

JUAN MARTÍNEZ DE RIPALDA AND KARL RAHNER'S SUPERNATURAL EXISTENTIAL

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[Editor's note: Some 350 years before Karl Rahner formulated his views on the supernatural existential, a Jesuit theologian from the University of Salamanca, Juan Martínez Ripalda, produced a coherent theory to provide theological support for the possibility of salvation for all. This theory rested on three core hermeneutical principles: "active" obediential potency in the human person, the supernatural elevation of every moral act irrespective of its context, and "wide faith."]

SINCE THE Second Vatican Council, Catholics have committed themselves to dialogue not only with regard to other Christian churches but also with members of other living faiths. A great deal of the credit for this new approach can be given to one theologian in particular, Karl Rahner. As Joseph Wong once remarked, "If Vatican II marks the watershed in the Christian attitude toward other religions, Karl Rahner is rightly called the council's chief engineer."¹

Roman Catholic theologizing about the salvation of non-Christians did not begin with Rahner. A significant center for this earlier reflection was the University of Salamanca. During the decades of the Council of Trent (1545–63) as well as the period immediately following its close, three Salamanca theologians made considerable contributions to this effort: Andreas de Véga (1498–1549), Domingo de Soto (1494–1560), and Juan Martínez de Ripalda (1594–1648). Of the three, only Ripalda received recognition by Rahner for contributing to his thinking on the question, and in particular to the formulation of his notion of the "supernatural existential."

Some 50 years have passed since Rahner published his first articulation of the supernatural existential toward the end of his seminal

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¹ Joseph H. Wong, "Anonymous Christians: Karl Rahner's Pneuma-Christocentrism and an East-West Dialogue," *Theological Studies* 55 (1994) 609–37, at 612; see also Gerald A. McCool, "The Philosophy of the Human Person in Karl Rahner's Theology," *TS* 22 (1961) 537–62, at 544–45; George Vandervelde, "The Grammar of Grace: Karl Rahner as a Watershed in Contemporary Theology," *TS* 49 (1988) 445–59, at 455–58.

article on Pius XII's encyclical *Mystici corporis*: "Hence, if man as a spiritual person accomplishes his 'nature' by the total decision about himself, then he must in the concrete, by this decision, always and inevitably take position for or against man's supernatural calling to a participation in the life of the triune God himself."² In a footnote added to the original text when republished in *Schriften zur Theologie*, Rahner noted that the thesis he was articulating was similar to and yet different from that of Ripalda. The difference lay in his rejection of the related Ripaldian "wide faith" thesis.

[T]he thesis enunciated in the above sentence does not come to the same thing as the doctrine of Ripalda who holds that every morally good free act is also a supernaturally elevated, saving act. For our statement leaves it still quite open whether according to God's free decree such a saving act requires also faith, with a definitively determined content of faith mediated by a revelation coming from without, and whether and in what way this may be lacking in a particular case.³

Rahner's agreement with Ripalda concerning the thesis of the supernatural elevation of every moral act represented a change in position. In Rahner's unpublished textbook on grace, *De gratia Christi*,⁴ he identified Ripalda as an adversary because he held the position that in the de facto, historical situation of humanity there were no purely natural moral acts. This apparent shift in position raises interesting questions for students of Rahner, but I will not deal with those questions here. My aim is simply to identify in what way Ripalda's theology ultimately helped Rahner. To achieve that, I provide a preliminary survey of three related topics in Ripalda's weighty tomes entitled *De ente supernaturali*: "active" obediential potency, the supernatural elevation of the moral act, and "wide faith." This offers a helpful way to contribute to our understanding of some historical antecedents to Rahner's important thesis on the supernatural existential.

Theologically, there is a family resemblance between Rahner and Ripalda, but it is not immediately obvious why this should have been the case. They lived three centuries apart. Ripalda was influenced by the Franciscan Duns Scotus, Rahner by the Dominican Thomas Aquinas. As censor of the Spanish Inquisition and confessor of the

² The official *Bibliographie Karl Rahner, 1924–1969*, ed. Roman Bleistein (Freiburg: Herder, 1969) states that this article first appeared as "Die Zugehörigkeit zur Kirche nach der Lehre der Enzyklika Pius XII *Mystici Corporis Christi*," in *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 69 (1947) 129–88. The footnote on Ripalda's relationship to the supernatural existential did not appear in that article but was added when Rahner republished it in his collected essays, "Membership of the Church according to the Teaching of Pius XII's Encyclical 'Mystici Corporis Christi,'" in *Theological Investigations* 2, trans. Karl-H. Kruger (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1963) 1–88, at 81–82 n. 95.

³ *Theological Investigations* 2.88.

⁴ K. Rahner, *De gratia Christi*, 3rd ed. (Innsbruck, 1951) 218.

