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**ORIENTATION TOWARDS MYSTERY: AN EXPLORATION INTO THE
THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY OF KARL RAHNER IN
DIALOGUE WITH PAULOS GREGORIOS**

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ABBREVIATIONS

- GS Abbott Walter M. ed. “Constitution on the Church in the Modern World Gaudium et Spes.” In *The Documents of Vatican II: All Sixteen Official Texts Promulgated by the Ecumenical Council 1963-1965*. Translated by Joseph Gallagher. London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1966.
- NPNF Letters and Select Works: A Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church. Volume II-XX. Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1968.
- ST Aquinas, Thomas. *The Summa Theologica*. Volume 1, Part 1. Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province. Second revised edition. London: Burns Oates and Washbourne, 1920.
- TI Theological Investigations 23 Volumes of *Theological Investigations* by Karl Rahner.
- NRSV New Revised Standard Version of the Holy Bible

ABSTRACT

The essential task of theological anthropology is to understand human beings as the icons of the incomprehensible God. The culmination of this task is not a direct encounter with God, rather it is to participate in the process of transformation. The goal for us is partaking in grace through the divine-human person that Christ Jesus embodies and progressively growing into that unity.

Karl Rahner and Paulos Mar Gregorios, representing two traditions, offer insights that deepen our understanding of theological anthropology. The East and West, with their unique perspectives, contribute to a comprehensive paradigm for understanding humanity's orientation towards the mystery of God.

The orientation towards mystery is bestowed as a gracious gift, with God choosing the human body as a confirmation of the image and likeness endowed to us during creation. Each day reveals a diverse perspective on humanity, challenging theology to offer its unique interpretation. War, hate crimes, racism, and immigration are contemporary issues in our times that demand a nuanced understanding, and theological anthropology plays a crucial role in shedding light on these challenges. Theological anthropology, as a discipline that explores the nature and significance of humanity from a theological perspective, offers insights into the roots of conflict, prejudice, and injustice. By examining the theological foundations of divine image, equality, and interconnectedness, theological anthropology can contribute to fostering empathy, promoting social justice, and challenging the ideologies. It encourages a holistic view that recognizes the inherent dignity of every individual.

This thesis explores a renewed understanding of the theological notion of the human person. This understanding of the human person is developed by examining the divine rootedness and relational aspects of Karl Rahner's theological anthropology in conversation with that of Paulos Gregorios.

CHAPTER ONE

FORMED AND REFORMED IN GOD'S IMAGE: EAST AND WEST

1. INTRODUCTION

Comprehending humanity remains fundamental to Christian theology and is also the focal point of contemporary issues in our society. The issues of migration, refugee crisis, hate crimes, ecological concerns, bioethics, and several socioeconomic concerns, all seem to be calling for a renewed understanding of humanity. Through the lens of theological anthropology, humanity could strive towards a more inclusive, compassionate, and just approach. For Christian faith, understanding the human in relation to God is essential. The whole point of the Christian message itself, as Karl Rahner identifies is certainly that God in all his sovereignty and glory wants to be the centre of human existence.¹ As he identifies in one of his prayers:

“What else is there that I can tell You about Yourself, except that You are the One without whom I cannot exist, the Eternal God from whom alone I, a creature of time, can draw the strength to live, the infinity who gives meaning to my finiteness... O God of my life, Infinity of my finiteness.”²

Humanity being created in ‘God’s own image’ and the incarnation of God, ‘God becoming man,’ remain the pivotal aspects for any discussion on theological anthropology. Wolfhart Pannenberg claims, “the foundation for a theological concentration on the human person was already laid in the early Christian faith in the incarnation of God.”³ Karl Rahner and Paulos Gregorios, two twenty- first century theologians who in their theological anthropologies, have profoundly identified the openness of humanity to the Divine. Paulos Gregorios, while discussing the God-human relationality, warns us not to stress the duality between God and human to the extent where they are separated in two, for they are indissolubly and inseparably

¹ Karl Rahner, “Man in the Spirit”, in *Theological Investigations Vol. XVII*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: Darton, Longman & Todd,1971), 55. All 23 Volumes of *Theological Investigations* by Karl Rahner shall be here onwards referred to as *TI*. Except name of article, volume, and page numbers all other details shall be listed in the Bibliography.

² Karl Rahner, *Encounters with Silence*, trans. James M. Damske (New York: Newman Press,1967),7.

³ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, trans. Matthew J. O' Connell (London: T& T Clark 1985),12.

united.⁴ Humanity does not exist except in that unity irrespective of whether we are conscious of the fact or not. God and human are not totally other.⁵

Interestingly, both Rahner and Gregorios share inspiring theological links with the Patristic tradition. However, it would be intriguing to examine the two theologians who fit into two streams of thought divided by geographical difference, commonly referred to as the East and the West. For Rahner, Eastern Patristics,⁶ Ignatian spirituality, and Thomistic influences have been significant in his early theological formation. Moreover, the Belgian Jesuit Joseph Maréchal (1878–1944) and Pierre Rousselot (1878–1915) were most influential in Rahner’s own interpretation of Thomas Aquinas.⁷ In Gregorios one can identify influences from the Eastern Patristic tradition, Indian Philosophy and a theological anthropology derived largely from Gregory of Nyssa.⁸ Gregorios nonetheless based all of his criticism of Western theology on a firm knowledge of it but also doesn’t shy away from recognising its merits.⁹

In this context the celebrated words of Pope John Paul in *UT UNUM SINT* (On commitment to Ecumenism) that, “the Church must breathe with her two lungs!” is relevant to our thesis topic.¹⁰ The two lungs Pope John Paul II mentions are the Western and Eastern traditions of the Christian Church. The statement highlights the need for a balanced learning from both Eastern and Western traditions for a Christian Church to survive and breathe healthily. Pope John Paul II's statement resonates by emphasizing the need for a balanced and

⁴ Paulos Gregorios, “Are God and Man One or Two.” *The Star of the East* 1/3 July (1979),5.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Brandon R. Peterson, “Karl Rahner on Patristic Theology and Spirituality.” *Philosophy & Theology* 27, 2 (2015), 499–512. Peterson explains that although it is rarely recognized, Karl Rahner, like Balthasar and Ratzinger, drew upon and was formatively influenced by the theology of the Church Fathers, especially in their writings on the Bible. Rahner’s early works from the 1930s, were particularly steeped in Patristic studies, and remains widely unknown, especially in the English-speaking world. Peterson quotes Karl Neufeld, “these interests continued to influence Rahner’s theology as a kind of underlying ‘substratum’ supporting his mature work, even if that work refrained from explicitly citing Patristic sources with as much regularity.”

⁷ Declan Marmion & Mary E. Hines, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 3.

⁸ This is evident from his writings, profoundly influenced by Eastern Patristics that draws on the theological anthropology of Gregory of Nyssa. Writings such as *Cosmic Man, A Human God, The Human Presence*, and several other articles reflect such an influence.

⁹ See, Paul Varghese, “A Sacramental humanism.” *The Christian Century* (September 23,1970): 1116-1120, accessed May 9, 2019, http://paulosmargregorios.in/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/A_Sacramental_Humanism.pdf.; Paulos Gregorios, *A Human God* (Kottayam: MGF, 1992), 13-52. Gregorios can be quite often found quoting from Papal writings and feels affinity to terms such as “Supernatural Grace” while explaining the uniqueness of Christ’s salvific act which has consequences for the whole of humanity.

¹⁰ Paulus Pp. Ii, Ioannes. “*UT UNUM SINT*: On commitment to Ecumenism,” Accessed July16,2018. http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25051995_ut-unum-sint.html

holistic understanding of the Christian faith. By acknowledging the contributions of both Eastern and Western traditions, theological anthropology can be more comprehensive, providing a richer understanding of humanity's relationship with God. This perspective aligns with the broader ecumenical movement's goal of “unity” among Christian traditions.

While the pursuit of “unity” among Christian traditions is a worthy aspiration, it is essential to recognize and address the criticisms and challenges it faces. Pope John Paul reminds of the challenges and overcoming the divides with God’s help. In an ecumenical venture Pope explains,

No one is unaware of the challenge which all this poses to believers. They cannot fail to meet this challenge. Indeed, how could they refuse to do everything possible, with God's help, to break down the walls of division and distrust, to overcome obstacles and prejudices which thwart the proclamation of the Gospel of salvation in the Cross of Jesus, the one Redeemer of man of every individual? I thank the Lord that he has led us to make progress along the path of unity and communion between Christians, a path difficult but so full of joy. Interconfessional dialogues at the theological level have produced positive and tangible results: this encourages us to move forward.¹¹

Achieving genuine unity while preserving the richness of diversity, respecting theological differences, reconciling ecclesiastical structures, maintaining interfaith relationships, and considering socio-cultural contexts are all complex and ongoing tasks in the ecumenical journey.

This study examines the theological anthropology of two theologians Karl Rahner (1904-1984) and Paulos Mar Gregorios as representatives of the West and East. Through an analysis of these two Theological anthropologies, this thesis will also critically evaluate and explore areas of dialogue between the two traditions. Themes such as ‘nature,’ ‘grace,’ ‘theosis,’ ‘beatific vision’ and ‘image of God’ will form key topics of this research. Central to Karl Rahner’s theological anthropology is grace as God’s self-communication.¹² And this grace is at the same time *a priori* and *epiktasis*, a constant stretching towards the divine as understood by Paulos Gregorios.

For Gregorios, humanity is the mediator (*methorios*) or the frontier being, mediating between the material and the spiritual, between the secular and the sacred, between God and

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Karl Rahner, “History of The World and Salvation-History,” *TI*, V, 103.

creation.¹³ A concise overview of the biographical details and the contextual factors in which these two theologians shaped their theological narratives would be helpful:

1.1 Karl Rahner: Introduction and the Context

Karl Rahner (1904-1984), born in Freiburg im Breisgau, West Germany, was ‘the dominant theological voice of the Roman Catholic Church in the twentieth century’¹⁴. The prominent theological categories in his writings include Spirituality, Anthropology, Ecclesiology, Christology, Trinity, Grace, and Mission. Grace for Rahner in essence is God’s self-communication in love or, as he points out elsewhere, “God’s self-communication in Christ”.¹⁵ It is essentially the action of God on man and cannot be thought of in any way apart from the free personal mercy of God, by which he gives himself as a gift to man. He writes regarding its universality: “Grace... always surrounds man, even the sinner and the unbeliever, as the inescapable setting of his existence.”¹⁶

The intrinsic relationship between nature and grace has always been vital to theology and Rahner’s concept of the supernatural existential is not only the starting point of his treatment of grace, but its very heart. The urge in humanity for striving towards God is a grace or *Capax Dei* (capacity for God). Rahner criticizes the extrinsic mode of relationship between nature and grace, where grace is presented as a “mere superstructure.”¹⁷ For Rahner, “Nature is, because grace has to be”¹⁸. And as the ground of nature, grace is the innermost center of this nature.¹⁹ Nature is never actually purely and simply secular; it is always nature graciously endowed with God himself.²⁰ For Rahner God is always present, inescapably at the center of each human life and that is what Rahner calls the “supernatural existential.”²¹ However, God’s grace also as God’s self-communication is within the individual as the foundation of human existence,

¹³ K.M George & K.J Gabriel, eds. *Towards a New Humanity* (Delhi: ISPCCK, 1992), 154.

¹⁴ Declan Marmion & Mary E. Hines, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, 2.

¹⁵ Karl Rahner, “Questions of Controversial Theology on Justification,” in *Theological Investigations iv*, trans. Kevin Smyth, (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1966), 216.

¹⁶ Rahner, “Nature and Grace,” in *TI, iv*, 181.

¹⁷ Karl Rahner, “Relationship between Nature and Grace,” *TI, I*, 298.

¹⁸ Karl Rahner, “On the Theology of Worship,” *TI, XIX*, 143.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Karl Rahner, “On the Theology of Worship,” *TI, XIX*, 143.

²¹ Gallagher, Michael Paul. *What are they saying about unbelief*. New York: Paulist Press. 1995, 32.

whereas it remains latent until the individual responds affirmatively to God. God embodies both the offering of the gift and as the prerequisite for its potential acceptance.²²

Human beings are primarily transcendent beings for Rahner. The human person is a transcendent being insofar as all of one's knowledge and all of one's conscious activity is grounded in a pre-apprehension (*Vorgriff*) of being.²³ In every active knowing, there is a prior awareness, or a co-awareness. However, the God and man union, Rahner warns, should not be reduced to the level of nature, to the level of what is given always and everywhere.²⁴ The truth of a divine humanity is not just an *a priori* quality for Rahner; rather it is the encounter and self-communication of God, intended for every person in grace and which has as its highest actualisation in the beatific vision.²⁵ We should bear in mind that for Rahner, Christology is the beginning and end of anthropology. Rahner's methodology as Declan Marmion explains, is 'from below,' "he favored an inductive ("from below") methodology, moving from anthropology to Christology"²⁶ An essential feature in Rahner's works is the synthesis of traditional scholastic, dogmatic and pastoral theology which makes it a practical dogmatic theology. A *dialectical analogy* persists in Rahner as a method, a dialectic between nature and grace, being and knowing, history and revelation, spirit, and matter.²⁷

Rahner's theology developed in the socio-political context of Nazi dictatorship, World War II and the genocide that ensued.²⁸ The period was marked by upheavals, in the socio-political context too. For example, from dictatorship to democracy and the reinstatement of democratic institutions, and rebuilding of civil society. The intellectual world of Rahner was largely that of neo-scholasticism. There was a resurgence of the Medieval scholastic tradition, especially the Thomistic legacy, which influenced his early writings. Much of Rahner's work can be

²² Morwenna Ludlow, *Universal Salvation: Eschatology in the Thought of Gregory of Nyssa and Karl Rahner* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 171. Also See, Karl-Heinz Weger, *Karl Rahner: An Introduction to his Theology* (Burns & Oates, London, 1980), 87: Grace is 'a reality that is always present at the very centre of man's existence in knowledge and freedom and in the mode of an offer which must be accepted or rejected.'

²³ Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, trans. William V. Dych (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 1978), 33. The *pre-apprehension of being* – in every active knowing, there is a prior awareness, a co-awareness of an infinite horizon.

²⁴ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 218.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 219.

²⁶ Declan Marmion, "Karl Rahner, Vatican II, and the Shape of the Church," *Theological Studies* 78 (2017), 34.

²⁷ Patrick Burke, *Reinterpreting Rahner: A Critical Study of His Major Themes* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), viii.

²⁸ Jürgen Kócka, *Civil Society & Dictatorship in Modern German History* (U.S.A: University Press, 2010), 4.

understood as not just an effort to merely reproduce this legacy, but to link this with contemporary thought and concerns. His essays vary on topics from “Poetry and the Christian,” “On the problem of Leisure,” “Theology of Power,” “Finding God in the World,” to “Jesus Christ in Non-Christian Religions” and “The Sunday Precept in an Industrial Society.”

1.2 Paulos Mar Gregorios: Biography and Theology

Paulos Mar Gregorios (1922-1996) was a renowned Indian theologian of the 20th century. A Metropolitan Bishop in the Malankara (Indian) Orthodox Syrian Church, he also served as president of the World Council of Churches (WCC). He was a prominent figure in global ecumenism, inter-religious dialogue and a preferred Christian theologian for many international science and religious discourses. His theological interests covered Systematic theology, Patristic, Sociology and theological anthropology.

Theological anthropology in Paulos Gregorios has its roots mainly in early Patristic and Indian philosophy. Eastern theology, according to Paulos Gregorios, lacks the great sanguinity about the power of the human to become the icon of the Divine.²⁹ It does not unduly praise human intellect, but neither does it maintain the utter helplessness of humanity.³⁰ Gregorios explores at length the Patristic notion of potential divinity and affinity towards the Divine, both of which evolve as points of reference in Rahner’s theology. However, the diversity of approaches in both theologians and the different contexts of their theologizing promises to be exciting to explore.

Gregorios’ holistic vision transcended the strictly academic confines of theology and philosophy, and he attempted to redefine them in light of his multifaceted interdisciplinary explorations in various forms and fields of human knowledge.³¹ His theology of incarnation upholds the offering of all the riches and beauty of physical creation to God in an act of thanksgiving. He vehemently resists all attempts to transform divine incarnation into a ground for the acquisitive-possessive drive of greedy human beings. Nor does he permit his informed interest in secular disciplines to be tied to any reductionist paradigms. His abiding concern was

²⁹ Paulos Gregorios, *A Human God* (Kottayam: MGF, 1992), 27.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Paulos Gregorios, *Paulos Mar Gregorios: A Reader*, ed. K.M. George (U.S.A: Fortress Press, 2017), xvii.

the blossoming of humanity as the “frontier being,” playing a creative mediatory role between the material and spiritual orders of reality.³²

For Gregorios, the vocation of humanity is to be like God, the source of ones being. Gregorios writes,

Humanity’s destiny is to be like God in every respect except that of being a non-creature, i.e., God is the source of his own being, but man’s being will always be derived from God. Yet in love, wisdom, and power, as well as in holiness which is after all something more than the combination of these three, man must become like God.³³

Gregorios describes theosis as a race towards the light. He turns to Gregory of Nyssa (in *Life of Moses*)³⁴ and explains it is a race towards the light, but the course is through darkness through the cloud of unknowing through the challenging task of laying aside the false and puffed-up knowledge that separates us from God. For Moses, the theophany appears - the burning bush. However, as he goes up Mount Sinai, it is in the darkness of the cloud that God encounters him.³⁵ This darkness is God’s incomprehensibility which Rahner also refers to as a ‘mystery of blinding darkness’³⁶ or ‘the darkness of his own light.’³⁷

1.2.1 Paulos Gregorios’ Writings

Bishop Gregorios’ had stints as a freelance journalist, Post office clerk, teacher in Ethiopia, and as an aide and education officer for the Ethiopian emperor, Haile Sellassie. After his theological education at Princeton, Yale, and Oxford, he was ordained a priest of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church (Indian Orthodox Church) in 1960. Newly Ordained Fr. Paul Varghese (Later Bishop Paulos Mar Gregorios) soon was a renowned ecumenical leader and an associate general secretary of the World Council Churches, where he also served as the President.

He was ordained as a bishop in 1975 while also serving as the principal of the Orthodox theological Seminary, Kottayam, Kerala (India) for several years. As Fr. Dr. K.M George

³²K.M George & K.J Gabriel, eds. *Towards a New Humanity* (Delhi: ISPCCK, 1992), ii.

³³ Paulos Gregorios, *Love’s Freedom the Grand Mystery* (Kottayam: MGF Publications,1997),176.

³⁴ Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, Translated by Abraham J. Malherbe, and Everett Ferguson (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 94-95. Gregory of Nyssa writes, “When, therefore, Moses grew in knowledge, he declared that he had seen God in the darkness, that is, that he had then come to know that what is divine is beyond all knowledge and comprehension, for the text says, Moses approached the dark cloud where God was. What God? He who made darkness his hiding place, as David says, who also was initiated into the mysteries in the same inner sanctuary.”

³⁵ Gregorios, *A Human God*, 32.

³⁶ Rahner, “The Immaculate Conception”, *TI I*, 210.

³⁷ Rahner, “The Eternal Significance of the Humanity of Jesus for Our Relationship with God”, *TI, III*, 37.

explains, “the breadth of his intellectual-spiritual journey is only partly captured in his written words. People who had a chance to listen to him would remember how felicitous his oral expression was. His way with words as he dealt with new ideas emerging from current scientific research and contemporary socio-economic and political discourses often delightfully surprised even the specialists in those fields, though at times the positions he took provoked many people.”³⁸

The works of Gregorios are crucial in understanding the dialectic between Western and Eastern theology. His works remain a major voice in rediscovering Patristic theology in the Indian context. Gregorios’ writings have been a reference for dialogue between science and religion, Indian Philosophy and Christian theology etc. The writings of Gregorios include, *A Human God, Worship in a Secular Age, Cosmic Man, Science, Technology and The Future of Humanity, Glory and Burden, Philosophy East and West* and several published articles on subjects ranging from Christology, Theological anthropology, Ecclesiology, Patristics, Indian Philosophy, and Ecumenism. In recent years, the Mahatma Gandhi University Chair of Paulos Mar Gregorios and MG Foundation have provided an institutional profile to academic interests in works of Gregorios. His eloquence and ecumenical involvements as a young theologian can be gauged by these words of Paul Albrecht,

As the first Orthodox theologian on the WCC staff, he was much sought after as a leader of Bible study, especially with lay persons. His biblical studies for the section on international issues of peace and war at the 1966 Geneva conference on church and society left a deep and lasting impression on the one hundred or so Christian political and economic leaders in the group.³⁹

Gregorios was appointed as moderator of the working committee on Church and Society and leader of the preparations for the world conference on "Faith, Science and the Future", convened at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1979. Albrecht further writes picturesquely that,

with more than 400 official participants and an additional 500 press and invited guests, this was undoubtedly one of the most significant WCC-sponsored encounters of the 1970s, and the metropolitan responded to the challenge brilliantly: as chairman of the conference, he captivated

³⁸ Gregorios, *Paulos Mar Gregorios: A Reader*, xvii.

³⁹Albrecht, Paul. "In memoriam: M.M. Thomas; Paulos Mar Gregorios." *The Ecumenical Review*, vol. 49, no. 1, 1997, 110. Gale General OneFile, link.gale.com/apps/doc/A19209008/ITOF?u=nuim&sid=summon&xid=f25861d8. Accessed 18 June 2021.

the assembled scientists and technologists and the MIT community by his understanding of the social ethical problems in their disciplines.⁴⁰

Gregorios evinces what seems today a rather naïve optimism about technological mastery of the world.⁴¹ For him, humanity's unique role is a role within, not vis-à-vis, creation, precisely because the priest is an integral part of that which a priest represents.⁴² Gregorios explicitly stated: "Art and science, philosophy and faith are all from the operation of the Holy Spirit"⁴³

2. Research Questions

How do the theologies of Karl Rahner and Paulos Gregorios express the relatedness of the Human to the Divine? And through an engagement with the selected writings of both, explore what is their specific contribution to theological anthropology?

Do the two theologians converge and diverge in their respective theological anthropologies?

How can the study of both theologians help to create a theological anthropology that inspires faith today?

3. Research Hypothesis

An evaluation of the theological anthropology of Karl Rahner and Paulos Gregorios guides us to a better comprehension of humanity and thus provides mutual enrichment for the Eastern and Western tradition.

This shared understanding acts as a bridge between Eastern and Western theological perspectives, fostering a connection and dialogue between the two traditions. It implies that despite historical and cultural differences, there is a common ground in the understanding of humanity that can facilitate a more cohesive and integrated theological discourse.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ John P. Slattery, ed., *T& T Clark Handbook of Christian Theology and The Modern Sciences* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 185.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid. See also: Paulos Gregorios, *Science for Sane Societies* (New York: Paragon House, 1987), 230-1,97.

4. Method of Study

The study would largely be analytic and reflective. It would focus on a critical approach to the two theologians' and their theological anthropologies, representing the two theological enterprises from the East and the West.

The landscape of Christian theology is vast and rich, encompassing diverse traditions that have evolved over centuries. This study undertakes a comprehensive and comparative exploration of two prominent theological traditions within the Christian world. The explicit goal is not only to critically evaluate these traditions but also to synthesize their key elements, with the overarching aim of fostering a new paradigm for dialogue and guiding future research endeavors.

5. Scope and Limitation

Firstly, theological anthropology is largely treated within the premise of Systematic theology and the two traditions used as representatives (Catholic and Orthodox).

Secondly, the contemporary issues of immigration and refugee crisis are contextual approaches for the study because the divinity of human beings affects the dignity of all humanity.

Thirdly, the study may face limitations in generalizing its findings due to the contextual and cultural specificity of theological perspectives. Rahner and Gregorios may reflect historical and cultural contexts that may not fully capture the diversity within Eastern and Western theological traditions.

6. Ecumenical Consultations

Various formal and informal ecumenical endeavors in the past between the Catholic church and the Orthodox Churches provide motivation for further research. A milestone in the ecumenical dialogue between the Catholic church and Oriental Orthodox Churches dates back to the Pro Oriente consultations held from 7-12 September 1971, at Vienna. Bishop Paulos Gregorios as a participant recorded his thanks and expressed gratitude to the Archbishop of Vienna, His

Eminence Cardinal König and to the memory of the dear departed Mgr. Otto Mauer for this great initiative.⁴⁴

Cardinal Franz König founded the *Pro Oriente Stiftung* (organization) in 1964, which later became the most significant platform for dialogue between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches. Franz König was a true ecumenist and a significant presence at Vatican II. “One of the giants of the post-Vatican II church, Cardinal Franz König died at age 97 in his native Vienna on March 2013”, wrote the Catholic New Times at his death.⁴⁵ Karl Rahner was chosen by Cardinal Franz König as his Theological advisor to Vatican II, an offer to which Rahner was reluctant at first but later agreed.⁴⁶

The opening lines of the Decree on Ecumenism (Vatican II), *UNITATIS REDINTEGRATIO* states that, “The restoration of unity among all Christians is one of the principal concerns of the Second Vatican Council. Christ the Lord founded one Church and one Church only.”⁴⁷ The theological dialogues between the Eastern Orthodox (Chalcedonian) and the Oriental Orthodox (non-Chalcedonian) Churches had started with Non-Official meetings already in 1964, and it was not until 1971 that the first Non-Official meeting between Catholic and Oriental Orthodox theologians took place.⁴⁸ It is interesting to note that the first meeting at Vienna was attended by Fr. Paul Varghese (Paulos Gregorios) and Karl Rahner listed as Roman Catholic representative, but Rahner missed the meeting prevented by illness⁴⁹ The Malankara

⁴⁴“The Christological consensus reached in Vienna” Paulos Mar Gregorios, accessed 30 October 2020, http://paulosmargregorios.in/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/vienna_christology_dialogue.pdf

⁴⁵ "Cardinal König dies at 98." *Catholic New Times*, vol. 28, no. 8, 9 May 2004, p. 7. *Gale Academic OneFile*, <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A122027902/AONE?u=nuim&sid=AONE&xid=3682e312>. Accessed 5 Nov. 2020. See also, Cardinal Franz König, *Open to God, Open to the World*, Christa Pongratz-Lippitt ed., London: Burns & Oates, 2005.

⁴⁶ Encounters with Karl Rahner Remembrances of Rahner by those who knew him., *Encounters with Rahner: Remembrances of Rahner by Those Who Knew Him*, edited by Batlogg, Andreas R, Melvin E. Michalski, Marquette University Press, 2009. 48.

⁴⁷ “Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio*” accessed 29 October 2020, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19641121_unitatis-redintegratio_en.html

⁴⁸ Sebastian Brock, “The Syriac Churches and Dialogue with The Catholic Church” *Heythrop Journal*, XLV (2004), 466–476.

⁴⁹ The list of Participants from, **The Orthodox Church of India**: Rev. Fr. M. V. George, Vice Principal, Orthodox theological seminary, Kottayam, India. Rev. Dr. K. C. Joseph, World Council of Churches, Secretary for Scholarships, Geneva. Rev. Prof. V. C. Samuel, Dean of the theological Faculty of the Haile Selassie University, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. **Rev. Fr. Paul Varghese (Paulos Mar Gregorios)**, Principal of the Orthodox Theological Seminary, Kottayam, India. **Roman Catholic Church**: Rev. Prof. Dr. A. J. van der Aalst A. A., Prof. for

Orthodox Syrian Church (Indian Orthodox) theologians present on this occasion were Fr. Paul Varghese (later Metropolitan Paulos Mar Gregorios), Fr. V.C Samuel and Fr. M.V George while the Roman Catholic participants included stalwarts such as Fr. Aloys Grillmeier⁵⁰, Rev. Mons. Otto Mauer, Rev. Fr. John F. Long and others. The initiative for this meeting came from the PRO ORIENTE Stiftung in Vienna, founded in 1964 by the late Cardinal Franz König for the purpose of promoting Christian Unity between East and West.

The ecumenical relations between the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church (Indian Orthodox Church) and the Catholic Church could be highlighted by the fraternal visits of His Holiness Baselios Augen I to Pope Paul VI in Bombay (1964), His Holiness Baselios Marthoma Mathews I to Pope John Paul II in Rome (1983), the visit of Pope John Paul II to His Holiness Baselios Marthoma Mathews II at Kottayam (1986)⁵¹, and the meeting between Catholicos Baselios Paulos II and Pope Francis.⁵² In India, since 1989, there had been a separate Joint International Commission for Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church.⁵³ The starting point for this had been the meeting of the Catholicos of the Malankara Orthodox Church, Baselios Marthoma Mathews I, with Pope John Paul II in Kottayam (Kerala) during the latter's visit to India in 1986. From 1989 onwards this Commission has held annual meetings in Kerala, with participants on the Catholic side from the Roman Catholic Church, the Malankara Catholic Church, and the Syro-Malabar Catholic Church. Already at the end of the very first meeting it had proved possible to issue an Agreed

Dogmatics, University of Nijmegen, Netherlands. Rev. Prof. Dr. Johannes Emminghaus, Member of the Theological Advisory Council of PRO ORIENTE, Prof. for Pastoral Theology, University of Vienna, Austria. Rev. Prof. Dr. Alois Grillmeier SJ., Prof. for Dogmatics at the Theol. College, St. Georgen, Frankfurt/M, Western Germany. Rev. Prof. Dr. Ferdinand Klostermann, Member of the Theological Advisory Council of PRO ORIENTE, Prof. for Pastoral Theology, University of Vienna (prevented by illness). Rev. Mons. Otto Mauer, Chairperson of the Theological Advisory Council of PRO ORIENTE, Vienna, Austria. **Rev. Prof. Dr. Karl Rahner SJ.**, Prof. for Dogmatics, University of Münster, Western German.

⁵⁰ In the writings of Paulos Gregorios we find a great admiration for Aloys Grillmeier. He writes about Grillmeier's work as, "amazing storehouse of historical Christological erudition, Fr. Aloysius Grillmeier's *Chirst in Christian Tradition*." See: Paulos Gregorios, "Christology: Its Relevance Today" in *Human God*, 54. Gregorios at the Oriental Orthodox Roman Catholic Symposium in Vienna read this paper. Austria.

⁵¹ <http://mosc.in/ecumenical/relationship-with-the-catholic-church>

⁵² http://www.archivioradiovaticana.va/storico/2013/09/05/catholicos_of_the_malankara_orthodox_syrian_church_meets_with_pope/in2-725971

⁵³ Brock, "The Syriac Churches and Dialogue with The Catholic Church", 472.

Statement on Christology. Subsequent meetings have dealt with topics such as Sacramental Theology, Ecclesiology, and the very practical problem of Inter-Church Marriage.⁵⁴

7. Rahner and Gregorios: A Dialogue between East and West

A dialogue recording divergences and convergences between the theological anthropology of East and West is a vital task. Such theological engagement would be enlightening but also would help eliminate misapprehensions about each tradition. As Lawrence Cross puts it, theologians of both traditions, West and East are called to engage in a new ‘Patristic’ enterprise, namely, to search together for ways of expressing the mystery of redemption which can once again engage our contemporaries in the age of postmodernity.⁵⁵

In Rahner’s theological anthropology the human cannot be taken lightly. He points out succinctly, “Now, if God himself is man and remains man for all eternity, then theology may not make light of man. For if it did, it would then be making light of God who remains the impenetrable mystery. For all eternity, man is the expressed mystery of God – thus participating in the mystery of His supporting ground.”⁵⁶ For Rahner grace as God’s self-communication occupies a vital place. Interestingly, in Paulos Gregorios this grace is *a priori* and evokes a response in the form of *epektasis*- a constant stretching towards the divine in love. Stephen J. Duffy remarks, “Grace is God’s transforming presence enabling divinization of humans and their participation in the divine life. For Rahner, grace is primarily the divine self-gift.”⁵⁷

At the core of Paulos Gregorios’ vision is the Eastern Patristic perception of the dynamic fathomlessness of God’s being and the never-ending participatory ascent (*anabasis*) of the human spirit. Humanity is understood as the mediator (*methorios*) or the frontier being, mediating between the material and the spiritual, between the secular and the sacred, between God and creation.⁵⁸ Thus, the need to examine the human person as a being specifically open to transcendence will be a focus for discussion in the theological anthropology of Paulos Gregorios.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Lawrence Cross, “Theology East and West: Difference and Harmony.” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 71 (2006):67-76.

⁵⁶ Karl Rahner, *Spiritual Exercises*, trans. Kenneth Baker (Indiana: St. Augustine’s Press, 2014), 108.

⁵⁷ Stephen J. Duffy, *The Dynamics of Grace: Perspectives in Theological anthropology* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1993), 3.

⁵⁸ K.M George & K.J Gabriel, eds., *Towards a New Humanity* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1992), 154.

Rahner too in his *Theological Investigations* (Vol. III) tries to shed light on the concept of the gradual ascent of human perfection or *theosis*. In the article, “Reflections on the Problem of the Gradual Ascent to Christian Perfection”, he explores the Patristic traditions from Clement of Alexandria, who was the first theologian of the way of the Christian life (or Christian Perfection), to Gregory of Nyssa’s vision of God in the mirror of the clear soul, the direct experience of God in the obscurity of boundless yearning⁵⁹, to the perspective in the Middle Ages and the theology of the 16th -17th centuries.

After this exploration Rahner concludes that there exists the concept of the way of Christian perfection; however, what remains obscure is a more exact description of the stages in this progress in Christian life.⁶⁰ Thus, it becomes more evident that the presence of Divinity in humanity is a possibility as well as an *a priori* grace from God. Also, Rahner moves beyond the traditional “divisions” or stages in spiritual life towards Christian perfection. For Rahner the acquiring of ‘acquired virtues’ in stages of spiritual ascent would not really mean the acquiring of perfection itself but rather the acquiring of the possibility of greater perfection.⁶¹ He effectively proposes a “conception of the gradual development of the spiritual life which orientates this development towards mystical experience.”⁶² As Philip Endean explains, “given that Rahner acknowledges that God’s grace is present in all things⁶³, the point may be that the growth in grace and mysticism involves the gradual acceptance and appropriation of that presence.”⁶⁴

To designate the orientation of human beings to a supernatural end, that is, to salvation in the Christian sense, Rahner, in his intervention in the *nouvelle theologie* debate in 1950, coined the expression “supernatural existential.”⁶⁵ The supernatural existentialism of humanity can be better understood as an orientation towards the Divine offered through the divine self -

⁵⁹ Karl Rahner, “Reflections on the Problem of the Gradual Ascent to Christian Perfection,” in *Theological Investigations Vol.III*. trans. Karl-H and Boniface Kruger, (London: Darton, Longman & Todd ,1971), 6-8.

⁶⁰ Rahner, “Reflections on the Problem of the Gradual Ascent to Christian Perfection,” in *Theological Investigations Vol.III.*, 10.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*,19.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 23.

⁶³ Karl Rahner, “Religious Feeling Inside and Outside the Church” *TI, XVII*, 233. Rahner writes, “God is present through his grace in all piety”, also echoes the Ignatian maxim of “finding God in all things.”

⁶⁴ Philip Endean, *Karl Rahner, and Ignatian Spirituality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 49.

⁶⁵ David Coffey, “The Whole Rahner on the Supernatural Existential.” *Theological Studies* 65 (2004),95.

communication. More interestingly, in an interview published in 1979, Rahner records his appreciation and interest in the Eastern Patristic doctrine of *apocatastasis*:

“I really had the intention of writing something about a possible orthodox teaching on *apocatastasis* (the doctrine that all free beings will eventually share in the grace of salvation). To be sure, previous theology has considered the existence of eternal damnation and hell an already given fact or one that was absolutely certain to occur, in the same sense that it considered heaven and eternal beatitude certain. Today, I think, not only I myself but other theologians, as well, would speak differently, without wanting to represent a heretical teaching on *apocatastasis*.” (This interview was originally published in *America* on March 10, 1979).⁶⁶

In a similar vein Gregorios explains that what God has done in Christ has consequences for all humans. He convincingly expresses Rahner’s thought when he explicates that all, Christians, and non-Christians, are in the realm of “supernatural grace” stemming from the incarnation. The salvific act through Jesus Christ extends this gracious supernatural existential to all of humankind.⁶⁷

As Gregory Brett explains, “Human beings are grasped from within and oriented for relationship with God who is their finality, so that the human drive to reach out to the other (transcendentality) is not merely the condition of loving and knowing but is a reaching out in response to the self-bestowing Holy Mystery.”⁶⁸ The orientation in Rahner’s view is precisely a grace or the self-communication of God, whereas for Gregorios, coming from Gregory of Nyssa it is *epektasis*, the infinite stretching towards the God-form. Both theologians seem to begin with an *a priori* potential for divinity in the human person and the divine self-communication or God’s constant stretching outwards in love.

8. Conclusion: Anthropology and Theology

While doing Theological anthropology we are not talking only about the human, rather we speak about God in relation to human and vice a versa. To understand human beings, as icons of the

⁶⁶ Leo J. O’ Donovan, SJ, “Living into Mystery: Karl Rahner’s Reflections on his 75th Birthday,” *America: The Jesuit Review*, January 02, 2018, accessed May 9, 2019, <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2018/01/02/living-mystery-karl-rahners-reflections-his-75th-birthday>. These thoughts are also very well reflected by Rahner in *Theological Investigations*, Vol. XVI, “The One Christ and the Universality of Salvation.”

⁶⁷ Paulos Gregorios, *Love’s Freedom the Grand Mystery* (Kottayam: MGF Publications, 1997), 176.

⁶⁸ Gregory Brett. *The Theological Notion of the Human Person: A Conversation between the Theology of Karl Rahner and the Philosophy of John MacMurray* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2013), 85.

unfathomable mystery⁶⁹ is the task of theological anthropology. Rahner explains the theological task of understanding the human being succinctly,

The human can be expressed only by talking about something else: about God, who he is not. It is impossible to engage in anthropology without having first engaged in theology, since human is pure reference to God. Thus s/he himself is a mystery, always referred beyond himself into the mystery of God.⁷⁰

The word ‘mystery’ remains shrouded in so many apprehensions and misunderstandings. Rahner when asked to explain what the term ‘mystery’ means to him, answers, “The mystery consists in being able to grasp rationally that the incomprehensible really exists. This is the highest act of human understanding.”⁷¹ For Rahner, God is the unfathomable mystery of love⁷² and the self-communication of God in this love is grace to human beings.⁷³ However, the human being in one’s freedom can open or close herself/himself to this permanent, inescapable nearness of the absolute mystery.⁷⁴

Paulos Gregorios also understands God as incomprehensible in his ultimate nature but manifested to us in love through Jesus Christ and illumined by the Holy Spirit. He explains,

God, who remains incomprehensible in his ultimate nature and mode of being, has been dealing with human beings. We know God as a Person, or rather as Three Persons-in-One; God the Father has manifested himself through the incarnate Son, through the Holy Spirit. He loves us and has shown this love primarily in the life and work of our Lord Jesus Christ as illumined by the Holy Spirit⁷⁵

Gregorios, while explaining the basic clarifications by Gregory of Nyssa, writes that the ‘incomprehensibility of God is related not so much to the limits of our mind, as to God's nature

⁶⁹ Rahner, ‘The Concept of Mystery in Catholic theology,’ *TI, IV*, 37. See also, Rahner, ‘Hidden Victory,’ *TI, VII*, 157. Rahner here writes, ‘unfathomable mystery of love which we call God.’ He often uses the term ‘Mystery’ to denote God or God’s incomprehensibility to our rational minds.

⁷⁰ Rahner, *Thoughts on The Theology of Christmas, TI, III*, 32.

⁷¹ Karl Rahner, *Faith in a Wintry Season: Conversations and Interviews with Karl Rahner in the Last Years of His Life*, trans., and ed. Harvey D. Egan (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 160.

⁷² Rahner, ‘Hidden Victory,’ *TI, VII*, 157.

⁷³ Rahner, ‘Concerning the Relationship Between Nature and Grace,’ *TI, I*, 308. See also: Rahner, ‘The Doctrine of God and Christology,’ *TI, IX*, 124.

⁷⁴ Rahner, ‘A Small Fragment, on the Collective Finding of Truth,’ *TI, VI*, 89.

⁷⁵ Paulos Mar Gregorios, ‘Towards A Basic Document,’ *The Ecumenical Review* 1 (1989), 189.

itself.’⁷⁶ For Gregorios, ‘God is not possessed: God is infinitely reached after by the desire of love.’⁷⁷

The study of theological anthropology extends beyond an exploration of humanity alone; it involves a profound consideration of the relationship between humans and God, and vice versa. Theological anthropology in the East and West indeed exhibits varying emphases and theological methodologies. Nevertheless, it is essential to recognize that both traditions converge on fundamental beliefs concerning the divine image of humanity and the profound significance of the Incarnation in Christian theological thought. These differences and commonalities collectively enrich and diversify the tapestry of Christian theology, reflecting the multifaceted nature of the Christian faith.

Rahner and Gregorios as representatives of two different traditions integrate much from the common Christian Church heritage while also remaining faithful to the individual schools of thought. Their common ground as well as their distinctive backgrounds together help us get deeper insights into grip on theological anthropology. The East and West together have a lot to contribute towards a new paradigm, for understanding humanity’s orientation towards the mystery of God.

It is not surprising that there have been several critiques of both Rahner and Gregorios which shall be discussed in detail later.⁷⁸ The following chapters in this thesis will delve more into the individual aspects of these theological anthropologies and critically evaluate their respective strengths and weaknesses.

We exist in a world marked by wars, conflicts, boundaries, ethnicity, racism, and the subsequent impact on our physical environment. Understanding humanity and interconnectedness with the physical world are important amidst all these issues. Our anthropological perception should be cultivated through three key aspects: of recognizing human

⁷⁶ Gregorios, *A Human God*, 15.

⁷⁷ *Paulos Mar Gregorios: A Reader*, 279.

⁷⁸ Early critiques of Rahner included, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Rahner’s former pupil, Johann Baptist Metz, and Hans Küng. See, Declan Marmion, Rahner and his Critics: Revisiting the Dialogue, *Irish Theological Quarterly*, 68(2003), 195-212. And, Declan Marmion & Mary E. Hines, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 8. William J. Hill, “Uncreated Grace—A Critique of Karl Rahner” *The Thomist*, Vol27 (1963), 333-356.

personhood shaped in the image and likeness of God, acknowledging the self-transcending orientation endowed to every human being, and appreciating the interconnected priestly role of humanity.

CHAPTER TWO

GRACED HUMANITY: EXPLORING THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY IN

KARL RAHNER

1. INTRODUCTION

Grace is an important axis of Rahner's theological anthropology. Grace (Gr. χάρις, Lat. *gratia*) in theology is God's personal condescension and gratuitous clemency to humanity; but grace also signifies the effect of this clemency, in which God communicates himself to humanity.⁷⁹ Karl Rahner describes grace as God's communication of himself to man.⁸⁰ Grace always surrounds humanity and is the inescapable setting of our existence.⁸¹ 'God's communication of himself to man' became somewhat of a summary of Karl Rahner's theology of grace, on which he lectured at Innsbruck from 1937 onwards. For Rahner, this fundamental point of Christian dogmatic theology receives impetus from his basic reflections on human beings as constantly open, attentive, and God as freely and without any necessity of communicating himself to humanity.⁸²

Rahner uses the term *Selbstmitteilung* – Self-communication, in a very specific sense. In grace God does not merely do something or effect something, outside the divine being, rather God bestows God's own self to human beings. Rahner explains that 'Grace is God himself, and it is the communication in which he gives himself to man as the divinising favour which he is himself.'⁸³ God gives God's own self as God, as infinite being. God bequeaths the essence of divine being upon human beings. God offers himself to us in unsurpassable proximity and thus

⁷⁹ Karl Rahner & Herbert Vorgrimler, 'Grace' in *Theological Dictionary*, ed. Cornelius Ernst (New York: Herder and Herder, 1965), 192.

⁸⁰ Karl Rahner, "History of The World and Salvation-History," in *Theological Investigations v*, trans. Karl H. Kruger, (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1969), 103. All 23 Volumes of Theological Investigations by Karl Rahner shall be here onwards referred to as *TI*. Except name of article, volume, and page numbers all other details shall be listed in the Bibliography. **See also**, Grace, as 'the free self-communication of God to his creature' in Rahner, "Anonymous Christians", *TI VI*, 393; Essence of grace as 'the self-communication of God' in Rahner, "Religious Enthusiasm and The Experience of Grace", *TI XVI*, 41.

⁸¹ Rahner, "Nature and Grace", *TI, IV*, 182.

⁸² Herbert Vorgrimler, *Karl Rahner: His Life, Thought and Work*, trans. Edward Quinn (London: Burns & Oates, 1965), 28.

⁸³ Rahner, "Nature and Grace", *TI, IV*, 178.

the giver is himself the gift.⁸⁴ For Rahner, this divine self-communication is an action of free personal mercy of God, by which God gives himself as a gift to humanity.⁸⁵

In Rahner, the fundamental theme of Christian theology, ‘God’s self-communication to humanity’, gains its character from his own basic reflection on man as constantly “open, attentive, and on God as freely and without any necessity communicating himself to man: that is, from his anthropology”.⁸⁶ Furthermore, it also reflects the mark of a comprehensive understanding of biblical and patristic theology, especially of the Greek Fathers. Herbert Vorgrimler writes, “Rahner made use of modern French studies in patrology, particularly of the work of Henri de Lubac and Jean Danielou, and finally of a broad presentation of Tridentine teaching on justification.”⁸⁷

Out of his intense preoccupation with the theology of grace Rahner published a text on the theology of grace in Latin (*Codex de Gratia*⁸⁸), while there also resulted a number of important articles in the history of theology, essays on the concept of the “supernatural” in Clement of Alexandria (in the Roman review, *Gregorianum*, 1937), on Augustine and on Semi-Pelagianism (in *Zeitschrift fur katholische Theologie*, 1938), and on the scholastic conception of uncreated grace (1939); and an essay on the theological concept of concupiscence (1941).⁸⁹

While understanding grace as the communication of God's own being, Rahner also insists that God's self-communication is an ontological process. And thus, this process effects the divinization of the human person. Grace at once then affects nature, and indeed humanity is a priori graced because of God’s salvific will. And more importantly there is within each person a *potentia oboedientialis*⁹⁰ of nature, a kind of velleity, a yearning (only a conditional one of course) for the immediate possession of God.⁹¹

⁸⁴ Leo J. O' Donovan, *A World of Grace: An Introduction to the Themes and Foundations of Karl Rahner's Theology* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 1995), 66.

⁸⁵ Rahner, “Personal and Sacramental Piety” *TI, II*, 122.

⁸⁶ Vorgrimler, *Karl Rahner*, 28.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Vorgrimler, *Karl Rahner*, 29. This *Codex de Gratia* was published four times and appeared with 350 pages in 1954 at Innsbruck.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 28-29.

