God. According to Metz, it fails to see the needs of solidarity and it tends to privatize faith, diminishing it to a timeless decision of the individual person.⁴¹⁷

Karl Rahner apparently sought to appropriate some of the critical voices into later writings. He never regarded his own theology to be a closed system without potential for improvement and development.⁴¹⁸ Hence, the critique from Metz inspired him to an increasing focus on concrete ethical and political issues of our time⁴¹⁹. In chapter 8.2.2 we saw examples on some consequences of Rahner's understanding of neighbour love. Several of his later essays also treated issues of a more practical and political nature.⁴²⁰ Yet, he keeps warning that "one should not limit oneself merely to a one-sided social and political engagement ... A truly authentic Christian spirituality, he maintains, will not shy away from the attempt to bring such political engagement into an "inner synthesis" with one's spiritual life."⁴²¹ Rahner rather seeks to maintain the twofold mission of searching the will of God in the individual prayer; simultaneously paying attention to how this is to be lived out in the concrete, historical world. However, this must not lead the Christian to be stifled in the finite: "God and the world must not be made to coincide simply in a dead sameness".⁴²²

Critics like Balthasar and Metz are rightly pointing at an over emphasis on the transcendental approach in Rahner's writings. Rahner himself acknowledged the characterization of his theology as a "transcendental anthropology". In our thesis, too, we have seen that Rahner understands the transcendental experience to necessarily be mediated through a categorical experience in history, and he did not consider his theology to necessarily be contradictory to Metz' on this point.⁴²³ With his later attempts to emphasize social matters, he makes up for

⁴¹⁷ Cf. Marmion, text related to note 11.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid., see also note 9.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid.

⁴²⁰ E.g. *TI* 22, part 1, dealing with the dignity of human decision, tolerance, utopia and reality and the theological dimension of peace. In *TI* 23.2 he also treats the issue of nuclear weapons.

⁴²¹ Cf. Marmion and his note 25.

⁴²² *TI* 20.13: "The inexhaustible transcendence of God and our concern for the future"; *SzT* 14, 414.

⁴²³ "For it has always been clear in my theology that a 'transcendental experience' (of God and of grace) is always mediated through a categorical experience in history, in interpersonal relationships, and in society. If one not only sees and takes seriously these necessary mediations of transcendental experience, but also fills it out in a concrete way, then one already practices in an authentic way political theology, or in other words, a practical fundamental theology. On the other hand, such a political theology is, if it truly wishes to concern itself with God, not possible without reflection on those essential characteristics of humankind which a transcendental theology discloses. Therefore, I believe that my theology and that of Metz are not necessarily contradictory."

this imbalance. As I see this, one can easily overlook the spiritual dimension of Rahner's theology, which might lead to a very abstract understanding of the transcendental and the categorical. If, however, one really believes God communicates himself in the depths of every person, then the encounter with the historical Jesus Christ can only lead to a greater awareness of God's will for the world - whose contents are bound to concepts as love, solidarity and self-denying. This presupposes a belief in God revealing his word to the individual, causing and actualizing a response of love for God and neighbour. That is why I consider Rahner's writings on Ignatian Spirituality to bridge the gap between the transcendental and the categorical, as well as his writings on the unity of the love of God and the love of neighbour. There is rightly a dialectical tension between the transcendental and the historical in Rahner, where the first cannot be understood isolated from the latter; hence, Rahner himself claims that Christology is the *beginning and the end* of anthropology.⁴²⁴ His optimistic belief in God's self-communication and the universal effects can only be truly understood when Christology is the beginning and the end of the anthropology. The Christ- event reveals God's grace *and* requires a response. The tasks for the follower thus appear as both concrete and radical. The goal of the Ignatian *Exercises* is no less than a *readiness for kenosis* actualized in the individual's concrete life. If one takes the transcendental approach to be a hedgehog trick or a shallow humanism without appeal for decisive response, then one does not take into account the radical nature of the spirituality in Rahner's writings. In the following we will discuss two important aspects of this spirituality, the experiential character and the concept of love.

10.3. Theology and Experience

I started the second part of this thesis with looking at Rahner's understanding of experiencing God. The notion of experience is fundamental both within his theology and his spirituality, but in his writings he never actually defines it. In *Theological Dictionary*, he describes *religious experience* as "the inner self-attestation of supernatural reality (grace)", that is possible only "in conjunction with objective, conceptual reflection of the mind upon itself".⁴²⁵ It is not possible, then, to make a clear distinction between what Rahner calls "the inner self-

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

⁴²⁴ *TI*, 1.5; *SzT* 1, 205.

