

MAN'S EXISTENCE: SUPERNATURAL PARTNERSHIP

Several years ago a book appeared in the form of a dialogue between a moral theologian and a psychiatrist.¹ In the course of the discussion the psychiatrist, Paul Matussek, made the following observation: theology tends to describe sin as a turning away from God. Seeing sin in this way is inadequate and ultimately gives us a foreshortened view of reality. A psychiatrist can often observe that Catholic patients are really unable to experience the real nature of their own hardheartedness, vanity, selfsatisfaction, etc. Often they are unable to see what actually makes such conduct wrong. They immediately leap to the general explanation that such conduct offends God. One has the impression that by seeing the reality almost exclusively in this way they have allowed their real sensitivity to values to atrophy. "Their looking immediately upwards keeps them from seeing the values before them."²

Matussek is here commenting on the same phenomenon which Ebeling has characterized as a "Christian schizophrenia." Ebeling sees this as a danger "which has threatened modern Christianity so that faith and understanding of reality are cut off from each other, and so that one lives and thinks as a Christian in two entirely different ways, in the daily world of work and pleasure, and in the world of the religious representations of Sunday."³

One can hardly complain of a dearth of literature on "secular Christianity" or whatever our favorite name is for this current topic. Therefore the reader is excused for his feeling of "here we go again." But it may be hoped that the following article puts some of the questions already so often discussed in a fresh context.

MAN'S ULTIMATE REALITY: RELATIONSHIP TO GOD

It is a truism of Catholic theology that man's very essence and ultimate reality consists in his freely realized relationship to God. Such truisms, however, are often worth calling to mind in their various dimensions. The fact that man cannot be thought of or properly understood apart from God expresses not merely that relationship of dependence which exists between all categorical (created) being and the Transcendent; it means further that man must relate to God as person, as subject—in knowledge and freedom—or he simply does not exist as

¹ Richard Egenter and Paul Matussek, *Ideologie, Glaube und Gewissen* (Munich, 1965).

² *Ibid.*, pp. 152-53.

³ Gerhard Ebeling, *The Nature of Faith* (New York, 1962) p. 149.

person. The realization of man's selfhood is identical with his recognized and accepted dependence on God. For a personal creature, possession of self in knowledge and love necessarily presupposes, at least logically, possession of God in knowledge and love; this possession occurs in submission and surrender.⁴

Nor should we conceive this as if the person possessed his freedom and was then capable of taking a stand towards God from such a position. Being a person and freedom are identical; this coming to personal power first becomes a possibility for the individual when God's initiative encounters him. It is through this encounter and the decision which it makes possible that man comes to his selfhood, the possession of his freedom, for the first time. Before such encounter, an individual is best described as a potential but not actual person.

Man's self-realization as person, as freedom, is an evolving process. The individual, as freedom, consists of various levels or concentric circles of personal depth. At his heart, at the deepest level, man responds and commits himself in his totality. The commitments arising from more shallow or peripheral levels of the individual are formal freedom but do not constitute the person as such.

Man's development as person begins at the periphery, as it were, and works inwards towards this deepest core, just as a child moves in its personal relationships from shallower to ever deeper friendships until it arrives at the point where it is capable of a total and lifetime commitment.

The individual as person can be described in terms of two "births." The first of these is his physical birth; the second is his birth as a genuine person, which occurs considerably later. And to adapt a phrase of Augustine: we are born physically without our personal decision; our birth as person, however, is unthinkable apart from our own personal commitment. This original and initial decision, by which man crosses the threshold of personal existence, has come to be described in current theological literature as the *optio fundamentalis initialis*. The point we are calling to mind here is that this coming-to-be of the individual takes place in an *optio fundamentalis*, i.e., in his initial grave encounter with God.

The time between the individual's physical birth and his birth in freedom⁵ is also a history of encounter with God, but in a way that is

⁴ Cf. J. B. Metz, *Christliche Anthropozentrik* (Munich, 1962) esp. pp. 52-89; also his two articles in *Handbuch theologischer Grundbegriffe*, "Entscheidung" and "Freiheit"; Bruno Schüller, *Gesetz und Freiheit* (Düsseldorf, 1966) esp. pp. 21-25.

