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**The Self-Transcendence of Jesus
A Model for the Evangelisation of the
Adolescent**

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To the lovely Ciara and the lovely Ben

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Introduction

There have been times in my life (thankfully few!) when I have talked to people at social gatherings and sensed they were not listening to what I was saying. Perhaps, convention and social etiquette prevented them from expressing their true feelings to me. Instead, I received a 'glazed disinterested look', in which the person did not keep eye contact with me and made little attempt to engage with the topic of conversation. In talking about Jesus Christ to secondary school students, one can see that same glazed, disinterested look. Students say "we have heard it all before" or "its boring" or "what relevance does Jesus have for me?" One possible explanation for these comments is that students have become indifferent and immune to the person and message of Jesus Christ. Hence the glazed look!

This thesis originated in the 'glazed look' of students I have taught and ministered to as Chaplain over the past seven years. It is a look that has challenged me to ask myself "who Jesus is for young people and why do so many students not engage with him?" It is a look that has motivated me to explore ways in which I can facilitate an environment, where the person of Jesus Christ can speak to and resonate with these young people. In my search for a possible answer, I have been inspired by the theology of Karl Rahner who asked "what are the basic fundamental conditions for knowing God?" In other words, given that we know there is a God, what must be correspondingly real in our human makeup to give flesh to that belief?

For Rahner, the answer lay in the orientation of the human person to God. Essentially, he argues that human beings are transcendently oriented to God as evidenced in the human desire to know more, to question more, to love more. Such an orientation pre-disposes the person to be moved and transformed by the experiences of life. The result is that people can move beyond themselves or self-transcend and so come to discover their true divine origin. In the theology of Rahner, this is described as a movement from an implicit knowledge(transcendental) of God to an explicit knowledge(categorical) of God. Central to this theology is the humanity of Jesus, who is the model of what a human being is called to be. This idea of Jesus as a model of humanity will be developed further in chapter one and in chapter three. But before we begin exploring Jesus as a model, we are obliged to ask what connection has the humanity of Jesus to the evangelisation of teenagers?

In short, everything! I will argue in this thesis that adolescents are by their very nature oriented to God and primed to encounter Jesus as the very fulfilment of who they are. To be human then, is to fundamentally and irreversibly oriented to God. This Rahnerian understanding of divine disposition will be fully explored in chapter two. Like all of Humanity then, young people possess an intuitive self-awareness and are called to move beyond themselves to discover their true self. Both their psychological development and their spirituality reflect this. Both these important areas will be examined in chapter four and chapter five of the thesis. However, the general malaise of unbelief and the inheritance and interpretative blocks of modern day culture, makes it difficult for young people to discover their true orientation and disposition to the divine. In chapter six, I will examine various blocks to the innate religious orientation of the adolescent. I will conclude the chapter with a description of an effective retreat programme I used with a fifth year class, which incorporated the main tenets of Rahner's theology.

1:1 Introduction

In this opening chapter we will look at the struggle the early Church had in preserving Christ's humanity and his divinity. After many years of bitter theological debate, the Council of Chalcedon proclaimed Christ as truly God and truly Man. In Christ then, was the perfect union of the divine and the human. It was not a 50/50 division of divinity and humanity that later theologians implicitly understood when talking about Christ's nature, argues Elizabeth Johnson. Rather, it was a view that saw him as completely human and completely divine; "100/100 as Chalcedon had confessed."¹

Yet, the view that Christ was completely human and completely divine did not sit well with some early theologians and apologists who argued "How could Jesus be truly divine and human at the same time?" To fully understand the origin of this question, one must begin by first looking at the early Church.

1:2 From a Functional to an Ontological view of Christ

The early followers of Jesus had no doubt he was human and divine. In him, they saw the whole range of human emotions; from anger to joy, excitement to sorrow, and frustration to fulfilment. They could also see he was a man close to God, in his very presence, in his actions and in his prayer. These elements played a major part in how Jesus was understood by the post-resurrection communities. Such communities had no problem in acknowledging Jesus as their Lord and at the same time seeing him as a human being. There was no contradiction in their minds because these early Christians were primarily concerned with witnessing to what Jesus had done for them in a **functional way** i.e. the proclamation of Jesus as their Saviour. They focused on a relational understanding of Jesus and how God worked through Jesus to redeem them. In Mark's Gospel, then, Jesus is a man of action who must suffer and die. In Matthew, he is a teacher of the new law. In Luke, he is a man who brings healing and salvation to all. Yet, as these early communities expanded and came in contact with Hellenistic culture and its peoples, new challenges arose as to the identity of Jesus.

¹ Elizabeth Johnson, *Consider Jesus* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1990), p.20.

In this New World, Christianity was influenced by Greek philosophy, which moved away from an epistemology of how things act and function, to asking “What is the core of an object?” In Christian terms, it meant a shift from asking what Jesus did in a functional way, to asking **who he was in himself**, that allowed us to be saved in the first place. Looking at Christ in this ontological way, people began to ask, “Was Jesus God?” “If he was God how could he be human?” “If he was human how could he be God?” “Was he part human and part divine?” “Were there two natures in Jesus or two persons?” “Did he have a human will and a human soul?” The result was a long protracted debate on the nature and essence of Christ. A debate in which the Church attempted to steer between those who exaggerated Jesus’ humanity and those who over emphasised his divinity.

1:3 Nicea and Before

The early christological heresies were so extreme that no official condemnation was necessary. The problem lay not in the heresies themselves but in the refutation of them by theologians.

Docetism and Gnosticism were two related heresies that denied the humanity of Jesus. Docetism maintained that Christ was not truly man but only seemed to be a man. Thus, his life, his suffering and his death were not real. Docetism maintained the body was not a fit medium for the divine, as God would lessen himself by taking human form. A similar dislike of the body was displayed by Gnosticism, which talked about a fusion of the divine and the human in Jesus. This union was temporary as the divine left the human before the suffering and death of Jesus. This made the human in Christ peripheral to our salvation. On the other extreme, there was the erosion of Christ’s divinity in favour of his humanity. A Jewish Christian sect called the Ebionites argued that God adopted the human Jesus as his son and gave him a special grace.

Between these two extremes, there arose theologians who argued for a middle position e.g. Tertullian, Paul of Samasota and Origen. In their attempts to describe more clearly the Father/Son relationship, they tended to make Jesus into something more than a human being and less than God. Arius took up this unintentional subordination tendency and stated that the Son is a creature who was created by the Father and used by the Father in making the world. To Arius, God was absolute and

unchangeable and for God to give his essence to anything, he stopped being absolute and unchangeable. Influenced by Genesis and Proverbs 8:22-31, Arius argued anything existing outside of God is created. *De facto*, Jesus existed outside of God and so “ was himself a creature, a demi-God suspended between God and man, identical with neither and related to both.”²

The Council of Nicea (325) condemned Arianism in its credal formulation, which described Jesus Christ as “Begotten, not made, of one substance (*homoousios*) with the Father, through whom all things were made.” Thus, the Son did not come from the Father’s will as other creatures do i.e. he was neither created or made from nothing. Rather, the Son shared the same substance, essence or materiality as the Father. This use of a Greek philosophical word, *homoousios*, marked a significant change in how the Father/ Son relationship was understood by the Church in its adaptation of Hellenistic philosophy to describe a central dogma of its faith. Christ was indeed divine. Secondly, Nicea represented a movement away from a relational or functional understanding of Jesus to an exploration of who he was in himself. Finally, “the council had also established a “high Christology” that would for centuries accent the divinity of Jesus to an extent that would push his humanity into the background.”³ This was an unsettling consequence of Nicea as questions began to be asked about Christ’s true humanity and indeed about how this humanity and divinity were related.

² Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition 100-600* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), p.198ff.

³ Brennan Hill, *Jesus, the Christ* (Mystic, Connecticut: Twenty Third Publications, 1997), p. 221.

1:4 Post Nicea

The post Nicean era, was characterised by either an over-emphasis on Christ's humanity or divinity as evidenced in the schools of Alexandria and Antioch respectively. Furthermore, apologists viewed Christ as a mediator between God and humanity. To this end, they used the Greek (principle of rationality in universe) and the Hebrew (God's presence in history) understanding of the term Logos to describe the link between the Son of God and the human in Christ. Christ then was seen as a mediator between God and humanity. Yet, how the Logos was the Son and how it was connected to Jesus would be the cause of much debate in subsequent centuries.

Apollinaris of Laodicaea argued that the Logos is the sole principle of the flesh of Jesus and is so bound up with Christ's flesh that it takes over the function of the human soul. In other words, if God were to be human and remain God, he would have to replace the human soul of Jesus. This was an understandable reaction to the adoptionist ways of the Church at that time, but it failed to uphold a central tenet of Jesus' humanity, his human soul. The First Council of Constantinople (381) condemned Apollinaris by saying "the Son and the Word of God did not replace the rational and spiritual soul in His body but rather assumed our soul without sin and saved it." ⁴

Apollinaris' extreme views did not originate from a vacuum but emerged from a school of theology in Alexandria, which emphasised Christ's divinity and the close connection between the Logos and humanity. In this *logos sarx* approach, the pre-existent Logos is described as going down into the world and divinising it. The emphasis in this methodology was on Christ's divinity and the close unity of the Word and the human in Christ. It was this unity that was its strength but the approach tended to falter when it considered the eternal Logos taking on a genuine humanity. The overall result tended to be a lessening of Christ's humanity and the subsuming of that human nature into the divine nature i.e. Monophysitism.

By contrast, the school of Antioch was more concerned with preserving Christ's humanity and stressed the Word becoming a human being (Logos - anthropos). In essence, this approach was an ascending Christology that started with the life of Jesus. Its strength lay in its stress on the humanity of Christ and the distinct human and divine natures of Christ. Its weakness was in its inclination to lessen the

⁴ Richard P. McBrien, *Catholicism* (New York: Harper San Francisco, 1994), p. 470.

unity of Christ and have two subjects. Nestorius was an extreme example of this, as he denied a true unity between Christ's divinity and humanity in order to protect Christ's humanity. Instead, Nestorius proposed two separate persons in Christ and in so doing denied Mary as the Mother of God. The outcome was his condemnation at the Council of Ephesus (431), which upheld the Marian name of *Theotokos* and maintained the human and divine elements are united in the one divine person, Christ. However, St. Cyril's defence of Christ's unity at Ephesus, which understood the union on the level of nature and not person, lead inevitably to the heresy of Monophysitism in which the one divine nature swallows up the humanity of Christ. Worried the very Incarnation itself was being threatened, Pope Leo sent a letter to Flavian, Bishop of Constantinople, maintaining there were two unified natures and one person in Christ. This letter known as Leo's Tome⁵ was used in the defining Council of the Church, Chalcedon (451).

Using Leo's Tome and the Alexandrian stress on Christ's unity along with the Antiochene emphasis on the duality of the natures, Chalcedon professed that in Christ there were two natures, the human and the divine. These natures were united in the one divine person (*prosopon*) and one substance (*hypostasis*) without confusion, change, division or separation. In other words, their union did not compromise the uniqueness and individuality of these natures. Moreover, both these natures were essential to our salvation and so it was equally important for Christ to be completely human, as he was to be completely divine. Thus, Chalcedon talked about Christ as "truly God and "truly "man", "complete in divinity" and "complete in humanity" who was "like us in all respects, apart from sin;"⁶ In so doing, Chalcedon brought to an end many years of simmering debate on who Christ was in himself and held up for all to see that Christ was 100% human like the rest of humanity and 100% divine like his Father in heaven.

Subsequent Councils re-emphasised and refined what Chalcedon had professed. For example, the second and third councils of Constantinople added that Christ had two wills. But there was no doctrinal development from the last council of Constantinople to the present day.

⁵ Richard P. McBrien, op. cit., pp. 475-476.

⁶ Gerald O' Collins, *Interpreting Jesus* (London & New York: Mowbray, 1983), p.172.

1:5 Significance of the Patristic understanding of Christ and the subsequent de-emphasis on his humanity

Combating various christological errors, the Early Church preserved an important balance between Christ's humanity, his divinity and the union, which maintained them. Through the first Councils, the Church professed that Christ is divine and shares the same nature as God (Nicea). Secondly, his humanity and divinity are personally united (Ephesus). Thirdly, he is also fully human and shares the same nature as us (Constantinople I and Chalcedon) and so because he is human, he lived a truly human life in everything but sin, "a life of truly human actions, of truly human freedom, of truly human consciousness"(Constantinople 111).⁷ Pope Leo described Christ's humanity as " *'totus in nostris...completely part of our human world (DS, 293).*"⁸

Christ's humanity therefore was an integral part of who he was in himself and the early Church preserved this amidst bitter controversy, debate and argument. It was a humanity that became less emphasised during the medieval period where a certain Monophysite tendency existed. Here, Christ was portrayed as the Son of God who walked on the earth disguised as a human being. Furthermore, he was also portrayed as enjoying the beatific vision and so saw God directly, unlike the rest of humanity. In the universities, some theologians even argued that it was not appropriate to deny to Christ any perfection he may have had. Thus, Christ was seen as the perfect Carpenter, Sailor or Theologian. This lessening of Christ's humanity continued from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries through the use of the Neo-Scholastic manual approach to theology. These manuals organised doctrine in terms of thesis, antitheses and synthesis. No cognisance was given to contemporary understanding of Jesus' humanity or to scriptural descriptions of Jesus' humanity. Moreover, there was an underlying view that the natures of Christ made up half the picture each i.e. "Jesus became so to speak, 50/50, partly divine and partly human or totally divine and partly human, but not truly divine and truly human, 100/100 as Chalcedon had confessed."⁹ The overall consequence of this was a stifling of the genuine humanity of Christ; so richly present in the original dogma of Chalcedon.

⁷ Richard P. McBrien, op. cit., p.480.

⁸ Gerald O' Collins, op. cit., p.175.

⁹ Elizabeth Johnson, op. cit., p.20.

1:6 A Humanity Restored in the 1950's

It wasn't until the 1950's, on the fifteen hundred anniversary of Chalcedon that an attempt was made to unlock the original faith content of this Council. Johnson terms this "the first wave of renewal in christology" and "Given the basic tendency in the Catholic approach of the time to think of Jesus as more divine than human, this effort had the result of recovering the genuine humanity of Jesus".¹⁰ Foremost among the theologians who was exploring Jesus' humanity, was a German Jesuit, Karl Rahner.

Rahner was among a number of theologians who wanted to show how the Chalcedon formula of 'true God and true man' could be understood using contemporary philosophical methods. His aim was to make dogma meaningful by relating it to anthropology and human existence analysed through transcendental methods and transcendental theology. Rahner called this the mystagogical function of theology. Essentially, it was an attempt to relate Christian tradition and dogma to our own experience. Rahner argued there were two aspects to it.

Firstly, theology must assist those who have been born into the Christian tradition and have received the language and terminology of it without ever discovering from their own experience what it really means. Thus, religious terms and concepts which believers have always heard i.e. "Jesus as a truly human man" must be brought back to their original meaning "in which what is meant and the experience of what is meant are still one"¹¹ In other words, to talk about God's love, forgiveness or humanity, one must have in some way experienced that reality in the first place for it to make sense. It is a reality that has always been present in history but needs to be re-discovered in a constant seeking of the truth. Likewise, to talk about the genuine humanity of Jesus, one must have experienced what being human for Jesus was and is in the first place. Following on from that is the second part of mystagogical theology. This is the conveying of that original experience in a way that sustains the tradition through concepts and language, It is to this latter part of mystagogical theology that Rahner employed his understanding of knowledge, transcendental analysis and the supernatural existential. These we will explore in chapter two.

¹⁰ Ibid. p.21.

¹¹ Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith* (London: New York: Darton, Longman & Todd, Seabury/Crossroad, 1978), pp.16-17.

In Volume one, chapter five of his *Theological Investigations*, Rahner reviewed the current state of Christology and found it wanting. Not in the original formula, but in the way it had been understood and taught through the centuries. He concluded that Jesus' humanity was bypassed because of an outdated scholastic theology. This theology only repeated the two natures in the one person, found in the Chalcedon Creed. It did so in a deductive, *fait accompli* manner. No leeway was given to contemporary understanding and the dogma was seen as an end to the disputations that preceded it.

In marked contrast, Rahner advocated a dynamic, interactive approach to the truths of the Councils, Chalcedon in particular. Any truth about God, argued Rahner, is "beginning and emergence, not conclusion and end."¹² There is in the words of Rahner, "incitement"¹³ or desire to know God further. This incitement forms the basis for understanding Chalcedon not as a goal or an end in itself but as a means to a greater truth of knowing God more. We must not abandon, says Rahner, the Chalcedon creed or fearfully hold on to it, but with passion and questioning attempt to re-discover the truth of its dogma, a truth, which our historical memory has always known. It is a dogma that receives life from constant elucidation from those who want to unlock its meaning at any particular time or era. It requires of the person to be brave and to question why things are the way they are. Moreover, for a person to truly make his/her own of the Chalcedon formula, they must be open to the spirit of God in their own lives and think with their mind and their heart. Otherwise, the meaning of the dogma cannot speak to them,

"The degree of theoretical precision and existential vitality with which man understands what he hears depends on the degree to which he comprehends it within the total context of his spiritual being."¹⁴

Furthermore, the history of theology argues Rahner, is not only an account of how dogma developed but also a history of constant forgetting and re-discovering of "What was once given in history and is ever made present anew."¹⁵ It is this dynamic

¹² Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 1 (London:New York:Darton, Longman & Todd, Seabury /Crossroad, 1969), p. 149.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

approach of constantly trying to make one's own of dogmatic statements that Rahner advocates.

Finally, it is with this mandate of **incitement** and **searching for more** that will form the underlying motivation for the subsequent chapters. It is an incitement that wants to know "What does it mean that Jesus Christ was completely human?" and "Does this have any relevance for me and for my students?" It is this 'searching for more' that has its alpha and omega in the human person. Indeed, both the above questions pre-suppose an even more basic question, "What does it mean to be human?" It is to this latter question that Chapter two will concern itself.

1:7 Conclusion

In this opening chapter, we have seen how Christ was understood. Firstly, in a functional and subsequently in an ontological way. Secondly, we have historically overviewed a fundamental truth about Christ; he was truly and fully human and truly and fully divine. We have seen how this dogma was arrived at and how his humanity was gradually sidelined over the centuries to such an extent that the 1980 document of the International Theological Commission said, "The untold riches of Jesus' humanity need to be brought to light more effectively than was done by the Christologies of the past."¹⁶ Finally, we have looked briefly at Karl Rahner's energising and dynamic view of Chalcedon with its theological mandate of incitement and searching for more as a basis for understanding the truth of Christ's humanity. It is a truth that resonates in our own human existence.

It is this truth about our own humanity which will form the basis of Chapter two.

¹⁶ Gerald O' Collins, op. cit., p.174.

2:1 Introduction

In the previous chapter we discussed the humanity of Christ and the struggle the early Church had to preserve it. We talked a little about Rahner's view on the truth of the Councils. We asked what does it mean to be human? and we briefly discussed Rahner's understanding of Chalcedon. We also mentioned Rahner's use of the word 'incitement' or desire to know God more. It is to this 'desire' I now wish to return so as to explore how Rahner situates it squarely in the realm of human existence. It is an existence fundamentally oriented to God who is met "through the historical environment people experience in daily life."¹ It is an existence in which the more human we become, the closer to God and the more fulfilled we are.

2:2 Theological Anthropology: God in our existence

In his book, *On Being A Christian*, Hans Küng argues, "It is evident from the history of the Christian Church, of theology and spirituality, that being Christian has meant all too often being less than human."² He challenges the reader with finding a "new definition of the relationship between being human and being a Christian,"³ It is this challenge that faces each Christian who desires to witness to and communicate his or her faith in a sometime hostile world. It is a world that increasingly sees Christian revelation as extraneous, irrelevant and superfluous to one's day to day existence. It is a view that I confront each day in my work as a school Chaplain.

Modern Roman Catholic and Christian theology has taken to heart the imperative of acknowledging Christian Revelation in human existence. It is a search that constitutes the *raison d'être* of theological anthropology. Influenced by the modern sciences, philosophy and Christology, **theological anthropology** asks, "What is it about humans that makes it possible for them in their creatureliness to know or experience the infinite God?"⁴ It is characterised by the intellectual shift of the '**turn to the subject**'. Here the emphasis is on the person as a free, independent, individual and historical subject of consciousness, who is constituted in relation to others. Stress is placed on the particular, the practical and on the person as evolving and changing

¹ Stanley J. Grenz & Roger E. Olson, *Twentieth Century Theology, God and the World in a Transitional Age* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1992), P.241.

² Hans Küng, *On Being A Christian* (New York: Doubleday & Company Inc., 1984), p.530.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Janet K. Ruffing 'Anthropology Theological', in *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, ed. M. Downey (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1993), p.47.

within a historical reality. It is a reality, that is neither static or unchanged but open to the fresh possibility of change. It is a view in marked contrast to scholastic and classical theology, which saw a person as an individual substance of a rational nature and talked about unchanging essences and existence. It is to this fresh possibility of change that the human person is challenged to shape the future through the present, with all the possibilities and potentialities therein i.e. “Human Existence, therefore is not a given to be examined, but a potential in process of realisation.”⁵ It is a realisation that is situated in one’s very ongoing experiences of life, which draws a person into relationship with Jesus, who mirrors God in a human form. He is a God in whom one finds fulfilment and one’s end as a human being. Finally, it is a realisation that illuminates the human person’s basic orientation toward the Transcendent. Peter Berger, for example, talked about ‘signals of transcendence’ or ‘prototypical gestures’⁶ in ordinary, everyday life situations, which pointed to God. Our desire for hope, our humour, our creation of order and our sense of outrage all point to a reality beyond us. Similarly, Gregory Baum talked about ‘depth experiences’⁷ such as conscience, friendship, human solidarity and religious experience. All of these put us in touch with our deepest self and ultimately God. Bernard Lonergan⁸ argued, our unrestricted desire to know who we are, implies there is a source and sustainer of this desire, God. He subsequently explored the process of human understanding as a development of this desire.

Yet, if this human desire for God is truly human, what part does God’s free gift of self-communication play? In other words, if the orientation to God is natural, surely God who made human nature is obliged to fulfil it? If he does so, how can one say his self-communication is a free gift in the first place? Surely, he is obliged to satisfy it in human nature? Such a question underlines the classic struggle between understanding God as transcendent and immanent or a view of grace as extrinsic or intrinsic to human nature. Moreover, it is a struggle that came to a head in the 1940’s and 1950’s with the *nouvelle theologie* of Henri de Lubac, who argued the desire for God is an essential part of human nature and yet is still grace.

