“BEING SALVATION”:
A REINTERPRETATION OF RAHNER’S CHRIST AS SAVIOR

A Dissertation

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Brandon Reed Peterson

Robert A. Krieg, Director

Graduate Program in Theology
Notre Dame, Indiana
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While Christ’s salvific role as “primal Sacrament” is a widely documented part of Karl Rahner’s soteriology, another major and yet underappreciated part is Christ’s identity as “Representative” (both our representative before God and God’s before us). The dissertation uncovers this identity within Rahner’s theology, situating it in relation to other historical examples of representative soteriology (e.g., Irenaeus of Lyons) and to Rahner’s more familiar sacramental soteriological categories. It gives special attention to Rahner’s early studies of and writings on the Church Fathers, particularly Rahner’s own untranslated and recently published dissertation, *E latere Christi* (“From the Side of Christ”).
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Figure 2: Thirteenth-century miniature, “Eva und Kirche.” Reproduced from Karl Künstle, *Ikonographie der christlichen Kunst*: vol. 1, pp. 276-277, labeled as “Bild 110.”

Figure 3: Thirteenth-century Bible illustration. Image reproduced from Karl Atz and Stephen D. Beissel, *De kirchliche Kunst in Wort und Bild* (Regensburg: Manz, 1915), p. 72, labeled as “Abb. 134.” For better use of space, I have rearranged the panels to proceed from left to right (horizontally) rather than from top to bottom (vertically).
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there was to learn about Catholic theology. J. Matthew Ashley led me farther down the rabbit hole with a doctoral seminar on Rahner, exposing me to the breadth of Rahner’s thought and providing me with a foundational knowledge and set of key texts to which I have returned again and again. Finally, I offer my sincere thanks to Robert Krieg, whose enthusiasm in the classroom, sharp insights, and exceptionally generous and wise support as the director of this project have formatively shaped me as a theologian.

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I dedicate this dissertation to my grandparents, Gertrude and Verner (“Pete”) Peterson and Lucille and C. Eugene (“Gene”) Green, whose lives have, each in their own unique way, brought to life Paul’s words about faith, hope, and love.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AH Against Heresies, Irenaeus of Lyons
CCC Cathechism of the Catholic Church
CD Church Dogmatics, Karl Barth
D Enchiridion Symbolorum (31st ed.), Denzinger, edited by Karl Rahner
DS Enchiridion Symbolorum (32nd ed.), Denzinger, edited by Adolf Schönmetzer
ET English translation.
FCF Foundations of Christian Faith, Karl Rahner
GS Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes), Vatican II
KRA Karl-Rahner-Archiv
LfTK Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche (encyclopedia)
LG Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium), Vatican II
NRSV New Revised Standard Version (Bible)
PG Migne’s Patrologia Graeca
PL Migne’s Patrologia Latina
RAM Revue d’Ascétique et de Mystique (journal)
SM Sacramentum Mundi, Karl Rahner
ST Summa Theologiae, Thomas Aquinas
SW Sämtliche Werke, Karl Rahner
SzT Schriften zur Theologie, Karl Rahner
TD Theo-Drama, Hans Urs von Balthasar
TI Theological Investigations, Karl Rahner
ZAM Zeitschrift für Aszese und Mystik (Innsbruck journal; eventual renamed Geist und Leben)
INTRODUCTION

Standing about 300 feet to the south of the Main Building at the University of Notre Dame stands a statue of Jesus. A look at the center of Jesus’ chest reveals his radiant Sacred Heart, after which the basilica on campus (which also stands about 300 feet away) is also named. His arms are spread widely and extended in a welcoming gesture to the north, greeting those who descend the front steps toward the central part of campus. This statue of Jesus also faces the towering statue of Mary which stands prominently on the top of the Main Building’s golden dome (Figure 1).

Over the past decade or so that I have been studying theology at Notre Dame, passing this statue on the way to mass in the Basilica of the Sacred Heart or the occasional class in the Main Building, I have come to appreciate this statue as a piece of art which expresses an important soteriological message. The message is particularly poignant during the campus-wide stations of the cross, which typically occurs on Tuesday of Holy Week. During this two hour procession, which ends at the basilica, a fourteen-foot cross is carried by students, eventually to the penultimate station located directly in front of Mary on the dome, very close to this statue. As at every other station, the people gathered intone, “Behold, behold, the wood of the cross, on which is hung our salvation; O come, let us adore.” Interestingly, these words do not refer to Jesus as our
Savior, the one who brings about our salvation, but rather as our salvation itself. This soteriological message is further underlined by the Sacred Heart statue, beneath which rests a plaque which bears the words, *VENITE AD ME OMNES* (“Come unto me All”). The Christ depicted here is not simply dispensing grace which he has merited (i.e., “Receive the fruit of my work”), but is rather inviting the observer toward him, beckoning the world into his open arms where it can enter into his radiant, Sacred Heart.

Figure 1: Sacred Heart of Jesus statue, located immediately south of the Main Building at the University of Notre. (A). Rear. I took this photograph in January 2004 during my first year of undergraduate coursework at Notre Dame. (B) Front. I took this photograph in May 2014 during my final year of the Ph.D. program in theology.

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2 The reference to Jesus as salvation itself is confirmed by the phrase which follows, “let us adore.” Properly speaking, the wood of the cross is only *venerated*, whereas God alone *adored*. Thus, the object of the second clause is not the wood of the cross, but rather the salvation (i.e., Jesus) just mentioned. For more background on the devotion to Jesus’ Sacred Heart, see note 193 below.
This dissertation can be summarized as an argument that the theology of Karl Rahner has this same soteriological insight at its core: Jesus is best understood not just as a super-agent who performs and makes possible our salvation, but as the very locus of salvation itself. Since salvation consists in our existing in the immediate presence of God, partaking in his very life and even nature (2 Pet 1:4), this insight could also be expressed in Pauline terms: Our eternal life lies in our becoming “members” of the body of Jesus (1 Cor 12), the one who is both fully human and fully God (Phil 2); Christian existence is one of being “in” Christ, who sums up all creation in himself (Eph 1), the New Adam (Rom 5). In order to make the case that Rahner exemplifies this kind of soteriological rationale, I utilize a theological category under the name “representative soteriology.” Although the word “representative” has been used in soteriological discussions in a number of ways, I specify the shape of this category by appealing to three particular markers and the way in which they interact, namely (i.) Christ, gathering up the human family in himself, brings us before God, (ii.) Christ mediates the presence of God to us, and (iii.) Christ effects our salvation in a person-centered, rather than a primarily act-centered manner (Jesus not only does our salvation – he is our salvation!). Paradigmatic instances of representative soteriology occur in the theology of the early Church Fathers, especially that of Irenaeus of Lyons and his idea of “recapitulation.” Representative soteriology differs in very important ways from the idea of “physical redemption,” a purely ontological and incarnational theory of atonement attributed broadly to the Church Fathers in the early twentieth century.

Although the first chapter itself provides a more thorough introduction to the dissertation’s outline, method, and objectives, let me say a brief word here about how it
unfolds. The first chapter surveys the secondary literature on Rahner’s soteriology. In this literature, both Rahner’s critics and supporters predominately classify his soteriological thought as “sacramental.” My primary thesis is not that this assessment is wrong, but that it only tells part of the story: In Rahner’s particular system of thought, sacramental and representative soteriologies necessarily supplement one another. This first chapter features one especially important critic, whose critique resurfaces throughout the dissertation, namely Hans Urs von Balthasar. Balthasar deems Rahner’s soteriology, which he portrays in terms of symbol and solidarity, to insufficiently recognize Jesus’ death as pro nobis – in fact, he claims that Rahner’s soteriology is utterly inimical to the idea of Christ “representing” us. In the second chapter, I offer an in-depth look at the “sacramental” character of Rahner’s soteriology, analyzing his primary writings on das Realsymbol and demonstrating the relationship between sacramental soteriology (widely associated with Rahner) and representative soteriology. In the third chapter, I move away from Rahner’s writings in order to consider classical, patristic instances of representative soteriology; here, Irenaeus of Lyons looms especially large. In Chapter 4, I turn to back to Rahner, examining the soteriology operative in his early writings which draw heavily and explicitly upon the patristic categories treated in the previous chapter; in doing so, I focus especially on his theology dissertation, E latere Christi (“From the Side of Christ”). Finally, the last chapter examines the work from the latter half of Rahner’s

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career, demonstrating that the representative soteriology which he adopted during his early, patristic phase continues to have a formative impact on his mature theology.

It is very important to clarify that although Balthasar’s critique serves to some extent as a point of departure for my argument, I do not intend for this dissertation to be a work in “Rahner vs. Balthasar” polemics. The contemporary Catholic Church and the theologians within it are, in my judgment, frequently divided in a bizarre and unnecessarily tribalist fashion, often accompanied by broad (and often politically charged) labels of “liberal” and “conservative.” There are indeed very important theological differences between Rahner and Balthasar, and these differences certainly deserve to be studied in a careful and reasonable manner. However, this dissertation is not primarily concerned with such differences, and even less is it an exercise in Balthasar-bashing. Rather, my intention is to point out and elaborate upon a dimension of Rahner’s thought which has been significantly underappreciated by his critics and apologists alike. Since Balthasar’s critique provides an articulate and very convenient entry point into how Rahner’s soteriology is typically (and only partially) understood, I have made use of it.

To this point I should also add a short autobiographical note, namely, that this Balthasarian critique overlaps to a large extent with my own suspicious reaction to Rahner upon first encountering his thought as an undergraduate. As a student in a course called “Christian Anthropology,” I was perplexed as to how Rahner’s theological anthropology, with its ideas of the “supernatural existential,” human freedom, and self-transcendence, made any essential connection to Jesus Christ. I certainly recognized the maxim that “Christology may be studied as self-transcending anthropology, and
anthropology as deficient Christology,” but it was unclear to me how Jesus could function for Rahner as anything more than a prime instance of successful humanity. By the end of this undergraduate course, I clearly understood that Rahner’s anthropology posited that the free human person’s “Yes” to grace was always a “Yes” to Christ, but it would take a couple of graduate courses and further study of Rahner’s theology of das Realsymbol before I really had any significant grasp upon why this was the case. It was only later that I discovered that das Realsymbol provides only part of Rahner’s answer to this connection between the believer, grace, and Christ. Thus, this dissertation stands as the next major step in my own quest as a theologian to fully appreciate the role which Christ plays in Rahner’s thought.

Throughout the process of research and writing, I have come to appreciate how Rahner’s soteriology is to a large degree encapsulated by that Sacred Heart statue which I have walked by so many times during my time at Notre Dame. Perhaps it is symptomatic of being over-invested in my own small project, but I cannot approach this statue now without stopping and thinking of Rahner’s words: “I want to see the pierced side of him who has locked me in his heart and who therefore took me with him when he went home, passing over from this world through death to the Father, so that I, too, am now where only God can be. I want to see the wood of the Cross, on which the salvation of the world, my salvation, hung. Come let us adore him.”


5 “Good Friday: ‘Behold the Wood of the Cross...’,” in The Great Church Year, pp. 149-154 at p. 154.
CHAPTER 1:
CHRIST THE NOTIFICATION?
CRITIQUES AND CATEGORIZATIONS OF RAHNER’S SOTERIOLOGY

1.1 Rahner: A Target of Criticism

Karl Rahner’s status as one of the most influential theologians of the twentieth century is uncontested. However, valuations of that impact differ significantly. While many have celebrated his influence on Catholic theology, others have viewed his theology with deep suspicion. The time surrounding the Second Vatican Council exemplifies this phenomenon. In the years leading up to this event, Rahner had garnered enough detractors among the Roman Curia to have him entirely excluded from council preparations. Once he was included, which occurred only after Pope John XXIII’s personal intervention at Cardinal Julius Döpfner’s behest, his activities quickly led to the appointment of a Roman censor for all of his writings. While Cardinal Alfredo Ottaviani (the head of the Holy Office) eventually remitted the censor and even gained a deep respect for Rahner over the course of the council, some of his detractors remained steadfastly opposed to his thinking; during the council, a group of “French integralists”

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published a pamphlet identifying Rahner and Joseph Ratzinger as “heretics who… are worse than Teilhard and the modernists.”⁸ On the other hand, his theological contributions were embraced by enough council fathers to find expression in a multitude of the council’s documents, including *Lumen gentium*, *Dei Verbum*, and *Gaudium et Spes*.

In the years following Vatican II, Rahner’s detractors continued to criticize his thought sharply. Perhaps the most well-known of such criticism was leveled by the Swiss Catholic theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar. Among Balthasar’s major concerns were that Rahner jeopardized the demands and truth claims of Christian revelation in an attempt to “accommodate” the contemporary world⁹ and that his theory of the “anonymous Christian” was an oxymoron which (among other things) eviscerated evangelism and missionary activity.¹⁰ But along with these worries, Balthasar voiced a concern that for Rahner, Jesus Christ doesn’t actually “do” anything to accomplish our salvation.

This latter concern about Karl Rahner’s soteriology is central to this dissertation as its instigating point. That is, the question about how (and even whether) Rahner

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⁸ Karl Rahner, “Es ist merkwürdig bei einem Konzil,” *Stimmen Der Zeit* 9/2012, pp. 590-596, at p. 591. English quotations from non-English sources in this dissertation are, unless otherwise noted, my own translations.


understands Christ to *effect* human salvation serves as a point of departure for this study of his christology and soteriology, a study which takes this accusation seriously and attempts to interpret Rahner in such a way as to allay the concerns which underlie it (namely, insistence upon an authentic and robust christocentricity and on the indispensable place of the Paschal Mystery as the nexus point of salvation history). Let us turn to Balthasar’s critique itself.

1.1.1 The Instigating Question: Balthasar

In the fourth volume of his *Theo-Drama* series, Balthasar devotes about 80 pages to a historical outline of Christian soteriology before elaborating his own “dramatic” soteriology.\(^\text{11}\) Within this historical outline, he identifies two contemporary soteriological approaches, which he classifies in terms of “solidarity” (e.g., J. Alfaro, H. Küng, E. Schillebeeckx, Rahner) and “substitution” (e.g., K. Barth, W. Pannenberg, J. Moltmann, but also Catholics like Garrigou-Lagrange, Blondel, Daniélou). Balthasar’s own stated course of action is to synthesize these two insights, so that Christ’s solidarity *with* sinful humanity extends to a point of taking our sinfulness upon himself, and thus undergoing unique and unprecedented alienation from God; in the words of Jean Galot (of which Balthasar approves), “There is solidarity, it is true, but it extends as far as substitution [*bis zur Substitution*]: Christ’s solidarity with us goes as far as taking our place [*unsere*

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Balthasar insists that any account of “solidarity” ought to (i.) encompass human sinfulness (for “the incarnate Son of God’s solidarity [is] with sinful humanity”), and (ii.) “extend” into a unique, unsurpassable, vicarious suffering on the part of Jesus as a result of this sinfulness. However, Balthasar laments, solidarity “easily slides unnoticed into misuse at the hands of a liberal Christology that puts the emphasis on Jesus’ solidarity—expressed in his life and teaching—with the poor, sinners and the marginalized and sees the Cross as nothing more than the ultimate consequence of this ‘social’ solidarity.” On this view, “Jesus became the Redeemer, not by his death on the Cross, but by his moral example and his teaching.” Continuing, Balthasar explains that this understanding of “solidarity” tries to draw on the patristic understanding of the “exchange” between God and humanity which occurred in Jesus, but asserts that this “commercium no longer operates at the ontological plane but only on the social and

\[Stelle einnehmend\] and allowing the whole weight of human guilt to fall upon him.”

That is, “the idea of solidarity is insufficient, without that of representative (‘vicarious’) suffering.”

\[TD IV p. 297. The entire phrase “representative (‘vicarious’) suffering” is Graham Harrison’s translation of Stellvertretung.\]

\[Ibid.\]

\[Ibid., p. 268.\]

\[Ibid..\]

\[Ibid., pp 268-269.\]
psychological level.” 17 At this point, Balthasar concludes his treatment of contemporary solidarity soteriologies with an “excursus” on Karl Rahner. 18

From the outset, Balthasar portrays Rahner’s soteriology as inimical to theories of “representation.” “In Scripture, in the Fathers, and in Anselm, the pro nobis, preeminently in the Cross of Christ, is interpreted as a representative expiation [stellvertretende Sühne]. Rahner rejects this interpretation.” 19 As evidence, he cites an instance where Rahner critiques the idea of Jesus taking our place in such a way that “self-redemption” is undercut. 20 (It should be noted that in the passage cited by Balthasar, 21 Rahner specifically sets Anselmian “satisfaction theory,” rather than all accounts of “representation,” in opposition to “self-redemption.”) Moreover, Balthasar makes note of Rahner’s refrain that “God, who is unchangeable, cannot be caused to

17 Ibid., p. 273.

18 For purposes of reference to the original German text, this section can be found in vol. 3 of Theodramatik (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1980), pp. 253-262.

19 TD IV p. 274.

20 Ibid., note 5. Rahner explains the term self-redemption in “The One Christ and the Universality of Salvation” (1975): “If, however, self-redemption means that a man can achieve his fulfilment without God, then any form of self-redemption is foreign to Christian teaching. Christian salvation can only be understood as self-redemption in the sense that a man does not merely receive his salvation in a passive manner but rather realises it with total, and not just partial, freedom. The very possibility of freedom, however, is established by God through nature and grace. To gain a proper idea of this grace one should not conceive of the grace in which a man achieves salvation as an external means but rather as the innermost core of human freedom which is freely constituted by God” (TI 16:199-224, at pp. 206-207). Rahner returns to the term in “The Christian Understanding of Redemption” (1981), where he writes, “it is simply wrong to maintain that self-redemption and redemption from outside are…mutually exclusive” (TI 21:239-254, at p. 241).

21 Namely, from “The One Christ and the Universality of Salvation,” TI 16:208. As Bathasar cites it, “This theory ‘requires man’s place to be taken by Jesus in a way that is ultimately beyond our powers to conceive; it contradicts a proper understanding of man’s self-redemption…”” (TD IV p. 274, emphasis original. Note: G. Harrison’s English translation here differs from the one in TI, cited below in note 141).
‘change his mind’ by an event in the world like the Cross of Christ; he cannot be changed from an insulted, wrathful God to a reconciled God.” In rejecting this extreme view, which, Balthasar (rightly) notes, neither Anselm nor Scripture hold, Rahner is alleged to have thrown out the baby (“representation”) with the bathwater (theories of atonement based on changing God rather than us), as it were.

Balthasar goes on to say that Rahner’s immutable, saving God is styled as “he-who-is-always-reconciled [der je-schon-Versöhnte],” a vision of God which renders the “the Incarnation and death of Jesus Christ…only…a final cause or…a ‘quasi-sacramental’ cause.” According to Balthasar, such causality means that “it is not Christ who, in virtue of his uniqueness, embraces and contains mankind [die Menscheit in sich einfaßt] in order to reconcile it to God through his suffering—for we have already heard that such ‘representative’ action [Stellvertretung] is inconceivable.” While he does not go so far to say that Christ’s soteriological significance is for Rahner simply that of a moral exemplar, Balthasar repeats that for him “Jesus could not represent [stellvertreten] men in any other way but that in which one man is able to ‘be there’ for

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22 TD IV p. 275. As Balthasar notes, Rahner on several occasions (unfairly) attributes such a view to Anselm.

23 Such a description of God is embraced by Hegel in his account of the Christ-event, in which “God has shown himself to be by his very nature reconciled with the world” (Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion, 3 vols. (New York: Humanities Press, 1962), vol. 3 p. 99). But cf. Rahner’s claim in “Reconciliation and Vicarious Representation” (1982) that “God has reconciled the world to himself in Jesus the crucified” (TI 21:255-269, at p. 261).

24 TD IV p. 276.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid., p. 277
another”; Jesus is one graced man who exists in a weak “solidarity” with others who are not “essentially different” from himself.27 Rahner’s preference for a robust account of personal freedom (interpreted as “self-activation of the subject in its totality”) weakens his account of “solidarity,” and so “it remains unclear in what sense—if Christ is to be more than an example—Rahner wishes to speak of ‘sharing’ [«Teilnahme»] in the death of Christ.”28 Balthasar admits that Rahner “[o]ccasionally…does speak of a participation [Teilnahme] in the death of Jesus,” but confusingly “veto[es] against Jesus genuinely ‘representing’ [echte Stellvertretung] sinners.”29 Alternatively, Balthasar suggests that Jesus “on our behalf (that is, as our representative), should endure the alienating alienation… liberating man from alienation.” Such a “genuine ‘representation’ [Stellvertretung] (that is, on behalf of, and in the place of, the sinner)” would in fact enable rather than detract from our own self-actualization.30

Balthasar concludes his soteriological concerns by turning to Rahner’s more specifically christological writings. It seems, he says, that for Rahner, Jesus’ “(hypostatic) unity is only the highest instance… of the unity that comes about in the coincidence of the human transcendence toward the divine horizon and God’s self-

27 Ibid.
28 Ibid., pp. 278-279.
29 Ibid., p. 280.
30 Ibid., p. 281.
That is, “the ‘Hypostatic Union’… appears to be only the ‘most successful instance’” of concrete human nature, to which God is communicating himself.

Balthasar’s criticism of Karl Rahner can be summarized as follows: Determined to provide a robust account of human freedom, Rahner has constructed an anthropology according to which an immutable God is consistently self-communicating in grace to members of the human race as they, in turn, self-realize by accepting this grace. Jesus’ role within this scheme is merely to exist as the most successful case of this dynamic of self-communication and realization. While Rahner infrequently gives superficial lip-service to notions of our “participating” in Christ, he eschews any suggestion of Christ as our “representative” from his system, under the historically naïve pretense of guarding against atonement theories which seek to change God rather than us. The result is a rather weak soteriology: “Christ’s Passion,” Balthasar remarks with Rahner clearly in mind, “is more than a sacramental sign that God is reconciled to the world and is applying the fruits of this reconciliation to the world.” In other words, Rahner’s Christ does not so much do anything to effect our salvation as he does simply exist as a kind of notification to the world of what God is always and consistently doing anyway.

1.1.2 Concerns Related to Balthasar’s

This multifaceted critique raised by Balthasar proved to be quite influential after its publication. Not only was Rahner himself painfully aware of it, as we will see in Chapter 5, but Balthasar’s criticism exerted its influence on other evaluations of Rahner’s

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31 Ibid.

32 Ibid., p. 265
Christology and soteriology. Here, let us briefly consider two critical readers of Rahner whose interpretation of his soteriology overlap with that of Balthasar.

1.1.2.1 Guy Mansini

The first half of Guy Mansini’s *The Word Has Dwelt Among Us* is devoted explicitly to Christological considerations. A large swath of this first half deals with the theologies of Rahner and Balthasar, in places setting the two in contrast to one another. The book’s seventh chapter, “Rahner and Balthasar on the Efficacy of the Cross,” contrasts the two on the issue of soteriology. At the outset of this chapter, Mansini summarizes Rahner’s soteriological desiderata as follows: “the Cross is the cause of salvation only in a quite restrained sense, after the manner of a sacrament”; soteriology must “avoid[] the ‘inconceivable notion’ that Christ is our representative on the Cross or does anything in our stead,” but must instead stand as “an account in which ‘self-redemption’ has a prominent place”; the “anger of God…becomes a minor or even non-existent theme”; and finally, soteriology cannot undermine God’s immutability.