⁵ The time between these two "births" lasts longer, perhaps, than is often supposed. Karl Rahner dares the possibly surprising conjecture: "Probably the decision of faith

qualitatively different from that of the *optio fundamentalis*. Before the individual encounters God in an *optio fundamentalis*, he has passed through a series of ever-deepening encounters with God on the level of more peripheral freedom. The result of each of these encounters has been a deepened peripheral freedom moving toward the density of core freedom.⁶

Therefore, both the birth of the individual as personal subject and the prehistory of this *optio fundamentalis initialis* must be measured and understood in their ultimate reality as a coming-to-be of the subject in so far as he meets and hands himself over to God. The further stages of the individual's self-realization, following the *optio fundamentalis initialis*, manifest the same structure. Each new deepening of the personal existence that man has "answered-into-being" in his *optio initialis* is, in the last analysis, the result of another encounter with God; it is man existing as the answer he has given, and is, to the new initiative, the new life-giving, self-giving word of God.⁷

These are some of the implications of Catholic theology's understanding man as a relationship to God. The human person exists as actual person only to the extent that he freely grasps his own existence; grasping this selfhood is identical with meeting God and delivering himself over to God: first in an ever-deepening but peripheral, personal way; then in the core decision of the *optio initialis*; following this, in further, ever-deepening *optiones fundamentales*.⁸

EVERY SUCH ENCOUNTER IS SUPERNATURAL

This brings us to a traditional distinction in theology which in its present popular understanding causes far more confusion than enlight-

which stamps one's total life occurs today as a rule somewhere between the ages of twenty and twenty-five" (*Handbuch der Pastoraltheologie* 3 [Freiburg, 1968] 531). It cannot be shown here that the "personal birth" spoken of above and the decision of faith mentioned by Rahner are the same. Some serious reasons for equating these two will be discussed later in this article.

⁶ In the article "Transition between Grace and Sin," *THEOLOGICAL STUDIES* 29 (1968) 260-74, I discussed a different aspect of the development from *moralitas levis* to *moralitas gravis*. These two different questions should not be confused with one another. At present we are discussing the development of the individual as person. The previous article was concerned with the development of the individual as nature. While these two aspects are not completely independent of one another, they are by no means the same thing.

⁷ As indicated in "Transition" (cf. n. 6 above), such encounters should be thought of as occurring with relative infrequency in the life of the individual.

⁸ For our present purpose, we can leave aside the discussion of the *optio finalis*. The interested reader might confer Bruno Schüller, "Todsünde—Sünde zum Tod?" *Theologie und Philosophie* 42 (1967) 321-40, for a recent discussion of the literature on this question.

enment: the distinction between nature and grace. In this short consideration we can only take up one limited aspect of this question.⁹ We want to show how today there is a growing realization that every man lives in the supernatural order. It follows then that what was said in the preceding section is to be understood of every man, and that all men encounter God only in a supernatural manner.

First we might look at what this traditional distinction between nature and grace fundamentally has to say. *Humani generis* (DS 3891) warns against losing sight of the gratuity of our present supernatural order. It is precisely in this question of the gratuity of grace and the beatific vision that the distinction between nature (as *natura pura*) and grace has its primary role to play. This distinction becomes necessary if we are to understand clearly that man as created person would still be meaningful even if God had not elevated him to this state of super-created-person. This distinction is the shorthand formula which says that God's self-communication to man, even prior to any sin by which man makes himself positively unworthy of such self-communication, does not in any way necessarily belong to or follow from man's constitution as personal creature. In so far as we need to conceive of a hypothetical order of "unelevated" man to understand the gratuity of the present order of grace, we can refer to this hypothetical man as *natura pura*. Such a use of the term is necessary and helpful.

But a problem arises when this distinction is illegitimately applied to other questions. As a matter of fact, precisely this has taken place. How often have we not heard this distinction applied to motives, acts, love, etc.?¹⁰ Nor is this true only of popular piety. Rahner, commenting on Küng's book *Rechtfertigung*, remarks: "The sentence (p. 188): 'The majority of Catholic theologians concede today that de facto there is no such thing as a merely natural good act' is perhaps a bit exaggerated. The majority of theologians, even today, would still maintain the opposite opinion. . . . Whether or not the majority is correct—that is another question."¹¹

Pesch warns that thinking in terms of such possibly separable levels of man's existential activity is a serious misunderstanding and can lead easily to separating creation and redemption, as well as to a Pelagian anthropology.¹² He further remarks that this danger has realized itself and therefore suggests that we find a more personalist-existentialist

⁹ Cf. Georg Muschalek, "Schöpfung und Bund als Natur-Gnade-Problem," *Mysterium salutis* 2 (Einsiedeln, 1967) 546-58, with bibliography.

¹⁰ O. H. Pesch, "Übernatürlich," *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* 10 (2nd ed., 1965) 437-40.

