

## TRANSITION BETWEEN GRACE AND SIN: FRESH PERSPECTIVES

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THE PROBLEM posed in this paper arises from a common fact of current Catholic consciousness: the transition between grace and serious sin can be and often is, in the life of an individual, an occurrence which repeats itself with relative frequency. Yet there also exists a definite discomfort, a dissatisfaction with this conception of the reality which one finds expressed in various ways by penitents and confessors.

I intend to discuss this question in the light of some current theological trends and in this way to show that the discomfort is theologically quite justified; at the same time I shall indicate a positive direction for a solution.

Previous to the theological consideration it might be helpful to consider the question from a more or less common-sense point of view. The dissatisfaction presently felt by laity and clergy need not be due to a failure to take sin and grace seriously. It can well stem from a desire to take the ultimate importance of these realities quite seriously; for the question of grace and its loss involves love, commitment, decision, life—and these in the profoundest, richest, most meaningful degree conceivable. One can seek in vain for an example of genuine, mature, personal love, life, and commitment which allows for a weekly or even daily transition from fulness of affirmation to complete rejection.

To take one example from our secular experience: there is a form of profound life, love, and commitment which can die. In marriage, where interhuman commitment finds its profoundest realization, the possibility of its dying is simply a fact which needs no proof. But such love and commitment do not die a sudden death. Who would seriously entertain the notion that such love and commitment could be fully alive on Tuesday, dead on Friday, fully alive again on Saturday afternoon, only to die again by Monday morning? This love can die, but it does not climb from its grave with the frequency with which one climbs from the bathtub. It does not die a sudden death nor revive again quickly to die again, repeating this cycle in quick succession.

Now one cannot fail to experience dissatisfaction with a theory or practice which would make man's ultimate meaning—his love of, life in, and commitment to God—a shallower reality than the commitment of one human person to another. And yet, does not the present situation reflect just that? When one is encouraged to make an act of contrition as soon as possible after committing a mortal sin, or when one considers the present handling of persons with a "habit of serious sin" (sin, separation from Communion until confession, confession followed by Communion until one sins again, etc.), one asks: Out of what other concept could such a *de facto* consciousness and practice grow except the conviction that the transition between grace and sin can be a weekly or even daily occurrence in the life of an individual?

From such a situation the need arises for theological categories which will, on the one hand, not simply brush off as unimportant such matter as is presently considered gravely serious, and, on the other hand, not force us into a position which is ultimately intolerable. Such categories are not completely lacking.

Several current theological concepts offer themselves as promising towards a solution to this question. They will be presented here in a rather sketchy form, and this of necessity. To attempt to spell them out in all their detail would be the task of a book, not an article. The literature referred to in this article offers a more detailed analysis of the various aspects for the interested reader.

#### MAN AS MULTIDIMENSIONAL FREEDOM—CORE FREEDOM

The first of these concepts is that of the multileveled structure of man as free agent. Such an analysis of man was proposed as early as 1922 by Dietrich von Hildebrand.<sup>1</sup> This concept now plays a key role in the thinking of many contemporary European theologians.<sup>2</sup> According to this theory, man is structured in a series of concentric circles or various

<sup>1</sup> Dietrich von Hildebrand, "Sittlichkeit und sittliche Werterkenntnis," *Jahrbuch für Philosophie und phänomenologische Forschung* 5 (1922) 463–602.

<sup>2</sup> In the writings of Karl Rahner, see especially "Über die gute Meinung," *Schriften* 3 (Einsiedeln, 1956) 127–54; "Gerecht und Sünder zugleich," *Schriften* 6 (Einsiedeln, 1965) 262–76. Cf. also Bruno Schüller, "Zur Analogie sittlicher Grundbegriffe," *Theologie und Philosophie* 41 (1966) 3–19. For a recent and rather thorough treatment of this question, with good bibliographical material, see Herman Reiners, *Grundintention und sittliches Tun (Quaestiones disputatae* 30; Freiburg, 1966).

levels. On the deepest level of the individual, at the personal center, man's freedom decides, loves, commits itself in the fullest sense of these terms. On this level man constitutes self as lover or selfish sinner. This is the center of grave morality where man makes himself and his total existence good or evil.