⁵ Richard P. McBrien op. cit., p. 130.

⁶ Peter L. Berger, *A Rumour of Angels* (London: The Penguin Press, 1970), p. 70.

⁷ Richard P. McBrien, op. cit., p. 216.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. p. 114 – 115.

Karl Rahner, a leading Jesuit theologian, attempted to bridge the tension between de Lubac's view and the understandable reaction of Rome, by arguing we are by our very nature spirit and so profoundly open to and oriented to God. A God who communicates his very self to us in our own humanity. However, this self-communication is not a given or a *de rigueur* of human existence. Rather, it is an offer and possibility of grace found within every human being and in everything that is human, "For everything genuinely human can be an echo of God and the occasion for encountering God's gracious presence."⁹ It means every person is essentially oriented to the possibility of God's self-communication. It is a possibility that could have been otherwise i.e. God did not have to create humanity with this purpose and end. This Rahner terms 'pure nature' and forms part of his understanding of the 'supernatural existential' which we will return to later. To circumvent the lacunae of de Lubac, then, Rahner posits that we are oriented to God but this is a free gift of God. Something he was not obliged to give in the first place.

Yet, the important thing to remember in Rahner is our basic orientation to God and how this orientation forms the mainstay in his search for the conditions in the human person that allows a person to come to knowledge of God in the first place. Rahner argues, the *a priori* condition for knowledge of God is grace, which is the self-communication of God in the human subject. Thus, the human person is capable of going beyond themselves (transcending) in knowing God because "*God is already present in the person as the transcendent force or condition which makes such knowledge possible.*"¹⁰ It is (as it were) as if each person has had a spiritual microchip embedded by God in their very person that orients them to God. It is to this orientation and 'microchip', I wish to examine in detail so as to flesh out Rahner's profound understanding of Revelation in human existence.

2:3 Rahner's New Language of Faith.

Karl Rahner's theology is open, dynamic and relevant today as it ever was. Though he spent most of his life in academia, theology for Rahner, was far from academic in the pejorative sense of the word. Instead, theology was about faith seeking understanding in a modern setting and resonating in the very core of a person.

⁹ William Dych, *op. cit.*, p.38.

¹⁰ Richard P. McBrien, *op. cit.*, p.146.

The setting for Rahner was one of “pluralism, secularisation and historical doubt.”¹¹ It was a setting heavily influenced by neo-scholastic theology, on the one hand and major political, cultural and ideological upheavals, on the other, in the 1950’s and 1960’s. Rahner used these old and modern influences to develop a theology that was alive and in historical, dialectic motion.

Rahner argued that a modern theologian is mandated to introduce people to the experiential reality of God in their lives. He calls this process ‘mystatgogy’¹² and it is the resonance that faith and theology have in one’s own reality. A resonance that is necessary for a belief in God to be truly assimilated and owned by the believer. It can be unhelpful, argues Rahner, to re-visit old forms of faith communication in an attempt to understand one’s present experience. Rather, what is necessary is the “mediation of a philosophy”¹³ to communicate faith as a person’s understanding of him or her self. It is a philosophy and a philosophical transcendental analysis that emerges from a fundamental belief in the person of Jesus Christ. In other words, given that we know there is a God, what are the necessary conditions in the human person to arrive at a knowledge of God? To this end, Rahner uses transcendental philosophical ideas on human existence and knowledge to develop his search for the conditions necessary for knowing God. Philosophy for Rahner therefore, is not an end in itself but a means by which to bring to the fore that which is fundamentally present and resonates in each one of us i.e. the orientation toward God. In the same way as Patristic theology used Plato and Scholasticism made use of Aristotle, Rahner used transcendental analysis and philosophy to allow him to communicate the truth of God in a modern world. More importantly, it gave him the tools with which to connect the Christian tradition to the experience of people; enabling them to understand what the Christian tradition is saying and allowing this tradition to speak to people.

Before we look further at this orientation toward God, we need to briefly explore what is this transcendental philosophy that Rahner made use of, in his search for the conditions of knowing God.

¹¹ George Vass, *A Theologian in Search of a Philosophy, Understanding Karl Rahner Vol 1*. (London: Sheed & Ward, 1985), p.21.

¹² Karl Rahner, ‘Theology and the arts’, *Thought* 57, no..224 (March 1982), p.26. in *Rahner*, op. cit., p.29.

¹³ George Vass, op. cit., p. 22.

2:4 Transcendental Philosophy

Transcendental philosophy is a form of philosophy developed by Immanuel Kant, which surveyed the vast area of epistemology and asked, “How do I know something is true?” Immanuel Kant was among a number of Philosophers known as the German Idealists who examined the role of the person in knowing. This was an age-old epistemological problem that went something like this;

1. How do I know?
2. How do I know that I know?
3. How do I know this knowledge is objective and correct?

One response to the above questions was the Rationalist philosophy of Descartes who maintained that one could have knowledge of something without direct experience of that object. Descartes believed that reason alone could be used to decide what is true or false. This truth was summarised in the words “Cogito ergo sum” i.e. I think therefore I am. This supremacy of reason he applied to his own existence, to the existence of God and to the reality around him. The result was a distrust of experience, tradition and authority in favour of the mind. In contrast, stood the school of Empiricism, which argued that each of our minds is like a ‘tabula rasa’ or blank slate, in which experience and observation enter. Thus, as we look at, hear, touch and observe things, they are imprinted on our minds, which are the source of our knowledge. However, Empiricists argue this experiential source of knowledge is an unreliable indicator of reality as it really is and so experience can’t really be trusted.

Immanuel Kant attempted to overcome some of the shortcomings of Empiricism and Rationalism to form a transcendental, idealistic view of knowledge. Firstly, Kant used the rationalist emphasis on reason and the mind as descriptors of how the mind actually works. Secondly, looking at the empirical objects around him, Kant reasoned, we could only know them with our minds. Thus, it is our minds (idealism) and more specifically our understanding that sees reality in its essence i.e. “our ability to know makes it possible for us to have and understand our experience.”

¹⁴ This ability to know points beyond or transcends our individual experiences and reveals that we are part of a unified reality or what Kant calls a transcendent unity.

¹⁴ Jay Stevenson, *The complete Idiot's Guide to Philosophy* (Indianapolis, Alpha Books, 2002), 179.

But the question arises as to how one transcends these individual experiences to realise this unified reality that Kant talks about in the first place?

In asking that question we are engaging in a methodology that Kant terms a **'transcendental deduction.'** It is a deduction that starts with the question " **What are the a priori conditions for knowing something?** Put another way, "Is there anything in the knowing subject, which he/she brings to the object of knowing for that object to be experienced and known? Or what comes before experiencing so that experience is possible? Grenz and Olson ¹⁵ give a good example of transcendental deduction in their story of how the planet Neptune was discovered. Seemingly, before Astronomers saw the planet Neptune they deduced it was there by the unusual movements of the planet Uranus. Thus, the movements of Uranus prompted the astronomers to ask what makes it possible for Uranus to move the way it does? i.e. what are the conditions for Uranus to move the way it does? The answer was another planet!

To answer this question, Kant differentiated between the phenomenal and the noumenal worlds. The phenomenal world is the world as it looks to our senses while the noumenal world is the world as it really is. Kant argues we cannot know the noumenal world directly but we can get to know it indirectly through categories of understanding such as space, time substance and causality. These categories of understanding are *a priori* and are located in our minds. They existed before our very existence and so are necessary precursors for experiencing to take place. The overall result of Kant was a seismic shift in the theory of epistemology. No longer was experience the unreliable indicator of knowledge. Instead, it was the *a priori* conditions of the mind that made it possible for people to know reality truthfully.

2:5 Rahner's Transcendental Theology

Just as Kant asked "What are the a priori conditions for knowing?" Rahner asked, "What are the a priori conditions for knowing God?" Such questions form the core of Rahner's transcendental theology. It is a theology that asks, "What is it in human beings that allows the likelihood of faith to occur? In other words, given that we know there is a God, what must be correspondingly real in our human makeup to give credence to this belief? For Rahner, the answer lay in the orientation of human

¹⁵ Stanley J. Grenz & Roger E. Olson, op. cit., p. 241.

beings to God and how God created this orientation in the first place. However, to fully appreciate Rahner's understanding of human orientation and creation, we need to look at his understanding of human **knowledge**, his use of **transcendental analysis**, his understanding of the **Supernatural Existential**, along with an understanding of **transcendence** which is both **evolutionary** and **historical**.

2:5:1 Knowledge

The modern understanding of knowledge argues Rahner is about dominating, controlling and understanding the reality one sees as out there. Contemporary understanding of knowledge then is that which we grasp directly or indirectly outside of ourselves.

“We often imagine the essential nature of knowledge after the model of a tablet, on which an object is inscribed, whereby the object comes from outside, as it were, and appears on the tablet. We imagine knowledge after the likeness of a mirror in which some object or other is reflected.”¹⁶

This is the naïve realistic approach to human knowing which does not take account of the spiritual dimension, complexity and depth in human knowing. For Rahner, then, knowledge is not primarily about examining and coming to grips with a corpus of facts and figures. Knowledge is about being touched or stirred by “someone”¹⁷ This someone of course is Jesus Christ. To be human then for Rahner, is to be present and conscious of oneself as knowing and someone who is drawn to God. Rahner calls this type of existence “self presence” or “spirit”, to convey the view that knowledge is much more than control. It is about being drawn in by the mystery that is God. The more one knows, the more one becomes aware of how one's knowledge is but an island in the huge sea of the unknown; with every new discovery heightening one's sense of awe and mystery.

Thus, whenever we experience something as an object of our knowledge, we are at the same time aware of ourselves (self-present) as knowing. Moreover, Rahner would say this object of our knowledge is illuminated by our very mode of self-

¹⁶ Stanley J. Grenz & Roger E Olson, *op. cit.*, p.17.

¹⁷ William Dych, *op. cit.*, p.22.

presence. It is almost as if there is a déjà vu experience between the object of our knowledge and our being self-present/ "If the objective pole of knowledge is like something illuminated by a beam of light, the self presence of the knower is like a burning and luminous coal that is the source of the light."¹⁸

This self-presence for Rahner, is not an inert presence but openness or drive that goes beyond the object known to a greater horizon. This horizon is beyond the sensate thematic world of experience and forms the rational for the sensate. Rahner calls it the transcendental aspect in our experience. It is openness to God that does not come from a sifting of information, argument and evidence but "*begins at the very moment when we become really conscious of ourselves as personal subjects, as human beings, with all that this implies.*"¹⁹ It is knowledge of God not revealed through study and experience (*A posteriori knowledge*) but it is an openness to and a being stirred by God prior to experience (*A priori knowledge*) and which forms the basis for thematic experience.

However, the question arises as to how one becomes aware of being stirred or grasped by God in the first place To explain that properly, we need to look at Rahners's use of transcendental analysis.

2:5:2 Transcendental Analysis

In *Foundations of Christian Faith*, Karl Rahner describes the human being as "the question which rises up before him empty but really and inescapably and which can never be settled and never adequately answered by him ."²⁰ It is a good starting point to explain Rahners analysis, which aims to show that human beings by their very nature are dynamically oriented toward God.

To ask a question is a normal everyday activity for a lot of people and is a constitutive aspect of being human, argues Rahner. A question communicates we don't know something but we want to know it. There is in the question a searching for the truth as we suspect there is something further to be known. Or to this put another way, "Asking a question reveals that we are in touch with a known unknown."²¹ When we receive an answer then from our question, we don't stop there, as

¹⁸ William Dych, op. cit., p. 42.

¹⁹ Richard P. McBrien, op. cit., p.193.

²⁰ Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, op. cit., p. 32.

²¹ Elizabeth Johnson, op. cit., p.22.

inquisitiveness impels us to ask even more questions. Each question is a stepping stone to further understanding and further questioning. It is this questioning that reveals we are dynamically searching for and open to the Truth or the Infinite. Yet, does this constant questioning ever stop? Do we reach a point of fulfilment or is there an insatiable human desire always to know more? Existentialist philosophers would agree that human beings are always searching for and open to the 'more' or the infinite in their lives. However, they would disagree as to whether people ever reach a fulfilment. John Paul Sartre for example, acknowledged we are open to the more or the infinite in our lives, but because life is absurd, we are destined never to be fulfilled.

In contrast, Rahner argues we are by our nature open to the 'Infinite' or the self-communication of God in grace. Secondly, we are only going to be sated by this Infinite who is God, or, in the words of St. Augustine, "You have made us for yourself, O God and our hearts are restless until they rest in thee."²² Thus, each question we ask leads inexorably to God who is the fulfilment of our desire to know more. Indeed, it isn't only questions that reveal we are open to and drawn to God. When we love and are loved we show dynamism of the human spirit in its search for love. A dynamism that reveals that we are only satisfied by infinite love, God. Another good example is the ability of people to hope in situations that defy hope i.e. death camps or prisons. Where people are deprived of all basic needs, are maltreated, abused, violated and still they manage to hope. Such is the legacy of the human capacity to see a different situation than what is before them. It is the capacity to go beyond or transcend their situation and move to the ultimate source of hope, God. Rahner summarises the notion well when he says,

"In every act of cognition, in every transcendental experience in which humans reach out beyond themselves and their finite world toward an infinite horizon of meaning, hope and love, they show that they always, already know God implicitly."²³

Rahner gives other telling examples in life of that transcendent quality within us that underpins the categorical world in which we live. This enables us to reach out to this

²² Augustine, *Confessions* trans. H. Chadwick (NY:OUP, 1992), P.111.

²³ Karl Rahner, *Hearers of the Word*, trans. M. Richards (New York:Herder & Herder, 1969) pp.65-66.

horizon of meaning, hope and love that is God. "Have we ever tried to act purely for love of God, when no warmth sustained, when our act seemed a leap in the dark, simply nonsensical?"²⁴ Have we ever made a sacrifice for a person who did not thank us and we did not feel happy about it? Or forgave somebody but got nothing from it and the person took it for granted? Or did we ever undergo an "experience of trust as we sink into darkness."²⁵ Or "When the whole of a person's life despite all contrary experiences and disappointments, quietly opts for the light and the good."²⁶ All these examples point to a general reality that transcends (goes beyond) the particularity of our life, to reveal a God at the very core of our being who draws us into relationship with him and to whom we are drawn in the activities of life. Rahner calls this transcendent element of our humanity a "secret ingredient"²⁷ which is mediated through the world and which can only be glimpsed at in mystical experiences or when one faces the loneliness of death or in the experiences described above.

Yet, this transcendent element in our human make-up is often avoided, ignored or simply not recognised in one's day to day activities, argues Rahner. One can adopt the "naïve approach" to life and live day to day in a controlled superficial environment, without thinking too much because "it is more sensible not to break one's head over it."²⁸ One can also be a postponer. In other words, one can accept everything has an ultimate purpose or an end of line question but there is no pursuance of either the question or the purpose. In some ways, this is similar to the first approach in that there is an avoidance of ultimate ends and purposes. However, the second approach is perhaps more irresponsible because the person is consciously aware of ultimate ends in his/her nature but chooses not to pursue it right away. Finally, there is the approach of despair, which argues by viewing the world and the actions within it as a whole is meaningless, nonsensical and is furthermore unanswerable!

It is our very life then, our actions, our faith and our hope, which point to that mystery which is God. It is a mystery that we are drawn to and seek fulfilment in as we live by something which is beyond and within us at the same time. This openness of the

²⁴ Karl Rahner, *Do You Believe in God?*, trans. R. Strachan (New York: Newman Press, 1969), pp.112-113.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Karl Rahner, *Meditations on Freedom and the Spirit*, trans. R. Ockenden, D. Smith, C. Bennet (New York: Seabury Press, 1978), p. 24.

²⁷ Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, op. cit., p.35.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 32.

human being to God's self-communication in grace, Rahner terms a '**supernatural existential.**'

2:5:3 Supernatural Existential

Existential was a designation used by Rahner's old philosophy Professor, Martin Heidegger to denote those elements of human existence that were necessary in describing human existence. Existentials were what made us human. This openness to God's self-communication in grace, which Rahner talks about, is an 'existential' and a constitutive element of what it is to be human. It represents part of the 'new theology' of Henri de Lubac where the human desire for God is truly human and an essential part of our humanity. Yet, if this were a natural desire, is God not obliged to satisfy it? And if he did how could one say that God's self-communication is a free gift? This was one of the problems the 'new theology' faced in the 1940's and one which Rahner attempted to deal with in his designation of the existential as 'supernatural'.

As we have said at the beginning of the chapter, God could have created human nature without this disposition to him what Rahner calls 'pure nature'. As such then, this disposition is a free gift from God, which can be accepted or rejected by the person. It is the offer and the possibility of grace to each human being, which is the existential. It is an existential that can be accepted or rejected but the offer always remains. It is (as we mentioned before) as if each human being has a spiritual microchip embedded in the person that pre-dispose him/her to God and it is up to that person to act on this pre-disposition or incitement to know God more.

Elizabeth Johnson²⁹ uses an architectural metaphor of the Pantheon in Rome for understanding the Supernatural Existential. The Pantheon was a pagan temple that was converted into a church. It is round and it has a dome that is cut out in the centre that allows sunlight through. On a sunny day when one enters the Church, one has the feeling of being uplifted and drawn to the light coming down through the roof. Johnson argues the Pantheon is an example of human nature understood through existential analysis. In the human activities of asking questions, loving somebody or hoping against hope we are shown to be open to the light that is God. By these very same activities, we are moving toward our fulfilment as human beings. A fulfilment

²⁹ Elizabeth Johnson,, op. cit., P.24.

that was created in the first place by God. Rahner terms this openness, **Transcendental Revelation**. It is a revelation that does not communicate specific information about God in terms of facts and concepts. Rather, it is as Rahner calls it an un-thematic and un-reflexive knowledge of God that each human being has in their very nature, which opens them to God's self-communication. Moreover, this openness is a basis for what Rahner calls **Categorical Revelation**. This type of revelation involves a reflexive and thematic knowledge of God in terms of knowing who He/She is. In many ways, it is the challenge of the modern age to facilitate a movement from a transcendental to a categorical revelation of God.

2:5:4 Humanity as Transcendent and Historical.

For Karl Rahner, then, the question of what it means to be a human being is not one question among other theological concerns but it is *the question*. For, in knowing what it is to be human or what human existence is (Anthropology) one then has the key to know and experience God (Theology). As human beings, then, we are from our very roots, radically oriented to God. A God who created us with an in-built yearning for him. This is the *a priori* condition for knowing God. Thus, whatever we say about being human, we at the same time say something about God who is the focal point, goal and essence of this humanity. Any description, then, of God mirrors a profound truth about human existence because "God is not "a" Being separate from the human person. God is Being itself, permeating and grounding the person but transcending the person as well."³⁰ But what does this word 'transcending' mean?

Etymologically, the term derives from the word '*transcendere*' and means "to rise above, surpass, go beyond, climb over, surmount".³¹ Originally it was a metaphor for describing God who is above and beyond the world and who came down into the World from above, "God is in heaven and you are on earth" (Eccles 5:2.) In Scholastic theology, it was a qualifier of being. From a contemporary perspective, McBrien differentiates between 'transcendental' and 'transcendent' in explaining Rahner's view of existence. Transcendental is the ability to go "beyond or above or

³⁰ Richard P. McBrien, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

³¹ T.F. Hoad, ed. *Oxford Concise Dictionary of English Etymology* (Oxford: New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p.501.

over something else”³² while transcendent is that which in reality does go beyond, above and over something else.

God, then, is the Transcendent One in whom all of reality is transcending and in whom all things find their fulfilment. This reality is not static but **unfolding historically over time**. In other words, history for Rahner is not caused by external forces, over which one has no control. Instead, people are at the centre of history. It is these people who by their nature are open to God, the sustainer and life force of that orientation. Thus, in every self transcendent act, one is creating and shaping the history of man’s return to God as the fulfilment of his very self, “we can have the hope that now in our present lives and finally after death, we will meet God as our own fulfilment.”³³ In a word, it is the history of salvation.

We are transcendental then in so far as we are moved beyond ourselves to the Transcendent One (God) in our everyday and lifetime activities of questioning, hoping, loving and all other activities that call us out of ourselves. In so doing, we give witness to our existence that derives its meaning beyond the physical, cultural, political, psychological and economic needs that demand our attention in society. This is what is transcendental about our being human. Moreover, it is a transcendence that is **evolutionary**.

It is an evolution influenced by Georg W.F. Hegel. Hegel argued that all reality develops dialectically in time from thesis, antithesis to synthesis. In other words, reality processes itself through time and eventually realises itself as it goes from knowledge to counter knowledge and finally a coming together of these opposites. For Rahner then, each person is spirit and matter. They are matter in that they are part of a concrete historical reality and so experience this reality as corporeal beings i.e. through knowledge, senses, feelings etc. At the same time they are spirit, in that they have an in-built *a priori* orientation to God, which is continually calling them to move out beyond themselves **i.e. to self-transcend**, in their yearning for God. This openness is a necessary pre-condition for hearing the Word of God.

Matter and spirit, then, are deeply linked and have the same end result, the fulfilment of God’s Kingdom in the world. It is a world in which the self-communication of God is extant from the beginning and is present in human nature. It

³² Ibid., p.146.

³³ Karl Rahner, *Karl Rahner in Dialogue, Conversations and Interviews 1965-1982*, ed.. P. Imhof and H.Bialtowons, trans. Harvey D. Egan (New York: Crossroad, 1986), p.147.

is a world and historical process characterised by an active sense of becoming/moving from lower to higher, from simple to complex, from unconscious to conscious, from conscious to self-conscious.³⁴ It is a becoming that is characterised by the active self-transcendence of matter in which God is the principle of this self-transcendence. Thus, “We have the capacity to move beyond ourselves, to become something higher and better than we are, because “the Absolute Beyond” is already in our midst, summoning us forward toward the plenitude of the kingdom.”³⁵ It is an existence whose aim is the self-realisation of the person where he/she sees himself as a “coming to the light”³⁶, that is God. A light of enlightenment, fulfilment and a sense of coming home

Simply put, the history of the world is the history of salvation. It is a history that moves inexorably toward the unity of spirit and matter as humanity realises and acts on the God given capacity to self-transcend. Thus, whenever we move beyond ourselves, we witness to the human capacity for self-transcendence and thereby move one step closer to the unfolding of the Kingdom of God. It is a kingdom originating in God’s self-communication which challenges us to grow more like him day by day in our own self-transcendent acts as a community or as individuals. It is a process of hominization or humanization in which God calls us back to what we were always intended to be, the fulfilment of God’s creation. And so, the more human we are, the closer to God we are and the nearer we are to becoming the truly free individuals God called us to be at the very beginning, i.e. “closeness and distance or being at God’s disposal and being autonomous do not vary for creatures in inverse but rather in direct proportion.”³⁷ Elizabeth Johnson puts it more clearly when she quotes Rahner by stating, “Nearness to God and genuine human autonomy grow in direct and not inverse proportion.”³⁸

³⁴ Richard P. McBrien, op. cit., p.496.