¹¹ K. Rahner, *Schriften* 4, 261, n. 13.

¹² Pesch, *art. cit.*, col. 440.

substitute for nature-supernature. This, he recommends, will not endanger our adequate understanding of the actual supernatural order but will avoid the negative connotations which have grown out of a misuse of this traditional distinction. Pesch warns that theology dare use this distinction only in a very precise and restricted way, because nature (as *natura pura*) does not exist as such.¹³ Alfaro says:

Man experiences himself—as elevated in his basic spiritual structure through grace—not as *natura pura*, but as a child of God. In his innermost consciousness, man lives from God and calls to Him as his Father (Rom 8:15 f.). The unity of nature and grace in man is, consequently, not a mere coexistence of juxtaposition or superimposition. Nature, in man as he really exists, is not *natura pura* but elevated nature; it is nature as intrinsically modified, as vivified in its very fundamental intentionality. Under the influence of grace, man's religious consciousness reaches an inner unity; it is determined by the a priori of supernatural intentionality. Man's existential situation receives its psychic characteristic (supernatural existential) from grace.¹⁴

This basic conviction has also found its expression in Vatican II. *Gaudium et spes* does not speak in terms of an "a priori of supernatural intentionality" or of the supernatural existential. This document describes man's supernatural elevation in terms of Christ's meaning for each and every man, i.e., in terms of salvation history.

All this holds true not only for Christians, but for all men of good will in whose hearts grace works in an unseen way. For, since Christ died for all men, and since the ultimate vocation of man is in fact one, and divine, we ought to believe that the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to every man the possibility of being associated with this paschal mystery.¹⁵

The Council makes no attempt to speculate on the further nature of this work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of every man; Vatican II does not try to spell out the manifold implications which such a conviction contains. But such an explication is precisely the intent of recent speculation on the supernatural existential and the anonymous Christian.¹⁶

¹³ When the Christian sees the non-Christian practicing genuine virtue, he can no longer say "these are merely 'natural' virtues. There are no merely natural virtues; they exist only in the abstract" (Rahner, *Schriften* 5, 404).

¹⁴ J. B. Alfaro, "Natur und Gnade," *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* 7 (2nd ed., 1962) 834; cf. also his article "Person und Gnade," *Münchener theologische Zeitschrift* 11 (1960) 1-19. Cf. also the article mentioned above in n. 9.

¹⁵ *Gaudium et spes*, no. 22 (tr. *The Documents of Vatican II*, pp. 221-22); cf. also *Lumen gentium*, no. 16; *Ad gentes*, no. 7.

¹⁶ Although these two questions are closely related, they are not identical. Supernatural existential has to do with man's situation prior to his free decision. Anonymous Christian is applied to the *existentielle*, or freely decided, situation of the individual.

Such speculation represents an attempt to describe in anthropological categories Christ's irreversible role in the history of every individual.¹⁷

If we cannot be satisfied with a theory depending on some kind of private divine revelation to explain man's supernatural encounter with God, we must look elsewhere for an answer. There are many reasons to believe that a far more adequate and fruitful explanation can be found. The direction of the solution proposed in the following section recommends itself especially because of the consequences it has not only for the question of the anonymous Christian, but also because it gives us a better basis for understanding the relationship between the implicitly and explicitly religious reality in the life of a professed Christian.

TRANSCENDENT AS DEEPEST DIMENSION

In this section we want to develop the following thought: man's primary and fundamental encounter with God should not be conceived of as a naked and vertical relationship with God; rather, God presents Himself to man as the infinite and absolute dimension of the encounter with finite and created reality. Put most simply: supernatural love of God and genuine love of man constitute an essential unity; the fundamental and primary arena of supernatural encounter with God is not a plane "over" or "beyond" my encounter with created reality, but occurs as the deepest dimension of this encounter and in no other way.

Such a statement must necessarily seem exaggerated, if not downright false, so long as we construct a model of man's arche-encounter with God in terms of prayers, liturgy, etc.; that is, so long as we equate explicit categorical attention to God with encounter with God. It is simply not so that the intensity of one's existential encounter with God is necessarily in direct proportion to one's explicit attention to