An act originating in this dimension of man has the character of total and definitive disposition of self. Schüller, speaking of such an act, says: "Such a salvation decision represents the purest form of human free choice. Therefore, J. B. Metz can characterize man's freedom as 'power to totality' and as 'power to definitiveness.'"<sup>3</sup> Here, at the heart of man, freedom engages itself with its fullest existential intensity.

In any number of places Karl Rahner describes the power and dimensions of such an act of this core freedom. One of the ways in which he characterizes it is as an act which translates time into eternity or in which eternity realizes itself. "Where such a free act of solitary decision occurs in absolute obedience to a higher law or in a radical yes of love to another person, there something eternal takes place."<sup>4</sup> In this article it is clear that Rahner does not mean this in any merely poetical sense.

Now from the very dimensions and intensity of such a fundamental, definitive act of man in self-disposition before God it must be clear that its very nature excludes the possibility of a series of quickly-repeated transitions between life and death. Walgrave emphasizes a point that bears repeating here: the death of sin is something horrible, and a life which can in short hops go from life to death, then back again to life, and then to death is not life at all.<sup>5</sup> A failure to see this must spring more from an unreflective habit of taking such a rapid, oft-repeated transition for granted than from any reasons intrinsic to the nature of this reality. The current trend towards seeing morality more in the categories of a "tendency moral" than an "act moral" grows precisely from a deepened awareness of the real nature of the

<sup>3</sup> Schüller, *art. cit.*, p. 5. His reference to Metz is to the article "Freiheit," in *Handbuch theologischer Grundbegriffe* 1 (Munich, 1962) 403-14.

<sup>4</sup> Rahner, "Das Leben der Toten," *Schriften* 4 (Einsiedeln, 1960) 432-33. See also Horkheimer, Rahner, and v. Weissäcker, *Über die Freiheit* (Stuttgart, 1965) pp. 34-35.

<sup>5</sup> J. H. Walgrave, "Standpunten en stromingen in de huidige moraltheologie," *Tijdschrift voor theologie* 1 (1961) 60-61.

core freedom, the *Grundentscheidung*, the *option fondamentale* of man.<sup>6</sup>

We are now in a position to draw a first conclusion with regard to the question posed at the beginning. Because of the nature of man's core freedom and its implications, a series of rapid transitions between life and death on this level must be excluded. What appears to be a rapid and oft-repeated transition between sin and grace must have some other explanation.

#### EXTERNAL ACTS AND CORE FREEDOM

Now we must focus our attention on the order of external acts, because it is precisely here that the obvious phenomenon of rapid transition presents itself. The question arises as to the nature of the relation which exists between this core freedom as described above and the external acts. Schüller describes this relationship in the following way:

It is not the individual good works which constitute the essence of moral goodness; rather it is the loving decision for God which expresses itself in these actions. Good works have their importance as symptoms. In these works the genuinity of my decision and love for God manifests and proves itself; as the soul is not its body but only lives and realizes itself in the medium of its body, so too the love of God, the very essence of my moral goodness, is not identical with its good works, though it can only live and realize itself in the medium of these good works.<sup>7</sup>

Seen in this way, a person's good works are the connatural and spontaneous reaction to the values which he confronts in his concrete life. These actions in themselves are not new free decisions but this fundamental decidedness concretely spelling itself out in the space and time of incarnational existence. In speaking of the external acts of the sinner, Schüller says:

His fundamental overactual decidedness against God and against the whole moral order constitutes the common denominator, that existential a priori for his consequent moral conduct. His thrust is to confirm and express himself, corresponding to the situation, in acts and deeds, in thoughts and words. These acts of self-expression and self-confirmation are by no means ever-new decisions, they do not originate in ever-new free self-determination; rather they have a consecutive

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Reiners, *op. cit.*, especially "Moral der Tendenzen," pp. 104-12; also Walgrave, *art. cit.*, pp. 58-61, 64-67.