³⁵ Ibid., p.495.

³⁶ Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations* Vol. 1. (London:New York: Darton, Longman & Todd, Seabury/ Crossroad, 1969), in Translators note 1, p.184.

³⁷ Karl Rahner, *Foundations*, op. cit., p.226.

³⁸ Elizabeth Johnson, op. cit., p. 29.

2:6 Conclusion

In this chapter we have briefly explored Karl Rahner's understanding of what it is to be human. We began by acknowledging the desire for God in human nature and existence. This desire for God is an essential aspect of who we are. It is an aspect created by God in a free loving way. However, God was not mandated to make it so. It is theoretically possible therefore, that God could not have created this desire within us. This, Rahner calls 'pure nature' but this is not the case in our existence.

We have also looked at Rahner's use of philosophy as a means of developing and communicating his conviction of faith in the man Jesus. This new language of faith sees faith as the self-understanding of the person. Rahner is also influenced by the transcendental philosophy of Kant. He looked for the *a priori* conditions for knowing something in his method of transcendental deduction. In a like manner, Rahner asks, "Given that we know there is a God, what are the conditions within ourselves that makes this knowledge possible?" Through transcendental analysis, then, Rahner argues, we are by our nature open to God's self-communication in grace. This forms the first stage of revelation, i.e. transcendental revelation. The second stage is categorical revelation. Furthermore, this dynamic orientation to God is created by God and has as its end the fulfilment of the human being in God. To be human therefore is to transcend ourselves in love, in hope, in faith. It is a drawing beyond ourselves to witness to "a principle that transcends us, over which we have no power and which summons us to surpass ourselves and frees us to be creative in the shaping and redirection of history."³⁹ It is a movement to the 'light', that is God within us. This does not happen in a historical vacuum however. Every self-transcending action then, is a movement closer (hominization) to our pre-ordained fulfilment as human beings; where in death we will see God as our own completion.

The most perfect exponent of this self-transcending action that Rahner talks about, is Jesus Christ. For it is the Incarnation that allows God come to the light in Jesus, because "God's will to be an existential being himself and thus to achieve self-realisation in common with other beings defined by their capacity to realise themselves".⁴⁰ He is the self-transcendent / self-realisation model par excellence, who incarnates the human essence of being dynamically open to God. It is to him we will

³⁹ Richard P. McBrien, op. cit., p.148.

⁴⁰ Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations* Vol 1. op. cit., p.184.

turn to in chapter three to explore how Jesus embodied the self-transcendence, Rahner talks about.

3:1 Introduction

In the last chapter, we looked at Karl Rahner's perspective on human existence as fundamentally open to and fulfilled in God. Previous to that, we examined how the human nature of Christ was upheld in the early Councils. This doctrinal emphasis on the humanity of Jesus, however, tended to be overlooked in subsequent centuries. It wasn't until the early fifties that a re-emphasis on the truly human nature of God emerged. In chapter one, we learned that Elizabeth Johnson termed this the 'first wave of renewal' in Christology.

The subsequent, 'second wave of renewal', was a fleshing out of how God became a human being in Jesus. This involved a close scrutiny of the **Jesus of history** and his relevance to our faith. Questions were asked such as: "How did the Gospels originate?", "What were their sources?", "How were they edited?", "Can we ever discover the true historical Jesus?", "Does this historical Jesus have a bearing on our faith today?" In pursuit of the answers to these questions, there developed the biblical disciplines of Textual, Source, Form and Redaction criticism. Each discipline attempted to understand how the gospels were pieced together in their depiction of the life, message and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth.

This chapter then, will start with the proposition that faith begins with an encounter with the historical reality that was Jesus of Nazareth and we will examine the difficulty in accessing that reality. Secondly, it is a faith that sees meaning in the data that history communicates. It is a meaning that reveals in the believer himself or herself, "an act of recognition of that for which it had been searching."¹ **In other words, faith is the realisation of what one already knows in the pre-thematic recesses of one's consciousness.** It is the experience of the penny dropping or the light dawning, as we live our lives and move toward this realisation. It is Jesus, who is the **model of this self-realisation** par excellence and is the person we are called to imitate as Christians.

¹ William Dych, op. cit., p.56.

3: 2 An overview to the search for the historical Jesus

The centrality of faith for Rahner begins with an encounter with the historical reality that was Jesus of Nazareth; “the basic and decisive point of departure of course lies in an encounter with the historical Jesus of Nazareth.”² It is a faith that is intimately connected with history because for Rahner all knowledge is mediated by history. That includes of course the knowledge of God. Through Jesus then, God has definitively entered into history and time. Rahner’s approach emphasises the strong connection between Christian faith and history. In particular the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. It places stress on a personal, human and historical figure called Jesus who “worked with human hands, he thought with a human mind. He acted with a human will and with a human heart he loved.”³ If one does not predicate one’s faith on the real, historical life of Jesus, then one is engaging in a modern type of fideism, argues Rahner.

For Rahner, modern fideism emerges from historical criticism about Jesus and the difficulty of identifying the historical Jesus beneath the layers of redaction, dogma and tradition. It derives from nineteenth-century philosophers and theologians who argued that reason is of no help in understanding Christian truth. Such an approach tended to underplay the link between faith and history in its claim that

“a primitive divine revelation, received through faith and transmitted through language and tradition, was required for the mind’s grasp of the first principles on which speculative philosophy and ethics depended.”⁴

Essentially, fideism denies rational knowledge of God without divine revelation. In terms of what we are saying about the historical Jesus, fideism makes irrelevant the connection of faith and history, simply because of the difficulty of pinpointing the real Jesus of Nazareth without the light of faith. For, if one takes fideism on board, the Jesus of history becomes a mythology or an idea created by faith. The result is the disconnection of faith to a definite historical event two thousand years ago. It is a faith

² Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, op. cit., p. 177.

³ *Gaudium et Spes* 22:22-23 in *The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in Vatican Council 11*, ed. A. Flannery (Dublin: Newtown: Dominican Publications, E.J. Dwyer PTY LTD, 1992), p.923.

⁴ Gerald A. McCool, ‘Fideism’, in *The New Dictionary of Theology*, eds J. Komonchak, M. Collins, D.A. Lane (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1990) p.397.

that runs contrary to Rahner's understanding of a **personal, historical Jesus**, who lived and touched the core of people's lives.

Yet, if we are to agree with Rahner and place the starting point for faith as an encounter with the historical Jesus of Nazareth, certain questions arise. Firstly, how do we know that God has definitively entered the world through Jesus? Indeed, how do we know that Jesus existed at all? How do we know the title 'Christ' was not penned by the people who knew him as a title of hope and not a title of reality? How do we know that Jesus did and said what he was described as doing in the Gospels? Such questions demand a response and the response for Rahner is found in how one understands history.

History for Rahner can be divided into two phases or parts. The first part is to ask the historically factual question, i.e. "**What happened two thousand years ago?**"⁵ In other words, it is incumbent upon the historian to **re-construct** what happened all those years ago in a far-flung part of the Roman Empire. The second part or aspect of history for Rahner is the **active role of the knower** and the framework within which the knower knows. This is the faith aspect and is separate from but is deeply connected to the historical world. Faith however does not make up for the lacunae in historical knowledge but rather recognises in the historical events, the fulfilment of the believer's deep-seated longing and questions. In the words of Rahner:

"Salvation history strictly as such must belong to the dimension which we call the history of man in a very objective and real sense, and it is also affirmed as real and objective in the assertion in which faith grasps its object and its ground together in a free act and decision borne by grace."⁶

It is necessary then, to examine both aspects of history so as to fully appreciate Rahner's understanding of the historical Jesus.

⁵ William Dych, op. cit., pp.49 ff.

⁶ Karl Rahner, *Foundation of Christian Faith*, op. cit., pp.240-241.

3:3 History as re-construction and its inherent difficulty

Broadly speaking, history may be defined as the recording and analysis of past events. In particular, it may refer to “the past events or experiences of a specific person”.⁷ In this case, it is Jesus of Nazareth. But what must one do to access and reconstruct the experiences and events of Jesus? One must turn to the sources that describe him and one must critically examine such sources as to their authenticity and reliability. Indeed, it is the aim of the historian in looking at sources to “strive for objectivity, to recreate in words and with the help of visual aids, statistics, graphs, charts and the like, the human past as it actually was.”⁸ Such a definition, when applied to Jesus of Nazareth, begs the question, “Can one re-create in words or prove the life of Jesus of Nazareth?” Indeed, Alfred Von Hranack said in his book *What is Christianity ?*, “Everything that we know independently of these Gospels, about Jesus’ history and his teaching may be easily put on a small sheet of paper, so little does it come to”.⁹ Our task therefore is not an easy one but a necessary one in the search for the historical and personal Jesus that Rahner talks about.

That a person called Jesus existed is not in dispute. Viewing the Roman and Jewish sources of the time, we can broadly prove there was a person called Jesus of Nazareth. Firstly, there are the Roman historians such as Suetonius, Tacitus and Pliny the Younger. None of them were pro-Christian as they wrote about the history of Rome. Tacitus, while detailing the rule of Nero, described Christians as those who “take their name from Christ who in the reign of Tiberias, the proconsul Pontius Pilate condemned to suffer.”¹⁰ Pliny, the Younger, writing to the Emperor Trajan about a group called the Christians wrote, “the Christians gather at dawn on a fixed day and sing a hymn to Christ as to a God.”¹¹

⁷ *New English Dictionary and Thesaurus* (New Lanark, Scotland: Geddes and Grosset Ltd, 1994), p.293.

⁸ James Hennesey, ‘History’ in *The New Dictionary of Theology*, Eds.Komonchak, Collins and Lane, op. cit., p.468.

⁹ Gerald O’ Collins, op. cit., p.36.

¹⁰ Tacitus, *Annales*.15.1, 4. in *The Mystery of Jesus Christ*, op. cit., p.50.

¹¹ Pliny the Younger, *Epist.* 10, 96. in *ibid.*, p.50-51.

Next, there are the non-Christian Jewish sources of Philo and Flavius Josephus who described Jesus as

“a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles.”¹²

Though there is doubt as to the full authenticity of this text, there is no doubt, the original text of Josephus did not dispute the historical existence of Jesus. Yet, these Roman and Jewish sources reveal little else other than the fact that Jesus existed, he had a group of followers and that he suffered. To fully explore the historical Jesus however, we need to look at another richer but more problematic source on Jesus, the Gospels. In doing so, I will be relying on Chapter two of Brennan Hill’s book, *Jesus the Christ*.¹³

3:3:1 The Gospels as a source for the historical Jesus

In the search for the Jesus of history, a number of approaches to the gospels have evolved. Let us briefly examine each approach.

To see the gospels as divinely inspired and historically accurate descriptions of the life of Jesus is to take on board a **fundamentalist and literalist** stance to the scriptures. One of the inherent assumptions in this approach is that eyewitnesses wrote the gospels or those who made use of eyewitness accounts. Secondly, the gospels were all written independently of one another and so any contradictions in various accounts could be harmonised or blended together. Thirdly, no distinction existed between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith. Though such an approach was extant as far back as the second century, more recent example could be found in the writings of Fulton Sheen, Ferdinand Pratt, Giuseppe Ricciotti and Fulton Oursler. Writing in the 1940s and 1950s, these devout men wrote biographically factual lives of

¹² F.F. Bruce, *Jesus & Christian Origins Outside the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975), p.37.

¹³ Brennan Hill, *op. cit.*, pp.33-54.

Jesus. This was achieved through the harmonising of the four gospels in to a logically sequential whole, starting with his birth and ending with his death and resurrection. Jesus then, was pictured as knowing who he was from the start of his ministry and his followers saw him in the same way. Moreover, with imagination and poetic licence, these writers could bring to life the inner thoughts and feelings of Jesus.

Though such an approach can be uplifting in the portrayal of Jesus, concomitant critical biblical research, reveals the symbiosis and depth of the gospels (through source, form, textual and redaction criticism) in a way the literalist approach has ignored. Such research, begun earlier in the last century by (in the main) German Protestant theologians and subsequently by Catholic theologians, revealed how the Gospels were not intentionally biographical but testimonies of various faith communities. They were written with specific audiences in mind; using certain literary techniques and drawing from a common collection of sayings known as “Q”, as well as from oral stories and sayings, handed down about Jesus. This was not to ignore however, the hand of the writers in bringing together the various sources in compiling the gospels, thereby revealing a particular angle on the significance of Jesus of Nazareth. Yet, with all this scientific critique on the gospels, the question of the historicity of the Gospels becomes even more urgent. In other words, does biblical criticism clearly reveal a historical encounter with the person of Jesus?

Answering such a question hinges on whether or not or how you would separate the historical Jesus and Jesus as the Christ. H.S. Reimarus was the first to make such a distinction. As a **Rationalist**, Reimarus rejected any notion of the supernatural or the spiritual. Viewing the Gospels through this atheistic prism, Reimarus rejected the title of Christ for Jesus along with traditional doctrines about him. Instead, he argued that Jesus was a ‘wannabe’ revolutionary who attempted to create a political kingdom. His endeavours ended in failure and his followers stole his body and created the cult of Christianity. Outright condemnation inevitably greeted Reimarus’ posthumous work but the consequence was the beginning of the search for the historical Jesus to counter his outrageous claims. Scholars like Von Harnack, Renan and Strauss tried to pinpoint the real Jesus amidst the layers of theology, dogma and myth, so as to arrive at the flesh and blood Jesus. Using Mark’s gospel as an historical basis for the life of Jesus, these theologians attempted to write factual accounts of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Their efforts, however, were doomed to failure when Wrede showed in 1901 that the gospel of Mark was not a

historical account of Jesus but a highly nuanced theological one. A further nail in the coffin came from Albert Schweitzer, who brought to light the futility of writing a life of Jesus from the gospels. He argued that the seekers of the historical Jesus had in fact projected themselves and their background into Jesus. Accordingly, Jesus was transformed into a philosopher, a social worker or a teacher of ethics, “There is no historical task which so reveals a man’s true self as the writing of Life of Jesus.”¹⁴

The overall result was a gradual halt in the search for the historical Jesus in Protestant academic circles and a movement away from the historical person of Jesus as a basis for faith. Theologians such as Bultmann, Strauss and David Tracy accepted in faith the message of Jesus and his disciples but advocated a movement away from the Jesus of history because of the severe difficulty, if not impossibility, of locating him. David Strauss for example, argued Christian faith is not built on a person but on an idea of a divine/human unity. Jesus was only important in so far as he embodied this idea. Rudolf Bultmann queried the historicity of the gospels and described them as disconnected anecdotes. For him, belief was a blind leap of faith in the gospel message of salvation preached by Jesus Christ. It was not based on the person of Jesus whose historicity could not be proven anyway and even if one could prove it, would be irrelevant. In a similar way, David Tracy posits a theology and a faith based on those who witnessed the Christ event. The historical Jesus for Tracy is a non-runner, simply because of his lack of accessibility when wading through the gospels.

The fourth and final response to the gospels is the affirmation that the gospels do reflect the historical Jesus in the eyewitness testimonies to Jesus. Granted, the gospels are not biographies of Jesus *per se*, they are certainly evidence of those who sat at the feet of Jesus and in all probability, evidence of what Jesus actually said, “This disciple is the one who vouches for these things and has written them down and we know his testimony is true.” Jn 21:24. Probability, possibility and likelihood are the linguistic vocabulary of the trade, when describing the historical Jesus in this approach. They are “guesses” about Jesus, but they are extremely well educated guesses that are based on competent research.”¹⁵. Through the scholarship of Ernst Kasemann and others, a new quest was begun for the historical Jesus beneath the various layers of theology, tradition and myth. By calling upon the historical critical method and applying criteria of authenticity to the gospels (i.e. multiple attestation,

¹⁴A. Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, in *Interpreting Jesus* op. cit., p.22.

¹⁵Brennan Hill, op. cit., p.51.

dissimilarity/discontinuity and coherence) it is possible to reconstruct something of the message and life of Jesus. What follows is a brief account of what is historically retrievable and generally agreed upon by scholars in this approach.

Originating from Nazareth, Jesus became involved in a movement begun by John the Baptist. Thereafter separating from John, he began a roaming ministry accompanied by his disciples, in which he let it be known that 'the Kingdom of God is at hand'. He conveyed this central message in parables, stories and in his very actions. He proclaimed his message to all strata of society. He befriended the poor, the tax collectors and the outcasts of Jewish society, including women. He performed miracles and exorcisms. Through his preaching, his actions and his lifestyle, he antagonised the Jewish leaders of his day. After celebrating Passover in Jerusalem, he was arrested, tried and executed as a messianic pretender by the Roman authorities, who saw him as a threat.

Such are the bare facts of the historical Jesus and an example of Karl Rahner's first sense of the human person's interaction with the historical world, as the reconstruction of events. Yet, for Rahner, this is only the first aspect of the historical process. The second and complimentary aspect of history is how we interpret the facts and recognise in them the fulfilment of our very selves.

3:4 History as Recognition

Gerald O' Collins in *Interpreting Jesus*, explains how "A totally uninterpreted grasp of anyone or anything is impossible."¹⁶ In other words, we are the hermeneutic for understanding facts through our own background and interests. There is no such thing as a bald historical fact. For example, a person may look at a bridge and be unmoved by the experience. However, an engineer may look at the same bridge and be in awe of its complexity and structure. Applying this concept to theology, Rahner would say, we interpret the fact of the historical Jesus through the light of faith and we recognise in him the fulfilment of who we are called to be. Rahner calls this "the 'mutual conditioning' between particular historical events in the life of Jesus and the 'eyes of faith' which see their credibility."¹⁷

¹⁶ Gerald O' Collins, op. cit., p.70.

¹⁷ William Dych, op. cit., p.55.

Going back two thousand years ago, we can say there was something in this Jesus of Nazareth that spoke to the disciples and which made them do extraordinary things. For example, in Mark we find, “at once they left their net and followed him”. (Mk 1:18) and in Luke we observe his followers saying “Did not our hearts burn within us as he talked to us on the road and explained the scriptures to us?” (Lk 24:32) Rahner would attribute this ‘something’ to the basic anthropology of the human being, which by his/her nature is open to and fulfilled in the divine. As we discussed in chapter two, such openness is not initially explicit but is buried in our pre-thematic knowledge of ourselves, as a vague recollection or inkling of who we are called to be. As we go through life, this pre-thematic awareness becomes explicit in those day to day categorical realities of our lives, which challenge and invite us to go beyond ourselves and to realise who we are. In chapter two, we gave examples of reaching beyond ourselves as indications of this orientation. Elizabeth Johnson puts it well when she says, “Throughout our lives various historical experiences provide the occasion for us to translate our intuitive self-awareness at the transcendental pole into words and concepts at the categorical pole.”¹⁸

If we look at the gospels then, we must say they are testimonies of faith of various Christian communities. These testimonies were originally based on an encounter with the historical Jesus. Yet, it was more than just an encounter. It was ordinary men and women with their first century religious desires and hopes, recognising in Jesus, a fulfilment of these desires and hopes. Obviously, this was not an instantaneous thing but a growing awareness of who Jesus was and how he spoke to that deepest part of them. Rahner would call this experience of the disciples, the movement from the transcendental to the categorical pole of self-awareness. It was within this framework of First Century religious consciousness that the disciples saw Jesus for who he was i.e. the very fulfilment of themselves. It took the disciples a long time to work through this initial spark, that the encounter with the Jesus of Nazareth ignited. Work through it they did, however, and it was their conviction and commitment that “his words and actions, given the divine authority with which he was invested, are a headline for what we ourselves should do.”¹⁹ In other words, Jesus was a model for who the disciples were. But what is it to be a model? and more to the point, how do we understand Jesus as a model?

¹⁸ Elizabeth Johnson, *op. cit.*, p.40.

¹⁹ F. Ocariz, L.F. Mateo Seco, J.A.Riestra,, *op. cit.*, p.51.

3:5 Jesus as a model of self-transcendence

The Oxford English dictionary defines model as “exemplary, ideally perfect”.²⁰ Such a definition seems apropos when examining how Jesus was viewed through the ages as a perfect model for humanity. Rahner described this popular understanding of Jesus as “crypto-monophysitism”.²¹ For Rahner then, people tended to view Jesus as a historical figure with a divine consciousness who could see into the minds of people, forecast the future and use miraculous powers to change nature. Such a mindset had its origins in medieval times, when theologians worked under the influence of the Greek idea of knowledge and associated it with perfection. To know then, was to be perfect and virtuous, while ignorance was a blot on perfection. Obviously, theologians did not want to depict Jesus as being ignorant, so they began to attribute to Jesus all types of knowledge that went beyond his everyday knowing. Specifically, this meant that Jesus had beatific knowledge i.e. a face to face knowledge of God, because of his fittingness as the Son of God. Secondly, he had infused knowledge. This was knowledge of the past, present and future, put directly into his mind by God. Lastly, Jesus had experimental knowledge. People normally learn by trial and error but Jesus never had to learn or be taught the essential life skills. He in fact taught himself. The consequence of such a depiction is a far cry from the Chalcedon definition of “one substance with us as regards his humanity; like us in all respects, apart from sin”.²² For Rahner, such an image of Jesus appears more mythological than human.

Rahner himself attempted to overcome these christological lacunae through his depiction of human knowing as transcendental and categorical, which we discussed in chapter two. At the subjective level of our human knowing then, we have a sense of who we are and what we are called to be. This is what I called the religious microchip in chapter two. Moreover, we live out this sense of ourselves in the categorical world in which we find ourselves, through human activities such as questioning, loving and hoping against hope. If Jesus is truly human then, as

²⁰ F.G. and H.W. Fowler eds, *The Pocket Oxford Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), p.472.

²¹ William P. Lowe, ‘Jesus Christ’ in *The New Dictionary of Theology*, op. cit., p.541.

²² DS 301f in *Interpreting Jesus*, op. cit., p.172.