⁴²⁵ Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimler: "*Concise Theological Dictionary*" (London: Burns & Oates, 1983), "Experience" p. 164-165.

attestation” of grace and the following reflection or interpretation of this “experience”.⁴²⁶ As always, experiences have to be reflected on and interpreted. How is it then possible to rely on religious experience as a basis for decisions, as we have seen throughout the *Exercises*? Is it possible at all to “know” something of God and his will out of personal experience?

In an article presented in *Theological Studies*, P.D. Molnar argues sharply against what he calls “Rahner’s Solution from Experience”.⁴²⁷ I will present only a few of his critical comments before discussing the issue in dialogue with Marmion and Lindbeck. Molnar’s primary concern seems to be God’s transcendence and the important distinction between Creator and creature.⁴²⁸ He attacks Rahner’s theology, point by point, claiming that his understanding of grace “leaves us unable to distinguish God from ourselves both theoretically and practically”. This is due to how Rahner sees the “coming-to-self” as an experience of God, which according to Molnar is to substitute experience for knowledge of God. This confusion occurs when “the determining element ... for Rahner is man’s experience and not the transcendent God”.⁴²⁹ As the title “Can we know God directly” indicates, the starting-point of Molnar is most of all epistemology and his agenda is clearly to defend tradition and Christian doctrines.⁴³⁰ Our few examples of his concern demonstrate clearly enough that his understanding of theology excludes the experiential dimension. In my opinion, it is not possible to understand Rahner without also acknowledging the possibility of experiencing God. But that experience must not be seen as intellectual, reflective knowledge. In Molnar’s article he too easily identifies experience with knowledge. To experience God is according to Rahner not equal with *knowledge* about God, as we also will see later in this discussion. Molnar thus criticizes several doctrines of Rahner on false premises; without even mentioning the words “mystery”, “ineffable” or “unfathomable” which are frequent words of Rahner when he speaks of God. Throughout this thesis it should have become clear that Rahner never intended to claim any certain, conceptual knowledge of God. On the contrary, the primary word of God seems for Rahner to be “Mystery”. This mystery is according to Rahner an inmost part of the mystery of the human being. We can never grasp God, and all human

⁴²⁶ Cf. Marmion, part III: “Excursus: Rahner, Theology and Experience”.

⁴²⁷ Cf. note 398

⁴²⁸ Molnar, 228.

⁴²⁹ *Ibid.*, 244.

⁴³⁰ Molnar concludes: “Rahner’s method leads him to dogmatic conclusions that are at variance with Scripture and the tradition. In effect, this method leads him to confuse the movement of the world with God’s free movement. The threat of pantheism or panentheism which Christians always wanted to avoid has thus become the determining element in Rahner’s thought.” *Ibid.*, 261.

knowledge is nothing without lived experience, which for Rahner is *love*. Some chosen lines from one of his prayers speak about both knowledge and experience:

Truly, my God, mere knowing is nothing...
How can we approach the heart of all things, the true heart of reality? Not by knowledge alone, but by the full flower of knowledge, love. Only the experience of knowledge's blooming into love has any power to work a transformation in me, in my very self. ... Thanks to Your mercy, O infinite God, I know something about you not only through concepts and words, but through experience. ... You have seized me; I have not "grasped" You.⁴³¹

When I repeatedly return to Rahner's reflections on spirituality, it is due to my understanding that his spiritual and academic writings have to be seen as a whole.⁴³² Molnar is in my opinion neglecting the spiritual dimension, which is one of the reasons for his critique. Anyhow, if he considers it impossible to have religious experiences, then Rahner's theology rightly has to be rejected.