Mansini then proceeds to give a more detailed reading of Rahner’s later, explicitly soteriological works, relying on Anselm Grün’s work as a guide. The way in which Rahner proposes to best realize the above desiderata, Mansini suggests, is to propose that

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34 Ibid., p. 94.

Christ’s cross effects salvation according to the mode of a sacrament. In doing so, Rahner “equates saying that the death of Jesus ‘causes’ salvation with saying that it has a ‘meaning’ for us,” for “the Cross is supposed to cause simply because it signifies.”

Pointing out that such a proposal may seem to “do[] nothing more than reduce the Cross to an event of revelation, a sort of demonstration of God’s love,” Mansini observes that Rahner “tries” to underline the robust sacramental character of signifying in this case. Even so, Mansini’s language of “tries,” as well as “supposed to cause,” anticipates his own evaluation of Rahner’s level of success in styling Christ as an “effective exemplar (produktive Vorbild).”

Mansini’s explicit evaluation occurs after a lengthy treatment of Balthasar’s own soteriology. In that evaluation, Mansini cites Balthasar’s own “excursus” on Rahner’s soteriology, noting that it can “be argued that Rahner does not do justice to the New Testament foundations of the notion of representation,” a notion which Mansini says Rahner “jettison[s].” Mansini suggests that Rahner’s insistence on avoiding this term is not in fact to protect human freedom, as Rahner himself claims (and which Mansini suspects to be a false pretense), but rather is due to Rahner’s insistence on protecting divine immutability, combined with Rahner’s inability to realize that the cross can

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36 Mansini, The Word has Dwelt Among Us, p. 98.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid., pp. 98-99.
change things other than God (namely, “it can work an economic change”). Mansini concludes that the cross “is not merely the manifestation of the antecedent salvific will of God (Rahner), but is also a change – but only in the economy.”

To be clear, Mansini does not adopt own Balthasar’s own soteriological system (indeed, he is quite critical of it), but his critique of Rahner leans significantly on Balthasar’s “excursus.” Mansini judges Rahner’s soteriology to acknowledge the cross’s salvific efficacy in only a “restrained” sense, that the paschal mystery becomes for Rahner simply a “sort of demonstration of God’s love,” and that Rahner “jettisons” any notion of Christ “representing” humanity.

1.1.2.2 George Vass

George Vass, who inherited Rahner’s own chair at the University of Innsbruck, devotes the fourth volume of his series on “Understanding Karl Rahner” to the topic of “The Atonement and Mankind’s Salvation.” Although much of this volume is dominated by consideration of the “anonymous Christian,” it includes a more general evaluation of Rahner’s overall soteriology as well. Vass makes it clear from the

40 Ibid. Interestingly, Mansini is even more critical of Balthasar, deeming that much of Balthasar’s constructive soteriology “must be abandoned,” due to his confusion over Christ’s natures leading him to improperly “import” things into the immanent Trinity (pp. 111-112). Mansin’s ultimate conclusion is that both giants of the twentieth century are inadequate, and the best soteriological move is to retreat to medieval scholastic theology: “where we are left after we use Rahner to criticize Balthasar, and Balthasar to criticize Rahner, is with the prior tradition, the tradition of St. Anselm and St. Thomas on ‘satisfaction’” (p. 113).

41 Ibid., p. 112.

beginning that he feels an “uneasiness” with Rahner’s account of human salvation, quickly going on to boldly assert that “Rahner has, properly speaking, no theory of redemption” at all. Vass explains,

What has made me uneasy throughout in presenting Rahner’s soteriology is the fact that he seems to explain away this dramatic character of man’s redemption by either reducing it to the historical process of man’s ‘engracement’ by Christ, or attributing it to God, whose love is unalterable in his salvific purpose. Of course, these are mediated through Jesus Christ, but mediation in itself means an a-personal function which does not allow the contours of the personal Mediator to appear, the Christ who, because through his deed mankind’s fate was basically altered, apparently changes the attitude of God to mankind.

Vass is much more at home with more act-centered, dramatic soteriological theories in which the interplay between God, Jesus, and the rest of humanity, moves into an open future in which all parties are, in some way or another, changed. By shunning words like “propitiation” and “ransom,” Rahner renders his view a sterile, playing-out of a pre-ordained process, which Vass at several points even compares to Hegel’s system. As this process goes through the motions, Christ’s mediation is simply the result of God’s will, the eventual realization of which was really just a matter of course. According to Vass, any genuine theory of redemption accounts for Christ performing “a free deed… on

43 Ibid., p. 16.

44 Ibid., p. 17.


46 “A justifiable suspicion may arise that in Rahner’s thought mediation can be reduced to a pre-established, if not necessary, fulfillment of God’s self-bestowal on mankind” (Ibid., p. 17).
our behalf. The Mediator was destined by God to do freely something which man was unable to do.”⁴⁷

Vass’s lament over the lack of an authentic, representative-Mediator is only one of several ways in which his critique of Rahner echoes Balthasar’s excursus. Explicitly citing Balthasar, Vass wonders whether on Rahner’s system there exists “a difference between man and the Incarnate beyond that of degree?” – for it seems to Vass that Christ is for Rahner merely a prime instance of successful humanity, and as Balthasar suggests, even Mary could fulfill this function in the same way.⁴⁸ In the end, Rahner’s soteriology boils down to Christ notifying the world of a salvation which is already occurring:

“man’s soteria through the mediation of Christ’s cross is but the manifestation of God’s ever permanent loving concern to save mankind.”⁴⁹

Vass’s assumption that the two ideas of (i.) a representative-Mediator and (ii.) the performance of a discrete, salvific task are inextricably bound to one another is an assumption which should be kept in mind as the dissertation unfolds. Indeed, I would suggest that Vass’s assumption that Christ’s “representation” is bound together with a singular vicarious act is also operative in Balthasar’s own similar critique. It is no

⁴⁷ “Rahner seems painstakingly to avoid words connected with or expressing this drama: ‘expiation’, ‘propitiation’, ‘sacrifice’, ‘ransom’, and their like…. Yet, these words seem to have been part and parcel of the traditional faith: Christ’s mediation was always thought to be a free deed of an incarnate person – on our behalf. The Mediator was destined by God to do freely something which man was unable to do” (Ibid., p. 18).

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 19. Cf. Balthasar’s remark in his excursus on Rahner’s soteriology, “Furthermore, we would have to ask why the death of Mary (and her life, which was a preparation for it) did not lead to the same hypostatic union. Was she not free, according to Catholic teaching, from all inherited and personal guilt? And, as such, since she was perfect, was her death not of the same quality as that of Jesus?” (TD IV p. 280).

surprise that both thinkers thus find Rahner’s soteriology “inadequate,” precisely in its lack of any dramatic element.

1.1.3 Doubts Raised by the International Theological Commission

Several others have raised doubts about Rahner’s place for Christ in the story of human salvation. Among the more amicable of such criticisms can be found in “Select Questions on the Theology of God the Redeemer,” published by the Vatican’s International Theological Commission (ITC) in 1995. The text begins with “an outline of the authentic Christian teaching on redemption and its bearing on the human condition, as the Church has propounded this teaching in the course of her tradition.” After anthropological considerations about “the human condition” which is seriously affected by sin, a brief survey of concepts similar to redemption in other major religions, and reflections about the human situation in the modern world, the text moves on to consider redemption from biblical and historical perspectives (Parts II and III, respectively). The latter is of particular interest for us. In its discussion of medieval theologies of redemption, the document makes a distinction between a “descending,” incarnational dimension of redemption which emphasizes God’s initiative, and an “ascending” dimension of “legal restitution” embodied by “theor[ies] of sacrifice” and Anselm’s notion of “vicarious satisfaction.”


51 Ibid., Part III, nn. 16, 25.
Rahner enters the discussion as a twentieth century theologian “who wish[es] to restore the sense of God’s ‘descending’ action on behalf of his needy creatures.” The whole idea of “expiatory sacrifice,” which the ITC has classified as “ascending,” is identified as repugnant to Rahner’s sensibilities. Rather than “expiator,” Rahner’s Christ is styled as “both God’s irrevocable self-communication in grace and the acceptance of that self-communication by humanity.” The document does an admirable job of succinctly stating Rahner’s assertion that Christ’s redemptive role operates in accordance with “quasi-sacramental causality” (a topic to which we will devote significant attention below) in which “God’s salvific will posits the sign, in this case the death of Jesus along with his resurrection, and in and through the sign it causes what is signified”; Christ himself is described as one such efficacious sign, “a symbolic reality.”

The fruits of the redemption brought about in this way by Christ may, for Rahner, “be obtained through the acceptance of the inner self-communication of God which is given to all, as a ‘supernatural existential.’”

In its evaluation of Rahner’s contribution to recent soteriology, the ITC praises his emphasis upon God’s (“descending”) initiative and the human response to that love. It also notes that Rahner is able circumvent many of the pitfalls associated with popular

52 Ibid., Part III, n. 30.
53 Ibid., Part III, n. 30.
55 Ibid., Part III, n. 30.
56 Ibid., Part III, n. 31.
“ascending”) “legalistic” articulations of redemption. However, it raises some suspicions which echo those voiced by Balthasar, especially concerning “the causal efficacy of the Christ event and especially to the redemptive character of Jesus’ death on the Cross.” Specifically, it asks, “Does the Christ-symbol simply express and communicate what is antecedently given in God’s universal salvific will? Is God’s inner word (as ‘transcendental revelation’) emphasized at the expense of the outer word given in the proclamation of the gospel as good news?”

In other words, the ITC expresses the concern that for Rahner, salvation is extended as an offer to all through God’s universally operative salvific will and appropriated via the “supernatural existential” which exists in the heart of every person; Christ, on the other hand, may “simply express” this widespread and continually ongoing occurrence.

Interestingly, Balthasar’s critical evaluation finds another echo in the ITC’s evaluation of Rahner. It is noteworthy that after making a distinction between “ascending” and “descending” dimensions of redemption, Rahner’s own theology is explicitly associated with the “descending” movement (although, if pushed, the authors

57 Ibid., n. 32.

58 Ibid., n. 32.

59 The ITC’s lukewarm and even wary evaluation, nevertheless infused with genuine respect and praise, bears a remarkable resemblance to an evaluation of Rahner’s Christology and soteriology offered by Joseph Ratzinger in Principles of Catholic Theology (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1987), pp. 162-171. There, Ratzinger discusses the critique that Rahner’s idea of universal orientation toward self-transcendence, which is “concretized” in Christ and his Church, results in a “Christianity that is no more than a reflected universality” (p. 166). To this, Ratzinger suggests, “Rahner could, of course, refute all this by saying that he, too, takes as his point of departure that which is inconceivably new, the Event that is the Savior. He could say that what is universal has now become that which saves only because, in this Savior, a universality of being has come to pass that could not emanate from being itself. I prefer to leave open the question of whether this does justice, on a conceptual level, to what is particular and unique in the salvation history that has its center in Christ” (ibid.).
would likely acknowledge the “human response” element of Rahner’s theology as “ascending”\textsuperscript{60}. In the section which follows its discussion of Rahner, titled “Retrieval of Earlier Tradition,” the ITC notes the efforts of “contemporary Catholic theologians [who] are seeking to maintain in tension the ‘descending’ and ‘ascending’ themes of classical soteriology.” It goes on to offer a “composite” sketch of this growing movement, which draws upon “Irenaeus, Augustine, and Thomas Aquinas” and which typically take the form of “narrative or dramatic” accounts.\textsuperscript{61} These accounts, it notes, fulfill their “ascending” dimension not through “legalistic theories of restitution or penal substitution,” but rather put the accent on what we might call representative headship…. Christ identifies himself with fallen humanity. He is the new Adam, the progenitor of redeemed humanity, the Head or the vine into whom individuals must be incorporated as members or branches…. The incarnate Word becomes the gathering point for the constitution of a reconciled and restored humanity.\textsuperscript{62}

This representative of ours, Christ, the ITC goes on to say, “identifies with sinful humanity and experiences the pain of its alienation from God,” a comment which echoes Balthasar’s call for a representative Savior who “endure[s] the alienating alienation.”\textsuperscript{63}

\textsuperscript{60} Joseph Wong notes that Rahner himself makes the “ascending” and “descending” distinctions and that Rahner’s christology and soteriology embody both aspects (although later in his career Rahner especially emphasized the former). See section 1.2.2 below.

\textsuperscript{61} ITC, “Select Questions on God the Redeemer,” Part III, n. 57. This latter remark makes it clear that Balthasar, whose \textit{Theo-Drama} volumes discuss soteriology at length, is among the theologians being exeposed.


\textsuperscript{63} I would argue that this latter qualification about alienation need not be part of a “representative” soteriology, although the elements in the foregoing description quoted from the ITC constitute the very heart of such a category.
The presentation of “ascending” and “descending” soteriologies offered in the ITC’s “God the Redeemer” implicitly evaluate Rahner in a similar way as Balthasar has, namely, as a theologian whose theory of redemption stands opposite from categorizations of Christ as our “representative.” While Balthasar explicitly makes this claim, the ITC document suggests it by deeming Rahner a “descending” thinker and subsequently articulating representation as an alternative to “restitution” within the “ascending” group of soteriological concepts. Although the ITC clearly appreciates much of Rahner’s theology on this topic, the document’s reader is left with the impression that for Rahner, the heavy lifting, as it were, of the work of redemption is perhaps being carried out by God’s salvific will and the supernatural existential, and that the most fruitful path forward in Catholic theologies of redemption lies elsewhere, in a retrieval of the idea of “representation.”

1.1.4 Other Assessments of Rahner’s Christology

Framing the issue differently but touching on many of the same themes already discussed, Schubert Ogden has contended that Rahner’s Christology ends up being “constitutive” (i.e., Christ as the sine qua non of human salvation) in name only, and, in effect, collapses into normative (i.e., exemplary) christology. His succinct but overall fair treatment of Rahner (with whom he disagrees but who he still finds to be

64 Schubert M. Ogden, Is There Only One True Religion or Are There Many? (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1992), 93-95.

65 Ogden uses the descriptor “representative” for what others (e.g., J. Dupuis, J. Wong) have labeled “normative.” This differs entirely from how we are using “representative” in this dissertation (a usage which coincides with constitutive christology, rather than standing as its mutually exclusive alternative).
“ingenious,” “subtle,” and “nuanced”) notes that Rahner tries to avoid two soteriological alternatives which are often presented as exhaustive.66 On the one hand, most accounts of Christ’s being constitutive of salvation (in distinction from simply being its norm)67 are framed in terms of the satisfaction theory, which Rahner believes almost inevitably to suggest that Jesus effects salvation by changing God (i.e., mollifying wrath, etc.; this sort of salvific efficacy accords with Gerald O’Collins’s description of “propitiation,” as it was understood in Greek paganism).68 On the other hand, merely attributing a normative salvific role to Christ is not sufficient for Rahner, who wants to preserve the traditional claim that Christ uniquely causes of our salvation as its constitutive source.

As Ogden summarizes, Rahner avoids these two soteriological horns (in some places, at least) by turning to a Thomistic (and, more originally, Aristotelian) distinction between “efficient” and “final” causality. While the Christ-event cannot “efficiently” cause or bring about God’s salvific will (which is, rather, eternal and consistent), Jesus

66 Ibid., p. 94.

67 In discussing a widely read article by J. P. Schineller, S.J. (“Christ and Church: A Spectrum of Views,” Theological Studies 37 (1976), pp. 545-566), Brian McDermott, S.J., summarizes this distinction well: “By a constitutive position he means one according to which salvation would not be a reality if the life, death, and resurrection of Christ had not occurred; Christ is necessary and sufficient as the one who brings about salvation. A normative Christology, on the other hand, sees Christ as the supreme God-given norm, pattern, or example of salvation, in the light of which other legitimate paths to salvation may be illuminated, evaluated, and purified. No Christology can be constitutive without also being normative, but a Christology can be normative without being constitutive” (Word Become Flesh: Dimensions in Christology (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1993), p. 283). Typically, conversations about Christ’s “constitutive” role in salvation occurs in the context of theology of religions, as theologians argue about the role and extent which Christ and non-Christian religious have in the salvation of non-Christian individuals. See Jacques Dupuis, S.J., Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1997.

68 This connection, which Rahner indeed makes, is rather unfair to satisfaction theory, but may be more accurately associated with (at least some versions of) penal substitution theory. On “propitiation,” see O’Collins, Jesus Our Redeemer: A Christian Approach to Salvation (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 15-18.
Christ can be and in fact is its “final” cause. Rahner explains this latter category by describing Christ as the “primal sacrament” who communicates grace according to the same kind of causality by which the sacraments operate. While Ogden does not elaborate much on Rahner’s favored causality, we will explore it in detail in the second chapter.

Although Ogden has a great respect for Rahner’s efforts, he, without “claiming to offer an adequate criticism of Rahner’s...thesis,” finds it unconvincing. In Ogden’s judgment, Rahner’s attempt to split the horns of propitiation and normative christology ends up crashing into either of the two boundaries. He explains,

If there is a real and not merely verbal difference in the Christ event’s not being the efficient cause of God’s saving will, but being its final cause instead, then, so far as I can see, the Christ event is not really constitutive of salvation after all, but only representative [ = normative] of it, similar to the way in which sacraments in general are thus representative. If, on the other hand, the Christ event is different enough from sacraments generally not only to represent God’s saving will but also really constitute it, then, in my view, there is not a real, but only verbal, difference in its being called the final cause of God’s will to save instead of its efficient cause.

In Ogden’s final judgment, Rahner’s idea of Christ as “primal sacrament” and “final cause” consistent more with a normative rather than constitutive christology.

(Ogden himself opts for such a normative position and appropriates Rahner’s terminology of Christ as “primal sacrament”; he does, on the other hand, claim that “Jesus is constitutive of Christianity.”)

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69 Ogden, Is There Only One True Religion or Are There Many?, p. 94.

70 Ibid..

71 Ibid., pp. 96-97.
While Ogden recognizes Rahner’s (allegedly unfulfilled) desire to affirm a constitutive christology, J.T. Farmer goes so far as to simply categorize Rahner’s christology as normative. According to such a position, “Salvation, always possible for all humanity even apart from Christ, becomes normatively present in him.”\(^\text{72}\) Such a position in fact matches quite nicely with the criticisms which Balthasar has leveled at Rahner, namely, that Christ is merely “the most successful instance” of a humanity to which God is communicating himself, one graced man among many. It should be noted that such a normative categorization of Rahner is convincingly rebutted by Joseph Wong in an article cited by Farmer (mistakenly in support of) himself.\(^\text{73}\)

Finally, a more specific criticism about Christ’s efficacy in Rahner’s soteriology concerns the role of the cross. Using Rahner, Schillebeeckx, and other twentieth-century theologians as a foil to compare against his own soteriology, Thomist Rik Van Nieuwenhove says that Rahner in fact “fail[s] – or refuse[s] – to attribute any salvific significance to the cross of Christ.”\(^\text{74}\) Such a critique is at once more specific and more caustic than those above. Rather than the salvific efficacy of the entire Christ event, Van Nieuwenhove hones in on Christ’s passion and death. Moreover, beyond accusing


Rahner of granting the cross only “normative” meaning rather than the constitutive efficacy of a *sine qua non*, Van Nieuwenhove charges Rahner with denying any positive salvific significance for it *at all*. Against such a position, he retorts that “emptying the death of Jesus of all salvific power contradicts the New Testament witness (including, in all likelihood, the way Jesus himself viewed his passion) and the ensuing tradition of Christian reflection on the cross.”

1.1.5 Summary of Criticisms

These critical assessments of Karl Rahner’s christology and soteriology coalesce around the constitutive place for Jesus Christ as the *sine qua non* of salvation. Almost all of these assessments recognize Rahner’s insistence upon Jesus being the symbol or sacrament of human salvation, that is, the highest and culminating moment of God’s salvific action within human affairs. But his critics’ evaluations raise the question of whether such a role grants Jesus Christ a sufficient place within God’s plan of salvation.

Balthasar’s worry is that for Rahner, God is always already reconciled to humanity; rather than being humanity’s “representative” (a role which, in his judgment, would impede on Rahner’s particular notion of human freedom), Christ is one man among many humans who is not essentially different from them. His role consists of standing as the prime instance of, and thus grand announcement about, a larger, ongoing

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75 Van Nieuwenhove, “Bearing the Marks of Christ’s Passion,” p. 278.
process in which humans are being saved by God’s grace. Such a role falls woefully short of deeming Christ the constitutive *sine qua non* of human salvation.\(^7^6\)

Two other theologians, Guy Mansini and George Vass, produce critical evaluations which resemble and explicitly cite that of Balthasar. Mansini judges that Rahner’s “sacramental” theory of the cross’s salvific efficacy only grants a “restrained” level of causality, that event of Christ’s death is for Rahner a mere “demonstration,” and that Rahner “jettison[s]” any notion of Christ “representing” humanity. Vass echoes Balthasar in lamenting the lack of any dramatic element in Rahner’s soteriology, precisely in his rejection of any “representative” action on the part of Christ, who is merely the locus at which an inevitable, pre-ordained divine plan unfolds as a matter of course. For both Vass and Mansini, like Balthasar, the role which Christ plays in human salvation is rather thin, for he fails to “represent” us and functions more or less as a display board which notifies us of God’s loving will being carried out.

Also similar to Balthasar (though to a lesser degree), the ITC suggests that for Rahner, Christ merely *expresses* something (namely, the grace of salvation and fellowship with God) which is already available through God’s universally operative salvific will. Again, the role of Christ extracted from Rahner’s work seems, more than anything else, to be that of “notifier.” The ITC also portrays (though less explicitly that Balthasar does) Rahner and “representative” Christology as inhabiting paradigms distinct

\(^7^6\) Cf. Balthasar’s remark about Rahner’s God “who-is-always-reconciled”: “This does not mean that the perfect Yes to God on the part of the man Jesus is *the condition without which* neither the world nor *salvation would be possible*” (*TD* IV p. 276, emphasis added).
from one another. And once again, the underlying worry appears to be that “expressing”
salvation seems like a rather weak role for the constitutive Savior.

Finally, Schubert Ogden (along with J.T. Farmer) explicitly identifies Rahner’s
Christology as lacking an authentic “constitutive” identity. According to Ogden,
Rahner’s exchange of Christ’s “efficient” causative role (typically associated with
staurocentric satisfaction and substitution theories of atonement) for a “final” and
“sacramental” causality ends up rendering Christ a kind of “norm” for human salvation:
any “constitutive” dimension seems to exist in name only, a dimension desired by Rahner
which his Christology and soteriology never end up fulfilling. Van Nieuwenhove goes
even further, saying that in his desire to move away from classical cross-centered
soteriologies, Rahner (and many other contemporary Catholic theologians) has left the
cross bereft of any salvific significance at all.