Chalcedon says he is, he must share the same “bipolar structure”²³ that humanity has. Applying this bipolar structure of human knowing to Jesus, we can say the following.

On the subjective, pre-thematic level of his own consciousness, Jesus had a sense of who he was, as “He lived with a sense of radical closeness to God as the ultimate reality who was simply taken for granted as part of his life.”²⁴ Such a ‘radical closeness’, allowed him to come to terms with his own identity as the Son of God and what he was called to do. However, this “coming to terms” did not happen overnight. Rather, it occurred (in all probability) gradually as he lived his life, encountered people, was affected by people and the events in his life. Only then, in the to and fro of his life did Jesus come to realise who he was. Interestingly, Hans Küng argues that nowhere in the Gospels is Jesus described in relation to his virtues. Rather, it is in his actions and in his ability to relate to others that defines Jesus i.e. “What he is, is shown in what he does.”²⁵ If we apply this to our understanding of Jesus, we can say that Jesus learned about himself in what he did and the manner in which he related to others. By so doing, he came to a recognition of who he was. Put another way, **Jesus arrived at a knowledge of himself in the self-transcending acts of love, forgiveness, hope and compassion that we see throughout the gospels.** So, how does this depiction of Jesus impinge on us?

As we have already seen, Jesus was used as an erroneous model of perfection. It was a model that was extraneous to the experiences of most people and in all probability people found it very hard to relate to some one so perfect and so non-human or mythological, as Rahner would say. If we use his bipolar structure of knowing, we can say **that Jesus is not a model of perfection to be followed in every detail. Rather, Jesus as a model, speaks to our very core as human beings and reflects who we are and what we are called to be.** Thus, as Jesus worked through the pre-thematic awareness of who he was in the categorical world of first century Palestine, we too are called to work through who we are in Twenty First Century Irish society. Indeed, we are challenged to nail our colours to the mast in the everyday interactions and events of our lives. Thus, when we love with no possibility of thanks or when we forgive when it seems irrational or when we are moved to go beyond ourselves in service of the other, we are tapping into our own basic orientation to the

²³ Elizabeth Johnson, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

²⁴ William Dych, *op. cit.*, p.52.

²⁵ Hans Küng, *op. cit.*, p.551.

divine or that transcendental part of ourselves. Indeed, we are modelling a human Jesus that lived 2000 years ago. Not in a parrot like fashion but as the very essence of who we are and what we are called to be, more and more. In a sense then, **it is our human response and our openness to being moved** that exemplify our basic orientation to the divine. Obviously, we can choose not to move beyond ourselves and remain self-absorbed and inward looking. Sometimes this choice can be conscious or it can be an unconscious blocking of what is around us and we cannot or choose not to see it. Whatever the reason, the challenge for Christians is to be aware of their basic orientation to God and it is to the historical Jesus that this orientation is perfectly exemplified.

And so it is to this Jesus of Nazareth that we now turn to, as he looks directly at us and says, "Follow me" (Lk 5:28). For Hans Küng "Follow me" entails "*getting involved with him and his way and going one's own way...in the light of his directions.*"²⁶ Moreover, the Christian message for Küng aims at

"a wholly new approach to life, at an awareness transformed from the roots upward, a new basic attitude, a different scale of values, a radical rethinking and returning (*metanoia*) of the whole man."²⁷

It is this 'returning of the whole man and woman', that an encounter with Jesus inspires. It is a return to what we were originally intended to be i.e. "God created man in the image of himself, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them" (Gn 1:27). It is a return to a living, breathing, human Jesus, who possesses an "impressiveness", an "audibility" and "realizability"²⁸ that makes him more convincing than a set of ideas or principles. For Jesus is the very embodiment of what he preached and taught. So an encounter with Jesus can be a life-changing experience because it resonates with who we are as transcendental human beings and where we are going if we are open to the spirit of God in our lives. Nowhere is the power of this more evident than in the Gospels; in particular, the Gospel of Luke.

²⁶ Hans Küng, op. cit., p.545.

²⁷ Ibid., p.546.

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 546 ff.

3:6 Luke as an historically moving/transcending narrative

The Prologue to Luke sets the tone and the intention of the author. To begin with, Luke admits he has examined the story of Jesus carefully and acknowledges the various other eyewitness accounts. For his part, Luke intends to write an “orderly account” in order “that your Excellency may learn how well founded the teaching is that you have received”. (Lk 1:4) Luke appears to be intent on writing a cogent and historically accurate account of the story of Jesus and so “telling it how it is (or “was”)”²⁹ Though Luke does want to be seen as a careful Historian, Byrne argues, this is not his overriding concern. Indeed, he is not adverse to taking poetic licence in his narrative. Rather, Luke aims to show how well founded is the Christian belief in Jesus and that this Jesus is the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies of God in a way that goes beyond what believers originally thought.

To begin with, the phrase “write an orderly account” or *kathexes* in the Greek, does not strictly mean a chronological blow by blow account of what actually happened. Instead, it refers to a mode of recounting a story and an experience that aims to move and win over the listener. In chapter eleven of the Acts of the Apostles, the word *kathexes* is used to describe Peter’s experience in Cornelius’ house. His recounting of the experience was essentially not about conveying facts about the incident. He told his own story so the “circumcised believers”(11:2) would understand, be moved by and share his new understanding of the Gentiles within God’s plan. **To “write an orderly account” therefore is not simply about facts and chronology but is primarily about the inner movement, transformation and salvation of the reader.** Salvation for Luke is not simply about events or persons. Rather, salvation is when a person makes his/her own of the material of salvation and allows it speak to their heart, their mind and their soul. It is a total engagement of the person and it is evidence of the “firm assurance”(1:4) or *asphelia* of the Christian message of salvation.

This firm assurance of Salvation is further realised when people come to see what they had originally viewed as impossible is indeed resolved on a deeper more profound level. Luke Timothy Johnson puts it well when he explains how the original

²⁹ Brendan Byrne, *The Hospitality of God* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2000), p. 10.

believers attempted to “resolve the cognitive dissonance between their experience and their conviction.”³⁰ The most obvious example of this is in chapter twenty-four, when two disciples are on their way to the village of Emmaus and meet Jesus. Both were obviously devastated by the events of Good Friday. Their whole world was blown apart. The Messiah in whom they had given so much hope and who would “set Israel free” (24:21), was dead. Their dreams were shattered. It is this Jesus whom they fail to recognise (the Greek word for recognise is *Krateo*, which means “their eyes were held”) that opens up new horizons of understanding for them, as he explains the scriptures and says “Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer before entering into his glory?” (24:25). In so doing, he conveys a new take on the Good Friday events, and broadens the horizon of understanding and insight of both followers. Indeed, both men are challenged to look beyond what they have believed for so long and see in the risen Jesus, their very salvation and fulfilment. They are asked to look beyond themselves and see the workings of God in the rejection and death of Jesus, or, as Tannehill says, “This God requires the disciple to trust in God’s power and goodness when all the evidence points to the triumph of evil.”³¹ The overall result of the encounter then is a gradual unfolding of who Jesus is; culminating in the breaking of bread, where they recognise him. Afterwards, they acknowledge, “did not our hearts burn within us as he talked to us on the road and explained the scriptures to us?” (24:32)

The effect of this transformation or animation of the followers, is Luke’s way of showing how “well founded” 1:4 (*asphelia*) the Christian faith is amidst contradictory and confusing events. This was especially pertinent to the First Century world in which Luke wrote because the chosen people of Israel had by and large rejected the message of Jesus and it was the Gentiles who were taking the message of Jesus to their hearts. This had its own problems as we saw in Chapter 11 of the *Acts of the Apostles*, where Peter faced a hostile group of circumcised believers who had difficulty believing that Gentiles were followers of Jesus.

Moreover, such an account aims at drawing the reader into the story so as to convey a feeling that we (the readers) are participants in the enfolding drama i.e. I am

³⁰ Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke* Sacra Pagina 3, (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1991), P.399.

³¹ Robert C. Tannehill, *Luke* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), p.387.

the downcast disciple struggling with what has happened. The implication is that the Gospel is not only a historical testimony but also proclaims that

“Jesus is alive and that those whom his Spirit touches undergo an experience of salvation that is just as immediate and real for them as it was for those who saw him, heard him and felt his touch in Galilee and Judea.”³²

So what are the implications of what we have briefly discussed about Luke for Karl Rahner? What can we take from Luke so far in our discussion about human beings openness to God?

3:6:1 Self-transcendence in Luke

If we look at the Emmaus story from a Rahnerian perspective, we can say the following. Firstly, the people who met Jesus on the road were not the main players of the Christian faith i.e. they were not the apostles. It could be said, that they represent the majority of ordinary Christian believers at the time, who were overcome with grief and disappointment at the death of Jesus. They are the generic or everyday Christian and they are the people we can relate to as a reader. Secondly, the encounter with Jesus challenged them to go beyond or transcend their beliefs about what a Messiah should and should not do. They were asked to see how God’s plan of salvation cannot be sabotaged by human means and that in the midst of failure, ruin and death, God comes into his glory. It must have been difficult then, for these followers to relate their experiences, with what Jesus was saying to them. Yet, they were drawn in by what he had said and so “they pressed him to stay with them” (24:29.) Later, they recognised him in the breaking and the blessing of bread and admitted that their hearts burned as Jesus talked about the scriptures.

In some ways, this is a classic example of the mutual conditioning of the historicity of Jesus and the faith interpretation of which he is, which we talked about at the beginning of the chapter. Firstly, there is the encounter of the disciples with Jesus. The “fact” as it were. The encounter stirs something deep inside them and eventually they recognise Jesus. This is the second aspect of history for Rahner, the recognition. It is a recognition that answers the questions of meaning that are in the disciple’s hearts. It is a dawning of what they already know in their pre-thematic

³² Brendan Byrne, *op. cit.*, p.8.

consciousness and is brought to the fore by the encounter with Jesus. This encounter sparked what was already in them and so helped them realise who they were.

Moreover, it was Jesus who was the fulfilment of who they were. Yet it was not easy for them. They had to go beyond their religious mentality and transcend the fact of Jesus' death in order to see the fulfilment of their very selves in this man.

Elsewhere in the Gospel of Luke, we see other examples of people who are moved by the life and death of Jesus. We see a Centurion praise God as he witnesses the death of Jesus (23:47ff). Again, from a Rahnerian standpoint, we can say the soldier is responding to something deep inside of him as he looks at Jesus. This is all the more shocking for readers as he is a Gentile and probably (up until then) a dispassionate executioner. Yet, he is moved beyond himself to praise a God, that to all purposes, he had no experience of until the execution. Again, Rahner would say, we are by our very nature built for God and through our actions, our openness and responsiveness, we touch the divine in our lives. Staying with the death of Jesus, we have an even more shocking declaration of faith from a bandit or what Luke calls an "evildoer".³³

Jesus dies in agonising pain, mocked by the religious leaders in particular who say, "He saved others, let him save himself" (23:35). Here the leaders associate salvation with the physical reality of saving life. As such, they cannot go beyond a view of salvation that includes "the perpetuation of this human existence".³⁴ They fail to understand that salvation is not necessarily political liberation or the continuation of life. Rather, it is the restoring of God's people through the forgiveness of sins and through the life and death of Jesus. The criminal next to Jesus mocks him in the same vein as the leaders but the other criminal gives out to him for his lack of respect and his lack of understanding of Jesus. On a deeper level, this criminal is acknowledging who Jesus is and what salvation is all about. In essence, he has moved beyond his own situation and mentality to recognise in Jesus the very fulfilment of his own desires. Desires that he probably has not realised until he says "Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom." (Lk 23:42)

Once more in Chapter 5, we see how Jesus calls a hated tax collector by the name of Levi. Amazingly, Levi leaves everything and follows Jesus. A Rahnerian reading of this text would explain Levi's actions as a result of his search for questions

³³ Luke Timothy Johnson, *op. cit.*, p.376.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.380.

about his own meaning, his own existence and his own purpose. Something about Jesus and his words affect Levi to go beyond his own concerns, worries and social standing to recognise in Jesus, the fulfilment of his very self and to see himself in need of forgiveness and salvation. Why else would he leave everything?

Again in chapter 7, we see a woman “who had a bad name in the town” (7:37). Despite obvious disapprobation and shock from the self-righteous Pharisees, she gate crashes the gathering and proceeds to wash and anoint the feet of Jesus. She goes beyond her social standing as a sinner with the obvious disapproval of her society and anoints the feet of Jesus. Why does she do it? Perhaps, she sees her need for forgiveness and maybe she sees in Jesus, the healing, and fulfilment of herself. What’s more, it’s only when she transcends her own shame, embarrassment and her place in society that she finds true freedom and healing. Ironically, Jesus uses her hospitality as a model for showing Simon what true hospitality is. Like the woman, Simon is challenged to go beyond himself and see in Jesus, God’s prophet, who calls him to repentance and to re-appraise his hierarchical religious beliefs. Indeed, to see in the ‘fallen woman’, the Kingdom of God.

Through these brief examples in Luke (there are many more), we can get a flavour of a Rahnerian reading on the people of Luke. These are people who are open to and moved by the person of Jesus. They are the people who have the courage to move beyond themselves in their thinking, in their believing and in their actions. Such movement would not have been possible were it not for the person of Jesus who modelled what it is to go beyond oneself.

3:6:2 Jesus as a model of self-transcendence in action

To self-transcend is the very essence of Jesus in the gospel of Luke. For Byrne, Jesus conquered the evil of the world “not by insisting on his dignity as the Son of God but by choosing the way of service and treading the common human path of suffering and death.”³⁵ By this, Byrne means that Jesus was not on a self-glorification power trip. His whole life, as it developed was a movement toward the other. In particular, it was the movement towards his father. His rationale for discipleship in chapter nine talks about the renunciation of the self and the taking up

³⁵ Brendan Byrne, op. cit., p.197.

of ones cross because “What benefit is it to anyone to win the whole world and forfeit or lose his very self?” (Lk 9:25).

From the very beginning of his ministry, Jesus is shown to choose the other. In chapter (4:1-13), we see how Jesus is sorely tested after 40 days without food in the wilderness by the devil. The rejection of the three temptations exemplifies the type of kingdom and the type of messiah Jesus is talking about. Firstly, it is a kingdom that is the opposite of a common perception of a kingdom as a physical annexing of an area by violent means. Secondly, by his rejection of the first temptation, Jesus conveys we are more than our desires. We are like the Israelites in the desert, who were humbled and tested to reveal their hearts and see that “human beings live not on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of Yahweh.” (Dt.8: 3) We are called to look beyond our desires to see in God the one who can only satisfy our deepest needs. In the second temptation, the devil offers Jesus a fast track way to messianic power through the worship of evil and the control of human beings. In reply, Jesus quotes Moses, who says “you must do homage to the Lord your God, him alone must you serve.”(Dt.6: 13). Once again, it is to God we are to look toward, in our search for meaning and purpose and not the impulses of control and domination. In the third temptation, the devil manipulates scripture to force God’s hand and protect Jesus. Quoting Moses, Jesus says he has no right to manipulate God for personal reasons. Such a comment is lived out to the very end of Jesus’ life where he does not make demands on his father for his own personal need of survival at the Mount of Olives and at the crucifixion. Instead, like the servant in psalm 50, Jesus will walk in darkness and still trust in God “Which of you walks in darkness and sees no light? Let him trust in the name of Yahweh and lean on his God!” (Ps 50:10). This is a classic example of Rahnerian self-transcendence and in a sense summarises the whole meaning of the temptation story and its reverberations throughout the gospel.

Firstly, the temptations tested the very heart of Jesus in the wilderness where his defences were down because of hunger, loneliness and isolation. All very natural and human for anybody in the desert for 40 days! These temptations for First Century Hellenistic readers represent the three types of vices, the love of pleasure, the love of possessions and the love of glory. Such vices can be ingrained in all people and represent the battle of the heart between my desires, my wants, my ambitions and the desires of God. So easily, my desires can come between God and me. In the end, God can become what I want, what I desire. Indeed, throughout the Gospels, people

viewed Jesus in a way they wanted to and they were traditionally taught to see him as a strong leader who would overthrow the Romans and set up a new kingdom. Death and suffering was not part of the plan! Instead, Jesus lived a life of obedience to the father. He modelled obedience in his openness to all strata of Israelite society from the poor and the marginalised to the rich and privileged. He moved beyond his own desires and his own needs in openness to the people around him. In this movement, he was “astonished” (7:9) by people, he “felt sorry” (7:13) for people, he “shed tears” (19:41), he was angered by people (19: 43-44) and he touched people (18:15).

Ultimately, he gave his life for and forgave people in obedience to his father. By his very person then, he touched people’s lives and they were never the same again.

Yet, one could be forgiven for saying “It was easy for Jesus to move beyond himself to the other because he was the Son of God”. But if we take what Chalcedon says seriously and the development of the second wave of Christology seriously, along with what we have said in these three chapters seriously, then we are bound to say, “No, It was not easy for Jesus.” In fact, it must have been extremely difficult at times; particularly at the Mount of Olives or when he was being crucified. When part of him must have cried out for help, knowing what was in store for him, “In great anguish he prayed even more fervently:”(Lk 22:44). Yet, Jesus kept his eyes on his Father amidst the fear, the darkness and the pain and modelled for us what self-transcendence is all about in his very humanity.

3:7 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have examined Jesus as a flesh and blood historical figure. We have seen how difficult (and for some impossible) it is, to reconstruct the events and experiences of his life. However, in line with Ernst Kasemann, and others, there is a view that one can make educated guesses on the facts of Jesus of Nazareth. Such facts form the initial part of Karl Rahner’s understanding of history as the ‘mutual conditioning’ of events and the eyes of faith. For Rahner then, one interprets the facts of the historical Jesus through the light of faith; recognising in him the fulfilment of who we are called to be. Jesus then is a model that speaks to our very core as human beings. In Jesus, we are moved to go beyond our selves, just as Jesus did in his own life. It is a movement that is based on our very orientation to the divine and constitutes our very completion and fulfilment.

The story of Jesus then is the story of our own humanity. It is the story of how one man went beyond himself in every way possible in the service of others. Ultimately, he paid for this with his life but he modelled what it is to be human for the rest of humanity. To examine Jesus' humanity is to look at our own humanity and discover in it, the challenge to go beyond ourselves in the search for our very fulfilment in God. It is to say we are oriented to the divine. Moreover, by our actions and our life we are capable of being moved and challenged to transcend our very selves in the very fulfilment of who we are as human beings. Gerald O' Collins put it very well when he says

“Knowing and appreciating the concrete humanity of Jesus' life inevitably brings a deeper self-knowledge and a new appreciation of personal ways of being human in our own specific environments.”³⁶

It is necessary for Christians to recognise in our very makeup, the **orientation** and **outward movement** toward God in all spheres of life. By our very nature then, we are called to move outward and it is only in this outward movement that we come to a completion of ourselves.

The next two chapters will put flesh on the bones of self-transcendent outward movement, through the exploration of adolescent psychology and adolescent spirituality.

³⁶ Gerald O' Collins, op. cit., p.70.

4:1 Introduction

In the previous two chapters we have looked at self-transcendence as an essential quality of what it is to be a human being. We have seen how Jesus exemplified this in his life and in his death. This chapter will examine in greater detail the ‘self’ which transcends. In particular, we will examine the self-transcendence theory of Walter Conn, who argues that the foundational principle of the self is to go beyond itself and to reach out toward the other. By so doing, a person fulfils their very self, through “authentic self realisation and genuine self-denial”¹. This drive for self-transcendence is the essence of what being human is all about. Though the influence for Conn is more Bernard Lonergan than Rahner, both theologians share the Transcendental Thomistic premise, that human beings are radically open to God and are called to go beyond themselves. Next, we will look at adolescent development and see in it the challenge to move beyond the self. The reason we will do this is twofold. Firstly, to show how adolescence is predicated on self-transcendence as a basic element for the psychological development of young people. In other words, for young people to develop in a healthy, normal way, it is necessary they reach out beyond themselves to the others in their lives. Secondly, this self-transcendent mode of development, mirrors and is incorporated by the self-transcendence which Karl Rahner talks about and which we have examined in Chapter two. **This self-transcendence is the core of adolescent development and spirituality and will be the basis for subsequent discussions on the spirituality of young people and proposed catechetical/evangelical strategies.** Indeed, Charles Shelton acknowledges the necessity of including the developmental theories of adolescents in adolescent spirituality when he says, “The fourth aspect of adolescent spirituality is its sensitivity to the need for a *developmental perspective* as youth undergo diverse intellectual, physical and emotional changes.”²

¹ Walter Conn, *The Desiring Self: Rooting Pastoral Counselling and spiritual direction in self-transcendence* (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), p.35.

² Charles M. Shelton, *Adolescent Spirituality* (New York: Crossroad, 1995), p.10.

4:2 The authentic realisation of the true Self

What does it mean when one talks about the self? For Carroll Saussy, the “The *self* is a concept which defines what is most personal and unique about an individual.”³ Its inventory includes positive/negative experiences of life, one’s mind, body and spirit and a plethora of other considerations. For Saussy, people are a mixture of a false self and a true self. The term ‘false self’ originated with Winnicott⁴ who used it to describe the coping mechanism used by infants with inadequate mothers, who were unable to provide nurturing environments for their children to develop. It also included idealised images of what one should be or negative messages of what one would become. Thomas Keating describes the false self as the self which develops with the emotional shock of traumatic childhood experiences. Here the child “ seeks happiness in satisfying the instinctual needs of survival, esteem and control and bases its self-worth on cultural or group identification.”⁵

In contrast, the true self can be described as an “experience of aliveness”⁶ at the core of the human person. For Saussy “it hints at the realistic possibilities of who a person might become.”⁷ One way of looking at who a person might become, is through the Rahnerian lens of chapter two. In other words, the true self is one’s involvement in the divine life, because one is oriented to and called by God. Rahner calls this orientation the *Supernatural Existential* and finds its fulfilment in the activities of questioning, hoping and loving. All of which call us out of ourselves and give witness to the very principle and origin of our humanity i.e. God. Yet, there are problems with this approach. An obvious one is the question of how can one reconcile self-fulfilment and self-sacrifice. In other words, if I spend my life reaching beyond myself and looking toward the other, will I not neglect my own needs and desires in the process? Surely, I will end up as an unbalanced person, who has lost touch with myself as I live for the other? Another way of phrasing it would be that, self-sacrifice and self-fulfilment are mutually contradictory concepts that do not lend themselves to synthesis. Indeed, a cursory glance at scripture would seem to indicate that self-

³ Carroll Saussy, ‘Pastoral Care and Counselling and Issues of Self-esteem’, in *Clinical Handbook of Pastoral Counselling, Volume 2*, eds, R. Wicks & R. Parsons (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1993), p.366.