Condé Duke Olivares,⁵ Ripalda was close to the ecclesiastical power structures of his age; Rahner belonged to the "loyal opposition" within the 20th-century Church.

The theological similarities in the thought of the two men can be traced to the fact that they were both Scholastic theologians and members of the Society of Jesus. Within the interlocking fields of Scholasticism and the Society of Jesus, there is the possibility of quite similar answers to the conundrum of the salvation of non-Christians. While the Ripalda-Rahner connection establishes this possibility, the theological coincidence did not happen necessarily, nor did the Jesuit-Scholastic background of both men necessarily exclude other possible factors.

Of the two vectors, the most important one was that both were Jesuits. Their fundamental commonality is grounded in a shared spirituality based on the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius Loyola. The meditation on the Incarnation in the "Second Week" of the *Exercises*, in which the Holy Trinity intentionally decides upon its providential decree of salvation for all, would have been part and parcel of both theologians' prayer, repeated especially at each annual retreat.

The meditation on the mystery of the Incarnation also enabled them to express in different ways the truth that God can be discovered within the potency of the created universe. This virtuality of creation is the theme of the final exercise of the "Fourth Week," the "contemplation for obtaining love." Within Ripalda's thought this has to do with the *rationes formales sub quibus*⁶ of all creation, toward which both the supernatural and natural acts of knowing and loving are directed as object. Using his nonobjectified, precategorical revelation freely offered by God to the subjectivity of all human persons as an a priori horizon of their knowing and loving, Rahner developed the idea of the supernatural existential. Both theologians therefore evolved the

⁵ Antonio Perez Goyena, "Ripalda," in *The Catholic Encyclopaedia*, ed Charles Hebermann (New York: Robert Appleton, 1912) 862. For a scholarly reconstruction of Ripalda's early life based upon a variety of Jesuit archival sources, see Alfred Kaiser, *Natur und Gnade im Urstand. Eine Untersuchung der Kontroverse zwischen Michael Bajus und Johannes Martinez de Ripalda*, Munchener Theologische Studien, Theologische Fakultät 30 (Munich: M. Hueber, 1965) 13-17.

⁶ Juan Martinez de Ripalda, *De ente supernaturali disputationes theologicae*, rev. ed., 4 vols. (Paris: Victor Palme, 1870) Disputatio 65, Sectio 8, no. 40. This work was originally published between 1634 and 1648. Ripalda's intriguing line of thinking was developed to persuade his Thomist opponents who had rejected the thesis that both a natural and a supernatural act could have the same formal object. Ripalda developed the idea, loosely based on Molina's *De concordia*, q. 14, a. 13, disp. 28, ad 3, that a formal object has two *rationes sub qua*, the first realized by natural acts, the second by supernatural ones. In his *De fide divina* (Disputatio 2) Ripalda explained that this had to do with the attainability, knowability, or lovability of the object, see Sectio 1, n. 2-3, see also *De ente supernaturali* 1, Disputatio 46, Sectio 8, no. 39, and Jose Maria Carreras, S.J., *Significación teológica de Juan Martinez de Ripalda, en el pensamiento de K. Rahner, con referencia a la teoría de los Cristianos anónimos* (Lima: Facultad de Teología Pontificia y Civil de Lima, s.d.) 82-83.

idea of an a priori in created nature, profoundly open to and the condition for the possibility of realizing the transcendent, although Ripalda used pre-Kantian, Scholastic categories, and Rahner post-Kantian ones.

A second commonality between them was a healthy respect for the positive advantages offered by Scholastic theological methods. Although Rahner was always basically a Thomist, he knew the other traditions of Scholastic thought, such as Ripalda's 17th-century reaction to Thomism known as Molinism.

RIPALDA AND THE SALVATION OF NON-CHRISTIANS

The question of the life of grace of all people, including those known in his time as *infideles* (nonbelievers, non-Christians), was, in Ripalda's view, a straight-forward extension of Molinism and its analysis of the individual moral act. The thesis was formally articulated for the first time in 1633 by a student of Ripalda at a University of Salamanca disputation.⁷ The person presiding at this disputation was the dean of the Theology Faculty, Jesuit Juan de Lugo (1583–1660). Having been successfully defended, the thesis was included in 1634 in the first volume of Ripalda's ecclesiastically approved *De ente supernaturali* in its Disputatio 20.⁸ Ten years later de Lugo argued that, in this important matter, Ripalda was going against the unanimous opinion of the Catholic tradition.⁹ Notwithstanding de Lugo's change of mind, Ripalda repeated and elaborated the same thesis in Disputatio 63 of the second volume of the *De ente supernaturali* published in 1645. Ripalda conditionally withdrew this *sententia* in a posthumous work on the virtue of faith published in 1652.¹⁰

In addition to providing material for theological argument in the 17th century, there are other possible reasons for Ripalda's interest in the question of the life of grace of non-Christian believers. The first would be that this question must be part of the understanding of the purely supernatural, Ripalda's lifework. Taking seriously the title of Ripalda's theological *magnum opus*, restriction of the supernatural entity to the confines of Catholic Christianity would have to be questioned closely if the supernatural substance were truly universal. The

⁷ *De ente supernaturali* 2, Disputatio 62, no. 25.