⁹⁰ Latin term which means ‘obediential potency.’ The term was much explained and used in the writings of Thomas Aquinas. In a general sense, it means the capacity of the creature, obediently accepting the disposition and action of God.

⁹¹ Rahner, “Concerning the Relationship Between Nature and Grace”, *TI, I*, 304.

At stake in the nature/grace dialectic is the ontology of the human person in relationship to the free, astounding gift of God's presence and power to the world of creatures. Grace qualifies all divine / human relationships in such a way that they are freely initiated by God and in no way dependent upon the creature.⁹²

2. Nature and Grace

The intrinsic relationship between nature and grace is rooted in the conviction that what we become in our relationship with God cannot originate merely from our own abilities for self-growth. Thus, human nature must in some way be complemented by grace, the free self-communication of God.⁹³ Nature and grace has always been vital to theology and a better understanding of grace is developed in Rahner through the nature-grace schema. Rahner writes as an introduction, “It is a subject which arouses passionate discussion. Views differ over it and the controversy is not merely academic.”⁹⁴ On a practical level, for example, in interfaith dialogues, discussions on nature and grace can contribute to a better understanding between different religious traditions. Exploring how different traditions conceptualize the relationship between human nature and divine grace can reveal shared values and beliefs. This shared ground becomes a foundation for mutual understanding. Again, theological views on Nature and Grace can impact discussions in bioethics and medical ethics, especially concerning issues like the sanctity of life, medical interventions, and the ethical treatment of the human body.

It will also be clear from our discussion that Rahner succeeds in trying to extricate grace from the extrinsicism assigned in the past by stressing the immanence of God, yet all the while holding to the supernatural gratuity of grace.

A majority of Post-Tridentine theologians ascribed to an extrinsic understanding of grace. Grace, they came to maintain, is gratuitous not merely because of our sin, but primarily because of the poverty of our being.⁹⁵ However, the 20th century theological development brought in by Maurice Blondel, Joseph Maréchal, and Henri de Lubac, held that the human person has a positive, unconditioned desire for the mode of existence offered by grace, but the desire remains

⁹² Stephen J. Duffy, *The Graced Horizon Nature, and Grace in Modern Catholic Thought* (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press,1992),7.

⁹³ Duffy, *The Graced Horizon*,13.

⁹⁴ Karl Rahner, *Nature, and Grace Dilemmas in The Modern Church* (New York: Sheed and Ward ,1964),10.

⁹⁵ Rahner, “*Nature and Grace*”, *TI, IV*, 14-15.

inefficacious due to human nature, while *capax Dei*, cannot bring the desire to fruition. Thus, what grace provides is not a new end in itself, but new active powers for achieving the very end implanted in nature.⁹⁶

In the field of philosophy, Joseph Maréchal's conception of man as having a conditioned natural desire for the beatific vision stirred up minds to a new revived understanding.⁹⁷ Throughout the 1920's and 1930's, Joseph Maréchal carried out a comparative assessment of Thomas Aquinas and Immanuel Kant in the last three of his five "Cahiers" entitled *Le point de depart de la metaphysique*.⁹⁸ For Maréchal the human mind is essentially dynamic and its basic orientation manifests finality. In *Cahier V*, devoted to a comparison of Thomistic and Critical Philosophy, he stresses the fact that the human intellect spontaneously operates according to a purposeful ordering of its acts and its grasped objects toward truth.⁹⁹

Maréchal stressed the dynamism of intellect grounded in a Thomistic metaphysics of finality. The natural end of the human mind strives for God, strives to return to God by participating in the perfection of the Creator.¹⁰⁰ Marmion explains that,

Despite the censorious anti-modernist climate, Marechal introduced what came to be known as the 'transcendental method' into theology. If one aspect of Thomistic epistemology holds that all knowledge comes from the senses, another strand emphasises its a priori dimensions, its dependence on the light of the agent intellect. The transcendental method focuses on these a priori aspects of our knowledge, which it felt neo-Thomism had neglected.¹⁰¹

Maréchal hoped to preserve divine freedom in fulfilling man's natural desire by qualifying the natural desire as "conditioned".¹⁰² In his intellectual and transcendental dynamism, Maréchal considers man (as spirit, i.e. in his 'nature') in the inmost heart of his being as *desiderium naturale visionis beatificae* (The Natural Desire for the Beatific Vision) using the words of

⁹⁶ Duffy, *The Graced Horizon*, 15.

⁹⁷ Joseph Donceel, trans., *A Maréchal Reader* (New York: Herder, 1970), 6.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, x. *A Maréchal Reader* offers excerpts translated into English from, Joseph Maréchal, *Le point de depart de la metaphysique* (Paris: Desclee de Brouwer and Bruxelles: L' edition universelle, 2nd ed., 1937). The French title, *Le point de depart de la metaphysique* means, the starting Point of Metaphysics and *Cahier* is the French word for a - student's notebook.

⁹⁹ Louis Roy, "Rahner's Epistemology and its Implications for Theology" *Lonergan Workshop*, Vol 22 (2011), 421-439. See also, Donceel, trans., *Maréchal Reader*, x.

¹⁰⁰ Marmion, "Transcendental Thomisms" in Lewis Ayres, Ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Catholic Theology*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 701-717.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 706.

¹⁰² Donald L. Gelpi, *Life and Light: A Guide to the Theology of Karl Rahner* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1966), 46.

Thomas Aquinas.¹⁰³ This natural desire is conditional, without any obligation for the actual call to the beatific vision by grace.

However, Rahner explains it is a real longing for the absolute being which is present in every spiritual act as its *raison d'etre* (reason for being).¹⁰⁴ Yet for many theologians, Maréchal seemed to be calling into question the gratuity of grace. Yet out of all the deliberations came an increasingly general acceptance of the desire for God as an implicit and transcendent *a priori* of man's spiritual life.¹⁰⁵ As Stephen J. Duffy identifies, Maréchal's work brought about a dual effect: "the orientation to God began to be once again understood not as an "extra," but as a central principle in the human make-up and study was stimulated as to how grace affects person's already so disposed to God in their very nature and being."¹⁰⁶ The philosophy of Maréchal had also become a significant basis for the theological thought of Rahner from his formative years.¹⁰⁷

In ecumenical dialogue there was a shift of attention to a Christ-centered conception of grace, and then to an elaboration of a notion of grace which is more than a supernatural superstructure imposed on a man's nature. Further, the impact of existentialism led to a rethinking of grace in terms of concrete human contexts and in turn to a consideration of the problem of the justification of non-Christians. These paradigm shifts also found expression in Karl Rahner with the notion of the 'universality of grace' and the theory of 'anonymous Christian.' Rahner uses the phrase 'anonymous Christian' to convey his pastoral and theological conviction that all human beings are touched by the grace of Jesus Christ and thus drawn into the salvific embrace of God.¹⁰⁸

The awareness and implications of the supernatural in human beings developed, among theologians, followed by a movement to reflect more seriously on certain aspects of Christian teaching which had been lost. Rediscovery of transcendental Thomism and the St. Thomas's *desiderium naturale visionis beatificae* was vital during this period. They reflected more

¹⁰³ Rahner, "Nature and Grace", *TI, IV*, 170.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ Gelpi, *Life and Light*, 46.

¹⁰⁶ Duffy, *The Graced Horizon*, 52.

¹⁰⁷ Karl Rahner, *Faith in a Wintry Season: Conversations and Interviews with Karl Rahner in the Last Years of His Life*, trans., and ed. Harvey D. Egan (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 15.

¹⁰⁸ Declan Marmion & Mary E. Hines, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 8.

seriously on the meaning of actual grace which precedes justification on the relation between sacraments and personal acts and on the meaning of uncreated grace. Rahner preferred a transcendental-anthropological method in theology.¹⁰⁹ He postulates an *a priori* givenness in the human person and that the particular constitution of the human person precedes encounter with the world of experience.¹¹⁰ However, at the same time as Marmion explains, for Rahner the human person constitutes a unity of *a priori* givenness and a *posteriori* experiences,

Nothing can really be known about the *a priori* constitution of the human person without a *posteriori* experience that a person has. It is important to bear in mind here that Rahner always sees the human person as constituting a unity.¹¹¹

Rahner understands the human-finite spirit in its transcendental, a priori relationship to God, and this is a conception which he owes to Maréchal's basic insight.¹¹² He developed an understanding of the transcendental subject which went beyond the *a priori* conditions for the possibility of knowledge.¹¹³ Rahner explains that the human person as spirit encounters himself when he finds himself in the world and when he asks about God. And, when man asks about his essence, he always finds himself already in the world and on the way to God.¹¹⁴ Human being according to Rahner is essentially ambivalent, "always exiled in the world and is always already beyond it."¹¹⁵ Rahner describes the growing understanding of human- finite spirit orientation towards God:

There was an increasing understanding of the view that man's orientation, as spirit, towards God was not merely something that was also present in man, but that man's ordination to God, even though an implicit and a priori transcendental, makes him what he experiences himself to be,

¹⁰⁹ Declan Marmion, *A Spirituality of Everyday Faith: A Theological Investigation of the Notion of Spirituality in Karl Rahner* (Louvain: Peeters Press, 1998), 130.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 131.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² Vorgrimler, *Karl Rahner*, 54. Rahner when asked about historical figures most influential in his work answered: "As regards philosophy I would like to mention Joseph Maréchal, S.J., and Martin Heidegger. And with regard to spirituality, without a doubt, Ignatius of Loyola." See, Rahner, *Faith in a Wintry Season*, 39. Also, Rahner explains Maréchal's philosophical anthropology borrowing the words of Thomas Aquinas, "In his intellectual and transcendental dynamism, Maréchal considers man (as spirit, i.e., in his nature) in the inmost heart of his being as a *desiderium naturale visionis beatificae*- to use words of St. Thomas". See, Rahner, "Nature and Grace", *TI, IV*, 3.

¹¹³ Marmion, *A Spirituality of Everyday Faith*, 137. Rahner goes beyond Kantian knowledge of certain original concepts and the judgments generated from them, which must have arisen entirely *a priori*, independently of experience. See, Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Paul Guyer & Allen W. Wood, trans. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 128.

¹¹⁴ Karl Rahner, "Man as Spirit in the World" in *Spirit in the World*, trans. William Dych (New York: Continuum, 1994), 406.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

something that he can deny and repress only at the cost of sin, because even then it is affirmed in every act of his spiritual existence.¹¹⁶

Humanity's orientation towards God is understood as an implicit ever present and inescapable reality. Rahner suggests, "God's act of supernatural self-bestowal raises and re-orientates the transcendental dimension of the human spirit by the power of grace."¹¹⁷

In the article, on the "Relationship between Nature and Grace", Rahner develops his discussion, with a presumption that the questions raised concerning the relationship between nature and grace are well known and 'there is no need to provide an historical account of them'.¹¹⁸ Rahner criticises the extrinsic mode of relationship between nature and grace, where grace is presented as a "mere superstructure".¹¹⁹ He points out that this kind of superimposition had been prevalent in the theological academia of the last few centuries and thus also presents a 'circumscribed' human nature.¹²⁰ He staunchly criticizes the 'average teaching' about such a circumscribed human nature:

It cannot be denied that an extrinsicism of this kind has been current in the average teaching on grace in the last few centuries. It has been usual to presuppose a sharply circumscribed human 'nature' with the help of a concept of nature one-sidedly orientated to the nature of less than human things.¹²¹

Nature is thus understood as being 'disturbed' by the purely external 'decree' of God commanding the acceptance of the supernatural, a purely exterior divine ordination.¹²² Thus, an understanding that what man experiences existentially by himself as pure nature is problematic. Rahner vociferously criticizes this average view and calls it problematic and dangerous from a religious point of view. Because then the human being is always in danger of understanding himself merely as nature and of behaving accordingly.

Paulos Gregorios, whom we are using as interlocutor with Rahner in this dissertation, when interpreting Gregory of Nyssa's doctrine of grace, also criticises the average perspective which considers nature as a self-sufficient and self-contained unit with its own laws, and into

¹¹⁶ Rahner, "Nature and Grace", *TI, IV*, 170-171.

¹¹⁷ Rahner, "Church, Churches, and Religions", *TI, X*, 37.

¹¹⁸ Rahner, "Relationship between Nature and Grace," *TI, I*, 298.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ Rahner, "Relationship between Nature and Grace," *TI, I*, 298.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 299.

which grace has to ‘intervene’ from outside.¹²³ For Rahner, “nature is, because grace has to be”¹²⁴. And as the ground of nature, grace is the innermost center of this nature.¹²⁵ Nature is never actually purely and simply secular; it is always nature graciously endowed with God himself.¹²⁶

Nevertheless, Rahner also rejects the view attributed to the *nouvelle théologie*¹²⁷, that the inner reference of man to grace is a constituent of his nature in such a way that his nature cannot be conceived without it. Grace is *unexacted*, that is, that nature cannot demand grace as something ‘owed’ to it. Grace is a gift.¹²⁸ Rahner dismantles the binary by constructing a theology of nature and grace that brought the two into a unity in distinction. Grace, though an intrinsic constituent, an ontological determination of historical humanity, remains gratuitous. Man is the event (*das Ereignis*) of the absolute self-communication of God and its universality does not diminish its gratuity.¹²⁹

The difference between nature and grace is deep-rooted in the conviction that, what we become in our relationship with God cannot derive solely from our own capabilities for self-growth. Hence, human nature must somehow be supplemented by grace, the free self-communication of God.¹³⁰

2.1 A Patristic Overview: Nature and Grace

The influence of early Christian Fathers and their reflections is evident in Rahner’s theologizing. Rahner had an excellent command over what Declan Marmion describes as, ‘the wider theological tradition both East and West.’¹³¹ For Rahner, Eastern patristics¹³², Ignatian

¹²³ Paulos Gregorios, *Cosmic Man* (New Delhi: Sophia Publications, 1980), 129.

¹²⁴ Rahner, “On the Theology of Worship,” *TI*, XIX, 143.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ Rahner, “On the Theology of Worship,” *TI*, XIX, 143.

¹²⁷ The *nouvelle théologie* movement is also commonly known as the “ressourcement movement.” The overall appeal was not simply to reassert ancient theology, but to recover something that drove and defined that ancient theology. The key figures were Jean Danielou, Henri de Lubac, Henri Bouillard, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Marie-Dominique Chenu, and Yves Congar. Hans Boersma, *Nouvelle Theologie and Sacramental Ontology: A Return to Mystery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 2. See also: Jürgen Mettepenningen, *Nouvelle Theologie- New Theology: Inheritor of Modernism, Precursor of Vatican II* (New York: T&T Clark, 2010), xiii.

¹²⁸ Karl Rahner, “Personal and Sacramental Piety”, *TI*, II, 122.

¹²⁹ Stephen J. Duffy, “Experience of Grace” in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, 46.

¹³⁰ Duffy, *The Graced Horizon*, 13.

¹³¹ Declan Marmion, “Karl Rahner, Vatican II, and the Shape of the Church,” *Theological Studies* 78 (2017), 26.

¹³² Brandon R. Peterson, “Karl Rahner on Patristic Theology and Spirituality” *Philosophy & Theology* 27, 2 (2015), 499–512. Peterson explains that although it is rarely recognized, Karl Rahner, like Balthasar and Ratzinger, drew

spirituality, and Thomistic influences have been significant since his early theological formation. The Belgian Jesuit Joseph Maréchal (1878–1944) and the French Jesuit Pierre Rousselot (1878–1915) were most influential in Rahner’s own interpretation of Thomas Aquinas. His acquaintances with early Christian writings and theology probably began at an early stage of theological studies.¹³³ As Marmion writes about the spiritual basis of Rahner’s theology, “his early writings on the mystical doctrine of Origen and Bonaventure for example, led him to take seriously such teaching as valid theological sources”.¹³⁴ Rahner had a high opinion of the Eastern Theology:

Eastern theology will always have something fresh to say to the West, as it gave new inspiration to Aquinas, Petavius, and Scheeben. The theology of the East on the Resurrection and Transfiguration, on worship, on the unity of asceticism and mysticism, on symbols and on the transfiguration of the whole cosmos through grace, can even today give a new impulse to our Western theology.¹³⁵

Particularly, Rahner seems to be well versed with the theological works of the fourth century Cappadocians¹³⁶ and quotes extensively from Gregory of Nyssa while discussing the topics such as spiritual ascent¹³⁷, Biblical expositions and the use of the Spiritual senses¹³⁸, penance and sin¹³⁹, and the incomprehensibility of God and Mystery.¹⁴⁰

2.1.1 An Eastern Perspective: On Human Nature

The Indian orthodox theologian, Paulos Gregorios also highlights the image of God in human nature and explains that “Human nature cannot be sinful, for nature is what is created by God,

upon and was formatively influenced by the theology of the Church Fathers, especially in their writings on the Bible. Rahner’s early works from the 1930s, were particularly steeped in Patristic studies, and remains widely unknown, especially in the English-speaking world. Peterson quotes Karl Neufeld, “these interests continued to influence Rahner’s theology as a kind of underlying ‘substratum’ supporting his mature work, even if that work refrained from explicitly citing patristic sources with as much regularity.” (See, Neufeld, Karl, S.J. 1999. “Editionsbericht.” In SW vol. 3, pp. xiii–xvi).

¹³³Vorgrimler, *Karl Rahner*, 20. Rahner began his theological studies in 1929 at Valkenburg in Holland under outstanding scholars like K. Prumm, exegete and patrologist; J Rabeneck and H. Lange, dogmatic theologians.

¹³⁴ Declan Marmion, “The Notion of Spirituality in Karl Rahner”, *Louvain Studies* 21 (1996): 62. See also, Karl Rahner and Marcel Viller, *Ascese und Mystik in der Väterzeit: Ein Abriß*, Freiburg: Herder, 1989.

¹³⁵ Vorgrimler, *Karl Rahner*, 38. Rahner had a high opinion of Eastern Theology which he notes clearly while dealing with individual questions raised by Freiburg letter.

¹³⁶ Cappadocian Fathers - St. Basil, St. Gregory of Nyssa, and St. Gregory of Naziansus of the 4th Century.

¹³⁷ Rahner, “Reflections on The Problem of The Gradual Ascent to Christian Perfection”, *TI, III*, 8. Here the theme of ‘Christian perfection and Spiritual Ascent’ in Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Evagrius Ponticus etc. is also explored by Rahner.

¹³⁸ Rahner, “Spiritual Theology in Christian Tradition”, *TI, XVI*, 103.

¹³⁹ Rahner “Sin as Loss of Grace in Early Church Literature”, *TI, XV*, 51.

¹⁴⁰ Rahner “The Concept of Mystery in Catholic Theology”, *TI, IV*, 59.

and it was not created evil or sinful. What is constitutive of our nature is that it was created in the image of God, who is the perfection of all goodness.” Further, he explains that created nature must be ‘worked out’ through human freedom, because freedom is part of the image.¹⁴¹ Human freedom presents the choice of accepting or denying to every human being. Paulos Gregorios describes the two possibilities available to every human person:

One, to say ‘yes’ to the existence given to him by affirming that it comes from God and by working out in freedom its true nature as good. This is life. The other possibility is to say ‘no’ to that existence by refusing to acknowledge that it comes from God, thinking it is one’s own and by refusing to work it out as a manifestation of God’s own glory. This is *alloisosis*, alienation, death.¹⁴²

We shall now briefly discuss the anthropological perspectives of Gregory of Nyssa, on whom Paulos Gregorios bases his theological anthropology. Gregory writes in a preface in his enquiry about human nature:

The scope of our proposed enquiry is not small: it is second to none of the wonders of the world, perhaps even greater than any of those known to us, because no other existing thing, save the human creation, has been made like to God.¹⁴³

In Nyssa’s understanding human nature had the greatest importance and uniqueness of composition. While explaining the creation of human being he explains the unique composition of human nature, ‘enjoying God by means of his more divine nature, and the good things of earth by the sense that is akin to them.’¹⁴⁴ Gregory of Nyssa raises a pertinent question while discussing human nature in more detail, “In what then does the greatness of man consist, according to the doctrine of the Church? Not in his likeness to the created world, but in his being in the image of the nature of the Creator.”¹⁴⁵ For Gregory, the likeness of humanity to that of the creator is its greatness.

¹⁴¹ Gregorios, *Cosmic Man*, 156.

¹⁴² Gregorios, *Cosmic Man*, 156. Similarly, Rahner explains the two-fold modality of God’s self-communication. Man, as a free being to say ‘yes’ or a ‘no’ in the modality of an acceptance or in the modality of a rejection of God. See: Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, trans. William V. Dych (New York: Crossroad, 1997), 118.

¹⁴³ Gregory of Nyssa, “On the Making of Man” in *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers, Vol. V*, Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds. (U.S.A: Hendrickson Publication, 1999), 716. The Nicene and Post Nicene series shall be further referred as *NPNF*.

¹⁴⁴ Gregory, “On the Making of Man”, *NPNF*, XVI 722.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 750.

Morwenna Ludlow explains, that ‘Gregory really does believe in a unity which is human nature- just as he really believes that there is one God’.¹⁴⁶ Furthermore, there are two important points to consider: First, that this humanity (*anthropos*) contains all humanity- that is, all humans in both aspects, material and immaterial. Secondly, this human nature was created in the image of God: it is therefore not only asexual but atemporal.¹⁴⁷

3. Restoration of the Image of God

Human beings were created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26-27). Gregory of Nyssa remarks that created in the image of God also means that human nature is made a participant in all good, a potential for the good. Gregory writes:

“in saying that human being was made “in the image of God”: for this is the same as to say that He made human nature participant in all good; for if the Deity is the fulness of good, and this is His image, then the image finds its resemblance to the Archetype in being filled with all good.”¹⁴⁸

The image of God once distorted by sin was restored again by the Incarnation of God in human form. Christ's human nature is simultaneously both the prototype for our own, and the end to which we are restored.¹⁴⁹ Christ’s incarnation is a window to our salvation and to our ability to participate in God's goodness. According to Gregory of Nyssa, the assumption of human nature by Jesus Christ (the incarnation) transforms mortal humanity into living grace,

He by His own agency drew it up once more to immortal life, by means of the Man in whom He tabernacled, taking to Himself humanity in completeness, and that He mingled His life-giving power with our mortal and perishable nature, and changed, by the combination with Himself, our deadness to living grace and power. And this we declare to be the mystery of the Lord according to the flesh, that He Who is immutable came to be in that which is mutable, to the end that altering it for the better, and changing it from the worse, He might abolish the evil, which is

¹⁴⁶ Morwenna Ludlow, *Gregory of Nyssa: Ancient and Post Modern* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 179.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. Gregory of Nyssa is also appreciated by several theologians as the ‘feminist father.’ Ludlow quotes from Borresen’s reading of *On Making of Humankind*, where Gregory teaches a ‘two stage theory’ of creation, in which ‘the first creation in God’s image is purely spiritual and the second phase is the ‘creation of sexually differentiated bodies.’ See, Morwenna Ludlow, *Gregory of Nyssa: Ancient and Post Modern* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 168.

¹⁴⁸ Gregory, “On the Making of Man”, *NPNF*, XVI, 752.

¹⁴⁹ Elizabeth Agnew Cochran, “The *Imago Dei* and Human Perfection: The Significance of Christology for Gregory of Nyssa's Understanding of The Human Person”, *The Heythrop Journal* 50 (2009), 402-415.

mingled with our mutable condition, destroying the evil in Himself. For “our God is a consuming fire,” by whom all the material of wickedness is done away. This is our statement.¹⁵⁰

God took on human nature for our benefit, to give all human nature incorruption and Divine transformation.¹⁵¹ Gregory explains,

So as to give to all human nature a beginning and an example which it should follow of the resurrection from the dead, that all the corruptible may put on incorruption, and all the mortal may put on immortality, our first fruits having been transformed to the Divine nature by its union with God.¹⁵²

For Gregory, human nature as the creation of God is responsible for the continuity of God’s presence in this world. And the virtue of being created in the image and likeness of God, indicates that human nature is participant in all good.¹⁵³ Again, if the Deity is the fullness of good, and this is His image, then the image finds its resemblance to the Archetype in being filled with all good.¹⁵⁴ Human nature is the bond that ties God and man. It exhorts the latter in his present state of alienation from God to cleanse himself in order to restore what is an image of the divine within himself to its original splendor. It guarantees the *apokatastasis* as the restoration of human nature.¹⁵⁵

For the early Church Fathers, grace was the reason for nature and its fulfilment. The famous Thomistic maxim ‘Grace Does not Destroy Nature but Perfects it’ (*Gratia non tollit naturam, sed perficit*)¹⁵⁶ exemplifies this idea. Nature and Grace are complementary to each other. Further, Thomas Aquinas explains the empowerment by grace with a metaphor of water and heat in the *Treatise on Grace, Article one*, ‘Whether a man can know any truth without grace’:

Every power bestowed by God upon created things has the power to achieve some definite action by means of its own properties. But it cannot achieve anything further, unless through a form which is added to it. Water, for example, cannot heat unless it is itself heated by fire. So also, the human intellect possesses the form of intellectual light, which by itself is sufficient for the knowledge of such intelligible things as we can learn through sense. But it cannot know

¹⁵⁰ Gregory, *Dogmatic Treatises*, Book V (4), *NPNF*, 343. Gregory in this Treatise attacks the falsehood of Eunomius’ (*Against Eunomius*).

¹⁵¹ Gregory, *Dogmatic Treatises*, Book V (3), *NPNF*, 338. Human nature being made Divine (θεοποιούμενον).

¹⁵² Gregory, *Dogmatic Treatises*, Book II, (13), *NPNF*, 243.

¹⁵³ Gregory, “On the Making of Man” *XVI*, *NPNF*, 752.

¹⁵⁴ Gregory, “On the Making of Man” *XVI*, *NPNF*, 752.

¹⁵⁵ Johannes Zachhuber, *Human Nature in Gregory of Nyssa* (Boston: Brill, 2014), 244.

¹⁵⁶ Aquinas, “*Summa Theologica*, I, Q. I, Art. 8”, in A.M Fairweather, ed. and trans., *Aquinas on Nature and Grace: Selections from the Summa Theologica* (U.S.A: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006),46. Thomas Aquinas here actually considers the relation between revelation and human reason, but the principle has a general application.

intelligible things of a higher order unless it is perfected by a stronger light, such as the light of faith or prophecy, which is called "the light of glory" since it is added to nature.¹⁵⁷

However, the Thomistic understanding does not conceive human nature as completely doomed and grace as a superimposition on human nature. Thomas Aquinas is clear that “In regard to the sufficiency of his operative power, man in the state of pure nature could, will and do, by his own natural power, the good proportionate to his nature, such as the good of acquired virtue.”¹⁵⁸ And also, human nature possesses some natural good, “Human nature is not so entirely corrupted by sin, however, as to be deprived of natural good altogether.”¹⁵⁹

Gregory of Nyssa tells us that human nature is a compound and is mutable. Human nature is a means between the Divine and corporeal nature. In Gregory’s view created nature and uncreated nature differ in their ‘material’ essence.¹⁶⁰ He explains the difference between created and uncreated natures with the aid of a biblical allegory:

As the Gospel calls the stamp upon the coin “the image of Caesar”, whereby we learn that in that which was fashioned to resemble Caesar there was resemblance as to outward look, but difference as to material, so also in the present saying, when we consider the attributes contemplated both in the Divine and human nature, in which the likeness consists, to be in the place of the features, we find in what underlies them the difference which we behold in the uncreated and in the created nature.¹⁶¹

The differentiation between the created and uncreated is used to highlight that human nature is a compound nature or is a mean between the corporeal and incorporeal.¹⁶² Gregory explains that God made human nature a participant in all good. He adds that humanity, beyond all the virtues, is also endowed preeminently with the fact that we are free from necessity, and not in bondage to any natural power, but choice in our own power as we please; for virtue is a voluntary thing, subject to no dominion: that which is the result of compulsion and force cannot be virtue.¹⁶³ Nevertheless, Gregory argues that human nature, being also mutable, is vibrant or always on the move. Gregory of Nyssa attributes a compound nature to humanity, and the human nature he

¹⁵⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Aquinas on Nature and Grace, Treatise on Grace, Article One*, “Whether A Man Can Know Any Truth Without Grace”, trans. A. M. Fair Weather, (Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 139.

¹⁵⁸ Aquinas, *Aquinas on Nature, and Grace*, 140.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Gregory, “On the Making of Man”, *NPNF*, XVI, 753.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 752.

describes is the mean between immutable and mutable, unchangeable and changeable nature.¹⁶⁴ If it moves towards the good, ‘it will never cease moving onwards to what lies before, by reason of the infinity of the course to be traversed’.¹⁶⁵ In *De hominis opificio* (On the Making of Man) Gregory expresses a view which is very similar to the argument of the mutability of evil, except that he grounds it on the mutability of human nature: it is absolutely certain that the Divine counsel possesses immutability (τὸ ἀμετάθετὸν), while the changeableness (τὸ τρεπτὸν) of our nature does not remain fixed despite sin.¹⁶⁶ Therefore, for Gregory, human nature is a compound nature with the potential for goodness and ever mutable.

Interestingly, universal human nature is also a preferred analogy for the Trinity for several early Christian writers. Gregory of Nyssa and several Cappadocian writings employ the universal nature of humanity as an analogy for the Trinity.¹⁶⁷ The idea is that the way human being is one and many at the same time provides an analogy for the intratrinitarian relations.¹⁶⁸ For the Cappadocians, humanity shares a common essence (*homoousioi*). The common essence of humanity also opens a path for interreligious and anthropological discussions. However, this Trinitarian essence requires a more detailed discussion, which shall be considered and discussed within later chapters of the thesis.

4. Rahner on Human Nature: *Natura pura and Restbegriff*

Another important aspect of the nature/ grace deliberation is the question, is there a *Natura pura* (pure nature)? Is it a nature which is *a priori*, a graced nature, or could it ever be delineated as a remainder concept devoid of grace?

Since ‘self-communication in love’¹⁶⁹ is the motive of divine creation, we must be truly able to receive this love. We must, therefore, possess a real, permanent “potency” for it.¹⁷⁰ Even the damned have this “potency;” it belongs to the central and enduring existential makeup of humanity as it exists.¹⁷¹ There exists a real difference between human nature and the capacity to receive supernatural love. Human nature is a negative concept in some theological domains. It is

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.,753.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.,764.

¹⁶⁶ Gregory, “On the Making of Man”, *NPNF*, XXI,764.

¹⁶⁷ Zachhuber, *Human Nature in Gregory of Nyssa*, 17.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Rahner, “Concerning the Relationship Between Nature and Grace”, *TI*, I, 308.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.,312.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.,313.

that which is left in man as we know him once the supernatural is taken away. In other words, for the theologian “nature” means the human person minus the supernatural, what is left of them when their supernatural makeup is thought of as lacking. According to Rahner, the remainder concept (*Restbegriff*) is a postulated reality which remains over when the supernatural existential as unexacted is subtracted.¹⁷²

However, nature as a remainder concept is equally problematic, abstracting grace from the body of existential experience of humanity, and thus acquiring a pure nature.¹⁷³ The ontological presuppositions of this extrinsicism are problematic. Rahner explains,

But this ‘pure’ nature is not for that reason an unambiguously delimitable, de-finable quantity; no neat horizontal (to use Philipp Dessauer’s way of putting it) allows of being drawn between this nature and the supernatural (both existential and grace).¹⁷⁴

For Rahner, “We never have this postulated pure nature for itself alone”.¹⁷⁵ Now, carefully moving on to the other side of this debate: Can an inner reference of man to grace be a constituent of his ‘nature’ in such a way that the latter cannot be conceived without it, i.e., as pure nature? If yes, the problem that remains is: Would it still be possible to conceive of grace as unexacted? ¹⁷⁶ Rahner sets the proposition ‘grace is absolutely unexacted’ as the unquestioned point of departure for all further reflections.¹⁷⁷ It is a graced nature and Rahner believes that it is impossible to understand nature as *Natura Pura* (pure nature). He describes the ordination of man to the supernatural as ‘unconditional, yet natural.’¹⁷⁸ The essence of grace is ‘God’s self-communication in love.’¹⁷⁹

Rahner explains that human nature can never be “pure” but is always a graced humanity, and inescapable from the horizon of grace:

Actual human nature is never "pure" nature, but nature in a supernatural order, which man (even the unbeliever and the sinner) can never escape from; nature superperformed (which does not mean justified) by the supernatural saving grace offered to it.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷² Ibid.,315.

¹⁷³ Ibid.,302.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.,315.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.,304.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.,310.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.,307.

¹⁸⁰ Karl Rahner, *Nature, and Grace Dilemmas in the Modern Church* (New York: Sheed & Ward ,1964), 135.

For Rahner, our actual nature is *never* a ‘pure’ nature.¹⁸¹ It is a nature affixed in a supernatural order inescapable for a human being, even as a sinner or an unbeliever. This nature is continually being determined (which does not mean justified) by the supernatural grace of salvation offered to it.¹⁸² Rahner also maintains that humans have the potential for divinity and that the fulfillment of human nature comes through grace:

We can only fully understand man in his "undefinable" essence if we see him as *potentia obedientialis* for the divine life; this is his nature. His nature is such that its absolute fulfillment comes through grace, and so nature of itself must reckon with the meaningful possibility of remaining without absolute fulfillment.¹⁸³

Here we are reminded that human nature is always summoned to grace and required to accept God's offer of himself, in which alone it finds its real goal.¹⁸⁴ And when a human being rejects the offer, what remains is not pure nature but a potential recipient of God's forgiving grace and a nature which has turned against itself, because human nature is precisely humanity's unqualified, dialogical availability to God.¹⁸⁵ One should be wary of identifying the negative concept of nature found in theology with the philosophical concept of human nature as a rational animal. Strictly speaking the two concepts are not the same. For Rahner, natural and supernatural are distinct in man, but they are not chemically separable by human analysis.¹⁸⁶

5. Created and Uncreated Grace

In the traditional scholastic doctrine on nature and grace, there has been a vital difference; a division between so-called ‘created’ and ‘uncreated’ grace. Rahner explains that one needs to assume an analogous relationship between created and uncreated grace. And in this regard created grace could be understood as *causa materialis (dispositio ultima)* for the formal causality which God exercises by graciously communicating his own Being to the creature.¹⁸⁷ According to Rahner, created grace represents the basis and the condition of possibility of that reality in the relationship of God and man known as uncreated grace. While explaining grace according to

¹⁸¹ Rahner, ‘Nature and Grace’, *TI, IV*, 184.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

¹⁸³ Rahner, *Nature and Grace Dilemmas in The Modern Church*, 140-141.

¹⁸⁴ Karl Rahner & Herbert Vorgrimler, ‘Nature and Grace’ in *Theological Dictionary*, 308.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 308- 309.

¹⁸⁶ Rahner, ‘Concerning the Relationship Between Nature and Grace’, *TI, I*, 316. Man can experiment with himself only in the region of God's supernatural loving will, he can never find the nature he wants in a ‘chemically pure’ state, separated from its supernatural existential.

¹⁸⁷ Rahner, ‘Some Implications of The Scholastic Concept of Uncreated Grace’, *TI, I*, 342.

scholastic speculation Rahner writes, “The created grace is imparted to the soul, God imparts himself to it and dwells in it and what we call uncreated grace (God as bestowing himself upon man) is a function of created grace.”¹⁸⁸ The patristic tradition placed greater emphasis on uncreated grace and tends to look on created grace only because of divine presence within us.¹⁸⁹

In Rahner’s view there cannot be a possibility of thinking about created grace apart from uncreated grace. He explains,

Thus, on our view of the relationship between created and uncreated grace there does not exist even the beginning of a possibility of thinking of created grace apart from uncreated grace, and so of thinking of uncreated grace as a fresh gift arising out of a new and independent demonstration of God’s grace.¹⁹⁰

The relationship between created and uncreated grace is restructured in Rahner. In Rahner’s conception uncreated grace or the self-communication of God to human beings is primary.¹⁹¹ Marmion claims that, “this assertion lies at the heart of his understanding of Christian existence.”¹⁹² For Rahner uncreated grace is a constitutive element of human person. He explains this fact while explaining the experience of the Spirit (spiritual experience), “It comes about rather through God’s self-communication to the human spirit (uncreated grace) by which God becomes a constitutive element of human transcendence.”¹⁹³

Rahner also revisits the past, namely, the very foundations of Christianity, i.e., Scriptures, and more precisely the Pauline and Johannine writings, in his effort to understand this relationship.¹⁹⁴ Furthermore, the task Rahner takes up is how to bring into harmony the two ways of looking at things, that of Scripture and the Fathers on one hand, and that of Scholastic theology on the other : created grace because of God’s communication of himself to the man whose sins have been forgiven and again (in Scholastic theology) uncreated grace as the *basis* of this communication.¹⁹⁵

Rahner deliberates at length on the unexactedness (gratuity) of grace and discusses the relationship between man and grace. He tells us, that God wishes to communicate himself, to

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.,325.

¹⁸⁹ Donal L. Gelpi, *Life and Light: A Guide to the Theology of Karl Rahner* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1966),47.

¹⁹⁰ Rahner, “Some Implications of The Scholastic Concept of Uncreated Grace”, *TI, I*, 342.

¹⁹¹ Marmion, *A Spirituality of Everyday Faith*,164.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Rahner, “Experience of The Spirit and Existential Commitment”, *TI*, XVI, 29.

¹⁹⁴ Rahner, “Some Implications of The Scholastic Concept of Uncreated Grace”, *TI, I*, 320-322.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.,325.

pour forth the love which he himself is.¹⁹⁶ For Rahner this is the first and the last, an exclusive plan for humanity. He writes, “everything else exists so that this one thing might be: the eternal miracle of infinite Love. And so, God makes a creature whom he can love, he creates human being.”¹⁹⁷ Rahner explains that God creates human being with a potency to receive this love and that he can and must at the same time accept it for what it is: the ever astounding wonder, the unexpected, unexacted gift.¹⁹⁸ God has created human beings in such a way that they can receive the unexacted gift, yet an equal balance is struck when Rahner claims,

He creates him in such a way that he *can* receive this Love, which is God himself, and that he *can* and *must* at the same time accept it for what it is: the ever-astounding wonder, the unexpected, unexacted gift. And let us not forget here that ultimately, we only know what 'unexacted' means when we know what personal love is, not vice versa: we don't understand what love is by knowing the meaning of 'unexacted'.¹⁹⁹

‘Grace is absolutely unexacted’ is a proposition and according to Rahner the point of departure for most of his reflections, an indubitable axiom.²⁰⁰ In this context it is interesting to comprehend the German word *Ungeschuldet*²⁰¹, a word derived from *schulden* ‘to owe’ (Verb)²⁰² and wherein for Rahner conventionally it is translated as ‘unexacted’. But Rahner himself points out the disadvantage of this translation. The disadvantage is that ‘unexacted’ negates obligation from the point of view of the creditor, while *ungeschuldet* negates it from the point of view of the ‘debtor.’²⁰³ Thus, the word *ungeschuldet* means the grace of God cannot be claimed as owed to by human being but is a gracious gift.²⁰⁴

Grace is absolutely ‘unexacted’ and ‘not owed’ to humankind²⁰⁵, but remarkably human beings have the potential to receive this grace. The real man as God's real partner should be able to receive this love as what it necessarily is: as free gift. But that means that this central, abiding

¹⁹⁶ Rahner, “Concerning the Relationship Between Nature and Grace”, *TI, I*, 311.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 310.

²⁰⁰ Rahner, “Concerning the Relationship Between Nature and Grace”, *TI, I*, 304.

²⁰¹ *Ungeschuldet* means not agreed upon or not liable to transfer something, or not owed to the receiver.

²⁰² The word *Schuld* (noun) means “guilt”, or “what you owe”. Interestingly, *Meine Schuld* in the biblical sense means “my fault” but plural form, *Meinen Schulden* means “my debts”, or “something owed.”

²⁰³ Rahner, “Concerning the Relationship Between Nature and Grace”, *TI, I*, 304.

²⁰⁴ Gregorios also in a similar vein wrote, “the initiative is from God. Human being responds to it in obedience and cooperation.” See: Gregorios, *Cosmic Man*, 203.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 313.

existential, consisting in the ordination to the threefold God of grace and eternal life, is itself to be characterized as unexacted, as 'supernatural'.²⁰⁶

However, for Rahner there is a real self-communication of God to the creature and Rahner defines it more closely as true 'quasi-formal causality', as distinct from a created gift.²⁰⁷ In Rahner's own words, 'grace is a gift'²⁰⁸ 'unexactedness'²⁰⁹ and he reiterates the 'natural ordination of man to the supernatural.'²¹⁰ Rahner makes it clear that this grace is only then conceived in its true essence when it is recognized to be not just the created 'accidental' reality produced by God's efficient causality 'in' a (natural) substance, but includes 'uncreated grace' in such a way that this may not be conceived of purely as a consequence of created grace.²¹¹

Furthermore, Rahner also discusses the extent of created and uncreated grace and shares a concern that 'there is no agreement in Catholic theology on how exactly the relation between created and uncreated grace is to be determined'.²¹² He explains that, it 'is quite possible to regard uncreated grace as primary and as the grace which is the essential basis of the whole of man's grace-given endowment and as what alone renders intelligible the authentic and strictly supernatural character of grace.'²¹³ The grace of God's self-offer should not be mistaken as an exclusive privilege of Christians. Nor does the impossibility of deducing it as an *a priori* component of humanity imply it is purely an accidental addition.²¹⁴ Likewise, whilst explaining the importance of uncreated grace, Rahner does not shy away from admitting that it is of course true that the concept of uncreated grace means that man himself is genuinely and inwardly transformed by this self-communication and that therefore in this sense there is a 'created', accidental grace.²¹⁵

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 312-313.

²⁰⁷ Karl Rahner & Herbert Vorgrimler, 'Nature and Grace' in *Theological Dictionary*, 56.

²⁰⁸ Rahner, "Mystical Experience and Mystical Theology", *TI*, XVII, 98. See Also, Rahner, "Experience of The Spirit and Existential Commitment" *TI*, XVI, 25. And, Rahner, 'Justified and Sinner at The Same Time', *TI*, VI, 219.

²⁰⁹ Rahner, "Concerning the Relationship Between Nature and Grace", *TI*, I, 305-306.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 311.

²¹¹ Ibid., 312-313.

²¹² Karl Rahner, ed., *Encyclopedia of Theology: A Concise Sacramentum Mundi* (New York: Burns & Oates, 1975), 592.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Stephen J. Duffy, "Experience of Grace" in Marmion and Hines, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, 46.

²¹⁵ Rahner, *Encyclopedia of Theology*, 592.

6. Universality of Salvific Will

Rahner held a positive view of the salvation of humanity through grace and believed that salvation outside of the church is possible. He makes it clear at the outset of his discussion on the universal offer of salvation that ‘here the question is the possibility of salvation, not its actual realization’.²¹⁶ He believes that contrary to the view of St. Augustine, ‘no man is excluded from salvation’²¹⁷ because of so-called original sin and that ‘man can only lose the possibility of salvation through serious personal sin of his own’.²¹⁸

Interestingly, Paulose Gregorios was also critical of Augustinian soteriology and its preoccupation with individual and personal sin, original and actual.²¹⁹ Gregorios believed that salvation is more than deliverance from sin and it is making humanity like God, bringing humanity into fullness of life.²²⁰ He criticizes that, ‘we are today caught up in a negative and individual view of salvation’.²²¹ Rahner for his part, believed that God’s own self-communication in the form of grace objectifies God’s universal salvific will. Rahner puts it thus,

God’s universal will to save objectifies itself in that communication of himself which we call grace. It does this effectively at all times and in all places in the form of the offering and the enabling power of acting in a way that leads to salvation. And even though it is unmerited and ‘supernatural’ in character, it constitutes the innermost *entelecheia*²²² and dynamism of the world considered as the historical dimension of the creature endowed with spiritual faculties.²²³

Grace for Rahner is constantly implanted in the nature of the creature and its historical dimension in such a way that its awareness does not *ipso facto* or necessarily imply an objective

²¹⁶ Rahner, “The One Christ and the Universality of Salvation”, *TI*, XVI, 201.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 201.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*

²¹⁹ Paulos Mar Gregorios, *Love’s Freedom the Grand Mystery* (Kottayam: MGF Publications, 1997), 171.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*

²²¹ Gregorios, *Love’s Freedom the Grand Mystery*, 171.

²²² Greek *entelecheia*; Aristotle says that God is pure *entelecheia*. The corresponding Latin word is *forma*. The term denotes the principle which gives specific actuality, a positive determination of being. God is pure *entelecheia*, that is, pure act. See, “The reality of the soul as a self-subsisting separable substance”, in *The Catholic World*, Vol. XXIX (New York: The Catholic Publication Society, 1879), 344, accessed January 2, 2021, <https://books.google.ie/books?id=cwtGAQAAMAAJ&pg=PA344&dq=entelecheia&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjGgIiboKPwAhVRtmEKHW53Ccc4ChDoATACegQIABAC#v=onepage&q=entelecheia&f=false>.

Entelechy, in philosophy, means that which realizes or makes actual what is otherwise merely potential. Rahner uses the term to refer to, “grace as the innermost *entelecheia* of the world” (See, Rahner, “The Church’s Commission to Bring Salvation and The Humanization of The World ‘Horizontalism’ In Christianity And in The Contemporary Church”, *TI*, XIV, 313); “grace which constitutes the dynamic force and the *entelecheia* of this whole saving history” (See, Rahner, “Considerations on The Active Role of The Person in The Sacramental Event” *TI*, XIV, 166.).

²²³ Karl Rahner, “Observations on The Problem of The Anonymous Christian”, *TI*, XIV, 288-289.

awareness.²²⁴ Rahner's influence on the Second Vatican Council was pivotal and is well known. While explaining universal saving grace, he quotes the Second Vatican Council document 'Lumen Gentium' No. 16:

Those also can attain to everlasting salvation who, through no fault of their own, do not know the gospel of Christ or his Church, yet sincerely seek God and moved by grace, strive by their deeds to do his will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience.²²⁵

Remarkably, Rahner also maintains that the above doctrine applies even to those who are inculpable atheists and that the same point is made in 'Gaudium et Spes.'²²⁶

Declan Marmion, while enumerating the influence of Rahner on Vatican II explains that, "Rahner attempted to work out the theological implications of the newness of the Council's teachings by distinguishing between transcendental and categorial atheism/ theism, developing the concept of "implicit" (or anonymous) Christianity, and a reappraisal of the traditional theology of mission."²²⁷ He further explains Rahner's belief in dialogue in the context of pluralism and God's universal salvific will,

Already in 1961 Rahner was advocating an "open Catholicism" in the context of the pluralism of religions where "today everybody is the next-door neighbor and spiritual neighbor of everyone else in the world" and where there is now "one history of the world, and in this one history both the Christians and the non-Christians live in one and the same situation and face each other in dialogue." He explored how to reconcile the conviction that Christianity represents "the absolute religion, intended for all" with the thesis "that there are supernatural, grace-filled elements in non-Christian religions," a thesis grounded in God's universal salvific will.²²⁸

For Rahner therefore, God's grace is ubiquitous and also at work outside the church; God the Father invites all to share in the divine life.²²⁹ God's universal salvific will objectifies itself in that communication of himself which we call grace. This offering and enabling power acts always and at all places in a way which leads to salvation. Again, this grace constantly implanted in the nature of the creature and the historical dimension belonging to it as the dynamism and finalization of the history of man is, however, something of which humanity is only implicitly aware. The awareness may not *ipso facto* imply an objective awareness. It is present in the *a*

²²⁴ Ibid.,289.