⁴ D. Winnicott, *The Maturation processes and the facilitatory environment* (London: Hogarth Press, 1960).

⁵ Len Sperry, *Spirituality in Clinical Practice* (Philadelphia: Brunner-Routledge, 2001), p.39.

⁶ D. Winnicott *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment* (London: Hogarth Press, 1987) p.148.

⁷ Carroll Saussy, *op. cit.*, p.366.

sacrifice and not self-fulfilment is the order of the day, i.e. “Whoever gains his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will gain it.”(Mt 1:39) or “you must put aside your old self which gets corrupted by following illusory desires.”(Eph 4:17)? Again, “I tell you, unless one grain of wheat falls on the ground and dies, it remains just one grain. But, if it dies, it yields a great harvest.”(Jn12: 24).

Walter Conn, puts forward a theory of the self that synthesises the seemingly contradictory concepts of self-fulfilment and self-sacrifice. Firstly, Conn argues that the main drive of the self is to “transcend itself in relationship: to the world, to others, to God.”⁸ Such a drive is predicated on a “developed powerful self”⁹ which enables a person to achieve self-transcendence. This powerful self has three components to it; the “**ego**”, the “**I**” and the “**me**”. The ego, is a part of a person’s unconscious and sifts through a person’s dreams. It is in effect, the “inner organiser of experience”.¹⁰ It constitutes the driving force of the self in its desire for meaning and understanding, which ultimately leads to self-transcendence. It is responsible for sifting through and sorting out the plethora of emotions, impulses/drives that demand our attention, in the light of its (ego) unifying impulse for meaning, integration and self-transcendence. The conscious equivalent of the ego is the **self-as-subject (I)**, which dynamically moves the person beyond him or herself, in the desire for truth, meaning, value and love, in self-transcending relationships. Finally, there is the **self-as-object (me)** which is the self that is created as it attempts to construct a world of meaning and understanding, through the fourfold process of experience, understanding, judgement and decision. It is divided into a “material me”, a “social me” and a “spiritual me”.

Accordingly, in this human desire to transcend, there is a need to be a self and a need to go beyond the self, through transcendence. Both elements are different sides of the one desire to transcend and are mutually dependent. Theologically, this drive for self-transcendence symbolises the divine life within each person and is only truly complete in a personal relationship with God. From a psychological perspective, self-transcendence is different from self-sacrifice, if it is understood as a denial or a lessening of the true authentic self. Such a state of affairs would not only be anti-human for Conn, it would also be non-Christian. Self-transcendence is also different from self-fulfilment or self-actualisation, if it is understood as a self-centred desire to

⁸ Walter E. Conn, op. cit., p.5.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., p.44.

satiating every need. Again such a situation for Conn, would constitute an anti-Christian standpoint and would run contrary to the essential aspect of self-transcendence. Thus, authentic self-realisation along with genuine self-denial is the acknowledgement of our true selves as made in the image and likeness of God. It is a self made to move beyond, and in so doing, discover one's true self. Paradoxically then, self-transcendence maintains that to become an authentic self, one does not strive to self-gratify. Rather, one strives for the good of the other in the pursuit of truth, meaning, value and love. Conn quotes Viktor Frankl, to convey his point that "Human existence is essentially self-transcendence rather than self-actualisation. Self-actualisation is not a possible aim at all, for the simple reason that the more a man would strive for it, the more he would miss it."¹¹ Self-transcendence then, is not the fulfilment of one's egotistical desires and wishes. Rather, it is the fulfilment or coming to completion of the original intention of the self, in its desire for truth, value, meaning and love i.e. the ego and the I. In other words, it is only by **coming in contact with what we were originally intended to be, that we achieve authentic self realisation.** It is "our effective response to the radical desire of the human spirit for meaning, truth, value and love—a radical desire that is, at bottom, always a desire for God."¹² For Bernard Lonergan, such a desire forms the basis for understanding how people are open to God in human knowing/understanding and through the operations of experience, understanding, judgement and decision. It is this theology that Conn uses in his explanation of how self-transcendence allows authentic realisation of one's true self.

Yet, one could also apply what Conn is saying to Karl Rahner and argue that true self realisation is to see in life's experiences, the radical openness of the human being to God in the activities of questioning, hoping against hope and love. Thus, when Conn talks about self-realisation and its connection with Lonergan's a priori desire of the human being, one could also substitute Rahner's *a priori* condition of the human being. Firstly, because both Rahner and Lonergan come from the transcendental school of theology, which asked, "What are the a priori conditions for knowing God?" Both theologians argued that human beings were by their very nature open to God. However, both differed in how they applied their transcendental methodology. For Lonergan, the starting point was human knowing and how meaning

¹¹ Viktor Frankl, *Man's Search for meaning: An Introduction to Logotherapy* trans. I. Lasch (New York: Washington Square Press, 1963), p.175.

¹² Walter E. Conn, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

constituted people. To be human then, was to possess an un-restricted desire to know. This desire to know, formed the a priori condition for knowing and loving God. And for Conn it forms the basis for authentic self-realisation and genuine self-denial.

For Rahner then, the desire to know God is found in his transcendental analysis, which highlighted the human person's openness or potentiality for the self-communication of God. Thus each person is an arena by which God communicates his very self with the possibility that we can become more than what we are i.e. self-transcend. In reality, this potentiality to become more, shows itself in the mutual conditioning of faith and history, where faith sees meaning and importance in the events that history throw up. The reason it sees meaning and importance is because it recognises in the events of life a fulfilment of that which it has been unconsciously (**The ego**) or consciously (**the I**) searching for in the everyday events/moments of life (**the me**).

To be your true self is to be in contact with that which you were originally intended to be by God. It is this original intention that forms the blueprint for the 'ego', the 'I' and eventually for 'the me.' Conn uses Lonergan for his blueprint of the self. I am using Rahner in his depiction of the human being as radically open to God in their very nature. It is my contention, that to move beyond the self, one discovers one's true and authentic self as intended by God. It is a movement, that is echoed developmentally in adolescence and so forms a significant part of adolescent spirituality because

“ In fostering maturity of faith, religious educators must give due recognition to the findings of psychology. They must learn how, in faith's struggle for meaning, religious education must keep in step with the findings of maturation.¹³

It is to such findings of maturation in adolescence that I now wish to turn.

¹³ Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, *General Catechetical Directory*, (London: Catholic Truth Society, 1971), #71.

4:3 The Movement beyond the self in adolescent developmental theory

Adolescence may be defined as a “chronological period beginning with the physical and emotional processes leading to sexual and psychosocial maturity and ending at an ill-defined time when the individual achieves independence and social maturity.”¹⁴ It can be sub-divided into three stages, early, middle and late adolescence. It is obvious then from the very outset; there are many facets to adolescence, from the intellectual, emotional, social and sexual, right through to the spiritual. For the purpose of this thesis, I will be concentrating on **middle adolescence** i.e. from fifteen to eighteen year olds which corresponds to fourth, fifth and sixth year in secondary school. I will briefly examine a number of developmental theories that attempt to describe the various stages or processes that adolescents go through in this middle adolescent stage, as they move toward independence and social maturity. Essential to each of the theories is the assumption that each stage builds on and develops the previous stage. **My contention is that each movement or transition from one stage to another is a moment and a movement of self-transcendence**, where an emerging new self moves beyond the old self. In my opinion, such a movement or transition echoes psychologically the Rahnerian theological anthropology that human beings are by their very nature called to move outward and beyond themselves.

4:3:1 Cognitive Self-Transcendence (Piaget)

From his work with small groups of children, Jean Piaget formulated a theory of cognitive growth that consisted of various stages. For growth to happen, Piaget argues, there must be **organisation** and **adaptation**. Organisation is the maintenance of the adolescent self as he/she goes through life. It is equivalent to Conn’s ‘ego’ which sifts through and interprets experiences a person has in order to maintain the stability of the self. Adaptation, on the other hand, is the ability of the person to deal effectively with a changing environment and set of experiences. It does this through **assimilation** and **accommodation**. Thus, new information is assimilated into the

¹⁴ American Psychiatric Association, *A Psychiatric Glossary*. Washington,DC, American Psychiatric Association, 1975, as quoted in Nicholi, “The Adolescent,”p.519 in *Adolescent Spirituality, op.cit., p.2*.

current cognitive view of the person. At the same time, the person has to accommodate or re-structure his/her present thinking to allow this assimilation to occur. The overall result is a dynamic cognitive development, which is always maturing into deeper levels of understanding of the self and the world. Thus, as students start secondary school, they bring their life history, with all their past experiences (organisation) with them. They are then challenged to adapt to this new environment, as they are challenged to assimilate and accommodate new experiences and events. Such events may force them to re-evaluate or question previously held beliefs, cherished notions or world views. The overall result is a continual and deepening search for meaning, with a subsequent re-vamping of ideas in the events/periods of life. One such period is adolescence.

Piaget argues that early and middle adolescence is characterised by the development of formal operational thought. This type of thought is more abstract than a child's thought processes, which are confined to actual concrete experiences. Instead, the adolescent is freed from the fetters of concrete reality to move beyond himself/herself and imagine different scenarios of possibility as he/she pursues the real within the possible. Thus, the adolescent builds systems and theories in a world which is hypothetical, deductive and propositional and which "forms abstract propositions from the results of concrete operations, systematically combines all the possible variables and works toward the logical justification of hypotheses."¹⁵

Moreover, this

"new power of formal thinking brings together and transforms earlier strengths; it embodies the young child's fundamental wonder in a controlled manner and continues the older child's concern for order but opens it up to the hypothetical world of possibility."¹⁶

The consequence of formal thinking is that it "moves the adolescent, prompting him or her to ask complex questions and seek answers beyond his or her own ability to comprehend."¹⁷ In other words, adolescents are constantly challenged to move beyond themselves, as they attempt to re-formulate different issues they encounter in their lives and which constantly challenge them. In some ways, one could almost look

¹⁵ Walter Conn, op. cit., p.98. .

¹⁶ Ibid..

¹⁷ Charles Shelton, op. cit., p.33.

at the formal operation as similar to the origin of transcendental analysis where the questions eventually give way to the desire for and fulfilment in God. It is a desire that can be found in the very make-up of the adolescent. Another desire in the young person is the desire to be moral.

4:3:2 Moral Self-Transcendence (Kohlberg)

Under the influence of Piaget, Lawrence Kohlberg proposed a theory of moral development, based on his study of teenage boys from 10 to 16 years of age. Presented with moral dilemmas, the boys were asked to give reasons for the motivation of characters in these dilemmas. The emphasis of the study was not on the behaviour of the people i.e. the content of the moral reasoning, but on the rational or reasoning the characters used in determining what action(s) they took. Based on these responses, Kohlberg proposes three levels of moral reasoning; **pre-conventional**, **conventional** and **post-conventional**. 'Conventional' for Kohlberg, refers to the adhering to the rules and expectations of society, simply because they are society's rules. Consequently, the hermeneutic for understanding moral reasoning is the movement towards and beyond the socialisation of the self. Specifically, it entails the living out of values a person chooses among other conflicting values. Such values (truth, justice, life, punishment and roles of authority, sex) are present from the very onset of moral reasoning but they are perceived differently as moral development progresses. Thus, a child will understand punishment from a self-centred viewpoint while an adult may view it in its universal application to rising crime. Accordingly, Kohlberg's three levels plot the movement from a self-centred to an 'other' centred view of morality. In other words, there is a gradual movement from self-absorption to being aware of the thoughts of others and finally to the application of universal principles of justice and equality to all people in one's moral reasoning.

At the pre-conventional level, a young child does not understand the rules and expectations of society. Egocentric by nature, he/she views good and bad through the lens of not getting punished! Or simply having to obey, because that is what one must do. Moreover, the child's morality is centred on fulfilling his/her needs and wants. The perspective of the other does not come into it unless there is some degree of reciprocation, "Whether something is right or wrong is determined by reasoning

whether the actions are instrumental in satisfying the wants and desires of the child and only infrequently the needs of others.”¹⁸

In contrast, the Conventional level marks a gradual movement away from the egotistical nature of the self toward the inclusion of others, by the adolescent and middle adolescent. Moreover, there is a growing awareness of the demands of friends, family, school and society at large. Such an awareness of others is made more real through loyalty and adhesion to certain groups, to one’s country and to the status quo. The views of others are taken into consideration when deliberating on the morality of a particular course of action. Specifically at this level there are two stages of development, the *good boy-nice girl orientation* (stage 3) and the *law and order orientation* (stage 4). In stage three, a person attempts to elicit the acceptance and approbation of others, in the desire to conform within a group. To be a nice person is the criterion of acceptance into a group. Stage four is characterised by a stress on law and order as the middle adolescent moves gradually outward in the understanding of his/her moral reasoning. The expectations and duties of society become increasingly important as authority is accorded greater respect. Thus right or wrong is living up to one’s duty in society and adhering to the demands made on the person by certain groups i.e. the family, the peer group, the school. Yet, despite this outward movement of the adolescents and the increasing awareness of the relativity of their life situation, middle adolescence is still characterised by the phrase, “do your own thing and let others do theirs.” For Kohlberg and Gilligan, such reasoning betrays a failure to take full cognisance of the broader demands of others in society. Instead, adolescents continue to rely on individualism and in the security and comfort of peer groups despite the challenge of universal principles at the post-conventional level.

4:3:3 Religious Self-Transcendence (Fowler)

Just as Piaget assists us in understanding cognitive development and Kohlberg in moral development, James Fowler is our guide for faith development.

Fowler argues that when one talks about faith, the automatic assumption is, that one is talking about the content of religion i.e. the rules and dogma of religious belief. However, faith for Fowler occurs before specific religious belief. It is found in

¹⁸ Charles M. Shelton , op. cit., p. 44. .

the “ultimate concern”¹⁹ of people’s lives. This may be one’s ego, work, family or wealth. It involves the investing of one’s heart and soul into such concerns because “It shapes the ways we invest our deepest loves and our most costly loyalties.”²⁰ For Fowler, these ultimate concerns are more powerful than religious dogma because they represent the core value(s) of a person. Their origin lies in the big questions of life that we sometimes ask, i.e. “To what or who are you committed in life? In death? Or “What *are* those most sacred hopes, those most compelling goals and purposes in your life?”²¹ It is the ability then to conceptualise and develop answers to these questions, which form the essence of faith for Fowler and not the values and dogmas one holds dear. However, faith cannot be viewed as a structural process unless it emerges from a lived experience of values and religious beliefs. In the words of Fowler

“It is our way of finding coherence in and giving meaning to the multiple forces and relations that make up our lives. Faith is a person’s way of seeing him or herself in relation to others against a background of shared meaning and purpose.”²²

For Fowler, faith is best viewed as a verb, because it is a dynamic evolving process, in which one makes a commitment to an object, a group(s), an individual(s), and a community. It is a faith, which is relational. Firstly, to that which is transcendent i.e. something, which is beyond the self and becomes part of a person’s life. Secondly, it is relational to members or groups within the community to which a person makes a commitment. Moreover, like the previous developmental theorists, Fowler sees faith development occurring in a number of stages, each one building on and incorporating the previous stage. Furthermore, each stage can be difficult and the change from one stage to another can even be more difficult. This is particularly true for stage three and four in which middle adolescents attempt to critically make their own of religious values and beliefs.

Fowler describes stage three as *Synthetic-Conventional* and includes early and middle adolescents. Faith at this level is interpersonal because the adolescent views the world and its issues personally, i.e. seeing issues in terms of personalities than

¹⁹ James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1981), p.4.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.5.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p.3.

²² *Ibid.*, p.4.

underlying structures. Secondly, there is a conformity to ideas and expectations of significant others / peer groups. Here, ideas and values are internalised by the adolescent in order to develop a faith identity which must “provide a coherent and meaningful synthesis of the complex and diverse involvement’s the self experiences as it moves beyond the family into a much larger world”.²³ Thus, as the adolescent comes to realise the increasing complexity of the world along with a greater awareness of others, he/she tends to rely on significant others, to aid in the construction of a worldview. The inherent danger of such reliance is that personal beliefs are never taken on board or thought about. Thus, the adolescent accepts uncritically, the values of admired people in his/her life. Moreover, despite formal operational thought the adolescent still views religious symbols in a naive manner. For example, the symbol God is interpreted personally as ‘friend’, ‘companion’ or ‘father’ without any thought as to the appropriateness of such descriptions.

However, the cracks in the world of adolescence begin to appear with disagreements between significant others and with a realisation that previously held beliefs no longer stand up to the cold light of experience. Incidents may also occur in the adolescent’s life, which force him/her to look critically at previously held values and beliefs i.e. divorce, death, break-up of a relationship. The result is sometimes a painful breakdown of previously held beliefs about the self, as the adolescent begins to question his very identity. Erik Erikson calls this stage a crisis of identity.²⁴

4:3:4 Identity and Transcendence (Erikson)

For Erikson, adolescence is “a time of searching for an identity and developing a system of values that will influence the course of one’s life”²⁵ Identity is a core issue for the adolescent as he/she asks, “Who am I?” “What am I about?”, “Where am I going?”

From our brief exploration of the developmental theorists, one can begin to appreciate why identity becomes a pressing issue for the adolescent, as he/she is gradually moved beyond themselves in the quest for meaning and understanding. Firstly, the formal operational thought (described by Piaget) in adolescence, allows a

²³ Walter Conn, op. cit., p.100.

²⁴ Martin S. O’ Flaherty, *Creating Reflective Spaces* (Dublin: Marino, 1999), p.10.

²⁵ Corey, Marianne&Gerard, *Groups: Process and Practice(5th Ed.)*, (California;Brooks/Cole Pub. Co., 1997), p..323 in Martin O Flaherty, *Creating Reflective Spaces* (Dublin; Marino Institute of Education, 1999), p.10.

greater reflective capacity and an intense degree of questioning by the adolescent. Which enables the person to look beyond him or herself. Such cognitive reflection allows the adolescent to look at his/her own life history. Here the past is reflected upon, along with an emerging realisation of what the future may bring. Accordingly, present, past and future experiences collide, as the adolescent attempts to come to terms with new roles, new relationships and new ways of understanding the world in which he/she inhabits. The earlier childhood period of security continuity and order, gives way to a perception of life as more complex than hitherto thought. Allied to this is the growing outward socialisation of the young person as he/she comes to grips with societal mores (Kohlberg) and values. Here cognisance must be given to the societal values, as the adolescent figures out who he/she is in relation to others in the community. Again there are the searching questions or the 'ultimate concerns' that Fowler talks, about, which demand an answer if the adolescent is to make sense of life in a meaningful way.

Thus, the adolescent must chart the waters of his/her identity and search for the ultimate concerns that concretise the self-meaning the adolescent is moving toward. Moreover, it is within this adolescent sea of physiological, cognitive, faith and moral change, that Erikson formulates his theory of psychological development. It is a theory that points to the formation of identity as the key ingredient for the adolescent to progress into adulthood. Erikson situates his theory of personality on the "epigenetic principle"²⁶ in which organs of the body develop within a certain time frame, to form a whole i.e. the human person. In a like manner, the personality develops according to a plan, where each stage follows on from the previous stage in a sequential manner. Within each stage then, there is a development task to be fulfilled and a possible danger if the development task remains incomplete. On successful completion of the task, one can move on to the next stage, which is "nascently present before its own developmental period."²⁷ Erikson identifies eight stages of psychosocial development but it is the fifth stage that we will briefly explore, *Identity versus Identity Confusion*

Identity may be defined as "A well-organized conception of the self made up of values, beliefs and goals to which the individual is solidly committed."²⁸ In

²⁶ Charles Shelton, op.cit., p.79.

²⁷ Ibid., p.80.

²⁸ Laura E. Berk, *Infants, Children and Adolescents* 4th Ed. (Boston; Allyn and Bacon, 2002), p.600.

complex societies, teenagers undergo an identity crisis which is a “temporary period of confusion and distress as they experiment with alternatives before settling on a set of values and goals.”²⁹ Dearly held beliefs, assumptions and worldviews are held up to scrutiny during adolescence. Some are found wanting and are discarded while others are assimilated into a developing “solid inner core that provides a sense of stability as they move through different roles in daily life.”³⁰ However, the formation of this ‘solid inner core’ is not easy, because teenagers have to go through a process of doubt and “soul-searching” in order to come out the other end.

For Walter Conn this ‘soul searching’ is a going beyond anything the adolescent has experienced before as he/she tries to resolve their identity crisis. “In a very real sense, then, successful resolution of the identity crisis is the very essence of self-transcendence.”³¹ It is in effect the self-transcendence that Conn talks about at the beginning of this chapter, which involves a movement beyond the self, to discover the true and authentic self. It is a movement that is also echoed in cognitive,(piaget) faith (Fowler), and moral(Kohlberg) development and is essential in understanding teenage spirituality.

4:4 Conclusion

In this chapter we have specifically looked at what it means to be a ‘self’. We have examined the difference between a true, authentic self and a false self. Moreover, in the self-transcendence theory of Walter Conn, we have briefly explored the foundational *raison detre* of the self (‘ego’, ‘I’, and ‘me’) and discovered that the very essence of the self is to reach beyond itself and thus realise its true purpose of authentic self-realisation and genuine self-denial. Furthermore, I have argued in the chapter, that one can interpret Conn’s theory from the perspective of Rahner as well as Lonergan. Finally, we briefly examined the adolescent, developmental theories of Piaget, Kohlberg, Fowler and Erikson.

Each of these theories shares a common element. That is, for the adolescent to develop in a normal, healthy and mature manner, it is necessary they move out

²⁹ Ibid., p.600.

³⁰ Ibid., p.601.

³¹ Walter Conn, op. cit., p.97.

beyond themselves. For Piaget, this takes the form of formal operational thought. For Kohlberg, it is the gradual socialisation of the adolescent. For Fowler, it is the getting in touch with those questions of faith, which call us beyond ourselves, to answer our 'ultimate concerns' of life. For Erikson it the movement beyond the old self to discover a new self or identity, that can sustain the adolescent throughout his/her life.

Developmental self-transcendence then is a movement. It is to be moved by someone or something which results in the human being self-transcending to the other in his or her life. Such self-transcending is anticipated by and incorporated into adolescent spirituality. It is to such spirituality, I now wish to turn as I attempt to formulate a model for the evangelisation of fifth year students.