¹⁷ It is surprising that a man of Heinrich Schlier's unquestionable stature does not seem to realize this fact. On the one hand, he writes, commenting on 1 Pt 3:19-21: "Even to those lost souls of mythical prehistory—to those who were, in the eyes of men, hopelessly lost—Christ, the Just One . . . reached back and offered salvation (cf. 4:6). Through the power of the Spirit in whom He arose, Jesus Christ reached into the very extremities of past history and hopelessness. V. 19 f. underlines the cosmic universality and radicality of Jesus Christ's salvation event, an event which overlooked no one and knows no exceptions. His death bursts open every prison and saves from the most desperate situation. This statement significantly complements those of vs. 1:18 ff. about grace" (*Strukturen christlicher Existenz* [Würzburg, 1968] p. 63). On the other hand, Schlier has commented critically on Rahner's concept of the anonymous Christian (cf. *Geist und Leben*, June, 1967, p. 217). Schlier seems to me to overlook the fact that this concept is a systematic theologian's attempt to follow out to its necessary consequences the "cosmic universality and radicality of Jesus Christ's salvation event."

God. We do not necessarily most intensely nor first meet God when we free our hands of all other tasks to fold them in prayer.¹⁸

A difficulty in understanding this comes from our usage of such terms as "loving God," "knowing God," "rejecting God," etc. Our normal use of such categories refers to a reflexively conscious and conceptually formulated idea of God. This is quite legitimate and necessary for us humans. But it can lead to confusion—especially in our present context—if we mistakenly suppose that such knowledge of and attention to God constitutes the primary and essential element of such knowledge and attention. When we spoke of God as the indispensable *terminus ad quem* of man's free engagement, we had already, in categories of secondary reflection, taken apart an original multidimensional experience and given a name to one dimension of this experience which it does not necessarily have in the original encounter.

Here it would be helpful to distinguish between two different forms of human consciousness: on the one hand, an explicitly formulated consciousness of a reality; on the other hand, the existentially intense but perhaps unformulated consciousness of a reality. These two forms of human consciousness are by no means the same thing; they by no means wax and wane in direct proportion to one another.

This much is clear from our experience in knowing other persons. For example, if we reflect on the knowledge that husband and wife have of one another, or the knowledge that parents have of their children, we realize that what is known here is the uniqueness and individuality of a specific person. Obviously, the knowledge in question here is not exhaustive; there remain dimensions of the other person which here and now lie beyond the grasp of the knower and out of which the person known will continue to surprise his partner. But there is a real sense in which one knows the unique and irreplaceable person whom he loves. This knowledge is not mere emotion or affection (although it is essentially related to these as other kinds of knowledge are not). Nor is this knowledge, in itself, unclear or obscure. One reason we often feel that such knowledge lacks clarity is because of the difficulty we find in attempting to formulate it. If we have ever tried to describe a close friend to someone who does not know him, we quickly realize how inadequate our formulated description is. Often we realize that our words are actually distorting the reality; we stop short and conclude with a shrug: "You'll just have to meet him." The source of

¹⁸ This in no way implies that prayer, in its liturgical or private form, loses any of its importance. This aspect of the question will be discussed in a later section of this article.

our difficulty here is not that our knowledge is obscure or inadequate; our problem lies in conceptualizing and verbalizing our preconceptual and immediate knowledge of this person. It is precisely because we have a deeply personal knowledge of the person that we can so clearly see the gap between our genuine knowledge of the individual and our halting verbalized description. We experience here not an unclear knowledge grasping for expression but rather a profound existential knowledge failing to find an adequate medium of expression and communication.¹⁹

The preceding paragraphs were an attempt to make one point: to show that the degree of presence, recognition, and consciousness should not be equated with the degree of explicit formulation in conceptual knowledge.

Another aspect of this knowledge of other persons should be considered before taking up the question of man's mediated arche-encounter with God. We want to briefly describe the word-character of personal encounter. It is evident that those persons whom I know in the way described above have revealed themselves to me; they have become present to me in their uniqueness through "words." In the present context, word should be understood as meaning any form in which the individual person manifests and realizes himself: as body, spoken word, gesture, silence, deed, etc. It is only in these incarnations of the individual person, seen in their totality—as a structured, diversified, and nuanced unity—that this other person is present to me.²⁰ Seen from the point of view of knowledge we can then say that knowing another person involves an insight which we might describe as a "transcarnate" intuition, because this insight grasps in this incarnation the person (or at least some aspect of the person) who presents and realizes himself here. Such an intuition goes beyond the more superficial dimension of this "word" (a dimension which can in itself be recorded, measured, photographed) to the person himself present in this "word."

Therefore personal presence is word-presence; a human person can only be present to another to the extent that he gives himself to that which of itself is not necessarily personal, i.e., the material. Knowledge

¹⁹ We should not let the fact that emotions also struggle vainly to find adequate expression blind us to the difference between emotion and the knowledge of another person we are considering here. There are many human phenomena which fall into the area of preconceptuality; too often they have all been tossed into one pot.