²²⁵ Karl Rahner, "Observations on The Problem of The Anonymous Christian", *TI, XIV*, 291.

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Declan Marmion, "Karl Rahner, Vatican II, and the Shape of the Church," *Theological Studies* 78 (2017): 40.

²²⁸ Marmion, "Karl Rahner, Vatican II, and the Shape of the Church, 40.

²²⁹ Ibid.,33.

priori formal objects, in the further levels of significance in the spiritual and intentional capacities of knowledge and freedom.²³⁰

Paulos Gregorios too explains the universality of grace and how all humanity is in the realm of God's grace by borrowing the Catholic theological terminology "supernatural grace,"

To use Roman Catholic terminology, all people, Christians, and non-Christians, are in the realm of "supernatural grace" stemming from the incarnation. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ make a difference for the history of the world and the destiny of mankind.²³¹

The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ was for all humankind. Rahner is clear that God's saving will embraces everything and so permits even the sin of the world.²³² God's self-communication for Rahner which consists in an offer made to human freedom embraces the innermost nature and goal of man and therefore of salvation history.²³³ Rahner quotes the Second Vatican Council's definition of Church as the sacrament of the world's salvation and thus relates Jesus as the primary sacrament (*Ursakrament*).²³⁴ Rahner views the cross of Jesus as the universal primary sacrament of the salvation of the whole world and as the cause of the salvation signified.²³⁵

6.1 *The Anonymous Christian*

Another important concept while discussing the universality of grace in the thought of Karl Rahner is 'the anonymous Christians' (*die anonymen Christen*). The anonymous Christian was a thesis developed by Rahner which received favorable and hostile reactions from several theologians around the globe.²³⁶ Rahner, while explaining the concept of anonymous Christian,

²³⁰ Karl Rahner, "Observations on The Problem of The Anonymous Christian", *TI, XIV*, 288-289.

²³¹ Paul Varghese, "A Sacramental humanism," *The Christian Century* (September 23,1970): 1116-1120, accessed May 9, 2019, http://paulosmargregorios.in/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/A_Sacramental_Humanism.pdf.

²³² Karl Rahner, "The One Christ and the Universality of Salvation", *TI, XVI*, 214.

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Ibid.,216. The German term *Ursakrament* has profound theological connotations in Rahner. He uses it to mean Christ, as the primary sacrament and "thus also Church as *Ursakrament*, in that she encompasses all of the sacraments in herself." See: Karl Rahner, "The Sacraments" *TI, IV*,242. The relationship between Christ and his Church is thus also emphasized. This intrinsic relationship (Christ - Church 'ecclesiology') could also mean a lot for theological anthropology (God-man relationship) and offers an interesting analogy.

²³⁵ Karl Rahner, "The One Christ and the Universality of Salvation", *TI, XVI* ,216.

²³⁶ Karl Rahner, "Observations on The Problem of The Anonymous Christian", *TI, XIV*, 281. Rahner enumerates, "A. Roper has made this phrase the title of a book which has appeared in German, English, Italian and Spanish. Klaus Riesenhuber has presented a comprehensive survey on this question. In Japan Hans Waldenfels reacted favourably to my thesis, whereas other European missionaries in the same area took up an emphatically hostile attitude to this thesis of the 'anonymous Christian.' Hans Urs von Balthasar and Henri de Lubac likewise expressed

explains, that there are many who have not been touched explicitly by the Christian message and are outside the social unity of Christian Church. However, their failure to embrace Christianity remains devoid of any personal fault and they stand in a positive relationship to God.²³⁷ As a second point on this subject, Rahner explains, it is an individual who though non- Christian is justified by grace and through a faith, hope and love for God and mankind which are to be qualified as specifically Christian in a special sense.²³⁸

Rahner explains that an anonymous Christian is different from an explicit Christian.²³⁹ He tells us that the idea of the anonymous Christian does not mean that the realities which the anonymous Christian lacks, such as the explicit profession of Christian faith or baptism, are unimportant for salvation.²⁴⁰ According to Rahner, what is more important is,

that the heathen in his polytheism, the atheist in good faith, the theist outside the revelation of the Old and New Testaments, all possess not only a relationship of faith to God's self-revelation, but also a genuine relationship to Jesus Christ and his saving action.²⁴¹

On account of his universal salvific will, God offers every person enough grace to work out his salvation, although its acceptance or rejection remains in his/her absolute freedom. Therefore, as the Gospel pronounces, "So that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous."²⁴² For Rahner salvation remains ever present even outside institutionalised Christianity in the mode of the offer; supernatural grace to a human being's freedom.²⁴³

7. The Supernatural Existential

The term *Supernatural existential* is a synopsis of Rahner's theological anthropology. The supernatural existential is our unexacted or unmerited capacity to receive divine self-communication and the means by which we continue to negotiate the reality of our own

their opposition to it, while E. Schillebeeckx too expressed certain objections to it." See: Karl Rahner, "Observations on The Problem of The Anonymous Christian", *TI, XIV*, 281.

²³⁷ Karl Rahner, "Observations on The Problem of The Anonymous Christian", *TI, XIV*, 283.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*

²³⁹ Karl Rahner, "The One Christ and the Universality of Salvation", *TI, XVI*, 220.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*

²⁴² *Ibid.*

²⁴³ Karl Rahner, "Experience of the Spirit", *TI, XVIII*, 182-183.

existence.²⁴⁴ It means a designation or orientation of human beings to a supernatural end, that is, to salvation in the Christian sense. Rahner, in his intervention in the *nouvelle theologie* debate in 1950, coined the expression “supernatural existential” (*das übernatürliche Existential*).²⁴⁵ The task for Rahner through the idea of the *supernatural existential* was to demonstrate the disposition for grace as constitutive of the human spirit to avoid an extrinsic conception of grace and while also to ensure that the bestowal of grace really and truly fulfilled the human spirit. Rahner’s *Supernatural existential* can be better understood as the orientation towards and offered through the divine self-communication.

Rahner links the *Supernatural existential* to a personal call to direct personal communion with God in Christ:

This means: the person, as we have just outlined him, is called to direct personal communion with God in Christ, perennially and inescapably, whether he accepts the call in redemption and grace or whether he closes himself to it in guilt (by the guilt of original sin and of personal sin).²⁴⁶

Scholastic theology speaks of the capacity of human nature to be raised to the supernatural as an obediential potency.²⁴⁷ We should however be aware not to read into the extrinsicism of 19th century theology, which interpreted obediential potency as meaning the absence of contradiction between nature and grace. Rather the obediential potency means that nature is open to a supernatural existential. The openness which is more than an absence of contradiction is the transcendental condition of the possibility of a truly supernatural life, which is meaningful in its turn only if it is given as a gratuitous grace.²⁴⁸ Thus, it is evident that the supernatural existential belongs to the category of grace, a category more commonly used than understood.²⁴⁹

Interestingly, the supernatural existential is for Rahner related to its personal nature, however all the while remaining a gracious gift.²⁵⁰ God does not confer merely human gifts as a

²⁴⁴ Karl Rahner, “The Supernatural Existential” in G.B Kelly, Ed., *Karl Rahner: Theologian of the Graced Search for Meaning*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992), 110-115.

²⁴⁵ David Coffey, “The Whole Rahner on the Supernatural Existential,” *Theological Studies* 65 (2004): 95.

²⁴⁶ Karl Rahner, “The Dignity and Freedom of Man” *TI, II*, 241.

²⁴⁷ Gelpi, *Life and Light*, 53.

²⁴⁸ Gelpi, *Life and Light*, 53.

²⁴⁹ Michael G. Laker and Todd A. Salzman, “Karl Rahner and Human Nature: Implications for Ethics,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 74 (2009): 390.

²⁵⁰ Karl Rahner, “The Dignity and Freedom of Man” *TI, II*, 241.

token of God's love but communicates God's very self.²⁵¹ Through this communication we are enabled to partake in the very nature of God. There is, moreover, a fundamental structure, a 'supernatural existential', built into humanity by God that orients every person towards receiving God's offer of grace, and yet one must receive this as free gift.²⁵² In this way man exists in nature and 'supernature', which does not mean that it is left to his free choice whether he intends to understand himself as a purely natural person or as a person called to direct communion with God by grace.²⁵³ In the context of Rahner's theology of grace as Marmion clarifies, "this term refers not only to its gratuitous character (supernatural) as a result of God's universal salvific will, but also to a characteristic (existential) of each person's consciousness whereby they are open, or disposed, to the offer of the divine self-communication."²⁵⁴ For Rahner despite the gratuity of God's self-communication in grace, it is in a sense also a human 'existential' that is, an aspect of the human being constituting a person as the event of God's free and forgiving self-communication.²⁵⁵

Rahner tells us that the 'human being is the event of God's absolute self-communication' is an ontological statement.²⁵⁶ He further explains, 'such a statement expresses in words the subject as such, and hence in the depths of his subjectivity, and hence in the depths of his/her transcendental experience.'²⁵⁷ Rahner is clear that the self-communication is also a condition of possibility for its acceptance. God's self-communication as an offer is a necessary condition for the possibility of its acceptance and is fully realised in the acceptance of this divine self-communication.²⁵⁸

8. Oriented towards Mystery and Potential Hearers

Rahner presents the human person as a 'potential hearer of the Word,' 'oriented towards mystery' and possessing a spiritual openness to Divine revelation. And grace is understood at an

²⁵¹ Karl Rahner, 'Grace,' in *Sacramentum Mundi: An Encyclopedia of Theology*, 6 vols. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968 – 70), vol. ii, 415.

²⁵² Marmion, Declan, and van Nieuwenhove, Rik. *An Introduction to the Trinity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 231. Accessed July 28, 2023. ProQuest Ebook Central.

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Marmion & Mary E. Hines, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, xv.

²⁵⁵ Harvey D. Egan, "Theology and Spirituality" in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, 16.

²⁵⁶ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 127.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 126.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 128-129.

experiential level, everywhere as an active orientation, an ‘*a priori* capacity,’ of all created reality towards God. Another significant term used in Rahner’s theological anthropology is *the pre-apprehension of being* in every act of knowing, there is a prior awareness, a co-awareness of God. However, the union of God and man, Rahner warns, should not be reduced to the level of nature, to the level of what is given always and everywhere.²⁵⁹ The truth of a divinised humanity is not just an *a priori* quality, it is the encounter and *self-communication* of God, intended for every person in grace, and which has its highest actualisation in man in the beatific vision.²⁶⁰

At the same time for Rahner, Christology is the beginning and end of anthropology. God became human in Jesus Christ is the beginning of understanding humanity and thus of understanding God.²⁶¹ Rahner explains that ‘our longing for the absolute nearness of God, which is incomprehensible in itself, but which makes it possible for us to endure everything may make us aware that this nearness is not to be found in the claims of the spirit, but in the flesh and here on earth.’ And for Rahner we find this proximity of God in Jesus Christ. He explains,

“In that case, we shall find that proximity of God in no other place but in Jesus of Nazareth, above whom God’s star is placed and before whom we can have the courage to kneel and pray: The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us”.²⁶²

And the Word became flesh and lived among us²⁶³, is the heart of our salvation. As Paulos Gregorios points out, “It is the union of the divine and the human, without loss of the distinction between them, without one changing into the other in such a way that it loses its original identity, that is at the heart of our salvation.”²⁶⁴

Furthermore, let us briefly look into the concept of ‘mystery’ which is central to Christian reflection and is used intermittently also as an attribute of God. Human being is also often referred to as a ‘mystery,’ a mystery of nearness as ‘God chose to become human.’ Rahner explains,

Human being is a mystery. One is more than this. Human being is the mystery, not only because one is open to the mystery of the incomprehensible fullness of God, but also because God has

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 218.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 219.

²⁶¹ Rahner, “On the Theology of the Incarnation”, *TI, IV*, 118.

²⁶² Karl Rahner and Wilhelm Thuesing, *A New Christology* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1980), 17.

²⁶³ John 1:14 (New Revised Standard Version), “And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.”

²⁶⁴ Paulos Gregorios, *A Human God* (Kottayam: MGF, 1992), 66.

expressed this mystery as his own. God's becoming human, then, is the absolute mystery and it is also self-evident.²⁶⁵

The early Christian writers however, also used the term 'mystery' to positively explain the incomprehensibility of God and human limitation. God is incomprehensible in his essence, and we can know God through his grace, although never completely. Gregory of Nyssa aptly conveys the incomprehensibility of God as 'dazzling darkness' in his *The Life of Moses*. Gregory quotes the Psalmist "He made darkness his covering around him" (Psalm 18:11) to expound David's initiation into the mysteries.²⁶⁶

Paulos Gregorios for his part, conceives of God as one who remains incomprehensible in his ultimate nature and mode of being.²⁶⁷ Gregorios explains further, that we know of God as three persons-in-one manifested through the incarnate son, through the Holy Spirit, who love us.²⁶⁸ Rahner for his part, clarifies, while discussing considerations on dogmatic development, that it must also contain a dynamism ending towards the 'blessed darkness of the one mystery of God.'²⁶⁹ He believes that we have been called into the immediacy of the mystery of God through the eternal Word of God,

We have been called into the immediacy of the mystery of God himself and that this mystery gives itself to us in unspeakable nearness. It tells us simply that this nearness has been revealed and consummated as something irrevocable in the Son of Man, who is the presence of the eternal Word of God among us.²⁷⁰

In essence, for Rahner, the human being is mystery, not because he/she is in her/himself the infinite fullness of the mystery which concerns him, which fullness is inexhaustible, but because in her/his real essence, in her/his original ground, in her/his nature s/he is poor, yet nevertheless oriented to this fullness.²⁷¹ Rahner when asked what he means by mystery put it briefly, 'for me,

²⁶⁵ Rahner and Thiising, *A New Christology*, 17.

²⁶⁶ Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, trans. Abraham J. Malherbe and Everett Ferguson (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 95.

²⁶⁷ Paulos Mar Gregorios, "Towards A Basic Document," *The Ecumenical Review* 1 (1989), 189.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Karl Rahner, "Considerations on The Development of Dogma", *TI, IV*, 27.

²⁷⁰ Karl Rahner, "Questions of Fundamental Theology and Theological Method", *TI, V*, 22.

²⁷¹ Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 216.

the mystery consists in being able to grasp rationally that the incomprehensible really exists. This is the highest act of human understanding.²⁷² And furthermore, he explains that,

My reason grasped that it stands before the absolutely incomprehensible mystery. There is, you know, a form of Christian agnosticism, the acknowledgment of the absolute mystery. Doesn't even Paul speak of the *theos agnostos*, the unknown God?²⁷³

According to Rahner, our human existence is indefinable unless it is realized as beings who are oriented towards the God who is incomprehensible, an orientation towards the mystery of fullness.²⁷⁴ The human is also a mystery because God's call has entered the very structure of her created being and has radically relativised her knowledge of herself.²⁷⁵ The human is therefore a mystery because s/he is essentially related to the ever greater mystery which is God in his *self-communication* by means of his word.

For Rahner human beings stand as potential hearers of God's message. In *Hearers of the Word* Rahner reflects on the human being as essentially a potential hearer of a word from God. We are capable of listening to God's message, as such human beings stand open in freedom to a possible revelation of God. Rahner, in *Hearers*, attempts to demonstrate metaphysically how man has this potentiality. What is striking is that this "orientation" does not imply that we have an absolute right to this revelation, "but only that we have a duty to accept it, should it freely and gratuitously be granted to us."²⁷⁶ By way of introduction Rahner discusses the epistemological validation of the potential to hear God's word, as an *a priori* capability in humanity. He discusses the difficulty of epistemological validation in the case of a revelation from God (God's word) and consequently concludes that our listening to it is the only necessary response. In *Hearers* he establishes the human being as the being with the *a priori* capacity to hear a possible revelation of God.²⁷⁷ Consequently, Rahner defines theology as a hearing; hearing the historical word from God as revealed. We are capable of listening to God's message and Rahner refers to

²⁷² Karl Rahner, *Faith in the wintry Season: Conversations and Interviews with Karl Rahner in the Last Years of His Life*, trans. Harvey D. Egan (New York: Crossroad, 1991), 160.

²⁷³ Rahner, *Faith in the wintry Season*, 160.

²⁷⁴ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 217.

²⁷⁵ George Vass, *Mystery of Man, and the Foundations of a Theological system* (Westminster: Christian Classics, 1985), 2.

²⁷⁶ Karl Rahner, *Hearer of the Word*, trans. Joseph Donceel (New York: Continuum, 1994), 14.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

this capability as a potency. It is a potency that has no right to demand its object, but that may be addressed by this object and invited to obey its call.²⁷⁸

Also, Rahner explains that there is an inescapable circle between our horizons of understanding and what is said, heard and understood. These are intertwined and presuppose each other in a human being. And these presuppositions, as Rahner puts it:

are assumed to be inescapably and necessarily present in the ultimate depths of human existence. The Christian message itself creates these presuppositions by its call. It summons the human being before the real truth of his being.²⁷⁹

The message summons the human being before the truth in which one is inescapably caught, although this prison²⁸⁰, Rahner clarifies, is ultimately the infinite expanse of the incomprehensible mystery of God.²⁸¹ In Rahner's view, "humanity is the infinity of the absolute spiritual openness for being. An infinity which is the Mystery of God, the infinite expanse."²⁸² Rahner explains this spiritual openness of humanity as part of our everyday life,

To be human is to be spirit (*Der Mensch ist Geist*), i.e., to live life while reaching ceaselessly for the absolute, in openness toward God. And this openness toward God is not something that may happen or not happen to us once in a while, as we please. It is the condition of the possibility of what we are and have to be and always also are in our most humdrum daily life. Only that makes us human: that we are always already on the way to God, whether or not we know it expressly, whether or not we will it.²⁸³

The encounter of transcendence happens according to Rahner in the experiences of daily life, explicitly or inexplicitly. And this is what makes us human. We have been created with the orientation towards mystery to encounter or hear the message in everyday experiences.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.,16.

²⁷⁹ Karl Rahner, "The Hearer of the Message", in *Foundations of Christian Faith*, trans. William V. Dych (New York: Crossroad, 1997), 24.

²⁸⁰ Ibid.,24. The *prison* motif is employed by Rahner variously throughout his writings. Prison in philosophical writings is equated to confinement, both physical and spiritual. Interestingly, in the above context, Rahner refers to prison as the inescapable bond between humanity and the gracious mystery of God. Elsewhere, it is used to denote, 'the prison of the world' (Rahner, 'The Penitential Teaching of Origen', *TI, XV, 279*), 'Prison wall of her/his selfishness' (Rahner, "Life in the Church", *TI, XIX, 150*) or 'prison of egoism' (Rahner, "Grace and World", *TI, XVIII, 271*). Thus, it can be understood from various usages of the term 'prison,' that in Rahner the word largely denotes the human finitude or limitation of human nature and also highlighting the incomprehensibility of God. See also, 'we are buried in the *prison* of our own finitude' (Karl Rahner, "Experiences of a Catholic theologian", in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, 302.).

²⁸¹ Rahner, *Hearer of the Word*,24

²⁸² Ibid., 56.

²⁸³ Ibid., 53.

9. Conclusion

Grace is a gratuitous gift from God for humanity and is not in any way owed to humanity. However, grace is in the form of a potential present in humanity and needs to be acted upon in love and as real partners. In the introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, Declan Marmion and Mary E. Hines identifies that in Rahner the centre is always God who enters into relationship with the human being through self-communication, which is also Rahner's primary understanding of grace.²⁸⁴ For Rahner humanity's grace is its openness to the real goal, a potential present through grace. This openness is a God-given capacity for a divine self-communication in free grace.²⁸⁵

Rahner is clear that the natural (nature) and supernatural (Grace) are distinct in the human, but not easily distinguishable by human investigation. Grace is fundamental to human existence and is not just a dust jacket that wears out or is decoratively put over human nature.²⁸⁶ Nonetheless, its disposition cannot be conceived of as belonging to human nature. Also, it belongs to nature as far as it is a gift and does not automatically qualify humanity to reach its end goal.²⁸⁷ The distinction between nature and grace does not imply that nature is related to grace as that which is humanly intrinsic to that which is extrinsic.

As Stephen J. Duffy explains,

For Rahner, simply to view human openness, the obediential potency for grace, as more than a mere nonrepugnance, but as a yearning or velleity for God, is not sufficient. Rahner sees the openness as a conditioned orientation to grace, a natural existential. It is this transcendental orientation of humanity as such that provides the point of insertion for the supernatural existential of historical humanity.²⁸⁸

Human nature is a *graced nature* for Rahner. Moreover, grace for Rahner is part of being transcendental existential, or 'supernatural existential.' Thus, human beings are graced beings. The experience of grace is related to Rahner's understanding of the transcendental orientation of

²⁸⁴ Marmion & Mary E. Hines, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, 5.

²⁸⁵ Karl Rahner & Herbert Vorgrimler, 'Nature and Grace' in *Theological Dictionary*, 308.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 307.

²⁸⁸ Duffy, *The Graced Horizon Nature and Grace in Modern Catholic Thought*, 91.

the human person to God. It is apparent that such an orientation leads to an endless search for meaning, culminating in a being drawn towards holy mystery.²⁸⁹

Here it also seems important to bring Rahner into serious conversation with Gregory of Nyssa wherein human nature is understood as a compound nature. Human nature is to be understood as compound nature and ordained to grace, as a *potentia oboedientialis*. Rahner is clear that the analysis of man as *potentia oboedientialis* is not a chemically pure presentation of pure nature but is mixed up with trace elements from actual nature, and hence from its state of grace.²⁹⁰

For Rahner, the world is permeated by the grace of God.²⁹¹ The entire world is engulfed with the inescapable grace available by free choice. He believes Christ's saving love is universal and savior of whole humankind,

Christ's love is for all humankind, not just for Christians. It is for the whole of humanity that he has died, not just for Christians alone. He lives for the human race, and he is the lover and Saviour, as well as Lord, of the whole race of humankind.²⁹²

He likewise believes that what God has done in Christ has consequences for all people.²⁹³ Gregorios borrows the term 'supernatural grace' to convey that all people, Christians, and non-Christians, are in the realm of "supernatural grace" stemming from the incarnation. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ make a difference for the history of the world and the destiny of humankind.²⁹⁴

Paulos Gregorios too points out that when a human being surrenders himself to God's love and is united with him by grace then,

Man (human) penetrates entirely into God, and becomes God, without losing his identity as man. In Christ, God has become man and man has become God. Through ecstatic love, this union of God and man in Christ is realized again and again in human experience. Here concepts and thoughts must give place to 'mystical union.'²⁹⁵

²⁸⁹ Declan Marmion, "The Notion of Spirituality in Karl Rahner", *Louvain Studies* 21 (1996): 62.

²⁹⁰ Karl Rahner, "Nature and Grace", *TI, IV*, 188.

²⁹¹ Karl Rahner, "Considerations on The Active Role of The Person in The Sacramental Event", *TI, XIV*, 167.

²⁹² Gregorios, *Love's Freedom the Grand Mystery*, 196.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, 176.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁵ Paulos Gregorios, *The Human Presence: An Orthodox View of Nature* (Madras: CLS, 1980), 78. Bishop Paulos Gregorios also uses the Greek term *Perichoresis* (*mutual interpenetration*) elsewhere.

However, Gregorios as we have noted already speaks about a *diastema* (chasm) between the creator and his creation which remains but is bridged by an act of mutual love sustained by God's grace and the responding free will of humanity.²⁹⁶ Rahner also believed that in the vision of God²⁹⁷ face to face which grace makes possible, many mysteries are indeed bridged.²⁹⁸ The union is achieved through grace and the act of the human will yearning after God. This union with God through self-communication in grace is every so often referred to as the beatific vision or theosis, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

In summary, in Rahner's own words: 'Grace is therefore the grace of the nearness of the abiding mystery.'²⁹⁹ Therefore, this grace makes God accessible for humanity in the form of holy mystery and elevates humanity through God's own self-communication.

²⁹⁶ Gregorios, *The Human Presence*, 78.

²⁹⁷ Which can alternatively be understood as 'beatific vision.'

²⁹⁸ Rahner "The Concept of Mystery in Catholic Theology", *TI, IV*, 57.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

CHAPTER THREE

THE DIVINE PRESENCE

3. INTRODUCTION

“Man know thyself!” taking up the great maxim, the Church transformed and deepened it, so that what has been chiefly a piece of moral advice became an exhortation to form a metaphysical judgment.³⁰⁰ ‘Know yourself’, said the Church, that is to say, know your nobility and your dignity, understand the greatness of your being and your vocation, of that vocation which constitutes your being.³⁰¹ Across nations, religions, cultures, and time, human beings have been constantly, seeking and yearning for knowledge that constitutes own being, a yearning beyond their own selves. This desire or longing takes us outside of ourselves and opens up the possibility of a transcendental ‘interiority’ of man, uniting him with God. As Rahner suggests “one’s irresistible yearning for God”³⁰² and “for the immediate possession of God in the depths of the essence.”³⁰³

‘The Glory of God is the Glory of Humanity’ wrote Paulos Mar Gregorios, and that one of the tragedies of Christian thought has been the inclination to denigrate and denounce humanity as sinful, supposedly in order to magnify God’s glory. Gregorios explains;

Some people think that the more we affirm the sinfulness of human persons, the more we glorify God...Sinfulness is not the definition of a human person created in the image of God. Whenever that dignity and worth of the human being is affirmed (not vis-à-vis the non-human creation, but in harmonious and creative relationship with the rest of creation) there God is glorified. The glory of God is to be manifested in the glory of humanity. The two are not opposed to each other. That is the whole point of the Incarnation.³⁰⁴

The dualism between nature (which is understood as purely human) and grace (understood as Divine) is more a distinction than a separation. The incarnation unmask the potential for humanity, and as St. Athanasius put it, ‘Αυτός γὰρ ἐνηθρώπησεν, ἵνα ἡμεῖς θεοποιηθῶμεν’

³⁰⁰ Henri De Lubac, *The Drama of Atheist Humanism* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983),19.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*,20.

³⁰² Karl Rahner, “Conscience Freedom and The Dignity of Human Decision”, *TI, XXII*, 13.

³⁰³ Karl Rahner, “Concerning the Relationship Between Nature and Grace”, *TI, I*, 304.

³⁰⁴ Paulos Mar Gregorios, “Human Unity for the Glory of God”, *The Ecumenical Review*, Volume 37(1985), Issue2, 206-212.

“For the Son of God became man so that we might become God”.³⁰⁵ The catechism of the Catholic Church describes the divine partaking of humanity citing from the Church Fathers;

The Word became flesh to make us "*partakers of the divine nature*"(2 Pt 1:4): "For this is why the Word became man, and the Son of God became the Son of man: so that man, by entering into communion with the Word and thus receiving divine sonship, might become a son of God" (St. Irenaeus, *Adv. haeres.* 3, 19, 1: PG 7/1, 939), "For the Son of God became man so that we might become God." (St. Athanasius, *De inc.* 54, 3: PG 25, 192B), "The only begotten Son of God, wanting to make us sharers in his divinity, assumed our nature, so that he, made man, might make men gods."(St. Thomas Aquinas, *Opusc.* 57, 1-4).³⁰⁶

Rahner refers to the Trinity, Incarnation and Grace as the three mysteries in Christianity.³⁰⁷ He explains that “God has imparted himself to us through Jesus Christ in his Spirit as he is in himself so that the inexpressible nameless mystery which reigns in us and over us should be in itself the immediate blessedness of the spirit which knows and transforms itself into love.”³⁰⁸

4. INTRINSIC GRACE

The dialectic between Nature and Grace is probably the most important debate in theological anthropology. The division of nature and grace forms the basis of epistemology, metaphysics, philosophy, cultures etc. Karl Rahner had been vociferously critical of defining grace as something extrinsic. We have already discussed in the last chapter how Rahner criticises the teaching about human nature as ‘sharply circumscribed’³⁰⁹ and of grace as a ‘superstructure lying beyond the range of experience imposed upon human nature’.³¹⁰ Here, we shall largely concentrate on the *Nature* aspect to give it a more ‘from below’(anthropological) approach.³¹¹

Paulos Gregorios, while interpreting Gregory of Nyssa’s doctrine of grace, also criticizes the average perspective which considers human nature as a self-sufficient and self-contained unit with its own laws, and into which grace has to ‘intervene’ from outside.³¹² Gregorios writes, ‘For

³⁰⁵ Athanasius, *De Incarnatione* 54.3, Robert W. Thomson ed. & trans., (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1971),124.

³⁰⁶ “Catechism of the Catholic Church”. Accessed February 26, 2020, https://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p122a3p1.htm

³⁰⁷ Karl Rahner, “The Concept of Mystery in Catholic Theology”, *TI, IV* ,66-72.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 73-74.

³⁰⁹ Karl Rahner, “Concerning the Relationship Between Nature and Grace”, *TI, I*, 299.

³¹⁰ Karl Rahner, “Concerning the Relationship Between Nature and Grace”, *TI, I*, 300.

³¹¹ Declan Marmion, “Karl Rahner, Vatican II, and the Shape of the Church,” *Theological Studies* 78 (2017), 34. Prof. Declan writes, “Rahner favored instead an inductive (“from below”) methodology, moving from anthropology to Christology.”

³¹² Paulos Gregorios, *Cosmic Man* (New Delhi: Sophia Publications, 1980), 129.

Gregory all is grace. There is no nature apart from or outside of grace.’³¹³ He goes on to describe the division between nature and grace as a ‘false distinction,’ ‘as if nature itself was not a gift of grace.’³¹⁴

In Neo Scholasticism, the natural order is to be added with a separate order of grace as a superstructure.³¹⁵ The Neo-scholastics thought there was a fundamental distinction to be made between the order of nature and the order of grace. Nature is a created order (human reason), which can be achieved its by own natural powers. It is insufficient for salvation as well as insufficient for the knowledge of God. And to this natural order should be added, a separate order of grace. Neo Scholasticism portrayed grace as a *superadditum*, added to the powers of nature, and in some explications quite extrinsic to the interiority of the human being.³¹⁶

Grace was understood to be super added to orient human beings to the vision of God or a supernatural end. However, in context of world wars, and including the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), ressourcement theologians³¹⁷ like Marie-Dominique Chenu, Henri De Lubac and several other French theologians had a massive effect on the 20th Catholic theology of nature and grace.³¹⁸ This was a drastic change from what had prevailed in late 19th century of Neo-Scholasticism. The ressourcement theologians led a movement of going back to the sources, the primary texts.³¹⁹

For de Lubac, the “two-storied thinking” that had bedeviled Catholic theology for centuries, with the implication that “the supernatural order of grace is abruptly added on to the natural order, without the possibility of demonstrating any intrinsic coordination of the two

³¹³ Ibid., 130.

³¹⁴ Ibid., 147.

³¹⁵ Karl Rahner, “Concerning the Relationship Between Nature and Grace”, *TI, I*, 299-300. See also: Karl Rahner, *Nature, and Grace Dilemmas in The Modern Church* (New York: Sheed and Ward ,1964),115-117.

³¹⁶ David Fergusson, ed., *The Blackwell Companion to Nineteenth-Century Theology* (U.K: Blackwell Publishing, 2010), 389.

³¹⁷ Ressourcement theology (also known as *la nouvelle théologie*) is the name given to the work of several French theologians, who were active from the interwar period until and including the second Vatican Council (1962-65). These Scholars - including Marie-Dominique Chenu (1895-1990) and Yves Congar (1904-1995), Henri de Lubac (1896-1991), Jean Danielou (1905-1974) and Henri Bouillard (1908-1981) were prominent, who sought to ‘refresh’ Catholic theology by retrieving or returning to the sources of theology. See: Patricia Kelly, ed., *Ressourcement Theology: A Sourcebook*, (New York: T&T Clark, 2021),1.

³¹⁸ Patricia Kelly, ed., *Ressourcement Theology: A Sourcebook* (New York: T&T Clark, 2021),1.

³¹⁹ Ibid.,1-3.

levels,” was resolved at last by a unitary theological solution.³²⁰ In other words, the classic dualism between Grace and Nature is overcome by speaking of the one final end of man which is God.³²¹ They are not separate realms. Although there exists a distinction but never a separation (division) in Nature and Grace. It would be appropriate to borrow these words of Rahner spoken in another context to explain the dialectic of nature and grace,

...existing side by side with one another, but are present as mutually complementary...They are, in their relationship to one another, not one and the same, and yet at the same time they are inconceivable in isolation from one another.³²²

Karl Rahner criticizes the average text-book conception of the relationship between nature and grace, with a circumscribed human nature. Rahner writes, ‘grace appears there as a mere superstructure, very fine in itself certainly, which is imposed upon nature by God’s free decree’.³²³ Rahner comments that this extremism has been current in the average teaching on grace in the last few centuries.³²⁴ As Stephen J. Duffy put it succinctly, “Rahner dismantled this two-storied world and exorcised the dualism bedeviling Catholic life and thought by constructing a theology of nature and grace that related the two as a unity in distinction.”³²⁵

2.1 Created and Uncreated Grace

The debate about understanding grace and its categories is a daunting task for systematic theology. Rahner engages in this dialectic between created³²⁶ and uncreated grace³²⁷, the question of primacy between the two, and the essence of divinization etc. For Rahner the primary meaning of grace is uncreated grace (*gratia increata*): an act of God’s love, God’s universal

³²⁰ Robert L. Fastiggi, ed., “Ressourcement Theology” *New Catholic Encyclopedia Supplement* (vol. 2, 2010): 950-953, accessed 5 Mar. 2021, *Gale eBooks*, link.gale.com/apps/doc/CX1388100449/GVRL?u=nuim&sid=GVRL&xid=18ec2c55.

³²¹ *Ibid.*, 952. See also, Karl Rahner, “Observations on The Problem of The Anonymous Christian”, *TI, XIV*, 291. This grace-given elevation of the transcendental of man, i.e., the orientation of this to the immediacy of God as its final end, gives reality to the concept of revelation already at the stage of an a priori awareness.

³²² Karl Rahner, “Theological Observations on The Concept of Witness”, *TI, XIII*, 165. Here Rahner refers to the social and individual aspect of human being while evaluating the Theological concept of witness.

³²³ Karl Rahner, “Concerning the Relationship Between Nature and Grace”, *TI, I*, 299.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*

³²⁵ Stephen J. Duffy, “Experience of Grace” in Marmion and Hines, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 46.

³²⁶ Supernatural gifts given by God beyond the natural capacity of human beings. Created grace is the result of God’s free self-communication in Word and Spirit and is available to all persons.

³²⁷ The very life of the Triune God, given as divine self-communication. Uncreated grace (*gratia increata*) is participation in God.

salvific will and his revelation in Christ.³²⁸ He is clear that grace should not be conceived extrinsically and believes that grace forms part of the inner most core of human existence.³²⁹

According to Rahner grace is at the same time very much part of the innermost core of human existence and an offer given to human beings which can either be accepted or rejected.³³⁰ Rahner while summing up transcendental anthropology as decisive in his theology explains:

At least at one time, grace, assisting grace, and the outward circumstances shaped by God's grace in human life were conceived extrinsically, as discrete realities that occurred now and then, and which could be lacking completely in the sinner or the unbeliever. My basic theological conviction, if you will, is in opposition to this. What we call grace is obviously a reality which is God-given, unmerited, free, dialogical-in other words-supernatural.³³¹

Further, for Rahner grace is the innermost core of human existence and given as an offer which is transcendently peculiar; He writes,

But for me grace is at the same time a reality which is so very much a part of the innermost core of human existence in decision and freedom, always and above all given in the form of an offer that is either accepted or rejected, that the human being cannot step out of this transcendental peculiarity of his being at all. From this conviction, then, first arose what I call "anonymous Christianity" and the fact that I consider no religion-it is immaterial which one-ungraced, although this grace may be suppressed, or expressed in a depraved way.³³²

Grace is "the innermost and enduring deification of the world" and "the ground of an ultimate unity of mankind in itself and with God;" because grace is primarily God's personal presence: "God communicates himself to man in his own proper reality. That is the mystery and the fullness of grace."³³³

Uncreated grace (i.e., God as bestowing himself upon man) as understood in scholastic speculation was a function of created grace.³³⁴ And uncreated grace (God's communication of himself to man, the indwelling of the Spirit) implies a new relation of God to man. But this can

³²⁸ Karl Rahner, "The Meaning of Frequent Confession of Devotion", *TI, III*, 185. Grace is primarily God's free, creative act, his work the act of his love, more than ours. See Also, Karl Rahner, "Reflections on The Unity of The Love of Neighbor and The Love of God", *TI, VI*, 243- 244.

³²⁹ Karl Rahner, "Faith and Sacrament", *TI, XXIII*, 186. See also: Karl Rahner, *Faith in the wintry Season: Conversations and Interviews with Karl Rahner in the Last Years of His Life*, trans. Harvey D. Egan (New York: Crossroad, 1991), 21.

³³⁰ Karl Rahner, "The Act of Faith and The Content of Faith", *TI, XXI*, 157.

³³¹ Rahner, *Faith in a Wintry Season*, 21.

³³² Ibid.

³³³ Karl Rahner, " The Doctrine of Grace ", *TI, IV*, 176.

³³⁴ Karl Rahner, "Some Implications of The Scholastic Concept of Uncreated Grace", *TI, I*, 325.

only be conceived as founded upon an absolute entitative modification of man himself, the modification is the real basis of the new real relation of man to God upon which rests the relation of God to man.³³⁵ This entitative modification is created grace.

In Thomas Aquinas we can see the understanding and distinction of grace as both created and uncreated. Aquinas uses terms like “grace of divine help” “gratuitous grace (gratia gratis data)” to describe Grace.³³⁶ Further, he explains grace concisely in the early *Sentences* commentary:

Grace, however, it is signified, shows that there is something created in the soul, which is freely given; and nevertheless, by the term ‘grace’ can also be signified something uncreated. For example, divine acceptance, or, in addition, the uncreated gift, which is the Holy Spirit, can also be called ‘grace.’³³⁷

Aquinas highlights three senses of grace, grace as created in the soul, as a divine acceptance and as uncreated gift and the last two can be identified as instances of uncreated grace.³³⁸ However, the created quality in soul for Aquinas, as Richard Cross explains, must be ‘intrinsic but not natural.’ Cross writes,

Aquinas in *De veritate* argues in a very similar way. If a person is to be accepted by God to eternal life, there must be something intrinsic to the person in virtue of which they are acceptable. But this cannot be anything natural to the person: it must be something specially created in them by God—it must be something ‘created’ that is ‘a likeness of divine goodness.’ This feature must be an accident of the soul, a habit or disposition falling under the category of quality.³³⁹

The rise of Protestantism in the 16th century catalyzed the concept of extrinsic grace and interestingly, the Council of Trent (1545 to 1563) in a strong reaction against the extrinsic imputation theories deriving from Protestantism insisted upon the reality of created grace as an effect of God's causal love.³⁴⁰ It is also important to understand Rahner's works on Grace and

³³⁵ Ibid., 325.

³³⁶ Brian Davies, *Thomas Aquinas's Summa Contra Gentiles A Guide and Commentary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 288-289. See also: Mary T. Clark, ed. *An Aquinas Reader: Selections from the writings of Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1988), 447.

³³⁷ Aquinas, “Scriptum super Sententiis II, d. 26, q. 1, a. 1 c”, cited in Richard Cross, “Deification in Aquinas: Created or Uncreated”, *The Journal of Theological Studies*, 69 (April 2018), 108.

³³⁸ Ibid.

³³⁹ Ibid., 109-110.

³⁴⁰ William J. Hill, “Uncreated Grace—A Critique of Karl Rahner”, *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review*, 27(1963), 334.

Nature in the context of the scholastic problems of Post-Tridentine systematics.³⁴¹ Rahner develops the theology of grace and repentance in terms of their inner dynamics especially in view of contemporary questions. Interestingly, his first teaching course in theology was on *De Gratia Christi*.³⁴²

In contrast to the earlier teachings, the primary meaning of grace for Rahner is not created grace (*gratia creata*) but uncreated grace (*gratia increata*): God's universal salvific will and his revelation in Christ.³⁴³ Rahner believes that uncreated grace takes the primacy,

Thus, it becomes clear that the proposition no longer holds good which maintains that man has uncreated grace because he possesses created grace; on the contrary, with Scripture and the fathers the communication of uncreated grace can be conceived of under a certain respect as logically and really prior to created grace: in that mode namely in which a formal cause is prior to the ultimate material disposition.³⁴⁴

Rahner further makes it clear that his intentions are not to contest the scholastic speculations or concept of created grace, rather he wants to 'make available a more adequate appreciation of the nature of uncreated grace.'³⁴⁵

God communicates himself to the man to whom grace has been shown in the mode of formal causality, so that this communication is not then merely the consequence of an efficient causation of created grace.³⁴⁶ For Rahner grace is not efficient cause but 'quasi-formal' causality.³⁴⁷ God communicates himself to the finite entity in quasi-formal causality.³⁴⁸ Rahner explains that in the doctrine of Grace "the central element is the uncreated grace, which is the immediate self-communication of God in quasi-formal causality in contrast to an efficient causality."³⁴⁹ Thus it becomes clear that the proposition no longer holds good which maintains

³⁴¹ Roman A. Siebenrock, "Gratia Christi: The Heart of the Theology of Karl Rahner", *The Realms of Insight: Bernard Lonergan and Philosophy*, October-December (2007),1264.

³⁴² *Ibid.*,1264.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*,1265.

³⁴⁴ Karl Rahner, "Some Implications of The Scholastic Concept of Uncreated Grace", *TI, I*, 335.

³⁴⁵ Karl Rahner, "Some Implications of The Scholastic Concept of Uncreated Grace", *TI, I*, 326.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*,335.

³⁴⁷ Karl Rahner, "Some Implications of The Scholastic Concept of Uncreated Grace", *TI, I*, 335. Aristotle defined four causes: material (the matter of something) efficient (that which produces something), final (the purpose of something), formal (that which makes something to be what it is, the kind of being that it is). Since divine grace cannot be a formal cause within the human person (this would make the human divine), nor is grace merely extrinsic (efficient) to the human person, Rahner qualifies formal causality with "quasi" to express that God's grace is both fully given and fully efficacious in the human person.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*,335.

³⁴⁹ Karl Rahner, "The Concept of Mystery in Catholic Theology", *TI, IV*, 67.

that man has uncreated grace because he possesses created grace; on the contrary, with Scripture and the Fathers the communication of uncreated grace can be conceived of under a certain respect as logically and really prior to created grace: in that mode namely in which a formal cause is prior to the ultimate material disposition.³⁵⁰

2.2 Scripture and Patristic Sources

The background for Rahner's understanding of uncreated grace is based on the primary sources of revelation, the Scriptures and the early Church Fathers.³⁵¹ In St. Paul, Rahner explains that 'human's inner sanctification is first and foremost a communication of the personal Spirit of God³⁵² and as such understands every created grace, every way of being *numatikos*, consequently and a manifestation of the possession of this uncreated grace.³⁵³ Thus, for St. Paul we possess our pneumatic being (our 'created sanctifying grace') because we have the personal Pnuma of God.³⁵⁴ The same indication is to be found in St. John, although less explicitly. However, as Rahner states, 'nevertheless God's own indwelling is not forgotten'.³⁵⁵ As for the Fathers, especially the Greek Fathers, they see the created gifts of grace as a consequence of God's substantial communication to justified men."³⁵⁶ Rahner explores further the scriptures and the Patristic sources before reaching a conclusion that;

with Scripture and the Fathers, the communication of uncreated grace can be conceived of under a certain respect as logically and really prior to created grace: in that mode namely in which a formal cause is prior to the ultimate material disposition.³⁵⁷

Thus, it is clear the scripture and Patristic tradition are agreed that the justification of man involves two elements: the communication of the Spirit, and an inner quality inhering in the soul

³⁵⁰ Karl Rahner, "Some Implications of The Scholastic Concept of Uncreated Grace", *TI, I*, 336.

³⁵¹ Karl Rahner, "Some Implications of The Scholastic Concept of Uncreated Grace", *TI, I*, 321-324.

³⁵² Pnuma is given to us, and dwells in us. The 'Spirit' is given to us, is (dwells) in us (Rom 5:5; 8:9.11.15.23; 1 Cor 2:12; 3:16; 6:19; 2 Cor 3:3; 5:5; Gal 3:2.5; 4:6; 1 Thess 4:8; 2 Tim 1:14; Tit 3:5; Heb 6:4), as in a temple (1 Cor 3:16 s.; 2 Cor 6: 16). See, Karl Rahner, "Some Implications of The Scholastic Concept of Uncreated Grace", *TI, I*, 321.

³⁵³ Hill, "Uncreated Grace—A Critique of Karl Rahner", 336.

³⁵⁴ Karl Rahner, "Some Implications of The Scholastic Concept of Uncreated Grace", *TI, I*, 323.

³⁵⁵ Christ is (abides) in us (Jn 6:56; 14:20; 15:5; 17:26; 1 Jn 3:24), the Father and the Son make their dwelling in us (Jn 14:23), God is in us (1 Jn 4:4; 4:12 s.15), the Spirit is given to us and is in us (Jn 14:16 s.; 1 Jn 3:24; 4:13). See, Karl Rahner, "Some Implications of The Scholastic Concept of Uncreated Grace", *TI, I*, 323.

³⁵⁶ Ibid. See also, Hill, "Uncreated Grace—A Critique of Karl Rahner", 336-337.