There are two major issues which surface repeatedly in these evaluations, the first
of which concerns the “constitutive” vs. “normative” distinction. While only Ogden and
Farmer raise the issue of whether Christ is for Rahner in fact (and not just in desire)
constitutive of salvation, at the heart of each of these objections is a concern that Christ is
not the *sine qua non* of salvation. While Jesus may exemplify, notify, and express God’s
salvation within the world, it is not clear, especially given Rahner’s supposed distaste for
talk of Christ as “representative,” that if the Christ-event
never occurred, neither would human salvation. These criticisms boil down to alleging a failure for Rahner’s
Christology and soteriology to live up to the “christocentric” descriptor which is so often

77 By this term, I wish to indicate the entirety of Christ’s incarnation, life, death, and resurrection.
applied to him. The second main concern involves the notion of Christ’s “representing” the entire the human family. Balthasar, Vass, and (though to a lesser extent) the ITC all, though to various degrees, envision such representation in “dramatic” categories centering on a discrete, particular act performed by Christ in our stead, undergoing the alienation from God properly due to the rest of us. Since Rahner eschews this latter kind of dramatic, act-centered vision of reconciliation via proxy, his soteriology is presented in juxtaposition to the broad category of representation.

1.2 Symbol and Sacrament: The Standard Classification of Rahner’s Christology and Soteriology

The criticisms above, directed toward a very influential theologian, have certainly not gone unnoticed. Several of them have received explicit, published responses which defend a profoundly meaningful place for Christ in Rahner’s understanding of human salvation. The standard method by which such apologies are conducted in fact shares a particular evaluation with the criticisms: Rahner’s christology and soteriology are best classified according to the category of symbol and/or sacrament. But while Rahner’s critics go on to portray sacramental or symbolic causality as weak and ineffectual, his advocates describe it in far different terms: Christ, the Realsymbol and Ursakrament is the nexus point of God’s self-communication to the world. In other words, the broad apologetic strategy is to accuse Rahner’s critics of underestimating the value of positing Christ as the primordial Sacrament of salvation.
1.2.1 Denis Edwards

Though it is not an apology for Rahner, one of the most standard and accessible accounts of his soteriology can be found in Denis Edwards’s *What Are They Saying About Salvation?*. This work addresses various theologies of salvation from biblical and historical perspectives in order to focus on those of a more recent vintage, including that of Karl Rahner. Edwards follows a common approach to explaining Rahner, beginning with some of early philosophical claims made by Rahner about the *anthropos* drawn from *Spirit in the World* (1939) and *Hearer of the Word* (1941) in order to introduce his later, properly theological work.

Without naming it, Edwards makes reference in this introduction to Rahner’s *Vorgriff*, a term which is notoriously difficult to translate (often “pre-apprehension”). The act of knowing finite and limited things occurs, he explains, “along with, or over against, an implicit awareness of the whole range of being that is without limits. We know specific objects against an horizon of infinite mystery.” While we do not “grasp” (*greifen*) or have a grasp (*Griff*) upon this infinite, mysterious horizon which exists as the

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background against which all finite entities are known, we do encounter it in an anticipatory mode of approach through our (even daily) acts of cognition. This relationship to the undergirding, infinite horizon provides a basis for speaking of the human person as “self-transcendent,” as a finite creature within the world which is nevertheless oriented and even called toward an existence fully enveloped by Mystery itself, which Rahner identifies as God.

God’s offer of salvation, Edwards explains, is for Rahner an offer of nothing less than God’s very self through the gift of grace. God’s self-offer in grace is ever-present through what Rahner calls the “supernatural existential,” an invitation toward creaturely participation in God’s own life.\(^83\) Sin consists in the rejection of this offer, while salvation is realized through its reception. Such reception (and rejection) of this transcendental offer occurs through and is expressed by our free, historical, and day to day acts and choices. Rahner thus, on occasion, even speaks of “self-redemption,” signaling not a Pelagian account of salvation apart from grace, but rather our grace-driven appropriation of “objective redemption” brought about by God, and, especially, Jesus Christ.\(^84\)

Edwards is clear that such appropriation does not for Rahner consist of merely aspiring to model oneself after an exemplar-Christ whose only impact upon us comes by way of “moral influence.” An alternative and more robust notion of Christ’s salvific

\(^{83}\) Ibid.

\(^{84}\) Ibid., p. 24. On “self-redemption,” see note 20 above.
causality exists for Rahner’s Christ. Moreover, the idea in the popular imagination of Christ’s death propitiating God’s wrath by somehow altering his mind and will is not a viable candidate for such an alternative. Instead, the causal impact which Christ has upon our salvation, Edwards explains, is for Karl Rahner that of a primal Sacrament.

Rahner’s “basic thesis” is that Christ’s “death and resurrection are connected to the salvation of all men and women by way of sacramental causality…. The cross is a sacramental cause of our salvation in that it is the sign and the mediation of God’s salvation. It is the sign of the ‘victorious and irreversible’ saving activity of God in our world.”

Edwards makes two main points in this summary of Rahner’s “sacramental” soteriology. The first is that as the Realsymbol (Edwards uses this German term as an equivalent for “sacrament”) of God’s salvific grace, the Christ-event, especially the Paschal Mystery, is at once caused by grace and the cause of grace, in different respects. Insofar as his life and identity perfectly express and unveil God’s Reign within the world, Christ the sacrament is caused by and has its origin in God’s grace. But with respect to us, to whom Christ mediates the grace which he embodies in its temporal fullness, Christ the primal sacrament is the cause of grace which, like other sacraments, causes precisely that which is signifies or symbolizes. The entire life of Jesus, the Realsymbol of

85 Ibid., pp. 23-25.
87 “Jesus had preached the saving nearness of God, and he had claimed that this reign of God was identified with his own person…. The resurrection shows that Jesus is indeed the final and unsurpassable self-disclosure of God. He is the absolute Savior” (Ibid., p. 25).
salvation, perfectly signifies God’s grace; moreover, this life is “recapitulated” and
“fulfilled” in Jesus’ “free acceptance of death” and his glorious resurrection.\textsuperscript{88}

The second point which Edwards makes is that as God’s \textit{Realsymbol} or primal Sacrament, Jesus has rendered God’s saving will “irrevocable” within the world. The whole of salvation history, he explains, is marked by a kind of “ambivalence,” but God chooses “to give concrete and irreversible expression in history to divine saving love.” That is, God chooses “to give fixed historical form to the universal will to save” in Jesus Christ, who fully accepts (including \textit{and especially} in his death) God’s self-offer.\textsuperscript{89}

Although it does not engage in any defense of Rahner, Edwards’s account offers resources for answering criticisms that Rahner’s Christ exists merely as a “notification” to the world that God is enacting human salvation. If \textit{Realsymbol} or “sacrament” were to be understood simply as a shallow “sign,” such a criticism would have merit. However, as the primal sacrament, Christ does not only signify, but \textit{causes} in the very act of signifying. Edwards’s account of Rahner’s “sacramental” soteriology identifies the Christ-event as the primal means by which God’s grace is communicated to the world. As such, Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection stand as no mere notification of God’s salvific action, but rather is its very conduit.

\subsection*{1.2.2 Joseph Wong}

Perhaps the most thorough and authoritative treatment of Rahner’s sacramental christology and soteriology is Joseph Wong’s \textit{Logos-Symbol in the Christology of Karl Rahner}.\textsuperscript{88-89}

\textsuperscript{88}Ibid., p. 27.

\textsuperscript{89}Ibid., p. 27.
Rahner, a revision of his dissertation to which Rahner himself, in his last years, wrote the foreword.\textsuperscript{90} In it, Wong explores the origins, workings, and potential utilizations which lie latent within Rahner’s idea of \textit{das Realsymbol}, which Wong describes as the “joint concept of a ‘sacrament-symbol.’”\textsuperscript{91} Wong’s insight is that the “sacrament-symbol” is particularly useful for organizing Rahner’s various, disparate, and somewhat \textit{ad hoc} christological writings. In particular, he says that Christ as \textit{das Realsymbol} helps us to understand how Rahner (contrary to the ITC’s portrayal above) conducts a profound christology both from above (the Christ-event as the definitive final Word of the Father to the world) and from below (the Christ event as the “self-realization” of the “Son-Saviour” \textit{in} the world).\textsuperscript{92}

1.2.2.1 Rahner’s Spiritual Basis for Sacramental Christology

Rather than beginning with a “foundational” consideration of Rahner’s philosophical underpinnings for portraying Christ as the primal sacrament, Wong identifies Rahner’s Ignatian spirituality as the basis for his sacramental christology (as well as for his sacramental worldview).\textsuperscript{93} Following Ignatius of Loyola’s call to find God


\textsuperscript{91} Ibid., p. 34

\textsuperscript{92} Ibid., p. 158. Wong describes this two-fold movement accordingly: “The process of God’s gradual entry into history reaches its summit in the mystery of the incarnation” (ibid., p. 157).

in all things, Rahner’s fundamental “mystical insight” is that “God is always mediated through created realities, especially through people and events.”

But the finite realities which mediate God are, for Rahner, organized so as to depend on (insofar as they flow both from and toward) a single, definitive communication of grace to the world. Wong explains, “If for [St. Ignatius] things of the world are ‘sacraments’, then Christ is the _primordial_ sacrament of encounter with God.” Thus the “sacramental-symbolic” structure of divine-human relationship, is at its core, an “incarnational structure.”

Rahner’s christocentric sacramental imagination is especially active, Wong argues, in his early writings about Jesus’ Sacred Heart, which “is a sacramental symbol which effects by signifying (significando efficit). It is the incarnation, or realization in human form, of divine love.” It is only after these considerations about Rahner’s spirituality that Wong goes on to examine the philosophical underpinnings of _das Realsymbol_. Here Wong’s overview is in basic agreement with that of Edwards, as it builds towards Rahner’s affirmation of God himself as the “whither” of the _Vorgriff_.

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94 Ibid., p. 47. This sacramental worldview accords with the Ignatian insight that “[p]recisely because God is ‘really above the whole world’ and not merely its ‘dialectical antithesis’, he is also found _in the world_” (“The Ignatian Mysticism of Joy in the World” (1937) in _TI_ 3:277-293 at p. 291, cited in Wong, _Logos-Symbol_, p. 105).

95 Wong, _Logos-Symbol_, p. 56

96 Ibid., pp. 67-68.

97 Ibid., pp. 82-98.

98 Ibid., pp. 89-92.
1.2.2.2 Jesus Christ, *Significando Efficit* – The Human as *das Realsymbol* of God

Much of Wong’s monograph is organized according to considerations of Rahner’s sacramental christology in its “from above” and “from below” dimensions.99 Wong introduces the former through an explanation of “symbolic causality,” for which Rahner elsewhere uses the synonym “quasi-formal actuation.”¹⁰⁰ Rahner is bothered by a common supposition that Jesus’ divinity and humanity are only related to one another “extrinsically,” as two disparate realities which have been married in the incarnation. A better account of the relationship between Christ’s two natures (as defined by Chalcedon) mirrors that of the body and the soul. According to the classical hylomorphism which dominates the Catholic tradition (especially after Thomas Aquinas), the soul is not a ghost within a body moving it like a machine, but rather is the very form of the body itself. That is, the soul operates upon the body by way of formal causality; the body, as Wong explains it, may even be thought of as a type of “emanation” of the soul. Unlike efficient causality (a cause producing a consequence, or effecting a product), formal causality posits an intrinsic relation between the body and the soul.¹⁰¹

Rahner thus seeks to implement this sort of “intrinsic” relation within his Christology by suggesting that Christ’s humanity simply *is* the “emanation” of the divine Logos within the world of time and space. However, Rahner feels compelled to add the

99 Cf. Rahner’s own statement, “There is an ascending Christology (proceeding from the human being Jesus) which coincides with the classical descending Christology (God becomes a human being)” (“Jesus Christ—The Meaning of Life,” *TI* 21:208-219, at p. 218).


¹⁰¹ Ibid., pp. 129-30.
prefix of “quasi” to this relationship of formal causality, not to weaken the intrinsic relation, but to qualify the “automatic” element of this causality (e.g., the soul must ‘emanate’ the body) in order to guard the freedom of the transcendent Logos’s act of becoming incarnate.¹⁰² This is all to say that, conducting christology “from above,” Jesus Christ is das Realsymbol or primal sacrament of God in the world; when the Logos “self-exteriorizes,” the incarnate Son is what occurs.

The “from below” counterpart of Rahner’s christology (which, Wong notes, after 1968 he focused upon most heavily¹⁰³) also involves the idea of Christ as symbol-sacrament, in that this approach consists of demonstrating (not deducing¹⁰⁴), through the use of Rahner’s transcendental method, that the human person is a possible Symbol for the Logos, that is, potentially the appropriate bearer of God’s self-exteriorization. (It is this component of Rahner’s Christology that Rahner’s critics, especially Balthasar, have honed in upon.)

Rahner begins to unfold this “transcendental” approach to Christology with anthropological considerations. In particular, he focuses upon the human person’s radical “openness to God,” a prompting which resides deep within free human persons that points them beyond themselves. This orientation toward “self-transcendence” gives us a real desire (though not an unconditional demand) for grace (which is for Rahner the

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 131. Paul Molnar remains unconvinced that Rahner’s desire to protect God’s freedom with such a qualifier actually succeeds, calling the distinction “spurious” and accusing Rahner of a kind of “emanationism” (“Can we know God directly? Rahner’s solution from experience,” in Theological Studies 46 (1985), pp. 228-261, at pp. 231-232, cf. note 15).

¹⁰³ Wong, Logos-Symbol, pp. 35-36.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., pp. 106, 109, 132, 230-231
indwelling of the Spirit, or God’s very self-gift to us). Almost all of human existence, Wong explains, consists of our actions which, whether we know it or not, respond (either positively or negatively) to this call (termed the “supernatural existential” by Rahner; see Chapter 2.2.4 below) to self-transcendent fellowship with God. With this anthropological background (only roughly sketched here) in place, Rahner can introduce Christology as perfected anthropology. For in Jesus Christ, this call-and-response phenomenon occurs flawlessly. In Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, we observe the perfect expression of the human affirmative response to God’s invitation to fellowship; in Jesus and his “Yes!” to God, the human person achieves absolute fulfillment.\footnote{105}{Ibid., p. 133.}

Rahner thus speaks frequently of Jesus Christ as the “culmination” of humanity. This indeed implies that Jesus is the “prime-instance” of authentic humanity. As such, Jesus is indeed an indicator what human life ought to be, and what it can be. As Wong summarizes, “If man in his infinite openness is conceived as possible symbol of God, in his turn the God-Man as the ‘absolute Saviour’ is the sign or symbol of man’s definitive salvation.”\footnote{106}{Ibid., p. 135.} Jesus offers us a glimpse into fulfilled human existence and, standing at the end or \textit{telos} of a journey which he (as fully human) shares with us, beckons us toward participation in his “way” by affirming the supernatural existential call to grace that resides within each of our own hearts.

While accurate, this portrayal of Christ’s soteriological role addresses only one part of Rahner’s vision. Though he is certainly the “prime-instance” of humanity, Jesus
is for Rahner the primordial *Sacrament* of human salvation. For Rahner the idea of *das Symbol* is too profound to be reduced to a sign, the role of which is indicative; rather, his theology is built upon the “joint-concept” of the “sacrament-symbol.” And so, like Edwards, Wong underlines how Christ is not merely a sign of God’s salvation, but a sign that *brings about* (“realizes”) what it signifies (“manifests”). Such a sign is, by classical definition, a sacrament.

The Christ-event is a sacrament which “signifies something precisely by rendering it present and renders present by signifying.”107 In emphasizing this point, Wong specifically raises Balthasar’s critique of Rahner’s soteriology; for taking seriously the sacramental nature of Christ’s incarnation, life, death and resurrection exposes a false dichotomy at the root of Balthasar’s evaluation. “Balthasar’s objection that according to Rahner man owes his redemption not to the historical event of Christ’s death but to the always effective saving will of God, is based on a misunderstanding of Rahner’s view of ‘sacramental-symbolic causality.’”108 The either-or opposition between God’s universally operative saving will and the Christ-event dissolves when one posits the latter as *das Realsymbol* of the former, related to it not by means of an extrinsic pairing but rather intrinsic self-expression. In other words, Jesus Christ is the primordial Sacrament of, and *by which we receive*, God’s salvation, for “the saving will of God is ‘always effective’ precisely *in view* of the event of Christ, both proleptically and retrospectively.”109

107 Ibid., p. 161

108 Ibid., p. 242

109 Ibid. Wong continues, “[W]hen one understands properly the concept of quasi-sacramental causality, one can say that man owes his redemption to the eternal saving will of the Father and, at the same time, to Christ the Saviour. He is the ‘primordial Sacrament of salvation’, inasmuch as he freely and
1.2.2.3 Latent Fragments of a Representative Soteriology in Rahner

Before exploring how Balthasar’s critique overlooked the implications of Rahner’s account of sacramental causality, Wong touched on a similar point earlier in the monograph:

the soteriological function of the absolute Saviour is rooted in his ‘quasi-sacramental causality as sign’…. [A]s a sacramental sign, the absolute Saviour both manifests and realizes in the concrete God’s saving will on man’s behalf….. [T]he absolute Saviour is the symbol of the saving God offered to man through the Logos who is the ‘historical expressibility’ (geschichtliche Aussagbarkeit) of the Father’s fidelity. 110

Although the contents of these sentences to a large degree just reiterate the point about Christ’s sacramental salvific efficacy already discussed, Wong includes one clause which is particularly interesting, namely, “on man’s behalf.” Unfortunately, Wong does not expound upon this remark, but the suggestion that Rahner’s Christ, as the primordial sacrament, brings about God’s salvation on behalf of humanity appears to affirm some kind of representative role for Christ in Rahner’s soteriology.

It is important to consider what sort of representative role Wong might see for Christ within Rahner’s theological writings. For although Wong does not explicitly explore the representative category (even in relationship to Balthasar’s critique, in which the term surfaces several times), a genuine representative component to Rahner’s christology and soteriology would serve not only to refute a pervasive theme within

effectively constitutes the ‘historically irreversible saving situation for all” (ibid., pp. 242-243, emphasis original).

110 Ibid., p. 138.
Balthasar’s critical evaluation, but to illuminate precisely how Rahner envisions Christ, as Realsymbol and primal Sacrament, to communicate God’s grace.

It is quite clear that by “on man’s behalf,” Rahner does not mean that Christ sacramentally realizes God’s salvation in such a way that we are rendered passive spectators; “on man’s behalf” does not signify “our substitute.” (As Balthasar emphatically notes, Rahner so values our participation in human salvation that he even speaks of “self-redemption.”) Understanding this, Wong’s use of “on man’s behalf” to describe Christ’s sacramental soteriological role seems to reflect a different understanding of “representative”: namely, that it is only through an intimate relationship to this One that salvation is attained.

Wong’s reading of Rahner is that Christ, the primordial Sacrament, has definitively communicated God’s salvific grace to the world, but we, as free humans, must also receive this communication. As Wong puts it, “man’s salvation consists in freely appropriating this saving ‘situation’ through a life-long ‘conformation’ to the death of Christ…. [T]he absolute Savior is the symbol-prototype of the redeemed man.” 111 Let us consider these words more closely. The importance of (especially Christ’s) death for Rahner as the summative act of human freedom will be addressed more thoroughly in subsequent chapters, so we will set aside a detailed treatment of that matter for now. The claim articulates two soteriological functions for Christ. The first is sacramental: the Christ-event establishes a new saving “situation” of grace into which we can enter. The second is “prototypical”: Christ lives (and dies) a way to which we “conform.” The link

111 Ibid., p. 172.
between the two is that entering into or appropriating the saving situation consists in our act of conformation. Once again, the criticisms of Christ functioning as a mere “prime instance” underestimate the first “sacramental” function of Christ here described, reducing Rahner’s soteriological vision to the second one. But Wong hints at an even more profound dimension to this vision of Christ bringing about salvation as both symbol-sacrament and prototype.

Referring to this dual role earlier, Wong writes, “Rahner views the absolute Saviour as the prototype or symbol of true human existence,” and thus, “Christ is really sought after and encountered in the actual living out of one’s human existence, even if one is not aware of it.”112 Here, Wong indicates that Christ does not merely bring about a saving situation which we appropriate by imitation, but that our act of “appropriation” is really one of seeking and encountering Christ. One might even say that Christ himself is the “saving ‘situation’” into which we enter. Drawing out threads within Wong’s account of Rahner in this way, we are faced with a Rahnerian soteriology which is heavily relational in character. “On man’s behalf” can thus mean that Christ not only creates the “saving ‘situation’” for us, but, as the “Sought” of human existence, he actually constitutes that “situation”; the act of “appropriating” salvation thus becomes one of more intimately relating to the Savior.

1.2.3 Herbert Vorgrimler

Rahner’s longtime friend and student, Herbert Vorgrimler, offers an analysis of Rahner’s soteriology in his Karl Rahner: Gotteserfahrung in Leben und Denken,

112 Ibid., p. 140.
published about a decade ago.\textsuperscript{113} Focusing on Rahner’s late essay, “The Christian Understanding of Redemption” (1981), Vorgrimler offers an exposition of Rahner’s soteriology and defends it against its detractors. In doing so, he takes up many of the same themes treated by Edwards and Wong.

The first major point which Vorgrimler stresses is the centrality of human freedom to Rahner’s soteriology. He writes that “Rahner anchored the theme of redemption so much in the context of human freedom that the difference between self-redemption and redemption ‘from outside’ is dissolved.”\textsuperscript{114} This is because for Rahner, “redemption does not circumvent human freedom, but is rather ‘the fullness of this freedom itself.’”\textsuperscript{115} Human freedom itself is a gift from God and does not act in opposition, but rather in and through, God’s grace, given ultimately in Christ.

Vorgrimler also notes that Rahner refrains from couching his soteriology first and foremost within the context of human sin and the subsequent debt to God, as has often been the case (and continues to be, especially among Evangelical Protestants) for much of Christian history. “Rahner refuses to adopt the pessimistic soteriological-anthropological pathos which spanned from Augustine to the Reformation mentality, in which ‘the remission of the damning debt’ was felt to be the overall leitmotif of Christianity.”\textsuperscript{116} This is not to say that Rahner fails to recognize the “absurd darkness of


\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., p. 219.

\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., p. 218.

\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., p. 220.
the word,” but rather that for him the answer to that darkness is best understood not in terms of paying a debt with blood, but rather that “God must become the justified human; what one calls guilt and sin, is to be understood in a world of becoming (rather than event of friction) as a detour in their development.” Salvation is the story, full of twists and turns, of humanity coming to full, free development, a story the center of which is God becoming this developed human.

Next, Vorgrimler addresses Rahner’s assessment of traditional soteriologies, noting his distaste for Anselmian satisfaction theory and the commonly associated idea of Jesus’ vicarious-representative [stellvertretenden] suffering. According to a common, “false understanding” of such an idea, Vorgrimler explains, “it is assumed that Jesus did something in the place [anstelle] of other people, something which only he – and not the others – could do.” In Rahner’s view, Jesus does not “do what I was supposed to do,” but rather makes it possible for us to freely aspire to God in faith, hope, and love. Vorgrimler also notes Rahner’s reservations about the popular idea that in dying on the cross, Jesus “changed the mind” of an angry God. On the contrary, Rahner is confident “that the entire history of humanity is engaged from the outset by the merciful love of God.”

117 Ibid.

118 This characterization of Rahner’s soteriology, reminiscent of Irenaeus’s own anthropology, soteriology, and Christology, anticipates a major theme which, while not elaborated upon by Vorgrimler, will be analyzed throughout this dissertation.