²⁰ Obviously, this is a process which takes time. No single "word" can contain the depth, richness, and plasticity of the given person; hence the need for many "words" in various situations.

of persons corresponds to this; it is the direct and immediate intuition of the personal dimension which is the heart of any "word."

MAN'S ENCOUNTER WITH GOD

The foregoing analysis offers us some categories for better understanding man's primary encounter with God. God's presence to man manifests a word-structure analogous to the personal presence described above. Man's arche-knowledge of God is analogous to the transcarneate intuition described above.

In personal presence and knowledge the two elements of our original unity were: person and matter. The person becomes present in his "word"; the intuition reached to the personal heart of this "word." In discussing God's presence and man's knowledge of God, the two elements of the original unity can be described as the transcendent and the categorical, or described in terms of value as the infinite value and the finite. God is then present to man as the ultimate dimension of categorical reality. The "other" in which God "words" Himself is finite reality, analogous to the way a person "words" himself in the "other" of matter. Man's original knowledge of God can then be described as a transcategorical intuition in which man recognizes God in a preconceptual intuition as the heart and ultimate meaning of categorical value. This is analogous to the transcarneate intuition by which man knows another person at the heart of his "word."

It might help to look at this in terms of a concrete example. Let us suppose that a man realizes that his role as husband and father is jeopardized by increasing absorption with his work or his secretary.²¹ Recognizing his duty in this situation means not merely that the man realizes: *if I want to be a good father and husband, then . . .* To recognize his duty means for this individual that he sees the unconditional call which his family makes on him. The point we want to make here is that the characteristic of absoluteness implied in such an experience of grave obligation is precisely man's recognition of the Absolute's presence at the heart of this encounter. God's self-communication, offered in this situation (which implies the individual's own self-realization), presents itself as the dimension of absoluteness in the multidimensional value before which he stands. The individual might be incapable of giving this Absolute a name (a point which we will discuss shortly); he might describe this merely as his duty, as "what I know I have to do,"

²¹ Such an instance was chosen deliberately to exemplify some of the characteristics of the situation of serious decision: it does not occur on a "weekly" basis; it has profound effects on the direction of one's life; it is a larger complexity of many external acts which nonetheless constitutes a unity of personal intention, etc.

etc. But what he encounters here is the God of salvation who has drawn near to us in Jesus Christ.

To anyone familiar with the European theological scene it is no surprise that many theologians of importance now take for granted the principle that man's arche-encounter with God has its *Sitz im Leben* in the encounter with categorical value. Depending on the particular context in which they discuss this question, they may characterize this categorical being in different ways. Schüller, in his discussion of freedom, describes this as man's accepting his being-as-man. "What God offers man is not merely his own being-as-man, but also God Himself. These are not two separate offerings made by God but a single offering. Man's own selfhood is the created medium in which God Himself is offered to man."²² In another context Rahner can describe this decision for or against God in terms of man's lived decision to take life seriously, as somehow mysteriously meaningful, or reject it as an absurdity.²³ Or when we call to mind the fact that man's existence, described from another point of view, is essentially historical intercommunication, then it follows that we can also describe man's supernatural encounter with God at the heart of categorical value in terms of the unity of love of God and love of neighbor. Again it is Rahner who says:

Categorical and explicit love of neighbor is the primary act of loving God. The object of this love is God in His supernatural transcendence—perhaps unthematically but really and in every instance. . . . It is radically true—i.e., with metaphysical and not merely moral or psychological necessity—that one who does not love his brother whom he sees does not love God whom he does not see, and that he can only love God, whom he does not see, *in the act* of loving his visible brother.²⁴

These various ways of describing one and the same reality boil down to the following: (1) God Himself is present in His supernatural self-communication as the ultimate dimension of personal-categorical reality. (2) Man encounters and accepts or rejects this supernatural self-communication of God—even if unthematically—in so far as he accepts or rejects explicitly the categorical reality. (3) This encounter with God represents the primary and arche-confrontation with God and must serve as our model in understanding any further aspects of man's encounter with God.²⁵

²² Bruno Schüller, *Gesetz und Freiheit*, p. 23. Cf. also Rahner, *Schriften* 6, 549.

²³ *Schriften* 7, 56. ²⁴ Rahner, *Schriften* 6, 295.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 294: "The thematically religious act, *as such*, is and remains secondary compared to this" (that is, compared to the categorical and thematic act of love of neighbor).