⁸ In fact, the aspect of "salvation," as opposed to graced salvific actions, was only dealt with as a "corollary" in Disputatio 20, which dealt more generally with the life of grace in non-Christians and avoided the contentious issue of their justification.

⁹ J. de Lugo, *Disputationes scholasticae et morales* 1: *De virtute fidei divinae* (Paris: L. Vivès, 1891) Disputatio 12, Sectio 1, no. 4.

¹⁰ *De fide divina*, Disputatio 17, no. 207. Conditionally, because he distinguished between justification as a "thing in itself" (*ex natura rei*), the very nature of justification, and justification under the extrinsic law of God as interpreted by the Church. In the former sense he remained convinced of his thesis, but in the interest of the principle of taking the safer opinion in important matters he accepted that in the second sense the opinion was inappropriate.

second possible provenance for Ripalda's interest in the *infideles* would be related to the missionary outreach of the Catholic Church and of the Jesuits. In his day missionary methodology was under serious discussion because of the Franciscan-led opposition to the Jesuit approach being taken in China, as well as in North and South America.¹¹

The final context out of which the issue may have arisen was the ongoing controversy in Ripalda's day over the papal condemnation of Michel Baius (1513–1589). The Baianists claimed that Baius was merely repeating what Augustine had previously written and ideas subsequently repeated through the history of Catholic theology with regard to the impossibility of a non-Christian having a supernatural life. While many theologians of the time would have agreed with Baius that the word "Gentiles" in Romans 2:12–16 meant Gentile *fideles* (believing Christians), not *infideles* (nonbelievers), still in Proposition 22 Baius had been condemned for taking precisely this doctrinal position.¹² The issue of the *infideles* was, according to Ripalda, thematic in the early-17th-century struggle with the Baianists.¹³

Ripalda's Baroque Theology

Ripalda's creative and positive response to the question of the salvation of non-Christians was possible because the Molinist branch of Scholastic tradition encouraged, within certain limits, the articulation of creative theological possibilities. In commenting on Ripalda's use of patristic and conciliar sources to defend the possibility of salvation of non-Christians, de Lugo characterized his approach as "ingenious."¹⁴ Another word that comes to mind is "baroque."

Baroque art is linked to Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1598–1680), an Italian contemporary of Ripalda. The word itself comes either from the Portuguese "barrôco" (meaning an irregularly shaped pearl) or from the Italian "barocco" (meaning rocky, mountainous country). Its later, applied meaning relates to a bold style with dynamic oppositions. The

¹¹ While it is not possible to claim that Ripalda involved himself in the "Chinese Rites" controversy, it is possible that the theological approach he took to the question of non-Christians by isolating them as moral subjects from their surrounding pagan thought world may have influenced the later disciples of Matteo Ricci (1552–1610), who argued that the names *Tien* and *Chang-ti* used by their converts for God, as well as the ceremonies conducted in honor of Confucius and of deceased ancestors, were permissible because they were isolated as individual entities from the surrounding superstitious culture; see G. Carrière, "Chinese Rites Controversy," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia* 3.611–17, and J. Brucker, in *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, ed. A. Vacant et al. (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1928) 2.2364–91.

¹² *De ente supernaturali* 3, Disputatio 13, Sectio 3, nos. 11, 12, and 16; DS 1022.

¹³ One of whom was probably Cornelis Jansen (1585–1638), although Ripalda never spelled out who these opponents actually were. While Ripalda was teaching at the University of Salamanca and preparing the *De ente supernaturali*, Jansen made a memorable visit there in February 1627; see Antonio Astrain, *Historia de la Compañía de Jesús en la asistencia de España*, 7 vols. (Madrid: Razon y Fe, 1912) 5.160–3.

¹⁴ *De ente supernaturali*, Disputatio 12, Sectio 1, no. 6.

baroque is a reaction to established measures and standards, constituting a liberation from the established school. In music, improvisation and powerful tensions are characteristic of baroque. "Bizarre" and "ingenuous" are other artistic synonyms. Many such words might characterize the theology of Ripalda, which is characteristically committed to excess and eclecticism.