119 Ibid., p. 221.

120 Ibid., p. 222.
Finally, Vorgrimler turns to Rahner’s critics, naming Balthasar in particular. “There is for Rahner, contrary to the accusation made in bad faith by von Balthasar, a theology of the cross, but it does not stand under a sadistic, masochistic sign. Rahner has also refused to place his theology of the cross under the sign of Jesus’ abandonment by God, a move made by von Balthasar others; Rahner designates the view that Jesus – who devoutly prayed Psalm 22 on the cross – died forsaken by God, as false.”121 Interestingly, Vorgrimler grants a reading of Rahner shared by Rahner’s detractors, writing that for Rahner, “the cross is… not a reconciliation with God which would not have come about without the cross.”122

Vorgrimler closes his treatment by introducing Rahner’s sacramental theology of das Realsymbol as Rahner’s way of “hold[ing] on absolutely to the traditional beliefs that ‘salvation is in the cross’ and that the cross is ‘the cause of our salvation.’”123 This is because with das Realsymbol, a “relationship of mutual condition exists between ‘sign’ and ‘cause.’ The cross of Jesus Christ is ‘the effective sign of God’s salvific will in the world’ …. Simply said: The cross brings the previously existing cause of the cross to salvific efficacy. It would thus be an injustice to say of Rahner that for him, the cross is ‘only’ a sign.”124 Thus, according to Vorgrimler, those who criticize the cross’s salvific

121 Ibid.
122 Ibid. A more accurate statement, I would suggest, is that for Rahner God’s saving will for reconciliation does not originate with the cross, though full reconciliation between a sinful world and God will inextricably involve this event.
123 Ibid.
124 Ibid.
efficacy in Rahner’s soteriology underestimate the robust sacramental causality posited in his theory of das Realsymbol.

It should be noted that, like Wong, Vorgrimler touches briefly on themes which will be developed in this dissertation. In particular, he does so when referring to God becoming a justified human, as well as his opening statement in “Soteriologie”: “Much of what was contained in the earlier dogmatic manuals as ‘soteriology,’ following upon ‘Christology,’ can be found in Rahner’s work where he treats Christology, the Trinity, and God’s self-communication. This is because he cannot separate the ‘being’ and ‘work’ of Christ from one another.”

1.2.4 Eamonn Mulcahy

Mulcahy’s revised dissertation, The Cause of Our Salvation, focuses upon the soteriology of four late twentieth century British theologians. Nevertheless, his (somewhat brief) treatment of Karl Rahner’s christology and soteriology is important to Mulcahy’s work, since one of his major conclusions is that the soteriologies of these British (Protestant and Anglican) figures would have greatly benefited from dialogue with that of Rahner (among other Catholic thinkers), specifically on the issue of symbolic causality (a category which, in Mulcahy’s judgment, is the most promising


127 Ibid., p. 22-23.
direction for contemporary accounts of how Christ causes our salvation).\textsuperscript{128} In fact, Mulcahy wagers that “the most satisfactory answer to this question [of how a saving event in the past can have a transformative effect today] lies along the lines of \textit{symbolic causality}, where a symbol renders present the reality signified.”\textsuperscript{129} In order to begin exploring this concept, Mulcahy turns to Rahner, according to whom “soteriology has to turn to another field of theology to borrow a concept of causality… namely sacramental theology.”\textsuperscript{130} Thus, like Edwards and Wong, Mulcahy categorizes Rahner’s soteriology as one rooted in the idea of sacrament.

Much of Mulcahy’s assessment of Rahner includes ground already covered above. For instance, he acknowledges that for Rahner, Christ should not be said to “cause” God’s salvific will as if his death somehow “provoked” it or changed God’s mind; rather, if Christ and his cross are saving (and Rahner wants to affirm that they are!), they are \textit{the results} (rather than the origin) of God’s desire to save.\textsuperscript{131} Claims about Jesus’ life and death “causing” salvation are better handled in sacramental terms: Christ causes by signifying.

This is not to “reduce the cross to a merely revelatory event of God’s forgiving love as in Abelard’s alleged exemplarist theory,”\textsuperscript{132} as some of Rahner’s critics might

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{128} Ibid., p. 398.
\item \textsuperscript{129} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{130} Ibid., p. 399.
\item \textsuperscript{131} Ibid., p. 398
\item \textsuperscript{132} Ibid., pp. 399-400
\end{itemize}
have it. Although Christ and his cross “evoke in those who behold it the acceptance of a
grace always readily available,” Christ’s “revealing” and “signifying” do not, according
to Rahner, save by means of raising “awareness.”133 Rather, in the case of the “real
symbol,” the reality signified comes to be through the sign, which can even be said to
“cause” the (prior) reality within the world.134

As he concludes his treatment of it, Mulcahy categorizes Rahner’s soteriology as
“demonstrative” rather than “effective.” He elaborates, saying that “the cross does not
*provoke* or *produce* any effect (such as expiation or satisfaction or reconciliation), but
*evidences, shows, reveals* something. For Rahner, strikingly, the cross does not produce
salvation nor obtain redemption. The cross does not *do* anything at all! It discloses.”135

In this passage, it seems that Mulcahy overstates his case (although he appends a footnote
in which Rahner declares Christ to be the “*signum efficax*... the efficacious sign of God’s
salvific will in the world”). A thoroughly sacramental theology like Rahner’s does not
allow for an either/or dichotomy between categories like “demonstrative” and
“effective,” as the term *signum efficax* itself suggests. That Mulcahy seems to understand
the unity of the two in sacramental causality makes this categorization all the more
puzzling. Nevertheless, the most important categorization which Mulcahy makes

133 Ibid., p. 400.

134 Ibid., pp. 400-401. This same basic move for defending Rahner against such criticisms can be
found in Mark Lowery, “Retrieving Rahner for Orthodox Catholic Catholicism,” in *Faith & Reason* 17.3
(1991), pp. 251-272. Lowery sees such a defense as more easily accessible in Rahner’s writings on
Realsymbol and less so in his later works, especially *FCF* p. 272, note 44.

135 Mulcahy, *The Cause of Our Salvation*, p. 401, emphasis original.
consists of his decision to situate Rahner’s account of Christ as Savior in clearly sacramental terms.

Mulcahy’s treatment of Rahner in his sixth chapter is complemented by a constructive component. In this “modest soteriological proposition,” Mulcahy proposes a soteriology which (like Rahner’s) focuses on the *whole* of the Christ-event as a counterweight to what he views as tradition overemphasis on Jesus’ passion and death – in doing so, he “attempt[s] to elaborate a «relational» soteriology of *communio* based on a *transformational* model of atonement, in the key of a *symbolic* causality.”136 While his own constructive proposal utilizes the “relational” emphasis which operates within “representative” soteriologies (as “representative” is being used in this dissertation), Mulcahy’s use of “relational”137 or “representative”138 as descriptors for Rahner’s *own* theology are extremely sparse. The Rahnerian elements he sees in his own proposal have to do with symbolic causality, i.e., the idea of Christ effecting our salvation in the sacramental mode.

136 Ibid., p. 22

137 In his summary of Rahner’s *On the Theology of Death* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1965), Mulcahy writes, “it is only in death for Rahner that Jesus’ reality can become «pan-cosmic», entering into an open, unrestricted relationship with the whole world and hence able to enter into an effective salvific relationship with all men and women” (*The Cause of Our Salvation*, p. 459).

138 Mulcahy does discuss Christ saving us as our “representative.” This terminology occurs mainly when he is discussing Dorothee Sölle, as she treated in the writings of Reformed theologians Colin Gunton (ibid., pp. 88-95, 112) and John McIntyre (ibid. pp. 308-312). It also occurs in his treatments of Paul Fiddes (as a contrast to the idea of penal substitution, ibid. pp. 152, 160) and Vernon White (who, he notes, speaks in a somewhat Patristic key, ibid. p. 248-249). The closest that Mulcahy comes to giving a “representative” reading of Rahner’s soteriology is the following remark: “[T]he cross is not merely making known God’s saving will. It actualizes in Jesus’ «yes» humanity’s own response to God’s will. A symbol renders present” (ibid. p. 402, emphasis added).
1.2.5 Summary of “Sacramental” Assessments of Rahner’s Soteriology

Edwards, Wong, Vorgrimler, and Mulcahy all recognize Rahner’s distaste for popular Western soteriologies which center upon the death of Christ initiating eternal and divine consequences. Rahner, as these of his readers correctly determine, flips this scheme on its head, positing the Christ-event (and particularly the cross) as the means through which and eternal, divine will to save communicates itself to the world. Such a movement is properly categorized as sacramental, for Christ, like all other sacraments (of which he is the chief and principal), is the sign which effects what he signifies. These readers of Rahner also distance him from an “exemplarist” or purely “moral influence” brand of soteriology, noting that such an identifier shortchanges the profundity of what Rahner means by “symbol.”

Wong in particular emerges as a strong defender of Rahner. His joint term “symbol-sacrament” itself stands to ward off the “exemplarist” charge. Moreover, Wong has offered on Rahner’s behalf the most explicit and thorough response to Balthasar’s charges, an apology which turns on taking seriously Rahner’s idea of *das Realsymbol* and sacramental-symbolic causality. Although Balthasar too is aware of these terms and concepts, Wong insists that Balthasar, especially in attributing Rahnerian salvation to God’s will rather than to Christ and his cross, fails to fully appreciate the *intrinsic* relation of self-expression at the heart of *das Realsymbol*, a failure which leads to the false dichotomy just mentioned. With a sacramental-symbolic christology, the identification of Christ as “prime instance” is no reductive move; on the contrary, it is, situated properly within Rahner’s theology of *das Realsymbol*, a claim which has
profound sacramental and soteriological implications, positioning Christ as the indispensable nexus-point of God’s saving self-communication.

Though Vorgrimler’s apology is not as thorough as Wong’s, Rahner’s longtime friend and student makes some key observations about Rahner’s soteriology in his defense. Among these are the coextensive and noncompetitive nature of God’s grace and human freedom (which allows Rahner to use the term “self-redemption” in a non-Pelagian manner), Rahner’s distaste for staurocentric soteriologies which misappropriate the idea of Christ’s *stellvertretenden* suffering “in our place,” and finally the way in which Rahner’s sacramental theology allows him to retain the idea of “salvation in the cross” by rendering the latter *das Realsymbol* of the former.

The majority of these four theologians’ commentary concerns the idea of symbol-sacrament and the causality that accompanies it. But one element that is quite important to Rahner’s soteriological vision occurs, abridged as it may be, in the writings of Edwards and Wong. This element is what one might call a “twofold” account of how human salvation occurs. That is, Rahner sees two distinct (but not separated) movements or dimensions to the process of human salvation. Edwards describes it in terms of “objective redemption” brought about by God (especially in the Christ-event) and “self-redemption,” which consists of our appropriation (rooted, of course, in God’s grace) of the former. Wong similarly describes the definitive, sacramental Christ-event bringing about a saving “situation” which we appropriate in conforming our lives to the Christ-Sacrament. Although this “twofold” account is not the focus of either Wong or Edwards, it constitutes an important part of Rahner’s thought. Going a step further, one could note that God’s universal salvific will, operative in the supernatural existential, is directed
toward the saving “situation” or “objective redemption” brought about by Christ. Such a suggestion further serves to undermine the dichotomy in Balthasar’s criticism attacked by Wong.

Finally, latent within the accounts of Wong and Vorgrimler are indications of a possible basis for speaking of Rahner’s Christ as our representative. While none of the theologians here (or any of Rahner’s readers of which I am aware) explicitly link him with this term or category, “representative” is, it seems, the best concept for understanding Wong’s passing remark that for Rahner, Christ sacramentally realizes God’s saving will “on man’s behalf.” Moreover, Vorgrimler’s two observations about the intrinsic relationship between soteriology and Christ’s “being,” and the soteriological import of God “becom[ing] the justified human” (bringing humanity to its full development in a theological schema reminiscent of Irenaeus of Lyons), offer (albeit undeveloped) indications of Christ’s representative role in Rahner’s thought. Taken together with the twofold movement of redemption just noted, the idea of Christ saving as a representative in whom we participate holds promise as a more robust response to the criticisms waged by Balthasar and others, as well as for better understanding the profundity of Rahner’s nuanced soteriological thought.

1.3 A Further Response to Rahner’s Critics: Christ the Representative

Although the majority of Rahner’s readers, both advocates and critics alike, classify his soteriology as sacramental, this dissertation proposes that Rahner understands Christ to bring salvation as our Representative. To be clear, the proposal to understand Rahner’s soteriology in this category is not a suggestion to jettison the standard symbol-sacrament lens for understanding Rahner. Indeed, the concept of das Realsymbol and
symbolic causality are clearly at the very foundation of his account of salvation through Christ. Instead of a strict alternative, the suggestion here is that “representative” serves as a complementary category to that of “sacrament.” In fact, in Rahner’s theology, the claim that Christ is the primordial Sacrament of God’s salvation *implies and necessitates* his functioning as our Representative, and vice-versa. Although this particular claim will be substantiated in the next chapter, we will conclude the present chapter by explaining what is meant here by representative soteriology, indicating how such a category can effectively respond to critiques like that of Balthasar, and providing a motivating rationale for exploring this topic.

1.3.1 “Inconceivable” Representative Action?

The proposal for a representative soteriological scheme within Rahner’s theology may initially seem rather surprising, given Balthasar’s assessment above. As we have already seen, Balthasar portrays Rahner as *rejecting* the idea of “*pro nobis*” “representative expiation” found in Scripture, the Fathers, and St. Anselm’s doctrine of satisfaction.139 In fact, Balthasar asserts that Rahnerian sacramental causality does not posit Christ “embrac[ing] and contain[ing] mankind in order to reconcile it to God… such ‘representative’ action is inconceivable.”140 His textual basis for this judgment is Rahner’s remark, “The satisfaction theory requires the ultimately inconceivable notion

139 *TD* IV p. 274.

140 Ibid. p. 276
that Jesus is man’s representative and is opposed to the correct understanding of self-redemption outlined above.”

Several things must be noted about this remark. Conveniently, Balthasar omits “satisfaction” from the quotation, implying, from the context which he provides, that Rahner rejects a monolithic pro nobis formula contained within Scripture and the Fathers as well as in Anselm. However, Rahner’s specific objection, which is twofold, concerns the Anselmian formula which occurs in both “crude” and “subtle” forms, the latter of which supposes “tortuous distinctions.” First, Rahner asserts that history has proven satisfaction theory to have “obscured the simple fact that the event of the cross did not originate in an angry God who demanded reparation, but from a God of gratuitous and merciful love.” Second, as his preceding remarks show, he believes it to conflict with the notion of (non-Pelagian) “self-redemption,” discussed above. Thus, what is translated as “man’s representative… opposed to… self-redemption outlined above” is shorthand for his earlier assertion (to which Rahner even alludes!) that “a man does not merely receive his salvation in a passive manner but rather realises it with total, and not just partial, freedom.” Moreover, the English translation (which is, of course, not Balthasar’s) only exacerbates matters: “die Idee einer letztlich undenkbaren

141 “The One Christ and the Universality of Salvation,” TI 16:208. The original German reads, “Die Satisfaktionstheorie aber fördert die Idee einer letztlich undenkbaren Stellvertretung der Menschen durch Jesus und steht dem rechten Verständnis der Selbsterlösung entgegen, von der oben gesprochen wurde” (Schriften zur Theologie (henceforth SzT) vol. 12, p.262). (Note: TD IV incorrectly cites the page as 26.)


143 Ibid. p. 207.
“Stellvertretung der Menschen durch Jesus” could just as well be translated, “the idea of an ultimately unthinkable substitution in the human person’s place by Jesus,” since “Stellvertretung” carries a certain ambiguity (an ambiguity which, in Rahner’s usage, is clarified by attending to the surrounding context). So, while Balthasar would have us believe that Rahner “rejects” notions of pro nobis “representation” outright as “inconceivable,” what Rahner finds “inconceivable” is not the broad category of “representation,” but rather the (allegedly) “Anselmian” suggestion of a passively received salvation won by a proxy (i.e., one who “fills in” [Vertretung] the place [Stelle] of another).

144 English translations of Stellvertretung include proxy, vicar, representation, substitution, and surrogacy, among others.

145 For a critical treatment of Balthasar’s own usage of Stellvertretung, see Michele M. Schumacher’s “The Concept of Representation in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar.” Theological Studies 60.1 (1999), pp. 53-71. Joseph Ratzinger composed an encyclopedia entry on the notion of Stellvertretung which was published in the early 1960s (“Stellvertretung,” in vol. 2 of Heinrich Fries (ed.), Handbuch theologischer Grundbegriffe, 2 vols. (Munich: Kösel, 1962-1963), pp. 566-575; an English translation by Jared Wicks, S.J. can be found as “Vicarious Representation,” in Letter & Spirit 7 (2011), pp. 209-220). In it, Ratzinger in fact anticipates the exact point Rahner would make about the necessity of respecting a the individual’s freedom when affirming the concept: “It is also clear that salvation arising in virtue of vicarious representation does not arrive mechanically in a person, but requires in the recipient some kind of openness and readiness... A Pauline type of pītis [faith] must somehow be present, but we do not have to determine in detail what this could be. One might then even speak of this attitude of openness as a votum ecclesiae [desire of being in the Church], but one must not forget that this is only the subjective side of a totality which only has sense and meaning through the objective reality of the vicarious representation of the Christus totus [the whole of Christ]” (“Vicarious Representation,” p. 219).

146 Rahner’s label is almost surely unfair to Anselm. Though Rahner provides qualifications with his remarks about “crude” and “subtle” versions and “tortuous distinctions,” his use of “Anselmian” to describe what appears to be popularized penal substitutionary models of atonement is rather unfortunate. To his credit, Rahner seems to have leveled this sort of critique in a more nuanced way in his final years. E.g., “Everyone is aware of the attempt to explain this objective redemption and reconciliation by using the concept of the (vicarious) satisfaction which God’s eternal Son has made to God’s holy justice by his obedience unto death on the cross, thereby wiping out the ‘sins of the world.’ No doubt the Son’s obedience has an unsurpassable moral value which manifests God’s holiness and justice in the world. However, the notion of an exchange of goods or even of guilt being punished in the person of the guiltless Jesus must not be allowed to obtrude itself on the notion of satisfaction for the sins of the world by the Son’s obedience” (“Reconciliation and Vicarious Representation,” II 21:262).
Rahner explicitly says as much in another essay entitled, “The Christian Understanding of Redemption.” (It should be noted that this essay was originally a lecture in Vienna delivered in February of 1981, less than a year after the publication of TD IV; thus Balthasar would not have had access to it at the time of his writing.) There, Rahner affirms that the statement, “the human race is redeemed by the ‘vicarious’ suffering of Jesus [«stellvertretende» Leiden Jesu],” as well as “the human race is vicariously represented by Christ [Stellvertretung des Menschen durch Christus],” is “thoroughly valid [durchaus legitimen].” In doing so, Rahner explicitly addresses the ambiguity of Stellvertretung, affirming one usage and criticizing another.

Consistent with his earlier writing, the usage of Stellvertretung to which Rahner objects is one in which Christ does something “in the place” of others as their proxy. He elaborates,

A conception of vicarious [stellvertretenden] redemption in which Jesus does for me, what I actually ought to do myself but am not capable of doing, and which will then be “credited” to me is a conception that I consider to be wrong or at least a misleading formulation of the dogmatic truth that my redemption is dependent on Jesus and his cross.

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147 The original German text can be found in SzT 15:236-250. Another important essay on this matter is “Reconciliation and Vicarious Representation [Versöhnung und Stellvertretung]” (TI 21:255-269 [=SzT 15:251-264]), especially pp. 264-269 [=pp. 259-264].


149 I.e., “Jesus antelle der anderen Menschen etwas getan hat” (SzT 15:244).

As before, Rahner explicitly associates this usage of “Stellvertretung” with the Anslemian doctrine of satisfaction\(^{151}\) and the popularized soteriology of an angry God who is pacified by Jesus’ execution.\(^{152}\) But, at the same time, he provides an alternative understanding of Stellvertretung that properly explicates this “thoroughly valid” term. Asserting that there is an “undeniable origin of redemption from Christ,” he explains,

\[
\text{it is precisely through Jesus that it is possible that I myself, by the power of God’s self-communication, am really able to aspire to God, to have faith and hope in him and to love him; in other words, that I can really perform the highest act that can be expected of a human being given the highest possible requirements. Through Jesus my own freedom itself contains the possibility of redemption, liberation, and sanctification the like of which cannot be conceived in a higher, more tremendous or more radical way.}^{153}
\]

That is to say, in virtue of Jesus, who is himself the “origin of redemption,” each person has a salvific possibility to which his or her freedom can be directed: namely, God (the Realsymbol of whom in our world is, precisely, Jesus). Rahner’s objection is not, as Balthasar would have it, directed toward the idea of Jesus’ providing an indispensable possibility for us, nor the claim that Jesus “embraces and contains mankind in order to reconcile it to God”\(^{154}\); rather, Rahner denies the suggestion that Jesus does so in a way that renders us passive objects credited with the fruits of his free act as a proxy. It is only

\(^{151}\) Ibid.; SzT 15:244.

\(^{152}\) “Wherever we find primarily the idea of an angry God who, as it were, has to be conciliated by great effort on the part of Jesus, we have an ultimately unchristian, popular notion of redemption that is incorrect….God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, and it was not because the Son gave himself that an angry God with great effort changed his mind about the world” (ibid. p. 249; SzT 15:245).

\(^{153}\) Ibid., p. 248-249; SzT 15:245

\(^{154}\) TD IV p. 276; at note 25 above.
this suggestion which Rahner finds “unthinkable”; Jesus saving as our “representative,” even by way of “Stellvertretung” (an even more ambiguous term) is by no means denied.\textsuperscript{155} In fact, as I will discuss below in Chapter 5, Rahner asserts that “Jesus Christ, the Mediator, is the supreme representative of mankind in his vicarious redemption [der absolute Repräsentant der Menschheit in seiner stellvertretenden Erlösung].”\textsuperscript{156}

1.3.2 What is Meant by “Representative”?

Essential to the argument that Rahner’s soteriology has a “representative” component to it is a clear statement of what precisely is meant by Christ being our representative and by representative soteriology. First, it should be clear from the preceding that “representative,” as it is being used in this dissertation, is not equivalent to “substitute.” Just as “Stellvertretung” is rather ambiguous, so is “representative,” a term used in various ways by theologians, some of whom (especially those within the Reformed tradition) consider representation to be more or less synonymous with substitution.\textsuperscript{157}

\textsuperscript{155} It is noteworthy that Rahner’s earliest usage of Stellverteiter is consistent with his later approval of the term so long as substitution by the Stellverteiter is not implied. In his theology dissertation, \textit{E latere Christi} (discussed extensively below in Chapter 4), Rahner refers to Christ as the Representative of God and Mediator of God’s gifts [Gottes Stellverteiter und Vermittler der Gaben Gottes] (\textit{E latere Christi}, p. 26). Clearly, Jesus is not here envisioned God’s “substitute” on earth; rather, as this early text attests, Rahner has maintained a positive, more sacramental usage for Stellvertretung/ter from the outset of his theological career.