³⁵⁷ Hill, "Uncreated Grace—A Critique of Karl Rahner", 335.

and effecting a transformation of the justified. But the latter as a consequence of the former, and as fulfilling a secondary role in the sanctification of man.³⁵⁸

Interestingly, in the Eastern theology there is not any emphasis on such a distinction of grace; rather, the emphasis is on the gratuitousness of grace and on the movement of human beings to theosis.³⁵⁹ Paulos Mar Gregorios highlights that ‘the that the idea of enclosing man within a clearly defined “nature of man”, so that what is “super-natural” falls outside the nature of man, would be unacceptable to Gregory (Gregory of Nyssa) or to other Eastern Fathers.’³⁶⁰

2.3 Pure nature and *Potentia oboedientialis*

Rahner affirms that the concept of pure nature is legitimate,³⁶¹ but one can never find nature, in a ‘chemically pure’ state, separated from its supernatural existential.³⁶² ‘Pure nature’ is real to the extent of understanding the unexactedness of grace which goes together with man’s inner, unconditional ordination to it.³⁶³ ‘Pure nature,’ according to Rahner, is the necessary background against which one recognises that the beatific vision is a gratuitous grace, not merely due to man as a sinner, but not due to man even as a creature.³⁶⁴ Rahner clarifies the concept of pure nature further by stating an example,

If someone affirms, I experience myself as a being which is absolutely ordained for the immediate possession of God, his statement need not be false. He will only be mistaken if he maintains that this unconditional longing is an essential element of ‘pure’ nature, or if he says that such pure nature, which does not exist, *could* not exist.³⁶⁵

According to Rahner for human beings the experience of *visio beatifica* by the word of revelation and experienced as the marvel of free love of God in our longing for it, still remains

³⁵⁸ Ibid.,336.

³⁵⁹ Church fathers like Clement of Alexandria and Gregory of Nyssa speak of the gradual ascent and Christian perfection allegorically through examples of Abraham and Moses. Interestingly, for Clement the ideal man, freedom from passions, *autarkia*, *apatheia*, are all primarily a divine attribute and these are brought about fundamentally by the operation of Grace. Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004),135. See also, “The writings of Clement of Alexandria,” Vol. I. Translated by William Wilson in Ante-Nicene Christian Library, edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1869), 270-275. Peter Karavites, *Evil, Freedom, the Road to Perfection in Clement of Alexandria* (Netherlands: Brill, 1999), 178-180.

³⁶⁰ Gregorios, *Cosmic Man*, 40.

³⁶¹ Karl Rahner, “‘Nature and Grace’”, *TI, IV*,186.

³⁶² Karl Rahner, “‘Concerning the Relationship Between Nature and Grace’”, *TI, I*, 316.

³⁶³ Ibid.

³⁶⁴ Karl Rahner, “‘Nature and Grace’”, *TI, IV*, 186.

³⁶⁵Ibid.

not due to us (by nature).³⁶⁶ Human nature is ordained to grace, as a *potentia oboedientialis*. Human being is only really known in ‘indefinable’ essence when s/he is understood as *potentia oboedientialis* for the divine life and when this is his nature.³⁶⁷ Our nature is such that it must look to grace for its absolute fulfilment, and hence, in regard to itself, it must reckon with a non-frustrating absence of an absolute fulfilment.³⁶⁸ Rahner sums up that the analysis of humanity as *potentia oboedientialis* is not a ‘chemically pure’ presentation of pure nature but is mixed up with trace elements from actual nature, and hence from its state of grace.³⁶⁹

3 GOD-HUMAN: A DIVINE PARTNERSHIP

According to Rahner, human beings have a ‘supernatural partnership’ by grace with God.³⁷⁰ However, Rahner makes it also clear that this dialogue or partnership is unique and unparalleled.³⁷¹ Gregorios too describes the God-Human relationship as “a mysterious communication of God’s own being.” Furthermore, he quotes Gregory of Nyssa to explain that “God has made us not merely spectators of Divine power, but participants in His nature”.³⁷²

Rahner explains that in this partnership, ‘God is not just the partner who stands opposite a human being.’³⁷³ Rahner writes;

God himself initiates an absolute intercommunication between himself and man, i.e., in absolute self-communication which we call ‘grace’ giving himself in a direct partnership and intimacy, and not only showing himself to be the radically unapproachable Distant One, separating himself from the creature, the ‘other.’³⁷⁴

The experience of the relationship of grace between God and man, which springs from God’s self-communication is a self-giving into man’s real existence.³⁷⁵ Man is loved in God, and God

³⁶⁶Ibid.

³⁶⁷ Ibid.,187.

³⁶⁸ Ibid.

³⁶⁹ Karl Rahner, “Nature and Grace”, *TI, IV*,188.

³⁷⁰ Karl Rahner, “Guilt - Responsibility! Punishment within the view of Catholic Theology”, *TI, VI*, 199. See also, Karl Rahner, “The Christian Understanding of Redemption”, *TI, XXI*, 242. and Karl Rahner, “Dialogue with God”, *TI, XVIII*, 129.

³⁷¹ Ibid., See also, ‘God enters into relationship with the human being through self-communication,’ in Marmion & Mary E. Hines, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 5.

³⁷² Gregorios, *Cosmic Man*, 48.

³⁷³ Karl Rahner, “The Christian Understanding of Redemption”, *TI, XXI*, 241-242.

³⁷⁴ Karl Rahner, “One Mediator and Many Mediations”, *TI, IX*, 179.

³⁷⁵ Ibid.

in man.³⁷⁶ And our natures are so structured that if God chooses to offer us grace, the reception of this offer will be a truly human event, a gift that does not violate the Thomistic axiom, *gratia non tollit naturam sed perficit*. As spirit, "a supernatural end can be set for man without annulling his nature."³⁷⁷

Rahner describes the Catholic doctrine of grace and God-Human relationship as a divine partnership.³⁷⁸ He insists that, 'God is not just the partner who stands opposite a human being'³⁷⁹ but rather shares own self, giving himself in a direct partnership and intimacy.³⁸⁰ For Rahner, God creates human beings both as possibility and concrete realization. He continues,

God is, rather, the one who creates human beings as well as their freedom, both as possibility and as concrete realization despite all the genuine freedom human beings have and despite the relationship which this implies, and which can be viewed as one of partnership. And it is this God who by his free and absolute act of grace makes it possible for human beings to redeem themselves, so to speak.³⁸¹

Francis J. Caponi writes, created for partnership with the divine, humanity in its created aspect participates in the divine by existing as a hypaethral race, a creature of spirit, a being whose essence is "obediential potency," a natural receptivity to grace.

Paulos Gregorios also discusses humanity's two basic relationships- to the source and ground of its being on one hand, and to the created world in which humanity is placed on the other. These two relationships, according to Gregorios, are inseparable from each other. Man, and world cannot be understood as two separate realities. Yet, it is equally disastrous to understand God as only concerned about our souls and has no relationship to the creation.³⁸² Oscillating between extremes is fatal according to Paulos Gregorios, on the one hand, an other-worldly mysticism that ignores the reality and significance of humanity's sinful existence in history, and

³⁷⁶ Ibid. See also, Karl Rahner, "Reflections on the unity of the love of neighbor and the love of God", *TI VI* (London and Baltimore, 1969), 231-249.

³⁷⁷ Francis J. Caponi, "Karl Rahner: Divinization in Roman Catholicism" in Michael J. Christensen and Jeffery A. Wittung eds., *Partakers of the Divine Nature the History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions* (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2007), 263.

³⁷⁸ Karl Rahner, "The Christian Understanding of Redemption", *TI, XXI*, 242.

³⁷⁹ Ibid., 242.

³⁸⁰ Karl Rahner, "One Mediator and Many Mediations", *TI, IX*, 179.

³⁸¹ Karl Rahner, "The Christian Understanding of Redemption", *TI, XXI*, 242.

³⁸² Gregorios, *Cosmic Man*, viii.

on the other, a secular humanism that ignores the ground and source of the being of ourselves and the cosmos.³⁸³

Catholic theology holds as a matter of faith that creation is good.³⁸⁴ The created order is often understood as a symbolic and sacramental order. An order which can be understood, and which is indicative of the creator. For Nicholas of Cusa (1401-64), the world is no more 'for us' than God himself is 'for us' since it is the manifestation of God's very self. He understands the natural world, including human beings, as fundamentally oriented towards God because of divine immanence.³⁸⁵ Similar understandings of continuity between humanity and the natural world are found in Eastern Christian theologians such as Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus the Confessor.³⁸⁶

Rahner's vision of the God- world relationship is centered in his theology of grace. Grace is primarily understood as the offer of God's own life to humanity³⁸⁷, an offer which promises fulfillment to what is most fundamental in our experience. This concept is developed in ways that are important for our understanding of God as Trinity and for the relation between nature and grace.³⁸⁸

It is interesting to briefly discuss and highlight here the Greek notion of μετουσία (*metousia*) meaning participation in the *energia* (operation) of the creator by creation. The term metousia and the idea of participation has a long history in Greek thought.³⁸⁹ However, a comprehensive history of the term is not really the scope of this thesis and shall be discussed in some detail later.³⁹⁰ Paulos Gregorios writes, 'The creation cannot exist without participation in the will, energy, and wisdom of God'. Also, importantly the notion of participation or *metousia Theou* has

³⁸³ Gregorios, *Cosmic Man*, viii.

³⁸⁴ Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt and James J. Buckley, *Catholic Theology: An Introduction* (U.K: Wiley Blackwell, 2017), 85.

³⁸⁵ Nancy Hudson, "Divine Immanence: Nicholas of Cusa's Understanding of Theophany and The Retrieval of A 'New Model of God'", *Journal of Theological Studies*,56(2), (October 2005), 452.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁷ God's self-communication in love.

³⁸⁸ John P. Galvin, "The Invitation of Grace" in Leo J. O'Donovan, *A World of Grace: An Introduction to the Themes and Foundations of Karl Rahner's Theology* (Washington: Georgetown University Press,1995), 64.

³⁸⁹ David L. Balas, *Μετουσία Θεου: Man's Participation in God's Perfections According to Saint Gregory of Nyssa* (Rome: Pontificum Institutum S. Anselmi,1966), 1.

³⁹⁰ A detailed study of the topic can be found in the work of Fr. David L. Balas titled, David L. Balas, *Μετουσία Θεου: Man's Participation in God's Perfections According to Saint Gregory of Nyssa* (Rome: Pontificum Institutum S. Anselmi,1966) which interestingly Paulos Gregorios admires and mentions in his discussion. See, Gregorios, *Cosmic Man*, 124.

to be held in tension with the doctrine of *diastema* (separation) between creation and the creator for a holistic understanding.

4 BEATIFIC VISION AND THEOSIS

A human being becoming divine is an engaging, inspiring, and powerful religious idea.³⁹¹ The terms such as deification, beatific vision, theosis, are often used interchangeably to explain the human potential of imminence to the Divine. These terms have an intimate and overlapping relationship. In the spectrum of theological academia, while the West largely discusses the term *beatific vision*, the East speaks more of *theosis*. St. Athanasius (4th C.E) succinctly describes theosis and its scope,

humans cannot become like God in essence, yet by progress in virtue imitate God, the Lord granting us this grace, in the words, ‘Be ye merciful as your Father is merciful:’ ‘be ye perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.’³⁹²

The scripture provides a key foundation for beatific vision and theosis. St. Paul writes, ‘For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I only know in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known’ (1 Corinthians 13:12, NRSV). Paul uses analogical language to describe the final or eschatological vision which will be characterized by a direct gazing of God’s essence. There are several scriptural passages which classically support the doctrine of theosis and beatific vision. Moses’s vision in Exodus 33:18-23 in the Old Testament and 2 Peter 1:4, exhorting human beings to ‘become partakers of the divine nature’ through the divine power and graciousness are some examples.

Remarkably, the early Christian church has expressed many soteriological formulas to corroborate the definition of theosis³⁹³ ; a few prominent ones include : “God became a human being in order that the human being could become god”³⁹⁴; “the Son of God became the Son of

³⁹¹ Michael J. Christensen, “The Problem, Promise, and Process of Theosis”, in Michael J. Christensen and Jeffery A. Wittung eds., *Partakers of the Divine Nature the History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions* (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2007), 23.

³⁹² Athanasius, *Selected Works, and Letters* (NPNF 2: 1207).

³⁹³ Vladimir Kharlamov, *Theosis* (Cambridge: James Clarke Company, 2012), 42.

³⁹⁴ St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book III, Chapter 19. See, St. Irenaeus, *Adv. haeres.* 3, 19, 892, accessed May 10, 2019, <http://www.orthodoxebooks.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/Against%20Heresies%20-%20Irenaeus-1.pdf>.

Man in order that the sons of man could become the sons of God”³⁹⁵; “the Lord took upon Himself what is ours and by offering it in sacrifice, destroyed it and clothed us in what is His”; “even as the Lord, having been clothed in flesh, became man, so we, men, assumed by the Word, are deified (θεοποιούμεθα) for the sake of His flesh”; “the man below (Jesus) became God after He was united with God and became one with Him, because that which is better triumphed in order that I could be a god to the extent He became man.”³⁹⁶ These prominent definitions are ascribed to the Christian Patristic age of the first five centuries, to Fathers such as Clement of Alexandria, Irenaeus, Athanasius and the Cappadocians. In short, *Theosis* is the spiritual ascent into likeness to God. And the decisive element for it is that, in our human personhood we are created in the *image* and *likeness* of God. (Genesis 1:26-27).³⁹⁷

In the theological vision of Karl Rahner, the process of human divinization is the center of gravity around which moves his understanding of creation, anthropology, Christology, ecclesiology, liturgy, and eschatology.³⁹⁸ The structure of divinization and its possibility is articulated by Rahner within the debate on relationship between nature and grace.³⁹⁹ Francis J. Caponi believes that, ‘Rahner's vision of divinization is a comprehensive one, and is most profitably explored within the overarching Roman Catholic vision of the relationship between nature and grace’.⁴⁰⁰ Rahner explains that, grace and the beatific vision can only be understood as the possibility and the reality respectively of the immediate presence of the holy mystery as such.⁴⁰¹ For Rahner, human being elevated by grace, is the spiritual being which is ontologically directed to the beatific vision. Also, grace, being strictly supernatural, is ultimately the beatific vision or its ontological presupposition.⁴⁰² Grace and the beatific vision can only be understood as the possibility and the reality respectively of the immediate presence of the holy mystery as such.⁴⁰³

³⁹⁵ St. Athanasius, *De inc.* 54, 3. See, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, accessed May 10, 2019, http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p122a3p1.htm.

³⁹⁶ Vladimir, *Theosis*, 43.

³⁹⁷ Ibid.

³⁹⁸ Caponi, *Karl Rahner: Divinization in Roman Catholicism*, 259.

³⁹⁹ Ibid., 260. The essence of Catholic church's position is expressed succinctly by St. Thomas Aquinas: *gratia non tollit naturam sed perficit* (grace does not destroy but perfects nature).

⁴⁰⁰ Caponi, *Karl Rahner: Divinization in Roman Catholicism*, 259.

⁴⁰¹ Rahner “The Concept of Mystery in Catholic Theology”, *TI, IV*, 56.

⁴⁰² Ibid., 55.

⁴⁰³ Ibid., 56.

Rahner believed that in the vision of God face to face which grace makes possible, many mysteries are indeed bridged.⁴⁰⁴ The union or bridging is achieved through grace and the act of the human will yearning after God. In a similar way, Paulos Gregorios also speaks about *diastema* (chasm) between the creator and his creation which remains but is bridged by an act of mutual love sustained by God's grace and the responding free will of humanity.⁴⁰⁵ This union of human being with God through God's gracious self-communication is referred to as beatific vision or theosis.

Explaining the *beatific vision* Andrew Louth writes in his Foreword, (*Seeing God: The Beatific Vision in Christian Tradition*) "For all traditional forms of Christianity the *beatific vision*, gazing on God in the utmost joy, is the ultimate goal of Christian living, the fulfillment of our Christian discipleship".⁴⁰⁶ Hans Boersma explains that, "The final end of human beings is the vision of God."⁴⁰⁷ These descriptions about the *beatific vision* also convey an underlying eschatological relationship or fulfillment in God.

5 EPIKATASIS: STRETCHING TOWARDS THE MYSTERY IN LOVE

The beatific vision according to Rahner does not annul the incomprehensibility of God who remains the object of this vision.⁴⁰⁸ He explains that incomprehensibility is the content (substance) of the vision and the bliss of our love.⁴⁰⁹ Rahner describes that,

It would be a foolish and anthropomorphic misunderstanding to think that the proper object of vision and bliss was something perspicuous, comprehensible, and perfectly well understood, merely surrounded as it were by an obscure margin and a limit set by the finitude of the creature.⁴¹⁰

In the early Church Fathers, we find references to the 'incomprehensibility of God' and of the knowledge of God as 'dazzling darkness'⁴¹¹ which restructures the epistemology. Rahner uses a very similar expression when he describes incomprehensibility as 'the grace of loving the divine

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid.,57.

⁴⁰⁵ Paulos Gregorios, *The Human Presence: An Orthodox View of Nature* (Madras: CLS,1980) ,78.

⁴⁰⁶ Hans Boersma, *Seeing God: The Beatific Vision in Christian Tradition* (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), xiii.

⁴⁰⁷ Boersma, *Seeing God*, 17.

⁴⁰⁸ Rahner "The Concept of Mystery in Catholic Theology", *TI, IV*, 42.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid.,56. See also, Ibid., 42.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid.,56.

⁴¹¹ Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, trans. Abraham J. Malherbe and Everett Ferguson (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 95.

darkness without reserve, the divinely given courage to enter this bliss which is authentic and unique, and to enjoy it as the nourishment of the strong'.⁴¹² He explains that Grace and the beatific vision can only be understood as the possibility and the reality respectively of the immediate presence of the holy mystery as such.⁴¹³ God is not comprehensible even in the beatific vision.⁴¹⁴

In *Life of Moses*⁴¹⁵ Gregory of Nyssa aptly conveys the incomprehensibility of God. The true knowledge of what we seek consists specifically not in seeing, rather in awareness that our goal transcends all knowledge and is everywhere cut off from us by the darkness of incomprehensibility.⁴¹⁶ In the life of Moses, the moving into the darkness or clouds where God speaks is a spiritual ascent of realisation to God's mysteries. Gregory aptly quotes in this context the Psalmist "He made darkness his covering around him" (Psalm 18:11) to expound David's initiation into the mysteries in the same *inner sanctuary*.⁴¹⁷

For Rahner, grace does not imply the promise and the beginning of the elimination of the mystery, but the radical possibility of the absolute proximity of the mystery, which is not eliminated by its proximity, but really presented as mystery.⁴¹⁸ As Rahner puts it, "vision must mean grasping and being grasped by the mystery."⁴¹⁹

Another important aspect of looking at the orientation or stretching towards mystery by Rahner is done by explaining the epistemological basis. While discussing the ontology of *visio beatifica* Rahner considers narrowing down the metaphysics of knowledge to avoid the prevailing divergences according to the theories of knowledge one may presuppose.⁴²⁰ He provides a fresh epistemological basis as his point of departure,

In the original and basic concept of knowledge (which alone provides a means of interpreting metaphysically all concrete modes of knowledge), knowledge is not an 'intentional' stretching out of the knower to an object, it is not 'objectivity' in the sense of the going forth of the knower out of himself to something other, not an externally orientated entering into contact with an object by means of the cognitive faculty; it is primarily the being-present-to itself (*Beisichsein*) of an

⁴¹² Rahner "The Concept of Mystery in Catholic Theology", *TI, IV, 57*.

⁴¹³ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 73. Rahner, *The Hiddenness of God*, *TI, XVI, 231*.

⁴¹⁵ The work titled *Life of Moses* by Gregory of Nyssa.

⁴¹⁶ Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, 95.

⁴¹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴¹⁸ Rahner "The Concept of Mystery in Catholic Theology", *TI, IV, 56*.

⁴¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁴²⁰ Rahner, "Some Implications of The Scholastic Concept of Uncreated Grace", *TI, I, 327*.

entity, the inner illuminatedness of an entity for itself on the basis of its determinate grade of being (immateriality), it is a being-reflected-upon-itself (*Insichreflektiertheit*).⁴²¹

Thus, for Rahner clearly the knower stretches out to the existential reality of humanity, called the Mystery. Gregory of Nyssa called the unceasing stretching of the soul from one's initial relationship with God to actual union with Him, *ἐπέκτασις* (*epiktasis*).⁴²²

Gregorios highlights the concept of *ἐπέκτασις* (Epiktasis) found in writings of Gregory to describe the search and reach of humanity towards mystery in love. He takes on a more engaging metaphor used in Gregory's commentary on the Song of Songs- bride striving in love and desire for union with God in Christ.⁴²³ The perpetual tension of the soul towards cultivating the good, knowing God and uniting with Him was called by St. Gregory of Nyssa *ἐπέκτασις* (Greek. *ἐπέκτασις, εως* – a perpetual stretch, stretching more, having as its purpose the achievement of a goal: climbing, stretching, elongation, extension, expansion).⁴²⁴

Gregorios describes that humanity reaches out to God in love - an infinite process of knowing the beloved more and becoming more and more like the Beloved.⁴²⁵ This reaching in love is also equated to ascent to Mount Sinai, an ascent for which there is no stop.⁴²⁶ For Gregorios, “the good is infinite, its only boundary being evil. And hence progress in the good never ends.”⁴²⁷ Rahner also draws upon the metaphor of love for God. He draws our attention to “the true love which considers the beloved always as its end-goal, not as its means of access.”⁴²⁸ And this love is adoration, surrender of one's own will to God, confidence.⁴²⁹

⁴²¹ Ibid.,328.

⁴²² Liviu Petcu, “Philosophy and Experience of God” (2017), pp. 771-782 *The Doctrine of Epektasis. One of the Major Contributions of Saint Gregory of Nyssa to the History of Thinking*, 772.

⁴²³ Paulos Gregorios, *A Human God* (Kottayam: MGF, 1992), 35.

⁴²⁴ Liviu Petcu, “Philosophy and Experience of God” (2017), pp. 771-782 *The Doctrine of Epektasis. One of the Major Contributions of Saint Gregory of Nyssa to the History of Thinking*, 772-773. The word comes from *ἐπ-εκ-τεινομένην*, “longing for the outside,” used by Paul the Apostle in Phil. 3:13, “going for the things ahead”, the verse which inspired St. Gregory when using the word.

⁴²⁵ Gregorios, *A Human God*, 35.

⁴²⁶ Ibid.,36.

⁴²⁷ Ibid.

⁴²⁸ Karl Rahner, “The Consecration of The Layman to The Care of Souls”, *TI, III*, 271.

⁴²⁹ Ibid.,272.

6 PARTICIPATION IN THE TRINITARIAN LIFE OF GOD ⁴³⁰

For Rahner God relates to us in a threefold manner, and this threefold, free, and gratuitous relation to humanity is not simply a copy or an analogy of the inner Trinity, but is the Trinity itself, even though communicated freely and gratuitously.⁴³¹ Further Rahner writes,

That which is communicated is precisely the triune personal God, and likewise the communication bestowed upon the creature in gratuitous grace can, if occurring in freedom, occur only in the intra-divine manner of the two communications of the divine essence by the Father to the Son, and the Spirit.⁴³²

However, here we may need some clarification on the communication in the ‘intra-divine’ manner. Does that imply communication to humanity is in the same manner as between the persons of Trinity? Rahner explains that the one triune God communicates God’s own self in absolute self-utterance and as absolute donation of love.⁴³³ In a *quasi-formal* causality God really and in strictest sense of the word bestows own self.⁴³⁴ Rahner also adds that this communication of self in grace ‘does not bring the communication down to the purely created level’.⁴³⁵

Here some more detail offered in the Eastern theology or rather the Greek Fathers could be discussed. Eastern theology explains this communication of God’s self with the help of distinction between two terms, *Ousia* and *Energia*. Paulos Mar Gregorios explains, the distinction between *ousia* and *energia* plays a key role to understand the creator and creation. He makes it clear that the *ousia* is shared only within the godhead of the Triune Creator, and cannot be shared by the creation, either epistemology (intellectually) or ontologically (that is, in terms of being). However, the Creator’s *ousia* does share its *energia* with the creation. Gregorios underscores, in fact it is from this *energia* that the creation has the basis of its existence and its possibility of sharing in the good.⁴³⁶ He points out that as understood by Gregory of Nyssa, *Ousia* and *Energia* are not ‘discontinuous’ and ‘disjunct realities’ as was reasoned by Eunomius.⁴³⁷ Gregorios points out, that ‘by sharing the *Energia* of that *Ousia*, the creation is

⁴³⁰ Karl Rahner, ‘The Prospects for Dogmatic Theology’, *TI, I*, 28. Rahner draws a scheme for dogmatic theology in ‘A Treatise of Dogmatic Theology.’

⁴³¹ Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans. Joseph Donceel (New York: Crossroad, 1997),35.

⁴³² *Ibid.*

⁴³³ *Ibid.*,36.

⁴³⁴ *Ibid.*,36.

⁴³⁵ *Ibid.*,37.

⁴³⁶ Paulos Gregorios, *Paulos Mar Gregorios: A Reader* (U.S.A: Fortress Press, 2017), 217.

⁴³⁷ *Ibid.*

enabled to participate, in measured degree and not in achieved perfection, in both being and goodness'.⁴³⁸

For Gregorios, participation in the *ousia* of God means to be *autozoēs* (*self-life*), *autagathos* (self-good), *ho ontos on* (who/which is truly being).⁴³⁹ And this is possible only for the three persons of the Triune Godhead.⁴⁴⁰ Gregorios continues, what we can participate in is the being, life and goodness of God as it is given to us in God's *energeia* which has brought us into being, sustains us in life, and leads us in the good. Gregorios explains that all three belong to the nature of man, but adds a caveat, 'the whole of the nature of man is God's gracious gift.' And Gregorios pointedly remarked, 'Nature is grace.'⁴⁴¹ Rahner also emphasizes that our relationship with God, formed by grace (including its concrete appearance in salvation history), has a directly trinitarian structure.⁴⁴² This relationship of humanity is with the inconceivable God; that it is communicated by the appearance in history of God's absolute self-committal in Jesus; that this self-committal 'comes home' to us as Love at the innermost centre of our being, without losing its strictly divine character.⁴⁴³

Rahner advocates an interesting 'anthropological angle' to the dogmatic treatment of Trinity. He engages with dogmatic theology as transcendental anthropology, meaning that every dogmatic treatment must also be considered from its transcendental (anthropological) angle. He tells us that many things become more intelligible without at the same time destroying the mystery if an anthropocentric perspective is applied to the doctrine of the Trinity.⁴⁴⁴ Rahner explains that our relationship with God has a trinitarian structure:

If we presuppose that our relationship with God, formed by grace (including its concrete appearance in salvation history), has a directly trinitarian structure; that it is always a relationship with the inconceivable God and that it is communicated by the appearance in history of God's absolute self-committal in Jesus; that this self-committal 'comes home' to us as Love at the innermost center of our being, without losing its strictly divine character; that the consequent trinitarian structure of our direct relationship with God through grace is also proper to God because of his actual self-communication- if we assume this, then the permanent mystery of the 'immanent' Trinity is made possible.

⁴³⁸ Gregorios, *Paulos Mar Gregorios: A Reader*, 218. "Ousia of God is the fullness of being and infinity of goodness" See, Gregorios, *Paulos Mar Gregorios: A Reader*, 217.

⁴³⁹ Gregorios, *Cosmic Man*, 151.

⁴⁴⁰ Gregorios, *Cosmic Man*, 151.

⁴⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴⁴² Rahner, "Theology and Anthropology", *TI, IX*, 33.

⁴⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid.

Rahner is also clear that on account of God's absolute self-communication in 'uncreated' Grace, the immanent Trinity⁴⁴⁵ is strictly identical with the economic Trinity⁴⁴⁶ and vice versa,⁴⁴⁷ and we are then able to read the doctrine of the Trinity 'anthropologically' without falsifying it.⁴⁴⁸ The statement of their identity means that the three "persons" of the economic Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, respectively, are identical with those of the immanent Trinity. The "basic axiom" (*Grundaxiom*) articulated by Rahner was that "the immanent Trinity is strictly identical with the economic Trinity and vice versa".⁴⁴⁹

Rahner criticises the anti-trinitarian timidity which affects theologians when treating of the relationship between human and the three divine persons which is set up by grace.⁴⁵⁰ Further, he explains that,

It is always taken to be a relation founded on 'created grace,' a grace brought about by efficient causality, and the relationship is merely 'appropriated' in a different manner by each of the three divine persons. The sacraments and eschatology are naturally treated in the same way.⁴⁵¹

In addition, Rahner feels that in the doctrine of creation, as treated today, the Trinity is scarcely mentioned in contrast to the way it was handled by the great theologians of former times like St Bonaventure.⁴⁵² Rahner writes that sadly the Trinity is not considered at all in the famous constitution of Benedict XII on the *Visio Beatifica*. It speaks only of the 'divine essence,' to which the most intimate personal act, that of self-disclosure, is attributed.⁴⁵³

For Rahner, Trinity is a mystery of salvation which is revealed to humanity through the incarnation.⁴⁵⁴ The doctrine of the Trinity teaches that God as triune communion extends outwards into history to include and draw in all of creation. As with any Christian doctrine, this

⁴⁴⁵ Rahner, *The Trinity*, 2. Immanent Trinity refers to the divine persons with respect to one another.

⁴⁴⁶ Economic Trinity refers to the divine persons as they are revealed and act in salvation history.

⁴⁴⁷ Rahner refers to the assumption that, economic Trinity is equal to immanent Trinity and vice versa as a 'quite legitimate assumption.' Rahner writes, the economic Trinity of salvation is ipso facto the immanent Trinity. Rahner, "Remarks on The Dogmatic Treatise *De Trinitate*", *TI, IV*, 88. See Also, Rahner, "Questions About God", *TI, XVI*, 241. See: Rahner, 'Remarks on the Dogmatic Treatise *De Trinitate*,' *TI, IV* (London and Baltimore, 1966) 77-102.

⁴⁴⁸ Rahner, "Theology and Anthropology", *TI, IX*, 33.

⁴⁴⁹ David Coffey, "Trinity", in Marmion & Mary E. Hines, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, 99.

⁴⁵⁰ Rahner does note the exceptions like Petavius and Thomassinus, Scheeben, Schauf and so on who merely confirm the rule.

⁴⁵¹ Rahner, "Remarks on The Dogmatic Treatise *De Trinitate*", *TI, IV*, 82.

⁴⁵² *Ibid.*

⁴⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁴ *Ibid.*,88.

salvific or soteriological principle must be to the fore.⁴⁵⁵ He explains, that the Trinity of the ‘economy of salvation’⁴⁵⁶ is the immanent Trinity and this assertion is a defined truth of faith at one point, in one case, for Jesus is not simply God in general, but the Son; the second divine Person, the Logos of God is human. For Rahner it is true to say that the doctrine of the Trinity cannot be adequately distinguished from the doctrine of the economy of salvation.⁴⁵⁷ The triune personal God dispenses salvific grace and initiates participation. As Gregorios sums it, “The Holy Trinity is known by initiated participation, not by human logic or concept.”

6.1 Incarnation, Personhood and Relationality.

Grace flows from the Triune God and the Lordship of Jesus, and it connects persons and communities to God. Just as one cannot speak of grace apart from speaking of Trinity and Christology (Incarnation), one cannot speak of the effects of God’s grace apart from human beings as recipients.⁴⁵⁸ God’s self-communication (*Selbst-Mitteilen*) is necessarily triune and constitutes salvation history to be what it is: the total offer of God’s self through Christ to the human being who is created as the recipient of the self-communication of God, and who is made capable by the spirit of receiving God’s free gift. Rahner recognised that the only way to ensure that the doctrine of the Trinity and the doctrine of salvation are seen as the same was to adhere to the biblical, creedal, liturgical, and Greek emphasis on the diversity of the divine persons in our salvation.⁴⁵⁹

Rahner in the chapter “God’s Threefold Relation to us in the Order of Grace”, proposes his thesis that,

Each one of the three divine persons communicates himself to man in gratuitous grace in his own personal particularity and diversity. This trinitarian communication is the ontological ground of man’s life of grace and eventually of the direct vision of the divine persons in eternity.⁴⁶⁰

For Rahner each of the three divine persons communicates himself as such to man, each in his own special and unique way of personal being, in the free gift of grace.⁴⁶¹ The Trinitarian

⁴⁵⁵ Declan Marmion, and Rik van Nieuwenhove, *An Introduction to the Trinity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 2.

⁴⁵⁶ God’s providential plan of salvation; God’s management and dispensation of grace.

⁴⁵⁷ Rahner, “Remarks on The Dogmatic Treatise *De Trinitate*”, *TI, IV*, 89.

⁴⁵⁸ Shawn Colberg, “The Gift of Grace and the Perfection of Human Nature”, in Mary Ann Hinsdale and Stephen Okey eds. *T& T Clark Handbook of Theological Anthropology* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021),111.

⁴⁵⁹ Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, x

⁴⁶⁰ Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, 35.

communication is the ontological foundation of the life of grace for human beings and the immediate vision of the divine persons. Rahner continues,

This trinitarian communication (the ‘indwelling of God’, the ‘uncreated grace’, to be understood not merely as the communication of the divine ‘nature’ but also and indeed primarily as communication of the ‘persons’, since it takes place in a free spiritual personal act and so from person to person) is the real ontological foundation of the life of grace in man and (under the requisite conditions) of the immediate vision of the divine persons at the moment of fulfilment.

This self-communication of the divine persons (trinitarian communication) takes place according to their personal proprieties; according to and by virtue of their relation to one another.⁴⁶² God relates to us in a threefold manner, and this threefold, free, and gratuitous relation to us is not merely a copy or an analogy of the inner Trinity, but this Trinity itself, albeit as freely and gratuitously communicated.⁴⁶³

Further, the fourth century trinitarian formula ‘one *ousia*, three *hypostasis* (one essence and three persons),’ is also dealt by Rahner in some detail. He recognizes that the formula would be misleading in the present context unless the term *person* is shed of its individualistic connotations.⁴⁶⁴ Each divine person is a person in an absolutely unique way.⁴⁶⁵ However, Rahner warns of the ‘self-consciousness’ concept for three persons. He prefers “‘distinct manner of subsisting’”, a term which captures both the diversity of the persons and their shared God-ness.⁴⁶⁶

Trinitarian dogma as it has been in the Christian tradition, not an easy topic to explain and even more difficult comprehend.⁴⁶⁷ As Catherine LaCugna writes in the introduction to *The Trinity*, Personhood will remain notoriously difficult to define precisely, but this may be a good reminder that no one concept is up to the task of defining the ineffable mystery of God.⁴⁶⁸

⁴⁶¹ Karl Rahner, “Remarks on The Dogmatic Treatise *De Trinitate*”, *TI, IV*, 96.

⁴⁶² *Ibid.*

⁴⁶³ Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, 35.

⁴⁶⁴ Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, xviii.

⁴⁶⁵ xviii, *The Trinity*. David L. Balas, quotes *Contra Eunomium* by Gregory of Nyssa and explains the personhood, “‘In the Holy Trinity (έν τή άγία τριάδι) there can be no difference according to the greater and less; the Divine Persons are equal to one another in the communion (κοινωνία) of Uncreatedness but differ in their personal properties. The Father is Ungenerate (άγέννητος), the Son is the Only begotten (μονογενής), the Holy Spirit neither Ungenerate nor Only begotten’”. See, David L. Balas, *Μετοψία Θεου: Man's Participation in God's Perfections According to Saint Gregory of Nyssa*, 211.

⁴⁶⁶ Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, xix.

⁴⁶⁷ Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, xx.

⁴⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

For Rahner, incarnation of the Word of God is the very center of the reality from which we Christians live, of the reality which we believe.⁴⁶⁹ He explains that the mystery of the divine Trinity is open(ed) to us only here (in incarnation); only here is the mystery of our participation in the divine nature accorded us.⁴⁷⁰ Gregorios for his part, names trinity and incarnation as the two unshakable pillars and hallmark of Christian faith. He writes the two “namely the worship of the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, on the one hand, and on the other the incarnation and incarnate ministry of the Second person of the Holy Trinity, Our Lord Jesus Christ.”⁴⁷¹ Rahner explains, that the Incarnation is such a theologically and religiously central element in Christian life that on that account the Trinity is always and everywhere irremovably present.⁴⁷² However, Rahner criticises the limited meaning of incarnation which only signifies that a person of Trinity has assumed flesh and God became human, but not the fact that this person is precisely that of the Word, Logos⁴⁷³ the eternal Logos of God who was made flesh.⁴⁷⁴

Incarnation also accords and restores to humanity a participation into life, being and the good.⁴⁷⁵ St. Athanasius describes in his writings ‘the restoration of the image of God in us and through Christ.’⁴⁷⁶ ‘Restoration’⁴⁷⁷ is the foremost factor which makes up the account given by Athanasius of the need of man which drew forth God’s mercy in the incarnation of the Word.⁴⁷⁸

⁴⁶⁹ Karl Rahner, “On the Theology of The Incarnation”, *TI, IV*, 106.

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁷¹ Paulose Gregorios, “Holy Trinity - Concept or Mystery” (article in Silver Jubilee Celebration Souvenir of Ranny Holy Trinity Ashram, 1996), 43-47, accessed February 22, 2021, http://malankaraorthodox.tv/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/holy_trinity_pmg.pdf.

⁴⁷² Rahner, Remarks on The Dogmatic Treatise ‘De Trinitate,’ *TI, IV*, 80.

⁴⁷³ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁴ Rahner, “Priest and Poet”, *TI, III*, 304. Logos is not just a *person* of trinity, rather as Rahner explains, “Logos is image, likeness, reflection, representation, and presence filled with all the fullness of the Godhead.” See: Rahner, “The Theology of The Symbol”, *TI, IV*, 238.

⁴⁷⁵ Gregorios, *Cosmic Man*, 151. See also, Ilaria L.E. Ramelli, *The Christian Doctrine of Apokatastasis*, (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 1-221. The theory of ἀποκατάστασις, *apokatastasis* (restoration), has its roots in both Greek philosophy and Jewish-Christian Scriptures and literature, and a major theologico-soteriological doctrine in Patristics.

⁴⁷⁶ David L. Balas, *Μετουσία Θεου: Man's Participation in God's Perfections According to Saint Gregory of Nyssa*, 150. See also, *Contra Eunomium*, CE III, II 43-57, CE III, X 1-17; CE III, I, 21-66, etc.

⁴⁷⁷ It is observed that Apokatastasis (ἀποκατάστασις) and *anaktisai* (ανάκτηση) are two terms employed by Church Fathers while speaking of restoration. Apokatastasis is the term mostly employed by Gregory of Nyssa to explain restoration. See, Gregory of Nyssa, *Catechetical Oration*, Trans. J. H. Srawley. (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1917), 26.

⁴⁷⁸ Athanasius, *St. Athanasius on The Incarnation*, Archibald Robertson trans., (London: D. Nutt, 1891), xx. See also, Philip Schaff, NPNF2-04. Athanasius: Select Works and Letters, 144. Philip Schaff points out that in the theology of Athanasius, ‘the purpose of the Incarnation was at once to renew us, and to make known the Father (de Incarn. 16); or as he elsewhere puts it (ib. 7 fin.), ἀνακτίσαι τὰ ὅλα, ὑπερ πάντων, παθεῖν, and περὶ πάντων πρεσβεῦσαι πρὸς τὸν Πατέρα. The idea of ἀφθαρσία which so often stands with him for the *summum bonum* imparted to us in Christ,

In the words of Athanasius, ‘the Word of God came in his own person, that, as he was the image of the Father, he might be able to create afresh (or rebuild) after that image’.⁴⁷⁹

Paulos Gregorios describes incarnation as restoration to the participation in Being, Life, and the Good.⁴⁸⁰ He writes,

But participation in Being, Life, and the Good as the original possibility of unfallen Man, has been lost, because of Man’s choice to participate in Evil, Death, and Non-being. The restoration of that possibility, as Gregory of Nyssa sees it, is the whole point of the Incarnation of the Lord.⁴⁸¹

For Rahner incarnation and grace are two inseparable and mutually conditioning aspects of the one mystery of God’s self-bestowal upon the world⁴⁸² Grace as self-communication is essentially, not incidentally, tied to Jesus Christ-not because God has decreed such a union, though it might have been otherwise; rather, Incarnation and grace are the two inseparable acts of divine self-communication. For Rahner, grace and Jesus Christ are each causally related to the other: Christ is the cause, the "prospective entelechy," of history, and Christ is the absolute fulfillment-the result, as it were, of God's self-communication in grace to spiritual, historical reality. Thus, Incarnation and the divinization of the world by grace are interdependent elements, "two correlative factors of God's one free self-communication to the creature."⁴⁸³

Interestingly, Rahner also underlines the fact that the Trinity as present in the economy of salvation through the two ‘missiones,’ grace, and the Incarnation (the two central mysteries of Christianity) necessarily also embodies the Trinity as immanent,⁴⁸⁴ thus highlighting again the axiom that the immanent and economic trinity are identical.

involves a moral and spiritual restoration of our nature, not merely the physical supersession of φθόρα by ἀθανασία (de Incarn. 47, 51, 52, &c., &c.)’.

⁴⁷⁹ *On the incarnation of the Word*, 13. Quoted by Hans Boersma, *Heavenly Participation: The weaving of a Sacramental Tapestry* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 46. The term *anaktisai* means, ‘create afresh’ or ‘rebuild’.

⁴⁸⁰ Gregorios, *Cosmic Man*, 151.

⁴⁸¹ Gregorios, *Cosmic Man*, 151.

⁴⁸² Karl Rahner, ‘Reflections on Methodology in Theology’, *TI, XI*, 109.

⁴⁸³ Caponi, 268.

⁴⁸⁴ Karl Rahner, ‘Reflections on Methodology in Theology’, *TI, XI*, 109.

7 VISION AND THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD: A CRITIQUE

For Rahner, the knowledge of God is rooted in that subjectivity and free transcendence and in that situation of not being at one's own disposal.⁴⁸⁵ He refers to the transcendental knowledge of God as the experience of mystery. And he explains that the knowledge of God constitutes the very essence of this transcendence.⁴⁸⁶ The knowledge of God is, nevertheless, a transcendental knowledge because man's basic and original orientation towards absolute mystery, which constitutes his fundamental experience of God, is a permanent existential of man as a spiritual subject.⁴⁸⁷

Interestingly, the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* defines Beatific vision as a clear knowledge of the Triune God and,

The supernatural act of the created intellect by which the beatified angels and souls are united to God in a direct, intuitive, and clear knowledge of the Triune God as He is in Himself. This direct, intuitive, intellectual vision of God, with the perfection of charity necessarily accompanying it, is the consummation of the divine indwelling in the sanctified spirit or soul, for by this vision the blessed are brought to fruition in such a union with God in knowledge and love that they share forever in God's own happiness.⁴⁸⁸

Rahner's understanding of beatific vision seems to be different from the above definition. He avoids the definition of beatific vision as a direct, intuitive, and clear knowledge of God (Triune God). Rather, he suggests a new epistemology where the essence of knowledge lies in the mystery⁴⁸⁹ and surrender in love.⁴⁹⁰ Beatific vision for Rahner does not completely dissolve the incomprehensibility of God. He writes,

Revelation does not mean that the mystery is overcome by gnosis bestowed by God, even in the direct vision of God; on the contrary, it is the history of the deepening perception of God as the mystery. This continues in the direct presence of God afforded by what we call the beatific vision and can only be sustained in the loving surrender to the enduring mystery.⁴⁹¹

⁴⁸⁵ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 57.

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁴⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁴⁸⁸ Redle, M. J. "Beatific Vision." In *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed., 168-177. Vol. 2. Detroit, MI: Gale, 2003. *Gale eBooks* (accessed March 2, 2021), 168.

<https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CX3407701215/GVRL?u=nuim&sid=GVRL&xid=cb658a18>.

⁴⁸⁹ Rahner, *The Hiddenness of God*, *TI*, *XVI*, 237.

⁴⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 239.

⁴⁹¹ *Ibid.*

Rahner explains that classical theology holds firm to God's incomprehensibility even in beatific vision.⁴⁹² But scholastic teaching differs from Scripture in that the state of human salvation, of ultimate blessedness, is more radically centered upon the beatific vision.⁴⁹³ Rahner criticises that in the scholastic approach, beatific vision is conceived as the fulfilment of man's theoretical intellect and the being of God is stressed upon.⁴⁹⁴ He evaluates the scholastic understanding with the classical theology assertion that, 'Man can never entirely or exhaustively grasp God.'⁴⁹⁵ And this can only be resolved by our perception of knowledge being 'raised up' into love.⁴⁹⁶ Rahner explains that, 'otherwise knowledge, taken in the sense usual in Western tradition, would itself founder on the alien and inhospitable rock of God's incomprehensibility'. He suggests a reevaluation of the fundamental character of knowledge and a positive predicate for incomprehensibility.⁴⁹⁷ For Rahner, 'the fundamental character of knowledge should be understood, not in the sense of 'seeing through' and object, but rather as a possible openness to the mystery itself.'⁴⁹⁸

Rahner is clear that human beings are oriented towards God and this orientation towards the absolute mystery always continues to be offered to him by this mystery as the ground and content of his being.⁴⁹⁹ This original experience is always present, and it should not be confused with the objectifying, although necessary, reflection upon man's transcendental orientation towards mystery.⁵⁰⁰ Moreover, it does not destroy the *a posteriori* character of the knowledge of God, but neither should this *a posteriori* be misunderstood in the sense that God could simply be indoctrinated from without as an object of our knowledge.⁵⁰¹

Furthermore, Rahner explains that the unlimited and transcendent nature of man, the openness to the mystery itself which is given radical depth by grace should direct humanity to the incomprehensible mystery, in relation to which the openness of transcendence is

⁴⁹² Ibid.,231.

⁴⁹³ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁵ Rahner, *The Hiddenness of God, TI, XVI, 232.*

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid.,234.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁸ Rahner, *The Hiddenness of God, TI, XVI, 234.*

⁴⁹⁹ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith, 44.*

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid.,53.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid.

experienced.⁵⁰² The experience of the nameless mystery as both origin and goal is the a priori condition of all categorial knowledge and of all historical activity; it is not merely a marginal phenomenon at the end of the road.⁵⁰³

Rahner describes that it is not a journey on which humanity grows weary in the pursuit of knowledge, leaves what is still unknown to itself, and gives the name of mystery to this unmastered realm of the intelligible.⁵⁰⁴ In contrast, knowledge in the primary sense is the presence of the mystery itself.⁵⁰⁵ Rahner goes on strikingly to describe the knowledge of the incomprehensibility of God as ‘speech of the being without a name’, ‘about which clear statements are impossible’, ‘the dumbness essential for silence to be heard’, and that it is ‘greatest act of worship of God in love’.⁵⁰⁶

Interestingly, these words of Rahner echoes in Paulos Gregorios when he speaks of worshipping God who is beyond our comprehension.⁵⁰⁷ He writes,

We can sing to God, praise God, thank God, bow before God, worship God, love God, serve God, trust in God, repent and return to God when we have gone astray. We can know God as a person. but cannot know God as an object of our cognition. God is not in the same category as objects in the world.... God remains beyond our comprehension, but God has come to us in a human form - divine-human person with whom we can deal better.⁵⁰⁸

For Gregorios the end is not "Beatific Vision" or the mind's direct encounter with God.⁵⁰⁹ The vision is only a beckoning a call to be reshaped, so that through the divine-human person that Christ has become, we too might become truly divine-human, sharing in Christ's nature, and growing into him. Gregorios suggests, what Christians should seek is not the experience of the Beatific Vision but participation in the transfiguring process by which humans grow towards the image of God. This process is infinite, a horizon that always reveals new things, but always also recedes, beckoning us to advance further. Gregorios explains that in the process we see light, but then we may soon have to pass through darkness, towards that Horizon that infinitely beckons.