Theologically the real distinction between essence and existence in baroque theology translates into a further distinction between the "law of God" and "the nature of the thing in itself." Ripalda appealed to a Scholastic theory of the "state of pure nature." This was an unsubstantiated possibility because *de facto* after the Fall of Adam and Eve it was thought that no one could live in this way. But, theoretically, using the distinction between essence and existence, a human person could be conceived of as living a purely natural life without the need of divine grace. Therefore, each theological assertion could be examined in order to discover whether it would follow *ex natura rei* or not.

The *natura rei* in nominalist theology could also refer to the order of graced nature as well as "pure nature." Theologically the concept stressed the fact that there are many ways in which God operates in our world, and that the "names" we place on particulars do not control their essence but merely describe an element of their existence at one moment in time. Nevertheless these "names" or "universals" may be correctly stated to be real affirmations. The way of "divine providence"¹⁵ known to Christians through divine revelation, is one such way *ex lege Dei*. In *Disputatio 20*, Ripalda spoke of another way of salvation appropriate to certain non-Christians who, through no fault of their own, do not realize this possibility in their lives. This he called "the law of supernatural providence."¹⁶

CORE HERMENEUTICAL PRINCIPLES IN RIPALDA

While Rahner eventually accepted Ripalda's argument concerning the supernaturality of moral actions, he had a problem with his notion of "wide faith" (*fides lata*). These are two of the three core hermeneutical principles operating in Ripalda's theory. The third precept, not commented on by Rahner, is "active" obediential potency. If any of these three principles is ignored, challenged, or denied, Ripalda's theory begins to drift away from reality. Therefore the fact that Rahner along with the papal magisterium has taken issue with "wide faith" is a serious matter.

Active Obediential Potency

The title *De ente supernaturali* indicates that for Ripalda the supernatural is extrinsic to nature. He attributed two meanings to the word

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, *Disputatio ultima*, no. 394.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 1, *Disputatio 20*, *Sectio 11*, no. 6.

“nature.”¹⁷ First there is the generic meaning of any physical principle that has its own proper activity. According to this definition, the supernatural reality belongs to nature. The second meaning, more specific, refers to the two or more classes of substances and qualities that can be created by the power of God.¹⁸ According to Ripalda, the theological logic of created essences demands that they be placed in different categories that he called “transcendental” and that have no connection with each other.¹⁹ A hierarchy of created essences exists with the quasi-divine “supernatural reality” of grace at the top. Therefore, with regard to the “transcendental” hierarchy of created essences, Ripalda broke from the Thomist tradition of evaluating creatures through an analysis of their proper activity. Instead of analyzing their activity, Ripalda chose a metaphysical analysis of hierarchy made up of three levels: natural creatures, supernatural creatures, and their uncreated origin.²⁰ By his rigorous separation of categories of created reality without transcendental connection to each other, Ripalda claimed that we could understand each in its own distinctiveness.

Perhaps because of this transcendental analysis of nature, Ripalda needed to find potential connections between the various levels of creation. He needed some way to establish a relationship between the natural order and the supernatural. This he found in the notion of “active obediential potency.” For those familiar with Scholastic philosophy, the expression might sound like an oxymoron, but not in the baroque theology of Ripalda.

Although in the philosophy of Ripalda’s age the natural was juxtaposed to the supernatural, in the natural order an existing creature, through obediential potency, could be “obedient” or subject to God the Creator’s power to effect in it something that could never have happened if it had been left to its own natural powers. Thus, for example, in a miracle such as Jesus’ healing of the blind man Bar Timeaus, the natural order was not suspended, since this would imply some original defect in divine wisdom. It was just a miraculous transformation not contrary to nature. Bread and wine used in the eucharistic celebration, likewise, by virtue of the “obediential potency” through the power of the Word of Christ, become the Body and Blood of the Lord.

Ripalda’s notion of active obediential potency went beyond the occasionalism of this miraculous interpretation of obediential potency, because it meant that human nature, through intelligence and will, is positively directed to God’s power to act in it through divine grace. Ripalda therefore added to the Scholastic metaphysical discussion of obediential potency an active element found through analysis of the human faculties of intellect and will.²¹ Ripalda’s theological parsing of

¹⁷ Ibid. 1, Disputatio 1, Sectio 4, no. 26.

¹⁸ Ibid., Sectio 3, no. 22.

¹⁹ Ibid., Disputatio 7, no. 39.

²⁰ P. Dumont, “Ripalda,” in *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique* 13/2.2734–35.