<sup>7</sup> Bruno Schüller, "Das irrige Gewissen," in *Theologische Akademie 2* (ed. K. Rahner and O. Semmelroth; Frankfurt, 1965) 11-12. Similarly Rahner, *Schriften* 6, 271.

character: because the individual is a sinner, he can only act and function as a sinner.<sup>8</sup>

From this Schüller draws the conclusion that three things must be distinguished:

(1) the act of free decision, which occurs in *nunc indivisibile* and hence has no temporal extension; (2) the decidedness, constituted by this free decision, which perdures as overactual; (3) the various acts in which this overactual decision expresses, represents, and confirms itself according to the given situation.<sup>9</sup>

At this point we seem to be presented with our original dilemma in an even more acute form. On the one hand, we have indicated that the fundamental orientation of the individual, because of its intensity and character, cannot lightly and rapidly pass from death to life, etc. On the other hand, if the external acts of a person are precisely the incarnation of this fundamental orientation through core freedom, and if they do manifest such a repeated and relatively frequent transition, are we not forced to conclude that the fundamental thrust, as their source, also correspondingly changes? So it seems that we are forced to reject one of these principles as disharmonious within the total picture.

#### MORE PERIPHERAL FREEDOM AND ITS INCARNATION

This would be true if external acts were only possible as the incarnations of this deepest engagement of human freedom and if this were the only form in which human freedom realized itself. But this is not the case. Up to now we have limited our discussion to one degree of human freedom: to that engagement of freedom as it occurs in its fullest existential intensity. It is, of course, only as such that human freedom is fully itself, is genuine theological freedom, is *libertas gravis*. Any engagement of freedom which is less intense than this is called such only analogically.<sup>10</sup> But freedom is not limited to this life-and-death-dealing engagement which originates in the heart of the person. Freedom can also realize itself in the more peripheral dimension of man. Rahner remarks:

<sup>8</sup> Bruno Schüller, *Gesetz und Freiheit* (Düsseldorf, 1966) p. 127.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 128. Cf. also Franz Böckle, "Vom Sünder und seiner Sünde," *Theologisch-praktische Quartalschrift* 114 (1966) 300-308.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Schüller, "Zur Analogie," pp. 3-15.

But precisely because man is many-dimensional, because he is not the abstractly formulated person as moral theology so easily conceives him, because he is constructed in layers from the core outwards, and because (also his free) engagements can originate out of these various dimensions (since formal freedom is not something which has its origin in the core alone, but a reality which is also, so to speak, diffused throughout the total person), therefore a person can do one and the same thing and this out of various and per se contradictory motives and intents.<sup>11</sup>

This means that freedom can not only realize itself in the various levels of man, in varying degrees of existential intensity, but that these various levels can actually stand in contradiction to one another. This phenomenon is precisely what Schüller has in mind when he speaks of moral inconsistency. He describes it in these terms:

A person affirms definitely one moral value and at the same time rejects another, although the latter is intrinsically connected with the former; the person has, on the one hand, seriously decided to do God's will, and yet, without surrendering this decision, freely does that which is contrary to God's will. Such a simultaneous affirmation and denial of God's will would destroy the inner unity of the person if both occurred in the same way. But that is not the case. . . . He affirms it from the center of his person and rejects it from a more peripheral dimension of his person.<sup>12</sup>

Now just as the core freedom was seen to incarnate itself in external acts, so too do the more peripheral engagements of freedom. This means that in the concrete conduct of the individual there will exist acts arising from the various levels of the person—some flowing con-naturally from the decidedness in the center of the person and others arising from distinct engagements of more peripheral freedom. These latter need not be consistent with the direction of the fundamental option; they can stand in contradiction to it. Further, precisely because of the shallower character of more peripheral freedom, it will not have the same degree of stability as core freedom. Hence the external conduct arising from such a level will be more apt to fluctuate between affirmation and rejection.

Integrating this with what has been said earlier, we would formulate a second conclusion on our way to a better understanding of the problem posed. Because of the magnitude and consequences of the fundamental option, it must be considered as having a considerable degree of

<sup>11</sup> *Schriften* 3, 136.

<sup>12</sup> Schüller, *Gesetz und Freiheit*, pp. 101-2. Cf. also Reiners, *op. cit.*, pp. 119-25.

stability and exclude the possibility of a frequent fluctuation between affirmation and negation. When such a phenomenon does exist in the external order, its source in the person should be seen as lying not in the core freedom but in a more peripheral dimension, a dimension of *moralitas levis*.

Nor is this merely a flight from sin. It should not be interpreted as an attempt to make apparent sin a harmless reality. Such a conclusion is a two-edged sword. It can mean that much apparent sin does not really originate at the heart of the person and hence lacks the grave character of actual serious sin. It can also mean the same for an apparent penitence.