\textsuperscript{157} For example, see vol. 3 of Herman Bavinck’s (d. 1921) \textit{Reformed Dogmatics: Sin and Salvation in Christ} (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), pp. 326, 404-405.
Although theology in the early twentieth century tended to subsume representative soteriological thought within other categories, the classification began emerging in its own right as the twentieth century went on.\textsuperscript{158} William Wolf lists it alongside atonement theories such as the classical “Christus Victor,” Anselmian satisfaction, Reformation theories of substitution, and moral influence theories, associating it with twentieth-century thinkers like Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Dorothee Sölle.\textsuperscript{159} (Other recent figures who could be added include Walter Kasper,\textsuperscript{160} Karl Barth,\textsuperscript{161} Hans Urs von Balthasar,\textsuperscript{162} Joseph Ratzinger,\textsuperscript{163} Kathryn Tanner,\textsuperscript{164} William

\textsuperscript{158} On the tendency to conflate substitution and representation, as well as the need to distinguish the two ideas, see Dorothee Sölle’s \textit{Christ the Representative: An Essay in Theology after the ‘Death of God’} (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967), p. 19ff and \textit{passim}.


\textsuperscript{160} Walter Kasper, \textit{Jesus the Christ} (New York: Paulist Press, 1977).

\textsuperscript{161} Karl Barth, \textit{Church Dogmatics} (henceforth \textit{CD}), G.W. Bromiley, T.F. Torrance (ed.), 5 vols. in 31 parts (London; New York: T&T Clark, 2010). Note Barth’s “new Adam” language in \textit{CD} II/2 pp. 688-690, and recapitulation themes present in \textit{CD} III/2 pp. 148, 166; \textit{CD} IV/1 pp. 48, 58; \textit{CD} IV/2 pp. 25, 28, 163, 522. Notably, like Balthasar, Barth often pairs the ideas of “representative” and “substitute” (e.g., \textit{CD} IV/1 p. 230).


\textsuperscript{163} Joseph Ratzinger \textit{Introduction to Christianity} (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), pp. 202-205, where he cites Barth and Balthasar extensively, as well as \textit{Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration} (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008).

\textsuperscript{164} Kathryn Tanner, “Incarnation, Cross, and Sacrifice: A Feminist-Inspired Reappraisal.” \textit{Anglican Theological Review} 86.1 (2004), pp. 35-56, as well as \textit{Christ the Key} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
Placher,^{165} Brian McDermott,^{166} and Clark Pinnock.^{167} This is not to say that this category is one the origins of which is only a century old. On the contrary, recent attention to Christ saving as our “representative” is due to renewal and retrieval of a theme which dominated patristic literature, as we will see below in Chapter 3. Irenaeus of Lyons, in particular, will be a figure central to the present study.

In order to describe what is meant by “representative” soteriology, three characteristics will be offered here. While each or even all of these characteristics can be found in other theories of atonement, the centrality of these three and the particular way in which they mutually interact account for the distinctness of “representative” soteriology.^{168}

1.3.2.1 Person-Centered

One of the refrains repeated tirelessly in soteriological discussions is that the best accounts of atonement unify Christ’s “person” and “work.” Without slighting the “work” of Christ or rendering his free actions within the world inconsequential to our salvation, a representative soteriology centers upon Christ’s Person. That is to say, at the heart of the process of human salvation is an intimate union with Jesus Christ himself; Christ’s free


^{166} Brian McDermott, Word Become Flesh, pp. 246-248.


^{168} Cf. the three “principles” of Catholicism (namely, sacramentality, mediation, and communion) in McBrien, Catholicism, pp. 9-14.
actions and “work” (e.g., gathering disciples, ministry, passion, and death) are at the service of bringing us to himself (e.g., “Follow me”\textsuperscript{169} and “I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself”\textsuperscript{170}). The incarnation was not a means to a super-agent Christ performing a particular salvific task, but rather Christ’s tasks are directed toward facilitating our approach to and sharing in the locus of the incarnation. Thus, as a person-centered soteriology, representation depends on the notion of incorporation into and participation in Jesus Christ himself.\textsuperscript{171}

This point is made articulately by Brian Daley in his article, “He Himself is Our Peace.”\textsuperscript{172} Taking Anselm’s famous question, \textit{Cur Deus homo?}, as his starting point, Daley notes that Western theology has tended to answer that in order to “set things right” after sin, humanity needed a divine Savior who had the means to do so. Daley sets out to provide an alternative, patristic answer which focuses not so much on what Christ did as who he is. Christ’s Person, he explains, is thus for many of the Fathers “in itself the realization of salvation,” for salvation is ultimately “achieved in Jesus’ identity rather than accomplished as his work.”\textsuperscript{173} Daley proceeds to review Irenaeus, Origen, Origen,

\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{169} Matt 4:19, 8:22, 9:9, 10:38, 16:24, emphasis added.

\textsuperscript{170} John 12:32, emphasis added.

\textsuperscript{171} “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-grower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit” (John 15:1-5b).


\textsuperscript{173} Ibid., p. 151, emphasis original.
Athanasius, Augustine, Gregory of Nyssa, and Cyril of Alexandria, among others.

Summarizing and concluding this historical survey he writes,

It is the very person of Jesus, for instance, which—for Irenaeus or Athanasius—achieves the full revelation of God’s grace and glory in the fallen world, remaking the damaged image (in Athanasius’ understanding) or bringing it (as Irenaeus suggests) from simply being an image to being God’s full likeness…. Jesus has begun in his own person a new humanity, radiant with life and free of the enslaving obligations of the old order…. [T]his understanding of Christ as not only the agent but also the locus of human salvation is articulated in Patristic theology.\(^{174}\)

Daley has no illusions of these various historical figures sharing a single, monolithic account of atonement. In fact, he emphasizes the distinctive roles that revelation, healing, payment, victory, exchange, and transformation play for different patristic theologians. But what all of them share, he argues, is a central appreciation for how Christ, in his very Person and identity rather than in a single restricted act (i.e., his death), brings these things about:

for most of the Fathers, redemption or salvation is to be identified not simply as the new relationship between humanity and God that has come into being as the effect of Jesus’ sacrifice for us, of his death on our behalf on the cross; rather, it is identified as the union, the living interpenetration, of God and humanity that is first fully realized in his own person. It is in… the whole life of Jesus… that the ‘event’ of redemption is to be found.\(^{175}\)

Accordingly, if salvation consists first and foremost in Christ’s Person as the locus of salvation, human appropriation and reception of salvation does not consist merely in being “credited” with the fruits of an act, but rather in entering into an intimate

\(^{174}\) Ibid., p. 166.

\(^{175}\) Ibid., p. 173.
relationship (initiated by God) with Christ himself. That is, in Pauline language, the
blessed become “members” of the body of Christ (1Cor 12), which is the locus of
salvation, and thus, in the words of 2 Peter, participate in the divine nature. The act of
appropriating salvation through this participation in and incorporation into Christ
constitutes the “subjective” (to use the “self-redemption” and “objective redemption”
categories highlighted by Edwards and Wong) element of representative soteriology.

1.3.2.2 Christ, the Presence of God to the World

The other two characteristics of “representative” soteriology serve as
complements to one another. The first of these, to use Rahnerian language also employed
by the ITC above, is descending, focusing upon God’s act of incarnation – becoming
fully human in Jesus Christ. This incarnational characteristic should not be taken to
mean (as some of the Fathers have been accused – see the discussion of “physical
redemption” in Chapters 3 and 4 below) that the moment of Christ’s incarnation
constitutes the entirety of salvation for a representative soteriology. While the union of
God with Christ’s humanity is indeed the focus here, the view’s person-centered
character warns against attributing too much to any single act or moment like the
incarnation. This uniquely intense, intimate, and hypostatic intersection of God and
humanity extends rather, over the whole of the Christ-event (and is not without
anticipations, as well as echoes, in virtue of the Spirit’s activity). Rather than a saving
moment, the incarnation, in a representative soteriology, is a salvific interval.

The emphasis on God’s presence before us in the person of Jesus Christ is clear in
many of the patristic “representative” thinkers mentioned above. Augustine, Athanasius,
and many others echoed variations of Irenaeus’s claim that Christ “became what we are, so that we can be what he is.”176 Cyril of Alexandria, as Daley points out, stressed that God unites himself to our injured flesh in order to bestow life upon it: “he bore our nature, reshaping it to share his own life. And he is in us: for surely we have become participants in him, and we have him in ourselves through the Spirit. For this reason, we have come to be ‘partakers in the divine nature’ (2 Pet 1:4).”177 The act of God, through his Son and eternal Word, coming among us in the Christ has rendered God personally accessible within our world, within time and history – and the implications are immense. As Athansius summarized Irenaeus, “He, indeed, assumed humanity that we might become God.”178 This result is not some magical outcome of the act of incarnation – rather, it follows from a proper understanding of what salvation is – God’s very presence, which draws us into the divine life, elevating and transforming us.179 This brings us to the third characteristic.

176 Specific instances will be considered below in Chapter 3.

177 Qtd. ibid., p. 168


179 “God must work our salvation by becoming one of us… because salvation cannot be conceived simply as a ‘work’…. salvation simply is God’s personal presence among us” (Daley, “He Himself Is Our Peace,” p. 175-6). Cf. Rahner: “Salvation here is to be understood as the strictly supernatural and direct presence of God in himself afforded by grace” (“The One Christ and the Universality of Salvation,” TI 16:200).
1.3.2.3 Christ, the Authentic Human Before God

Of a piece with the second “descending” marker is the third, “ascending” characteristic of representative soteriology. This characteristic is often expressed by the Fathers’ (with that Paul before them and of Vatican II after\(^\text{180}\)) reference to Christ as the “New Adam,” the fully authentic human person. Early Christian thinking, including that expressed in Scripture, relied on typological claims in which Old Testament figures and events precede and point toward counterparts in the New Testament. Adam and Christ serve as one of the most referenced of these pairs: Adam (with Eve) is the progenitor of all earthly life, while Christ (with the Church) is the author of renewed spiritual life. Juxtapositions of the two also make up a large part of this typological reflection, with Adam’s disobedience being reversed by Christ’s perfect obedience, etc.\(^\text{181}\) “New Adam” language serves to articulate the claim that Christ, as the perfect human, has changed the entire human situation.\(^\text{182}\) In virtue of our relationship to (indeed, incorporation within)

\(^{180}\) “Adam, the first man, was a type of him who was to come, Christ the Lord. Christ the new Adam, in the very revelation of the mystery of the Father and his love, fully reveals humanity to itself and brings to light its very high calling. It is no wonder, then, that all the truths mentioned so far should find in him their source and their most perfect embodiment. He who is the ‘image of the invisible God’ (Col. 1:15), is himself the perfect man who has restored in the children of Adam that likeness to God which had been disfigured ever since the first sin. Human nature, by the very fact that it was assumed, not absorbed, in him, has been raised in us also to a dignity beyond compare. For, by his incarnation, he, the Son of God, has in a certain way united himself with each individual” (Gaudium et Spes (GS) n. 22. All translations of documents promulgated by the Second Vatican Council are from Austin Flannery, O.P. (ed.), Vatican Council II: The Basic Sixteen Documents (Northport, NY: Costello, 1996), pp. 163-282).

\(^{181}\) Cf. Paul in Rom 5:14ff

\(^{182}\) “[J]ust as the head has risen from the dead, the rest of the body—the body of every human being found among the living—should also rise, when the time of his condemnation for disobedience is fulfilled, coming together in all its members and joints, and strengthened by the growth of God” (Irenaeus, AH III.19.3, qtd. in Daley, “He Himself Is Our Peace,” p. 174).
this one among us, we participate in the dignity of this one, who has provided a definitive and authentic trajectory for the human race.

This “ascending” component of representative soteriology demonstrates that an essential part of human salvation is our aspiring, in the Person of Christ, the New Adam, toward and achieving perfected human existence in union with God. It is not simply a story of God becoming human, but also one of radical human transformation so as to share in the divine life. Christ brought something new to us, but he did so as a human, a man among us with whom we can enjoy fellowship, and in whose fellowship we are healed and elevated.

Together with the (descending) incarnational characteristic, this (ascending) divinizing characteristic of representative soteriology constitutes “objective redemption” brought about by God in the Christ-event. The Person of Christ, who is both God in our presence as well as the authentic human before God, is the locus of human salvation. He himself is “objective redemption,” whom we subjectively “appropriate” by being incorporated into him. Using Johannine language to make this point, the ITC summarizes the three components succinctly under the banner of “representative headship”: “Christ identifies himself with fallen humanity. He is the new Adam, the progenitor of redeemed humanity, the Head or the vine into whom individuals must be incorporated as members or branches…. The incarnate Word becomes the gathering point for the constitution of a reconciled and restored humanity.”

1.3.3 Rahnerian Representation as a Response to Balthasar

Balthasar’s accusation that Karl Rahner’s Christ does not really bring about our salvation (which is for him already just a *fait accompli*), but rather testifies to it as a kind of notification to humanity as its prime instance, has garnered a substantial and effective response. In particular, Joseph Wong has compellingly argued that Balthasar’s worries about Rahner’s soteriology are grounded in a failure to take seriously his category of symbolic-sacramental causality, according to which Christ indeed causes the grace which he preeminently discloses as *das Realsymbol* of God’s salvation. In other words, while Christ’s life and death does not for Rahner bring about God’s salvific will in eternity, it does bring it about, in the sacramental mode, with respect to *us*. Accordingly, the originality of this dissertation lies not in providing a response to an unanswered accusation.

Rather, what this dissertation seeks to accomplish is to prove that Karl Rahner’s soteriological thought, which has heretofore been classified virtually unanimously as “sacramental,” is a legitimate instance of *representative* soteriology as well. That is, it does not argue against the standard categorization, but rather expands upon it, arguing that for Rahner, Christ the “representative” is not only a *complement* to Christ the primordial sacrament, but that these two categories imply one another. If this is the case, Wong’s answer to Balthasar, the root of whose concern is that Rahner’s soteriology is insufficiently christocentric, can be supplemented and strengthened: not only does Christ *cause* our salvation (in a sacramental mode), but for Karl Rahner, Jesus Christ *is himself*
The very locus of it. As such, Christ is the unequivocal and indispensable center of human salvation, and concerns that Rahner’s christology and soteriology fail (against Rahner’s own claims) to account for the constitutive place of Jesus as the sine qua non of human salvation can be put to rest. In addition, this dissertation’s argument vigorously contests the accusation that Rahner’s Christology and soteriology are inimical to Christ representing us.

1.3.4 Rationale and Motivation for this Inquiry

Since it proposes representative soteriology as supplementary to the sacramental categorization of Rahner, this dissertation builds upon Joseph Wong’s authoritative Rahnerian study of Christ as Savior, and can even be viewed as a partner to and extension upon his own dissertation. A better appreciation for Rahner’s nuanced (and rather opaque, at least in places) theology can thus be achieved. Moreover, by expanding the categories under which Rahner’s soteriological thought can be understood, a more robust answer to critics like Balthasar (and even to “advocates” who themselves favor the sort of reading given by Balthasar) can be made, as was just explained. Such an answer can perhaps advance a rehabilitation of Rahner’s thought in contemporary theological conversation, a conversation which has been increasingly dominated by Balthasar’s own

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184 Cf. FCF pp. 284, 293.
powerful and creative theology and which has, by extension, adopted or presumed many of Balthasar’s (at times vitriolic) criticisms of Rahnerian thought.\textsuperscript{185}

But the impetus of the current project has a third dimension as well: with the advent of Rahner’s \textit{Sämtliche Werke}, a 32-volume complete works of Rahner begun in 1995 and only now coming to its completion, a renewed attention to Rahner’s early writing has come about. Although readers like Wong have noted Rahner’s focus on the Church Fathers early in his career (a focus which seems, explicitly, at least, to have waned as his career progressed), only recently has the suggestion been made that a profound continuity exists between Rahner’s early work in patristics and his later dogmatic essays. In volume three of Rahner’s \textit{Sämtliche Werke}, which focuses upon writings concerning patristic spirituality and theology, Karl Neufeld has even suggested that a patristic “substratum” exists within Rahner’s later work, even if the Fathers are not explicitly cited or even mentioned.\textsuperscript{186} Andreas Batlogg has also underlined the importance of traditional historical theology for Rahner, clarifying that Rahner did not see himself as an “innovator,” but rather as mining a tradition which was richer than the confines of the neo-scholasticism of his training (which he deeply respected, but to which he did not limit himself).\textsuperscript{187}

\textsuperscript{185} The movement to relegate Rahner’s theology to a (failed) project of a bygone era is exemplified in the recent article by R.R. Reno, “Rahner the Restorationist: Karl Rahner’s time has passed,” \textit{First Things} no. 233 (May 2013), pp. 45-51.


Rahner’s own theological dissertation, *E latere Christi* (published only relatively recently, included in the third volume of Rahner’s *Sämtliche Werke* in 1999), will play a significant role in the current project as evidence that the representative soteriology of the Fathers heavily shaped Rahner’s own understanding of Christ as Savior during this important, formative time in his career. Sections within this dissertation find clear echoes in his later writings that demonstrate the ongoing continuity and non-explicit “substratum” noted by Neufeld. Accordingly, a third rationale for this dissertation is to bolster this claim of continuity with specific attention to Rahner’s soteriology.
That Rahner’s soteriology has been primarily classified as sacramental in nature has already been shown, along with a variety of elaborations upon, critiques of, and apologies for his sacramental account of Christ as Savior. However, the theoretical framework that underpins Rahner’s suggestion that Christ is the Ursakrament was left rather undeveloped in the last chapter. This theoretical framework is built upon Rahner’s notion of das Realsymbol, a concept which is not only the heart of his sacramental thought (and thus indispensable for the predominant classification of his soteriology), but is also, according to his brother Hugo Rahner, the idea which stands as the essence and embodiment (Inbegriff) of Karl Rahner’s larger theological corpus. In addition to aiding an understanding of the sacramental categorization of Rahner’s soteriology, the present exploration of das Realsymbol is a necessary pre-condition for my claim, with

188 “Another common theological area which immediately applies to the issue of ‘God in the world’ concerns our efforts… on the theological interpretation of the devotion to the Sacred Heart. And what I have written about the theological history of this devotion, you have speculatively underpinned in the essay, which I personally hold to be the essence and embodiment of your foundational, theological direction, ‘Theology of the Symbol’ (1959)” (Hugo Rahner, “Eucharisticon fraternitatis,” in J.B. Metz (ed.), Gott in Welt. Festgabe für Karl Rahner, 2 vols. (Freiburg i.Br.: Herder, 1964), vol. 2, pp. 885-899 at p. 897). Even Karl Rahner himself declared that “no theology can be complete without also being a theology of the Symbol” (“The Theology of the Symbol,” in TI 4:221-252, at p. 235), and “the concept of Symbol… is an essential key-concept in all theological treatises” (“The Theology of the Symbol,” TI 4:245)
which this chapter will close, that Rahner’s sacramental soteriology is compatible with and, in fact, *implies* a supplementary representative soteriological classification.

The chapter will begin with an overview of Rahner’s seminal article on *das Realsymbol*, “The Theology of the Symbol,” exploring the concept through a general ontology as well as applications of *das Realsymbol* which Rahner offers as explanatory examples. Second, I will consider the influences, both spiritual and philosophical, which contributed to the development of *das Realsymbol* as a theological concept. Third, I will briefly compare Rahner’s *Symbol* category to those of Paul Tillich and Roger Haight. In the fourth section, I will move from the general level to the particular application of interest to the present study: Christ’s salvific efficacy. Rahner’s writings in which he applies sacramental causality to soteriology will feature prominently; Christ’s death on the cross, the *symbolisch* moment in which the Christ-event culminates, will conclude this section. Finally, the chapter will highlight the call for a “representative” supplement which issues from the sacramental-*symbolisch* world of thought operative here.

2.1 “The Theology of the Symbol”

While the assessment that *das Realsymbol* holds a central place within Rahner’s thinking is fairly common, Rahner devoted only one essay of significant length to the topic: “The Theology of the Symbol” (1959). While Rahner certainly speaks of *das

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189 Throughout this dissertation, I will use the German “*[Real]*Symbol” and “*symbolisch*” when referencing Rahner’s concept in order to better distinguish the term from common English usage of “symbol” and “symbolic.”

190 In addition the evaluation of H. Rahner, cf. those of Joseph Wong and Stephen Fields (below).
Realsymbol elsewhere in his work,\textsuperscript{191} only this article includes a thorough treatment of the concept’s general ontology, along with several applications. This being the case, a fairly close reading of this seminal text is warranted in the present chapter.

Rahner opens and closes the article with reference to a particular application of das Realsymbol: the theology underlying the devotion to Jesus’ Sacred Heart. This fact is not all that surprising; although “The Theology of the Symbol” also appears in the fourth volume of his Theological Investigations (TI), it was originally written as a contribution to a volume on Jesus’ Sacred Heart.\textsuperscript{192} Rahner’s references to the theology of the Sacred Heart (as did the practice of the devotion itself) declined (but never disappeared) over the course of his career, but this connection is important to keep in mind as we try to understand das Realsymbol and Rahner’s intentions for it.\textsuperscript{193}

At the outset of the article, Rahner laments that while the usage of the word Symbol is very common (and indeed even unavoidable in discussions of the Sacred

\textsuperscript{191} Along with explicitly mentioning “Realsymbol,” Rahner also signals this concept, as Wong has noted, through his language of “self-expression” (Selbstausdruck, Selbstaussage) which appears frequently (especially in his christological writings) (Wong, Logos-Symbol, p. 39).


\textsuperscript{193} The devotion to Jesus’ Sacred Heart as the natural, physical embodiment of Jesus’ human and divine love, arose gradually throughout history, having its origins (as we will see below in Chapter 4) in the Patristic focus on Christ’s pierced side, which was gradually articulated in terms of his heart opened up on the cross. The devotion grew throughout the Middle Ages and received a great increase in public practice after 1673-1675, when St. Margaret Mary Alacoque (1647-1690) received private revelations concerning the devotion. Just before the dawn of the twentieth century, Pope Leo XIII, in his encyclical Annum Sacrum (1899) consecrated the entire world to Jesus’ Sacred Heart. In the fifty years which followed, which includes Rahner’s birth in 1904, the devotion flourished, with further encyclicals being issued in 1928, 1932, and 1956. For further background, see C.J. Moell, S.J., “Sacred Heart, Devotion to,” in New Catholic Encyclopedia, 2nd ed., 15 vols. (Detroit: Gale, 2003), vol. 12, pp. 490-492.
Heart), its meaning is not immediately clear (though it is often presumed otherwise). For instance, Jesus’ “physical heart” certainly bears some relation to his redeeming love, but what precisely does it mean to say that Jesus’ heart is the Symbol of his saving love? By the end of the article, Rahner hopes to have explicated a detailed and specific meaning of Symbol which will provide an answer to this question about the Sacred Heart and hopefully prove useful in other respects. This explication occurs in two modes, a general ontology of the Symbol as well as illustrative examples, which we will consider in that order.