²¹ Walter Principe, “Obediential Potency,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia* 10.606–7; F.

the expression "active obediential potency" means "potency" in a direct sense and "active" in an indirect sense. In its usual meaning, obediential potency is that power which nature has, as intrinsic to itself, to respond to active elevation by God. Whereas the power itself is common to all of created nature, its activation, whenever it may occur, is a grace-filled, supernatural event. Obediential potency means, therefore, a passive aptitude of a creature to being elevated by God. In Scholastic terms it is common to the "formal cause," both intrinsic as well as extrinsic to a creature, of the reception of supernatural elevation.²² Ripalda found this understanding inadequate. Instead of being intrinsic to human nature to enjoy a supernatural destiny or a vocation to the supernatural life, the activation of the obediential potency in the Scholastic system seemed to him to be arbitrary and unconnected to human nature.²³ In avoiding Pelagianism and preserving the gratuity of the intrinsically supernatural gifts, one tends to lose sight of the special characteristics of the human natural faculties of intellect and will as intrinsic principles of the supernatural life. Otherwise, there would be no connection between nature and grace.²⁴

Ripalda defined obediential potency as "the aptitude of created things to fulfil a task (in accord with the judgment of a superior agent and by that agent's help, which is not owed to them) that they cannot fulfil by their natural power and by the concursus that is owed to them."²⁵ Two potencies exist in created nature according to Ripalda: the passive potency of the natural form, which exists throughout creation; and the passive potency susceptible of the supernatural form, which is to be found only in human nature as a special gift intimately related to divine providence. This passive potency for the supernatural form is a middle category between obediential potency and natural potency, taking characteristics from both; it is "the absolute potential to receive the supernatural form and to live the supernatural life."²⁶

The context of the development of this notion of obediential potency was not the question of the salvation of non-Christian believers but the *de auxilium* controversy over the efficacy of grace in the 16th and 17th centuries. Ripalda's position, one he shared with Luis de Molina (1535–1600) and other Jesuits, was that human nature was "active" in the event of salvation, not as a remote principle, but that it took part in an immediate and proximate sense. Ripalda's opponents claimed the Dominican theologian Domingo Báñez (1528–1604) as their leader, and took the supernatural habit as the total and complete power of performing a supernatural act.

Buck, "Potentia oboedientialis," in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, 2nd ed., 10 vol (Freiburg Herder, 1963) 8 646–47

²² *De ente supernaturali* 1, Disputatio 25, no 4

²³ *Ibid* 1, L 2, Disputatio 25, Sectio 2, no 3

²⁴ *Ibid* 1, Disputatio 24, no 4

²⁵ *Ibid*

²⁶ *Ibid* Disputatio 7, Sectio 5, no 14

The Jesuits and other theologians known as "Molinists" faced the charge of "Pelagianism" by their opponents. Ripalda's response was to insist that the help of grace is the efficient cause of the supernatural habit or act, but that the formal cause is the human intellect and will.²⁷ What this means in practice, and why it is important to anchor Ripalda's discussion of the "wide faith" of non-Christians through his thoughts on "active obediencial potency," is that the intellectual and moral movements of all people, which Ripalda called *species impressae*, enjoy a non-Pelagian concursus with "prevenient" grace.

Ripalda understood actual grace to be the various thoughts and movements which, from time to time, affect an individual in moral and spiritual ways so that he or she wants to and does do good. For example, one might suddenly be "struck" with the thought that he or she should visit a hospital to discover whether anything could be done to help the patients there. This sudden desire may or may not be acted upon, but since its provenance is extrinsic and because it definitely has an important influence on the person's intellect and will, Ripalda chose to call such an emotion prevenient, or actual, grace. This point of view on grace has obvious application to the question of the salvation of non-Christians who also share these "supernatural" emotions.²⁸

The impressed species, understood as experiences of prevenient grace, are germane to the question of "wide faith" because they represent a paradigm for the way any person comes to accept the truth of faith. Ripalda insisted upon the priority of "pious affections" to this assent for the following reasons: the assent of faith is free and meritorious; this freedom cannot reside in the intellect; therefore, it must be the freedom and merit of the will ordering such assent; the truth of faith is per se obscure and intrinsically incapable of determining the intellect to assent; and this truth lacks the power to determine the will. Without the power of pious affections, or impressed species in the will, the intellect is incapable of becoming determined upon the obscure assent of faith.²⁹

Ripalda's Theology of Supernatural Elevation

The ancient theological adage "*facienti quod in se est Deus non denegat gratiam*" was key to Ripalda's discussion of the graced life of non-Christians. The general idea of this proverb is that to one having done whatever one could to the best of one's ability, God will not deny grace. In *Disputatio 20* Ripalda discussed various possible interpretations of this piece of traditional theological wisdom. He argued that some theologians had understood it in a semi-Pelagian way. He then presented his own position, which became the theological basis for the positive claims he made concerning the moral life of non-Christians.

²⁷ *Ibid.* 1, L. 2, *Disputatio 30*, *Sectio 7*, no. 35.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, *Sectio 6*, no. 78.

²⁹ *Ibid.* 3, *Disputatio 22*, *Sectio 12*, no. 130.