To understand how it is possible for an individual to know God in the deeply existential (but preconceptual) way just described (so that his present supernatural justification and his future supernatural salvation can arise from such knowledge) and yet be ignorant of God in an explicit formulated way, demands that we consider the relationship between these two kinds of knowledge. First of all, it should be emphasized that these are both essentially human knowledge.²⁶ Human knowledge does not first become genuinely human when it reaches the stage of conceptually formulated knowledge.

But the term preconceptual knowledge includes a multitude of kinds of such knowledge. Like all knowledge, preconceptual perception varies according to the reality which is known. The preconceptual knowledge one has of a friend differs from his preconceptual consciousness of self; my preconceptualized grasp of the principles of logic differs from my preconceptual aesthetic knowledge, and so on. Depending on the depth of the reality which is present in preconceptual consciousness, one will be able with more or less speed, ease, and adequacy to render this conceptualized. Some realities stand, as it were, closer to conceptualization. The more easily a reality can be conceptualized with relative adequacy, the less personal this reality will be. Conversely, the more personal the being, the more difficult it will be to adequately formulate it conceptually.²⁷

²⁶ Leslie Dewart's concern in *The Future of Belief* is primarily with conceptualized knowledge, and without questioning much of what he has to say in this book it seems to me that he goes too far when he says: "Truth, therefore, is attributable to Christian belief by reason of the latter's character as religious experience—an experience, to be sure, which would not be human or, therefore, religious unless it were cast in the form of specific concepts" (p. 113). "In the distinction suggested here, the concepts in which the faith is articulated are rather the formal means by which the human experience of faith . . . comes into being precisely as human, that is, as conscious" (p. 112). Genuine human consciousness should not be equated with conceptual human consciousness. This does not imply that, seen in a certain way, conceptualized knowledge is not a further perfection and development of such preconceptual knowledge. But this further development is primarily in the order of cognition itself. That which makes human knowledge genuinely human is not this last degree of evolution in the cognitional order, but the fact that it so brings man into unity with a reality that he can reasonably commit himself to this reality. Therefore fully human knowledge is that which calls forth decision; it is that which transcends the cognitional order into the volitional order. Similarly, the rules of formal logic can be expressed in a conceptualized system which undoubtedly has great value for man. But the principles of such logic do not first become human when this conceptualization takes place. The person who thinks logically knows these principles unreflexively and uses them unthematically; the individual's knowledge and use of these in such an implicit way is already genuinely human—i.e., they function as they should in human activity, even though they are not yet fully reflexively present to his consciousness.

²⁷ Cf. Metz, *Christliche Anthropozentrik*, pp. 58, 62.

Preconceptual consciousness has a dynamic thrust to go beyond itself, to incarnate itself in formulation. This self-transcendence takes on all the forms which the person has at his disposal for self-incarnation: art, music, abstract and systematic thought. Therefore, preconceptual consciousness spontaneously thrusts towards its own conceptualization; but there is many a slip twixt the cup and the lip.²⁸ The actual process of conceptualization can be realized with varying degrees of success; the formulation can be anything from a snug fit of the original to a formulation which actually contradicts the given of consciousness.²⁹

The success of this process of translating the original given of preconceptual consciousness into conceptual knowledge depends on a variety of factors, many of which are completely independent of both the actual consciousness and its dynamic to conceptualize itself.³⁰ The success or failure of a somewhat adequate conceptual translation can depend on a person's cultural world, the philosophical categories which are available to him as a working vocabulary; it can be considerably influenced by his habits of thinking, his prejudices—with all their reasonable and unreasonable explanations. To return to our original question: it is possible for someone to experience the absolute call to give his life, talents, interest, and enthusiasm for others (speaking in the categories we have developed above, we would say: to experience the presence, promise, and self-communication of the Transcendent in the categorical) and yet to deny radically that this in any way had to do with God. Because it is quite possible that the concept of God represents for the individual everything abstract, antiquated, repressive, clerical, ignoble, and childish; and in his honesty he cannot take a reality as profoundly rich as his genuine but preconceptual experience of God and call it by a name which to him would be blasphemy.

²⁸ The Church, in teaching that man cannot know with absolute certitude his own condition before God, points to at least one reality which must be present to man's preconceptual consciousness but cannot be reflexively grasped adequately. Cf. on this point Rahner, *Schriften* 2, 290; *Schriften* 5, 119.