⁵⁰² Rahner, *The Hiddenness of God*, *TI*, *XVI*, 238.

⁵⁰³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁷ Gregorios, *A Human God*, ii. See also, Rahner, *The Hiddenness of God*, *TI*, *XVI*, 238 – 239.

⁵⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, iii.

Like Rahner, Gregorios also recommends a new epistemology of loving surrender⁵¹⁰ where, ‘even our knowledge must be laid aside, as we pass through the cloud of unknowing. It is not knowledge that helps you advance, but the love that transfigures.’⁵¹¹

Another highlight in both Rahner and Gregorios is found in their critical outlook shared while discussing *Benedictus Deus* by Pope Benedict XII⁵¹². Gregorios is outrightly critical of the definition on beatific vision by pope whereas Rahner puts forward a balanced critique at several junctures quoting *Benedictus Deus* in *Theological Investigations*.⁵¹³ Rahner is particularly critical of the preposition defined by Pope Benedict XII that ‘perfect beatitude granted to man by God consists in immediate access to God. For example, God is himself the fulfilment of man’, and clarifies it ‘is not anything other than the expression of a radical human hope in the Spirit of God’.⁵¹⁴

Gregorios narrates that Pope Benedict took his position on beatific vision of ‘divine essence’⁵¹⁵ so seriously that when some Armenians sought union with Rome five years later (1341), and the Pope counted it as one of the Armenian heresies that they denied the blessed vision of the essence of God to Christians.⁵¹⁶ Gregorios remains highly critical of the distinction developed by Western scholasticism between vision of knowledge and vision of comprehension, the second alone being impossible.⁵¹⁷ Gregorios, applying Nyssa’s allegoric representation explains that the theophany appears to Moses as light - the burning bush. However, as Moses travels up the mountain, it is in the darkness of the cloud that God encounters him.⁵¹⁸

Paulos Gregorios quotes Aquinas (*Summa Contra Gentiles*, III:51,54,57) to express that human intellect cannot comprehend the essence of God.⁵¹⁹ He quotes Philipians 3:12-14, to

⁵¹⁰ Rahner, *The Hiddenness of God*, TI, XVI, 239.

⁵¹¹ Gregorios, *A Human God*, iii.

⁵¹² Rahner critically refers to Pope Benedict XII while discussing several subjects in *Theological Investigations*. Rahner, “Remarks on The Dogmatic Treatise *De Trinitate*” TI, IV, 82. Rahner, TI, XVII, 114-116, “The Intermediate State”? See also: Paulos Gregorios, *Paulos Mar Gregorios: A Reader* (U.S.A: Fortress Press, 2017), 276.

⁵¹³ Rahner, *The Hiddenness of God*, TI, XVI, 236.

⁵¹⁴ Ibid.

⁵¹⁵ Pope Benedict XII, “Benedictus Deus”, accessed March 11, 2021, <https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/benedictus-deus-on-the-beatific-vision-of-god-13139>.

⁵¹⁶ Gregorios, *A Human God*, 26.

⁵¹⁷ Ibid.,26.

⁵¹⁸ Ibid.,32.

⁵¹⁹ Ibid.,26. Gregorios writes, “Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa Contra Gentiles* (III: 51, 54, 57) and in the *Summa Theologica* (Prima: Q.12) expressly cites Sf. John Chrysostom (*Commentary on John, Homily XV*), and Dionysius

represent the Pauline allegory of race as ‘a race of theosis.’⁵²⁰ It is a race towards the light, but the course is through the cloud of unknowing, through the difficult task of laying aside the false and puffed up knowledge that separates us from God.⁵²¹

8 CONCLUSION

The communication of mystery takes place towards humanity in grace; and as Rahner reminds ‘‘mystery demands, as the condition of possibility of its being heard, a hearer divinized by grace.’’⁵²² Grace, being strictly supernatural, is ultimately the beatific vision or its ontological presupposition.⁵²³ And human being, elevated by grace, is the spiritual being ontologically directed to the beatific vision. To put it succinctly, as Caponi explains, Rahner articulates the understanding of divinization through three interlocking concepts: ‘‘the divine self-communication’’, ‘‘supernatural existential’’⁵²⁴, and ‘‘quasi-formal causality’’.⁵²⁵ Rahner explains that, whether human beings explicitly recognize it or not, whether humans can or cannot reflect upon it in itself and in isolation, human is, in virtue of the grace offered to humanity in freedom.⁵²⁶ This grace Rahner clarifies, is implanted in the mode of a formal object and of a spiritual perspective of an *a priori* kind, orientated towards the immediacy of God as his final end.⁵²⁷

Nature is not to be understood as a plain and obvious reality, totally involved with itself, to which grace is added (extrinsically) as the result of a kind of secondary decision of God.⁵²⁸ God lovingly seeks in freedom to bestow himself and, because he so wills in freedom; and because he wills grace, creates a nature to which he can impart himself as free love.⁵²⁹ For

the Pseudo-Areopagite (*de Divinis Nominibus* I:5) who say that God's essence cannot be comprehended by human knowledge.’’

⁵²⁰ Gregorios, *A Human God*, 32.

⁵²¹ Gregorios, *A Human God*, 32.

⁵²² Karl Rahner, ‘‘The Concept of Mystery in Catholic Theology’’, *TI, IV*, 47.

⁵²³ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁵²⁴ Supernatural existential is our unexacted capacity to receive the divine self-communication and the means by which we continue to negotiate the reality of our own existence. See, Karl Rahner, ‘‘The Supernatural Existential’’ in G.B Kelly, Ed., *Karl Rahner: Theologian of the Graced Search for Meaning*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992), 110-115. The topic has been discussed in detail in the previous chapter of this thesis.

⁵²⁵ Caponi, *Karl Rahner: Divinization in Roman Catholicism*, 263.

⁵²⁶ Rahner, ‘‘Observations on The Problem of the ‘Anonymous Christian’’’ *TI, XIV*, 289.

⁵²⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵²⁸ Rahner, ‘‘On the Theology of Worship’’, *TI, XIX*, 144.

⁵²⁹ *Ibid.*

Rahner, “Nature is because grace has to be”.⁵³⁰ And from the outset, as ground of nature, grace is the innermost center of this nature.⁵³¹ Gregorios also highlights the gracious nature of humanity and remarks, “Nature is Grace”.⁵³² Therefore, nature is never purely and simply secular; it is always nature graciously endowed with God himself.⁵³³ Underpinning both the Patristic and scholastic teaching on grace, is the concept of the *desiderium naturale*, the desire, natural to all human beings, for the beatific vision which ultimately leads us to God.⁵³⁴

Yet Rahner is very clear that grace does not imply the elimination of mystery.⁵³⁵ For him, grace is rather the radical possibility of the absolute proximity of the mystery, not eliminated by its proximity, but really presented as mystery.⁵³⁶ Fascinatingly, Rahner explains the vision of the Mystery by corresponding it with a pilgrim’s journey, which does remind us of Nyssa’s, *Life of Moses*. Rahner sums up,

The Pilgrim, still a stranger to the vision of God, can be deceived about the character of absolute mystery in God, because he knows the holy mystery only as the distant and aloof. When he sees God, God’s incomprehensibility is the content of his vision and so the bliss of his love.⁵³⁷

For Rahner it would be a foolish and anthropomorphic misinterpretation to maintain that the proper object of vision and bliss was something perspicuous, comprehensible, and perfectly well understood, merely surrounded as it were by an obscure margin and a limit set by the finitude of the creature.⁵³⁸ In beatific vision what is comprehended and what is incomprehensible are in reality one and the same thing.⁵³⁹ The divine incomprehensibility as Vladimir Lossky explains, “is a tendency towards an ever-greater plenitude, in which knowledge is transformed into ignorance, the theology of concepts into contemplation, dogmas into experience of ineffable mysteries.”⁵⁴⁰

⁵³⁰ Ibid.

⁵³¹ Ibid.

⁵³² Gregorios, *Cosmic Man*, 151.

⁵³³ Rahner, “On the Theology of Worship”, *TI, XIX*, 144.

⁵³⁴ Kelly, ed., *Ressourcement Theology: A Sourcebook*, 13.

⁵³⁵ Karl Rahner, “The Concept of Mystery in Catholic Theology”, *TI, IV*, 56.

⁵³⁶ Ibid.

⁵³⁷ Ibid., 56.

⁵³⁸ Ibid.

⁵³⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁰ Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (London: James Clarke, 1957), 238.

Rahner's view of the incomprehensibility of God has its positive side and a blessed content which can be known even though it cannot be fully expressed.⁵⁴¹ Otherwise, the incomprehensibility of God would be only a blank unintelligibility, the mere absence of a reality.⁵⁴² For Rahner, "knowledge as clarity, sight and perception, and knowledge as possession of the incomprehensible mystery must be taken as the two facets of the same process: both grow in like and not in inverse proportion".⁵⁴³ Thus, Rahner explains that grace and the beatific vision can only be understood as the possibility and the reality respectively, of the immediate presence of the holy mystery as such.⁵⁴⁴ Through the immediate presence of the Holy mystery the beauty of the inexpressible nature of the Trinity shine in us and we are deified by the Holy Spirit who conforms us into the perfect image of the Father.⁵⁴⁵

The doctrine of the Trinity teaches us that God as triune communion extends outwards into history to include and draw in all of creation in love.⁵⁴⁶ Gregorios explains that by affirming oneness and threeness as well as all manifoldness are in God, we can derive guidance for the unity between churches or traditions and as well as for the whole of humanity.⁵⁴⁷ He is clear that diversity belongs to the heart of unity. And yet not all diversity — certainly not the diversity of chaos and non-relation.⁵⁴⁸ Diversity must be united by a particular kind of relation.⁵⁴⁹ Gregorios admits that in the case of God and in the case of the church⁵⁵⁰, that relation lies in the dialectic of freedom and love in the community of mutual submission and commonality of being and action.⁵⁵¹ In the doctrine of Trinity as we understand it, God is a community of three persons, linked by commonality of being, purpose and action, united in a mutual love that pours oneself

⁵⁴¹ Ibid.

⁵⁴² Ibid.

⁵⁴³ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁵ Vladimir Lossky, *The Vision of God*, Asheleigh Moorhouse, trans., (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1983),98. Lossky here quotes from St. Cyril of Alexandria. See, Cyril of Alexandria, "Commentary on the Gospel according to St. John", vol. 2, in *Library of the Fathers 48* (London: Walter Smith, 1885), 370-71.

⁵⁴⁶ Declan Marmion and Rik van Nieuwenhove, *An Introduction to the Trinity* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 2.

⁵⁴⁷ Gregorios, "Human Unity for the Glory of God", 210.

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁰ In the case of ecumenical relations between churches or for unity between the Eastern and the Western Theological enterprise.

⁵⁵¹ Gregorios, "Human Unity for the Glory of God", 210.

out for the sake of others.⁵⁵² And it is, “through the communion and relationship present within God, the human person, created in the image of God, is called to share in this dynamic.”⁵⁵³ In the context of the current pandemic and ecological catastrophe, this triune communion calls forth humanity for unified efforts and harmonious well-being of the whole creation.

⁵⁵² Ibid., 211, Gregorios also describes that, “It is from the overflow of this mutual love that the creation has come into being, and humanity has appeared on the earth.”

⁵⁵³ Declan Marmion and Rik Van Nieuwenhove, *An Introduction to the Trinity*, 3.

CHAPTER FOUR

BEYOND HUMANITY: AN EVALUATION: KARL RAHNER AND PAULOS GREGORIOS

1. INTRODUCTION

Ours is an era that looks at scientific prowess in transforming human beings. Humanity transformed beyond humans and into transhumanism. Indeed, in our age, ‘to be fully human is to be beyond human.’⁵⁵⁴ The debate in our day continues the nature of humanity and how it is defined in relation to technology, non-human life, and transhumanism. Transhumanism, a movement exploring the use of technology to enhance human physical and cognitive abilities, raises ethical questions about the boundaries of human nature. Contemporary conversations focus on topics such as genetic engineering, cognitive enhancements, and the implications of blurring the lines between humans and machines. The emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) has further sparked the integration of technology into human life.

The focus on human personhood is not an exclusively modern development. Anthropological elements can be found throughout the biblical writings, emphasizing personal faith, the vision of God, moral conversion, and individual responsibility before God. A concern with human interiority also appears in Patristic and Medieval writings, such as Gregory of Nyssa’s *Life of Moses*, Augustine’s *Confessions* and *De Trinitate*, and Thomas Aquinas’ reevaluation of faith and reason in the *Summa Theologiae*. Moreover, it comes to the fore in the Reformation period, in the debates surrounding faith, good works, and Christian liberty.⁵⁵⁵

Although the movement towards a more ‘anthropological orientation’ in theology has roots in Patristic, Medieval, and Reformation thought, it develops mainly in the modern era.⁵⁵⁶ The scientific, political, and philosophical upheavals of the Renaissance and Enlightenment of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries paved the way for a transformed understanding of the

⁵⁵⁴ Charlie Blake, Claire Molloy & Steven Shakespeare, eds. *Beyond Human*, (London: Continuum, 2012), 1.

⁵⁵⁵ Kevin M. Vander Schel, “Modern Method in Theological anthropology: The Turn to the Subject”, Mary Ann Hindsale & Stephen Okey, eds. in *T& T Clark Handbook of Theological anthropology* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021), 24.

⁵⁵⁶ Patristic Period (100-451), The Middle Ages and Renaissance (500-1500), The Reformation and Post Reformation (1500-1750), The Modern Period (1750 onwards). As classified in Alister E. McGrath. *Historical Theology: An introduction to the History of Christian Thought* (U.K: Blackwell Publishers, 2023), v-vi.

human person and reason as an independent and authoritative criterion.⁵⁵⁷ In this chapter, I shall explore the aspects of theological anthropology in the thought of Paulos Mar Gregorios, interspersing it with Karl Rahner's converging and diverging approaches.

2. Sacramental Humanism

Paulos Gregorios seeks a renewal of theological anthropology and subscribes to a 'sacramental and ecclesiological humanism.'⁵⁵⁸ He calls forth for a re-examination of Augustinian thought, which he feels, in turn, has influenced the shaping of the theological sphere as a whole. Gregorios is especially critical of the low view of matter leading to a low view of the human element in the Incarnation of our Lord, taking sin as almost constitutive of human nature.⁵⁵⁹

For Gregorios, humanity is pervaded by sin, and there is no denial of it; however, sinfulness is not the definition of a human person created in the image of God.⁵⁶⁰ Moreover, when the dignity and worth of the human being are affirmed (not vis-à-vis non-human creation, but in harmonious and creative relationship with the rest of creation), then God is glorified.⁵⁶¹

Gregorios criticizes Augustinian soteriology because of its preoccupation with individual sin and distortions of sacraments as accommodations of spiritual realities to suit the grossness of human beings.⁵⁶² The formulation of the doctrine of the sacraments in the Middle Ages may be considered an outstanding achievement. However, the Augustinian framework assumes the superiority of the inner and the superficiality of the external.⁵⁶³ In *City of God*, Augustine describes a sacrament as a "sacred sign" (*sacrum signum*)⁵⁶⁴ and the "visible form of invisible grace."⁵⁶⁵

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁸ Paulos Mar Gregorios, *Love's Freedom the Grand Mystery*, (Kottayam: MGF Publications,1997), 172.

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid.,170-171.

⁵⁶⁰ Paulos Gregorios, *Paulos Mar Gregorios: A Reader* (U.S.A: Fortress Press, 2017), 282.

⁵⁶¹ Ibid.

⁵⁶² Gregorios, *Love's Freedom the Grand Mystery*, 170-71. Gregorios clarifies that his criticism is not to destroy reputation but to seek the renewal of theology in a genuinely ecumenical context. For Gregorios, Augustine is a "great genius, a spiritual and intellectual giant." See also, Alister E. Mc Grath, *Reformation Thought: An Introduction* (U.K: Blackwell Publishers,2012), 222. Calvin also considered the sacraments to be divine accommodation to human weakness. God accommodates to our limitations.

⁵⁶³ Phillip Cary, *Outward Signs: The Powerlessness of External Things in Augustine's Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), viii.

⁵⁶⁴ Civ. Dei 10:5.

⁵⁶⁵ Cary, *Outward Signs*,162. An Augustinian formulation, although not an exact quote but a phrase derived from Augustine's writings. *Ep. 105:12*

To understand his semiotics, the answer Augustine provides to why both Moses and God are said to sanctify the people of Israel in Leviticus is important. Augustine has a clear distinction between the visible sacrament and invisible sanctification:

How is it then that both Moses and the Lord sanctified? It is not Moses in place of the Lord; instead, Moses sanctified by visible sacraments through his ministry, while the Lord sanctified by invisible Grace through the Holy Spirit, which is also where the whole fruit of the visible sacraments is. Without this sanctification of invisible Grace, what is the profit of the visible sacraments?⁵⁶⁶

Instead of relating sacrament and grace as sign and thing signified, Augustine lays them on separate tracks: the visible track of sacramental sanctification and the invisible track of spiritual sanctification. Thus, the visible and invisible are two different orders of causality and sanctification, one external and the other inward.⁵⁶⁷ As Phillip Cary points out, in Augustine's semiotics, ever since the treatise *On the Teacher*, it is clear that outward things can signify an inner thing but cannot cause us to have it. Outward signs cannot communicate an inner gift, in the original sense of the term 'communicate': they cannot cause us to share in it as a common good. That sharing or communication must occur at a deeper level, the inward level of the soul, which the outward sign merely signifies and marks.⁵⁶⁸

Gregorios objects to the dualism in Augustine's sacramental thought and contends that the "understanding of sacraments as *verbum visibile* an accommodation to our weak bodily nature, of the purer word, which must be invisible, has Manichean antecedents."⁵⁶⁹ Gregorios' view is that matter is the vessel of the spirit and therefore is foundational to the sacramental thought:

Without the recovery of a richer sacramental view, we cannot recover a theology that takes the Incarnation seriously. For Gregorios, the world is good; the body is good. Without the body, there are no senses; without the senses, the human mind knows nothing. Christ has taken his body into heaven. The matter is the medium of the spirit. In fact, matter itself is spiritual so the Eastern fathers would argue.⁵⁷⁰

⁵⁶⁶ As in 163, QQs in Hept. 3:84, Questions on the Heptateuch

⁵⁶⁷ Cary, *Outward Signs*, 163.

⁵⁶⁸ Cary, *Outward Signs*, 156.

⁵⁶⁹ Paul Verghese, *Freedom, and Authority*, Freedom, and Authority (Madras: The Christian Literature Society, 1974), 48. Augustine's point of departure seems to be a dualism: the separation of matter from spirit and the elevation of one over the other.

⁵⁷⁰ Verghese, *Freedom and Authority*, 48.

Gregorios points out that a sacrament is generally a means and a seal of attestation of some specific grace in the West.⁵⁷¹ He explains that the East is not used to thinking in such terms and introduces three terms preferred to speak of sacraments, as *mysterion* (μυστήριον; meaning ‘hidden or secret’) in Greek *rozo* (meaning to conspire, to initiate into) and *qudosho* (from root *qadesh* meaning sanctify, hallow, or consecrate) in Syriac.⁵⁷² In the Eastern understanding, a sacrament is a mystery in so far as it penetrates the eternal order of reality and thus transcends our time-space logic.⁵⁷³ Gregorios shows how all mysteries are related integrally to the great mystery of Incarnation and its continuation in the body of Christ.⁵⁷⁴ He explains that the Eucharist completes all sacraments.⁵⁷⁵

For Gregorios, soteriology must deal with more than deliverance from sin.⁵⁷⁶ He believes salvation is making human beings like God, bringing him into the fullness of humanity;⁵⁷⁷ Moreover, today we are caught in a negative and individual view of salvation.⁵⁷⁸ For Gregorios, the sacramental principle is integral to the human condition and to the Incarnation. As a sacrament has two aspects inseparably joining the outer and inner, the external and the internal, humanity’s call is to be a mediator and a frontier being straddling both realities, the creator, and the creation.⁵⁷⁹ Gregorios puts it succinctly, “human beings are citizens of two worlds’”.⁵⁸⁰

3. Incarnation and Trinity

⁵⁷¹ Gregorios, *Love’s Freedom the Grand Mystery*, 171.

⁵⁷² Ibid., 177-179.

⁵⁷³ Ibid., 178.

⁵⁷⁴ Paulos Mar Gregorios, *Glory, and Burden*, (Delhi: ISPCCK & MGF, 2006), 180. For Gregorios, “Baptism is the initiating mystery by which through faith and action we participate in the death and resurrection of Christ. Thus, Baptism-Eucharist is the actual process of participation in the risen life Christ the God-man who unites the community of the Church with the community of the Holy Trinity.” See, Gregorios, *A Reader*, 143.

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid. Pope Benedict XVI (Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis* Para 17) stated, “The holy Eucharist brings Christian initiation to completion and represents the center and goal of all sacramental life.” See, https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20070222_sacramentum-caritatis.html

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid., 171.

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁹ Gregorios, *A Reader*, 285.

⁵⁸⁰ Gregorios, *Love’s Freedom the Grand Mystery*, 171.

Gregorios has consistently highlighted the importance of recognizing the basic tenets of Christology and thus delving into the greatest mysteries of Christianity – Incarnation and Holy Trinity.⁵⁸¹ He writes that the literature of the Christian Church leaves us in no doubt that the two great mysteries, the Mystery of the Holy Trinity, and the Mystery of the Incarnation, are the foundation of Christianity. They relate to the very ultimate ground of our human existence. The whole Christian tradition has grown up on these two roots.⁵⁸²

For Gregorios, the doctrines of Trinity and Incarnation belong together and have been recognized as the foundation for Christian faith since at least the fourth century. He explains, the “early church reflected on who this Jesus of Nazareth was and the apostolic proclamation that this human person was none other than the eternal Son of God incarnate.” Gregorios also proposes a Trinitarian model and pattern for Christian unity. He writes,

Diversity belongs to the heart of unity. And yet not all diversity — certainly not the diversity of chaos and non-relation. A particular kind of relation must unite diversity. In God and the Church, that relation lies in the dialectic of freedom and love. And also, in the community of mutual submission and commonality of being and action.⁵⁸³

Rahner also explains that the Incarnation is the very centre of the reality from which we Christians live, of the reality we believe. The mystery of the Trinity and human participation in divine nature is accorded to us through Incarnation. He writes, “For the mystery of the divine Trinity is open to us only here; only here is the mystery of our participation in the divine nature accorded us, and the mystery of the Church is only the extension of the mystery of Christ.”⁵⁸⁴

Rahner calls humanity’s participation in divinity as humanity’s supernatural calling to a participation in the life of the triune God himself.⁵⁸⁵ With God becoming human, humanity is called to share the life of God supernaturally. As Rahner describes,

By the fact that God the Son became man of the Virgin Mary, a member of this one human race, the Word of God became himself a member of this one Adamite humanity and, conversely, the

⁵⁸¹ Monsignor Otto Mauer *ed.*, *Wort Und Wahrheit*, Supplementary Issue Number 1 (Vienna: Pro Oriente, 1972),168.

⁵⁸² *Ibid.*,168.

⁵⁸³ Gregorios, *Human Unity for the Glory of God*, 210. The next chapter will include a detailed discussion on the ecumenical engagements between the Catholic and Orthodox churches.

⁵⁸⁴ Karl Rahner, “On the Theology of The Incarnation”, *TI, IV*, 105.

⁵⁸⁵ Karl Rahner, “Membership of The Church According to The Teaching of Pius Xii’s Encyclical: *Mystici Corporis Christi*”, *TI, II*, 82.

one human race became thereby fundamentally and radically called to share the life of God supernaturally.⁵⁸⁶

Furthermore, Rahner speaks of an *incarnational tendency* in the grace of God. He states, Grace is not merely ‘merited’ by human beings but bears a distinctive trait of him who, as God-Man, has introduced it in a definite manner into the world. Furthermore, Christ has earned it by the act of salvation on the cross so that it becomes the legal property of his brethren (human beings) according to the flesh.⁵⁸⁷ Rahner tells us that this Grace has an ‘incarnational tendency’ if we may put it this way. He writes, “Grace has not merely a dynamic directed to the inner life of God in which it makes us participate, it also has a dynamic directed towards the world, by which it causes human being whom it saves to be comprised within the redeeming and transfiguring descent of the Word of the Father into the world, and in which he gives this world his Holy Ghost.”⁵⁸⁸ As Gregorios reminds us, this is to open ourselves to that Spirit, which is our common calling to the glory of the One God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.⁵⁸⁹

4. The Two Natures

For Gregorios, the basic Christological understanding of nature of Christ is an essential aspect for theological anthropology. He explains that the two natures (human and divine) are not linked in such a way that the divine nature is the subject and the human nature the instrument.⁵⁹⁰ Nor are the two natures placed side by side so that human beings can have contact only with the human nature of Christ. Our union is with God in Christ and not merely with the human nature of Christ.⁵⁹¹

Strikingly, Rahner also explores the Chalcedonian formula⁵⁹² for a better understanding of theological anthropology and does not shy away from suggesting to his readers to sketch the

⁵⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁷ Karl Rahner, “Personal and Sacramental Piety”, *TI, II*, 120-121.

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁹ Paulos Mar Gregorios, “Human Unity for the Glory of God” *The Ecumenical Review* vol.37, no.2 (1985), 212.

⁵⁹⁰ Otto Mauer *ed.*, *Wort Und Wahrheit*, 174-175.

⁵⁹¹ Ibid.

⁵⁹² The Council of Chalcedon (451) stated that a divine and a human nature are united “inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably” in the one Person of Christ. It states the unity of two poles: transcendence and immanence of the Word. Interestingly, Gregorios explains why his tradition (Oriental Orthodox) prefers one united terminology, “We fear that the two-nature formula is sometimes misunderstood by as meaning two different persons, i.e., The pre-existent logos and the man Jesus somehow uneasily yoked together. He clarifies, “we know that theologians on the Chalcedonian side do not teach this. However, the distinction between the historical Jesus and the Kerygmatic Christ in contemporary Christology worries us.” Gregorios succinctly puts the reason for such a Theological divide,

outlines of theological anthropology from the starting point of Christology. He claims it is not perverse to conceive our human selves in terms of that Man who as such is God's presence for us, existent in the world.⁵⁹³ Rahner believes that Christology is at once the beginning and end of anthropology and that for all eternity, such an anthropology is really Theo-logy. For God himself has become man. The less we merely think of this humanity as something added to God, he says the more we understand it as God's very presence in the world and hence (not, all the same) see it in a true, spontaneous vitality and freedom before God, and the more intelligible does the abiding mystery of our faith become, and also an expression of our very own existence.⁵⁹⁴

For both Rahner and Gregorios, it seems that the Christological debate and its contemporary relevance are significant. In his article, "Current Problems in Christology" in his *Theological Investigations*. Rahner furthers our understanding of who man (human) is⁵⁹⁵ and in a preface, he admirably explains the scope of formulations and formulas:

The clearest formulations, the most sanctified formulas, the classic condensations of the centuries-long work of the Church in prayer, reflection, and struggle concerning God's mysteries: all these derive their life from the fact that they are not an end but beginning, not goal but means, truths which open the way to the - ever-greater - Truth.⁵⁹⁶

Rahner neither recognises 'a petrified preservation nor abandonment of a formula'.⁵⁹⁷ He feels the approach required is instead (the more spiritual it is) a becoming-new which preserves the old and preserves it even more as old, the more spiritual this history is.⁵⁹⁸ For Rahner, all formulations of the Church "transcends itself" and "are not end but beginning."⁵⁹⁹

For his part, Paulos Gregorios, in his writings, tries to focus on the problem of human union with God with some Christological questions. The one nature Christology is integrally connected to our understanding of theosis. For Gregorios, the primary question is, "Are we saved by an encounter of faith in Christ or by union with him?"⁶⁰⁰ Do we simply stand face to

"what has caused the separation between two sides appears now to have primarily cultural, political, and terminological." See, Gregorios, *The Human God*, 69. Gregorios also admits, "The person of Jesus Christ transcends so much our comprehension and linguistic expression that no formulation is adequate to describe Him."

⁵⁹³ Karl Rahner, "Current Problems in Christology", *TI, I*, 184-185.

⁵⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 186.

⁵⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 150.

⁵⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 184.

⁵⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 151.

⁵⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 150.

⁶⁰⁰ Paulos Gregorios, *A Human God* (Kottayam: MGF, 1992), 65.

face with him at a distance, or do we become united with him in such a way that from one perspective, we are Christ, and from another perspective, Christ can be distinguished from us and prayed to?⁶⁰¹ Furthermore, he answers, “I think the latter view which emphasizes both union and distinction, is more faithful to the original tradition.”⁶⁰² Gregorios clarifies that if we affirm, as seen in writings of some theologians (e. g. Emile Mersch in the *Total Christ*)⁶⁰³, that our union is only with the human nature, which since it is the human nature of the Divine Logos, has divine properties transmitted to it, then we are still emphasizing the distinction of the natures, and there may be implied here fear to affirm that our human nature can be really united to the Divine nature.⁶⁰⁴

Here Gregorios raises a pertinent question: Isn't that the point of the Incarnation?⁶⁰⁵ For him, Incarnation affirms that our human nature can be really united to the Divine nature. He believes that if Christ's human nature was united to his divine nature, our human nature could also be united with Christ's divine-human nature, not just with his human nature. Furthermore, this is essentially what the one united nature Christology seeks to affirm. He writes that “our commitment to a *theosis* soteriology is at the base of our one-nature Christology, which does not deny the distinction between the divine and the human but emphasises their union rather than on their distinction”.⁶⁰⁶ The divide between human and divine is overcome by the Incarnation of God in Jesus Christ.

5. Humanity: The Glory of God

Gregorios felt that the tragedy of Christian thought had been the tendency to denigrate and denounce humanity as sinful, supposedly to magnify God's glory.⁶⁰⁷ He explains a great danger when some people think that the more we affirm the sinfulness of a human person, the more we glorify God.⁶⁰⁸ In his writings, while describing humanity as the Glory of God, he has two

⁶⁰¹ Ibid.

⁶⁰² Ibid.

⁶⁰³ Mersch, Émile (1890–1940), Jesuit theologian. He sought to construct a Theological synthesis in the ‘Mystical Body of Christ.’ He traced the doctrine of the Church through history and expounded it from a systematic standpoint.

⁶⁰⁴ Gregorios, *A Human God*, 66.

⁶⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid.

aspects highlighted: Human beings revealing the Glory of God through virtuous deeds and humanity's chief end as glorifying God.

For Gregorios, there is no denying that humanity is pervaded by sin, but sinfulness is not the definition of a human person created in the image of God.⁶⁰⁹ Whenever this dignity and worth of human beings is affirmed (not vis-a-vis the non-human creation, but in harmonious and creative relationship with the rest of creation) there, God is glorified.⁶¹⁰ Gregorios draws attention to the Hebrew word for glory, " *kabod*", which means weight or worth, and explains that the glory of God consists in the manifestation of God's worth, excellence, and quality.⁶¹¹ Thus, God is glorified when God's love, wisdom, and power are shown forth.⁶¹²

Gregorios says, the glory of God is to be manifested in the glory of humanity.⁶¹³ The two are not opposed to each other; that is the whole point of the Incarnation.⁶¹⁴ Christ took the form of a human person and a servant, not just in order that the Son of God's self-emptying would in itself glorify God. On the contrary, the loving, sacrificial acts of the self-emptied human person, who also takes the form of a suffering servant, truly glorifies God.⁶¹⁵ Gregorios writes, "going on stating that we are sinners does not bring glory to God. However, when God's excellence, God's goodness as love, wisdom, and power, is manifested in the actions of persons and communities, God is glorified."⁶¹⁶ Rahner also clarifies that when a human being 'justified by God's Grace does in faith what God has commanded does not glorify man before God and vis-à-vis God, but rather extols God'.⁶¹⁷ All 'meritorious actions' are manifestations of the one, divinely effected gift of Grace given to man; they let appear what is actually in man.⁶¹⁸

Gregorios draws attention to the Incarnation of God into human form as the greatest manifestation of the glory of God. And thus, he explains that wherever persons show forth the goodness of God through their attitudes, words, actions, and prayers, there God is glorified,

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁶¹⁰ Gregorios, *A Reader*, 282.

⁶¹¹ 281, *A Reader*

⁶¹² Ibid.

⁶¹³ Ibid.

⁶¹⁴ Ibid.

⁶¹⁵ Ibid.

⁶¹⁶ Ibid.

⁶¹⁷ Karl Rahner, "The Comfort of Time", *TI*, III, 144.

⁶¹⁸ Ibid.

irrespective of whether such person is a believer or not.⁶¹⁹ And to recognise such goodness wherever it exists and to support it in any creative way should form part of “our common calling, to the one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”⁶²⁰

For Gregorios, in Jesus’ person, the divine being and human being are inseparably united without confusion. There is now, in Christ, no “total otherness” between God and humanity.⁶²¹ Furthermore, this theological recognition of humanity in the person of Jesus Christ has its consequences on understanding divinity in human beings. God took human form and exalted human nature to become partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). And to the question of how God is glorified through humanity, Gregorios writes,

When God's excellence, God's goodness as love, wisdom, and power, is manifested in the actions of persons and communities, God is glorified. The glory of Christ as a human person is the manifestation of the glory of God. Wherever human persons show forth the goodness of God through their attitudes, words, actions, and prayers, there God is glorified —irrespective of whether such persons are believers or not. To recognize such goodness wherever it exists and to support it in any creative way should form part of our common calling, to the One God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.⁶²²

The glory of humanity becomes revealed when human beings do the works of God. In these works, God and humanity are simultaneously glorified.⁶²³

6. The Transfiguring Participation

Theosis in the East and Beatific vision in the West, are concepts of deification explaining human beings, ‘becoming by grace, who Christ is by nature.’⁶²⁴ However, it seems these concepts are understood differently in the two traditions. Interestingly, these divergences are almost negligible in the thought of both Karl Rahner and Paulos Gregorios, representatives of the two traditions. Within the two traditions, the struggle remains regarding speaking about the object of the vision. Some pertinent questions are: What do we mean when we say we hope to see God or partake in God’s nature? Do we see the essence of God in the beatific vision? Is it a “direct

⁶¹⁹ Ibid.

⁶²⁰ Gregorios, *A Reader*, 283.

⁶²¹ Paulos Mar Gregorios, “Human Unity for the Glory of God”, *The Ecumenical Review*, Volume 37(1985), Issue 2, 211.

⁶²² Gregorios, “Human Unity for the Glory of God”, 209.

⁶²³ Gregorios, “Human Unity for the Glory of God”, 207.

⁶²⁴ John Arblaster & Rob Faesen eds. *Theosis/Deification: Christian Doctrines of Divinization East and West* (Leuven: Peeters, 2018), 91.

union with the absolute God in a direct vision?⁶²⁵” and is it that we experience God’s very own reality “‘experienced in the direct vision of God?’⁶²⁶”

Gregorios does not agree with the understanding of “beatific vision” as largely understood in the West as the mind’s direct encounter with God. He points out,

The end is not “beatific vision” or the mind’s direct encounter with God as in the Western Tradition. Instead, the vision is only a beckoning, a call to be reshaped, so that, through the divine-human person that Christ has become, we too might become truly divine-human, sharing in Christ’s nature, and growing into him.⁶²⁷

Gregorios echoes the Patristic understanding of theosis as ‘participation’ and explains that what Christians should seek is not the experience of the beatific vision but participation in the transfiguring process by which human beings grow towards the image of God.⁶²⁸ The theme of the deification of the human person was one of the most fundamental themes of Christian theology in its first centuries in the Greek world. Theosis is understood as a transforming union of the human person with God.⁶²⁹ For Gregorios, the transfiguring process is infinite, and it is the “horizon” always reveals new things but always recedes, beckoning us to advance further.⁶³⁰ Human nature thus understood has potential for the transformation and furthers it by the Grace of God (and consistent human efforts).

⁶²⁵ Karl Rahner, “Questions on The Theology of History”, *TI*, V,104.

⁶²⁶ *Ibid.*,103.

⁶²⁷ Gregorios, *A Reader*, 286.

⁶²⁸ *Ibid.* “According to Gregory of Nyssa, there are no limits to the degree of perfection, knowledge of God, or Godlikeness that can be progressively achieved. Grace restores the image and appropriates the likeness of God "as far as possible" in this life and the next, as St. Paul suggests in 2 Corinthians 3:18. Deification, for Gregory, quoting Paul, is a life of gradual transformation and perfection, "from glory to glory" without limitation. Our heart's desire to see God constantly expands as we progress toward the Good. "This truly is the vision of God: never to be satisfied in the desire to see him Thus, no limit would interrupt growth in the ascent to God.” Michael J. Christensen *the Problem, Promise, and Process of Theosis*, in Michael J. Christensen and Jeffery A. Wittung eds., *Partakers of the Divine Nature the History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions* (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2007), 26-27. See, Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses* 2.239. Gregory of Nyssa: *The Life of Moses*, trans. Abraham Malherbe and Everett Ferguson, CWS (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1978), 116-17.

⁶²⁹ John Arblaster & Rob Faesen eds. *Theosis/Deification*, 1.

⁶³⁰ Gregorios, *A Reader*, 286. Gregory of Nyssa wrote, “so it is then certainly impossible to achieve perfection, since, as I have related, perfection is not demarcated by any boundaries. The only boundary for virtue is the lack of a boundary. However, how could one reach the sought-after limit when there is no limit?” See, Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, trans. Abraham J. Malherbe and Everett Ferguson (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 31.

For Gregorios, the process of transfiguration is also passing through a cloud of unknowing into light, resonating Nyssa's words in *Life of Moses*.⁶³¹ He writes,

We see the light, but then we may soon have to pass through the darkness toward that Horizon that infinitely beckons. Even our knowledge must be laid aside as we pass through the cloud of unknowing. It is not knowledge that helps you advance but the love that transfigures.⁶³²

He explains that our love of God and unconditional love in the form of Grace transfigures humanity.⁶³³ Gregorios clarifies that there is no duality or opposition between God and humanity; there are, of course, fundamental differences; but the affinity far exceeds the differences.⁶³⁴

For Rahner, in a similar vein, 'Participation in the divine nature' is a vital expression to explain human divinization. He explains that through Incarnation, the mystery of our participation in the divine nature is accorded to us." Rahner describes that Grace is God himself and more importantly, Grace is not just a pardon for the poor sinner but 'participation in the divine nature.'⁶³⁵ As Francis J. Caponi observes, "Created for partnership with the divine, humanity in its created aspect participates in the divine by existing as a hypaethral race, a creature of spirit, a being whose essence is "obediential potency," a natural receptivity to Grace".⁶³⁶

The image of God within us is not dormant rather is dynamic and vibrant. As Michelle A. Gonzale explains, "our growth in the image of God is part of our self-discovery of whom we are, as created by God. This leads to dramatic anthropology, where the human is in the process of becoming. We are always moving towards God."⁶³⁷

⁶³¹ Gregorios, *A Reader*, 286.

⁶³² Ibid.

⁶³³ Ibid. Rahner uses a similar expression that human beings must "welcome the love of God imparting God himself as free grace that is not owing to him." See, Karl Rahner, "Brief Theological Observations on the state Of Fallen Nature", *TI, XIX*, 47.

⁶³⁴ Ibid.

⁶³⁵ Karl Rahner, *Nature and Grace, TI, IV*, 178.

⁶³⁶ Francis J. Caponi, "Karl Rahner: Divinization in Roman Catholicism" in Michael J. Christensen and Jeffery A. Wittung eds., *Partakers of the Divine Nature the History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions* (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2007), 262.

⁶³⁷ Michelle A. Gonzalez, "Created for God and for each other", in Mary Ann Hindsale & Stephen Okey, eds. in *T& T Clark Handbook of Theological anthropology* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021),67.

⁶³⁷ Ibid.

7. Incomprehensibility and Vision

As we try to draw a paradigm of knowing about divinity, it is important to note how far it is possible to explain the divine-human communion through Grace. The essence of God is unattainable, but God has been revealed to us through His *energies* or Grace.

Fundamentally, incomprehensibility is not overcome in *Theosis* or *beatific vision*. Theological anthropology of the West is often criticized for the direct vision of God possibility endorsed in the beatific vision, whereas the East highlights the incomprehensibility. However, this cannot be an overarching statement. Rahner describes that this incomprehensibility continues in the direct presence of God afforded by what we call the beatific vision and can only be sustained in the loving surrender to the enduring mystery.⁶³⁸ He writes, “From this mystery man is no longer able to escape: he accepts God as he is, as the mystery of incomprehensibility who, once recognized, is the very truth of man and, once loved, is his blessed fulfilment.”⁶³⁹

In Gregorios, it is evident that he believes in the incomprehensibility of God and emphasizes the element of understanding God *via negativa*. For Gregorios, divinization is a race towards the light through the course of darkness, and like Moses, it is in the darkness of the cloud that God encounters us. He writes,

It is a race towards the light, but the course is through darkness through the cloud of unknowing. Through the difficult task of laying aside the false and puffed-up knowledge that separates us from God. Theophany appears to Moses as light - the burning bush. However, as he goes up Mount Sinai, it is in the darkness of the cloud that God encounters him.⁶⁴⁰

Now at some points in his writings, Rahner does reflect on the beatific vision as ‘an immediate, non-analogical vision of God’ (‘Some Implications of the Scholastic Concept of Uncreated Grace’, *TI I*: 328), in which ‘the divine essence itself shows itself directly, clearly and openly, in contradistinction to the analogous language of God which is mediated by the knowledge of finite beings different from God’. However, a generalization about Rahner’s understanding of beatific vision cannot be assumed unless we also learn from other articles where he persistently points out the incomprehensibility of God in Beatific vision. His point is that,

⁶³⁸ Karl Rahner, “Questions About God” *TI*, XVI, 239.

⁶³⁹ *Ibid.*, 244.

⁶⁴⁰ Gregorios, *A Human God*, 32.

God remains incomprehensible, and the object of vision is precisely this incomprehensibility, which we may not, therefore, think of as a sort of regrettably permanent limitation of our blessed comprehension of God. On the contrary, it must rather be thought of as the very substance of our vision and the very object of our blissful love.⁶⁴¹

Similarly, Rahner explains that the “vision must mean grasping and being grasped by the mystery”⁶⁴² In the Beatific vision, God thus remains incomprehensible, and the object of this vision is to realize this incomprehensibility. Rahner describes that when “s/he sees God, God’s incomprehensibility is the content of her/his vision and so the bliss of her/his love”.⁶⁴³ Surprisingly, Rahner calls it a foolish and anthropomorphic misunderstanding to think that the proper object of vision and bliss was something perspicuous, comprehensible, and perfectly well understood.⁶⁴⁴ As Gregorios states, essentially theosis is the ascent of Mount Sinai, an ascent for which there is no stop. The good is infinite and its only boundary being evil.⁶⁴⁵

8. NATURE AND GRACE

Eastern theology has a dynamic character and excludes every external combination of the ideas of nature and Grace. Instead, they interpenetrate each other exist in one another.⁶⁴⁶ Very interesting imagery is drawn by Gregory of Nyssa when he compares sin and evil as an ugly mask put over the beauty of the image. He writes,

“...the misery that encompasses us often causes the Divine gift to be forgotten and spreads the passions of the flesh, like some ugly mask, over the beauty of the image.”⁶⁴⁷

Our nature is the foundation of what we are and is what everybody shares, what makes all people alike. Therefore, being according to the divine image is intrinsic to our nature.⁶⁴⁸ It gives us the capacity to become like God or not, to choose between good and evil, live a life of virtue, love God and neighbor, be rewarded by God in the age to come or not, and enjoy communion

⁶⁴¹ Karl Rahner “The Concept of Mystery in Catholic Theology”, *TI, IV,42*.

⁶⁴² *Ibid.*

⁶⁴³ *Ibid.*,56.

⁶⁴⁴ *Ibid.*,56.

⁶⁴⁵ Gregorios, *A Reader*, 279.

⁶⁴⁶ Vladimir Lossky, *Orthodox Theology: An Introduction*, Translated by Ian, and Ihita Kesareodi- Watson (New York: SVS Press, 1978), 131.

⁶⁴⁷ Gregory of Nyssa, “On the Making of Man” in *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers, Vol. V*, Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds. (U.S.A: Hendrickson Publication, 1999), 558-559.

⁶⁴⁸ Nonna Verna Harrison, “The human person as image and likeness of God”, in Mary B. Cunningham and Elizabeth Theokritoff, *The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008),111.

with God in heaven. Their nature thus makes people capable of likeness to God, communion with him, and eternal life in the age to come – that is, salvation.⁶⁴⁹

The distinction between nature and *Grace* plays a crucial role in understanding the doctrine of theosis (deification) in Paulos Gregorios. Nature is understood in relationship to the creation of the human being in the image of God. Human nature does not presuppose the sinfulness of the human person, and nature and Grace are essentially identified as correlated realities. According to Gregorios, Gregory of Nyssa presents the remarkable intrinsic relationship between nature and Grace, "There is no nature apart from or outside of grace."⁶⁵⁰

Gregorios reflecting Eastern Patristics, explains that human beings are created in the image of God, and thus by nature, humanity is, therefore, to be like God, a participant in all good. Nevertheless, at the same time, sin is extrinsic to human nature, an accretion from the outside.⁶⁵¹ It is unlike making human nature totally devoid of the good and conceiving Grace as something supernatural entering nature from the outside.⁶⁵² Grace cannot be something added to a static and given entity called nature, but what we call nature is created, sustained, judged, and guided by Grace.⁶⁵³ For Gregorios, the whole nature of man is God's gracious gift and he puts it succinctly, "Nature is grace."⁶⁵⁴

Interestingly, even Rahner criticises this understanding of Grace as entering from outside, as a "mere superstructure."⁶⁵⁵ although he would not go to the extent of calling nature grace, if this meant diminishing its gratuity.⁶⁵⁶ In *Science, Technology, and the Future of Humanity*, Gregorios criticizes Rahner for maintaining an opposition between nature and

⁶⁴⁹ Harrison, "The human person as image and likeness of God", 111.

⁶⁵⁰ *Cosmic Man*, 129. Morwenna Ludlow comments while discussing the relationship between the divine and human agency that, "Paulos Mar Gregorios stresses the importance of divine agency through human nature, claiming that in Gregory's theology all is grace and that it would be a misinterpretation to impose an artificial distinction between grace and nature on his theology." See, Morwenna Ludlow, *Universal Salvation Eschatology in the Thought of Gregory of Nyssa and Karl Rahner* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 106. We shall discuss this criticism further in the chapter.