2.1.1 General Ontology

In common parlance, “symbol” is often used almost interchangeably with ideas like “sign,” “emblem,” and “metaphor.” Rahner, on the other hand, employs the term in a highly specific and technical way. His claims regarding the Sacred Heart, the sacraments, and even the eternal generation of God’s Son, all of which appeal to the notion of Symbol, would be egregiously misunderstood if Symbol were taken in the “popular” sense. To make this point clear from the outset of the article, Rahner makes a distinction between “symbolic realities” (Realsymbole) and “symbolic representations” (Vertretungssymbole). The latter classification describes two independent, self-
constituted realities which somehow “agree,” insofar as the one indicates the other.\textsuperscript{196} Since the two already-established realities are only \textit{extrinsically} paired with one another, their relationship to one another can be completely arbitrary. Rahner’s interest lies not in these so-called “symbols,” but rather in “the highest and most primordial manner in which one reality can \textit{represent} another \textit{[Weise der Repräsentanz einer Wirklichkeit für eine andere].”}\textsuperscript{197}

Rahner introduces his idea of \textit{das Realsymbol} by describing entities or beings \textit{[Seiende]} which “necessarily ‘express’ themselves in order to attain their own nature,” and are thus symbolic.\textsuperscript{198} If one entity is \textit{das Realsymbol} of another, it is so (unlike \textit{Vertretungssymbole}\textsuperscript{199}) in virtue of an \textit{intrinsic} relation between the two. This intrinsic relation is such that the \textit{Realsymbol} in fact \textit{mediates} and \textit{communicates} the very presence of that which it symbolizes: “we call this supreme and primal representation \textit{[Repräsentanz]}, in which one reality renders another present (primarily ‘for itself’ and only secondarily for others), a \textit{Symbol}: the representation \textit{[Repräsentanz]} which allows

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\textsuperscript{197} Ibid., p 225; \textit{SzT} 4:279, emphases mine. Rahner’s choice of the word \textit{Repräsentanz} (rather than \textit{Vertretung}) here is noteworthy.
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\textsuperscript{198} “The Theology of the Symbol,” \textit{TI} 4:224. Moreover, Rahner makes the claim that \textit{all} beings are in fact symbolic in this way.
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\textsuperscript{199} As Rhodora E. Beaton puts it, “Aware of the many different definition of symbol, Rahner is clear that \textit{Realsymbols} are not arbitrary signs or costumes, which merely share some agreement or similarity with that which they signify” (\textit{Embodied Words, Spoken Signs: Sacramentality and the Word in Rahner and Chauvet} (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), p. 117).
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the other ‘to be there’ [«da-sein»].”200 Thus, self-expression and self-communication through the intrinsically related “other” stand as prominent features of Realsymbole which distinguish them from Vertretungssymbole.

A third feature of das Realsymbol is the unity of the Symbol and “symbolized” achieved in this act of self-expression. In describing this feature, Rahner observes a “unity in plurality” which in fact appears in every instance of being. Noting that all finite beings are plural in virtue of their finitude (and thus cannot be “absolutely ‘simple’”) and that even the infinite Triune God is a plurality of Persons, Rahner claims that “being is plural in itself.”201 And yet such plurality is not inimical to unity, but conducive to unity (and, moreover, in the case of the Trinity, to unity in its highest form!202); after all, the relationship he has in mind is not “the subsequent conjunction of separate elements which once stood only on their own,” but a plurality which results from the self-expression of an “original unity.” In Rahner’s words, “[T]he ‘original unity’ develops, the plural stems from an original ‘one’… ‘dis-closing’ itself into a plurality in order to find itself precisely there.”203 By “finding itself” in the other through its act of self-expression, the “original

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200 “The Theology of the Symbol,” TI 4:225; SzT 4:279. Once again, it is important to notice that Rahner’s initial introduction to his theory of Symbol heavily utilizes “representation” language, especially considering the claim in this dissertation that Rahner’s portrayal of the Christ-Redeemer as Sacrament has the implied complement of the Christ-Redeemer as Representative.


202 Rahner claims that “plural” unity is the highest and purest kind of unity, since it “would be theologically a heresy, and therefore ontologically an absurdity, to think that God would be really ‘simpler’ and hence more perfect, if there were no real distinction of persons in God” (ibid., pp. 227-228).

203 Ibid., p. 227
one” is brought to perfection and “self-realization.” The somewhat paradoxical relationship of unity and plurality which exists between the “original one” and its “other” is apparent in the statement with which Rahner closes his overview of the Symbol’s general ontology: “The symbol strictly speaking (Realsymbol) is the self-realization of a being in the other, which is constitutive of its essence.”

To summarize, das Realsymbol describes the phenomenon of an “original one” expressing itself in an “other,” in such a way that the other in fact communicates the very presence of the “original.” The Realsymbol does not arbitrarily “stand for” the symbolized, but in fact exists as the expression and self-realization of it, the two forming an ontological unity of the highest kind. Thus, it is incorrect to view the “symbol,” as Rahner means it here, as a simple “pointer” to or merely “like” the reality which it symbolizes, though some of his readers have referred to his notion in his way.

204 Repeating his opening claim that “being is of itself symbolic, because it necessarily ‘expresses’ itself,” he elaborates that this self-expression occurs necessarily precisely “because it must realize itself through a plurality in unity” (ibid., p. 229, emphasis added). “Each being…. gives itself away from itself to the ‘other’, and there finds itself in knowledge and love… [B]y constituting the inward ‘other’… it comes to… its self-fulfillment” (ibid., pp. 229-230).

205 Ibid., p. 234, emphasis added. Cf. The Symbol is “the reality, constituted by the thing symbolized as an inner moment of itself, which reveals and proclaims the thing symbolized, and is itself full of the thing symbolized, being its concrete form of existence” (ibid., p. 251).

206 In a later essay from 1970, Rahner elaborates, “a manifestation of this kind is not merely a subsequent promulgation of something which is in any case present even without such promulgation. Rather, it is something in which the reality promulgated brings its own individual history to its fullness and so extends its own real nature in that it integrates within its own individual history more ‘material’. In this sense, then, the manifestation is the ‘cause’ of that which is manifesting” (“Considerations of the Active Role of the Person in the Sacramental Event,” in TI 14:161-184, at p. 178).

207 E.g., Nancy Clasby, “Dancing Sophia: Rahner’s Theology of Symbols,” in Religion & Literature 25.1 (1993), pp. 51-65. Clasby gives an accurate treatment of how Rahner, in some ways echoing Heidegger, sees “being in the world” as “expressive” rather than “static” (ibid., p. 54). However, in places she offers inferences about (e.g., “the cosmos itself exists as God’s symbol, … his body,” ibid., p. 57) and summaries (“A symbol discloses its referent indirectly by showing us not what it is, but what it is
Although Rahner’s theological applications of \textit{das Realsymbol} will be explored below, his appeal, with which he concludes his section on “general ontology,” to the “scholastic philosophical” (i.e., medieval articulations of classical Aristotelian) theory of matter and form for illustrative purposes is worth including within the present overview of his general ontology. Unlike Plato’s idea of “form,” i.e., something existing in the “Platonic heavens” entirely separated from (though standing in some relationship of “resemblance” to) matter, Aristotle held that “form” existed as \textit{and only as} the internal, instantiated organizing principle of a material being. To use an example from Aristotle, a bronze statue is not some earthly shadow of a Platonic statue-form, but is rather the thing (“substance”) constituted by the unity of the form and the thing’s matter. The bronze statue is en\textit{formed} bronze; it embodies and expresses the form, which in turn resides within it as its inner structural principle.\textsuperscript{208} Blending this classical account with his own language of Symbol, Rahner summarizes,

\textit{the figure-forming essence of a being… constitute[s] and perfect[s] itself…. by really projecting its visible figure outside itself as its – Symbol, its appearance…. The ‘form’ gives itself away from itself by imparting itself to the material cause. It does not work on it subsequently and ‘from outside’, by bringing about in it something different from itself and alien to its essence. The ‘effect’ is the ‘cause’ itself.}\textsuperscript{209}


“Formal causality,” a category quite familiar to those (like Rahner) trained in Thomistic philosophy and theology, thus stands as an explanatory touchstone for Rahner’s articulations of das Realsymbol. Although Rahner’s category of realsymbolisch causality is broader (cases of Realsymbole are not restricted to “substances” instantiating “forms,” as will be seen shortly), formal causality is a clear210 instance of Rahner’s Symbol at work, and one to which he will return in “The Theology of the Symbol.”

2.1.2 Explanatory Applications

The second part of Rahner’s article consists of theological applications of the general ontology presented in the first part. The article’s conclusion also brings this ontology to bear on the matter of Jesus’ Sacred Heart, an issue also discussed in the introduction and which thus frames the entirety of Rahner’s essay. The order in which he presents these applications is more or less “descending,” beginning with God in se and moving, via God’s sacramental presence in the world, toward anthropological considerations. I will follow Rahner’s own ordering here, presenting only broad outlines of the topics he treats.

Rahner begins with what he calls “the supreme form of” the theology of the Symbol, namely, the theology of God’s Logos.211 After reiterating that his usage of Symbol must be understood in the technical sense just established, Rahner posits that “the Logos is the ‘Symbol’ of the Father… the inward symbol which remains distinct from

210 Wong actually refers to it as the “best” instance of Rahner’s ontology of the das Realsymbol (Logos-Symbol, p. 81).

what is symbolized [Symbolisierter], which is constituted by what is symbolized, where what is symbolized [Symbolisierte] expresses itself and possesses itself.” 212 That is, the Logos is the “other” into which the “original one” (the Father) self-expresses, forming a perfect unity while maintaining distinction. Rahner thus utilizes das Realsymbol to account for the eternal generation of the Second Person of the Trinity. 213

As Rahner continues, he “nests” the successive Realsymbole within one another, constructing a sort of sacramental chain. Having thus established the first “link” in the Son’s eternal, symbolisch generation from Father, Rahner transitions to the second “link”: the symbolisch expression of that Son within human history. However, prior to his treatment of the Logos’s incarnation, Rahner addresses Augustine’s proposal (which Thomas Aquinas follows) that the Persons of the Trinity are basically “interchangeable” when it comes to which Person could assume Christ’s human nature (although, of course, only the Second Person is said to have in fact assumed it). 214 For a combination of both

212 Ibid., TI 4:236; SzT 4:292.

213 Cf. “If this God expresses his very own self into the emptiness of what is not God, then this expression is the outward expression of his immanent Word, and not something arbitrary which could also be proper to another divine person” (FCF p. 223).

214 “If, following a theological tradition which began only since St Augustine, one simply takes it for granted that each of the divine persons could set up, each for himself, his own hypostatic relationship to a given reality in the world and so could ‘appear’, then the fact that within the divinity the Logos is the image of the Father would give the Logos no special character of symbol for the world, which would be due to him alone on account of his relationship of origin to the Father. The Father could also reveal himself and ‘appear’ without reference, so to speak, to the Son. But if one does not make this pre-supposition with St Augustine, which has no clear roots in the earlier tradition and still less in Scripture, one need have no difficulty in thinking that the Word’s being symbol of the Father has significance for God’s action ad extra, in spite of such action being common to all three persons” (“The Theology of the Symbol,” TI 4:236). Cf. Thomas Aquinas’s Summa Theologiae (henceforth ST) III q. 3 aa. 5-7 (Summa Theologica, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 5 vols. (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1947)). Thomas does acknowledge that it was “more fitting” for the Son (rather than the Father or the Spirit) to assume Christ’s human nature (ST III q. 3 a. 8).
historical and theological reasons, Rahner departs from this Augustinian trajectory, positing instead that God’s outward “utterance” *ad extra* is a continuation of God’s own inward self-expression that generates the Son. In other words, the same Logos which is God’s self-expression in eternity in turn self-expresses within history through the incarnation. Rahner elects not to elaborate on the matter here (though he does elsewhere), but the brief excursus underlines how central the *intrinsic* relation of *Symbol* and symbolized is for Rahner.

Turning to his second “link,” the incarnation, Rahner voices yet another concern about theological “extrinsicism,” raising his perennial complaint that Christ’s humanity is too often understood as a kind of “uniform” which the Logos dons and uses as a sort of “mouthpiece.” This crypto-Monophysitism, he worries, not only fails to respect Christ’s human will and subjectivity, which end up being construed as kinds of instruments or puppets operated by God, but it also establishes only a weak (and hardly

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217 Cf. *FCF* pp. 224, 287 and ubiquitous in Rahner’s Christological writings.

218 It should be noted that “instrument” language, which Rahner frequently criticizes on this topic, does not automatically entail this “puppet” view of Christ’s will. As Rahner certainly would have been aware, Thomas Aquinas refers to Christ’s humanity as the (conjoined) *instrumental* efficient cause of grace, of which God *in his divinity* is the principal efficient cause (*ST* III q. 62 a. 5). And, at the same time, Thomas understands Christ’s human will, acknowledged to be entirely free (*ST* III q. 18 a. 4), as part and parcel of its action as an instrument (i.e., Christ’s human will : Christ’s humanity :: A saw’s sharpness : a saw) (cf. *ST* III q. 62 a.1 ad 2). Rahner’s worry here (as it is with “Anselmian” satisfaction, which vaguely resembles Anselm’s doctrine!) seems to be concern a looser, popular usage of “instrument” language.
“intrinsic”) union of Christ’s natures, “hypostatic” though it might be. On such an account, Christ’s humanity could, at best, function as a kind of “signal” of his divine Person.

Rahner’s das Realsymbol offers a much more satisfying account: Christ’s humanity is not so much something “assumed” as it is the result of the Logos’s act of “exteriorizing” within the world. By positing the human Jesus as “the ‘appearance’ of the Logos itself, its Realsymbol in the pre-eminent sense,” Rahner is able to present Christ’s humanity as something intrinsically related to the Logos and genuinely revelatory of God, rather than something in itself alien to the Logos and its reality, which is only taken up from outside like an instrument…. [T]he humanity of Christ is not to be considered as something in which God dresses up and masquerades…. [It] is the self-disclosure of the Logos itself, so that when God, expressing himself, exteriorizes himself, that very thing appears which we call the humanity of the Logos.

In addition to rendering Christ’s humanity an authentic revelation of the Logos, a realsymbolisch incarnation also provides an account of a most intimate union of Christ’s natures; for if Christ’s humanity is das Realsymbol of the divine Logos, the two enjoy the

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kind of realsymbolisch unity which also characterizes the oneness of the eternal divine Persons, a unity of which there cannot be any purer kind. 222

Having established the Father’s Realsymbol as the Logos, and subsequently the Logos’s Realsymbol as the human Christ, it should come as no surprise that Rahner’s next “link” is das Realsymbol of Christ. This, Rahner says, is the Church, which is das Realsymbol of the presence of Christ…. [T]his Symbol of the grace of God really contains what it signifies; that it is the Ursakrament of the grace of God, which does not merely designate but really possesses what was brought definitively into the world by Christ: the irrevocable, eschatological grace of God which conquers triumphantly the guilt of man. 223

With this move, Rahner openly acknowledges that he is drawing on the work of his contemporaries who have styled the Church as the “sacrament” of Christ. 224

Although it is true that by depicting the Church as das Realsymbol Rahner follows a larger movement which identified the Church as Christ’s “sacrament” (a movement

222 “The Theology of the Symbol,” TI 4:227-228

223 Ibid. p. 241. Cf. “the Church is the abiding and ultimate sacrament of the world’s salvation…. [W]herever and however the Church is this ultimate sacrament of salvation for the world, there Christ is present in his Spirit” (“The Presence of the Lord in the Christian Community at Worship,” TI 10:71-83, at p. 83).

which would eventually be enshrined in Vatican II’s *Lumen Gentium* in 1964\(^{225}\), it is also true that Rahner envisioned the foundations of such a move early on in his career. In the conclusion of his dissertation from 1936, *E latere Christi* (which dealt with patristic exegesis, typology, Christ’s wounded side and ecclesiology), Rahner calls for the development of a “general ontology of the presence of the life of Jesus in the life of the Christian.”\(^{226}\) Such an ontology, he envisions, would undergird his dissertation’s claim that Christ’s pierced side, from which the Fathers understood the Church to emerge,\(^{227}\) is a kind of “inward” *Symbol* (as opposed to a *Symbol* given its meaning “from without”\(^{228}\)), a *Symbol* which stands as “an ‘address’ to later historical persons,” granting Jesus’ life a kind of “abiding presence [*Gegenwärtigbleiben*]” to them.\(^{229}\) In other words, in the mid-1930s Rahner already envisioned the Church and Christ’s presence to exist in a *symbolisch* relationship to one another. It is noteworthy that decades later, when he introduces the Church as the third “link” of the *realsymbolisch* chain, Rahner repeats this language and theme from his ecclesiological dissertation, speaking of the Church bringing about Christ’s presence throughout the various eras and locations of history: “the Church is the persisting presence [*Gegenwärtigbleiben*] of the incarnate Word in

\(^{225}\) “[T]he Church, in Christ, is a sacrament – a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of the unity of the entire human race” (*Lumen Gentium* (LG) n. 1; cf. LG n. 48)

\(^{226}\) *E latere Christi*, p. 83.

\(^{227}\) *E latere Christi* centers on the patristic typological idea that the Church is the “second Eve” which emerged from the wounded side of the “second Adam” who “slept” on the cross, just as the first Eve was formed from the first Adam while he slept in the Garden.

\(^{228}\) cf. Rahner’s distinction in “Theology of the Symbol” between *Realsymbol* and *Vertretungssymbol*.

\(^{229}\) *E latere Christi*, pp. 82-83.
space and time… it continues the symbolic function of the Logos in the world.” 230 (I will further address how *E latere Christi* anticipates “The Theology of the Symbol” below, especially in Chapter 4.)

Although Rahner offers several other applications, his *realsymbolisch* chain ends with his considerations of the sacraments, which he asserts are *Realsymbole* of the Church. “The sacraments make concrete and actual, for the life of the individual, the symbolic reality [*Symbolwirklichkeit*] of the Church as the primary sacrament and therefore constitute at once, in keeping with the nature of this Church, a symbolic reality [*Symbolwirklichkeit*].” 231 That is, as Christ’s *Ursakrament*, the Church mediates his ongoing presence; but the Church only achieves this identity through the individual sacraments, which Rahner says elsewhere are “acts in a process of concrete self-fulfilment on the part of the Church.” 232 Since they are thus the Church’s “other” through which the Church is mediated and self-realizes, the sacraments are genuine *Realsymbole*. Rahner finds further support for this claim in the classical sacramental axioms which locate the sacraments’ efficaciousness precisely in their act of signifying, thus testifying to the intimate, intrinsic relationship between *Symbol* and symbolized. 233

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230 “The Theology of the Symbol,” *TI* 4:240. In another essay, Rahner identifies the Holy Spirit as the “medium” of Christ’s presence to the Church (“The Presence of the Lord in the Christian Community at Worship,” *TI* 10:73-74). Lest this inclusion of the Holy Spirit be thought of as an entirely later corrective to his almost exclusive focus on the First and Second Persons of the Trinity in this article, it should be noted that throughout *E latere Christi*, Rahner refers to Christ’s pierced side, out of which the Church emerges, as the “Source of the Spirit.”

231 “The Theology of the Symbol,” *TI* 4:241

232 “Considerations of the Active Role,” *TI* 14:181.

233 Namely, *Sacramenta efficiunt quod significant et significant quod efficiunt* (Sacraments effect what they signify and signify what they effect), *sacramenta gratiam efficiunt, quatenus eam significant* (sacraments effect grace, insofar as they signify), as well as *sacramenta significant gratiam, quia eam...*
Before concluding the article, Rahner’s attention returns to Thomistic-Aristotelian hylomorphism for one more application of his ontology of the Symbol: the human body as das Realsymbol of the human soul. Although it is common to hear humans described as the unity of body and soul, Rahner notes that this is a flawed description, both in terms of Thomas’s classical anthropology as well as his own realsymbolisch version. The “body” cannot exist as such independently and apart from the soul, otherwise there would be not true unity, but only a grouping of two self-constituted realities. This is why Thomas’s hylomorphic anthropology speaks of the soul (i.e., the human person’s “form”) and “prime matter” (which exists purely in potentiality rather than actuality) as constituents of the body, which the human person is. That is, human beings are, like the bronze statue, enformed matter, prima materia taken up and ordered according to the inner principle of the form/soul. Accordingly, the human body is the expression and full realization, that is, das Realsymbol, of the human soul.

efficacient (sacraments signify grace, which they effect). Rahner writes, “If we are to speak of an effectiveness belonging to the sacramental sign, then it… is to be envisaged as an effectiveness inherent in the sign precisely as such” (ibid., TI 14:177).

234 Cf. FCF pp. 182-184.

235 Likewise, the soul “must not be understood – quite unscholastically – as a fragmentary portion of the whole man. It is the one originating source of the whole man” (“The Theology of the Symbol,” TI 4:248).

236 Historical philosophers disagree as to what Aristotle means by “prime matter” and its place within his physics; however, Rahner is here following Thomas’s reading.

237 “[W]hat we call body is nothing else than the actuality of the soul itself in the ‘other’ of material prima, the ‘otherness’ produced by the soul itself, and hence its expression and Symbol in the very sense which we have given to the term Realsymbol” (ibid., p. 247).

238 [T]he body is the Symbol of the soul…it is formed as the self-realization of the soul…the soul renders itself present and makes its ‘appearance’ in the body which is distinct from it” (ibid.).
“The Theology of the Symbol” closes by returning to the question posed in its introduction: What ought we to make of the statement that Jesus’ heart is the Symbol of his saving love? Here, Rahner provides some background by describing an ongoing dispute about the proper object of Sacred Heart devotion. For one camp of theologians, the word “heart” is understood in a very broad sense, as indicating one’s “entire inner life” (including the bodily heart). A second camp, however, speaks of Jesus’ love being adored under the “symbol” of his bodily heart. The former group, Rahner reports, has taken issue with the latter one, arguing that its scheme divides the single object of Sacred Heart devotion into a variety of particular devotions.

Such a criticism, as well as the division itself between the two groups, can be dissolved by understanding “symbol” as das Realsymbol. Rahner contends that the first group’s discomfort with the second presumes that the “symbol” is only “extrinsically ordained” to the “symbolized.” However, if “a Symbol is not something separate from the symbolized,” but is rather “the reality, constituted by the thing symbolized as an inner moment of moment of itself” and “its concrete form of existence,” then devotion to a Symbol-Heart is not divided amongst a variety of objects at all. Indeed, Rahner notes, the first camp can then be included within the second, for Jesus’ bodily heart can be adored as the Symbol of his “whole,” his inner life and saving love.

As in the case of the Church, Rahner anticipated this application of Symbol to the Sacred Heart nearly 25 years earlier in E latere Christi:

Our Sacred Heart devotion today certainly adores the bodily heart of Jesus. This bodily heart has a priority with respect to other parts of Jesus’ humanity, which

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239 Ibid., p. 251.
are also worthy of adoration, but it is only the object of a special devotion because it is a *Symbol* to us of the redemptive love of the God-man for us, summing up all of the achievements of this love in a sign.\textsuperscript{240}

Furthermore, Rahner is not simply advocating the position of the “second group” in saying this. Two paragraphs above this remark about the Sacred Heart in *E latere Christi*, he distinguishes between *Symbole* which have their meaning assigned to them by an observer or only retrospectively, and *Symbole* which have their meaning *intrinsically* and from the outset. That is, Rahner has already made the distinction which he says dissolves the “first group’s” qualms with the second, qualms which are rooted in an “extrinsic” version of “symbol.” However, it is only in “The Theology of the Symbol” that he fully develops an ontology which distinguishes the two kinds of *Symbol* and that he applies this distinction to this debate about “objects” of devotion.