But the same difficulty continues to plague us; for the real problem arises precisely where there is question not of venial morality but of grave morality, where the external acts in question have to do with serious moral matter *and* where the person has the necessary knowledge that it is such a question of serious matter. Is not serious matter precisely that which by definition can call forth this core freedom of man when the individual has the knowledge that it is such? And is it not simply a fact that we also have a frequent fluctuation in just such questions?

#### MORAL KNOWLEDGE

This brings us to a very difficult question in moral theology, one which to a great extent is still uncharted water: the question of *cognitio practica*, that moral cognition required as an indispensable condition of man's moral freedom. The distinction between merely theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge is traditional. But a quick look at the standard moral texts shows how little attention this difference has attracted from moral theologians. Its treatment is jejune, to say the least. One cannot avoid the impression that for the most part a very conceptualistic attitude lies behind the treatment of the question. The evolution of theoretical knowledge into practical knowledge seems an easily-made progression that follows more or less automatically. The manner in which the question of disturbing the good faith of an individual is treated betrays a conviction that 95% of the communication of practical knowledge is accomplished in the communication of

formulated, theoretical knowledge. This is more than questionable, as should become clear in the following sections.

First we shall take up a point already mentioned in discussing man's freedom. Recently one aspect of this has received growing attention: an act of moral freedom is not so much a choice of something outside the person which God wants the individual to choose; rather it is an act of self-creation, an act which has as its object the free person himself. For this reason J. B. Metz can say:

With the growing insight into man's original manner of being, into his subjectivity, it becomes ever clearer that his powers terminate not in some object but in man himself. . . . Therefore neither does his freedom occur merely as an object-orientated engagement, as a choice "between" individual objects, but rather as self-realization of the individual who chooses objects, and only within this freedom, in which one "produces himself," is he also "free" with regard to the material of his self-realization. He can do this or that or omit it with respect to his own (indispensable) self-realization.<sup>13</sup>

If this element constitutes the actual stuff of free choice, it must also be present in the cognitional element, in the *cognitio practica*, which has its essence and meaning as the indispensable condition for human freedom. This means, then, that moral cognition terminates primarily not in some object outside the subject; rather it is a consciousness of the subject himself as possibility, as absolutely necessary possibility.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Metz, *art. cit.*, p. 410.

<sup>14</sup> The whole question of the varied kinds of human knowledge and consciousness has received considerable attention of late. The thesis that the various elements essential to and present in *cognitio practica* need not be conceptually formulated and are only to a certain extent formulatable cannot be discussed here; it will be taken for granted. Nor is there space here to discuss the relationship of theoretical and practical knowledge. The interested reader might confer some of the following works: K. Rahner, *Vom Glauben inmitten der Welt* (Freiburg, 1961) pp. 115-16; "Akt," "Atheismus," "Gebet," in *Kleines theologisches Wörterbuch* (Freiburg, 1961); *Schriften 2* (Einsiedeln, 1955) 290; *Schriften 5* (Einsiedeln, 1962) 38-53, 228-29, 236-39, 119-23; *Das Dynamische in der Kirche (Quaestiones disputatae 5)*; Freiburg, 1958) pp. 74-148; "Atheismus," *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche 1* (2nd ed., 1957) 988-89; August Brunner, *Glaube und Erkenntnis* (Munich, 1951) *passim*; *Stufenbau der Welt* (Munich, 1950) esp. pp. 85-130; Josef Pieper, *Glück und Kontemplation* (Munich, 1957) pp. 71-76; E. Schillebeeckx, *Personale Begegnung mit Gott* (Mainz, 1964) pp. 44-45; *Offenbarung und Theologie* (Mainz, 1966) p. 218; J. Maritain, *The Range of Reason* (London, 1953) pp. 66-85; Joseph de Finance, *Essai sur l'agir humain* (Rome, 1962) pp. 103, 240-41; J. B. Metz, "Religiöser Akt," *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche 1* (2nd ed., 1957) 256-59; "Befindlichkeit," *ibid.* 2 (2nd ed., 1958) 102-4.