While Molnar focuses on experience as knowledge, George Lindbeck has taken another approach in his well known book "*The Nature of Doctrine*". In this book he presents three traditional types of perspectives on religion and doctrine and the two positions of Molnar and Rahner could be explained according to these perspectives. It is, however, not within the scope of my thesis either to make a full account of Lindbeck's perspectives nor analyze the differences between Molnar and Rahner. It is of more interest to look at how Lindbeck points at Rahner together with Tillich and Tracy as examples of what he identifies as a liberal perspective. The roots for liberal theologians, like Rahner, can according to Lindbeck be traced back to Schleiermacher.⁴³³ From this perspective, doctrines are mere "shadows of our religious emotions", which implies that inner experience is prior to expressions uttered in words of doctrines or in culture.⁴³⁴ Lindbeck points in particular to Rahner's understanding of the transcendental experiential source combined with the categorical revelatory source as an effort to combine experience and doctrine.⁴³⁵ He nevertheless rejects this perspective because he understands religion to be viewed within a "cultural and/or linguistic framework", and that the relationship between religion and experience is dialectical rather than unilateral.⁴³⁶

Language is a communal phenomenon shaping who we are and religions are according to

⁴³¹ Rahner: "God of knowledge" in *Prayers for a lifetime*, 16-17.

⁴³² Herbert Vorgrimler, Rahner's pupil and friend, claims that all of Rahner's writings are influenced by *life*, by experiences, and that it is most of all in the spiritual writings one discovers the heart of Rahner's thoughts. Vorgrimler: *Understanding Karl Rahner – an Introduction to his Life and Thought*, p. 2-3.

⁴³³ Lindbeck p. 16

⁴³⁴ Ref. Marmion, part II

⁴³⁵ Lindbeck p. 24

⁴³⁶ Ibid p. 33

Lindbeck viewed as interpretative schemes, usually embodied in myths or narratives.⁴³⁷ I referred above to an article of D. Marmion dealing with Rahner and his critics. Here he also discusses Lindbeck's analysis, which he finds to be rather narrow-minded:

Whatever the merits of Lindbeck's rule-theory of doctrine he has oversimplified the "experiential-expressivist" approach by suggesting that the relationship between experience and doctrine in Rahner is unilateral rather than dialectical. ... When applied to Rahner's work as a whole, labels such as "transcendental" or "experiential-expressive" are insufficient descriptions.⁴³⁸

I agree with Marmion that it is difficult to place Rahner's theology in a scheme like Lindbeck's. Rahner's works are too varied to fit into this; besides we saw in the previous section how he often tried to accommodate his theology to ever new situations. Thus, Marmion assumes that Rahner would have appreciated the cultural-linguistic approach suggested by Lindbeck.⁴³⁹ But Lindbeck's critique initiates with Marmion a reflection on the role of experience in Rahner's theology, presented as an excursus in his article. There he shows that for Rahner, religious experience is precisely dialectical and not unilateral as Lindbeck indicated. Marmion presents seven characteristics of Rahner's convictions about the experience of God, of which many already have been mentioned in this thesis, but as a summary I quote parts of the list:

...we can say, firstly, that *everyone* has such an experience, however diffuse and unthematic it may be. Secondly, such experience is both *unthematic* and *prior* to any subsequent attempt, on our part, at conceptualization and analysis. Thirdly, this experience of God is, at the same time, an *experience of the self* Fourthly, the experience of God constitutes the radical essence of every personal experience ... God may indeed be "met" in our experience, though it is always as holy mystery that God is encountered. Fifthly, religious experience involves *gradations* – ranging from ordinary experiences of grace to more mystical experiences.⁴⁴⁰

This list, and our previous presentation, may serve to show that for Rahner experience has to be seen as "a dynamic interplay of the *transcendental and categorical* realms", and it makes it clear that experience is at the core of his theology.⁴⁴¹ That does not mean, of course, that knowledge or doctrines are directly formed out of personal experience. Reflections coming out of experience need nevertheless not to be rejected as a source for theology. One example can be the human experience of love, as have been presented here as a *theology of love*, also illustrated by the prayer above. At the same time our religious experience is "shaped and

⁴³⁷ Ibid, ref. also Marmion part II.

⁴³⁸ Marmion, part II.

⁴³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid., part III, emphasis by author.

⁴⁴¹ Ibid., emphasis by author.

mediated by our prior beliefs and concepts, by our interaction with a religious tradition and by language.⁴⁴² This is the complicated interplay of experience, faith and doctrine. For Rahner the fundamental starting-point seems to be the transcendental experience, but it is always linked both to reflection and to tradition. In the context of this thesis, Rahner's faithfulness to Scripture is demonstrated by how *kenosis* is linked to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and his example of self-surrender, which on the other hand is related to the human experience of abandoning, ranging from the universal and unthematic to the concrete sacrifices of renunciation. If *kenosis* as the following of Christ should be reduced to doctrines only, then the appeal of this thesis would be futile. *Without experience* of the living God and the encounter with Jesus Christ, *kenosis* is reduced to mere moral law and human efforts, which obviously will fail when it comes to the practice of following Christ. According to the prayer quoted, *love is the power of transformation*. In the next section we will once more return to the subject of love, presenting a broader reflection on Rahner's concept of the unity of the love of God and the love of neighbour.