While it remains true that “The Theology of the Symbol” stands as Rahner’s only prolonged consideration of *das Real*-*symbol* within his large body of writing, the judgment of his brother, Hugo, that *Symbol* is the essential center of Rahner’s overall theology seems accurate. Not only is it clear that Rahner’s thinking on the matter reaches back to at least his theology dissertation in 1936, but the applications of it which he sketches provide the themes and trajectories of topics to which he would return throughout his career. These especially include his adamant rejection of Trinitarian theology in which the divine Persons are exchangeable and his insistence that Christ’s

\textsuperscript{240} *E latere Christi*, p. 83. He also calls Jesus’ Sacred Heart the “symbolisch recapitulation of the achievements of God’s love” (ibid., p. 84).
humanity is not simply a “uniform” donned by the Logos,\textsuperscript{241} but also his writing on the sacraments and the idea of “mediated immediacy.”\textsuperscript{242}

2.2 Background and Influences Underlying \textit{das Realsymbol}

Over the course of Rahner’s career, he engaged in philosophical as well as theological research and writing. As it is well-known, Rahner’s original course of advanced study at the University of Freiberg was in philosophy. However, his dissertation, \textit{Spirit in the World} (which would eventually be published in multiple editions and translations), was deemed unacceptable. Rahner subsequently transitioned to a career theology, a subject for which he had previously developed a strong interest during his studies at Valkenburg. His theology dissertation, \textit{E latere Christi}, was quickly submitted to and accepted by the University of Innsbruck.

Rahner’s extensive training in both philosophy and theology has led to disagreements over how to interpret his prolific body of work in the latter field. One recent debate\textsuperscript{243} which has received significant attention concerns whether Rahner’s theology is best interpreted as resting squarely on the “foundation” of his philosophical

\begin{footnotes}
\item[241] He also briefly mentions the ongoing and perpetual role of Christ’s humanity as \textit{Symbol} mediating the beatific vision to us, which stands merely as an assertion in “The Theology of the Symbol” (\textit{TI} 4:244) but which he defends elsewhere (cf. “The Eternal Significance of the Humanity of Jesus for our Relationship with God” (1953), in \textit{TI} 3:35-46).
\item[243] A summative overview of this debate can be found in Robert Masson, “Interpreting Rahner’s Metaphoric Logic,” in \textit{Theological Studies} 71.2 (June 2010), pp. 380-409.
\end{footnotes}
commitments, a position advanced by Patrick Burke, and which has simply been presumed by many others. Opposed to such a “foundationalist” hermeneutic is Karen Kilby. According to Kilby, no overarching or undergirding philosophy is operative in Rahner’s theological corpus; in fact, she contends that several elements in Rahner’s mature theology (e.g., the “supernatural existential”) are diametrically opposed to his early philosophical claims in *Spirit in the World* and *Hearer of the Word*. His theology, she argues, does not proceed from an underlying and independent philosophy, although it does utilize philosophical ideas (e.g., the *Vorgriff*) at the service of faith seeking understanding.

Interestingly, accounts of the influences behind Rahner’s *Realsymbol* also split into two “camps” which offer very different assessments of the importance of philosophy

244 See Patrick Burke’s *Reinterpreting Rahner: A Critical Study of His Major Themes* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002). Such a reading has, until recently, been a largely unquestioned default understanding of Rahner (by many of his critics as well as his advocates). Among Rahner’s advocates, Gerald McCool, S.J. refers plainly of “the philosophical foundations of [Rahner’s] theology” (“Introduction: Rahner’s Philosophical Theology,” in *A Rahner Reader* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975), pp. xiii-xxvii, at p. xxvii). Representative of the critical pole of this camp is Robert Barron’s *The Priority of Christ: Toward a Postliberal Catholicism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2007), in which Rahner’s theology is presented as resting entirely upon (as well as ultimately determined and restrained by) his early philosophical work in *Spirit in the World* and *Hearer of the Word*. For Barron, the fact that Rahner’s *FCF* presents anthropology first and christology second is sufficient confirmation of this foundationalist structure of Rahner’s thought, as well as Rahner’s reliance upon the “modern” and “liberal” heritage of Kant, Schleiermacher, et al. (pp. 32-34). (The fact that the anthropological reflections of Barron’s champion, Thomas Aquinas, precede his systematic christology, the latter of which is reserved for the fourth and final *pars* of the *Summa Theologiae*, is absent from Barron’s genealogical analysis.)

245 E.g., William Dych: “Rahner delivered a series of fifteen lectures in Salzburg during the summer of 1937 which were to be extremely important in the development of his theology. They were concerned with the philosophy of religion, and he applied the philosophy of knowledge developed in his Freiburg dissertation [i.e., *Spirit in the World*] to the question of knowing God through an historical revelation. They were subsequently published under the title *Hörer des Wortes*, translated into English as *Hearers of the Word* [later, *Hearer of the Word*]. These two books were the seminal and foundational works out of which Rahner was to develop his philosophical theology” (*Karl Rahner* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1992), pp. 7-8; emphasis mine).

for this concept. Joseph Wong has argued that *das Realsymbol* emerged primarily (though certainly not exclusively) from commitments which Rahner adopted from Ignatian spirituality. Writing after Wong and aware of his account, Stephen Fields has identified the primary factors which shape *das Realsymbol* to be philosophical theses advanced by J. Maréchal, Kant, and Hegel, among others. I do not wish to imply that the differing assessments of Wong and Fields map neatly onto the positions of Kilby and Burke. Nevertheless, the tendency for Rahner’s readers to assess and interpret his work primarily from either philosophical or theological starting points (which may say more about the reader than Rahner) is certainly not uncommon.

2.2.1 Ignatian Spirituality

Before directly addressing the “spiritual” bases out of which Wong sees *das Realsymbol* emerging, a few preliminary remarks are in order. First, it should be made clear that Wong acknowledges both spiritual and philosophical motivations behind Rahner’s understanding of *Symbol*. That said, in his judgment Rahner’s spiritual motivations take priority over his philosophical ones. Accordingly, Wong’s “background study” on *das Realsymbol* proceeds in this order: Chapter 1 explores the “Religious Origin of Rahner’s Symbol Concept,” while Chapter 2 treats “Rahner’s Ontology of ‘Realsymbol’ and its Philosophical Presuppositions.”

Second, Wong’s decision to prioritize Rahner’s spiritual motivations over his philosophical ones accords with a significant fact, noted above, which Wong himself notes only briefly.247 While Rahner’s seminal article on *das Realsymbol* does address the

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concept’s applicability to Christology, the Trinity, the sacraments, and even anthropology.248 “Theology of the Symbol” was originally composed as a contribution to a volume on Jesus’ Sacred Heart. The fact that Rahner’s most explicit and lengthy treatment of the topic occurs as a prolegomena to devotion to Jesus’ Sacred Heart249 speaks forcefully to the position that das Realsymbol emerged primarily from “spiritual” considerations.

Finally, at the service of situating what follows within his overall project, Wong’s main thesis is that Rahner’s Realsymbol, specifically as applied to the Second Person of the Trinity (Logos-Symbol), is the “key-concept” for understanding and even uniting Rahner’s various and disparate Christological writings. Rahner himself commented on this project shortly before the end of his life in the volume’s foreword. There, he generally evaluated Wong’s efforts positively, affirming the sort of continuity (even if it wasn’t always consciously operative) posited by Wong and noting that this renewed emphasis on Symbol, which Rahner describes as having “developed in the course of writing a theology of devotion to the Sacred Heart,” infuses his later “formal” and “abstract” Christological work with a richness which was somewhat lacking.250 To be

248 It is typically in association with these very topics that Rahner’s readers take up interest in das Realsymbol.

249 Rahner’s own introductory remarks in this article (TI 4:221-222) situate it as an attempt to address the question of whether the proper object of devotion to the Sacred Heart is Jesus’ physical heart or Jesus’ love; by suggesting that the former is das Realsymbol of the latter, Rahner is able to provide a most succinct answer to this question: yes.

250 Rahner writes, “considerations essential to my Christology are drawn together here which I had indeed developed in the course of writing a theology of devotion to the Sacred Heart but which I had overlooked in producing my first brief systematic Christology during my years in Muenster. The reassertion of my considerations on devotion to the Sacred Heart, however, enriches and deepens the
clear, Rahner offers no evaluation of Wong’s thesis about the “priority” of his motivations; however, his reference to Jesus’ Sacred Heart when discussing Symbol (thus underlining the original context out of which his most explicit writing on the subject emerged) is noteworthy.

Wong begins his “spiritual” account of Rahner’s influences by describing Rahner as a “theologian and a philosopher, as well as a mystic.” This somewhat startling statement is probably best understood in light of Rahner’s famous proposition that “the Christian of the future will be a mystic or he or she will not exist at all,” a proposition which he follows by characterizing mysticism not as “singular parapsychological phenomena, but a genuine experience of God emerging from the very heart of our existence.” Wong judges that Rahner, as a professional theologian, is more informed by his “mystical” side than his “philosophical” side.

At the center of this mystical side, Wong explains, is the insight that “God is always mediated through created realities, especially through people and events.” While this sacramental insight might be more generally described as particularly Catholic, Wong especially credits Ignatius’s spirituality, with its emphasis on “finding

otherwise somewhat too formal and abstract outline of systematic Christology which resulted in both the work I did in Muenster and in my Foundations of Christian Faith” (Wong, Logos-Symbol, p. 6).

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251 Ibid., p. 46.


253 Wong, Logos-Symbol, p. 46.

254 Ibid., p. 47.
God in all things,” for influencing the Jesuit theologian’s sacramental worldview.

Moreover, this sacramental worldview is accompanied by a strongly christological vector which directs this widespread mediation of God in the world. Wong describes this vector as a “Christ centered incarnational vision” according to which the human “experience of God is always mediated, explicitly or implicitly, by the humanity of Christ.”²⁵⁵

In fact, along with the call to “find God in all things,” Wong identifies “Christ mysticism” as the major factor through which Ignatius of Loyola influenced Rahner’s spirituality. “If for [Ignatius] things of the word are ‘sacraments,’” Wong explains, “then Christ is the primordial sacrament of encounter with God.”²⁵⁶ That is, it is in virtue of the incarnation that other mediations of grace through creation occur, for through God’s entering into and uniting with creation, creation itself has been infused with God: “by the fact that the Logos has taken flesh, things of the world are no longer mere ‘means’ in order to reach God. Rather they are quasi-sacraments mediating the presence of God himself.”²⁵⁷

Having sketched this “Ignatian” sacramental worldview according to which the entire created order serves as a sacramental mediation of God’s grace dependent upon Christ, Wong offers the Rahnerian deduction that “man’s ordinary life is imbued with the grace of Christ,” and thus “one can hardly opt for anything without having to do with

²⁵⁵ Ibid.
²⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 56.
²⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 57.
God and Christ either by accepting or rejecting them.” Anticipating how Rahner may describe this worldview in his technical vocabulary, Wong suggests that “the order of creation is the ‘symbol’ of the order of grace constituted by it for its own realization and manifestation.” To summarize, Rahner’s claims (which will be examined below) that all of reality is “symbolic” and that the Logos offers the prime example of das Realsymbol are rooted in Ignatius’s vision of a sacramental world which is in turn dependent upon the mediation of grace in Christ.

In company with Ignatius, the devotion to Jesus’ Sacred Heart is identified by Wong as central to Rahner’s spirituality; importantly, appeals to Symbol abound in Rahner’s writings on the Sacred Heart. The “basis” of this devotion, as identified by Wong, could easily be described as “Ignatian,” given the considerations above. It is that all realities mediate God, but “Christ is the one Mediator between God and man.” This “basis” is identified as such because in speaking of Jesus’ “heart,” two layers of Symbol are operative. The most basic layer concerns the human being Jesus as the Ursakrament of God’s grace; the second layer concerns the “heart” which sums up that very human being.

According to Rahner, “heart” is an Urworte, a word burgeoning with meaning. “Heart” denotes not only one’s “biological heart” or “pulmonary flesh,” but also the “heart of the person” in a more profound sense; in fact, the former is said to be the

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258 Ibid., pp. 57-58.
259 Ibid., p. 57.
260 Ibid., p. 63.
Symbol of the latter. By this, Rahner does not mean that heart is a “conventional sign” or an “arbitrary symbol.” Rather, he calls it an Ursymbol uniting two intrinsically related realities – the corporal heart and the “heart of the person” are never without each other. Accordingly, talk of Jesus’ “heart” concerns both the center of his self-realization as well as the center of his corporal self. Being that both of these realities are in turn sacraments which realize God’s love within the world, Rahner, combining the two “layers” of Symbol mentioned above, ventures to say that “the veneration of the Sacred Heart is, in fact, precisely a devotion to that love of God which has been made present to us in Christ Jesus.”

Rahner’s early and explicit connection of Sacred Heart devotion to his theory of Symbol support Wong’s identification of the former and a strong impetus for the latter. Although Wong’s subsequent chapter discusses the philosophical presuppositions underlying das Realsymbol, such presuppositions will be, in the interest of space, discussed below through the lens of another of Rahner’s readers.

261 Ibid.

262 Ibid., p. 65. This statement would, it seems, imbue heart transplants with incredible metaphysical significance.

263 “Unity-Love-Mystery,” TI 8:229-247, at p. 235, qtd. in Wong, Logos-Symbol, p. 66. Wong offers his own summary: Jesus’ Sacred Heart is a “symbol...to be understood in the sense of a sacramental sign. It does not merely convey a concept but it actually contains ‘in its innermost depths that abundance of grace and power’ which it signifies....the Sacred Heart is a sacramental symbol which effects by signifying (significando efficit). It is the incarnation, or realization in human form, of divine love” (ibid. pp. 67-68).
2.2.2 Philosophical Stimuli

In his *Being as Symbol*, Stephen Fields has proposed an alternative principal influence behind *das Realsymbol*, namely, Rahner’s philosophical forbearers.\(^{264}\) Certainly, Fields agrees that Rahner’s philosophy, in particular his metaphysics, is at the service of a larger (theological) project. Nevertheless, he asserts that Rahner’s philosophical work is “an original contribution that merits attention in its own right.”\(^{265}\)

Without explicitly characterizing Rahner’s theology as “foundationalist” with respect to his philosophy, Fields endeavors to examine the latter *in se* in *Being as Symbol*. A significant portion of this work consists of analyzing the influences behind *das Realsymbol*. Explicitly disagreeing with Wong’s assessment, Fields “locate[s] the origins of the Realsymbol principally in philosophical theories of the symbol,”\(^{266}\) summarily stating that “Rahner conceives the Realsymbol by interpreting Thomism in light of the tradition of Kant to Heidegger.”\(^{267}\) In particular, he identifies J. Maréchal and neo-Thomist theories of knowledge, Thomas Aquinas’s sacramental thought, and elements common to Goethe and Hegel as influential contributors to Rahner’s concept.\(^{268}\)


\(^{266}\) Ibid., p. 3.

\(^{267}\) Ibid., p. 20.

\(^{268}\) Peter J. Fritz has recently expanded on the project undertaken by Fields by examining Rahner’s notion of *das Realsymbol* in relation to Friedrich Schelling’s philosophy (“Karl Rahner, Friedrich Schelling, and Original Plural Unity,” in *Theological Studies* 75.2 (2014), pp. 284-307). It should also be noted that Fields engages in a lengthy analysis of the implications which *das Realsymbol* has for a “metaphysics of language,” an analysis in which he identifies Kant and Heidegger (in the latter’s
Before specifically addressing Fields’s account of these philosophical influences, let us situate it within his broader understanding of Rahner’s “original contribution” to philosophy. Fields describes this contribution as a “mediation of Thomism through the lens of issues raised in philosophy stretching from Kant to Heidegger,” a mediation in which both Thomism and the continental philosophical tradition are each creatively reinterpreted. In Fields’s judgment, Rahner’s entire metaphysics is developed around Realsymbole, i.e., beings which “necessarily express themselves in order to constitute their essential nature,” beings which are not “inert and static substances, but… dynamic self-mediating realities.” Realsymbolisch “being” is structured according to a process of emanation (signifying itself in a concrete reality) and return (self-perfection). In other words, the “exitus-reditus” schema which M.-D. Chenu famously used to describe Thomas Aquinas’s organization of the Summa Theologiae, an organization which reflected God’s Being in the orders of creation and redemption, is applicable to beings on the finite level as well. For the sake of precision, Fields breaks the movement of this

269 Fields, Being as Symbol, p. 2.

270 Ibid.

271 Ibid., p. 6.

schema into three moments of *das Realsymbol*: (i.) an “original unity,” (ii.) a medium / “other,” and (iii.) a “perfected unity.”

2.2.2.1 Joseph Maréchal, S.J. and Neo-Thomist “Metaphysics of Knowledge”

Let us turn to the Fields’s account of the philosophical influences on Rahner’s concept. The thesis of Fields’s entire second chapter is that Rahner’s *Realsymbol* can be seen as a development upon Joseph Maréchal’s theory of knowledge. Maréchal continued fellow Jesuit Pierre Rousselot’s “transcendental Thomist” quest to bring put Kant (with his turn to the subject) and Aquinas (and the *analogia entis*) in conversation with one another. Fields describes Maréchal’s particular effort here as an attempt to “overcome Kant’s metaphysical agnosticism about the Absolute by justifying how the noumenon penetrates the world of empirical phenomena”; in doing so, Fields suggest, Maréchal “implicitly conceive[s] Being as self-mediational,” and is able to bring “symbol and analogy into harmony.”

Fields’s claim of “implicit symbolism” in Maréchal, which is the crux of his argument for Maréchal as an influence upon *das Realsymbol*, is rather detailed; at the risk of oversimplification, it will be presented here in an abbreviated manner.

Maréchal, working from Aquinas and ultimately Aristotle, recognizes three phases of cognition: (i.) *assimilation*, in which the senses collect data from an external object, data which the imagination then synthesizes into a “phantasm”; (ii.) *abstraction*,

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274 Ibid., p. 30.
in which the intellect renders the product of assimilation intelligible as a universal, and
(iii.) objectivation, in which one judges the perceived object to exist apart from oneself.275

Operative in the act of cognition is an “implicit symbolism,” according to Fields. This symbolism is based on a string of “intrinsic mediations” between the various cognitive faculties. Working backward from the three phases just mentioned, Fields explains that “the soul informs the intellect that informs the corporeal powers.” That is, the soul’s “intrinsic medium” is the intellect, while the intellect’s “intrinsic media” are the senses.276 In short, following the soul’s exitus through this chain of “intrinsic media” to the perceived “other,” “spirit expresses itself immanently in matter,” i.e., it functions as a “symbol.”277

2.2.2.2 Thomas Aquinas and Sacramental Theory of Causality

The sacramental thought of Thomas Aquinas is the second major philosophical influence identified by Fields. Fields suggests that Rahner, at least in part, proposed das Realsymbol as an alternative to Thomas’s sacramental theory of causality, which Rahner found to be in some ways deficient.278 It should be noted that das Realsymbol stands for

275 Ibid., p. 31. The first two of these stages, at least, are at the heart of classical Thomistic-Aristotelian epistemology.

276 Ibid., p. 32

277 Wong makes a similar point regarding Rahner’s account of human knowledge, in which “knowing is first of all the subject’s return to himself” (Logos-Symbol, p. 85); he goes on to claim that the overall ontology operative in Rahner’s Hearer of the Word, one marked by emanation and return, corresponds with Rahner’s ontology of the Symbol (ibid., p. 86).

278 Fields, Being as Symbol, p. 52
many of Rahner’s readers (and often for Rahner himself) as a functional equivalent for “sacrament.”

Fields begins by providing a brief overview of Thomas’s treatment of sacraments in the *Summa Theologiae*. There, Thomas defines a sacrament as “a sign of a sacred reality inasmuch as it has the property of sanctifying” human beings, which Fields summarizes as an “efficacious sign” which “causes what it signifies.” In accounting for how sacraments are efficacious, Aquinas has recourse to the idea of “instrumental causality,” a subcategory of “efficient causality.” (Thomas likens the instrumental cause to a hatchet used by a carpenter to fashion a bench.) This move by Thomas was in turn a reaction against the sacramental occasionalism or concomitance taught by Peter Lombard, a theory which held that the sacraments are basically signs which present “occasions” on which God always bestows grace. By characterizing sacraments as instrumental efficient causes, Thomas was able to connect their signatory value (e.g., water washing) with what God accomplished through them (e.g., cleansing of sins,

279 Fields does not go so far as to equate the two, though he affirms that the two ideas “intersect.” He explains: something is a Realsymbol if it “mediates a signified reality intrinsically, dynamically, and reciprocally,” while something is a sacrament if it causes or effects what it signifies (*Being as Symbol*, pp. 52-53).

280 *ST* III q. 60 a. 2 co.

281 Fields, *Being as Symbol*, pp. 38-39

282 Fields seems to indicate that “instrumental causality” is a category taken from Aristotle; however. While “efficient causality” certainly is an Aristotelian category, the subdivisions of principal and instrumental efficient causes seem to come later. Most likely, Thomas’s subdivision here is rooted in John Damascene’s language of Christ’s humanity as God’s instrument (cf. *ST* I-II q. 112 a. 1 ad 1).

283 *ST* III q. 62 a. 1 co.

regeneration). In other words, Thomas wanted the sacraments to operate more like God’s hatchet than as a reminder for God to make a bench.

Improvement though they may be, Thomas’s efforts did not satisfy Rahner for two reasons. First, Rahner was unable to see how Thomas’s sacraments, as “instrumental efficient causes,” establish an “intrinsic” bond with the grace they communicate. Second, Rahner was unable to see how the efficaciousness of Thomas’s sacraments is essentially, and not just accidentally, related to the Church.\footnote{Ibid., p. 46.} Rahner’s counterproposal lies in his schema of “nesting” Realsymbole. The human Jesus is the Realsymbol of the Logos (i.e., the other into whom the Logos emanates to form a perfect unity), and the Church is subsequently the Realsymbol of Jesus Christ\footnote{“As a Realsymbol, the Church is both distinct from and identical with its signified reality, the glorified Christ, the effective means of sanctification” (Ibid., pp. 47-48).} \footnote{Ibid., p. 48.} Furthermore, the Church’s sacraments \textit{in turn} function as \textit{its} Realsymbole, “actualiz[ing] the Church: they bring it to self-realization and they consummate its unity.”\footnote{Ibid., p. 48.} In Fields’s judgment, Rahner’s development of \textit{das} Realsymbol was at least partially motivated by a desire for an account of sacramental causality which features a strong, “intrinsic” link between the sacraments and the grace they communicate, as well as with the Church which bestows them.
2.2.2.3 “Self-perfection” in Goethe and Hegel

Field’s final set of influences which we will examine here shifts from the previous Thomistic considerations to late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Germany. While the previous influences addressed how Realsymbol functions to relate finite and infinite modes of being (Maréchal) and to better account for intrinsically efficacious signs (Thomas), Fields sees in Goethe and Hegel the ingredients for Rahner’s claim that das Realsymbol brings the “original unity” to self-perfection in the “other.” More specifically, he argues that Rahner’s account of “becoming,” which emerges from his engagement with German Idealism, “is an origin of the Realsymbol.”

According to Fields, Goethe’s description of “reality as self-mediating,” which was “systematized” by Hegel, is an important ancestor of Rahner’s Realsymbol. He explains that for Goethe, the reality which we experience as “manifold” is in fact derived from “an underlying unity.” As an explanatory example of this multiplicity in unity, he cites Goethe’s observation that through reading discrete words or hearing discrete notes, we form singular thoughts and unified phrases or songs. This insight is systematized in Hegel, for whom “reality is a dialectical progression that reconciles duality without

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288 See note 268 above.