*Person and Nature*

Schüller introduces another concept into this discussion which will take us further: man as person and man as nature. These terms are used in the sense that Rahner uses them in his analysis of concupiscent. <sup>15</sup> Schüller says:

Man *is* already himself before his free self-determination, namely as nature, as himself presented by God's grace. Man, however, *becomes* himself first, namely as person, insofar as he accepts himself in freedom as that God-given self. The unconditional imperative (*das unbedingte Sollen*) of the law reveals itself then as the relationship of man to himself, insofar as he, as undecided person, is related to himself as offered by God, i.e., as nature. God wills that man become fully in his own free self-determination what he is fully from God's grace. <sup>16</sup>

So, the object of man's freedom, and hence his moral knowledge, is himself (obviously as the created medium in which God communicates Himself). But this can be specified still more. For man as nature does not simply mean the species man, *animal rationale*. Man's being as man includes not only the specific notes which he shares with all other human beings, but also those concrete, individuating characteristics of this specific individual. Schüller remarks, in discussing the relationship between divine law and the law of man:

The law of God, as far as content is concerned, is the man himself, as he is offered himself, not only in his membership in a community, but also in his multiple other social relationships, and not least of all in his unique individuality. So the law of God demands of the individual that he be himself. <sup>17</sup>

Therefore, the object of man's freedom and moral knowledge—at least an essential element of this object, i.e., the created medium in which God's offering of Himself realizes itself—is precisely the free individual himself in all his here-and-now concreteness, the individual as nature, as God-given task.

<sup>15</sup> Rahner, "Zum theologischen Begriff der Konkupiszenz," *Schriften* 1 (Einsiedeln, 1954) 377-414, esp. p. 393.

<sup>16</sup> Schüller, *Gesetz und Freiheit*, p. 43.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 66-67. Such a concept plays a key role in Rahner's description of existential ethics; cf. "Über die Frage einer formalen Existentialethik," *Schriften* 2, 227-46; "Der Anspruch Gottes und der Einzelne," *Schriften* 6, 521-36; "Zur 'Situationsethik' aus ökumenischer Sicht," *Schriften* 6, 537-44.

*Nature as Developing*

Now it will be well to focus our attention more closely on man as nature. Man as nature includes not only the specific characteristics which the individual shares with other men, but also all those unique notes which constitute him this concrete unique person. Further he has, as nature, a history; he develops. Man does not drop full-blown from heaven; he evolves through a series of stages which must be measured in years and in some cases in decades. The various dimensions of man are inchoately present even in the infant, but they will only realize themselves fully in the course of the individual's history.

A concrete example will help make this point clear. We will take the dimension of human sexuality, for two reasons: first because of the considerable data at hand in this area, and secondly because it is most often in this area that the problem we have been discussing presents itself.

Today it is quite clear that the individual passes through many phases of his own sexuality: infantile sexuality, a period of sexual latency, adolescent sexuality moving through the stages of *sexus* to *eros* to the maturity of *agape*. When this development is healthy, it moves gradually from a nonreflexive, nonpersonal state to a mature awareness and integration into personal love. Therefore, human sexuality is not present as a univocal reality in the life of an individual; it develops as an emerging reality, and hence is present during this process of evolution only in a way which is analogous to that fully mature stage towards which it is moving.

Putting this in the context of what has just been said about man as nature being the medium of moral cognition, we might pose the following questions. Just because such a dimension of man as nature—e.g., his sexuality—in its fullest stage of development is capable of being the medium of God's self-communication in its fullest form and intensity, a call to the very core of the person, does it necessarily follow that it must be so in all stages of its development on the way to this final stage? Is it not conceivable that just as the dimension of nature itself grows and deepens, so too does its ability to be the medium of this ultimate call of and encounter with God? And is it not possible that until it reaches a certain intensity of development, it is still on its

way to this final stage and might be experienced as obligation, as a possible area of self-realization and hence encounter with God, but to a lesser degree than this ultimate fundamental encounter it will later have?

Translated into more traditional categories, this would mean that a given dimension of man as nature—e.g., his sexuality—could move from being an amoral reality through various stages of intensifying *moralitas levis* to the point where it becomes *moralitas gravis*. To insist that all dimensions of man which can be in their maturer stages the medium of ultimate encounter with God at the core of human freedom, must be this already in all stages of their development, is a naked presumption which must be proven. Because of what has already been said, there are good reasons to believe that it cannot be proven.