10.4. The Love of God and the Love of Neighbour, a Critical Reflection

In chapter 7.3.1 Karl Rahner's notion of the unity of the love of God and the love of neighbour was presented. This concept, together with Rahner's depiction of love as unconditional self-abandonment, seemed to provide a balanced understanding of love as a key to *kenosis* and the following of Christ.⁴⁴³ In the present discussion we have nevertheless met critics that find Rahner's approach to be narrowly anthropocentric. The critic of the unity of loves goes in a similar direction. Some critics think Rahner's identification of love of God with love of neighbour is "undermining the absolute priority in Christianity of the love of God for us by 'identifying' love of God with love of neighbour."⁴⁴⁴ Hans Urs von Balthasar is one example; in his view the love of God cannot be compared with the love of the neighbour:

The Christ who lives in me is so deeply within me (and closer to me than I am to myself) because he took me to himself on the cross and constantly takes me to him again in the Eucharist. How could my relationship with my neighbor be comparable to that – and therefore require the same answering love from me? The bridge to brotherly love in the sense of Christ is the fact that he has done for everyone what he has done for me.⁴⁴⁵

⁴⁴² Ibid.

⁴⁴³ See chap. 7.3.2

⁴⁴⁴ Marmion, part I. He refers to Hans Urs von Balthasar on this, but without providing the specific source.

⁴⁴⁵ Balthasar, *The Moment of Christian Witness*, 112-113.

Balthasar's concern is the otherness of God; according to the Scripture the love of him has primacy over against the love of neighbour. "To transfer this primacy to the love of one's neighbor would certainly amount to an abandonment of the whole theological ethic of the Old Testament."⁴⁴⁶ Balthasar rightly points at a weak point when it comes to lack of references to the Old Testament. Werner G. Jeanrond gives in *A Theology of Love* a mainly positive evaluation of Rahner's theology of love, but he thinks Rahner misses the connection to the Old Testament and the Jewish tradition. "As a result, the praxis of love initiated by Jesus Christ is implied to be a radically new departure of love rather than developed in constructive continuity with Jewish tradition." Rahner's ethics is radically Christocentric, as we have seen above.⁴⁴⁷ That does not mean, however, that he subordinates the love of God to the love of neighbour. His concern is to point to the *unity* of the loves and to "elucidate how the whole truth of the Gospel is hidden and in germ in the love of one's neighbor".⁴⁴⁸ Furthermore, late in his life, he seems to distinguish more than before the love of God and the love of neighbour.⁴⁴⁹ *The Love of Jesus and the Love of Neighbor* came as late as 1983; this is the main source for my discussion on the issue.⁴⁵⁰ There Rahner stresses that "the love of God is the totality of the free fulfillment of human existence".⁴⁵¹ To equate human love with love for God I see as a misunderstanding of the dialectic of the unity of loves. Furthermore, this is to overlook that Rahner understands the grace of God to be the origin of all love: "Selfless acts of love are not merely proofs of our love of God, but are underpinned and supported by God's divinizing grace."⁴⁵² We love, because he loved first.⁴⁵³

In my earlier presentation of love as the key to *kenosis*, this was related both to Ignatian Spirituality and to the *kenotic character of love* – the unconditional self-abandonment.⁴⁵⁴ Jeanrond understands Rahner's concept of love in a similar way: "God must be loved for His own sake. And the love of God ultimately requires that we human beings are prepared to lose ourselves in the ineffable mystery."⁴⁵⁵ The love of neighbour in fact *presupposes* the self-surrender to God; it is not possible to love the neighbour without first loving God,

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid., 110, note 41.

⁴⁴⁷ See the discussion with Linnane, chap. 10.1 and cf. note 408.

⁴⁴⁸ Marmion, part I.

⁴⁴⁹ Jeanrond, 150.

⁴⁵⁰ This book consists of three essays that were first published during 1980-1981. *LJLN*: preface p. 9 and p. 65.

⁴⁵¹ *LJLN*, 70.

⁴⁵² Marmion, part I.

⁴⁵³ 1. John 4:19, see also note 309.