²⁹ Rahner offers the following example: "One who places a spiritual act knows 'subjectively' what such an act is, since he as subject is present to himself in actual identity with this act. Still, a theoretical psychologist, who is a sensist and therefore materialistically denies man's spirituality, can bona fide give a false theoretical explanation of his spiritual act; what he subjectively experiences he translates objectively incorrectly in conceptualized formulation" (*Schriften* 8, 199).

³⁰ A further complicating factor is that the area of preconceptual *experience* includes more than just the preconceptual intellectual knowledge we have been discussing. If, therefore, data which is not actually genuine preconceptual knowledge is mistaken for such knowledge and therefore included in the process of conceptualization (or vice versa: not all the preconceptual knowledge is included as object of this conceptualization), the correspondence between the preconceptual and its conceptualization is even less.

It would seem to me that this is Rahner's point when he writes: "Granted, one might consider himself an atheist, who has actually accepted God in his absolute subjection to the demands of morality (which is not simply assured by the fact that he can qualify as a 'respectable gentleman'); and he even knows this in the depths of his conscience, although he incorrectly interprets, in his formulated consciousness, what actually takes place."³¹

In short, we might say: because the preconceptual knowledge of God concerns the most profoundly personal reality possible; because the proportion between personal being and ease in objectification is inverse; because conceptualization is precisely the objectification of the preconceptually consciously given; because this process of conceptualization depends in its success on a complex of unpredictable factors which can render it ultimately impossible: therefore it is understandable that a person can know and choose God on the deepest level of his being-as-subject and not realize this (or even deny it) on another level of his conscious activity.

Before moving on to some more practical conclusions we might summarize the foregoing discussion: (1) The human person exists as such only in so far as he encounters and accepts God. (2) In our present order of creation and redemption such an encounter is always supernatural. (3) The fact that most men seem to have no encounter with God's categorical word-revelation in no ways calls the legitimacy of the first two points into question, because man's arche-encounter with God occurs in man's encounter with categorical reality. Therefore this engagement of knowledge and love can remain an "anonymous" but genuinely supernatural one.

CONCLUSIONS

The following remarks will not be as systematic as might be desirable; nor do they pretend to answer all the questions which might have been raised in the course of the preceding analysis. They must stand as some observations that occur to the author at the moment.

1) The distinction between "merely natural" love, etc., and supernatural love is, in the last analysis, without foundation. Wherever genuine human love is realized, we have an instance of supernatural love—of God and of neighbor. Therefore the love between husband and wife, of parents for their children, provided it be genuine personal love and not a pseudo love—or, to speak in the terms of Fromm, a merely psychological symbiotic union—is in every instance supernatural love. It well might be that such love remains anonymously

³¹ Rahner, "Atheismus," *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* 1 (2nd ed., 1957) 988-89.

supernatural; the individual himself and his environment might be ignorant (in their reflexive consciousness) of the supernatural nature of this love. This does not alter the fact that such love is never merely natural. If the pseudo love of mother instinct or a merely symbiotic union cannot be qualified as supernatural love, it is not because this is merely natural love; rather it is because such pseudo love is not genuine love at all, but a phenomenon which can have certain superficial similarities to genuine human love.

2) Any activity which functions as a real preparation, help, or education to such genuine personal engagement, anything which supports and makes this possible, is, to the same degree, a service to the supernatural—whether it professes this or not. Which does not mean that every organization or individual that professes to foster genuine human values, *ipso facto* fosters such values. But wherever and to the degree that one promotes the genuinely human, he thereby fosters the supernatural. Therefore professed Christians have a duty to work together with those who share the same basic goals. It would be a mistake here to overweight the differences on the secondary level of formulation and perhaps thereby miss the unity of primary and fundamental reality—reality which is supernatural.

3) To the present, theology has tended to use two different vocabularies in discussing the explicitly religious and the secular realities of our life. This definitely has hindered our seeing clearly the relationship between these two dimensions of our existence. For example, sacramental theology spends a great deal of time discussing the fact that the sacraments cause grace. If what we have tried to analyze earlier in this article is correct, then one might also legitimately speak of secular reality as causing grace. This, then, lays bare the question: Are these two distinct causes of grace? What is the difference between them? Is one better, a more privileged cause of grace? Fully aware that the following are fragmentary remarks and by no means an adequate answer, the following suggestion might be offered.

We might try to understand the relationship between these two aspects of reality in terms of one common denominator: the sacramentality of all created reality, i.e., all created reality as a medium of God's presence. We might consider all created reality (to the degree that it is personal) as sacramental—as the arena of our supernatural encounter with God. Christ, through His Incarnation, has elevated all created reality to the supernatural (Christocentric) order; He has made creation sacramental (cf. Rom 13; Gal 5:14; Mt 25:34-46). This means that Christ has instituted the sacramental character of secular reality as really as He has instituted the sacraments.