⁶⁵¹ Paulos Mar Gregorios, *Science, Technology, and the Future of Humanity* (Kottayam: ISPCK & MGF, 2007) 20.

⁶⁵² Ibid.

⁶⁵³ Gregorios, *Glory, and Burden*, 192.

⁶⁵⁴ Gregorios, *Cosmic Man*, 151.

⁶⁵⁵ Rahner, "Relationship between Nature and Grace," *TI, I*, 298.

⁶⁵⁶ Stephen J. Duffy, "Experience of Grace" in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, 46.

Grace.⁶⁵⁷ However, it is evident from our discussions that for both Rahner and Gregorios, nature and Grace have to be understood more in a union than in opposition. While Gregorios refraining from, and Rahner writing at length about the distinction between Nature and Grace, they functionally affirm the graced nature of humanity.

8.1 Divine Participation: *Ousia* and *Energia*

In Gregorios, the participation of nature in Grace is an important aspect to explore. As Gregorios explains, ‘Across the *diastema* or discontinuity between the Creator and the creation, there exists the continuity of *metousia* or participation. Without that participation, nothing can exist.’⁶⁵⁸ However, it would be interesting to explore an answer, to what extent do we participate in the being of God?

Created for partnership the destiny of man is to be like God in every respect except that of being a non-creature, i.e., God is the source of his being; however, human’s being will always be derived from God.⁶⁵⁹ However, in love, wisdom, and power, as well as in holiness, which is, after all, something more than the combination of these three, man must become like God.⁶⁶⁰ Through his Patristic understanding, Gregorios makes it very clear that human beings can only participate in the being, life, and goodness given to us through God’s *energia* and not in *ousia* (essence).⁶⁶¹ The *ousia* is only shared within the godhead of the Triune Creator and cannot be shared by the creation, either epistemologically (intellectually) or ontologically (in terms of being). However, the Creator’s *ousia* does share its *energia* with the creation.⁶⁶² For Gregorios,

⁶⁵⁷ While criticizing Augustinian view of man’s essential nature to be sinful, Gregorios expresses his dismay and writes, “The opposition between nature and grace continues to plague western theology, even in a new theologian like Karl Rahner.” See, Gregorios, *Science, Technology, and the Future of Humanity*, 19.

⁶⁵⁸ Gregorios, *Cosmic Man*, 151. We have already dealt in some details with the concepts, *diastema*, and *metousia* in the previous chapters.

⁶⁵⁹ Gregorios, *Love’s Freedom the Grand Mystery*, 176.

⁶⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁶¹ Gregorios, *Cosmic Man*, 151. See Also, Paulos Mar Gregorios, "Are God and Man One or Two? Reflections on the Secular Temptation," *Star of the East* vol. 1, no. 2 (April 1979): 21. Gregorios explains that human beings can know God only through operations (*energia*) of God. According to Gregorios the *ousia* and *energia* cannot be two distinct realities. It is from the *ousia* that the *energia* emerges, and the latter is an expression of the former. Hence, this is what we mean when we say that God is love or Mercy; it is because we have experienced God’s loving actions or operations that we project love to the being of God.

⁶⁶² Gregorios, *A Reader*, 217. The idea of participation has thus two levels and is the principle of continuity alongside the *diastema* or discontinuity between the two levels. Gregorios anchors his thought on observations by Gregory of Nyssa and recognizes that Gregory of Nyssa made use of Eunomius’ *ousia-energeia* construction to a different effect.

participation in the *ousia* of God means to be *autozoēs, autagathos, ho ontos on* (He who is life, and good in himself) and this is possible only for the Three Persons of the Triune Godhead. Therefore, we can participate in the being, the life and the goodness of God as it is given to us in God's *energeia*, which has brought us into being, sustains us in life, and leads us in the good.⁶⁶³ Furthermore, Gregorios clarifies that all three belong to the nature of human beings.⁶⁶⁴ He explains that “whole of the human nature has been assumed by him (Jesus Christ), and there is now no humanity other than the one which Christ took.”⁶⁶⁵

Taking a cue from Gregory of Nyssa, Gregorios sums up the lost possibility and its restoration through Incarnation,

The participation in Being, Life, and the Good as the original possibility of unfallen Man, has been lost because of Man's choice to participate in Evil, Death, and Non-being. The restoration of that possibility, as Gregory sees it, is the whole point of the Incarnation of the Lord.⁶⁶⁶

Gregorios explains that through Grace we receive the possibility of approaching God despite our sin and living in the joy of His love.⁶⁶⁷ As such Grace is freedom both from sin, and from death, for in access to God and by life in His love, sin is itself wiped away and death is overcome.⁶⁶⁸ Rahner also admits that Grace is not just a pardon for the poor sinner but ‘participation in the divine nature.’⁶⁶⁹

For Gregorios, in Jesus Christ, we have a new kind of humanity; it is a humanity that died and rose again, sinless.⁶⁷⁰ This humanity is inseparably united with God, and this great new thing has come into being through the Incarnation.⁶⁷¹ Sacramentally it is in this new humanity that Christians participate by virtue of their baptism, of their anointing with the Holy Spirit, and their participation in the body and blood of Christ.⁶⁷² Gregorios writes,

This is what matters, the participation in this new humanity that is indivisibly and inseparably united with God. This is how I am saved, by Participation in the new humanity which has overcome sin and death - not by some experience, not by my faith, but by my being taken by the

⁶⁶³ Gregorios, *Cosmic Man*, 151.

⁶⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁵ Gregorios, *Science Technology* 80,

⁶⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁷ Paul Varghese, *The Joy of Freedom: Eastern Worship and Modern Man* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1967), 24.

⁶⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁹ Karl Rahner, *The Doctrine of Grace, II*, IV, 178.

⁶⁷⁰ Rahner, *A Human God*, 83.

⁶⁷¹ Ibid.

⁶⁷² Ibid.

Grace of God into His Son's Body to be a member thereof. It is in that Body and in that new humanity that there is eternal life.⁶⁷³

For Gregorios like Rahner, Grace, not sin, is the last word on human persons.⁶⁷⁴

9. The Gift of Freedom

For Gregorios, freedom is fundamental to human nature. The capacity to create oneself (into good or evil), and to be a co-worker with God, so to speak, is part of the image (of God).⁶⁷⁵ God gave freedom to His creation; freedom to reject the good with which it is endowed, thereby choosing evil.⁶⁷⁶ Gregorios points out that “Christian theology has generally been reluctant to accept this idea of Gregory of Nyssa that human being is not simply a creature pure and simple, but a co-creator of himself and his world.”⁶⁷⁷

The gift of freedom is a greater grace than the most sovereign Grace.⁶⁷⁸ Gregorios explains, ‘to love the good freely and not by compulsion, that is the greatest gift of God, and this gift is given to human being’.⁶⁷⁹ For Gregorios, as he repeatedly states, human nature is not evil, for it is God’s creation. However, humanity is still free to choose between good and evil.⁶⁸⁰ Gregorios explains that for Gregory of Nyssa, the misery and the grandeur of human existence are held in dialectical tension, centered in human freedom and the Grace of God.⁶⁸¹

Gregorios tries to provide a fresh understanding of freedom. However, freedom cannot be just used to explain the origin of evil and human sinfulness without attributing it to God.⁶⁸² God’s transcendence and immanence are aspects of his freedom.⁶⁸³ As Nikolai Berdyaev puts it, “freedom is the source of tragedy”, because it allows a genuine choice by God and by

⁶⁷³ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁴ “Sin and the Subversion of Ethics”, Mary Ann Hindsale & Stephen Okey, eds. in *T& T Clark Handbook of Theological anthropology* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021), 109.

⁶⁷⁵ Ibid.,154.

⁶⁷⁶ Gregorios, *Love’s Freedom the Grand Mystery*,194. Gregorios explains, “Evil is a denial of created being itself, which cannot really be without being also good.”

⁶⁷⁷ Gregorios, *Cosmic Man*,154. Gregorios also comments that Teilhard de Chardin is probably the only recent thinker who has developed this idea as a central element of his thought.

⁶⁷⁸ Gregorios, *A Reader* ,233.

⁶⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁰ Gregorios, *Cosmic Man*, 164.

⁶⁸¹ Gregorios, *Cosmic Man*, 165.

⁶⁸² Gregorios criticizes the use of freedom in Augustine, saying ‘but that freedom was not of a great value in itself for Augustine’ 47, *Human God*, Paulose Gregorios

⁶⁸³ Rahner, *A Human God*, 47.

humanity.⁶⁸⁴ Freedom also has its effect in enabling humans to overcome the shackles of passions. Gregorios explains, “to be free also means not to be directed by one’s passions and ambitions or deterred from action by false inhibitions and complexes”.⁶⁸⁵

Also, for Gregorios, Grace means the possibility of freely approaching God despite our sin and living in the joy of His love. Grace is thus a gift of freedom both from sin and from death. And in access to God and by life in His love, sin is itself wiped away, and death is overcome.⁶⁸⁶ Thus essentially for Gregorios, sin does not appertain to human nature, but is something which has accrued to it, something alien, which alienates changes, falsifies human nature.⁶⁸⁷ On the other hand, freedom structurally belongs to human existence, and this is precisely because freedom belongs to the very *ousia* of God.⁶⁸⁸

As Gregory of Nyssa describes, human being created in the image of God, “could not, therefore, be without the gifts of freedom, independence, self-determination; and his participation in the Divine gifts was consequently made dependent on his virtue.” Thus “owing to this freedom he could decide in favour of evil, which cannot have its origin in the Divine will, but only in our inner selves, where it arises in the form of a deviation from good, and so a privation of it.”⁶⁸⁹

9.1 Freedom and Creativity

Mar Gregorios relates human beings to God's attributes, the chief of which is freedom: Precisely because man is the image of God, freedom is the very essence of his being. He was offered

⁶⁸⁴ Tim Noble, “Theosis and Pleroma in East and West”, in John Arblaster & Rob Faesen eds. *Theosis/Deification: Christian Doctrines of Divinization East and West* (Leuven: Peeters, 2018), 135.

⁶⁸⁵ Gregorios, *Love’s Freedom, the Grand Mystery*, 173-174. Interestingly, in Indian Philosophy, the alternate Sanskrit term to denote freedom, *moksa*, also means spiritual freedom and has an eschatological meaning (the final destiny of the soul and humankind). Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan explains it is a fundamental belief that the universe is law-abiding to the core and yet that man is free to shape his own destiny in it. See, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Charles A. Moore, *A Source book: In Indian Philosophy* (Princeton, New Jersey Princeton University Press 1957), 354.

⁶⁸⁶ Varghese, *The Joy of Freedom*, 24. For Gregorios “worship is the realization of Grace and freedom. Joy is its constitutive mark.”

⁶⁸⁷ Gregorios, *Cosmic Man*, 139.

⁶⁸⁸ Gregorios, *Cosmic Man*, 140.

⁶⁸⁹ Gregory of Nyssa, “*The Great Catechism*” in *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers, Vol. V*, Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds. (U.S.A: Hendrickson Publication, 1999), 645. The Nicene and Post Nicene series shall be further referred as *NPNF*.

every occasion to participate in and create the good. However, he was under no compulsion to do so.⁶⁹⁰ Freedom is something given to humans so that, all the while being a creation, s/he can themselves become a creator and alter the shape, direction, and meaning of creation.⁶⁹¹

Gregorios puts it succinctly, “Man makes himself, for the good or evil”⁶⁹² For Gregorios to see the human enterprise as a joint operation between God and human is neither dishonoring God’s sovereignty nor exalting human beings above her/his created limit.⁶⁹³ Human beings are indeed co-workers with God because they too are free and creative. But the fullness of freedom and creativity is to be found only in and through God.⁶⁹⁴

Gregorios believes in anthropology that emphasizes human freedom and offers new ways to look at the world. However, he also offers new challenges, and these challenges must be met. He writes: "But precisely because freedom is part of the image, the created nature has to be 'worked out through human freedom."⁶⁹⁵ A human being can freely navigate through and reach what is best. Rahner for his part, without freedom, the human being could not stand before God as a responsible agent in dialogue and partnership with God.⁶⁹⁶ Human beings are truly co-workers with God because they, too, share freedom and creativity. However, the fullness of freedom and creativity is to be discovered only in and through God.⁶⁹⁷

9.2 Freedom as Transcendence and Imminence

In his seminal work *Cosmic Man*, Gregorios explores and points out three aspects of God’s Freedom in which human beings participate as an image of God- Freedom as Transcendence, Immanence, and Creativity.⁶⁹⁸ Explaining the relevance of Christological debate today, Gregorios explains that the “nature of Christ cannot be reduced to concepts comprehensible to a finite mind, precisely because as God and as man, his being transcends the categories of finite

⁶⁹⁰ Paulos Mar Gregorios, *The Human Presence: An Orthodox View of Nature* (Madras: The Christian Literature Society, 1980), 64-5

⁶⁹¹ Ibid. *Ibid.*, 70. He cites Gregory of Nyssa. This freedom, “is not completely identical with the freedom of God but rather is as icon is to archetype.”

⁶⁹² Gregorios, *Cosmic Man*, 154.

⁶⁹³ Ibid.

⁶⁹⁴ John Arblaster & Rob Faesen eds. *Theosis/Deification: Christian Doctrines of Divinization East and West* (Leuven: Peeters, 2018), 146.

⁶⁹⁵ Gregorios, *Cosmic Man*, 156. This is his assessment of Gregory of Nyssa.

⁶⁹⁶ Karl Rahner, “The Dignity and Freedom of Man”, *TI, II*, 248.

⁶⁹⁷ Tim Noble, *Theosis and Pleroma in East and West*, in John Arblaster & Rob Faesen eds. *Theosis/Deification: Christian Doctrines of Divinization East and West* (Leuven: Peeters, 2018), 146.

⁶⁹⁸ *Cosmic Man*, 110.

reason or of time-space existence.”⁶⁹⁹ However, Incarnation for human beings is the event enabling participation in ultimate reality transcending the categories of finite existence.⁷⁰⁰ As Philip Rossi puts it, “In the activity of God as incarnate Redeemer, human freedom is elevated to participate in the sustaining, healing and elevation of a broken creation.”⁷⁰¹ Through Incarnation, human freedom is thus elevated to participate in the process of divinization.

Gregorios further anchors his understanding of Gregory of Nyssa’s approach and explains,

For Gregory of Nyssa, the absolute transcendence of God expressed in the concept of *Diastema* is the basis of God’s freedom. God is not “affected” by what happens in the cosmos; while the cosmos is in time and space, God’s being is beyond the *diastema*. God’s transcendence thus is not simply a spatial removal beyond all that is in the cosmos....⁷⁰²

For Gregorios, transcendence is the basis of God’s sovereignty.⁷⁰³ Moreover, the essence of both freedom and of transcendence is not to be misunderstood as spatial separation or temporal potentiality; rather it is “to be self-governing, self-regulating, self-authoritative, self-propelling, to be not the effect of outside causes, but a new cause which creates effects outside itself for good.”⁷⁰⁴ Gregorios believes that it is these qualities that God has given to human beings as his most precious gift, the greatest value that makes humans ‘lord of the earth.’⁷⁰⁵

God’s immanence in the creation is a quality balancing the transcendence of God.⁷⁰⁶ While *diastema* refers to transcendence, *metousia* (participation) explains the immanence of God in creation. Gregorios explains that *metousia* is a possibility given by the act of creation and becomes realized in the act of Incarnation as a historical reality.⁷⁰⁷ Gregorios clarifies that

⁶⁹⁹ Paul Verghese, “The Relevance of Christology Today” Monsignor Otto Mauer ed., *Wort Und Wahrheit*, Supplementary Issue Number 1. Vienna: *Pro Oriente*, (1972),174.

⁷⁰⁰ Ibid.,170.

⁷⁰¹ Philip Rossi, “Human Freedom, and The Triune God”, in *Handbook of Theological Anthropology*, 129.

⁷⁰² Gregorios, *Cosmic Man*, 143. Gregory writes explaining about God as “Being Who transcends all existence.” See, Gregory of Nyssa, “*Answer to Eunomius*” in *NPNF*, 426.

⁷⁰³ Gregorios, *Cosmic Man*,144.

⁷⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁵ Ibid. The “lord of the earth” is a possible interpretation of Genesis 1:26b, (NRSV).

⁷⁰⁶ Gregorios, *Cosmic Man*,149.

⁷⁰⁷ Gregorios, *Cosmic Man*, 150. Gregorios further explains that “God’s imminence in the creation is not by *ousia*, but by *energia*.” And “that God’s freedom consists in the capacity to bring into being, sustain and lead to its fulfillment, the creation.” Which is not by compulsion but by God’s goodness as it expresses itself in freedom.” See, Gregorios, *Cosmic Man*, 148.

human being is immanent in the creation and transforming it by her/his will, by prayer, and by *energia* or operations.⁷⁰⁸ He puts it briefly that, “Human beings’ presence in the material creation is what lifts it up to God.”

CONCLUSION

Pope John Paul II, in his encyclic, wrote, “Man is called to a fullness of life which far exceeds the dimensions of his earthly existence, because it consists in sharing the very life of God.”⁷⁰⁹ This understanding of human nature is a significant factor in analysing and addressing many of the sensitive issues facing the world and churches today. Further, traditional Christian understandings of human nature, its scope, limitations, and possibilities could be a source of hope for societal challenges facing humanity today and developments in the natural sciences.

“What are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them” (Psalm 8:4) is a question that has disturbed us since time immemorial. The human person is complex and more properly in a Christian understanding a mystery, which comes and has its existence in the incomprehensible mystery of the creator, God.⁷¹⁰ One vital key to the mystery and reality of human beings which Christian tradition offers is this: human beings are made in the image of God.

The mystery of the true humanity we see in Jesus Christ, the word made flesh, is incomprehensible. Our attempts to investigate and understand human nature cannot exhaust the worth, the depth, and the dignity which belong to each person as created and loved by God. As we acknowledge, with faith and awe, the holy mystery of God, we see and reverence that same mystery in the person of Jesus. We must also see and revere a reflection of that same mystery in every human being.⁷¹¹ The Divine image gives value to all human lives.

⁷⁰⁸ Gregorios, *Cosmic Man*, 149.

⁷⁰⁹https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031995_evangelium-vitae.html

⁷¹⁰ *Christian Perspectives on Theological anthropology: A Faith and Order Study Document*, Faith, and Order Paper 199, (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2005), 12. Accessed <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/christian-perspectives-on-Theological-anthropology>

⁷¹¹ *Christian Perspectives on Theological anthropology, A Faith and Order Study Document*, Faith, and Order Paper 199, (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2005), 33. See, <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/christian-perspectives-on-Theological-anthropology>

The idea of enclosing man within a clearly defined “nature of man” so that what is “supernatural” falls outside the nature of man has always been unacceptable to the Eastern Fathers.⁷¹² For Gregorios, as in Patristic understanding, human nature is not evil, for it is God’s creation.⁷¹³ Human nature is still free to choose between good and evil, which is the basis on which the call to repentance can be addressed to a human being. However, the call is not merely in respect of each individual act but to a continuing life separated from evil and reunited with God.⁷¹⁴ Another feature of being in the image of God is that humans are made to be “co-creators” with God (Gen 2:19). However, our creativity is limited by our creatureliness. Nevertheless, we have been given the capability to explore, envisage, and bring into being new possibilities within the created order.⁷¹⁵

For Gregorios, sin is not at the depth of human nature; rather, it is freedom, and it is in this depth that human being discovers God. He writes,

“what is at the depth of “human nature” is not sin, but his freedom. Because at the depth he is free, therefore at the depths he also discovers the source of his freedom, namely the creator God.”⁷¹⁶

The interrelatedness of creation (universe) and human beings is vital for Gregorios. He quotes quantum physics and relativity theories to prove the interrelatedness and interactions at the subatomic level.⁷¹⁷ Gregorios writes, “at the subatomic level, the observed and the observer are united in one interlocking system.”⁷¹⁸

For Gregorios, human beings are an integral part of the universe and cannot stand outside of it, making himself the subject and the object. Humans are not merely a resident in the universe, surrounded by different objects which s/he is free to manipulate. Human beings are an

⁷¹² Gregorios, *Cosmic Man*, 41.

⁷¹³ *Ibid.*, 164.

⁷¹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷¹⁵ *Christian Perspectives on Theological anthropology: A Faith and Order Study Document*, 38-39 accessed <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/christian-perspectives-on-Theological-anthropology>

⁷¹⁶ Gregorios, *A Reader*, 202.

⁷¹⁷ Gregorios, *Science, Technology, and the Future of Humanity*, 104-105. As Carlo Rovelli explains, “Quantum mechanics is a theory about the physical description of physical systems relative to other systems, and this is a complete description of the world” See, Carlo Rovelli, “Relational Quantum Mechanics”, *International Journal of Theoretical Physics* 35; 1996: 1637-1678, accessed <https://arxiv.org/abs/quant-ph/9609002>.

⁷¹⁸ Gregorios, *Science, Technology, and the Future of Humanity*, 105. He quotes, David Bohm (1917-1992, an American- British theoretical physicist) to explain “the notion of unbroken wholeness and inseparable quantum interconnectedness of the whole universe.”

inextricable part of the universe and have emerged from within.⁷¹⁹ Stephen Toumlin, in *The Return to Cosmology: Postmodern Science and the Theology of Nature* (1982), contends that we must think about the cosmos as a single integrated system where all things in the world- human, natural, and divine are related in an orderly fashion.⁷²⁰

Interestingly for both Rahner and Gregorios, freedom is a vital concept. For Rahner, a human being is constituted by the creative freedom of God and given the capacity to accept God's self-communication. He writes,

The person who redeems himself in freedom, i.e., places God in the center of his own free existence, is a creature constituted by God's creative freedom and is therefore given the capacity to accept God's self-communication.⁷²¹

Further in this aspect, Morwenna Ludlow critically notes that Gregorios erroneously concludes that, "Gregory's doctrine of grace is dialectically in tension with the notion of freedom."⁷²² She opines that even the analysis of Mar Gregorios perhaps does not do full justice to Gregory's theology in this assessment of the role of human freedom:

because Gregory sees God both as the grounds of the possibility of virtuous human action and as the one who rewards virtue with further help, this appears to bind both human and divine agency into a harmonious whole rather than hold them in tension.⁷²³

However, when we explore further into Gregorios' there is almost no denial that he interprets Nyssa's theology as a harmonious whole of the relationship between human and divine agency.⁷²⁴ Gregorios in following pages of the same chapter (*God and Man: Continuity and Discontinuity*)⁷²⁵ which Ludlow quotes from explains clearly that the human enterprise as a joint

⁷¹⁹Gregorios, *Science, Technology, and the Future of Humanity*,110. It is worthwhile to be reminded of the creation of Human beings "then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being." (Genesis 2:7). Thus, also highlighting the "compound nature" of humanity as described by Gregory of Nyssa in *On the Making of Man*.

⁷²⁰Patrick Slattery, *Curriculum Development in the Postmodern Era* (New York: Routledge Publications, 2013), 276.

⁷²¹ Karl Rahner, "The One Christ and The Universality of Salvation", *TI*, XVI, 207.

⁷²² Ludlow, *Universal Salvation Eschatology*,106. See, Gregorios, *Cosmic Man*, 130-1.

⁷²³ Ibid.

⁷²⁴ This is also very well described by Ludlow when she explains that the nature and grace distinction in Nyssa's theology as understood by Gregorios. She writes, "Paulos Mar Gregorios stresses the importance of divine agency through human nature, claiming that in Gregory's theology all is grace and that it would be a misinterpretation to impose an artificial distinction between grace and nature on his theology. See, Ludlow, *Universal Salvation Eschatology*,106.

⁷²⁵ Gregorios, *Cosmic Man*, 129-154. Ludlow quotes from this chapter and the particular sentence interestingly forms only part of an introduction to a chapter which extensively discusses concept of human freedom.

operation between God and Man. Gregorios writes, “To see the human enterprise as a joint operation between God and Man is neither dishonoring God’s sovereignty nor exalting Man above his created limit.”⁷²⁶ Furthermore, the term “dialectic tension’ employed by Gregorios seems to explain distinctness and not difference. He always emphasizes the concept of unity within diversity, initially influenced by Gregory, which also advances in his own theological works.

On the other hand, while clarifying the concept of freedom and evaluating Gregory of Nyssa, Gregorios also tends to emphasize the possibility of virtuous human action. Gregorios explains that human being if he/she is in the image of God and free, “has also to practice the same virtues- i.e., mighty, heroic acts for the good of others, not because an external necessity compels them, but because it is their nature to do mighty acts in freedom.”⁷²⁷

Gregorios, depending heavily on Gregory of Nyssa, expounds on the incomprehensibility of God and identifies *theosis* as an orientation towards the Mystery for which human beings have potential. He explains, “to be human is a project- a race to be run, a constant going beyond.”⁷²⁸ For Gregorios, knowledge of God or an intuitive beatific vision of God is not an issue, it is transfiguration into the glorious image of God (which was distorted by sin) that matters.⁷²⁹

Paulos Gregorios, throughout his writings, highlights the human being as a cosmic being, existing dynamically between two poles, the source and ground of its being on the one hand and to the created world on the other.⁷³⁰ Similarly, Karl Rahner describes this existence of humanity as a being stretched between heaven and earth,

We plod along like pilgrims on a road whose end disappears in the incomprehensibility and the freedom of God; we are stretched between heaven and earth, and we have neither the right nor

⁷²⁶ Gregorios, *Cosmic Man*, 154.

⁷²⁷ Ibid., 150.

⁷²⁸ Gregorios, *A Human God*, 32. And points out the peculiarity of being a Christian, to be Christian is to be put on the right track and to be given a community in which the race can be better run- the race of theosis.

⁷²⁹ Gregorios, *A Human God*, 31.

⁷³⁰ Gregorios, *Cosmic Man*, viii. He wrote, “No authentic Christian Anthropology can be conceived except in this framework.

the possibility of giving up either one. One is not the other, yet neither can be realized without the other.⁷³¹

As Gregorios clarifies, God remains beyond our comprehension, but God has come to us in a human form, ‘a divine-human person with whom we can deal better.’⁷³² Christ remains God while being human.⁷³³ For Gregorios, in Christ, we are seized by God’s incarnate love, and in union with Christ, we respond to God in faith and gratitude.⁷³⁴

The pervasive influence of Gregory of Nyssa is evident in the thought and writings of Paulos Mar Gregorios.⁷³⁵ However, he was an Orthodox theologian with a genuine interest in a dialogue between the East and West, in which he does not shy away from emphasizing the differences.⁷³⁶ As a pioneer at the Catholic-Oriental Orthodox consultations (*Pro-orientale*) and ecumenical dialogues, as President of the World Council of Churches, his contributions as an observer from the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church to the Second Vatican Council, etc. remain a valuable resource for present-day ecumenical engagements.

⁷³¹ *Utopia And Reality: The Shape of Christian Existence Caught Between the Ideal and The Real*, 33, *TI*. See also, Fr. Dr. K.M George in *Toward a Eucharistic Missiology: An Orthodox Perspective*, describes the intent and paradigm of missiology as ‘‘self-giving inner pilgrimage to the source of light that enlightens all.’’

⁷³² Gregorios, *A Human God*, ii.

⁷³³ *Ibid.*

⁷³⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷³⁵ Gregorios, *A Reader*, 205.

⁷³⁶ Gregorios, *A Human God*, iv. After describing his differences with the West, he writes that, ‘‘These could start a debate or dialogue between East and West.’’

CHAPTER FIVE

THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY EAST & WEST: EMBRACING THE TWO APPROACHES

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the principal goals of anthropological thought is a comprehensive science of man and a challenge is the diversity of available sources. For theological anthropology to be comprehensive, several disciplines are to be united toward the goal. No element or aspect of the universe is independent of a relation to God, since God is the Lord of all creation: “The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it” (Psalm 24).⁷³⁷ In our contemporary context, we regularly encounter a question about the source of data. Nearly every field of human activity offers some anthropological data and perspectives on what it means to be human.⁷³⁸ Today theological anthropology draws impetus about the human person from the Bible, traditions, cultures, science, and socio-economic developments to name but a few.

We must enter this new period, our own way and solve its questions for ourselves because though truth, the radiance of reality, is universally the same, it is mirrored variously according to the mediums in which it is reflected.⁷³⁹ We also need the courage to accept and recognize that truth appears differently in different lands and ages according to the living materials out of which its symbols are hewn.⁷⁴⁰ Learning from various traditions and knowing each other helps build up theological anthropology for our times. The divide of borders, cultures, or religions is of little importance while dealing with grave social and anthropological concerns such as a pandemic, hate crimes and wars between nations.

Our world was shaken by a pandemic in the first quarter of 2020. As a life-threatening illness brought about by a new virus, its far-reaching implications at individual and collective

⁷³⁷ Kathryn Tanner, “The Difference Theological Anthropology Makes.” *Theology Today*, 50 (4) (1994): 567–79. <https://search-ebscohost-com.may.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0000875919&site=ehost-live>.

⁷³⁸ Marc Cortez and Michael P. Jensen, eds. *T&T Clark Reader in Theological anthropology*, 7.

⁷³⁹ Joseph Campbell, ed., Heinrich Zimmer, *Philosophies of India*, (New York: Meridian Books, 1956), 1.

⁷⁴⁰ “Truth is one, but the wise men know it as many” (Rig Veda: *Ekam sat vipra bahudha vadanti*); also, could be paraphrased as, “God is one, but we can approach Him in many ways.” See, *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Science*, Philip Clayton, and Zachary Simpson, eds., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 11.

levels were evident. We witnessed an unbelievable degree of loss of life, health, livelihood, and a threat to the ever-glorified human prowess. In these times within the Christian framework, ontological, ethical, and theological shifts which were highlighted by the pandemic also need attention. In the context of a global discourse about the post-covid world, theological anthropology should foster engendering humility and resilience borne from the recognition that we are so profoundly interconnected with each other and with the ecosystem.⁷⁴¹ We certainly need an anthropological stance that recognises human dignity and cosmic interconnectedness⁷⁴²

Pope Francis in his opening address at the Meeting on ‘Faith and Science: Towards COP26’ clarified, “Everything is connected; in our world, everything is profoundly interrelated. Science, but also our religious beliefs and spiritual traditions, have stressed this connectedness between ourselves and the rest of creation.”⁷⁴³ The multidisciplinary fields of science and social science experts emphasize the “ecology of disease” – the interconnectedness of human-animal and human-environmental interactions that result in emerging diseases that potentially lead to epidemic outbreaks, such as COVID-19.⁷⁴⁴ Gregorios, clarifies that the authentic ‘Christian tradition’⁷⁴⁵ affirms, “what emerges is one universe, man inextricably interlocked within that system.⁷⁴⁶ It is this notion of creation as one inter-related web of space and time as mere aspects of it and not any kind of medium or vessel in which realities exist”.⁷⁴⁷

⁷⁴¹https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html, Accessed November 4, 2022.

⁷⁴² Enriched further by the Cappadocian notions of cosmic “sympathy” (συμπάθεια), “conspiracy” (συμπνοία) and “communion” (κοινωνία), See, Paul M. Blowers, *Drama of the Divine Economy: Creator and Creation in Early Christian*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 358. Also, Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si*,’ 86. See, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html

⁷⁴³ <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2021/10/04/211004a.html>, Accessed November 4, 2022.

⁷⁴⁴ Albers, Heidi J et al. “Disease Risk from Human-Environment Interactions: Environment and Development Economics for Joint Conservation-Health Policy.” *Environmental & resource economics* vol. 76,4 (2020): 929-944. doi:10.1007/s10640-020-00449-6. As Gregorios explained, there is no nature as “creation minus man”, man is inseparable from that unity. He is convinced that the hypotheses of relativity and quantum physics confirms the unity and inter-relatedness of the cosmos. See, Paulos Mar Gregorios, *Science, Technology, and the Future of Humanity* (Kottayam: ISPC & MGF, 2007), 107.

⁷⁴⁵ The authentic Christian tradition which infamously meant for Gregorios the ‘The Eastern Orthodox Church tradition.’ See, Paulos Gregorios, *A Human God* (Kottayam: MGF, 1992), 42. Also, K.M George, ed., *Paulos Mar Gregorios: A Reader* (U.S.A: Fortress Press, 2017), 131.

⁷⁴⁶ Gregorios, *Science Technology, and the future of Humanity*,106.

⁷⁴⁷ Ibid.

In terms of ecclesiology, what are the long-term effects of one's *sacramental disconnect* with prolonged online masses, and the lack of experience with communion?⁷⁴⁸ How are the people of God discovering new ways of sacramentality? From an ethical perspective to what extent are we motivated to rethink oppressive gender ideologies that have exacerbated sexual and gender-based violence at homes during lockdowns? The fragility of human existence itself was evident in the context of the pandemic. Our theologizing should guide mindset changes and conversion of hearts on mitigating the hardening of boundaries (borders) that have further disenfranchised the most excluded people on earth like Indigenous people, refugees, migrant workers, children, the infirmed and the aged, all of whom are more vulnerable in a pandemic.

Theological anthropology in such a context must serve the need of recognising and reclaiming human dignity across the borders of culture, ethnicity, language, and color. Churches and social organizations must strive for a paradigm shift in understanding humanity and the blessed created order. The theological wealth from various traditions could offer a better comprehension of humanity and the natural world. This reordering and learning from the Christian traditions of the East and West could act as a source for future ecumenical and social engagements.

As we explore the works of Rahner and Gregorios as representatives of these two traditions, we note that they are unlikely companions in several ways. At a glance through their works, there seems almost no correlation, but their thoughts are deeply connected in their understanding of God and human beings. Rahner, as mentioned, lacked the details about other religions (at least in some of his writings), whereas Gregorios explores deep into the intricacies of ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue. They both were faithful to their traditions and looked upon the classical categories of theology as valuable for furthering a contextual approach.⁷⁴⁹

2. The Unity of Spirit and Matter

The dialectic between spirit and matter is vital for a better understanding of the theological anthropology in Rahner and Gregorios. The relationship of spirit to matter is one of the key

⁷⁴⁸ Sharon A. Bong, Michelle Becka, and Carlos Mendoza- Alvarez, eds., "Editorial", *Concilium*, 2022/2 (London: SCM Press, 2022), 8.

⁷⁴⁹ Categories like Ecclesiology, Sacramental and Christological theology etc. formed a major portion of their writings.

questions to be explored. And discerning the Holy Spirit in a Spirit-filled world (matter) is vital for theology.⁷⁵⁰ As Frederick C. Bauerschmidt, writes, “in seeing both the material and spiritual world as the result of the loving action of a good creator, Catholic theology makes a fundamental affirmation of the entire created order”.⁷⁵¹ Spirit and matter are mysteriously connected, they stand as two dimensions of one reality. These seemingly opposed realities have their origin and source in God.⁷⁵² Rahner and Gregorios both emphasize the mutual relatedness between spirit and matter.⁷⁵³

Nevertheless, a biased outlook on the material world existed (probably still lingers!), a belief that the material world is of relatively low value and the spiritual represents a higher existence. This led to a mutual incompatibility between the spiritual realm and the material world. A hierarchical view of the world devised a lack of belief in the goodness of the created order.⁷⁵⁴ Also, the difficulties of the human condition were a result of our true selves, our spirits, being trapped within our material bodies.⁷⁵⁵ As Rowan Williams notes, “ thus the religious impetus of Gnosticism is the longing to escape from the temporal and the fleshly.”⁷⁵⁶ God and the world were understood as strangers to one another: that there is a world is the result of accident or malevolence on the part of some heavenly power.⁷⁵⁷ Furthermore, the solution to these difficulties was the liberation of the spirit from matter, which was achieved in early centuries through receiving some sort of secret knowledge (in Greek, *gnosis*, thus the name

⁷⁵⁰ V. Kärkkäinen, Kristeen Kim, and Amos Yong, *Interdisciplinary and Religio-Cultural Discourses on a Spirit-Filled World* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 251.

⁷⁵¹ It is “rather the faith- filled clinging to the goodness of world and its creator that one must make when things go disastrously wrong.” See, Frederick C. Bauerschmidt and James J. Buckley, *Catholic Theology: An Introduction* (U.K: Willey – Blackwell, 2016), 72.

⁷⁵² Rahner, *The Unity of Spirit and Matter in The Christian Understanding of Faith*, *TI*, *VI*, 156.

⁷⁵³ Rahner, *Christology Within an Evolutionary View of the World*, *TI*, *V*, 164. Gregorios speaks about “material-spiritual reality” and united in the eucharistic presence. He describes it while discussing the sacramental presence of Jesus Christ as material Bread and wine in Eucharist. See, Gregorios, *The Star of the East*, Vol. 4, No. 2, April-June 1982, (5-13), 2.

⁷⁵⁴ William B. Whitney, *Problem and Promise in Colin E. Gunton’s Doctrine of Creation* (Netherlands: Brill Publishing, 2013), 41. Augustines’s understanding of Genesis occurs in two stages, such that God first creates something similar to Platonic forms and then creates the (lower) material world. See, Colin E. Gunton, “The Doctrine of Creation” in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine*, Colin E. Gunton ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 149.

⁷⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵⁶ Rowan Williams, *The Wound of Knowledge*, (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1990), 25.

⁷⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

“gnostic”) that was brought into the world by a savior, often identified as Jesus, sent from the distant realm of the benevolent God.⁷⁵⁸

The duality of matter and spirit is dissolved (in some sense)⁷⁵⁹ through the Christian understanding of creation (cosmology) and the created order redeemed by the incarnation of Jesus Christ. He is the medium through whom the relationship between God and the world, God and man is established. The creatures existing in the world, created beings, animate and inanimate, share in one substance which is a mixture of matter and spirit.⁷⁶⁰ In Christianity, the very idea that the Word has been made flesh, the dogma of the Incarnation, shows that the material world is not too low to be accepted by God.⁷⁶¹

Rahner explains that the Christian faith recognises a unity of spirit and matter by their very origin, their history and their final end.⁷⁶² While making this assertion God is rather that absolute mystery, which whether we want to or not, we always associate at least implicitly in our spiritual encounter or the world with the presupposition and ground of objects and subjects.⁷⁶³ Rahner says, “In the assertion of the Christian faith expressed above, God, therefore, stands as the ground and all-embracing, pre-given unity of the experience of the spirit and the material world in their unity.”⁷⁶⁴ And for him, these seemingly so opposed and disparate realities, spirit and matter have their one origin and source in the one God.⁷⁶⁵ For Rahner, spirit and matter are

⁷⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁹ Although we cannot give away the duality to embrace a monism of matter and spirit. Robert Frost (1874-1963) would criticize that the dualism of spirit and matter, of two sexes, and of good and evil, was built right into the evolutionary process. See, Frost, “The Future of Man,” in *Collected Poems: Prose and Plays*, 868. According to Frost, only a good Trinitarian could understand and accept the virgin birth of Christ and the doctrine of the Incarnation. Towards the end of his life, although Frost showed an increasing awareness and concern about the conflicts between spirit and matter, he also extended their unity by exploring the harmony between them in religious orthodoxy.

See, Peter J. Stanlis, “In the clearing: Continuity and Unity in Frost’s dualism”. *Humanitas*, volume 18, Issue 1/2 (2005), 89. For Frost as a dualist, in practice, in the daily life of man in society, good and evil were both present, and often mixed. To disregard or minimize evil in human nature, to underestimate its power, could result in allowing it to be triumphant.

⁷⁶⁰ <https://www.bu.edu/wcp/Papers/Onto/OntoDerk.htm>

⁷⁶¹ Lesslie Newbigin, *Honest Religion for Secular Man* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2011), 24.

⁷⁶² Karl Rahner, *The Unity of Spirit and Matter in The Christian Understanding of Faith, II, VI*, 155.

⁷⁶³ Ibid.

⁷⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁶⁵ Ibid.

thus upheld by the permanent actual power of that infinite and necessary being whom we call God.⁷⁶⁶

In a similar vein, for Gregorios, “matter itself comes from God and is in God”. He explains that, according to Gregory of Nyssa, matter comes from spirit and is “spiritual in its essence.”⁷⁶⁷ Gregorios feels this is an insight that accords well, with modern physics which regards all matter as charges of energy, rather than as simply composed of particles. Gregorios quotes Gregory of Nyssa and explains, matter is not opposed to the spirit but is identified with it.⁷⁶⁸ For Rahner, matter is good; it expresses its origin in its own way and, if the gnostic error is to be rejected that there is a tragic inner contradiction within God himself it cannot therefore ultimately be the opponent of the spirit.⁷⁶⁹

Gregorios does not oppose spirit to matter either and explains that matter is the medium of the spirit.⁷⁷⁰ In fact, he explains, “matter itself is spiritual – so would the Eastern Fathers argue.”⁷⁷¹ He has a sacramental understanding of the world as the place where God is at work in all creation. He reminds his readers that Nyssa believed that matter is spiritual, a product of God's will.⁷⁷² Gregorios' own view is that matter is the vessel of the spirit and therefore is foundational to his sacramental worldview.⁷⁷³

⁷⁶⁶ Ibid, 156.

⁷⁶⁷ Gregorios, *A Human God*, 48. For Gregory a distinction or category of matter is not even present in God and exists on a human level. He explains this while discussing generation and creation. “For God, when creating all things that have their origin by creation, neither stood in need of any matter on which to operate, nor of instruments to aid Him in His construction: for the power and wisdom of God has no need of any external assistance matter.” See, *Book II, NPNF*, 153. “We know that the Word is the Creator of matter, by that very act also producing with the matter the qualities of matter, so that for Him the impulse of His almighty will was everything and instead of everything, matter, instrument, place, time, essence, quality, everything that is conceived in creation.” See, Gregory Nyssa, *Book II*, in *NPNF*, 153. Gregory points out that God in his sovereignty and “the power of God's will serve for material substance.” 158, *NPNF*. Also, For Gregory all things are of God, He writes, “Yet we do believe that all things are of God, as we hear the Scripture say so; and as to the question how they were in God, a question beyond our reason, we do not seek to pry into it, believing that all things are within the capacity of God's power—both to give existence to what is not, and to implant qualities at His pleasure in what is.” Gregory of Nyssa believes in a mutual concurrence of incorporeal and corporeal to bring to genesis the material nature. He calls the essence ‘substratum’ and when it mixes with the other properties such as ‘color, weight, length’ etc. it gives birth to material nature. See, Gregory of Nyssa, *An argument against those who say that matter is co-eternal with God* in *NPNF*, XXIV

⁷⁶⁸ Gregorios, *A Human God*, 48.

⁷⁶⁹ Karl Rahner, *The Unity of Spirit and Matter in The Christian Understanding of Faith*, *TI*, VI, 156.

⁷⁷⁰ Paul T. Verghese, *Freedom and Authority* (Delhi: CLS-ISPCCK & Lucknow Publishing House, 1974), 48.

⁷⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷⁷² Ibid., 64-68.

⁷⁷³ Ibid., 48. This he explains while discussing the Augustinian ‘low view’ of the Sacraments.

Gregorios explains that in human being the divine breath is his constitutive reality, though he participates also in the creation by will since he is made of the dust of the earth.⁷⁷⁴ Man's unique role is a role within, not vis-a-vis, creation.⁷⁷⁵ Mar Gregorios is probably one of the first to use the image of "priest" for man's role in creation since the priest is an integral part of what s/he signifies.⁷⁷⁶ Likewise, the Vatican document by the International Theological Commission (on *The Reciprocity Between Faith and Sacraments In The Sacramental Economy*), shows how the human person, through a kind of "cosmic priesthood," leads creation towards its true purpose: the manifestation of the glory of God.⁷⁷⁷

Scripture also witnesses the relationality between matter and spirit. Matter and spirit are contrasted but mysteriously connected and originate from God.⁷⁷⁸ Rahner takes us through the lens of Scripture explaining the unity of matter and spirit in the creation of human beings. He explains that the human being in the Old Testament is very "undualistically and unplatonicly a unity in his being and history", and the physical world is seen from the very beginning as an environment intended for humanity.⁷⁷⁹ He explains that "Man comes quite unashamedly from the earth," without losing the fact that s/he is also called to be the spiritual, responsible partner of God, called directly by God, as the product of the material cosmos, without scripture thereby allowing this one human in the paradoxical duality of her/his origin to break up into two quite independent realities called spirit and matter.⁷⁸⁰

However, regarding the difference between spirit and matter, Rahner is also clear that "unity has never meant uniformity." He explains that they constitute, despite differences, the one reality of the world,

⁷⁷⁴ Paulos Gregorios, *A Human God* (Kottayam: MGF, 1992), 49.

⁷⁷⁵ John P. Slattery, ed., *T&T Clark Handbook of Christian Theology, and the Modern Sciences*, (London: Bloomsbury Publishing 2020),185.

⁷⁷⁶ Gregorios, *The Human Presence* (Madras: The Christian Literature Society,1980),85.

⁷⁷⁷ https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20200303_reciprocita-fede-sacramenti_en.html, Accessed on 11 November 2022.

⁷⁷⁸ See, I Cor. 6:20, "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore, glorify God in your body. And I Cor. 15:50-52, "What I am saying, brothers and sisters, is this: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed." And 2 Cor.5:1, "For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." After the creation of cosmos God confirms its goodness in these words, "God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good." (Genesis 1:31).

⁷⁷⁹ Karl Rahner, *The Unity of Spirit and Matter in The Christian Understanding of Faith*, *TI*, VI ,161.

⁷⁸⁰ *Ibid.*,161.

Unity has never meant uniformity but has simply envisaged the fact that in the realm of the one and yet pluralistic reality of the world, in so far as it is distinct from God it is absolutely one ground, what we call spirit and what we call matter are at least in the actual order of reality irreversibly related to one another and that together, in spite of their differences, they constitute the one reality of the world, and that they do not exist merely one beside the other as if enclosed merely by an empty space.⁷⁸¹

Rahner is clear that such a distinction (between matter and spirit) cannot be conceived as simply an absolute metaphysical separation of the two realities.⁷⁸² If spirit and matter are said to be found in mutual correlation in the same original experience, then they cannot be absolutely separate from one another.⁷⁸³ As Gregorios puts it, “matter itself is spiritual; or as we would today say- matter is a mode of energy⁷⁸⁴”, the energy of God. The dialectic between matter and spirit is to be taken seriously to understand the interconnectedness of humanity and the cosmos.⁷⁸⁵

2.1 The Sacramental Vision

Sacraments are central to Christian theology and faith, and much of sacramental theology owes its sources to Bible and traditions. The word *Sacramentum* (Latin) is taken from its root word *sacrare* meaning to constitute a thing or person of divine right.⁷⁸⁶ The suffix -mentum could designate the agent, the action, or the object which was made sacred.⁷⁸⁷ The Syriac equivalent for the word sacrament is *Rozo* or *Qudosho* and in Greek *Musterion*. Etymologically, the Syriac and Greek equivalents fittingly describe the mystical, sanctifying, and incomprehensible nature of

⁷⁸¹ Ibid.,163.