Contrary to our common sense, said Ripalda, grace is not given to those who work for it or implore heaven for it. Rather, it is found by those who were not seeking it, nor intending to look for it. The formulae of the Second Council of Orange express the essential doctrine that Augustine and his followers had persistently used against all forms of Pelagianism. And for this reason Catholic tradition had consistently condemned any necessary connection between merit and human effort or prayer.

Ripalda improved upon the thought of Molina himself in the *De concordia* by insisting that there is a priority of grace in moral activity³⁰ not only in the *scientia media* but in each and every moral act which is elevated by prevenient grace.³¹

The non-Christian person will not be accorded grace as a result of his or her fulfilment of the Decalogue. Rather, as a result of a divine decree, *ex lege Dei*, each time a non-Christian performs a moral action, in his or her human spirit an impressed species corresponding to the object is generated, thereby driving the will to love the good that supernatural providence grafts onto it. The result is not merely a natural act, but an *actus honestus* which is supernatural and salutary.³² Divine sovereignty is maintained within the salvific nature of the good act because God's providence can accomplish the supernatural illustrations independently of the natural impressed species, even though in practice they are always joined.³³ This is because the formal object of the moral virtues is the same as that of the natural virtues.

If Ripalda can claim a concursus between natural and supernatural thoughts and feelings, a major objection to Ripalda's thesis on the good action would have to do with the type of faith involved. This is because the type of people he was discussing were those who, within the historical unfolding of "ordinary providence," had not enjoyed the opportunity to encounter a preacher of the gospel and, therefore, had no chance to learn about those articles of faith (or *illustrationes*, in Ripalda's vocabulary) in which it was thought that one must believe in order to be saved. Without a miraculous intervention by God, the instruction

³⁰ Ibid. 1, Disputatio 20, Sectio 11, no. 7.

³¹ Ibid., no. 6.

³² Louis Capéran, *Le problème du salut des infidèles: Essai historique*, rev. ed. (Toulouse: Grand Séminaire, 1934) 333–34. Carreras has correctly pointed out that Ripalda published different versions of the possible modalities of supernatural concursus in the good action (*Significación teológica* 46–59). The first is a "simultaneous operation" model: each intrinsically natural act is at the same time extrinsically supernatural. The second describes a "transformation": supernatural grace elevates the natural act so that it is converted into an intrinsically supernatural one. The last model posits a "concurus": the will intends both a natural and a supernatural finality in each moral act and simultaneous with it. In later expositions of his theory the "transformation" model disappears in favor of the first and third; see *De ente supernaturali* 2, Disputatio 110, 4, Sectio 13, no. 33; 2, Disputatio 8, Sectio 12, nos. 149–50, Disputatio 18, Sectio 5, no. 47, 96–98; Disputatio 19, Sectio 6, no. 53; Sectio 7, no. 62; Disputatio 21, Sectio 5, no. 52.

³³ *De ente supernaturali* 1, L. 1, Disputatio 20, Sectio 3, n. 15.

of these people about the things in which they must believe would be impossible. The immediate assistance to make the act of faith, which Ripalda understood as belonging to the category of "sufficient grace" promised to all for salvation, would be lacking. But this would contradict the "ordinary providence," which implies that everyone is offered sufficient grace in order to be saved.³⁴

The solution of positing a miracle was not satisfactory to Ripalda because it lacked plausibility. In this regard Ripalda wrote that while the miraculous intervention of God should not be ruled out, miraculous intervention should not replace the "normal" fulfilment of the natural law—meaning above all else the love of God, which must be supernatural by definition.³⁵ Ripalda believed that his solution was more plausible, since it admitted both the natural and supernatural love of God and linked both the natural and supernatural so that one without the other could not exist, yet without obliterating one by the other. He then went on to develop the idea of "wide faith".

"Wide Faith"

Ripalda claimed that he had found the distinction between "wide" and "strict" faith in the catechism of Pope Pius V. No clear answer can be given to the question whether Ripalda conceived and used this distinction first, and then developed his theory of the good act subsequently, or vice versa. There are good reasons for arguing that the idea of wide faith was a crucial corollary to his idea that every moral action is subject to supernatural elevation, and, in fact, this is how the matter appears in the received text of the *De ente supernaturali*.³⁶ From the text of Disputatio 63 it is clear that Ripalda considered his thesis to be a logical extension of the Jesuit or Molinist position on actual grace.

In order to explain how actual, prevenient grace could be operative in the lives of non-Christians, Ripalda argued that we should accept two forms of supernatural faith, one lived out by people who die without contact with the Church and its gospel message, and the other lived out by Christians who share the good news of Jesus Christ. He was aware of the controversial nature of this topic:

We have seen that every supernatural affect takes its origin from the supernatural knowledge of a morally good object. Now we must see whether that supernatural knowledge, which is necessary for a supernatural affect, pertains

³⁴ Ibid. 1, L. 1, Disputatio 20, Sectio 22, no. 110.