5:1 Introduction

In the last chapter we saw how self-transcendence was not about self-sacrifice or self-centred fulfilment. Rather, it was concerned with the authentic self-realisation of the person. Moreover, we observed how self-transcendence was essential to the cognitive, moral, religious and self-development of the adolescent and that this development must be taken account of, when one examines adolescent spirituality. But, what is this adolescent spirituality that we have alluded to? **What does it mean, when we say, adolescents are spiritual?** To answer such a question, we must firstly examine the term spiritual as an acknowledgement of the ‘more’ in our lives. Next, we will look at spirituality as the living out of this ‘more’ in our lives. Only then can we proceed to an explicit Christian spirituality, where we will explore the three aspects of the spiritual Life. Finally, we will see what constitutes an adolescent Christian spirituality in order to develop a pre-evangelical and an evangelical approach to exploring Jesus’ humanity with fifth year students. This chapter then, will argue that **adolescent spirituality is built on a self-transcendent spirituality, which is Christocentric and originates in the very humanity of the adolescent.** It is a spirituality that speaks to and moves the very core of the young person as they move outward beyond themselves.

5:2 What is it to be Spiritual?

Richard McBrien defines the term ‘spiritual’ as “to know and to live according to the knowledge that there is more to life than meets the eye”.¹ In a similar vein, Vincent Nichols outlines his understanding of spiritual as “that capacity in each of us to reach beyond the physical, the present, the immediate and to respond in a manner which takes us, in a lesser or greater extent, outside of ourselves.”² From a very fundamental perspective then, to be spiritual is to move beyond oneself in the recognition and acknowledgement there is more to life than what one sees. However, such a definition begs the question, “What is it that allows us to transcend ourselves in the first place?”

¹ Richard P. McBrien , op. cit., p.1019.

² Vincent Nichols, ‘The Spiritual Development of the Young Person’, Address at AMCSS Annual Conference, May 2/3, 1996, Galway, Ireland.

Again, if we turn to McBrien, we find,

“To be spiritual means, beyond that, to know, and to live according to the knowledge, that God is present to us in grace as the principle of personal, interpersonal, social and even cosmic transformation. To be open to the spirit is to accept explicitly who we are and who we are called always to become and to direct our lives accordingly, in response to God’s grace within us.”³

McBrien’s definition picks up most of Karl Rahner’s theological anthropology that we examined in chapter two. To be human, for Rahner, is to be fundamentally oriented toward God, a God, who made us with an in-built yearning (a religious microchip) for him. This yearning is a spiritual truth that is present un-thematically in every human being. It is a yearning that conveys an implicit rather than an explicit knowledge of God. Its origin is in the human being’s increasing desire to know more, to love more, and to hope more. Ronald Rolheiser describes this desire as a “restlessness, a longing, a disquiet, an appetitiveness, a loneliness, a gnawing nostalgia...a congenital all-embracing ache that lies at the centre of human experience and is the ultimate force that drives everything else.”⁴ At the heart of this restless desire is God and in the fulfilment of that desire, there is God.

Viewed through the lens of ‘**restless desire**’ then, one can say there is an intuitive awareness in each human being that there is something more in their lives. A ‘something more’ which underpins their thoughts, their beliefs, their actions and which challenges them to go beyond themselves, because where there is “genuine believing, hoping and loving there takes place that self-transcendence, that losing of the self, wherein one finds God as the innermost depths of one’s experience.”⁵ This ‘something more’ or a sense of the divine, can involve a threefold process of an **inner movement**, a subsequent **transformation** and an **outer movement**. An inner movement can be described as something, which moves and affects a person. This ‘something’ can include the manifold experiences, relationships and events that constitute a person’s life. Some of these experiences can affect people so profoundly, that a transformation takes place within them and results in their moving beyond

³ Richard P. McBrien, *op .cit.*, p. 1019.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.4.

⁵ William Dych, *op.cit.*, pp. 127-128.

themselves. Sometimes, these actions are spontaneous and unconscious and at other times, they represent a conscious struggle between competing desires. For example, one could be so moved by the harrowing television pictures of a famine, that one decides to donate money to relieve the suffering of people in that famine area. Another example could be of an alcoholic, who may decide not to take a drink, despite the strong desire to do so. Yet another example could be of a tired and exhausted mother, who continues to put the welfare of her children first. However, not all movements outward are physical or movements toward people. It could be a decision by a person to be hope-filled and optimistic, when there is little evidence of either in his/her life. Yet, behind all these examples, lies this intuitive self-awareness or longing that drives a person outward beyond himself or herself. Michael Paul Gallagher calls these moments “traps for depth”.⁶ In other words, they are moments or situations in people’s lives that convey that human desire for love, for hope, for belief, for understanding. They are desires whose origins lie in the human orientation toward the divine without the explicit knowledge of that divine force within us.

However, for some people, this intuitive self-awareness or basic orientation, may never move beyond awareness or desire because of a lack of interest or because of some of the reasons we talked about in Chapter two. For others, there evolves a growing realisation of who they are, through their life situations, their relationships and their experiences. Though both types of people share the same orientation and desire, both react differently to its presence. For Rolheiser, this is the essence of spirituality, “What we do with that fire, how we channel it, is our spirituality.”⁷ It is spirituality that necessarily pre-figures and anticipates a reflexive and thematic knowledge of God.

5:2:2 What is Spirituality?

Spirituality then is the concern with that ‘restless desire’ or that fire within us, to love more, to hope more, to believe more, to understand more. Specifically, it means how one listens to and lives out, the desires of our divine oriented nature. The word “spirituality” itself originates from the Hebrew word *ruach*, which translates as “spirit”, “breath” or “wind”.⁸ The Oxford English Etymology dictionary describes

⁶ Michael Paul Gallagher, *Dive Deeper* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd., 2001), p.122.

⁷ Ronald Rolheiser, *op. cit.*, p.6.

⁸ Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Spirituality* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), p.1-2.

spirit as a “breath of life”, “vital principle” and a “vital power”.⁹ To be spiritual then, is to be in touch with, and to sustain, that which, enlivens and animates the ‘vital power’ within each person. Alister McGrath defines spirituality as “that which animates the life of believers, and urges them on to deepen and perfect what has at present only been begun.”¹⁰ This desire or ‘internal animation’ is not explicitly religious but represents an *a priori* condition for knowing God in the first place. **It represents a vital first step in the movement toward an explicitly religious conviction.**

Michael Paul Gallagher calls this openness and orientation to the divine, the **pre-religious** aspect of faith. It is the presence of God in every one of us. For him it is the “inner core of Spirit-guided desire before we arrive at an explicitly Christian interpretations of our experience ” where “Our hearts are being drawn towards love prior to finding the face of love in Christ.”¹¹ Gallagher argues that religion (the organised aspect of one’s response to God) can sometimes block the life-blood of the original Christian story. Indeed, there is a danger, that one could rush headlong into explicit religion, without taking cognisance of that which is most fundamental in each one of us, “the experience of searching, of struggling to live genuinely, of being slowly transformed by the adventure of life.”¹² This ‘adventure of life’ provides the soil for faith to grow and develop. Without it, explicit religion would be hollow, as there would be no connection between explicit religion and the innate divine orientation of the believer. Bereft of this fundamental connection, institutional religion would be in danger of becoming irrelevant to the faith of the believer. To put it another way, explicit religion would not speak to or resonate with the believer’s world. There would be no possibility of **authentic inner movement, authentic transformation and authentic outer movement**, which is the very essence of every human being.

Gallagher maintains therefore, that institutional religious believers are drifting from the Church because neither their imagination nor their hopes are being spoken to. Indeed, I would add, that people’s innate desire to self-transcend in love, in belief, in hope, are not fully spoken to either.. The result then, is a view of institutional

⁹ T.F.Hoad, *op. cit.*, p.453.

¹⁰ Alister E. McGrath, *op. cit.*, p.2.

¹¹ Michael Paul Gallagher, *op. cit.*, p.120.

¹² *Ibid.*

religion by some (particularly adolescents) as extraneous and irrelevant to their innermost yearnings, their struggles, their joys, their pain. Such an opinion runs contrary to a Rahnerian understanding of spirituality, as a radical openness to the divine. **It is an un-thematic openness, that anticipates and sets the foundation for a true, authentic and resonated knowledge of God through Jesus Christ.**

Moreover, it is a knowledge of God that not only moves and transforms the believer but also draws the believer out of himself /herself, in service of the other.

5:3 Christian Transcendental Spirituality

In his *Theological Investigations*, Karl Rahner describes the essence of the Christian life. “The basic and ultimate thrust of Christian life consists not so much in the fact that a Christian is a special instance of mankind in general, but rather in the fact that a Christian is simply man as he is.”¹³ In the previous section, we have seen the transcendental aspect of man and woman as they are. Man and woman as un-thematically oriented to the divine; evidenced in such experiences as loving, hoping, believing and understanding. In this section we will see the categorical aspect of man and woman as they are, who follows through with his/her orientation toward the divine. Such a follow through reveals the character of God and his relationship with us through history and culture. Karl Rahner understands this as Categorical Revelation, where “people by God’s grace actualise their natural and supernatural transcendental and “break through” as it were to a reflexive knowledge of God.”¹⁴ This ‘break through’ can happen on all different levels but its basis lies in the

1.The search for God.

2.The three outward movements of the spiritual life.

3.The response to and the following of Jesus Christ.

The common denominator of all three aspects of how God breaks through, is in the disposition to move outward or to self-transcend. For Merton, it is in the moving beyond myself and thus discovering my true self. For Nouwen, it is the call of each Christian to reach out to oneself, to others and to God. Underpinning Merton and

¹³ Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, op. cit., p.402.

¹⁴ Stanley J. Grenz & Roger E. Olson, op. cit., p.247.

Nouwen is the centrality of Jesus, whose humanity speaks to our fundamental orientation to the divine and draws us into becoming the fulfilment of our true selves.

5:3:1 The search for God

The famous Trappist monk and spiritual writer, Thomas Merton, describes Christian spirituality as a process of discovery or search for the true self, where, “If I find him, I will find myself and if I find my true self, I will find him.”¹⁵ In other words, an encounter with God is an encounter with the **true self**. For Merton, there is no difference between the true self and God, “You have to see your will and God’s will dualistically for a long time. You have to experience duality for a long time until you see its not there.”¹⁶ Indeed, Merton argues that Christians are challenged to help God in “the work of creating the truth of our identity”.¹⁷ However, certain things stop us from discovering our real identity. For Merton, it is the ‘false self’ which emerges from our own egocentric desires and perceptions, that prevents us from being the people God intended us to be in the first place. The false self prevents openness to the reality of God living in us. The spiritual life for Merton then, is the process of re-discovering one’s true self. But how does one do that?

For Merton, the answer lies in an apparent paradox because “In order to become myself, I must cease to be what I always thought I wanted to be, and in order to find myself I must go out of myself, and in order to live I must die.”¹⁸ For Merton then, it is the reaching out beyond oneself in love to the other that one discovers the true authentic self. It is the letting go of self-centred concerns and absorption’s in favour of selfless love that we come to know our original identity. In chapter four, Walter Conn calls this original identity, the ‘I’ and the ‘self-as-subject’. Both refer to the unconscious and conscious dynamo within each one of us, to self-transcend. Thus, every time a person acts through selfless love and moves out beyond himself or herself, then, they are coming to a closer image of what God intended them to be.

In many ways, Merton’s sentiments parallel what we have been saying about Rahner’s view of human existence. An existence that is transcendently oriented

¹⁵ Thomas Merton, *Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: Dell, 1960), p.23.

¹⁶ Joann W.Conn, ‘Spirituality’ in. *The New Dictionary of Theology*, Komanchak, Collins & Lane, Eds. op. cit., p.984.

¹⁷ Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions Books, 1961), p.32.

¹⁸ Thomas Merton, *Seeds of Contemplation*, op. cit., p.41.

beyond itself, toward God, who is the cause, the sustainer and the fulfilment of that existence. This God is the cornerstone of our very existence. Through our self-transcending acts then, we move a step closer to ourselves or to our 'true self' as Merton would describe it. Through this process of hominisation, we share in the return to what we were originally intended to be. Moreover, by our orientation to the divine, we are pre-disposed to the search for God. It is a search that calls us to be open to the everyday events and the people in our lives because therein lies the presence of God. We are challenged then to allow these 'everyday events' to move and transform us. For, it is only in the openness to the reality that surrounds us, that authentic inner transformation and subsequent outer movement can occur.

5:3:2 The outward movements of the spiritual life

Henri Nouwen in his book, *Reaching Out*, identifies three components of Christian spirituality, the self, others and God. He explains how "In the midst of a turbulent, often chaotic, life we are called to reach out with courageous honesty to our innermost self, with relentless care to our fellow human beings, and with increasing prayer to our God."¹⁹ For him, spirituality is best conveyed by the verb, 'to reach out' because it encapsulates the challenge to each Christian as they try to live out their lives. **The first movement in Christian spirituality is to reach out from our own inner loneliness and unease, toward solitude.** Nouwen argues that loneliness is a major problem in contemporary society and can be the cause of many social ills, such as drug abuse, alcoholism and suicide. Its apparent origin lies in the paradoxical nature of society, where people receive cultural messages of community support and togetherness, along with a contradictory message, which says, "Life is about competition and rivalry, so make sure you look after number one!" Such a negative and oftentimes subliminal message can cause a disease in the very core of the person, where even one's closest relationships become tainted with rivalry and competition. The consequence is that people believe they are not loved for who they are and that deep down they fear they are alone.

For Nouwen, there is a "suspicion that there is no one who cares and offers love without conditions, and no place where we can be vulnerable without being used."²⁰

¹⁹ Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Reaching Out* (New York: Image Book, 1986),p.15.

²⁰ Ibid., p.26.

The pain of this suspicion is avoided at all costs by people in society because to be alone or to be lonely, is to touch base with our core fear that we are not loved. Consequently, people engage in all types of restless activities, to avoid the fears encountered in loneliness. This may include the over dependence on work, on friendships, on group associations, on sex, on drugs and alcohol and on cravings of all sorts. The result is a people who are without foundation or roots, drifting from one relationship to another or from one 'high' to another 'high' to avoid the pain of loneliness. So the question inevitably arises, "what can I do with this sense of being alone?"

Nouwen argues that the beginning of the spiritual life starts with the cessation of avoidance strategies, which deny loneliness, to allow a person "enter into the desert of our loneliness and to change it by gentle and persistent efforts into a garden of solitude."²¹ Nouwen understands solitude as the cultivation within our heart of that stillness and silence, which places our many decisions, activities and experiences into perspective. It is in effect, the creation of a sacred space within ourselves "where we can discover the voice telling us about our inner necessity- that is, our vocation."²² Such a cultivation of solitude does not happen overnight. Rather, it begins with a disposition of silence within our deepest centre. A centre in which the gnawing questions of life i.e. am I loved?, are looked at and lived out. This is a centre, where we discover the truth about ourselves. Merton calls this, the 'true self'. Conn calls it the 'I' and its conscious equivalent, the self-as-subject. Whatever one calls it, it is the basis from which one views oneself in the world. In doing so, one no longer follows the whimsical desires that are part of the rootless false self. Instead, one taps into a deep inner core, present in all human beings. A core that allows us to be more compassionate and open towards others, "It is in deep solitude that I find the gentleness with which I can truly love my brothers."²³ A core that recognises the divine motivator within each one of us as one listens to the inner voice of the divine. This leads on to the second movement of the spiritual life, the reaching out to other people in the spirit of hospitality because without this inner solitude, we are unable to reach out to others in our life.

²¹ Henri J. Nouwen, op. cit. p.34.

²² Ibid.,p.40.

²³ Thomas Merton, *The Sign Of Jonas* (Garden City, N.Y: Doubleday, Image Books, 1968),p.261.

Nouwen argues that hospitality in the Old and New Testament has a very rich tradition of welcoming the stranger in an open and generous manner. Yet, the concept of hospitality has a broader and deeper significance than the welcoming of a stranger to one's home. It is a basic attitude and a way of being, which creates a welcoming and non-threatening space for the stranger. Here the stranger can be at home without feeling condemned, threatened or brow beaten into adopting the other person's worldview or opinion. Nouwen describes it as a "space where people are encouraged to disarm themselves, to lay aside their occupations and preoccupations and to listen with attention and care to the voices speaking in their own center."²⁴ Underlying his view of space is the understanding that one cannot change a person through what we say or do. Rather, hospitality allows a holy space between two people, in which the person has the possibility of tapping into and becoming aware of their very centre. A centre, in which they meet themselves as they truly are, with all the possibilities and potentialities therein. A centre, in which they find God. Finally and most importantly, Nouwen identifies the **movement from illusion to prayer**.

To change from loneliness to solitude and to give space for strangers to grow, one must be rooted in the reality of the divine. It is a reality that calls us to move beyond those illusions within ourselves i.e. immortality, which prevent us from acknowledging the mystery of God in our presence. It is a presence that is not always strongly felt by the believer in his or her solitude. That is why Nouwen situates the beginning of spirituality as a patient "waiting in expectation which allows us to recognize the first signs of the coming God in the center of our pains."²⁵ Despite our lack of belief and despite our feelings of God's absence, by tapping into our solitude, we have a sense of a loving God. Indeed, "By watching carefully our endless desire to love, we come to the growing awareness that we can love only because we have been loved first."²⁶ On the same lines, but in a different book, Nouwen describes the God we encounter in solitude, who "healed us before we could make any gesture to help, who set us free long before we could free others, and who loved us long before we could give love to anyone."²⁷

²⁴ Henri Nouwen, op. cit., p. 76.

²⁵ Ibid. p.128.

²⁶ Ibid.p.129.

²⁷ Henri Nouwen, *Out of Solitude* (Notre Dame, Indiana, : Ave Maria Press, 1975), pp.21-22.

Such powerful statements about God by Nouwen summarises beautifully what we have been saying all along about the human beings orientation to and communication with the divine. It is an in-built orientation, borne sometimes out of solitude and pain and a subsequent openness to the other, which witnesses to the presence of God in fair weather and foul. It is an orientation that begins with God and ends with God as the fulfilment of our very selves. The dedication of Ronald Rolheiser's book, *Seeking Spirituality*, to Henri Nouwen, depicts beautifully, the self-transcendence of the human being, who with all his pain and struggles, continues to reach out beyond himself to the divine.

“By sharing his own struggles he mentored us all, helping us to pray while not knowing how to pray, to rest while feeling restless, to be at peace while tempted, to feel safe while still anxious, to be surrounded by a cloud of light while still in darkness, and to love while still in doubt.”²⁸

5:3:3 The response to and the following of Jesus Christ

Just as the movement toward God is essential for understanding Nouwen's perspective on spirituality, the centrality of Jesus is likewise vital for understanding a Christian spirituality. For without Jesus, there is no truly Christian spirituality. Richard McBrien explains Christian spirituality as a “response to the call of God, issued through Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.”²⁹ Alister McGrath talks about Christian spirituality as the “living out of the encounter with Jesus Christ.”³⁰ But what does this ‘living out’ mean?

In chapter one of this thesis, we saw how the humanity of Jesus was communicated by the early Ecumenical Councils. There was no doubt as to the genuine humanity of the man, Jesus. The Council of Chalcedon professed that He was “complete in his humanity”, “truly man”, “of one substance with us”, “like us in all respects, apart from sin.”³¹ However, this began to change over the centuries and it took almost fifteen hundred years for the recovery of the genuine humanity of Jesus, in the nineteen fifties. In chapter two, we explored what it means to be truly human. For Rahner, it meant that we are transcendently oriented toward the divine, who is

²⁸ Ronald Rolheiser, op. cit., foreword.

²⁹ Richard P. McBrien op cit., p. 1016.

³⁰ Alister McGrath, op.cit., p.2-3.

³¹ Gerald O' Collins, op. cit., p. 172.

our alpha and our omega. In other words, by our very humanity we are grounded by a divine desire to reach out beyond ourselves. It is a desire that we share with a person who walked the dusty Mediterranean roads two thousand years ago, Jesus of Nazareth. In him, we recognise something about ourselves. We recognise that which we have been looking for. Our questions, our desires, our needs, are answered in the living out of his humanity. His humanity that embraced the ups and downs of life and was forever true to his deeply human, inner longings. Longings that he could have ignored or walked away from. To those longings that he responded to, right up to his death. Consequently, **Jesus is not an extraneous model of how we should be; rather, he is the model of what we really are.** What ‘we really are’, if we are to listen to and respond to those inner longings of our hearts and minds, which can only be fulfilled by God through Jesus Christ.

Having explored the concepts of ‘spiritual’, ‘spirituality’ and ‘Christian spirituality’, we are now in a position to see how they will all form part of an adolescent Christian spirituality.

5:4 The initial foundation of an adolescent Christian spirituality

As I have argued throughout this thesis, the exploration of the divine starts with and ends with an exploration of the human being. The adolescent is no different. Firstly, like any other human being, the **adolescent is radically oriented toward God** by his/her very nature. This orientation is present un-thematically, as the in-built desire for God. This is initially expressed in the recognition that there is a deeper meaning to life or a perception by the adolescent, there is ‘something more’ to life. This is communicated in the restless desire of the adolescent to move out beyond himself or herself in the search for truth, meaning, identity, and love, to name but a few! This desire is the embodiment of Rahner’s transcendental analysis that we talked about in chapter two. That analysis reveals human beings as always thirsting for the infinite. Adolescents are no different, as they too, thirst for the infinite. Michael Paul Gallagher talks about a “natural desire for God” in which “our hearts are always on the watch-out for vision, love, fullness, surprise”.³² Similarly, adolescents

³² Michael Paul Gallagher, op , cit., p.9.

are on the watch-out for meaning, connection, truth, and love; all of which entail, to a greater or lesser extent, a movement out beyond themselves in the search for answers.