⁷⁸² Ibid.,168.

⁷⁸³ Ibid.

⁷⁸⁴ Verghese, *Freedom and Authority* ,64.

⁷⁸⁵ Matter and energy in science today has a similar dialectic. Interesting also is for example, the discussions around *dark energy*, it is believed that DE makes up over 70% of all the matter and energy in the entire universe. See, *Dark Matter and Dark Energy: A Challenge for Modern Cosmology*, eds Monica Colpi, Sabino Matarrese, Vittorio Gorini, Ugo Moschella, (Netherlands: Springer, 2011), xi. The discovery of the late-time cosmic acceleration dubbed ‘dark energy,’ has been a mystery despite tremendous efforts to understand its origin over the last several decades. See, *Dark Matter and Dark Energy: A Challenge for Modern Cosmology*, 331. Also, <https://science.nasa.gov/astrophysics/focus-areas/what-is-dark-energy>.

The yet to be explored realms of knowledge is often true of science. As Gregorios puts it, Scientific knowledge (operational knowledge, not something to be sniffed at!) is one of the biggest achievements of human reason, extremely useful. But it must not make the claim that it knows everything. See, Audio recording, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pQQ6zG3Xkx8>, 4:30- 45 minutes.

⁷⁸⁶ William A. Van Roo, *The Christian Sacrament*, Vol.262, (Roma: Cura Pontificiae Universitatis Gregorianae, 1992), 36.

⁷⁸⁷ Ibid.

God's grace.⁷⁸⁸ The word *Qudosho* comes from the root *Qadesh*, meaning 'sanctifies', 'hallow', or consecrate.⁷⁸⁹ *Rozo* or *Mysterion* is a corporate act of a specific body and in some sense is closed to those outside it. A *Musterion* transcends spatio-temporal logic and is therefore trans-conceptual, and to that extent logically antinomic.⁷⁹⁰

Karl Rahner and Paulos Mar Gregorios held a view of the sacraments that gave vital content to their theologies. They explained the sacraments in ways that were both new and traditional to their respective theological traditions. Rahner envisions the Church as the "fundamental" sacrament and offered to all with sacramental significance in history even where the individual sacrament (of Baptism) has not yet been confirmed.⁷⁹¹ However, Rahner then makes a distinction between this grace and what constitutes its effective sign. For Rahner "this grace is never simply identical with that which constitutes its effective sign".⁷⁹²

While engaging with a Non-Christian, Rahner explains a Christian should think of the church as, "the visible and apprehensible form of that which already has a unifying force at the interior level, as the historical expression of that which is universal to all men and, in a true sense, evident to all."⁷⁹³ He proposes to every Christian that we can say this in all calmness "that through the sign of the particular sacrament, as it is conferred, the grace of God assures us that its power extends everywhere".⁷⁹⁴ The grace of God, according to Rahner, extends even to those areas where the specific sacramental sign has not so far been applied as such in the concrete to those individuals in whom we hope that the grace of God will powerfully take effect.⁷⁹⁵

⁷⁸⁸ Gregorios explains that in the West a sacrament is generally a means and a seal of attestation of some specific grace. The East is not used to thinking in such terms. We prefer to speak of a 'mysterion,' *rozo* in Syriac, *mistir* in etiopic. *Rozo* comes from the root *raaz* meaning to conspire and might have its origin in the mystery cults. See, Gregorios, *Glory, and Burden*, 177-178.

⁷⁸⁹ Gregorios, *Glory, and Burden*, 179-180.

⁷⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 178.

⁷⁹¹ Rahner explains that "Church appears to the Christian as the fundamental sacrament of a grace which, precisely because it is offered to all, presses forward to express its sacramental significance in history even where the individual sacrament (of baptism) has not yet been conferred." See, Rahner, *The New Image of the Church*, *TI, X*, 24.

⁷⁹² Rahner, *The New Image of The Church*, *TI X*, 24.

⁷⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹⁵ Rahner, *The New Image of The Church*, *TI X*, 24.

For Rahner the seven sacraments are important, and they are sacraments because they are the ritual actions of that sacrament that is the Church.⁷⁹⁶ Although the Christian Church has disagreements and controversies surrounding the concept of the sacrament in different traditions, we shall look at the sacramental worldview of both theologians. Their views on matter and spirit as discussed earlier throw light on the perspective of a *sacramental* worldview.

Rahner explains that ‘the sacraments are specific events of God’s grace as forgiving, sanctifying, and imparting the divine nature.’⁷⁹⁷ This gives us a glimpse into his understanding of sacraments as a vital requisite in the process of divinization. However, he is clear that because the sacraments have this significance, it does not mean that grace from God only impinges upon the world during the sacramental act, as if it were trying to penetrate the world from the outside and gradually loses its force until another sacramental act renews it.⁷⁹⁸ For Rahner, the world is permeated by the grace of God.⁷⁹⁹ The world is constantly and ceaselessly possessed by grace from its innermost roots, from the innermost personal center of the spiritual subject.

Rahner attempts to bridge the conventional divide existing between a ‘supernatural beyond’ and a ‘lower secular world’ deprived of grace and meaning. He situates the divine experience of the sacraments within the broader context of grace that is experienced in the domains of one’s daily life.⁸⁰⁰ A sacramental worldview identifies the mysteries of God as hidden in material creation and the heart of a sacramental worldview is Incarnation, i.e., God became a human being. For Rahner, Jesus Christ was the primary sacrament (*Ursakrament*), which is the original ‘sign and instrument of the innermost union with God and of the unity of

⁷⁹⁶ ‘‘Grace and Sacraments: The Mystery of the Divine-Human Encounter’’, in *Theological Foundations: Concepts and Methods for Understanding Christian Faith*, John J. Mueller, Leslie M. Ortiz, et al. eds., (U.S.A: Saint Mary’s Press, 2007), 188. Interestingly, the Orthodox Church in general has no consensus on the number of Sacraments. However, in addition to the Eucharist she accepts the above seven Mysteries as major Sacraments because they pertain to the entire believing community and most importantly are closely related to the Eucharist. As Gregorios wrote, ‘‘there has been no conciliar decree binding on the Orthodox which fixes the number seven or specifies which seven.’’ See, Gregorios, *Glory, and Burden*, 179. ‘‘First of all, we must say that traditionally the Orthodox never counted the sacraments.’’ See, <https://www.oca.org/questions/sevensacraments/the-sacraments>, Accessed on 28 April 2023. Also See, Bordeianu, Radu. *Dumitru Staniloae: An Ecumenical Ecclesiology*, London: T&T Clark, 2011.

⁷⁹⁷ Rahner, *Considerations on The Active Role of The Person in The Sacramental Event*, *TI*, *XIV*, 167.

⁷⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰⁰ Sebastian Madathummuriyil, ‘‘Sacramentality and Comparative Theology: Rethinking Transcendence in Immanence’’ in *T & T Clark Handbook of Sacraments and Sacramentality*, Martha Morre-Keish and James W. Farwell, eds., (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2023), 410.

the whole of mankind.’⁸⁰¹ Incarnation is the perfect and decisive revelation of God to humankind. The very fact of the Incarnation tells us that the material world is not evil, yet it also explains to us how God chooses to share His being with us. Vladimir Lossky tells us that, confession of the Incarnation of the Son of God is ‘‘the source of true Christian theology.’’⁸⁰²

2.1.1 Triumphalist Science and the Sacramental world view

Neither Gregorios nor Rahner oppose spirit to matter, as we have discussed earlier in the chapter. Gregorios has a sacramental view of the world as a place where God is at work in the whole of creation. While explaining the technological-sacramental unity he reminds us to consider the sacramental reality of matter as the bearer of God.⁸⁰³ He also writes that Gregory of Nyssa believed that matter is spiritual, and this because of God's will.⁸⁰⁴ Gregorios writes,

‘Science is a useful tool, it helps them. It may also help us partially to understand the nature of reality but cannot give us an adequate picture of it. Such a modest evaluation of science is the one prevalent among most philosophers of science.’⁸⁰⁵

Gregorios was critical of the commercialization of science and promoted the use of science for genuine human welfare. He criticized the vested interests captured by the military-industrial-banking complex that runs the market economy of the world.⁸⁰⁶ He proposes, it is not a romantic retreat from sci-tech and industry that will take care of the issue. Gregorios felt that the colossal and uncontrolled power of the sci-tech establishments needs to be resolved. Humanity cannot afford to simply let these establishments rule, dominate, and exploit.⁸⁰⁷ Science and technology

⁸⁰¹ Rahner, *The One Christ and The Universality of Salvation*, TI, 215-16. As Rahner explains ‘‘If the Second Vatican Council emphasizes that the Church is the sacrament of the world’s salvation and explains this statement by describing the Church as the basic sacrament of salvation, then Jesus Christ may be called the primary sacrament (*Ursakrament*).’’

See also, *The Reciprocity Between Faith and Sacraments in The Sacramental Economy*, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20200303_reciprocita-fede-sacramenti_en.html#_ftn30, Accessed on 22 December 2022.

Cf. Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 1, 9, 48, 59; Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 5, 26; Decree *Ad Gentes* 1, 5; Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 42, 45.

⁸⁰² Vladimir Lossky, ‘‘The Two Monotheisms’’, in *Orthodox Theology: An Introduction*, (New York: St. Vladimir’s Press, 1978), 34.

⁸⁰³ Gregorios, *A Reader*, 129.

⁸⁰⁴ Verghese, *Freedom and Authority*, 64.

⁸⁰⁵ Gregorios, *Science, Technology, and the Future of Humanity*, 37.

⁸⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 116.

⁸⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 145

must be liberated to become a handmaid of humanity, not an oppressive dictator. Rahner likewise explains that any science, at least as practiced in the concrete by the individual scientist, has a tendency to monopolize.⁸⁰⁸ Furthermore, Rahner explains that every scientist, therefore, has the tendency to instruct the other sciences and scientists, and is prone to the temptation of failing to listen to others, or being willing to hear from them only what is confirmed for him in his own science.⁸⁰⁹ Sci-tech ought not to dictate our identity, but rather be harnessed to contribute to the shaping of humanity's identity, guided by carefully selected norms determined not by science and technology, but by humanity itself.⁸¹⁰

Gregorios says, “we need sci-tech, “without it we will make our people perish””.⁸¹¹ However, it cannot be allowed to become the master or the shaper of our identity. This is possible, only when two preliminary conditions are in process of fulfillment:

- a. The establishment of just, peaceful, and ecologically sound societies, and
- b. The creation of a deeper awareness of the true nature of science and technology as enterprise, as commodity, and as reality-disorder, among our common people, among our sci-tech and industrial community, and hopefully among our political leadership.⁸¹²

Gregorios criticised the West for rapid development of science-technology that took an exclusively triumphalist unscaramental one-sided anthropological stance.⁸¹³ And thus he says, began the Faustian exodus of deflection of technology from the path of good. He advocates regaining a capacity for a sacramental understanding of reality.⁸¹⁴ In a similar vein, Hans Boersma wrote, “once modernity abandoned a participatory or sacramental view of reality, the created order became unmoored from its origin in God, and the material cosmos began its precarious drift on the flux of nihilistic waves.”⁸¹⁵

⁸⁰⁸ Rahner, *Theology as Engaged in An Interdisciplinary Dialogue with the Sciences*, *TI, XIII*, 84.

⁸⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸¹⁰ Gregorios, *Science, Technology, and the Future of Humanity*, 145.

⁸¹¹ *Ibid.*, 147.

⁸¹² *Ibid.*

⁸¹³ Gregorios, *A Reader*, 129.

⁸¹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸¹⁵ Hans Boersma, *Heavenly Participation: The weaving of a sacramental tapestry*, (Cambridge: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 2011), 2.

Gregorios agrees to the fact that science is one way of seeing reality, quite a successful way, admittedly.⁸¹⁶ However, he is clear that no thinking person would claim infallibility for science, nor would he give it any methodological monopoly over human knowledge. While Gregorios genuinely admired the dazzling brilliance of 20th century science and technology, he was sharply critical of the way in which contemporary civilization made use of it. His fundamental questions about ‘the nature of nature,’ about human nature and destiny and about the possibility of a global civilization are rooted in justice and peace, love and compassion, self-discipline, and sacramental worldview.

In the late 20th century John D. Zizioulas, another theologian from the Orthodox world, developed his theology in the context of a sacramental worldview. He famously wrote, “Through the sacraments, the church brings all of creation -not just human beings - into a relationship with God. The church becomes in this way the very core and nucleus of the destiny of the world.”⁸¹⁷ Like Gregorios, he rejects the dichotomies between ‘nature and history, the sacred and the profane, reason and myth, art and philosophy’ that have characterised so much of Western theology. He also conceives a ‘cosmic liturgy’ like that of St. Maximus the Confessor, the seventh-century Greek Father, suggesting a sacramental aspect to reality, and a necessary sacramental approach if humans are to comprehend reality more fully.⁸¹⁸

Both Karl Rahner and Paulos Mar Gregorios have thus made important contributions towards a sacramental understanding of the world. While they have different perspectives and focuses, both theologians have helped to deepen our understanding of the sacraments and their role in the life of the Church and the individual.

3. THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY AND DIALOGUE

As religion is explicitly dedicated to reestablishing the connection between the created and the Creator, human endeavors to interpret this connection have consistently manifested in both anthropological and metaphysical systems. Universally, within various religions, there has been a broad recognition that human beings bear a distinctive responsibility to fully respond to the

⁸¹⁶ Paulos Gregorios, *Science, Technology, and the Future of Humanity*, 36.

⁸¹⁷ John D. Zizioulas, “The Mystery of the Church in Orthodox Tradition”, *One in Christ*, 24 (1988), 296.

⁸¹⁸ John Zizioulas, “Preserving God's Creation: Three Lectures on Theology and Ecology: Lecture One”, *KTR* 12:1 (1989), 1.

Absolute. Consequently, the nature of these cognizant human agents, who in some manner constitute the focal point of creation, becomes a central theme in religious discourse. The exploration of theological anthropology helps in revealing the divine essence within every human being and fosters a culture of mutual respect among individuals. It guides us towards the fundamental assumption of the goodness inherent in God's creation.

In the words of David Tracy, dialogue is not to be understood as merely a dimension of Christian praxis but as 'a religious experience' in its own right.⁸¹⁹ A human being's commitment to a particular religious tradition has a part to play in entering a salvific relationship with transcendence.⁸²⁰ The term dialogue today is used to cover a wide range of engagement between religious traditions, from daily interaction between groups in neighborhoods to organized discussions and debates between expert scholars, from formal exchanges between spiritual or institutional leaders to inter-religious activism around social issues. The objectives of dialogues may vary, from peace, and reconciliation to social change, and from mutual understanding to cooperation. However, common to all these forms of inter-religious engagements is mutual respect and openness to the opportunity of learning from each other.⁸²¹

Rahner and Gregorios are representatives of a strand that sees dialogue in more intrinsic terms. For both, dialogue is a conversation in love and not just an intellectual exercise. Rahner considered 'Dialogue and Tolerance as the Foundation of a Humane Society.'⁸²² For Rahner, a society is humane only if it allows the widest possible tolerance in social dialogue. And the other way around: Dialogue and tolerance characterize a humane society; it cannot exist without them.⁸²³

Gregorios endorses dialogue with other faiths as well as with the secular world. He envisions a demand for a full manifestation of the freedom and dignity of all human beings- men, women, and children as a major dynamic in the march of history.⁸²⁴ He describes the

⁸¹⁹ Lewis Ayres, Medi Ann Volpe, Thomas L. Humphries, eds., *Oxford Handbook of Catholic Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019),934.

⁸²⁰ *Ibid.*,938.

⁸²¹ Catherine Cornille, ed., *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2013), xii. Accessed November 24, 2022. ProQuest E book Central

⁸²² Karl Rahner, *Dialogue and Tolerance as The Foundation of a Humane Society*,15, *TI XXI*.

⁸²³ *Ibid.*,16.

⁸²⁴ Paulos Mar Gregorios, *Love's Freedom the Grand Mystery: A Spiritual Autobiography* (Kottayam: MGF Publication, 1997),190.

interreligious movement and the women's movement as significant aspects of the advancement of human history.⁸²⁵ In the context of dialogue with other faiths, Gregorios takes his position from the Indian philosophical principle of *Ekam Advitiyam*⁸²⁶, or one without a Second. Gregorios explains that all diversity and difference ultimately find their unity in the One without a Second; that One is more ultimate than the many.⁸²⁷ Gregorios stresses that his own Eastern Orthodox Tradition has confirmed that there is no creation other than God or outside God because the infinite Ultimate has neither outside nor other.⁸²⁸

John Meyendorff, the renowned orthodox theologian, reminds us that for the orthodox faith other religions could be instruments of God with the purpose of elevation of humanity to the divine life,

Christ is never mere man or God but always *theoanthropos* (God-man), seeking to elevate human beings to theosis. As long as other religions have the same goals, the elevation of humanity to divine life, they are perceived by the Orthodox as instruments of God in the world.⁸²⁹

Through dialogue with other religions, much has been accomplished. Rather than competing with one another over territories, converts, or claims, religions have generally come to adopt a more conciliatory and constructive attitude toward one another, collaborating in social projects and exchanging views on common religious questions.⁸³⁰ Centres for interreligious dialogues have emerged in different parts of the world and international meetings are coordinated, bringing together leaders and scholars from different religious traditions to engage in mutually respectful conversations. This in turn has led to increased reflection on the nature of interreligious dialogue and its many forms and manifestations.⁸³¹

⁸²⁵ Ibid.

⁸²⁶ The Sanskrit phrase, *Ekam Eva Advitiyam Brahma* (*Chandogya Upanishads*, of *Sama Veda*) which means, God is One and is the only One without a second. It reminds us to understand the oneness in everything and seek to understand that oneness by recognizing the latent Divinity (Brahman) in different living beings that encounter us. Remarkably similar to the Ignatian understanding of finding God in all things. See, Linda J. Tessier, ed., *Concepts of the Ultimate*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), 105.

⁸²⁷ Gregorios, *Love's Freedom*, 191. See also, K.M George, ed., *Paulos Mar Gregorios: A Reader* (U.S.A: Fortress Press, 2017),168.

⁸²⁸ Gregorios, *Love's Freedom*, 191.

⁸²⁹ John Meyendorff, "The Christian Gospel and Social Responsibility," in *Continuity and Discontinuity in Church History*, E.F. Church, and T. George eds., (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1979),123.

⁸³⁰ Catherine Cornille, ed., *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2013), xii. Accessed November 24, 2022. ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁸³¹ Ibid.

The term dialogue now covers interactions including engagements for peacebuilding, social concerns, and engagements between disciplines of academia, religions, and institutions. Although the goals of each engagement may differ, the common denominator in all these forms of inter-religious engagements is mutual respect and openness to the possibility of learning from the other.⁸³² It can be rightly said that one of the main goals of inter-religious dialogue is growth or rather the goal of inter-religious dialogue is growth in terms of understanding oneself by understanding the other.⁸³³ Plurality needs to be taken seriously and to be welcomed, not merely as a matter of fact, but in principle. Its place in God's plan of salvation for humankind must be stressed.⁸³⁴

Theological anthropology specifically can throw more light onto the dialogue between religious traditions. An attempt to think through the meaning of the human story as it is lived out in relation to God is essential for every religion. Theological anthropology provides insights into this relativity between God and human which can help foster dialogue between religious traditions. Interestingly, almost every religion (or rather every civilization) ascribes some form of divinity and essential relationship to humanity (and to the cosmos)⁸³⁵ through its creation stories (or theory for the origin of the Universe). God creates human beings with special attention and detail.⁸³⁶ Another interesting aspect of cosmologies is the representation of the defining characteristic of humanity as duality. An underlying essential duality is represented through matter and spirit, evil and divine, etc.⁸³⁷

⁸³² Ibid.

⁸³³ Ibid.

⁸³⁴ Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (New York: Orbis Books, 2002), 201.

⁸³⁵ Cosmos (Greek word) which means 'order.' The Oxford English Dictionary defines the Universe as "The whole of existing things."

⁸³⁶ The concept in Indian scriptures such as the *Matsya Purana*, sage Manu was the first human being. Manu was born by union between Gods, Lord Brahma, and Goddess Shatrupa (Saraswathi). Manu obtains through long penance his wife Ananti. Although less specific, Islam has a similar creation story as in the Bible, which speaks of creation in six days and human being created with clay. In Jewish understanding *Elohim* (God) created the world and that human beings are *Elohim's* special creation. Rahner in his essay concludes by hinting at the possibility of Muslim and Christian theologians coming together to "talk about a joint profession of faith in the one sole God." See, Paul G. Crowley, *Rahner beyond Rahner: A Great Theologian Encounters the Pacific Rim*, (New York: Sheed & Ward, 2005), 45.

⁸³⁷ Marc Cortez, Michael P. Jensen eds. 'The image of God', in *T&T Clark Reader in Theological anthropology*, (Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 109-110. E.R Dodds traces the origins of Greek cosmological anthropology to the myth of the Titans. These were the giants who slew, cooked, and ate the body of the infant Dionysius. In revenge, Zeus slew the Titans, from whose smoking ruins their derived humanity. See, E.R Dodds, *In the Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951), 104.

Rahner recognises that universal salvation history is one with the special salvation revealed in Jesus Christ. He suggests that a systematic theologian could offer viewpoints and a framework to the historian of religion “to discover that God’s grace is always and everywhere active for man’s salvation and its salvific power, although obscurely and imperfectly, also manifested in the non-Christian religions.”⁸³⁸ Every historical situation is included in God's grace, and it is in history that humanity comes to know God. Every human being is intended to achieve salvation through his/her particular history, not despite it. The Council affirms this in “Dogmatic Constitution on The Church, *Lumen Gentium*.”

Those also can attain to salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the Gospel of Christ or His Church, yet sincerely seek God and moved by grace strive by their deeds to do His will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience. Nor does Divine Providence deny the helps necessary for salvation to those who, without blame on their part, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God and with His grace strive to live a good life. Whatever good or truth is found amongst them is looked upon by the Church as a preparation for the Gospel.⁸³⁹

Gregorios explains that Christ incarnate is a human being- consubstantial with all other human beings. He became a human being.⁸⁴⁰ The whole of human nature has been assumed by Jesus Christ, and there is no humanity other than the one which Christ took- our humanity in which all human beings participate, whether they believe in Christ or not, whether they recognise the nature of their humanity or not.⁸⁴¹ He writes, “No human being is alien to Christ”.⁸⁴² They share in Christ’s humanity in ways that we must spell out elsewhere. They might not be members of the Body of Christ, but they are not unrelated to Christ. And since Christ assumed humanity and loves humankind, the Church can do no other. God took matter into himself, and matter is not alien to God now.⁸⁴³

While Gregorios would criticize Rahner and other Catholic theologians of his time for being laden by Augustinian pessimism about salvation, it seems Rahner was much misunderstood by Gregorios. Rahner wrote while explaining the Church’s hope for universal salvation that, “Such a universal hope (and it is only a hope) is an amazing development for the

⁸³⁸ Rahner, *On the Importance of The Non-Christian Religions for Salvation*, *TI*, xviii, 296.

⁸³⁹ Dogmatic Constitution on The Church, *Lumen Gentium*, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html, Accessed November 24, 2022.

⁸⁴⁰ Gregorios, *Science Technology, and the future of Humanity*, 80.

⁸⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴² *Ibid.*

⁸⁴³ *Ibid.*

Church going beyond Augustine's pessimism about salvation.''⁸⁴⁴ Another very sharp criticism Rahner makes of Augustine is during discussions about the 'Anonymous Christian.' He explains his dissatisfaction with the Augustinian term '*massa damnata*' the damned masses of African people untouched by Christianity.⁸⁴⁵ Rahner could never comply with such an understanding. He explains,

Augustine also knew that in the southern part of his African homeland, there were "untouched" by Christianity. But he just consigned these to the *massa damnata*, to the damned masses, too cold-blooded for my feelings. Of course, we cannot think like that anymore.⁸⁴⁶

Rahner here and in several other writings distances himself from such Augustinian pessimism about the salvation of humankind.⁸⁴⁷ However, one may find some truth in Morwenna Ludlow's comment when she writes, "In sum then, Rahner's view of universal salvation is coherent and attractive when expressed in terms of hope; but because he sometimes goes further than this and speaks both of the possibility of hell and the certainty of God's world-wide victory in love, he leaves a tension in his eschatology with which it is difficult to deal."⁸⁴⁸ However, Rahner encourages hope and optimism for universal salvation. He reminds us that the task of Christian theology is to work closely on the basic message of Jesus Christ,

Formerly theology asked apprehensively, how many are saved from the *massa damnata* of world-history. Today we ask whether we may hope that all are saved. This question, this attitude, is more Christian than the former and is the fruit of a more mature Christian awareness that has grown over a long period and is slowly coming to terms more closely with the ultimate basic message of Jesus on the victory of God's Kingdom.⁸⁴⁹

The challenge before us today is to stride forward and grow into this awareness of hope for universal salvation accorded by God. When religions encounter one another in dialogue, they

⁸⁴⁴ Rahner, *Faith in a Wintry Season*, 77.

⁸⁴⁵ Rahner, *The Abiding Significance of The Second Vatican Council*, *TI*, *XX*, 101.

⁸⁴⁶ Rahner, *Faith in a Wintry Season*, 133.

⁸⁴⁷ Rahner explains that, in more than a millennium of struggle theology has 'overcome Augustinian pessimism regarding the salvation' of the individual and reached the optimism of the Second Vatican Council, assuring supernatural salvation in the immediate possession of God to all those who do not freely reject it through their own personal fault. See, Rahner, *On the Importance of The Non-Christian Religions for Salvation*, *TI*, 292.

⁸⁴⁸ Morwenna Ludlow, *Universal Salvation Eschatology in the Thought of Gregory of Nyssa and Karl Rahner* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 247.

⁸⁴⁹ Rahner, *The Abiding Significance of The Second Vatican Council*, *TI*, *XX*, 102.

develop up a community in which differences become complementarities and divergences are changed into pointers to communion.⁸⁵⁰

3.1 Intersections with Indian thought

Paulos Mar Gregorios occupies a significant place in the landscape of Indian theology and philosophy. His intellectual journey was influenced by the rich heritage of Indian philosophical traditions. Gregorios's exploration of Indian philosophy and its intersections with western thought offers valuable insights into the synthesis of ideas across cultural boundaries.

Gregorios underscored the pivotal role of Indian mysticism in shaping Western philosophical and religious thought. He argued that the fundamental insights of mysticism, such as the quest for union with the divine and the exploration of inner consciousness, originated in India and found expression in Western traditions through channels such as the Plotinian tradition and the Greek Hesychast tradition.⁸⁵¹ The living tradition of mysticism Gregorios felt has had a decisive role in the shaping of the West.⁸⁵² Gregorios highlights the example of Plotinus (205-270 CE) who taught in Alexandria and Rome. Plotinus it is clear from his *Life of Plotinus* wanted to travel to India and accompanied Roman Emperor Gordian (243 CE) on an expedition to Persia.⁸⁵³ Plotinus saw contemplation rather than rational thought as the true way to wisdom and realization, in which Gregorios draws parallel to the Indian philosophical concept of *Dhyana* (contemplation)⁸⁵⁴.

The interaction between Indian and Greek philosophies is a fascinating aspect of intellectual history, characterized by exchanges of ideas, cross-cultural influences, and mutual enrichment. Gregorios explains that even before that the arrival of St. Thomas the apostle who made many converts in North-West India which had been thoroughly hellenised by that time, and along the southern coast of Kerala and Tamil Nadu⁸⁵⁵ And it was about this time that Greeks entered the spice trade and began sailing frequently to India. However, the more popularly known contact between Indian and Greek cultures dates to the time of Alexander the Great's conquests in the 4th century BCE. Alexander's campaign brought Greek culture into contact with

⁸⁵⁰ Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (New York: Orbis, 2002), 200.

⁸⁵¹ Ibid.

⁸⁵² Gregorios, *A Reader*, 72.

⁸⁵³ Ibid., 71.

⁸⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵⁵ Gregorios, *A Reader*, 69-70.

the Persian Empire, which had connections with India.⁸⁵⁶ Although direct evidence of philosophical exchange is scarce, this period laid the groundwork for later interactions. One of the most notable periods of interaction occurred during the Hellenistic period in the regions where Greek and Indian cultures converged, notably in the northwestern Indian subcontinent. This led to a syncretic blend of Greek and Buddhist thought, as evidenced by the Gandhara art and the influence of Greek artistic motifs on Buddhist sculptures.

Some scholars argue for the influence of Indian philosophies, particularly Buddhism, on certain strands of Greek thought, such as Pyrrhonism and Scepticism. The travels of Greek philosophers like Pyrrho and others to India are documented, suggesting exchanges of philosophical ideas.⁸⁵⁷ Also, with the expansion of the Roman Empire and the establishment of trade routes connecting the Mediterranean with India, cultural and intellectual exchanges continued. The influx of Indian philosophical texts into the West through translations and the influence of Indian thought on Neoplatonism and Gnosticism are noted in historical accounts.⁸⁵⁸

Modern scholars have undertaken comparative studies of Indian and Greek philosophies, exploring similarities and differences in their metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical frameworks. While both traditions have unique features, scholars have identified parallels in concepts such as the pursuit of wisdom (*sophia* in Greek, *jnana* in Sanskrit) and other ethical ideals.

Overall, the interaction between Indian and Greek philosophies demonstrates the richness and complexity of intellectual exchanges across cultures, contributing to the diversity and evolution of philosophical thought in both traditions. Gregorios engaged deeply with various schools of Indian philosophy, including Vedanta, Buddhism, and Jainism. He recognized the richness and diversity of Indian philosophical thought, appreciating its profound insights into the nature of reality, consciousness, and the human condition. Engagement with Indian philosophies has been

⁸⁵⁶ Seaford, Richard, ed. *Universe and Inner Self in Early Indian and Early Greek Thought*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017. Accessed April 29, 2024. ProQuest Ebook Central, 11.

⁸⁵⁷ Flintoff, Everard. "Pyrrho and India." *Phronesis* 25, no. 1 (1980): 88–108. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4182084>.

⁸⁵⁸ See, Adrados, Francisco R. "INDIAN AND GREEK PHILOSOPHY." *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute* 58/59 (1977): 1–8. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41691672>. Also see, Flintoff, Everard. "Pyrrho and India." *Phronesis* 25, no. 1 (1980): 88–108. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4182084>. Seaford, Richard, ed. *Universe and Inner Self in Early Indian and Early Greek Thought*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017. Accessed April 29, 2024. ProQuest Ebook Central.

transformative for Gregorios, opening new vistas of understanding and appreciation for the richness of human thought. He wrote, I have learned from my own Indian tradition “the principle of *Ekam advityam* or one without a second; I know now that all diversity and difference ultimately find their unity in the One without a Second; that One is more ultimate than the many.”⁸⁵⁹ He further explains that his own Eastern Orthodox tradition has confirmed that there is no creation other than God or outside God, because the Infinite Ultimate has neither outside nor other.⁸⁶⁰

Paulos Gregorios advocated for a synthesis of Eastern and Western thought, recognizing the complementary nature of these intellectual traditions. He believed that cross-cultural dialogue and exchange could foster a more holistic understanding of reality and human existence. Gregorios’ synthesis of Indian mysticism and Western philosophical traditions exemplifies his commitment to bridging cultural divides and fostering a pluralistic worldview. By drawing upon the insights of Indian philosophy and Western mysticism, Gregorios believed we can transcend cultural boundaries and embrace a more holistic understanding of reality. Dialogue and exchange are crucial for nurturing a pluralistic ethos that honours the diversity of human experience.

3.2 A Small Step towards the Collective Finding of Truth.⁸⁶¹

Rahner emphasises the importance of dialogue to communicate truth. He explains that dialogues must be more than a mere exchange of information. For him, ecumenical theology or dialogue cannot be limited to this exchange of information.⁸⁶² However, much of it may constitute the initial stage, and however important it may be for it not to be aimed at gaining individual converts for one’s own Church, Rahner goes on to say that ‘theology has to do with truth.’⁸⁶³ It is not aimed only to inform but rather to communicate truth- the truth which makes valid claims upon the other party and therefore can and should be communicated by the informant in such a manner that he identifies with this claim to truth.⁸⁶⁴

⁸⁵⁹ Gregorios, *Love’s Freedom the Grand Mystery*, 191.

⁸⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁸⁶¹ Rahner, *A Small Fragment on the Collective Finding of Truth*, TI, VI.

⁸⁶² Rahner, *On the Theology of The Ecumenical Discussion*, TI, XI, 31. See, 1 Timothy 2:4 (NRSV), St. Paul writes about the God, “who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”

⁸⁶³ Karl Rahner, *On the Theology of The Ecumenical Discussion*, TI, XI, 31.

⁸⁶⁴ Ibid.

Similarly, for Gregorios, in religious dialogue, two or more human beings meet each other, with mutual trust and openness, each respecting the convictions of the other; the aim is to understand each other in their varying religious traditions, and to be mutually helped in one's own grasp of the truth.⁸⁶⁵ For Rahner, "there can and must be dialogue today".⁸⁶⁶ However he reminds the partners in dialogue that one needs to take own convictions seriously and should act in genuine freedom,

The dialogue must however be not one which is a cowardly, relativistic dialogue in which the partners no longer take their own convictions seriously and thus cannot really talk in any true sense because they have nothing to say to each other. Dialogue needs to be in genuine freedom and not merely in that toleration and co-existence where one puts up with one's opponent merely because one does not have the power to destroy him. It must be a dialogue in which one risks oneself.⁸⁶⁷

While the dialogue is often thought of as a peaceful and amicable exchange of views, it also often entails argument and fierce debate.⁸⁶⁸ Dialogues between denominations or religions need to witness not only to the contents but also to the truth of their faith convictions. For Rahner, every dialogue must also be on its guard against idle talk and non-involvement.⁸⁶⁹ In dialogue, one must have the humility and courage to choose his/her partner since /she cannot talk with everyone if her/his dialogue is not to degenerate into empty chatter.⁸⁷⁰

Rahner brings a higher meaning to the dialogue than just mere exchanges and agreements when he writes that, "dialogue must remain surrounded by that silent respect for the fact that what is being spoken about transcends by far everything that is said: the man who, as Pascal says, infinitely transcends man and his secret which is God."⁸⁷¹ Thus, every dialogue is an acceptance of God's incomprehensibility and our ignorance, he explains "it must remain

⁸⁶⁵ Paulose Gregorios, 'Dialogue with world religions: Basic Approaches and Practical Experiences,' *Indian Journal of Theology*, 29(1980), 10. See, https://mosc.in/the_church/theology/theology-of-dialogue. An interesting Quranic verse (5:44-48), in a broader interreligious context "We sent Jesus, son of Mary, confirming the Torah which had been sent down before him, and gave him the Gospel containing guidance and light, which corroborated the earlier Torah, a guidance and warning for those who preserve themselves from evil and follow the straight path." *Al-Quran: A contemporary translation*, Ahmed Ali, (Princeton: Princeton University, 1993), 104.

⁸⁶⁶ Karl Rahner, *Reflections on Dialogue Within a Pluralistic Society*, *TI*, *VI*, 41.

⁸⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶⁸ *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue*, edited by Catherine Cornille, John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2013. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/nuim/detail.action?docID=1155087>.

⁸⁶⁹ Karl Rahner, *Reflections on Dialogue Within a Pluralistic Society*, *TI*, *VI*, 41.

⁸⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷¹ *Ibid.*

enclosed by the silence in which man puts up with himself and accepts himself in the incomprehensibility of his existence whose depth is God.”⁸⁷² Rahner vehemently advocates that every dialogue with all its learnedness, uncompromising thought, and sharp definition of standpoints, must be a dialogue of love even when one modestly keeps silent about it.⁸⁷³ He points out, “It must and can be this”.⁸⁷⁴ He explains,

Hence every true dialogue is merely the infinite effort which tries to ensure that in the splendor of the expressed and mutually possessed truth, there may also appear what can already be present in the depth of the heart, as long as we really desire it: the love which alone is believable.⁸⁷⁵

Gregorios similarly reminds us that Christian love is a sufficient and compelling basis for entering dialogue.⁸⁷⁶ In the same article, Gregorios appreciates the attempts by Rahner and others to understand other religions. He writes, theologians like Karl Rahner, with a broad-minded existentialist, neo-Thomist orientation, have been quite open to the possibility that other religions can be a positive factor in the understanding of divine revelation.⁸⁷⁷

Gregorios in his writings recognises the novel approach in Roman Catholic theology that seems to be based on “the universal salvific will of God.”⁸⁷⁸ He explains that this is reflected in Karl Rahner’s writings as well as in the article by Fr. Eugene Hillman which he quotes,

Every religion serves God’s saving purpose in history, insofar as it offers its followers an awareness of their own inadequacies before God even when God may be only a suspected influence behind the immediate questions of human destiny. Every religious act is a saving act, insofar as it directs persons to a greater love for one another.⁸⁷⁹

Gregorios is impressed by the approach based on, “the universal salvific will of God” exemplified by H.S Schelette and Piet Schoonenberg. He comments that the line of thought of Karl Rahner and Bernard Lonergan seems similar which he sums up as “The grace of God is universally operative and open to all human beings; in all our knowing and willing we are reaching out towards reality and thus to the Infinite Transcendent.”⁸⁸⁰

⁸⁷² Ibid.

⁸⁷³ Ibid.

⁸⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁷⁵ Ibid.,43.

⁸⁷⁶ Paulose Gregorios, ‘Dialogue with world religions: Basic Approaches and Practical Experiences,’ *Indian Journal of Theology*, 29, (1980), 9.

⁸⁷⁷ Gregorios, *Dialogue with world religions*, 9.

⁸⁷⁸ Ibid., 8.

⁸⁷⁹ Ibid. E. Hilman, “Evangelization in a wider Ecumenism: Theological grounds for Dialogue with other Religions” *The Journal of Ecumenical studies*, Vol-12, 4(1974), 8.

⁸⁸⁰ Ibid, 9.

3.3 Cosmic Grace

“God desires the salvation of everyone”.⁸⁸¹ And this salvation is willed by God in Christ and for the whole of humanity, Rahner writes,

And this salvation willed by God is the salvation won by Christ, the salvation of supernatural grace which divinizes man, the salvation of the beatific vision. It is a salvation really intended for all those millions upon millions of men who lived perhaps a million years before Christ and also for those who have lived after Christ in nations, cultures and epochs of a very wide range which were still completely shut off from the viewpoint of those living in the light of the New Testament.⁸⁸²

Rahner admits that it is a priori quite possible to suppose that there are supernatural, grace-filled elements in non-Christian religions.⁸⁸³ This is not just a possibility of salvation, but actual salvation itself.⁸⁸⁴ However, this also includes the right to decide in human freedom which is itself a gift from God.⁸⁸⁵ For Rahner grace has been offered even outside the Christian Church and also that, in a great many cases at least, grace gains the victory in man’s free acceptance of it, this being again the result of grace.⁸⁸⁶ Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.⁸⁸⁷

Although Rahner’s theology of the anonymous Christian presents’ religions in a positive light, it is vulnerable to the critique that he did not approach other religions on their own terms but in terms of the grace of Christ. This observation is true; however, Rahner’s purpose was not phenomenological, not an analysis into types of religious experiences. Instead, he offered a way to interpret, in the context of religious pluralism, the Christian conviction that God wills the salvation of all people, in and through Christ. He also offered a way for the Christian faithful to

⁸⁸¹ Rahner, *Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions*, *TI*, *V*, 123.

⁸⁸² *Ibid.*, 123-124.

⁸⁸³ *Ibid.*, 122. However, Rahner makes it clear that this statement of his thesis does not mean of course, “that all the elements of a polytheistic conception of the divine, and all the other religious, ethical, and metaphysical aberrations contained in the non-Christian religions, are to be or may be treated as harmless either in theory or in practice.

⁸⁸⁴ Rahner, *Christianity and The Non-Christian Religions*, *TI*, *V*, 123. Rahner is criticized for no detailed attention to the particularities of other religions. Rahner’s persistent care for the nuances of Christian thought and piety are noticeably not matched by a similar care for the corresponding nuances in other religious traditions, or even by a resolution to refrain from unkind comparisons about which he could not possibly have been certain. See, Francis X. Clooney, ‘Rahner beyond Rahner: A Comparative Theologian’s Reflections on Theological Investigations 18,’ in Paul G. Crowley, ed., *Rahner beyond Rahner: A Great Theologian Encounters the Pacific Rim* (Lanham, Maryland: Sheed & Ward/Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 8.

⁸⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 125.

⁸⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸⁷ Romans 5:20 (NRSV). Rahner paraphrases this verse, “Where sin already existed, grace came in superabundance”. See, Karl Rahner, *Christianity and The Non-Christian Religions*, *TI*, *V*, 125.

have a positive perspective on the possibility of salvation for the unbaptised, doing so without losing the significance of ecclesial faith.⁸⁸⁸

We have various aspects and distinctions of grace in the Divine and human relationship. God creates and sustains us in grace; the gracious presence through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit as helper of humankind is ever manifested in our lives. However, this grace extends to the whole of creation and not just to human beings. The basic conviction of Gregorios is that creation itself is a consequence and manifestation of the gracious will of God, and therefore the grace of God is present and active in the whole of creation.⁸⁸⁹ The acceptance of this axiom permits us to see the gracious activity of God in every aspect of creation- in other religions, in anti-religious movements, in the life of animals and birds, even in the movement of ‘inanimate’ matter which too is animated by the creative and gracious energy of God.⁸⁹⁰

For Rahner, the relationship between grace and creation is organic and not like some additive.⁸⁹¹ He writes,

When we perceive Christian grace as the bearer and support of human existence and self-fulfillment through God's self-communication, then naturally the relationship of grace and creation, of natural knowledge of God and of revelation theology, of grace and nature, is no longer simply additive or measured in levels, like the stories of a house.⁸⁹²

Rahner is clear that the distinctions between revelation and natural metaphysics, nature, and grace, natural law and supernatural moral law are methodologically correct because grace is unmerited, but these are secondary and relatively supplementary distinctions.⁸⁹³ Furthermore, God's presence is at the center of this created world through the incarnation of Jesus Christ. For Rahner “Christ is at the heart” of this earth,

Christ is already at the heart and center of all the poor things of this earth, which we cannot do without because the earth is our mother. He is present in the blind hope of all creatures who, without knowing it, are striving to participate in the glorification of his body. He is present in the history of the earth, whose blind course he steers with unearthly accuracy through all victories

⁸⁸⁸ Richard Lennan, “Beyond the Anonymous Christian: Reconsidering Rahner on Grace and Salvation”, *Theological Studies* 2022, Vol. 83(3) (443–460), 458-459. Jacques Dupuis wrote, “Religious pluralism in principle rests on the immensity of a God who is love.” See, Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, (New York: Orbis Books, 2002),387.

⁸⁸⁹ Verghese, *Freedom and Authority*, 86. However, for Gregorios, human being is part of the creation, but to be distinguished from the rest of the creation by the fact that he alone is created in the image of God. See, Verghese, *Freedom and Authority*,71.

⁸⁹⁰ Verghese, *Freedom and Authority* ,86.

⁸⁹¹ Karl Rahner, *Faith in a Wintry Season: Conversations and Interviews with Karl Rahner in the Last Years of His Life*, trans. Harvey D. Egan (New York: Crossroad,1991), 24

⁸⁹²Ibid.

⁸⁹³ Ibid.

and all defeats onwards to the day predestined for it, to the day on which his glory will break out of its own depths to transform all things.⁸⁹⁴

The grace of God thus extends to the four quarters of the earth and binds each one of us in the relationship of interconnectedness. Our interconnectedness by being part of the graced cosmos seeks a greater responsibility in this relationship. As Patriarch Bartholomew I explains, “The way we treat each other is immediately reflected in the way we treat our planet; the way we treat each other. And how we treat the earth, and all of the creation defines the relationship that each of us has with God.”⁸⁹⁵ Our relationship with this world (and all living and non-living beings) defines our relationship with heaven (God).⁸⁹⁶ As Gregorios put it, man is part of nature, he can never get outside nature.⁸⁹⁷

4 Oriented Towards the Incomprehensible

Rahner wrote, “The one incomprehensible mystery of God is a reality, and you must die into it.”⁸⁹⁸ Mystery is a word toward which our generation has apprehensions. Does mystery mean that which is hidden, unrevealed and remains unknown to the rational mind? Is it a term to simply denote whatever is unknown? Or an effortless way of evading any rational explanation? Whatever the etymology of the basic Greek word *be*, what a religious man understands by a mystery is, very generally speaking, something which is both hidden and revealed: revealed because, being essentially hidden, it requires, to manifest itself to mind, a new act that enables man to apprehend it by either independent quest, initiation by a teacher, or divine gift, or most frequently by all three.⁸⁹⁹

Rahner when asked about the high point of his life (80 years) famously explained, “The real high point of my life is still to come. I mean that abyss of the mystery of God, into which one lets oneself fall in complete confidence of being caught up by God's love and mercy forever.”⁹⁰⁰ To the question what do you mean by the word “mystery?” What constitutes the *mysterium of human life*? Rahner explained that the mystery consists in being able to grasp rationally that the

⁸⁹⁴ Rahner, *Hidden Victory*, TI, Vii, 158.

⁸⁹⁵ Bartholomew I, *Cosmic Grace, Humble Prayer: The Ecological Vision of the Green Patriarch Bartholomew*, John Chryssavgis ed., (Michigan: W B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2003), 190.

⁸⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹⁷ K.M George, ed., *Paulos Mar Gregorios: A Reader*, 139.

⁸⁹⁸ Karl Rahner, *Faith in the Wintry Season*, 166.

⁸⁹⁹ *The Mysteries and the Religion of Iran*, in *The Mysteries*, (New York: Princeton University Press, 1955), 135.

⁹⁰⁰ Karl Rahner, *Faith in the Wintry Season*, 38.

incomprehensible really exists. This is the highest act of human understanding.⁹⁰¹ Cataphatic theology proceeds by making affirmations about the nature of God. It may lead to some knowledge of God, but it would be an imperfect way because God is by his very nature unknowable.⁹⁰²

On the other hand, apophatic or negative theology leads us ultimately to a learned ignorance, or rather it helps in gaining knowledge of incomprehensibility. We comprehend the incomprehensibility and recognise our limits. Apophaticism consists in negating that which God is not.⁹⁰³ As Lossky explains it, “thus side by side with the negative way, the positive way ‘cataphatic’ opens out. God Who is the hidden God beyond all that reveals Him, is also He that reveals Himself. He is wisdom, love, and goodness.⁹⁰⁴” Lossky makes it clear, however, God’s nature remains unknowable in its depths, and that is exactly why He reveals Himself.⁹⁰⁵

Such an approach would immediately seem to transgress not only modern, analytical, and scholastic theology in the Western Christian tradition but also the rationality and scientific empiricism which largely remains as the foundation of the Western epistemological paradigm. The West may not have treated apophatic theology as explicitly as their Eastern counterparts; nevertheless, as Andrew Louth explains, “the greatest scholastics, such as Bonaventure (d. 1274), Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274) and Meister Eckhart (d. 1328), preserve at the heart of their theology a sense of the apophatic.”⁹⁰⁶

Human being has a double participation, in two poles of existence, God and the world.⁹⁰⁷ For Gregorios, it is only by remaining in this tension between God and the world that the human being can grow to the fullness of his humanity.⁹⁰⁸ The double participation can be effectively maintained only through participation in the life of the community of the spirit, and through the sacramental mysteries combined with a solid scientific technological mastery of the world. This

⁹⁰¹ Ibid.,160. As elsewhere, this Apophatic approach is evident in Karl Rahner.