³⁵ Ibid., nos. 112–13.

³⁶ It is not possible at this point to discuss the absence of Ripalda's famous distinction in his *Brevis expositio litterae Magistri Sententiarum* (Lyons: Fratres Anissoniorum et J. Posuel, 1676), originally published in 1635, the year after he had published Disputatio 63 of the *De ente supernaturali*, where he clearly defined and defended the double nature of supernatural faith. This omission is surprising since the "Master of the Sentences" would seem to have given him a good opportunity for such an exposition in Book 3, Distinctio 25, "De fide antiquorum."

to faith. Most serious theological difficulties and frequent condemnations by the Councils and Fathers of the Church depend on the examination of this question. To shed light on this examination the labor and sweat of theologians will be desired by anyone turning his mind and study to this disputation.³⁷

Ripalda then went on to define two types of supernatural faith.

I call strict faith the assent to an object because of the testimony of God proposed by the Church through the external and vocal ministry of men. The faithful regularly have such theological faith, having conceived it from hearing it. But [I call] wide faith any other supernatural knowledge of the good derived partly from the external testimony of irrational creatures or from the internal inspiration of God, which knowledge God inserts like a voice into the hearing of the mind, instructing man in an interior school without a voice sounding exteriorly.³⁸

Having defined the matter in this way, Ripalda then applied a thoroughgoing hermeneutic to the positive sources of theology, whereby he understood "faith" in these texts to mean either "strict" or "wide" faith. An open mind would be necessary to follow his interpretation, and it is this, above all, that he asked from his readers.³⁹ If readers enjoyed such an "open mind," then Ripalda was able to focus their attention on the two types of faith described in many passages of Scripture. Faith in Scripture is not a generic reality, but a specific one.⁴⁰

For example, in the "lilies of the field" passage in Matthew 6, Jesus points to irrational creatures in order to draw his disciples, whose faith is weak, to a deeper appreciation of divine providence. Much of Scripture takes on new meaning. *Fides ex auditu*, based upon Romans 10, makes more sense because Christians have heard the Word of God and have chosen faith or rejection of God. Acts 14, where Paul and Barnabas were mistaken for Zeus and Hermes by the Lyconians, contains teaching put on the lips of Paul which Ripalda considered to be the equivalent of the wide-faith thesis.

While his 17th-century readers might have appreciated the way Ripalda marshalled Scholastic concepts to defend the thesis we are discussing, they would have had to ask whether wide faith was sufficient as the human contribution to the justification process, known in theological circles of that age as the *dispositio ultima ad justificationem extra sacramentalem*. Since the Council of Trent there existed a clear doctrine concerning the *dispositio ultima*, and the common understanding was that strict faith was a key element in it along with charity and repentance for one's sins. Ripalda admitted that this was indeed the case, but considered that this was external divine law *ex lege Dei*, and was not necessarily what salvific or justifying faith *ex natura rei* was in itself. Because of *potentia absoluta* God can choose to

³⁷ *De ente supernaturali* 2, Disputatio 63, proel.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, Sectio 1, no. 6.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, Sectio 2, no. 7.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 1, Disputatio 20, Sectio 10, no. 108.

grant justification only to those who have encountered the *illustrationes* of the Church.

Nevertheless I determine absolutely that strict faith is necessary for justification, since neither opinion, affirmative or negative, is convincing by way of evident arguments. Now in probable and dubious matters that are very serious, as is the subject being addressed in this disputation, the judgement of the safer side is to be chosen even if the opposite appears more probable on the basis of the arguments. Now the judgement of the side affirming the necessity of strict faith for justification is safer because it is more in conformity with the common opinion of theologians, to whom a prudent person should submit his judgements in matters of this sort. . . . The necessity of strict faith is not to be based on the very nature of the salutary effects disposing the subject to justification but on the extrinsic law of God who wills that justification not be given other than as the result of a preliminary illustration of strict faith.⁴¹

Three important issues emerge from the reasoning Ripalda employed in his retraction. First, according to the nominalist principles employed, the question is still open, because it is possible that God's will for salvation was not exhausted by the "external law," and that there were in fact other ways and means of justification such as, for example, wide faith. Second, Ripalda generally followed in his theological methodology the system known at the time as "probabiliorism." That is, to say he was not satisfied to find a single theological source in order to pronounce an opinion to be tenable. Rather he sifted through all possible sources in order to judge which opinion was "more probable."⁴² Finally, Ripalda did not retract the related thesis on the supernatural elevation of every moral action.⁴³ Karl Rahner fastened upon this fact as grounds for holding his own version of this thesis. Since the censors of Ripalda's work, did not deny that non-Christians enjoyed the effects of divine grace in their lived-out moral experience. Ripalda's retraction had to do only with the status of the doctrine of justification.