⁴⁵⁴ See chap. 7.2.3 and 7.3.2.

⁴⁵⁵ Jeanrond, 150.

thematically or not.⁴⁵⁶ In that way, it is possible to agree with Balthasar: the love of God has primacy to the love of neighbour. On the other hand I would not agree that the unity of loves is abandoning the ethics of Scripture, even if it rightly is drawing on the Gospel rather than the Old Testament. Rahner's account of love is in fact diverse and rich, as the conclusion of Jeanrond demonstrates:

Sometimes love is the way towards fullness of God and of the human being, at other times, love demands a total self-giving and self-forsaking surrender. Elements of mystical theology, phenomenological insights, anthropological reflections and starting points compete with Christological convictions in Rahner's lifelong and varying struggle with the theology of love. However, he never loses sight of the unity of love and its mysterious potential to bring God and human beings together without dissolving the one into the other.⁴⁵⁷

Within this great variety of aspects, I find Rahner's concept of the unity of love to have a specific importance for the understanding of *kenosis*. Without this unity, the self-emptying would easily become either unilateral mysticism focusing on the inner devotion, or merely moral obligation to neighbourly love. The unity of the love of God and the love of neighbour is thus bridging an otherwise unhealthy gap between the mystical and the ethical.

After treating *kenosis* from several aspects of Karl Rahner's writings and also having met some of his critics, I will in the following chapter sum up all strands, coming to a final conclusion of my research question.

11. Conclusion

In this thesis I have investigated the transcendental theology of Karl Rahner, in order to find a theological basis for understanding the concept of *kenosis* as a following of Christ. Ignatian spirituality was then explored to deepen the understanding and to point to the consequences of such an understanding of *kenosis*. The research question was:

How do the transcendental theology and the Ignatian spirituality of Karl Rahner contribute to an understanding of kenosis as a following of Christ?

In this conclusion I will present the results of my research, taking into account the critical elements from our latest discussion. My five sub questions will also be recalled and answered subsequently during this final chapter.

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid., see also chap. 8.2.

⁴⁵⁷ Jeanrond, 152.

Throughout the first part of the thesis, we saw how Rahner connects anthropology to Christology and vice versa. First I examined the conditions for human beings to relate to God. According to Rahner, the human being is borne by the grace of God's self-communication. God is always and necessarily there, and it is according to human nature to seek God and thus respond adequately. We learnt that abandoning is the essence of the human being. By looking at those aspects, I came to an answer on my first sub question: *What are the existential conditions for a human kenosis?*

Karl Rahner sees an ontological connection between the historical event of Jesus Christ and human beings; which makes it possible to claim that Jesus is the fulfilment of human nature. The gift of God's self-communication has become irreversible, and the *obedient self-surrender* of Jesus demonstrates *how* he as a human being related to the Father. Karl Rahner's starting-point in the human conditions of Jesus corresponds to the human being's potency for receiving the Word of God. He claims that the hypostatic union in Jesus is principally the same as the grace bestowed upon every human being. On the other hand, Jesus is unique, since he is simultaneously also himself an offering. He is the gift of God himself, while humans in general are receivers only. In the *kenotic* act of becoming human, God has assumed human nature, thus enabled it to receive the full gift of himself. In this lies the answer to our second sub question: *How does the kenosis of Jesus Christ affect the human being ontologically?* On the side of the human being this has radical consequences. The first and primary consequence is, as we have seen, on the side of receiving, the other on responding. When some critics assume that the transcendental theology of Rahner is too bland, even tending towards pantheism, *the responding part* has not been taken seriously.⁴⁵⁸ Responding to the Christ-event is for Rahner not only to accept the gift of God, even if he believes that one can receive the gift of God unthematically and thus also anonymously. When confronted with the Gospel and in the personal encounter with Jesus Christ, the human being is challenged to a radical response. Due to the historical life of Jesus, we have a *model* that shows the way of *kenosis* and also demonstrates that this way is confirmed by God in the resurrection. During the chapter on Christology, we further saw that the attitudes modelled by Jesus are marked by what I denoted as *kenotic* attitudes. Obedience, self-surrendering, submitting to the will of God and a readiness for death are attitudes answering the *third* sub question: *What is the character of kenosis?*

⁴⁵⁸ See chap. 10.2; 10.3, note 430.