Need it be unthinkable that human sexuality in some of its stages of development can be obliging in a way less than *sub gravi*—and this per se, not per accidens? Does it not rather follow that this is so from the scholastic axiom “the foundation of obligation is in being”? If this very being itself has as an essential characteristic that it develops and evolves, then does it not follow that the obligation it imposes, and the knowledge of this, can and must also evolve correspondingly?

It would be futile to try to determine in general where this transition from *moralitas levis* to *gravis* takes place—at least in an article of this nature. And the point to be made is not the where, but the fact that such a transition from *moralitas levis* to *gravis* gives a more satisfying total picture. The uncertainties which are an intrinsic part of this proposed analysis seem more than compensated for by the large area which finds in it a more consistent explanation. And are the uncertainties really greater than those encountered before?

The development of such a dimension of nature does not involve merely a physical maturation. This can, in some cases, come considerably sooner than that fuller maturity which includes all the other dimensions of man. The fuller development of such dimensions—especially the more deep-seated, personal dimensions which make up man as a moral reality—involves all the richness which constitutes the totality of genuine personal being: physical, emotional, intellectual, social, and psychological. That the influence of the familial and cultural milieu on such development is extremely important, either aiding or hindering it, needs no demonstration.

*Internal Word of Nature—External Word of Authority*

From what has been said it should be clear that to be genuine moral knowledge—a call of God to accept one's self and in this medium of self to accept God Himself—man must be given himself, and this not merely in theoretical sentences but as the existential call of self as nature. Now if man as nature has a development intrinsic and essential to itself, which takes time and experience, we should not try (because ultimately we cannot succeed) to leap over this process in a kind of holy impatience, thereby attempting to force with theoretical communication what can only organically come from a deeper and more fundamental knowledge, from man's consciousness of self as what he can become and is hence called to be here and now.

Certainly, theoretical knowledge has a role to play in this very evolution, and a very important one. It will normally be an essential aspect of this process, but it cannot replace the process. If its true ancillary role is not seen for what it actually is, it can ultimately postpone the real goal it is to serve; for it should not be forgotten that man as nature in all its dimensions can be seen from two different points of view: as obligation and as motivation, as a promise of deeper existence. These are not two different realities but two different aspects and functions of one and the same reality. Because of the psychological structure of man, one can seem to make relatively rapid progress in and impact on the first of these areas. That is, one can impose a serious obligation from outside which can appear even to the individual concerned to arise from himself. Now such teaching may well open the person's eyes to what is a real obligation here and now that he might otherwise not see. It can make the perception of such a real obligation and opportunity—genuinely given internally—easier; it can point the way. This is certainly one of the main functions of theoretical knowledge and its communication.

But it might also be that this obligation is not a genuine serious call of man himself as nature—at least not yet. In this case the obligation, fear, bad conscience, etc., is more a question of psychologically imposed obligation which is disproportionate to the dimension of himself at its present stage of development. When this happens we have a situation in which the element of serious obligation, as a moral reality, seems to be present. Is it really such? And what of the corresponding

motivational force? Since the dimension of nature itself has not yet developed to the point where it corresponds in its motivational impact to this artificially intense obligation imposed from outside, the individual is placed in a situation which can only produce anguish. This is not, however, the anguish of one who genuinely perceives, in true moral cognition, a gravely serious good and freely rejects this obligation and opportunity. Rather it is the anguish of one who, lacking the deeper existential motivation which the reality itself does not yet offer, and which this reality alone can ultimately give, therefore in a failure in this area loads on himself a sense of guilt to a degree which exceeds the genuine obligation of the situation.

There is a real obligation at stake here. The situation is one in which a genuine obligation can be experienced—but on the level of *moralitas levis* (which obviously admits of more or less seriousness and is never a matter of inconsequence). But over and above this, and mixed indistinguishably with this, is a far more intense experience of guilt which plays itself out on a psychological rather than a genuinely moral level.