⁴¹ *Tractatus theologici et scholastici*, Disputatio 17, Sectio 13, nos. 204–5.

⁴² On July 6th, 1687, Tirso González, a Spaniard who had been professor of moral theology at the University of Salamanca, was elected Superior General of the Society of Jesus. He then attempted to move the entire Society into the use of the "probabilior" theory of casuistry in their confessional practice and counselling of morally troubled Catholics. In so doing González precipitated a serious crisis in his religious community; cf. W. V. Bangert, *A History of the Society of Jesus* (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1972) 274–79.

⁴³ The systematic reflections on faith and salvation of non-Christians were continued after Ripalda's death in the teaching and writing of a Jesuit at Louvain, Gilles Estrix (1624–94). Estrix advanced Ripalda's thinking and defended the notion of wide faith, which Estrix's Jansenist opponents characterized as *fides non fides*, *fides elementaris*, *fides scientifica*; see Albert Sohler, "La foi probable: L'acte de foi d'après Gilles Estrix (1624–1694)," *Gregorianum* 28 (1947) 511–54, at 548; L. Ceyssens, "L'influence de Gilles Estrix sur l'origine de la Députation louvaniste à Rome (1677–1679)," *Gregorianum* 30 (1949) 130–57. The "wide faith" thesis of Estrix was condemned by the Holy See in 1679 as Proposition 23, part of a series of 65 "laxist" propositions (DS 2123).

RAHNER ON RIPALDA

There are no positive references to Molinism in Karl Rahner's writings. In fact his theology of grace involves a fundamental rejection of Molina and his disciples. For this reason, it comes as a surprise that Rahner was, by and large, quite positive about Ripalda. Rahner agreed with the thesis that all moral actions are subject to supernatural elevation even if they are performed outside of an explicitly Christian context. Because Ripalda had proposed it in the 17th century and because it had not yet been censured by the official magisterium, Rahner found an extrinsic argument in favor of the supernatural existential. The fundamental importance of Ripalda for Rahner is that he represents a theological antecedent for the correct evaluation of the moral activity of non-Christians.

In his article on the relationship between nature and grace Rahner cautioned his readers that they should not be frightened if his central thesis on the supernatural nature of every *actus honestus* resembled that of Ripalda.

*If in every moral act he takes a positive or negative attitude to the totality of his de facto existence (a supposition whose reality we need not examine here), then we must say: every morally good act of man is, in the actual order of salvation, also in fact a supernaturally salutary act. We should then have arrived at the well-known point of view maintained by Ripalda. This conclusion need not terrify us. First of all, the thesis of Ripalda, though rarely maintained, is exposed to no theological censure. And secondly, one could still hold the basic position outlined here, even if the supposition which brought us to the thesis of Ripalda were contested, which would avoid the position of Ripalda.*⁴⁴

Yet Rahner was ambivalent about Ripalda. On the one hand he wanted to hold Ripalda's position, but on the other hand he wanted to distance himself from its Molinist presuppositions which include an extrinsicism with regard to divine grace. In his 1958 article discussing Hans Küng's study on Barth, Rahner disputed Küng's claim that the majority of Catholic theologians took the same position as Ripalda, namely, that all moral acts are subject to supernatural elevation. But while Rahner denied that any theologians other than Ripalda and Vasquez had held this, he did not deny that the moral act was salvific.⁴⁵ The fact that Ripalda and Vasquez had proposed what could be termed the moral aspect of the supernatural existential was important to Rahner. He could argue that it was a probable opinion. Rahner's last mention of Ripalda in his writings notes his impact not only on his own work but on the work of Vatican II also.

This can be formulated in the following terms: *in the present order of salvation*

⁴⁴ K. Rahner, "Nature and Grace," in *Theological Investigations* 4, trans. Kevin Smyth (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1966) 165-88, at 180.

⁴⁵ K. Rahner, "Questions of Controversial Theology on Justification," in *Theological Investigations* 4.189-218, at 209.

a moral act that is truly positive ("actus honestus") is in fact also a salvific act ("actus salutaris") in the proper sense in virtue of the grace which always exalts it and which is offered always to every man by the universal salvific will of God. This more general principle is, it is true, not universally accepted in Catholic theology. Nevertheless in different forms it has already been maintained in it for a long time, for instance by Vasquez and Ripalda, and materially speaking should certainly be accorded recognition as a prolongation of what the Second Vatican Council teaches with regard to the possibility of salvation for the non-Christian and the inculpable atheist.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ K. Rahner, "Marriage as a Sacrament," in *Theological Investigations* 10, trans. David Bourke (New York: Herder, 1973) 199–221, at 205.