At the beginning of this chapter we described how these outward movements originate in the inner transformations of the person, transformations caused by the little and large events in adolescent life. A case in point, is a young student who came in to talk to me a few years ago. As we talked, it transpired he had been in a lot of trouble in the school for hitting a student. As our conversation deepened, he explained how he had lost his father at an early age and from that moment onwards “felt angry”. Consequently, whenever people would ‘slag’ or criticise him, he would physically punch the person(s). From his descriptions of his anger, it felt like this rage took him over and he was powerless to stop. His one love was football. But even this was difficult as he was constantly rowing and receiving red cards! Despite his red cards, he managed to stay on the team and succeeded in reaching a football final. Again, his anger got the better of him and he was sent off for a retaliatory foul and received an ankle injury. The game ended with a victory for his team and amidst all the jubilation the team manager picked him and brought him to the centre of the pitch to receive the cup on behalf of his team. From his animated description, I could see how moved he was by the manager’s action. And how the manager had seen through his bad temper and reputation and recognised him as the dedicated and passionate footballer that he was. To a young, angry and fatherless boy, the manager’s actions had stirred something deep within him. A ‘something’ that made him look at himself in a positive, successful and less harsh way. Michael Gallagher calls this something, “transforming moments” which “come through friendships, even through failures, through the cries of others or through the strangeness of silence.”³³

These **transforming moments** occur in all aspects of adolescent experience. In sport, it could be the team spirit that drives a player beyond his own capacity to play the ‘game of his life.’ In school, it could be a student who feels sorry for an isolated and bullied classmate and attempts to make them feel welcomed in the class. In friendship, it could be the decision to forgive another student who has told hurtful lies about that person. Or, it could be the death of a grandparent that turns the young person’s life upside down but he or she continues to hope for a better tomorrow. It could be an adolescents unpopular stance on a certain issue or the decision of an

³³ Michael Paul Gallagher, op. cit., p.78.

adolescent to admit his /her homosexuality. Whatever the example, these transforming moments move or stir the young person to go beyond themselves and to connect with the presence of the eternal life in the everyday where “the very commonness of everyday things, harbours the eternal marvel and silent mystery of God”.³⁴ It is a movement that requires courage, openness and trust from the young person to listen to that which awakens his/her deepest yearnings and to act on those yearnings. For therein lies the beginning of spirituality and Christian spirituality in particular. This then is the pre-religious aspect of faith, which represents the innate orientation of the believer; captured in those transforming moments in the life of the adolescent. These are moments of mystery that give witness to the divine element within the humanity of each adolescent. Moments that prepare for and are integral to the second element of adolescent spirituality, Christian Transcendental Spirituality. For without them, there is no resonance between that which is deepest within us; glimpsed through the lens of transcendental analysis and Christian spirituality

5:5 Christian Transcendental Spirituality

In his homily to the youth of New York at Madison Square Garden, Pope John Paul II said, “When you wonder about the mystery about yourself, look to Christ who gives you the meaning of life. When you wonder what it means to be a mature person, look to Christ who is the fullness of humanity.”³⁵ Such a quote represents an apt ‘break through’ from a transcendental to a categorical knowledge of God through the person of Jesus Christ. For it is in the person of Jesus, that Christian transcendental spirituality finds its motivation and its animation.

Charles Shelton argues that a low Christological approach to understanding Jesus is a more effective way for young people because it concentrates on the humanity of Jesus; his life, his work and his message. Adolescents are drawn to a human Jesus, argues Shelton, because he “offers the adolescent a model of *personal relatedness*”.³⁶ Put simply, the young person can relate to Jesus because there are issues which both share and that are common to all humanity. Issues such as identity,

³⁴ Karl Rahner, *Belief Today* (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1967), p.14.

³⁵ John Paul II, “Homily in New York City”, (Catholic Mind 78, January 1980), p.30 in Charles M. Shelton, *Adolescent Spirituality*, op., cit. p.9.

³⁶ Charles M. Shelton, op., cit., p. 127.

growth, relationships, intimacy. On an even deeper level, **one can say there is a profound resonance between Jesus and the adolescent.** Both share the transcendental orientation toward the divine. As a consequence, both have an intuitive awareness of who they are called to be and both are called to work out this awareness in the concrete reality of the everyday. In the gospels, we have a faith account of how Jesus lived out his awareness in self-transcending acts of love, as he drew on that which was deepest in him, his true self in his humanity. Likewise, adolescents are called to live out their true humanity and to live the Jesus way. I am deliberately not saying, “live like Jesus” or “emulate Jesus”, because to do so, would imply that Jesus was somehow distant from humanity i.e. the extraneous model that we talked about. Instead, Jesus lived in an authentically human way. He was in touch with his deepest self and by his life, adolescents are challenged to live their humanity, authentically too. Accordingly, the adolescent is challenged with the questions “What is the purpose of my life?” Or to put it another way, “How am I being authentically human?” Or indeed, “What values do I stand for, now that I have looked at the life of Jesus?” They are confronted with the possibility of internalising and making real what Jesus means to them, with all the possibilities and fears that may bring.

Such a challenge, feeds into another positive aspect of Christology from below which Shelton calls “continued growth”.³⁷ To examine the life of Jesus then, is to see how he “increased in wisdom” (Lk 2:52) and how he went beyond himself to realise his true self. Likewise, the life of the adolescent is built on growth and wisely choosing that which corresponds to his true self. A true self that calls the adolescent outward. Such an outward movement is anticipated in the very psychological makeup of the adolescent which communicates the idea that for an adolescent to mature properly, he or she must move beyond themselves in some way. Accordingly, for Piaget, it is in the formal operational thought which confers a greater reflective capacity and an intense level of questioning. For Kohlberg, it is in the moral socialisation of the adolescent who is challenged to think of societal and universal mores. For Fowler, it is in the ‘ultimate concerns’ of life, that demands of the adolescent an answer. Finally, for Erikson, it is in the movement beyond the old self to an emerging new self and identity that constitutes a maturing adult life, a life which focuses on the inner core.

³⁷ Charles M. Shelton, *op.cit.*, p. 128.

We have already mentioned that Jesus was not an ‘out there’ model of how one should behave. Rather, he is the incarnational model of who we really are. If only we would listen to our deepest longings (inner core) and desires and recognise in them the very completion of our very selves. Yet, it can be very difficult for adolescents to find the time and the courage to pay attention to those deep inner longings and desires. The pace of life in Ireland has changed significantly over the past decade and the call to spend time with oneself is but one of many calls on the adolescent. Yet, it is a vitally important aspect of Christian transcendental spirituality, because it allows one to touch base with one’s inner core and to **cultivate a disposition of silence and solitude**. Such a disposition is especially difficult for adolescents because issues could emerge that might open the young person to overly self-critical examination and touch basic fears and anxieties, such as loneliness or lack of self-esteem. Yet, without this disposition, adolescents remain deeply un-rooted and without a foundation. Prisoners to the whim of their desires and not in touch with that inner and true self, that Merton calls God. Moreover, to be in touch with one’s inner self, means that one is more open to the experiences of life and accordingly more open to being moved by certain events and experiences. Such events move us deeply and there is a resonance between our true selves and the event or experience that moves us. The consequence is that we move beyond ourselves and reach out to the other? Why? Because this is who we truly are as human beings. **Dynamically oriented to God, whom we discover in the quietness of solitude and whom we recognise in the ordinary and sometimes extraordinary events and experiences of life**. This is a recognition that resonates with our true self and which urges us to move out beyond ourselves in service to the other. Only then, will we realise our true self as fundamentally oriented toward God.

5:6 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have explored the answer to the question we asked in the introduction, “What does it mean when we say, adolescents are spiritual? We looked at the terms ‘spiritual’, spirituality’ and ‘Christian spirituality’ and applied them to adolescent spirituality. In doing so, we found that there are two main features in the spirituality of adolescents. Firstly, adolescents share in the basic human orientation to the divine that are found in transforming moments of their everyday lives, moments that reach in to their inner self and move them to go beyond themselves or to self-

transcend. This is the pre-religious aspect of adolescent spirituality. Secondly, adolescent spirituality is centred on the life, death and mission of Jesus. His life resonates with the very humanity of every adolescent and indeed every person. His life challenges the adolescent to be open to authentic inner transformation and subsequent outer movement, as the young person moves to a greater realisation of who he/she was originally called to be.

Yet, the question must be asked, "Given that there is an adolescent spirituality, how does one use this understanding, to communicate the person and message of Jesus Christ to middle adolescents?" The very important answer to this question will be the concern of the next and final chapter.

6:1 Introduction

The noted theologian and popular writer, Fr Michael Paul Gallagher, tells of an incident that happened to him while living on campus at Fordham University. He decided to use the lift where he lived and go from the basement to the third floor. Once inside the lift and with the door closed, he pressed the third floor button. Nothing happened. Panic began to set in after he spent a considerable amount of time pressing the buttons for the first, second and third floors. Eventually, he managed to get out of the lift and mentioned his experience to one of his fellow Jesuits who asked him why he hadn't used the key. Looking at his own keys, he noticed a small innocuous looking key that was used specifically for the third floor. However, Fr. Gallagher was unaware he had it, "I had the key but I did not know it."¹

Metaphorically reflecting on this incident, Gallagher argues that people confine themselves to living in but a few floors of their humanity. The rest remain a neglected and unexplored terrain of their real selves. They have the key but they do not know it. To unlock this unexplored reality, one needs to pay attention to the key that is within oneself. For Michael Paul Gallagher, it is the imagination, but it is the contention of this thesis that it is one's fundamental orientation to and fulfilment in God, that is the key to unlocking the neglected spiritual floors of the adolescent. This is an orientation, that pre-disposes the adolescent to being 'moved' and transformed from within. It is a transformation that results in the young person, going beyond himself or herself in the service of others. It is the possibility of transformation that is the very essence of what it means to be human. It is quintessentially present in the life and death of Jesus Christ.

This chapter then, will propose a planned retreat programme on Jesus for Fifth Year students, as a means by which to tap into the neglected spiritual orientation of adolescents. To arrive at this programme, we first need to examine what impedes adolescents from discovering that key within them, which gives witness to the divine element of their lives. Secondly, we will look at various methodologies and models for working with young people. The chapter will end with an explanation of what constitutes an effective programme along with a brief outline of the Jesus programme.

¹ Michael Paul Gallagher, op. cit., p.10.

6:2 Adolescent Cultural Unbelief

One can broadly approach an understanding of culture from three standpoints. Traditionally, culture was viewed as the preserve of the elite in the artistic, intellectual and literary spheres of society. Secondly, culture may refer to the local culture of an ethnic group; its language, its tradition, its way of life. Thirdly, culture can be viewed as a reality we are all part of, in much the same way as the air we breathe. Here, “We interpret artefacts of our culture in a particular way; we develop common values within a culture and develop a world view in the light of assumptions about how things should be.”² Another way of looking at this definition of culture, is by imagining that we all possess an “unacknowledged set of interpretative tools, ways of responding to existence”³ Historically, these responses over time, constitute our worldview, our beliefs, and our values, which are shared by members of our community. They are communicated through our lifestyles, our families, our relationships, our literature, our role models, our symbols, our institutions and much more. A considerable amount of these values, beliefs and worldviews, are handed on from one generation to the next and so it is appropriate to say that there is an **Inheritance aspect to culture**. There is also an **Interpretative aspect to culture**, where people attempt to make sense of the various elements of culture within the context of their own intellectual, social and psychological milieu. One such element of culture is religious belief. I want to look at the religious belief of young people within an Irish culture. I want to see if it is useful as a means of tapping into the basic religious orientation of young people, which we discussed in the previous chapter.

As Chaplain to a secondary school, I have had the privilege of ministering to many students over the past seven years. In that time, I have come to the conclusion that the vast majority of students believe in a God or believe that there is something more to their lives. Yet, the answer to the question of how this belief is lived out continues to puzzle me. It seems that students are content to talk about their belief in God but make little reference to any formal religious worship or affiliation to institutional churches. When they do make reference, it normally entails a negative comment about the boring liturgies or comments about the corrupt Roman Catholic

² David Tuohy & Penny Cairns, *Youth 2K Threat or Promise to a Religious Culture?* (Dublin: Marino Institute of Education, 2000), p.2-3.

³ Michael Paul Gallagher, ‘New Forms of Cultural Unbelief’, *The Future of Religion in Irish Education* Ed. Pdraig Hogan & Kevin Williams, (Dublin: Veritas, 1997), p.20.

Church! Moreover, there seems to be a very low uptake by students and their families on the sacramental expressions of the Church i.e.mass, confession. The overall feeling I get from students then, is either an outright rejection or an indifference to the institutional expressions of faith of the Church but not an outright rejection of God! There are many explanations, which can be attributed to this substantial movement away from church attendance and activities. One of the most compelling explanations comes from Michael Paul Gallagher, who talks about cultural change and how it affects belief and church practices.

Cultural change he understands as a change in how people view their lives and where the “older approaches become not so much untrue as invalid, incapable of docking, so to speak with new horizon’s of exploration.”⁴ This is due in part, to a post-modern sensibility which displays unease with previously held certainties about meanings and values along with a view that truth can live outside the knower. Furthermore, there is unease with viewing history as evidence of the social progress of humankind or seeing science and reason in a positive light. Instead, post-modern thinking lauds one’s inner experience and argues that truth cannot exist outside of the knower. In other words, it is one’s individual or group experience that denotes truth and so anything that does not resonate within a person may end up being sidelined and ignored. This is what has happened to religious belief argues Gallagher. The response by people to a belief in God is best described as “unbelief”⁵ rather than lack of belief or non-belief. Unbelief connotes less clarity and more ambiguity and aptly describes for Gallagher the state of religious disinterest in Ireland today. It is a condition that is characterised by an apathetic, drifting lack of interest in God and in the official Church institutions. There is not a strong rejection of God that is displayed in the definite decision of an atheist. Instead, there is a religious apathy or disinterest characterised by non-involvement by the young person, where “unbelief has become an inherited confusion, a distance from roots, an unaggressive puzzlement about religious practices and their language, before Church religion and its mediations.”⁶ Out of this religious marginalisation, Gallagher identifies four types of cultural

⁴ Michael Paul Gallagher, “New Forms of Cultural Unbelief”, op. cit., p.20.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., p.21.

unbelief; religious anaemia, secular marginalisation, anchorless spirituality and cultural desolation.⁷

Religious anaemia is a view of the Church as an external edifice where there is no sense of spiritual vibrancy or life. Instead, the Church is seen as alien to the lived reality of the people, who perceive it as an authoritarian, corrupt, male dominated institution, beset by controversy. Thus, along with credibility, there is the very real issue of connection or lack thereof. Secondly, secular marginalisation is the sidelining of religion to the private spheres of life. There is a belief that religion is unimportant to the needs and issues of life. To express a belief in anything religious is to open one to the possibility of ridicule. Young people in particular, can be prone to sweeping aside a whole range of beliefs as outdated, outmoded and irrelevant to their own experiences and their world view. Evidence of this can be seen in classroom discussions, where there is reluctance for people to admit a belief in God in the public forum of a classroom. Thirdly, anchorless spirituality describes a situation in which young people hunger for something more in their lives, than the purely material. And yet, this hunger is not sated by their experience of Church. The result then is a person who is spiritually searching for more but who is without a firm religious base and who may be influenced by non-Christian spiritualities and heresies. Indeed, in my own school, I have noticed a considerable rise in the amount of young people who are dabbling, in occult practices. The final cultural unbelief for Gallagher is **cultural desolation**. For Gallagher, the pressures of a dominant culture prevent the development of religious awareness, sensitivity and imagination. Specifically, this is understood as a blockage or a lack **of disposition** by the student toward an awareness of the divine in his or her everyday life. Gallagher identifies the need for a renewal of young people's imagination in order for faith to take hold.

⁷ Ibid., p.21.

6:3 Inheritance/Interpretative blocks to adolescent religious sensibility

In this section, I wish to identify the **Inheritance** and the **Interpretative** aspect of culture as blocks to unlocking the key of adolescent religious awareness. The **Inheritance aspect of youth culture**, would seem to say that traditional Catholic ethos is quickly disappearing. Particularly, if one is to believe Michael Gallagher's description of religious anaemia and the falling sacramental uptake of adolescents and their families. From my own observations and conversations with students, I believe that a considerable number of them do not attend religious services. Yet, most would express some belief in a God. Secondly, there seems to be an absence of any formal religious ethos in homes and where there is, it is normally the grandparents who are the guiding force. Thirdly, to talk to teenagers about the traditions of the Catholic Church is to be greeted with an embarrassed and sometimes stony silence from them. This is because there is a considerable unfamiliarity and disconnection with the Church, its theology, its practices and its modus operandi. Why is this?

In their book, *Youth 2K Threat or Promise to a Religious Culture?* David Tuohy and Penny Cairns interviewed one hundred and fifty nine young people between the ages of seventeen to twenty four and in so doing have shed some light on possible reasons for this dis-connectedness. Examining the religious world of young people, they found there was a desire within them for connection and meaning as they tried to develop a genuine lifestyle. However, their experience of Church did not help this search. Firstly, their experience of parish was alienating, as there was little opportunity for them to get involved in parish activities and little contact with parish teams. Moreover, the model of Church they experienced at parish was more on the level of loyalty as Catholics than on a positive personal experience. Furthermore, the language of liturgy did not speak to their desire for personal transformational experiences and was seen as archaic and old fashioned. Secondly, parental belief or lack thereof, had a considerable influence on the belief of the young person. Often, the young people spoke of their parents having issues with religion. Some of these issues were about institutional membership of the Church and how the parents were forced to go to Mass by their own parents. Secondly, how they perceived the Church as imposing itself and its rules on them in their formative years. Thirdly, negative

experiences the parents had in the care of priests, sisters and brothers. Finally, experiences of personal disappointment and tragedy in which God was held responsible or God was seen as un caring. The cumulative effect of these and other influences have been resolved through non-practice, critical disaffection, and part acceptance of the Church and commitment to unusual and offbeat groups within the Church. Such modes of behaviour from parents, have been passed on in part to their children, argue Tuohy and Cairns, and go some way in explaining the general indifference and unbelief prevalent in youth culture today.

Another way of explaining this indifference and unbelief is by looking at youth culture from an **interpretative perspective**. By interpretative, I mean how young people make sense of God and belief within their own social, psychological and intellectual milieu. Firstly, one could say that the secular marginalisation that Gallagher talks about pushes the religious aspect of life towards the margins of society and towards the private sphere of life. It becomes more difficult then, for young people to talk about religious belief because it is not socially acceptable and is not considered “cool” by their contemporaries. Such an attitude may be subtly reinforced at home where there could be a general embarrassment, indifference or inability on the part of parents or siblings to talk about religious belief. School too may communicate the non-importance of religion and religious expression in the curriculum because,

“In some post-primary schools, the teaching of religion was minimalist. It did not have a prominent place on the timetable, and it did not seem to have a high priority with the teachers. In many cases, teachers were not trained to teach the subject, and this seemed to affect their confidence to teach it.”⁸

The content of catechetical programmes in schools also seem to lack a sustained and systematic approach in exploring a religious expression of personal issues and questions in a way that students could make sense of their experiences within a Christian setting. Instead, there was a concentration by teachers on social issues, comparative religions, personal development and relationships. Specifically Catholic and Christian teaching was thin on the ground. As one student said, “we didn’t seem to study Christian beliefs at all, especially in fifth and sixth year.”⁹ Possibly, one of

⁸ David Tuohy & Penny Cairns, op. cit., p.75.

⁹ Ibid., p.76.

the reasons for this is the difficulty some religion teachers have in conveying the Christian message in the present culture. Firstly, there is the apathy of the students and society at large to the subject of religion. Secondly, there is the 'glazed look' of students when one teaches specifically Christian topics like prayer, Jesus or the sacraments. In such circumstances, teachers may receive vociferous protests from students or there may be an atmosphere of total disinterest. Thirdly, there is the strong peer culture of the students, who may deride fellow students for voicing a personal conviction or a life struggle. Fourthly, the changing lifestyle of Celtic Tiger Ireland has meant that the pace of life has increased considerably with little time for personal reflection. This pace has filtered down to the students. Indeed, if one were to survey any group of teenagers, one would likely find a good number of them who work from between ten to twenty five hours a week! This may lead one to believe that there is little time in the fast pace of student life for personal reflection or for time to be alone. Indeed, one could argue, there is more scope for students nowadays to use avoidance strategies to escape from personal insecurities and fears that Henri Nouwen talked about in chapter five.

It is little wonder then, that teachers try to keep the issues in religion class as topical as possible for their own survival. Yet, by doing so, students lose out on an opportunity to discover the gentle voice of God amidst their own struggles and life experiences. They miss out on the opportunity to discover their inner orientation to God and how this shows itself in their everyday reality. Michael Gallagher argues that cultural desolation can block people's readiness or disposition for faith on the level of imagination and freedom. He argues that it isn't on the level of doctrine that one needs to evangelise young people but on the level of **disposition**. He proposes a "ministry of disposition"¹⁰ with which to access the hungers and needs within each person. **To view ministry as the cultivation of a disposition, is in line with the thematic content of this thesis.** A thesis which contends that adolescents share in the basic human orientation or disposition to the divine, found in the transforming moments of their lives. These are moments and experiences that speak to their inner core; allowing them the opportunity to move beyond themselves to the other. Yet, we have seen how difficult it is for young people to be allowed the opportunity to explore this God given orientation and disposition to the divine. Many influences conspire

¹⁰ Michael Paul Gallagher, 'New Forms of Cultural Belief', op. cit., p.25.

either consciously or unconsciously, to prevent a conducive atmosphere in which adolescents can come in contact with their basic orientation.

In the next section then, we will explore one way of engaging this fundamental orientation to the divine through the use of a retreat programme for fifth year students.

6:4 Models of Youth Evangelisation

To be an effective religious educator, one must **“critically investigate and understand what is to be communicated and, on the other hand, must attend to the methods, context, and effects of the communication process.”**¹¹ For the most part, this thesis has concerned itself with the first aspect of McBrien’s definition of religious education i.e. an exploration of what it is to be a human being. So what is it, to be a human being?

Firstly, it is to be fundamentally open to the divine in the human activities of questioning, loving and hoping. Secondly, it is an openness that allows one to be moved and transformed by life’s experiences, to such an extent, that one goes beyond oneself in reaching out to others. Finally, it is an orientation and disposition found in the psychological and spiritual development of the adolescent, which is centred on Jesus Christ. He is the exemplar par excellence, of orientation, inner transformation and outer movement. He models for us our human nature, in which we find our very fulfilment and completion.

Yet, this is only the first aspect of religious education. The second is how does one communicate this truth about our humanity to young adults i.e. “What are the methods, models and contexts, we need to examine, in order to communicate this essential truth? Putting this another way, we could ask, “How could one stimulate and explore the adolescents basic orientation to the divine in a way that could put them in touch with the central stimulus of the Christian faith, Jesus Christ?” We shall explore three possible models in working with adolescents and we shall utilise one of them as a basis for the planned retreat with fifth year students.

¹¹ Richard P. McBrien , op. cit., p. 57.

6:4:1 Deductive Models

George Boran ¹² identifies three models for evangelising young people today; the **traditional deductive model**, the **Modern deductive model** and finally, the **Transforming inductive model**.