Several texts of Rahner provided a solid *foundation for claiming that as Jesus emptied himself, his followers are called to do the same*. Thus, the connection of Christology to anthropology that Rahner offers, functions as a *theological framework* for understanding *kenosis* as following Christ, which was the primary intention of part I.

When we in part II turned to Ignatian spirituality, we looked at *kenosis* from new perspectives, focusing on the *experiences and commitment* involved. While we in the transcendental theology of *part I* saw that to be a subject is a returning to self, we learnt from Ignatian spirituality how “*a readiness for kenosis*” implies a de-centering of self; surrendering to the will of God. Those elements have to be seen together. The self-surrender is a *free* act, sustained by grace. It is both a returning to self – where God abides – and an act towards the fulfilment of human nature. Theologically, Rahner’s approach correspond with the Gospel, saying that taking up the cross to follow Jesus implies losing one’s life in order to find it.⁴⁵⁹ When really abandoning to the will of God, the human will is transformed and united with the will of God. Since *to be is to abandon oneself*, the fulfilment of human nature finds place when the will of God permeates the whole being, enabling the person to serve Him for the world.⁴⁶⁰

How this can come to happen, was the essence of the *fourth* sub question: *What is eliciting a desire for kenosis?* The presentation of Karl Rahner’s understanding of the immediate experience of God provided the necessary theological foundation for the more concrete answers given in Ignatian spirituality. The Ignatian *Exercises* demonstrated that by *praying* and meditating on the life of Jesus Christ one gets *personally involved* with his life. Thus, there is a cooperation of the human act of praying and the bestowal of God’s grace within the human. The act of *kenosis* is sustained by grace and the experience of encountering Jesus *evokes the desire* to let the *readiness for kenosis* grow and ripen. The focus Rahner gives on experience has been met with severe critique, as shown in the previous chapter. Our discussion on that concluded that if one omits taking into account the spirituality of Rahner, one easily can misunderstand his transcendental theology as well. If a theology of following Christ loses its experiential and mystical character, it ends in mere obligations requiring strength beyond the capacity of most human beings. Karl Rahner’s theology of grace provides an answer to this. Again, it has to be stressed the dialectic of Rahner’s transcendental theology which allows the gift of God to be operative even on an unthematic and anonymous level.

⁴⁵⁹ Matt. 10:38-39, par. Mark.8:34-35, Luke 9:23-24.

⁴⁶⁰ *FCF*, 218; cf. chap. 3.3.

The last part of the thesis offered some answers to my *fifth* and final sub question: *What is the material structure of following Christ?* Once more, we saw how the transcendental theology provided a foundation for *love* as a central key to understand the concrete following of Christ. The unity of the love of God and the love of neighbour does not allow for an individualistic approach to Christian life. A true love is directed towards *the other*, towards the needs of both the immediate neighbour and for the societal demands of the world. By putting weight on *the unity*, Rahner avoids reducing the love for God to the level of human love. Furthermore, in the previous discussion we saw that Rahner in his later period stressed the primacy of the love of God. When it comes to concrete expressions of renunciation, I found Rahner to be not so clear. To analyze this would require a more thorough research on the theology of the Evangelical Counsels. The same is to be said regarding his understanding of a gradual ascent to Christian Perfection. Thus, several questions are left open regarding how exactly the Christian life develops towards its fulfilment. However, *kenosis* is for Karl Rahner an essential element of this fulfilment. As the title *Surrender to Life* indicates: it is only by surrender to God that the human being finds the fullness of life.

Karl Rahner's transcendental theology and Ignatian spirituality has during this thesis *proved to be a rich and profound contribution to an understanding of kenosis as following Christ*. As the previous discussion revealed, the dialectic of the transcendental and the categorical is challenging for most readers; so also when it comes to an understanding of the following of Christ. For that reason it was helpful to see the transcendental theology over against Ignatian spirituality. On the other hand, my study demonstrates that Rahner's transcendental theology provides a solid basis for understanding Ignatian spirituality and in particular our keys to *kenosis*. Furthermore, this thesis' focus on the relatedness of Rahner's transcendental theology to Ignatian spirituality might be a contribution to the larger debate on how to understand the transcendental theology of Karl Rahner.

It is to hope that Karl Rahner's wide-ranging understanding of the term *kenosis* and his convincing belief in the immediate experience of God will reach out to more people for many years to come.

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- “The Eucharist and Suffering” in Vol. 3.11
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- “Reflections on the Experience of Grace” in Vol. 3.6
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