⁹⁰² Malcom Jones, *Dostoevsky, and the Dynamics of Religious Experience*, (London: Anthem Press, 2005), 73.

⁹⁰³ Vladimir Lossky, “The two Monotheisms”, in *Orthodox Theology: An Introduction*, (New York: St. Vladimir’s Press,1978), 32.

⁹⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁰⁵ Ibid.,33.

⁹⁰⁶ Andrew Louth, “Apophatic and Cataphatic Theology”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Mysticism*, Amy Hollywood, and Patricia Z. Beckman, eds., (New York: Cambridge University Press,2012), 144.

⁹⁰⁷ K.M George, ed., *Paulos Mar Gregorios: A Reader* (U.S.A: Fortress Press, 2017), 272. See also, *Science, Technology, and future of Humanity*, 71.

⁹⁰⁸ Ibid.

does not mean ecclesiastical control of science and technology, but it does mean that human culture should be penetrated by the Church's participation in the reality of God.⁹⁰⁹

4.1 Tiptoeing on The Earth: Creative Potential

Clement of Alexandria (4th C) describes this dual participation by presenting human beings as “tiptoeing on the earth”. This expression greatly emphasizes human yearning and divine orientation. The human being is also described as a ‘heavenly plant’⁹¹⁰, constituted by nature to have fellowship with God.

As is evident through the theologies of Rahner and Gregorios growing into divine likeness is recognised as a ‘potential’ gifted⁹¹¹ to humanity. The process of growing into divine likeness (*Theosis*) is a possibility open to human beings in all freedom; although the means, stages, and end is still debatable. This potential as Rahner explains, is objectively identifiable with the essence of humanity.⁹¹² He claims,

Among several clarifications about *potentia oboedientialis* in human beings, firstly it is not necessary that the potentiality need not be realized in every human being.⁹¹³ Secondly, rightly understood, it means that this *potentia* is not one potentiality along with other possibilities in the constituent elements of human nature: it is objectively identical with the essence of man.⁹¹⁴

Therefore, the orientation of humanity towards transcendence remains in the essence of one's being. The transcendence of man also makes it clear that it would be wrong to define him, to delimit and put bounds to his possibilities.⁹¹⁵ Timothy Ware claims, “man has God as the

⁹⁰⁹ Gregorios, *Science, Technology, and the Future of Humanity*, 71. This ‘double participation’ of humankind is narrated as the fifth Biblical-Patristic anthropology assumption. The detailed view of these assumptions has been discussed in previous chapters.

⁹¹⁰ “Born, as he is, for the contemplation of heaven, and being, as he is, a truly heavenly plant”, 316, Philip Schaff. This metaphor could provide some insights helpful for Theological anthropology. A plant derives its growth from both soil and sun. It grows and flourishes as a reality existing between earth and heaven.

⁹¹¹ And not owed by humanity, as already discussed in the earlier chapters of thesis.

⁹¹² Karl Rahner, *On the Theology of The Incarnation, TI, IV*, 111.

⁹¹³ Ibid. See also, Clement of Alexandria, Philip Schaff, *Fathers of the Second Century, NPNF*, 734. “For the vision of the truth is given but to few. Accordingly, Plato says in the *Epinomis*, “I do not say that it is possible for all to be blessed and happy; only a few. Whilst we live, I pronounce this to be the case. But there is a good hope that after death I shall attain all.”

⁹¹⁴ Rahner, *On the Theology of The Incarnation, TI, IV*, 111.

⁹¹⁵ Ibid.

innermost center of his being.”⁹¹⁶ Human persons are, as Nellas suggests a “Theological structure.” According to this conception, a human person is not fully oneself apart from God.⁹¹⁷

A new dignity is accorded to humanity in essence as Christ has restored us to the divine image and likeness. Incarnation thus helps humanity’s reorientation to the lost path. The image of a wanderer being reoriented to the lost route would in some way explain an outcome of incarnation.⁹¹⁸ Christ has also given us incorruptibility, 'engrafting it into our nature'⁹¹⁹ so that we are no longer subject to death.⁹²⁰

Human beings are first created and later renewed according to that image, in Christ. The image involves relationship and reflection.⁹²¹ Creation in God’s image involves a special relationship with God and an anticipated reflection of God. Renewal in God’s image entails a more intimate relationship with God through Christ and an increasingly actual reflection of God in Christ, to God’s glory.⁹²² This connection with God is the basis of human dignity. This reflection of God is the beauty of human destiny. All humanity participates in human dignity.⁹²³ And by his taking of flesh, all human flesh becomes worthy of a new respect.⁹²⁴

It goes without saying that this dignity, as we understand from the theological anthropologies of Rahner and Gregorios, is bestowed on all humanity. This dignity is affirmed

⁹¹⁶ Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2002) ,52.

⁹¹⁷ P. Nellas, *Deification in Christ: The Nature of the Human Person* (New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1997), 42.

⁹¹⁸ Gregorios uses this allegory of, ‘‘Humankind, having strayed from the city of God, which is its true dwelling, is now wandering in the desert, without God, who is true meat and drink for man. We have strayed from the way, which is Christ, but in his grace, he comes to find us in the desert and puts us back into himself, for he is both way and the city of life towards which the way leads (Ps 107:7)’’ See, Gregorios, *Cosmic Man*, 84.

⁹¹⁹ Usually, Severus says that we have had the grace of immortality restored to us by Christ, as in, e.g., Horn. LXXI (P.O. xii.56). Once he says, however, that Christ has 'engrafted incorruptibility into our nature at the root', when he is talking about the new conditions of our human birth, Horn. XLIX (P.O. xxxv.348- 350). We were never incorruptible by anything other than by grace.

⁹²⁰ *Three Monophysite Christologies: Severus of Antioch, Philoxenus of Mabbug and Jacob of Sarug* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 52.

⁹²¹ John F. Kilner, *Dignity and Destiny: Humanity in the Image of God*, Eerdmans, 2015. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/nuim/detail.action?docID=4859320>.

⁹²² *Ibid.*

⁹²³ *Ibid.*

⁹²⁴ *Three Monophysite Christologies*,52. Severus warns people away from the theatre at Daphne by telling them to respect their bodies as the image of God: 'Respect the second divine creation, by which the Word of God in taking a body from the Virgin is associated with you.' See, *Hom. LIV* (P.O. iv. s6). Severus is explicit: sin issues from the soul or the mind, not the body, Horn. -4). See also Horn. LXVIII (P.O. viii.375). Severus of Antioch writes, our human bodies are neither the punishment for sin, nor are they the cause of the first sin, for the body takes its value from the soul and is the image of the soul. The properness of the relationship between body and soul is expressed by Severus' statement that 'the soul is united to the body by nature', *Horn. LVIII* (P.O. viii.21g). 53.

across colour, creed, nations, and genders. The inherent dignity of each human person is to be recognised.⁹²⁵ Article 1 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* states precisely, “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.”⁹²⁶

4.2 An Iconic Relationship

Divinity and Humanity have an iconic relationship. The two hypostases stand in an iconic relationship to each other: one reflects the other on a different level of reality, the body is an image of the soul on the sensible level and in the same way, humanity is an image of the divinity on the created level in such a way that looking at the one, we see the other.⁹²⁷

The humanity of Christ is an iconic representation of divinity, and humanity forms a perfect image of divinity, on the created level in which it functions.⁹²⁸ It is this humanity that offers us our vision of God and acts as our model in our own ‘new creation’: We are divinized in the image of Christ.⁹²⁹ Christ’s Incarnation served as the mirror model for humankind’s “becoming” or theosis in union with Christ.⁹³⁰ Christ is to us not only our leader in the ascent towards God, He is our type, our model, and our teacher in all human matters. And the perfect measure of all things.⁹³¹ Christ is, as scripture witnesses, the new Adam who has, through his birth, ‘blessed our passage into existence’.⁹³²

Philoxenos of Mabug,⁹³³ the Syrian Church father, reminds his monks that the Incarnation occurred “for us” so that Christ might dwell “in us.”⁹³⁴ Following the Alexandrian tradition, Philoxenos argues that through the Incarnation the unique son of God became human

⁹²⁵ <https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention/what-are-human-rights>

⁹²⁶ <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>. The Declaration on Religious Freedom, *Dignitatis Humanae* Promulgated by His Holiness Pope Paul VI, on December 7, 1965, Stated the God has regard for the dignity of the human person whom He Himself created and man is to be guided by his own judgment and he is to enjoy freedom. See, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651207_dignitatis-humanae_en.html

⁹²⁷ *Three Monophysite Christologies: Severus of Antioch, Philoxenus of Mabbug and Jacob of Sarug* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976) ,15.

⁹²⁸ *Ibid.*,142.

⁹²⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹³⁰ *Ibid.*,21.

⁹³¹ Lossky, “The two Monotheisms”,20.

⁹³² *Ibid.*,44.

⁹³³ Syrian bishop, and theologian, born 440 C.E, Tahal, Beth-Garmaï (near modern Kirkūk, Iraq)-died 523 C.E.

⁹³⁴ *The Practical Christology of Philoxenos of Mabbug*, David A. Michelson, (U.K: Oxford University Press, 2014), 19.

and by this act opened the possibility for all humankind to become children of God through a restoration (or re-creation) of human nature in the new pattern of Christ where “God is man and man is God.”⁹³⁵ He is in whom God and the world have become one.⁹³⁶ For Rahner, God is not merely the one who as creator establishes a world distant from himself as something different, but rather he is the one who gives himself away to this world and who has his fate in and with this world. God is not only himself the giver, but he is also the gift.⁹³⁷ This being one in Christ (ἐν Χριστῷ) also challenges us to pave a way forward to strengthen our ecumenical relationships, a relationship that is particularly bonded by being in Christ and his Church.

5 Ecumenical Relations and The Way Forward: Engagements and Possibilities

Throughout the Christian Church's history, the ecumenical challenge has been a constant imperative.⁹³⁸ Churches have made several attempts to bond and to heal their differences. A smattering of illustrations of these early attempts to bond would include Augustine's laborious efforts to restore communion with the Donatists, the sporadic bargains struck from the fifth to the seventeenth centuries between Chalcedonians and non-Chalcedonians, the brief restorations of Orthodox-Catholic communion at the Councils of Lyons and Florence, doctrinal negotiations amongst the Lutheran and Reformed communities during the Reformation's formative period, the nineteenth-century Oxford Movement's overtures to Rome and Constantinople.⁹³⁹

The early 20th-century attempts at ecumenical relations include the beginning of the International Missionary Council in 1921, the first Life and Work Conference in 1925, and the Faith and Order Conference of 1927. Soon modern ecumenism gained its first permanent institutions which, given the participation not only of the major Protestant denominations and Anglicans but also of Orthodox and Old Catholics, began to assume universal proportions, incorporating as it did elements of all major Christian traditions, although not yet the Catholic Church. Again, by 1948 the latter two structures had coalesced into the World Council of Churches (WCC), which at its Delhi Assembly of 1961 would incorporate the IMC as well. In

⁹³⁵ Ibid. Philoxenos interprets this passage not as “dwelt among us” but more literally “dwelt in us,” i.e., the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is made possible because the Incarnation has bridged the gap between humanity and divinity.

⁹³⁶ Rahner, *The Death of Jesus and The Closure of Revelation*, *TI*, XVIII, 136.

⁹³⁷ Rahner, *The Specific Character of The Christian Concept of God*, *TI*, XXI, 191.

⁹³⁸ William C. Ingle-Gillis, *The Trinity, and Ecumenical Church Thought* (U.K: Ashgate, 2007), 4.

⁹³⁹ Ibid.

1962 the Second Vatican Council committed ‘irrevocably’, in John Paul’s words⁹⁴⁰, to the ecumenical project which climaxed in the December 1965 retraction of the excommunications in force since 1054 between Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy.⁹⁴¹ These developments together with the ever-increasing involvement at local levels in ecumenical projects helped to establish the imperative of common mission and ecumenical conversations.⁹⁴²

In particular, the ecumenical relations between the two churches, the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, and the Catholic Church, of whom Gregorios and Rahner are representatives have been cordial. The Orthodox Church in India continues the great legacy of ecumenism tread by H. G. Alexios Mar Theodosius, H. G. Philipose Mar Theophilos, H. G. Dr. Paulos Mar Gregorios (Paul Verghese), and Rev. Fr. Dr. V. C. Samuel, the bulwarks of the Orthodox Church ecumenical movement. A landmark in ecumenical relations between the Catholic and Oriental Orthodox Churches was the consultation at Vienna (Austria) organized by *Pro Oriente*, from September 7 to 12, 1971.⁹⁴³ Rahner and Gregorios were on the list of expected participants, However, Rahner could not attend the meeting due to ill health. Various levels of ecumenical engagements since the mid-20th century have brought joint statements and agreements like sharing of the sacrament of anointing of the sick and sacred places for worship.⁹⁴⁴ The dialogues between the two Churches continue to be led by the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity⁹⁴⁵ at two levels. Firstly, by the Joint International Commission for

⁹⁴⁰ *UT UNUM SINT On commitment to Ecumenism*, “At the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church committed herself *irrevocably* to following the path of the ecumenical venture, thus heeding the Spirit of the Lord, who teaches people to interpret carefully the "signs of the times” See, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25051995_ut-unum-sint.html

⁹⁴¹ Edward Yarnold, *They Are in Earnest: Christian Unity in the Statements of Paul VI, John Paul I, John Paul II* (Slough, 1982),67; See, Methodios Fouyas, *Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism and Anglicanism* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), 214. John Paul II, par. 3.

⁹⁴² William C. Ingle-Gillis, *The Trinity, and Ecumenical Church Thought* (U.K: Ashgate, 2007),4.

⁹⁴³ Monsignor Otto Mauer *ed.*, *Wort Und Wahrheit*, Supplementary Issue Number 1 (Vienna: Pro Oriente, 1972), 1. Archbishop of Vienna and founder of PRO ORIENTE, deepest satisfaction at the fact that theologians of the Oriental Orthodox Churches and the Roman Catholic Church convened in Vienna for their first Theological Consultation after 1,520 years of separation.

⁹⁴⁴<http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/dialoghi/sezione-orientale/chiese-ortodosse-orientali/relazioni-bilaterali/chiesa-malankarese-siro-ortodossa/declarations-of-agreement.html>.

These remarkable agreements were reached between the Roman Catholic Church and the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church in 2010.

⁹⁴⁵ The origin of the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity (DPCU) is intricately linked with the Second Vatican Council. It was Pope John XXIII’s desire that the Catholic Church’s involvement in the ecumenical movement be one of the Council’s chief concerns. Through the Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus* (28 June 1988), Pope John Paul II changed the Secretariat into the *Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity* (PCPCU). The Pontifical Council was changed to Dicastery in 2022.

dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches. Secondly, a Joint International Commission for dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church of India has been meeting formally for conversations since 1989.⁹⁴⁶

These and many other small steps contribute towards the walking together of Christ's disciples.⁹⁴⁷ Rahner says, "It seems to me that our ecumenical efforts should little by little produce concrete results." Interchurch commissions, and proceedings of private groups without official binding power, all fall short of the results that are increasingly expected today.⁹⁴⁸ He speaks about his vision of ecumenical dialogue and concrete steps forward, in the chapter, "Concrete Official Steps Toward Unification."

Rahner maintains that, when we conduct an ecumenical dialogue, or pursue ecumenical theology with one another despite the fact of our being divided among many Churches, then the ultimate necessary condition which we presuppose for this is that each of us recognises the others as Christians.⁹⁴⁹ He explains that we must learn from each other⁹⁵⁰ and that everyone testifies to the gift of grace which has been granted to her/him.⁹⁵¹ Each of us as Christian partners in ecumenical dialogue testifies to the Christian experience, so that the spirit and heart of others may be enlarged in order to experience the riches of grace more deeply and fully.⁹⁵² Rahner highlights the importance of dialogue from a spiritual aspect, "There is therefore, not merely an ecumenical dialogue in the field of dogmatic theology, of the constitutional life and practical activity, but also in the field of the spiritual life".⁹⁵³

He explains further that, what is essential is mutual recognition, that the partners to dialogue live in the grace of God, are justified by the Holy Spirit, and are sharers in the divine nature:

See, <http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/dicastero/presentazione/presentazione.html>

⁹⁴⁶<http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/dialoghi/sezione-orientale/chiese-ortodosse-orientali/relazioni-bilaterali/chiesa-malankarese-siro-ortodossa/declarations-of-agreement.html>

⁹⁴⁷ "That they may be one", St. John 17:21.

⁹⁴⁸ Karl Rahner, *Concrete Official Steps Toward Unification*, *TI*, *XXII*, 84.

⁹⁴⁹ Karl Rahner, *The Church in the World*, *TI*, *XIV*, 249.

⁹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵² *Ibid.*

⁹⁵³ Karl Rahner, *Justified and Sinner at The Same Time*, *TI*, *VI*, 219.

What it means, rather, is that we are convinced as a matter of hope, if not of knowledge at the explicit and theoretical level, that the partners to the dialogue on either side live in the grace of God, that they are truly justified by the Holy Pneuma of God and are sharers in the divine nature.⁹⁵⁴

These words about an interiority of true knowledge of God and faith conviction are pivotal for any ecumenical discussion, “All of us know in the Spirit of God something more simple, more true, and more real than that which we are capable of knowing and expressing in the dimension of our theological concepts.”⁹⁵⁵

Rahner highlights that there are two levels of faith, which need to be recognised before entering a dialogue. One is faith which is expressed through concepts and the other is interior faith (above the concepts and theological creeds).⁹⁵⁶ Ecumenical dialogue partners should bear in mind that theological definitions are conditioned by historical facts, and some are conventional in character.⁹⁵⁷ Rahner refers to the influence of linguistic conventions in the formation of theological terms and explains that,

words such as ‘person’ and ‘nature’ in Christology, ‘original sin’ in the theology of sin, ‘transubstantiation’ in the doctrine of the Eucharist, ‘infusion,’ ‘habitus,’ ‘increase of merit,’ etc. in the doctrine of justification certainly do point to a reality of faith and of binding conviction. But they also always imply the influence of certain linguistic conventions and language in the forming of definitions within a given confession which are not necessary and could in principle be altered without any surrender of what is really being expressed in such definitions.⁹⁵⁸

The person of Jesus Christ transcends so much our comprehension and linguistic expression that no formulation is adequate to describe Him says Gregorios.⁹⁵⁹ The linguistic and sociological differences have contributed to several difficulties in comprehending each other and shaping our understandings. However, walking together and leading conversations are vital in this journey of ecumenism. The Emmaus journey in Luke’s Gospel narrates this journeying of two disciples, sharing their struggles and perceptions and could serve as a model. In this event, Jesus joins and listens to them. He does not leave us alone but becomes a co-traveler. Yet without listening to

⁹⁵⁴ Karl Rahner, *On the Theology of The Ecumenical Discussion*, *TI, XI*, 35.

⁹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*,39.

⁹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*,39.

⁹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*,41-42.

⁹⁵⁸ Karl Rahner, *On the Theology of The Ecumenical Discussion*, *TI, XI*, 41-42.

⁹⁵⁹ Paulos Gregorios and William H. Lazareth eds. *Does Chalcedon Divide or Unite*. (Geneva: WCC, 1981), 76.

him we cannot know him or the truth about our situation. He is not recognisable to us until we hear him speak.⁹⁶⁰

Gregorios feels the Apostolic testimony recorded in the New Testament has three dimensions of Christology which we must keep in some balance today.⁹⁶¹ He explains that it is the central teaching of the Apostolic tradition that Christ is a three-fold saviour—Saviour of the Church, Saviour of all humanity, and Saviour of the whole universe in all its dimensions—those open to our senses and those that are not. In the first place there is the oikonomic-ecclesiological relation of Christ to the members of his Body the Church—a relation initiated by faith. Baptism and Chrismation, and sustained by the great mysteries of the Church, principally the Eucharist. Secondly, the relationship of Christ is to all humanity. For Gregorios, “It was not Christian humanity that the Son of God assumed.”⁹⁶² As a human person Jesus Christ is consubstantial with all human beings, whether they be Christian, Hindu, Muslim, Marxist, or Buddhist. It is the whole of humanity that has been sanctified by the Incarnate Body of Christ. Jesus Christ is the saviour of humanity - not just of Christians. He is Saviour of the world- (*ho Soter tou kosmou, vere Salvator mundi* (1 Jn. 4:14; Jn. 4:42). He is the saviour of all human beings (*Soter panton anthropon*-Tim. 4:10), though especially of believers. He is also the "Saviour of the Body" (Eph. 5:23), our Saviour (Jude 25, 2 Pet. 1:1,11; 3:18, Titus 1:3,4; 2:10,13; 3:4,6 etc.).⁹⁶³

A third relationship which Gregorios feels should not be overlooked, which is implied in the expression: “Saviour of the world”. He feels the relation of Christ to the universe is often overlooked or underplayed in many Christological treatises.⁹⁶⁴ For Gregorios Christ's work in the three dimensions are unique, but are interconnectedness to each other in the Church, in humanity, and in the cosmos.

⁹⁶⁰ Paul Duane Matheny, *Contextual Theology: The Drama of Our Times*, (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co.), 85. “And through the Sacrament of Eucharist.”

⁹⁶¹ 125, *Orthodox Identity in India: Essays in Honor of V. C. Samuel*, Edited by M. K. Kuriarose, Bangalore: Rev. Dr. V. C. Samuel 75th Birthday Celebration Committee, 1988.

⁹⁶² 125, *Orthodox Identity in India: Essays in Honor of V. C. Samuel*, Edited by M. K. Kuriakose, Bangalore: Rev. Dr. V. C. Samuel 75th Birthday Celebration Committee, 1988

⁹⁶³ Ibid.

⁹⁶⁴ Ibid.

6 Synodality and Ecumenism⁹⁶⁵

Synodality is an expression of particular interest for ecumenism in order to listen and to foster a relationship between the churches across traditions and borders. The Synodal Process of the Catholic Church initiated by Pope Francis in October 2021 has brought forward the term synodality to the center of attention. It is interesting to highlight the aim of the synodal process as described,

We recall that the purpose of the Synod is not to produce documents, but to plant dreams, draw forth prophecies and visions, allow hope to flourish, inspire trust, bind up wounds, weave together relationships, awaken a dawn of hope, learn from one another, and create a bright resourcefulness that will enlighten minds, warm hearts, give strength to our hands.⁹⁶⁶

Synodality denotes the style that qualifies the life and mission of the Catholic Church, expressing her nature as the People of God journeying together and gathering in assembly, summoned by the Lord Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit to proclaim the Gospel. Synodality ought to be expressed in the Church's ordinary way of living and working.⁹⁶⁷ Synodality, in this perspective, is much more than the celebration of ecclesial meetings and Bishops' assemblies, or a matter of simple internal administration within the Church; it is the specific *modus vivendi et operandi* of the Church, the People of God, which reveals and gives substance to her being as communion when all her members journey together, gather in assembly and take an active part in her evangelising mission.⁹⁶⁸

An important aspect of the Synodal process is listening. The '*Vademecum*⁹⁶⁹ for the Synod on Synodality' (Official Handbook for Listening and Discernment in Local Churches) published in 2021 explains, "The objective of the current synod is to listen, as the entire people

⁹⁶⁵ The great attempt of the Catholic Church to draw a deeper understanding of the term 'Synod' and employing it practically in gathering a wealth of participation from people globally is appreciable. The recent Pro Oriente and Vatican meeting 'Listening to the East' was a great attempt to listen to the other for a better understanding of the self. The Term Synod- etymologically from Greek term 'Sunodos' a compound word meaning meeting. From, *sun-* (σύν) 'together' and *hodos* (ὁδός) 'a way' 'a coming.' See, Walter W. Skeat, *The Concise Dictionary of English Etymology*, Wordsworth editions Ltd, 1993, 486.

⁹⁶⁶ <https://www.synod.va/en/what-is-the-synod-21-24/about.html>, Accessed on 28 December 2022.

⁹⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁶⁹ A handbook or guide that is kept constantly at hand for consultation. The phrase is Latin and means 'go with me;' it is first used (in the early 17th century) as the title of a book. See, <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803115033148;jsessionid=7EF90F39043445570B947E570B096E10>, Accessed on 30 December, 2022.

of God, to what the Holy Spirit is saying to the Church, and then by listening to one another, and especially to those at the margins, discerning the signs of the times.”⁹⁷⁰

A recent initiative under the joint patronage of two Vatican bodies: the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity and the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops to listen to the Orthodox churches on Synodality was a significant attempt at ecumenism.⁹⁷¹ Prominent theologians with international acclaim and young individuals representing Eastern Orthodox and ancient Oriental churches will deliver presentations on these topics. They subsequently shared their insights and experiences in synodal theology, church practices, and the spirituality of synodality with the ongoing global synod of the Catholic Church. Listening to each other and understanding how genders are represented in decision-making processes and what perspectives young people bring to such processes is a great process of recognizing the good in each other.

The whole Synodal Process aims at fostering a lived experience of discernment, participation, and co-responsibility, where a diversity of gifts is brought together for the Church’s mission in the world.⁹⁷² The synodal process thus could also be a continuing act of fellowship and walking together of the whole of humanity towards common concerns.⁹⁷³

6.1 Implications for Future Ecumenical Dialogues:

Mutual Understanding: Theological anthropology provides a crucial foundation for understanding human nature and the human person's relationship with God and the world. By engaging in dialogue on this topic, the Catholic Church and the Malankara Orthodox Syrian

⁹⁷⁰ <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2021/09/07/210907b.html>

⁹⁷¹ “Listening to the East” Synodality in Life and Witness of the Eastern Christian Church Traditions. <https://www.pro-orientale.at/en/past-initiatives-and-projects/listen-to-the-east-synodality>, Accessed on 11 August, 2023. In the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, the participation of lay and clergy is significant in every decision-making process. The process of consensus-building and discernment in the Orthodox synodal model can guide the Catholic Church in fostering unity and discerning the Spirit's guidance in its synodal discussions. The individual Churches and individuals participate through General Body meetings and a similar pattern at the Diocesan and National Church levels. The Malankara Syrian Christian Association is the highest decision-making body of the church. This association consists of lay and clergy representatives from various parishes and is responsible for making important decisions related to church governance and administration. The church’s governing document for legal and management purposes is known as the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Christian Constitution, 1934 which is also endorsed by the Supreme Court of Republic of India.

⁹⁷² *VADEMECUM*, <https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/document/common/vademecum/Vademecum-EN-A4.pdf>, Accessed on 28 December 2022.

⁹⁷³ This could include cooperation between religions for peace, terrorism, and ecological challenges.

Church can deepen their mutual understanding of each other's traditions, fostering respect, and appreciation for the richness of their respective theological insights.

Collaborative Theological Reflection: The convergence between Rahner's and Mar Gregorios's theological anthropology opens opportunities for collaborative theological reflection. By engaging in joint research projects, scholarly exchanges, and theological consultations, scholars and theologians from both traditions can enhance their understanding of each other's perspectives and contribute to the development of a shared theological vision.

Practical Cooperation: A shared understanding of theological anthropology can serve as a catalyst for practical cooperation between the Catholic Church and the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church. Collaboration in areas such as social justice initiatives, interfaith dialogue, and ethical engagement can be nurtured by a shared commitment to the dignity and worth of every human person as a reflection of God's image.

7 Challenges and the Way Forward

Cultural Context: While Rahner and Mar Gregorios provide a solid foundation for dialogue, it is important to recognize the cultural and historical contexts in which their theological perspectives developed. Both traditions bring unique cultural insights and perspectives to the discussion, and a nuanced understanding of these contexts is essential for fruitful dialogue.

Openness to Growth: Dialogue requires openness to growth and willingness to learn from each other. Both the Catholic Church and the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church should be open to reevaluating and reinterpreting their theological perspectives considering the insights gained from dialogue, allowing for a mutual transformation of understanding and practice.

Commitment to Ecumenism: For future ecumenical dialogues to bear fruit, there must be a shared commitment to ecumenism, recognizing the importance of unity in diversity. This commitment should extend beyond theological dialogues to practical cooperation, joint worship, and mutual exchange of resources and experiences.

By recognising the relational nature of human existence, the significance of the *imago Dei*, and the implications of the Incarnation, these two traditions can deepen their understanding of each other, foster mutual respect, and collaborate in addressing pressing global issues. Such dialogues require openness, humility, and a commitment to the shared mission of promoting the dignity and well-being of all humanity.

The exploration into the theological anthropology of Karl Rahner and Paulos Mar Gregorios reveals significant commonalities and areas of convergence that provide a foundation for future ecumenical dialogues between the Churches. By acknowledging the human person's orientation towards mystery, embracing the concept of the *imago Dei*, and considering the holistic nature of human existence, these two traditions can deepen their understanding, foster mutual respect, and collaborate in addressing pressing global issues. Through sustained engagement and genuine dialogue, the Catholic Church and the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church can contribute to a more unified and inclusive expression of the Christian faith in the world.

8 Conclusion: Towards a Holistic Relational Anthropology

Relationship with God is not a matter of definitive knowledge or possession of an object.⁹⁷⁴ Instead, a relationship with God involves acceptance of “being overwhelmed by light inaccessible, which shows itself as inaccessible in the very moment of giving itself.”⁹⁷⁵ For this reason, encounters with grace can be “unthematic,” in such a way that it is difficult to distinguish grace as a detached component of experience subject to exhaustive analysis.⁹⁷⁶ God’s relationship with the world is also better identified by the bond between matter and spirit traced by both Rahner and Gregorios. One can observe some intersections in their theologising which rejects dualisms and dichotomies as ‘human inventions.’⁹⁷⁷ For both Rahner and Gregorios, the dogmas of the Christian faith suggest that the body is an intrinsic part of the human person and participates in his or her being formed in the image of God. In fact, the Christian doctrine of

⁹⁷⁴ Richard Lennan, “*Beyond the Anonymous Christian*”: *Reconsidering Rahner on Grace and Salvation*, *Theological Studies* 2022, (Vol. 83(3) 443–460), 447.

⁹⁷⁵ Karl Rahner, “The Concept of Mystery in Catholic Theology,” 56. Also, Richard Lennan, *Beyond “The Anonymous Christian”*, 447.

⁹⁷⁶ Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, trans. William V. Dych (New York: Seabury, 1978), 53.

⁹⁷⁷ https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20040723_communion-stewardship_en.html

creation itself excludes a metaphysical or cosmic dualism since it teaches that everything in the universe, spiritual and material, was created by God and thus stems from the perfect Good.⁹⁷⁸

Rahner is clear that, “there is, in fact, an ultimate common bond of this kind between spirit and matter, for matter too is an element in the creation (which participates in God) wrought by God who is absolute and simple spirit. And God cannot make anything that is opposed to him and his nature as disparate from it and alien to it. Matter exhibits its ‘spirituality’ in that it appears as an intrinsic co-principle in a spiritual and personal being, and shares in the destiny of this being.”⁹⁷⁹ For Rahner, the physical world is not merely the outward stage upon which the history of the spirit, to which matter is alien, is played out, such that it tends as its outcome to quit this stage as swiftly as possible in order really to achieve full spirituality in a world beyond that of matter.⁹⁸⁰

Gregorios also thoroughly examines the relationship between God, human, and world. He believes it is through the human being and through nature (the natural world) that God presents himself to humanity.⁹⁸¹ In this sense, it is foolish to see God and nature as alternative poles places so that if man turns towards one, he must turn his back on the other.⁹⁸² We go towards God only by entering into the world.⁹⁸³ The other side of *priori* transcendence towards being (as in Rahner) is that we are historical beings and so must turn to the world as the place for a possible encounter with God.⁹⁸⁴

In the relationship between the world and humanity, Gregorios rejects the concepts of humanity’s domination or the stewardship of nature. The concept of stewardship, he feels, has the hidden possibility of objectification and alienation.⁹⁸⁵ He explains, “nature would remain some kind of property owned not by us, of course, but by God, given into our hands for efficient

⁹⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁷⁹ Rahner, *Immanent and Transcendent Consummation of The World*, *TI*, X, 288.

⁹⁸⁰ Ibid., 286. Gregorios tries to explain the interconnectedness of nature, human, and God uses the same analogy although in a different sense, “Nature itself is in fact the stage, complete with the actors and props among which man is placed. He cannot turn away from it, as long as he has to occupy some space...” See, Gregorios, *Human Presence*, 87. Furthermore, God is not a reality with physical boundaries, man cannot create a space-time interval between himself and God. God is the reality which sustains both man and nature.

⁹⁸¹ Gregorios, “Mastery or Mystery”, in *The Human Presence*, 87.

⁹⁸² Ibid.

⁹⁸³ Rahner, *Hearer of the Word*, 104.

⁹⁸⁴ Declan Marmion, “Transcendental Thomisms”, in *The Oxford Handbook of Catholic Theology*, 710.

⁹⁸⁵ Mastery or Mystery, in *The Human Presence*, 88.

and productive use.’’ In the history of the Old Testament, he feels, nature served the purpose of God, as when the land gives increase to the seed, and the sea becomes dry land for Israel to pass over. It is we who have made these false distinctions that remain part of our disastrous theological legacy.⁹⁸⁶

Gregorios explains that it was matter that Christ assumed to constitute his ‘‘historical’’ body; it was food that he ate, water or wine that he drank, air that he breathed, and the earth and sea on which he walked.⁹⁸⁷ The same body then transfigures at Mount Tabor, is crucified on the tree, came out of the tomb, the body then appears to his disciples, and in which he is seen as ascending to heaven.⁹⁸⁸ He is certain that God includes the whole universe in his creation as well as in the redemption in Christ. However, he clarifies that this does not remove all distinctions between humanity and the rest of creation.⁹⁸⁹ Humanity will offer up creation’s praise to God and use human ingenuity to act as partners with God in bringing the whole of creation into fulfillment.

Gregorios identifies the special vocation of humanity as the priest of creation, a mediator through whom God manifests himself to the creation and redeems it.⁹⁹⁰ But this does not make humanity completely discontinuous with creation, since a priest must be an integral part of the people he represents. Christ has become part of creation, and in his created body he lifted creation to God, and humankind must participate in this ‘‘eternal priesthood of Christ.’’⁹⁹¹

As theologies have become more contextual, interreligious, and interdisciplinary, these cannot be based on one philosophical system and so theologians are wary of a theological method operating from a universal or transcultural viewpoint that overlooks the ‘situatedness’ of the knower.⁹⁹² Rahner acknowledges that the theologies of the future will include a very high degree of pluralism in theology, and one which can no longer be mastered by any one mind.⁹⁹³

⁹⁸⁶ Gregorios, ‘‘Mastery or Mystery’’, in *The Human Presence*, 88.

⁹⁸⁷ Ibid

⁹⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁸⁹ Gregorios maybe criticized for being too Anthropocentric, however, we understand that in his understanding humans act as agents towards a cosmic fulfilment.

⁹⁹⁰ Ibid.,89.

⁹⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹⁹² Declan Marmion, ‘‘Transcendental Thomisms’’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Catholic Theology*, 715.

⁹⁹³ Rahner, *The Future of Theology*, *TI, XI*, 139.

He is certain that “the theology of the future will bear an ecumenical stamp”.⁹⁹⁴ Despite the lack of attention to the specificities of other religious traditions, in Rahner, the transcendental project offers important insight into what it means to be human.⁹⁹⁵ Humans are not solitary creatures. From the womb, we live in relationships, growing up in cultural, social, and political institutions that others, through the wisdom of their accumulated experience have created for us. To be human is to find our place in these relationships and these institutions, to take responsibility for them, to contribute to nurturing and improving them and ultimately to give something back to them. As Pope Francis describes,

We recognize the signs of divine harmony present in the natural world, for no creatures are self-sufficient; they exist only in dependence on each other, complementing one another and in the service of one another. We might even say that the Creator has given each to the other so that they can grow and reach fulfillment in a relationship of love and respect.⁹⁹⁶

The purpose of this research is to bring into dialogue the anthropological perspectives of the Western and Eastern Church with Rahner and Gregorios as representatives. Further, we aimed to introduce Western Christian readers to some of the distinctive perspectives and emphases of Eastern Orthodoxy in a way that facilitates understanding and appreciation. To achieve these aims, I have found it preferable to shape the treatment through categories familiar to both Western and Eastern Christian thought such as Theosis/Beatific Vision, Freedom, Nature, and Grace, etc. This thesis is intended to serve as a stimulus to framing a theological anthropology with an ecumenical perspective and as a springboard to future ecumenical engagements between the Catholic and Orthodox Church. As Rahner stressed, a real theology must never refuse to learn anew:

A real theology must not, nevertheless, refuse to learn anew and must not think that it itself in its existing form does not bring with it clouded and one-sided elements, elements which originated in the unchristian spirit of earlier centuries, and which have not become Christian simply because

⁹⁹⁴ Ibid.,143.

⁹⁹⁵ Declan Marmion, “Transcendental Thomisms”, in *The Oxford Handbook of Catholic Theology*,715. “Rahner saw the Council (Vatican II) as a watershed marking the transition from a European and western Church to a world-Church.” See, Marmion, Declan. "Some Aspects of the Theological Legacy of Karl Rahner." *Karl Rahner* 2010: 3-22.

⁹⁹⁶ <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2021/10/04/211004a.html>

we have become accustomed to them and so do not clearly experience their contradiction to basic Christian positions.⁹⁹⁷

Rahner and Gregorios represent their distinct contribution to a critically committed theological anthropology. Despite their distinctive traditions and ecclesial backgrounds, we can identify in these two thinkers' points of conjunction, which pave the way for more contemporary constructive ecumenical dialogue and joint actions.

The orientation *towards mystery* is offered as a gracious gift. God chose the human body to confirm the image and likeness gifted to us during creation. Every day the most diverse sciences make assertions about human beings, and each speaks in its own way, about this inexhaustible theme- Human.⁹⁹⁸ However, Rahner asks that the question which remains is “has man been yet ‘defined’ by all this?” A definition of what is a human being, or the nature of humanity is a challenging task. As Rahner says “one launches into an ocean which is literally boundless: for one can only say what man is by expressing what he is concerned with and what is concerned with him. But that is the boundless, the nameless.”⁹⁹⁹

The human being is a mystery in ones essence, which is their nature. *Imago Dei* involves man's fundamental orientation to God, which is the basis of human dignity and the inalienable rights of the human person. Since every human being is an image of God, s/he cannot be made subservient.¹⁰⁰⁰ Humanity's role within the cosmos, the capacity for social existence, and his knowledge and love of the Creator - all are rooted in our being made in the image of God.¹⁰⁰¹

The goal of Christian theological anthropology as an academic discipline is daunting, a comprehensive account of scripture's teaching about humanity in relation to God. In principle, it addresses all the characteristics, capacities, relationships, and ends of human life as presented in

⁹⁹⁷ Karl Rahner, *The Unity of Spirit and Matter in The Christian Understanding of Faith*, *TI, VI*, 155.

⁹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 109.

¹⁰⁰⁰ https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20040723_communion-stewardship_en.html, Accessed on 30 December 2022.

¹⁰⁰¹ https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20040723_communion-stewardship_en.html, Accessed on 30 December 2022.

the Bible, from our creation in God's image and fall into sin, through redemption in Jesus Christ, to our future in God's everlasting kingdom.¹⁰⁰²

The future also embodies a universal hope of salvation which is important for both Rahner and Gregorios. As Pope Francis describes,

We have realized that we are on the same boat, all of us fragile and disoriented, but at the same time important and needed, all of us called to row together, each of us in need of comforting the other. On this boat... are all of us. Just like those disciples, who spoke anxiously with one voice, saying "We are perishing" (Mark 4: 38), so we too have realized that we cannot go on thinking of ourselves, but only together can we do this.¹⁰⁰³

The storm exposes our vulnerability and uncovers those false and superfluous certainties around which we have constructed our daily schedules, our projects, our habits, and our priorities. We might be in the same boat or rather in different boats but in the same troubled waters. The boats of our own dogmas and structures may differ, but the waters that challenge our existence are the same. Our coming together and upholding each other through the stormy waters is thus more important.

Gregorios has an eschatological vision of God's plan for the created order and the vision that beckons and defies human words and concepts.¹⁰⁰⁴ The human mind can neither comprehend nor imagine what God has set in store for us and all creation.¹⁰⁰⁵ However, destiny is good without mitigation, pure joy in Love, peace in community with all, ecstasy without triumph and sweeter than anything our mind and senses can now enjoy.¹⁰⁰⁶ For Rahner, only the quality of unmeritedness in love can bring this creature to its consummation.¹⁰⁰⁷ Rahner describes how the triumph of grace is assured but that assurance cannot relieve the human being free of the obligation to respond to grace.¹⁰⁰⁸

¹⁰⁰² John W Cooper., "Scripture and Philosophy on the Unity of Body and Soul" , in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Theological anthropology* ed. Joshua R. Farris and Charles Taliaferro (Abingdon: Routledge, 28 Feb 2015), accessed 03 Jan 2023 , Routledge Handbooks Online.

¹⁰⁰³ https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/urbi/documents/papa-francesco_20200327_urbi-et-orbi-epidemia.html. (*Extraordinary Moment of Prayer*, presided over by Pope Francis *Sagrato of St Peter's Basilica, Friday, 27 March 2020*).

¹⁰⁰⁴ Gregorios, *Love's Freedom*, 193

¹⁰⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Rahner, "Immanent and Transcendent Consummation of The World", *TI*, X, 284.

¹⁰⁰⁸ Sean Winter, ed., *Immense Unfathomed Unconfined: The Grace of God in Creation, Church, and Community* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2013), 120.

Paulos Mar Gregorios and Karl Rahner have written comprehensively on the topic of deification (*Theosis*). While they approached the concept from different perspectives, they both emphasized the importance of deification in the Christian faith and the potential for individuals to attain a deeper union with God through the sacraments, spiritual practices, and grace of God. Deification, as understood by Gregorios, does not involve a direct vision where the essence of God is seen and grasped.

Gregorios often criticises the Augustinian persistence on the sin of humanity in his writings. However, Rahner provides a new perspective on it as a Catholic theologian. For him, sin is real, yet it is not equal in strength to uncreated grace and grace can overcome it: But that involves the free acceptance of God in grace and acting in accord with this fundamental orientation to God.¹⁰⁰⁹ As Lossky explains, God calls us to a supreme vocation, deification, to become by grace in a movement boundless as God, that which God is by His nature. And this call demands a free response.¹⁰¹⁰

The doctrine of deification always preserves this sense that God created the world to unite it to himself and that the purpose of creation is to achieve union with God.¹⁰¹¹ Humankind, fashioned in God's image to be a microcosm¹⁰¹² and of the Cosmos, has a key role in that process of deification. Through the Incarnation, the Word comes to us to take on this priestly role and fulfill it.

Both Rahner and Gregorios denounce the approach in Christian anthropology that overemphasizes sin as constitutive of nature and grace as coming from outside humanity. They advocate a broader vision of theological anthropology that overcomes dichotomies. The movement towards Divine Mystery which constitutes our existential fulfillment depends on the relentless worldly encounters that being human necessarily involves. To sum up, with a prayer by Gregory of Nyssa, "Now may we all return to that Divine grace in which God at the first

¹⁰⁰⁹ Joseph Wawrykow "Grace and Justification", in *Oxford Handbook of Catholic Theology*, Lewis Ayres, Medi Ann Volpe, Thomas L. Humphries, eds., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019),419.

¹⁰¹⁰ Lossky, "The two Monotheisms",72.

¹⁰¹¹ Andrew Louth "The Place of Theosis in Orthodox Theology", in Michael J. Christensen and Jeffery A. Wittung eds., *Partakers of the Divine Nature the History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions* (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2007), 36.

¹⁰¹² Gregory of Nyssa also describes human being as "a little world in himself." See, *On the Soul and the Resurrection*.

created man, when He said, ‘let us make man in our image and likeness;’ to whom be glory and might forever and ever. Amen.’¹⁰¹³

By examining the respective contributions to theological anthropology from both the traditions, we have identified significant commonalities and areas of convergences which could serve as a foundation for future ecumenical conversations. The findings bring potential for fostering greater understanding, dialogue, and cooperation between the Catholic Church and the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church through a shared vision of theological anthropology.

The theological anthropology of these stalwarts emphasises the dynamic relationship between God and human beings. They highlight through their works, the understanding that the human person is fundamentally oriented towards God and that this orientation is grounded in the human capacity for self-transcendence. Both traditions highlight and emphasise the relational nature of theological anthropology. They understand the human person as being created for communion with God and others. This shared emphasis on relationships can serve as a starting point for ecumenical dialogue, as it provides a common ground for understanding the nature and purpose of humanity. It has special relevance in the present context of human rights issues pertaining to war and immigration which surround us.

Rahner and Gregorios embrace an incarnational approach to theological anthropology. They acknowledge the significance of the Incarnation in understanding human existence and the redemption of humanity. This shared perspective can facilitate discussion on the nature of Christ's work and its implications for the understanding of humanity, promoting ecumenical understanding and collaboration. Both theologians recognise the concept of the *imago Dei*, the image of God, as foundational to understanding human nature. While Rahner focuses on the transcendent orientation of human beings, Mar Gregorios highlights the role of love in reflecting the divine image. These complementary perspectives could enrich the dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church and promote a deeper appreciation of theological anthropology in both the traditions.

Theological Anthropology of east and west contributes towards a framework for exploring the inherent dignity of every individual, promoting a perspective that transcends

¹⁰¹³ Gregory Nyssa, “A brief examination of the construction of our bodies from a medical point of view”, in *On the Making of Man*, NPNF, 586. Gregory of Nyssa uses this prayer to end his treatise, *On the Making of Man*.

cultural, social, and ethnic boundaries. By exploring different perspectives within theological anthropology, individuals are encouraged to view diversity not as a threat but as a testament to the richness of God's creative expression. Theological anthropology offers a counter-narrative, reminding individuals and communities that the essence of their identity lies in their shared humanity, created, and loved by the same divine source. By delving into theological anthropology of the two traditions, we gain a deeper appreciation for the interconnectedness of humanity.

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