The difference, then, is not that the sacraments are really more Christocentric or more sacramental or more supernatural than secular reality. We have seen that man's existence as person is essentially a Christocentric dialogue with God. This continuum of encounter, however, is not simply a continuous flow of homogenous units; rather it manifests peaks and troughs of (a) intensity and (b) explicitness. We have also pointed out that the peaks of (a) and (b) do not necessarily and in every instance coincide.

The sacraments, then, are those moments of the continuum of man's supernatural encounter with God in which the Christocentric character of this encounter comes to its fullest explicitness, but not necessarily its deepest intensity. The sacraments make explicit in spoken word, in song, in gesture, in action, what can be really present, but anonymously so, in the sacramentality of everyday life: that man encounters God as a member of God's people; that the origin of this encounter is found in God's loving initiative; that all peace, reconciliation, and love has its source in the historical self-communication of God in Jesus Christ—in His life, death, and resurrection, and the sending of His Spirit, etc.

Therefore the prime analogate of God's self-communication to man is the sacramental character (instituted by the Incarnation) of created, personal reality (realized in love of neighbor). So the sacraments must be understood in terms of this fundamental sacramental encounter; the sacraments stand in the service of the sacramentality of the secular. This seems to me to be the implication behind Rahner's statement: "We can definitely say that all prayer, all cult, all law of the Church, all the institutions of the Church are only auxiliary means to achieve one thing: to love God and our neighbor. And we can not love God except in that we love Him in our neighbor. When we do this, we have truly fulfilled the law."³²

All of which does not mean that the sacraments are unimportant, dispensable or up to the arbitrary choice of the individual to whom God gives them as a gift. God, as sole initiator of creation, of general and particular salvation history, meets men in different ways. He meets one in the full explicitness of our eschatological order; another he meets in the anonymous Christianity of his life in a desert, jungle, or secular city. How God will come to any given individual depends on God, not on man's choice. But where God comes to the individual, not only in the anonymity of the sacramentally secular, but also in the explicitness of His Church, here these two dimensions build an indivisible unity which man can only tamper with at the cost of rejecting God's

³² K. Rahner, *Gnade als Freiheit* (Freiburg, 1968) pp. 94-95; cf. also *Theologie des Todes* (Freiburg, 1958) p. 63; *Handbuch der Pastoraltheologie* 1 (Freiburg, 1964) 331 ff.

indivisible gift of Himself. As far as man has a choice—for himself or others—he must always strive to allow this ultimate Christocentric reality to spell itself out in all the dimensions of human life: as community, as individual with his various levels of knowledge and engagement, as law, theology, liturgy, private prayer, etc.

Among these explications the sacraments have a unique place of importance. In these signs instituted by Christ, the Christian not only experiences and celebrates the Christocentricity of his total existence (which cannot leave the anonymous Christianity of his life untouched, and which can be not only a peak of explication but also of intensity of encounter with God); he also experiences these as Christ-instituted signs of hope and promise for the world. They tell him how God stands towards the world; not merely towards the world which has already found the fullest explication of its ultimate reality—as Church—but towards the world which has not yet and perhaps never will, in God's providence, find this explicit, ultimate self-understanding.

Wherever the opportunity presents itself to help bring this ultimate Christocentricity of reality to its explicitness in all human dimensions of life and consciousness, we must presuppose that this is God's will. This is true, not because this explicitness first makes God's salvation present to the individual, but because our stewardship implies making this kingdom of Christ as thoroughly present in all the complexities of man's existence as is possible. That this is a positive value of great importance—an importance certainly great enough to bear the burden of the Church's missionary activity—should be clear to anyone who reflects on what this concretely means.

Therefore we have a duty to do everything possible to help ourselves and others make the richness of our supernatural existence as fully present as possible; we also have every right to be hopeful, even when this does not succeed, because it does not by any means imply that God has not found the heart of man.

The theological qualifications of the foregoing points run the gamut from *de fide to fortasse vera*. The theologian will notice where which tag belongs. Often the ideas developed here represented a personal groping for a better understanding of traditional truths or of the relationship between several traditionally accepted truths. The success of this venture has certainly varied considerably. Should this Note serve as a stimulus to find a more thorough and better solution to the questions raised—a solution which may prove the author wrong on one or many points—it will have fulfilled its aim.

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