The traditional deductive model of evangelisation has its origin in the Council of Trent (1545) in which the influences of Protestantism were repudiated by the Roman Catholic Church. Out of Trent, emerged various catechisms to instruct the clergy and the faithful in the precepts of the faith and so act against the criticisms of the Protestant reformers. These catechisms were hierarchical and authoritarian in nature in which catechetical conclusions were 'deduced' from abstract principles and theological doctrine and applied to everyday life. Their methodology followed a basic question and answer format. The answers were designed to give clear, comforting and unambiguous responses to a whole range of theological and faith concerns. Answers had to be learned off by heart and accepted by the faithful in an obedient and passive manner. Underlying the methodology of this approach, was the assumption that teaching the foundational tenets of the Church was sufficient to motivate young people, along with sin, fear and guilt. Moreover, prayer, the sacraments and the life of Jesus Christ, provided the medium through which people were transformed. Little importance was attached to the environment or one's experience, as the content of God's self-communication. Instead, the mind was an uncritical and passive receptacle of Church dogma.

This approach was successful because it operated in a pre-modern, homogenous Christian culture, where obedience took precedence over critical analysis. Moreover, little cognisance was taken of what shaped the values and attitudes of believers in the first place. Part of the reason for this, was because the Church operated within a relatively uniform and traditional society in which relatively few alternative models existed. However, the 1950's and 1960's saw the emergence of new and different ways of looking at reality, at culture at social justice and at the Church. The overall result then, was the decline of the deductive model for the evangelisation of young people, as it became an outmoded model for dealing with

¹² George Boran, *The Pastoral Challenges of a New Age* (Dublin:Veritas,1999), pp.122-153.

the challenges of a modern and post-modern culture. In its place developed modern deductive and transforming inductive, models.

The modern deductive model has the same basic “top down”¹³ approach of its predecessor but attempts to correct its lacunae through the use of psychology and education and an understanding of youth culture. This model is centred on apostolic movements and within these movements, one can identify Encounter and International movements. Encounter movements usually have their basis on the appeal of a founding member, who organises a series of talks, activities and presentations, which can be easily emulated by other organisers. They are normally weekend events and are characterised by quite intense emotional experiences, which attempts to break down the sense of alienation and individualism, experienced by a considerable number of young people. Furthermore, the communal atmosphere of the weekend, the friendships, the personal testimonies, the group work and the joyful liturgical celebrations, also help to ameliorate the sense of aloneness and marginalisation felt by adolescents. It is further strengthened by the personal stories of young people who talk about their own faith conversion through the discovery of Jesus in their life. The weekends then convey an image of the church as a community; challenged to follow Christ in the leading of a moral and a sacramental life. The international movements too, tend to focus on the experience of conversion and comradeship as a means by which to convey God’s care and the care of others within the movement. Prayer, spirituality and sacramental practice, form the central foundation of these movements, in which the adolescents are challenged to accept and follow Jesus. However, international movements have a broader appeal and a broader base from which to work out of. Thus, central tenets of the faith can be communicated in an accessible way to young people through radio, television, magazines and international teams.

It is obvious then, how one could be attracted to both types of movements because they offer a sense of identity and community to young people. They also offer emotional and spiritual support at a time when life is becoming more individualistic and fragmented. Yet, there are certain lacunae in these movements argues Boran. Firstly, there is less emphasis on intellectual assimilation of the Christian message and a tendency toward biblical fundamentalism. Secondly, little

¹³ George Boran. *op.cit.*, p. 128.

attention is given to examining the cultural and social conditions for the propagation and receptivity of the Christian message. Thirdly, religious formation in these movements are primarily inward looking, where the Christian message is viewed as an answer to life's problems but does not extend beyond to a more outward looking view of societal ills. Finally, the deductive methodology of apostolic movements tend to produce

“naïve and submissive youth, youth incapable of taking on a significant role in the historic process of social transformation, of intervening in an intelligent way in debate, in a pluralistic ideological environment.”¹⁴

Boran posits a third model of evangelisation, which he argues, is more in tune with the post-modern situation of modern day youth.

6:4:2 Transforming Inductive Model

The transforming inductive model stands in contrast with the previous two models. Whereas the deductive models start with theory and works down to reality, an inductive methodology has the lived experience of the believer as its starting point. As a model, it challenges young people to look at their own experiences and to see in them, the stirrings of a religious consciousness. Such a model acknowledges young people as reflective, growing and dynamic individuals, who are receptive to God in their lives and who are capable of being moved and transformed by these experiences. Thomas Groome, argues that the reason for an emphasis on experience is twofold. Firstly, God is always moving out to us in our everyday lives and asking us to respond to him in love and so it is only fitting to root the catechetical process in one's experiences. Secondly, “to educate for faith as a way of life, educators simply must engage people's own lives.”¹⁵ In other words, if one does not appeal to the experiences of young people, then one is less likely to speak to their hearts or their souls.

In many ways, this model reflects what we have said all along about young people as dynamically oriented to the divine and capable of being transformed and moved beyond themselves. We have already explored in chapter 2, 4 and 5 how the

¹⁴ George Boran, *op. cit.*, p. 141.

¹⁵ Thomas H. Groome, 'The Purpose of Christian Catechesis', in *Empowering Catechetical Leaders* Eds. T. Groome & M. Corso, (Washington, D.C.: National Catholic Association, 2002), p.26

ontological, psychological and spiritual make-up of the adolescent, pre-disposes them to divine orientation and transformation in the first place. The *General Directory for Catechesis* explains how “Every dimension of the faith, like the faith itself as a whole, must be rooted in human experience and not remain a mere adjunct to the human person”.¹⁶ **This model of evangelisation then, identifies the life situation of the adolescent as the initial step in the catechetical process. It is a process which echoes the pre-religious orientation of the adolescent to the divine in the activities of loving, hoping, questioning.**

Yet, the human situation is not the only consideration of catechesis argues Groome. One must also attend to the powerhouse of catechesis, which is the story of the Christian faith, from its inception to the present day. It includes Sacred Scripture and Tradition along with the teaching office of the Church, the Magisterium. Without these deposits of faith, the pedagogical process of catechesis would not be complete because “catechesis is...realised in the encounter of the Word of God with the experience of the person.”¹⁷ And so it is the task of catechesis of “Interpreting and illuminating experience with the data of faith”.¹⁸ Catechesis then is the interaction between life and faith. It is a relationship of symbiosis, in which people can interact with the story of Christianity and allow it to engage and speak to them in their life experiences. In this way, Catechesis draws on the whole person, who is challenged to discover a resonance between the deposit of faith and his/her own experience. Indeed, the origin of the word ‘catechesis’ comes from the Greek verb *Katechein* and means to ‘resound’ or to ‘echo’.

It has been and continues to be, the contention of this thesis, that there is a profound resonance or ‘echo’ between God and the human being or between life and faith. From a Rahnerian perspective, this resonance is based on the unthematic and non-reflexive orientation of human nature to God. It is an implicit knowledge of God, which every human being shares in the ‘depth experiences’ of life, which we explored in chapter two and chapter five. Such experiences speak to the very core of adolescents, which moves them to go beyond themselves. This we called the pre-religious aspect of adolescent spirituality and it is an aspect, which pre-disposes them to the Christian message. By their very nature then, students are primed to encounter

¹⁶ Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis* (Dublin:Veritas,1998),#87.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, #150.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, #153.

Jesus Christ, which constitutes the second aspect of adolescent spirituality. As we have already discussed in Chapter three, Jesus is not an extraneous model to be emulated. Rather, Jesus exemplifies who we are as human beings and what we are called to be. We are human beings then transcendently oriented to God and called to move beyond ourselves in the human activities of life, such as hoping and loving. In so doing, we give witness to the true essence of our humanity, which is “the grammar of God’s possible self expression”.¹⁹ Collectively and individually then, we are indicators of who God is through our very humanity. It is a humanity that allows us the possibility of realising our true self and orientation (chapter 4) as we move out beyond ourselves to the other. This orientation argues Karl Neufeld, is a pre-requisite for living the Christian message but,

“this basic fact is grasped by humans only insofar as they involve themselves with the claim and stimulus of the gospel, allowing it to speak to them and thereby activate potentialities that are inherent within them-for listening, understanding, assenting, etc.”²⁰

Using the metaphor from the introduction, one must ask, “How can one unlock the transcendental and the categorical orientation that is within every adolescent?” The remaining part of this chapter will be my attempt at putting into practice that which we have explored in the previous six chapters as a possible inroad into this question. Essentially, this practical application will take the form of a retreat programme that I organised for a group of fifth Year students. My aim will be to show how one can tap in to the adolescent pre-disposition to the divine and use it as a basis for exploring the humanity of Jesus.

¹⁹ Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, op. cit., p.223.

²⁰ Karl H. Neufeld, ‘Transcendental Theology’, in *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, ed. Rene Latourelle, (New York: St. Pauls by arrangement with Crossroad Publishing Company, 1994), p. 1083.

6:5 Adolescent Catechetical Retreat Programme

At the beginning of this chapter, we briefly examined the research of David Tuohy and Penny Cairns into the religious and spiritual culture of young people in Ireland. They discovered that religious education in schools was of little help in fostering a personal growth and a religious sensitivity. This was due in part, to an ethos of anti-religious sentiment and because of peer pressure, which made it difficult for students to talk about religious issues. Yet, the school retreat was one exception to this atmosphere of resistance to religion, because it gave students the space to think about their own life in a relaxed, reflective environment. Indeed, “some of the interviewees spoke of the retreat as a time of special insight or of special bonding with classmates because of discussions that took place.”²¹

The significant influence of retreats for young people, was one reason that prompted me to use it as a means to explore the humanity of Jesus. Moreover, the retreat format gave students the possibility of leaving the school and of encountering a more peaceful and reflective atmosphere. Such an atmosphere I feel is conducive to cultivating a disposition of silence and solitude in the adolescent. This is a necessary component in the spiritual life of the adolescent. Moreover, I have found from past retreats, that students are more open to new experiences, when they are in a more relaxed and a less pressurised environment. In beginning the retreat programme I was conscious of Trenton Ferro’s warning, “there are no “cookbook approaches to planning and setting up programmes for the religious education of young adults.”²² In other words, to organise a retreat is not a once off event, where there is a deposit of knowledge to be communicated in a step by step approach. This is the deductive model of evangelisation we talked about earlier in the chapter and it has not proven itself to be an effective catechetical tool. Rather, to engage in programme planning, one must consider the following questions. **What do I hope to achieve in the programme? To whom am I directing the programme? How will I achieve my aims in the programme? How will I evaluate the programme ?**

²¹ David Tuohy and Penny Cairns, op. cit., p.77.

²² Trenton R. Ferro, ‘Setting up a young adult Religious education Program’ in *Handbook of Young Adult Religious Education*, ed. Harley Atkinson (Birmingham, Alabama:Religious Education Press,1995). P.346.

6:5:1 The Four Elements of the Retreat Programme

To begin with, the overall aim of the retreat was to develop a deeper and transforming relationship between Jesus and young people. All too often, there is a glazed look of young people when one mentions 'Jesus'. My primary aim then was to break down the barriers young people have with an image of Jesus they describe as wearing a robe, having long hair, a beard and Moses sandals. This quasi-historical and removed image of Jesus, conveys a view of the 'man from Nazareth', as distant and uninvolved in human experience. This thesis has argued the complete opposite view. On the contrary, Jesus is the incarnation of our very humanity. It is his humanity, transcendentally oriented to God and lived out in the historical and categorical reality, that we find ourselves in. It is a reality that calls us to become more of who we were intended to be. Jesus was the lived reality of this transcendental and categorical aspect of the human being and so it is only fitting that we emulate him.

The second consideration in planning a programme is to ask "To whom are you directing the programme?". Consequently, the programme planner must understand the participants "both generically and specifically".²³ Generically is an understanding of the psychological concerns and sociological circumstances of the young adults. Chapter four dealt with the psychological concerns of the young adult. Through the insights of Conn, Piaget, Kohlberg, Fowler and Erikson, it was discovered that adolescence is predicated on self-transcendence as a basic element for healthy psychological development of the 'true self'. The sociological circumstances of adolescents were discussed at the beginning of this chapter when we explored the various influences within adolescent culture which impeded the discovery of the divine element within every adolescent. Finally, the specific understanding of the participants requires the programme planner to get to know the students individually and as a group, Both these requirements were fulfilled as the group in question were a group of fifth year students that I had taught religion to over the past three years. In that time, I got to know the students, their interests and their needs quite well.

The third aspect of planning a religious programme, is to explore the methodologies and approaches in conveying the overall aim of the programme. The retreat I organised for the fifth year students was basically divided into two parts and

²³ Trenton R. Ferro, *op. cit.*, p.349..

consisted of two approaches. **The first part was based on the adolescent pre-disposition toward the divine i.e. the pre-religious and transcendental aspect of adolescent spirituality .The second part was the exploration of Jesus as a model and an embodiment of transcendental and categorical revelation.** The aim of both approaches was to create the conditions in which the adolescent will be moved by certain stimuli and recognise in Jesus this same sense of being moved by stimuli. So what are these stimuli?

I began the retreat by playing a number of the student's favourite songs. I asked them what did they like about the songs i.e. what was it about the songs that moved them. Next, I placed a number of photographs in the centre of the room and asked them to choose a photograph that affected or moved them the most. After exploring their responses, I then placed a number of other photographs in the centre of the room. These photographs were of people reaching out beyond themselves to help other people. In the same way as before, I asked the students to choose a photograph they liked the most. It was at this stage, I introduced the concepts of being moved by something and of moving beyond oneself in helping other people. After a brief tea break, I asked the students to reflectively fill out a worksheet on transcendence and self-transcendence. The title of the sheet was 'The tree of limits and possibilities'. The aim of the sheet was to elicit from the students their own experiences of being moved and affected by life situations and how they went beyond themselves to reach out to friends, family or those in need. The aim here was to see if there was a resonance between transcendence and categorical revelation and the lived experience of the students. Moreover, this part of the retreat constituted the first section of the programme and primed the students to approach the humanity of Jesus from the perspective of being moved by people and situations and of going beyond oneself for the sake of others.

Whereas, the first part of the programme is visual and spatial in its content, the second part of the programme is more verbal and linguistic in its format. Its main focus is on the humanity of Jesus and the humanity of the adolescent. It began with a brainstorming session on the name 'Jesus'. After the students had shared on what they had written ,I handed out a brief questionnaire on the humanity of Jesus. The subsequent discussion on what the students had written, lead to interesting perspectives on Jesus' humanity. In general, there was a certain degree of ambiguity in how students viewed the humanity of Jesus. Though most agreed he was human,

quite a sizeable number added he was not human in the way the students are human. Some even added he was a magical character with special powers.

Following on from this discussion, we proceeded to examine three scripture passages in the Gospel of Luke. The reason for this, was to see if there was any resonance between the inner movement and self-transcendence of Jesus and the inner movement and the self-transcendence of the adolescent. The first scripture passage was the raising of the widow's son in Nain (Lk 7:11-17). The second, was the anguish of Jesus at the Mount of Olives (Lk 22:39-46). The third, was the Crucifixion of Jesus (Lk 23:26-43). The main group was then divided up into smaller groups and asked to take one of the scripture pieces. Using the criteria of inner movement and self-transcendence, the groups were asked, whether or not Jesus displayed the same human qualities as the students. Most students tended to agree, there was a strong human connection between both. However, they also admitted they were reluctant to agree there was an equal connection between the humanity of Jesus and the humanity of the adolescents. The retreat programme ended with a brief meditation on Jesus on the Mount of Olives as a model of self-transcendence in the face of impending death.

Finally, the fourth aspect of religious programming is reflection. Again Trenton stresses the importance of this when he talks about the "reflective practitioner".²⁴ Here the 'practitioner' looks back over a finished programme, to see what improvements could be made, what the students enjoyed and learned and what they found difficult. Applying this perspective to the retreat, I can honestly say there was a good response from the students to this unique programme. On the purely relational level, students seemed to enjoy the atmosphere of the retreat with their friends and the time away from school. Indeed as the day developed, some students seemed to visibly unwind into the relaxed atmosphere of the retreat house and the grounds. From the perspective of content, a large number of students enjoyed doing the first part of the retreat programme with its combination of music, photographs and the tree of limits and possibilities. However, the students found the second part of the retreat 'heavy' as they were not accustomed to discussing Jesus in such an open manner; being challenged to see him "like us in all respects," (Council of Chalcedon). Yet, some students admitted that their distant image of Jesus was beginning to change and they were appreciative of the new insights offered in the retreat.

²⁴ Trenton R Ferro, *op. cit.*, p.345.

Personally, I was thrilled with the retreat because it was a first step in raising awareness of the students' transcendental orientation to God. It also represented a significant step in attempting to move from a transcendental to a categorical revelation of God and it went some way in removing the glazed look on students' faces which I talked about in the introduction.

6:6 Conclusion

In this final chapter, we have explored the phenomenon of cultural unbelief, with its religious anaemia, secular marginalisation, anchorless spirituality and cultural desolation. We have also looked at other cultural and sociological blocks in society i.e. Interpretative and Inheritance aspects to culture, which can prevent adolescents from discovering the 'key' to the divine, that is always present within themselves. It is a key that cannot truly be accessed in deductive methodologies of evangelisation, but only through a transforming inductive methodology. It is a methodology that places experience and Christian faith, at the centre of catechesis. Christian faith and experience then, are symbiotically present in catechesis. Indeed, it is not only experience that illumines faith, it is the very orientation of a human being which conveys to us who God is. To be human then, is to be a divine oriented person (transcendental) who is challenged to continually discover and continually live out this awareness, in the historical and categorical reality of his/her life This is the core of what Rahner talks about in chapter two. Such a challenge is more accessible when one looks to the person of Jesus, who embodied the transcendental and categorical orientation to the divine, perfectly.

Consequently, the challenge for present day youth ministers is to facilitate and nurture the transcendental (pre-religious) and categorical potentialities and possibilities that are at the very core of adolescent humanity. They are the possibilities and potentialities that have been blunted by religious unbelief, by the inheritance and the interpretative blocks in culture and by a fast moving society. This makes it difficult for people to break through from a transcendental to a categorical knowledge of God. Such a knowledge of God has its origin in the transcendental pole of self-awareness. An awareness shared by all of humanity. It is an awareness that we are more than what we see or do and where "humans have to accept, in principle, that

they correspond to something greater,"²⁵ Secondly, life experiences present adolescents with opportunities to live out their transcendental self-awareness, in the concrete historical reality they find themselves. Such experiences are echoed developmentally in the cognitive, moral, religious and identity spheres of adolescence. Moreover, these experiences or 'depth moments' represent an opportunity for young people to be moved and to reach out beyond themselves. In so doing, they will come to recognise that which is deepest within them i.e. their fundamental orientation to and fulfilment in God. It is an orientation that is not only modelled in themselves but is perfectly modelled in the life and death of Jesus Christ, who shared this basic orientation.

In conclusion, those of us work with young people, are mandated to acknowledge, recognise and celebrate the fundamental orientation each teenager has to God. Furthermore, it is incumbent upon us to foster an environment that will allow young people to discover that God is in the very reality of their lives. Lives that are bursting with the potentiality (transcendence) and actuality (categorical) of the Divine at work. Perfectly and humanly modelled in the life of Jesus. I hope I have gone some way in reaching this ideal through the format of a retreat programme.

²⁵ Karl H. Neufeld, *op. cit.* p.22.

Conclusion

This thesis began by talking about the ‘glazed look’ of my students when I talked about Jesus in the classroom. This thesis finished with a description of a retreat I ran for fifth year students in which I applied two core ideas of the thesis. So what are these core ideas?

Firstly, by their very nature, young people **are fundamentally oriented to the divine**. In chapter two we saw how Karl Rahner termed this orientation the ‘supernatural existential.’ It is an orientation or a disposition, which forms the initial pre-religious basis for an adolescent spirituality. This orientation is exemplified in the transcendental intuitive self-awareness that students have of themselves, through the activities of questioning, hoping and loving. This self-awareness comes to the fore in the everyday realities and experiences of their lives. They are experiences that resonate with their very core and as a result they move out beyond themselves or their situations. Such experiences may include everything from bereavement, a relationship or a simple act of kindness from another student. Through such acts of self-transcendence then, young people come to discover their true authentic self. A self that is by nature open to the divine and capable of being moved and transformed by any number of relationships or depth moments. Such moments are pre-figured by the ongoing psychological development of the adolescent. Here, self-transcendence constitutes a necessary element of cognitive, moral, religious and identity development. We have also seen the various blocks (Inheritance and Interpretative) in society that impedes the basic divine orientation of the adolescent to the divine. Finally, we explored how the medium of a retreat was used as a means to cultivate the inherent disposition toward God, which each adolescent has by his or her very nature.

The second tenet of the thesis, focused on the **centrality of Jesus** as a model of self-transcendence. At the beginning of the thesis, we explored how the divinity and humanity of Jesus was debated in the early Church and how the Council of Chalcedon affirmed his full humanity. We discovered how Jesus’ humanity was overlooked until an interest in his humanity re-emerged in the nineteen fifties. Relying on the theology of Karl Rahner, we can say that Jesus shared our transcendental orientation to the divine and the categorical living out of this orientation. Indeed, through his life and death, Jesus modelled for us the human orientation to God and the living out of this orientation. It is through the humanity of

Jesus then, that Christians come to see themselves as they truly are in the eyes of God. It is a view of Jesus that is neither extraneous or distant to people's lives, but rather speaks to their core and to their in-built orientation to God. It is incumbent upon young people then to listen to that which deepest within them and to recognise it as the gentle "light murmuring sound" (1 kgs 19:12) of God. A sound that is difficult to hear above the societal din of adolescent culture with the many competing messages. Yet, a sound that has the potential of striking a chord within the adolescent, if he or she is open to hearing it.

To finish, John Henry Newman once wrote, "no man will be a martyr for a conclusion".¹ For the Christian message to truly take hold in the life of the adolescent, it must move **them from within and transform them to go beyond themselves**. No longer will young people accept a message that does not speak to or resonate with them. It is incumbent upon those of us who work with young people therefore, to facilitate an atmosphere (or cultivate a disposition) that will allow that which is deepest within the life of the adolescent, to emerge and be spoken to. What is deepest in them is what is most human; the basic drive or desire for God.

And so it is the challenge of the Youth Minister, Chaplain or Catechist, to facilitate a movement from a transcendental to a categorical revelation of God. Only then will the glazed look of students that I spoke about in the introduction, transform to a look of recognition and fulfilment of who they are truly called to be.

¹ John Henry Newman, *Grammar of Assent* (London: Longman, 1901), p.6.

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