Hence the common phenomenon of those who seriously try to live a good life and yet find themselves in a “habit of serious sin” and who therefore experience the utter gloom of sin and the sudden sunshine after confession—and this perhaps on a weekly basis. In the light of what has been said, it would seem that what they experience in such cases is a twofold reality: (1) genuine transition from sin to repentance on the level of *moralitas levis*, and (2) a release from the severity of the superego, rather than a transition from serious sin to grace. But since they have only the categories of damnation and salvation with which to interpret this, it can only be seen on this salvation-damnation horizon rather than as the actual mixture of genuine morality (*moralitas levis*) plus the psychological dimension which builds on and intensifies this. Such a situation cannot help but obscure the real moral issues involved and ultimately hinder progress towards the final goal.

#### *A Concerned Patience*

To avoid any misunderstanding, it should be emphasized that such a concept of man as nature developing, gradually moving from shallower to deeper possibility and obligation, from *moralitas levis* to *gravis*, does not mean that these areas are to be treated as unimportant or

with indifference during this stage of development. It only means that this development should be recognized for and treated as that which it is. An attitude of concerned patience should reign which helps the individual perceive the ever-deepening meaning and consequences of himself as nature, and in a way which corresponds to the reality as it actually presents itself to him. In this way one can point to, and help him open himself to, the next stage of evolution. It is highly questionable whether an approach which sees *only* the final stage and presents the reality in such an unnuanced and undifferentiated way is best suited to do this. Such an approach tends to speak in categories which lack a corresponding intensity in the individual, to speak about something which the individual experiences but not in the way he experiences it. This can more or less cast the whole dimension in a light of unreality and ultimately call into question its credibility. This has nothing to do with lacking the courage to speak a decisive word and take a definite stand where this is called for. It in no way supports such an indifference and cowardice.

But to point to a reality which is in fact less than God's eternal word of invitation to the heart of man (and this because God wills it here and now to be less than this), and to name this that ineffable, eternal mystery which it is not (yet), can be a disservice to the ultimate dignity and gravity of man's existence before God.

Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimler make an observation concerning the development and stages of man's history and our attitude thereto:

Each phase of life (childhood, youth, etc., and their different characteristics) has its own irreplaceable originality and hence its own role to play: to raise itself to the next phase and to integrate itself there as an abiding element. With this is set before us an eminently religious task, for the individual . . . as well as the educator, and above all for the theologian. The task is to work out the differences which the various phases of life produce in their existential relationship to Christian truths and to the individual moral goal-commandments (*Zielgebote*—B. Häring). . . . A failure to recognize such findings results in speaking to Christians in an unselective, undifferentiated, and schematic way. This overburdens them and like every ironbound legalism can end in a casting off of religion altogether. As long as deeper insight into these phases of life is lacking, a genuinely understood Christian patience can go a long way to help allow time for the development of the individual—even in the religious sphere. So too can love, which accepts another even

then as a Christian and brother when he has not (yet) arrived at the goal of all commands and matters pertaining to the Church.<sup>18</sup>

#### SUMMARY AND FINAL CONCLUSION

Because of the nature and depth of the fundamental option, this degree of freedom's engagement must have a considerable stability and therefore excludes the possibility of rapid fluctuation between affirmation and rejection.

When external acts of the individual seem to contradict this, the source of these acts must be seen as arising from a more peripheral level of freedom, insofar as these are genuine human acts.

Even when such acts concern what is generally considered *materia gravis*, this possibility cannot be excluded, even though the person have a theoretical knowledge of the seriousness of this matter. This is true because of the essential characteristic which man as nature possesses—i.e., it is an evolving and developing reality—and because of the absolutely necessary and essential role that man as nature plays in any genuine *cognitio practica*.

Finally, these facts must be kept in mind by those concerned with helping others hear this deepening call of God to become themselves.

<sup>18</sup> K. Rahner and H. Vorgrimler, "Lebensphasen," in *Kleines theologisches Wörterbuch*, p. 220. Cf. also by Rahner: "Messopfer und Jugendascese," in *Sendung und Gnade* (Innsbruck, 1961) pp. 148-83, esp. pp. 162-66; "Theoretische und reale Moral in ihrer Differenz," in *Handbuch der Pastoraltheologie* 2/1 (Freiburg, 1966) 152-63, with bibliography. In the last-named volume see B. Dreher, "Die Beachtung der Altersstufen und die stufenweise Initiation in das gelebte Christentum," pp. 110-33, with bibliography.