289 Ibid., p. 55

290 Ibid., p. 61

291 Ibid., p. 64

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suppressing it” into a unity, with its own “opposing other”; applied to rational
knowledge, “sublation” reconciles subject and object into a perfected unity.\(^\text{292}\)

Fields connects this systemization to Rahner’s das Realsymbol, through which
reality, including God (“Spirit”), mediates itself to the other and so achieves a “perfection
of unity.” For both Rahner and Hegel, “concrete reality dynamically embodies the
perfection of the mediation of its intrinsic opposition.”\(^\text{293}\) Importantly, Fields notes that
Rahner does not wholly adopt Hegel’s system, refusing to “reconcile Being’s infinite and
finite modes into a unity-in-difference that entails the univocity of reality”; for Rahner,
the intellect knows sensible things as \textit{finite substances} rather than as accidents of the
Absolute.\(^\text{294}\) Rahner’s insistence on God’s sovereignty and freedom to self-communicate
is also an important point of divergence.\(^\text{295}\) But in the end, Fields insists that Rahner’s
reflection on “becoming” and the alterations which he makes to the accounts of German
Idealism contribute to the emergence of his \textit{Realsymbol}. Writing over two decades

\begin{enumerate}
\item\(^\text{292}\) Ibid., pp. 65-66.
\item\(^\text{293}\) Ibid., p. 73. Cf. McCool, “Rahner’s metaphysics contain Hegelian elements. The metaphysics
of the Son’s relationship to the Father within the Trinity and the metaphysics of the Son’s relation to the
world in creation and the Incarnation, which are essential to the coherence of Rahner’s system, have an
unmistakably Hegelian origin. They all follow the Hegelian metaphysics of the spirit which, abiding
changelessly ‘in itself,’ changes ‘in the other,’ into which it ‘goes over’ in order to return to itself”
\item\(^\text{294}\) Fields, \textit{Being as Symbol}, p. 76
\item\(^\text{295}\) Wong, \textit{Logos-Symbol}, p. 131, cf. Rahner’s insistence on \textit{quasi}-formal causality in “Some
Implications of the Scholastic Concept of Uncreated Grace,” \textit{TI} 1:319-346, at p. 330; also note 102 in
Chapter 1.
\end{enumerate}
earlier, Gerald McCool states the connection even more boldly, referring to “Rahner’s Hegelian metaphysics of the real symbol.”

2.2.3 Evaluation: Priority of Spirituality or Philosophy?

Wong and Fields provide detailed analyses of the background out of which das Realsymbol develops, although they differ as to whether Rahner’s spirituality or his blend of Thomistic and German continental philosophy serves as the principal motivation for constructing the concept. Of course, both sets of influences contributed to das Realsymbol, and it is only in accounting for each of these that we obtain a complete picture of the thought-world out of which Rahner’s concept emerged. Nevertheless, the debate over which set takes priority is not without value. Establishing the primary impetus behind das Realsymbol is helpful in understanding how Rahner primarily intended it to be implemented. Especially for the purposes of this dissertation, whether Rahner developed das Realsymbol out of spiritual motivations or in efforts to resolve philosophical conundrums significantly impacts the likelihood of this dissertation’s claim that Rahner’s sacramental soteriology has a complement in representative soteriology. That is, if, as Wong argues, Rahner’s concept emerged primarily from a sacramental worldview and reflections on a christocentric devotion to the very center of Jesus’


297 In this respect, Wong and Fields provide almost perfect complements to one another. While Fields does not rule out non-philosophical influences, such influences are only mentioned in his (almost tangential) remark about disagreeing with Wong’s prioritizing spiritual stimuli; Fields’s own study is restricted to the philosophical variety. Likewise, although Wong dedicates his second chapter to the “philosophical” presuppositions of das Realsymbol, the majority of it is a review of Rahner’s own writings (“Theology of the Symbol,” Spirit in the World, Hearer of the Word), and the inclusion of philosophical thinkers occurs only in the process of arguing that Rahner’s account of “transcendence” is “Ignatian [Deus semper major] rather than Heideggerian” (Logos-Symbol, p. 98).
Person, a clearer case can be made that a person-centered “representative” account of Christ as Savior is a fitting counterpart to (and indeed, even implication of) a soteriology based upon *das Realsymbol*.

Without any intention of undervaluing Fields’s important work, it does seem to me that Wong’s prioritization of influences is correct. While Rahner also openly identified himself as a follower of Maréchal, much of Fields’s work in this section seems concerned more primarily with Rahner’s concept of the *Vorgriff* rather than *das Realsymbol*. Fields succeeds in showing how Rahner’s *Vorgriff* is strongly shaped by Maréchal’s considerations, but the *Vorgriff* and *das Realsymbol* are two very different ideas, even if they do both relate “finite and infinite modes of being” to one another. Likewise, Goethe and Hegel certainly shaped the intellectual milieu in which Rahner wrote, and Fields does show compelling similarities between their thought and *das Realsymbol* (and even how *das Realsymbol* makes correctives). Yet, Rahner never self-identified as a “Hegelian,” and it is fairly clear (especially from the examples Rahner himself chooses!) that Aristotelian-scholastic accounts of formal causality and hylomorphism provide an even closer analogue to *das Realsymbol* than does Hegelian dialectical thought. Although Fields has certainly shown Maréchal, Goethe, and Hegel to be influences in important respects, he seems to have been most successful in the case of Thomas and the sacraments; but even this “philosophical” influence, centered on the topic of the causal efficacy of the sacraments, is itself situated among “spiritual” concerns which Fields leaves virtually unaddressed.298

298 In a review of Fields’s *Being as Symbol*, Anne Carr observes that Fields “limit[s] his study to the metaphysics of Rahner, a thinker whose primary work was as a theologian and whose use of philosophy was driven by religious, indeed theological concerns. And each of the sources Fields considers had
Perhaps the most compelling reason to favor Wong’s prioritization is the intimate link in Rahner’s writing between the concept of *Symbol* and the devotion of Jesus’ Sacred Heart. First of all, it is quite significant that “The Theology of the Symbol” was originally composed for an anthology on devotion to the Sacred Heart. Even so, one may argue, it could be the case that this topic provided a forum for Rahner (who was by now, after all, a theologian by profession) to introduce his (primarily philosophical) concept via theological application. But entertaining such an idea of a convenient application is soon halted when one considers that Rahner was speaking of *Symbol*, and even a rough division between *Realsymbol* and *Vertretungssymbol*, in the same breath as “Sacred Heart” in his theology dissertation back in 1936.299 There he even issues a sort of call for “The Theology of the Symbol,” stating that fully distinguishing these two kinds of *Symbole* would require a “general ontology” which accounts for how a historical reality can be present to a different time, and particularly for how events of Jesus’ life (especially being pierced on the cross) can, as *Symbole*, achieve such presence to today’s significant theological concerns that he assiduously avoids, preferring to concentrate on philosophy in an effort to separate metaphysics from religious interests” (“Being as symbol: on the origins and development of Karl Rahner's metaphysics,” *Journal of Religion* 82.3 (2002), pp. 484-485, at p. 485).

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299 In his dissertation’s conclusion, Rahner identifies the patristic fascination with Christ’s pierced side (the theme at the center of *E latere Christi*) as an ancient analogue to contemporary devotion to the Sacred Heart: “we can reasonably say that the history of our idea [of the Church’s origin from Jesus’ pierced side] is a piece of the history of Patristic devotion to the Heart of Jesus…. When we seek in the Patristic period an analogue or traces of our Sacred Heart devotion, we must not mechanically search for texts in which the Heart of Jesus somehow mentioned. This method leads nowhere. We must instead ask whether the early Christians had a *Symbol* in which everything that they knew of the redeeming love of God was summed up in an object of their devotion…. But this was for them the pierced side of Jesus…. The difference between the Patristic devotion to the wounded side of Christ and the Sacred Heart devotion of today lies not so much in the content and in the psychological significance of a *symbolischen* recapitulation of the achievements of God’s love, but in a shift of the *Symbol*, whereby attention is directed even more clearly to the love of Christ and the *Symbol* is more easily a special object of devotion” (*E latere Christi*, p. 83). 

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Thus, it appears, the earliest mention Rahner makes of *das Realsymbol* (even if it has not yet been given the explicit name or the accompanying developed ontology, the latter of which, of course, draws on the philosophical sources which Fields identifies) occurs as Rahner suggests a route for linking the historical person of today with Jesus’ own Heart, the Source of the Spirit and recapitulation of his love opened up to us on the cross.

2.3 Distinguishing “Symbol” in Rahner from Other Usages

In “The Theology of the Symbol,” Rahner already distinguished his notion of Symbol from that of popular usage. However, “symbol” is also employed as a technical term for other theologians and philosophers as well. A lengthy overview of these thinkers cannot be given here, but it is worthwhile to briefly consider two prominent theologians and their own concepts in order to bring further clarity to the distinctiveness of Rahner’s idea, and simultaneously to discourage any hasty conflation of these terms. The first of these figures is the influential Protestant theologian writing a generation before Rahner, Paul Tillich. The second is another Jesuit belonging to the generation after Rahner who built upon his insights, Roger Haight.

2.3.1 “Symbol” in the theology of Paul Tillich

As is the case with Rahner’s, Paul Tillich’s understanding of symbol is a precise one which he makes clear via a distinction between two different groups. On the one

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300 Ibid., pp. 82-83.
hand, there is the mere “sign” (e.g., a street sign or traffic light\textsuperscript{301}), which can stand for another reality with which it is paired more or less arbitrarily. On the other hand, the symbol (e.g., a national flag\textsuperscript{302}) bears a stronger relationship to the reality which it symbolizes. Tillich writes, “We know that real representative symbols [\textit{echte repräsentative Symbole}], prevalent in history, art, and religion, cannot be arbitrarily substituted [\textit{willkürlich... ersetzt}] by other symbols. They have come out of a particular encounter with reality and are living only as long as the experience is alive.”\textsuperscript{303} Thus, the first way in which a symbol distinguishes itself from a sign is by arising “out of a particular encounter with reality”\textsuperscript{304}; as Adam Pryor puts it, “by some cultural-historical mechanism, [the symbol] has become the necessary construct for what it symbolizes,” and so is not simply an “arbitrarily assigned… placeholder.”\textsuperscript{305} Part and parcel of this

\begin{quote}
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\textsuperscript{301} “The red sign at the street corner points to the order to stop the movements of cars at certain intervals. A red light and the stopping of cars have essentially no relation to each other, at conventionally they are united as long as the convention lasts. The same is true of letters and numbers and partly even words. They point beyond themselves to sounds and leanings. They are given this special function by convention within a nation or by international conventions, as the mathematical signs. Sometimes such signs are called symbols; but this is unfortunate because it makes the distinction between signs and symbols more difficult” (Paul Tillich, \textit{Dynamics of Faith} (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), pp. 41-42).
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
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\textsuperscript{302} Ibid., p. 42.
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\textsuperscript{304} “Symbols cannot be produced intentionally…. They grow out of the individual or collective unconscious and cannot function without being accepted by the unconscious dimension of our being. Symbols which have an especially social function, as political and religious symbols, are created or at least accepted by the collective unconscious of the group in which they appear” (Tillich, \textit{Dynamics of Faith}, p. 43)
\end{quote}

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distinguishing factor, as Tillich indicates above, is that when the symbol ceases to be utilized by the cultural-historical locus which produced it, it “dies.” For example, Tillich deems the Virgin Mary a “dead” symbol for most Protestants. 306

A second distinctive characteristic of Tillich’s notion of symbol is its participation in the reality which it symbolizes. To get an idea of what Tillich means by participation, it is instructive to consider his example of a flag:

[T]he symbol… participates in that to which it points: the flag participates in the power and dignity of the nation for which it stands. Therefore, it cannot be replaced except after an historic catastrophe that changes the reality of the nation which it symbolizes. An attack on the flag is felt as an attack on the majesty of the group in which it is acknowledged. Such an attack is considered blasphemy. 307

Since Tillich’s symbols share in the power of the reality which they symbolize, Ronald Modras explains, they “can be stirring, elevating and integrating, as in the case of the cross for Christians, or destructive and disintegrating, as in the case of the Nazi swastika.” 308

Finally, Tillich’s symbol has the power to convey and communicate the reality symbolized. In the case of an “ultimate” symbol, God’s presence is communicated, and in such a way that the symbol “expresses not only the ultimate [i.e., God] but its own lack of ultimacy.” 309 Given Tillich’s desire to strongly distinguish God from the symbols


307 Tillich, The Dynamics of Faith p. 43.


309 Ibid.
which convey God’s presence, the language of “manifestation” \(^{310}\) and “awareness”\(^{311}\) is often used to describe such communication.

The similarities between the accounts of Rahner and Tillich are clear. Both distinguish between “thicker” and “thinner” symbolic entities, with Rahner’s Realsymbole and Tillich’s symbols (even “real representative symbols,” as we just saw) standing against “arbitrarily assigned” signals (Vertretungssymbole and signs, respectively). Moreover, these more robust categories successfully communicate the realities with which they are associated, expressing their presence in their act of symbolizing.

However, there are significant points of divergence between the accounts as well, two of which I will point out here. Although Tillich and his readers are largely content to speak of the symbol’s communication of the symbolized in terms of “manifestation,” Rahner consistently adds qualifications to any such usage, rendering any such “manifestation” a *signum efficax*:

>a manifestation of this kind is not merely a subsequent promulgation of something which is in any case present even without such promulgation. Rather, it is something *in which* the reality promulgated brings its own individual history to its fullness and so extends its own real nature in that it integrates within its own

\(^{310}\) “The Church ‘manifests’ the invisible community of grace…. It ‘represents’ the kingdom of God in history” (Ibid., p. 40).

\(^{311}\) “The symbol provides the concrete locality for the symbolic awareness of being-itself” (Pryor, p. 28). Notably, Tillich defines “sacrament” as “any object or event in which the transcendent infinite is perceived as present to the finite” (ibid., emphasis added), cf. Tillich, *The Protestant Era* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1948), pp. 108, 111.
individual history more “material”. In this sense, then, the manifestation is the “cause” of that which is manifesting.\textsuperscript{312}

Accordingly, for Rahner it is more accurate to speak of “self-realization” \textit{via das Realsymbole} than of “manifestation.”

The other major point of divergence concerns Tillich’s appeal to “participation” as a distinguishing characteristic of the symbol. As Pryor has summarized, for Tillich, the symbol participates in the reality symbolized, while the sign does not.\textsuperscript{313} Rahner’s bar for distinguishing between Vertretungssymbol and Realsymbol is set significantly higher. Only the latter is “the self-realization of a being in the other, which is constitutive of its essence”; that is, the Realsymbol is distinguished by “the ‘intrinsicity’ of the relationship between the two realities, ‘whether or not the symbol is the expression of the other being, for that being’s self-realization.”

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  \item[\textsuperscript{312}] “Considerations of the Active Role,” \textit{TI} 14:178. Cf. Rahner’s qualifications like “effective manifestation” (“The Presence of the Lord in the Christian Community at Worship,” \textit{TI} 10:81) and “brought about and made manifest” (“Considerations of the Active Role,” \textit{TI} 14:166). Tillich occasionally makes similar qualifications. E.g., “On the other hand, ‘becomes manifest’ does not mean only ‘becomes known.’ Manifestations are effective expressions,” or “actualizations” (\textit{Systematic Theology}, 3 vols. (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1951-1963), vol. 2 p. 175). However, in this case, Tillich promptly turns around and roots this “actualization” in subjective experience of the one who witnesses the manifestation (ibid., p. 176). Accordingly, while Tillich’s “manifestation” may not be reducible to “becomes known,” it seems closer to “becomes known” than it does to Rahner’s “self-realization.”
  
  \item[\textsuperscript{313}] Pryor, “Comparing Tillich and Rahner,” p. 28. Although Pryor opens his analysis of Rahner’s \textit{Realsymbole} by noting this difference, he posits that the major point of divergence between Tillich’s and Rahner’s theories of the symbol is Rahner’s concern with a “network” of mutually related symbols, while Tillich is more focused upon individual instances. In my own judgment, Rahner’s “The Theology of the Symbol” devotes vastly greater amounts of space to individual instances (e.g., filial generation, incarnation, etc.) than it does to any explicit treatment of a “network” (although the “nesting” character of \textit{Realsymbole} certainly stands out structurally); Rahner’s intrinsic criterion, of which Pryor indeed makes note, seems to me to be the greatest point of divergence from Tillich.
  
  \item[\textsuperscript{314}] Ibid., p. 29.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
a (even the prototypical) Tillichian symbol, it is hardly intrinsically related to its country, nor does the country “self-realize” through it. As Wong has commented, the flag would surely be classified by Rahner as a “conventional sign.”315 Similarly, Wong judges Tillich’s claim that Christ is a symbol of “Godmanhood” is not “serious,” given that Tillich “envisages the possibility of other ‘incarnations’” in other times or planets. Such speculation is impossible for Rahner and his realsymbolisch human being Jesus, who simply is the Logos he symbolizes, “exteriorized” within time and history.316

2.3.2 “Symbol” in the theology of Roger Haight

While much of Tillich’s symbol-theory was being worked out at roughly the same time as Rahner’s,317 the work of Rahner’s fellow Jesuit Roger Haight on the subject came decades later. This work is contained in Haight’s magnum opus, Jesus: Symbol of God, which I will consider here.318 There, Haight offers an attentive and overall accurate account of Rahner’s theory in the midst of articulating his own concept of the symbol. Haight classifies Rahner’s soteriology as both revelation-based319 and sacramental, with

315 Wong, Logos-Symbol, p. 192.

316 Ibid.

317 Keep in mind, Rahner began thinking about and proposing the development of an ontology of das Symbol by 1936 (with E latere Christi) at the latest (large sections of his dissertation had clearly been prepared before his arrival at Innsbruck).

318 Roger Haight, S.J., Jesus: Symbol of God (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1999). Although the book was awarded the U.S. Catholic Press Association’s top prize in theology in 1999, it received mixed reviews from other Catholic theologians, and also instigated an investigation by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF). The investigation led to an official notification on the work in 2004 and eventually, in 2009, to Haight’s suspension from teaching or writing on theological matters.

319 Ibid., p. 344ff. Haight offers a perhaps surprising (but perceptive and indeed accurate) pairing by situating both Rahner and Karl Barth within this revelation-based descriptor.
Jesus acting the “symbolic or sacramental cause” of God’s universal grace\textsuperscript{320}; in fact, Christ is for Rahner the “constitutive cause of this grace.”\textsuperscript{321} Focusing in on the “mediating” dimension of \textit{das Realsymbol}, Haight explains that

Jesus does not only speak \textit{about} God, nor is he merely a message \textit{about} God. He is the very Logos of God made present. Rahner is insistent upon this even while being resolute about the real humanity of Jesus. All of this makes sense within the context of Rahner’s theology of the symbol…. As a symbol makes present something other than itself, so Jesus makes present God as Logos, that is, the self-expression of the Father.\textsuperscript{322}

Like Wong and \textit{contra} Balthasar, Haight recognizes the robust role that Rahner’s soteriology envisions for Christ as the indispensable and constitutive sacramental mediation of God’s saving grace; such a \textit{symbolisch} Christ is no mere indicator or notification of salvation, but rather stands the very conduit which brings it about.

The majority of \textit{Jesus: Symbol of God} is devoted to Haight’s own usage of “symbol,” a concept which differs from Rahner’s \textit{Realsymbol} in several important respects. Early on, Haight makes the same basic move made by Tillich and Rahner, distinguishing between two symbolic groups; for Haight, they are the “conceptual or conscious symbol” (e.g., a “metaphor”) and a “concrete symbol” (e.g., the “human body”)

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\item [\textsuperscript{320}] Ibid., p. 350. For Rahner, Haight continues, “the salvation of historical human existence as such requires the actualization of the complete union of God with human existence in an event in history” (ibid.).

\item [\textsuperscript{321}] Ibid., p. 434.

\item [\textsuperscript{322}] Ibid., pp. 438-439, emphasis original. Of course, Rahner would further add that in addition to being the Logos’s “other,” Jesus exists in intrinsic and perfected unity with the Logos as its self-realization; indeed, Jesus \textit{is} the Logos “exteriorized.”
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
mediating the “human spirit”). Elaborating upon the latter, “thicker” category, Haight explains that the “concrete symbol” mediates the presence of another reality. Although Haight’s example (the human body) and mediation-criterion match well with das Realsymbol, Haight omits any talk of “self-realization” or “exteriorization, as well as any assertion of the symbol and symbolized achieving a “perfected unity.” The “intrinsic” factor which is the hallmark of Rahner’s Realsymbol is thus nowhere to be found. It comes as no surprise, then, that when Haight goes on to apply his concept to Jesus, he opens with a major qualifier and cashes the statement out purely in terms of mediation: “for Christians, Jesus is the concrete symbol of God…. People encountered God in Jesus, and they still do…. in a large variety of ways they experienced God and God’s saving presence mediated by him.”

In addition to being evident in the language which Haight omits, the contrast between Haight’s symbol and Rahner’s das Realsymbol can be observed in new language which Haight employs quite frequently, namely, that of consciousness and awareness. Consider, for instance, his account of Jesus as God’s revelation “from above.” As the “concrete symbol” of God, Jesus “reveals God” and “makes God present” according to

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323 Ibid., p. 13.


325 Whereas das Realsymbol is employed by Rahner as predominately metaphysical, ontological concept (i.e., the human Jesus simply is the Logos “exteriorized” within the world’s history), Haight regularly gives indications that his “concrete symbol” (despite its juxtaposition to “conceptual or conscious symbol”) is much more epistemological in nature. Such a character accords with Haight’s deliberate effort to write for a post-modern milieu in which universal, metaphysical claims are often regarded with deep suspicion, if not rejected outright.

326 Haight will go on to downplay any “from above” approach as largely irrelevant in the post-modern milieu (ibid., p. 432).
“symbolic or sacramental causality.” Thus far, the account is thoroughly Rahnerian. However, Haight makes a significant divergence in explaining, “Symbolic or sacramental causality effects by bringing to consciousness and explicit awareness something that is already present within, but latent and not an object of clear attention or focused recognition.” Rahner, on the other hand, explicitly dissociates his notion of sacramental causality from any account of simply raising awareness. Moreover, Haight’s focus upon symbols functioning so as to bring about consciousness is scattered throughout *Jesus: Symbol of God*, from its opening pages to its statement that no empirical causality can amount to salvation; only God causes salvation…. Thus the causality of Jesus for human salvation is in the genus of symbolic or sacramental causality. By representing God’s action for salvation, Jesus makes conscious and explicit to human beings something that would not have been revealed, known, or conscious in the same way without him.

Given such statements, one might justifiably say that Balthasar’s concern about Christ functioning simply as a “prime instance” and notification of human salvation

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327 Ibid., pp. 358-359.

328 Ibid., p. 359.

329 In speaking about the *symbolisch* salvific efficacy of Christ’s death, Rahner explains that “in a sacramental sign the saving will of God and grace find historical expression. Sign and signified are essentially one… so that the reality signified comes to be in and through the sign, and the sign therefore, in this specific and limited sense, causes the reality signified…. [T]he cross can and should be understood in this sense as the cause of the salvation signified and not merely regarded as the cause of our awareness of salvation in faith” (“The One Christ and the Universality of Salvation,” *TI* 16:215, emphasis added).


wrought by a “God-who-is-always-reconciled” were perhaps voiced a generation too early.

Another theme which distinguishes Rahner and Haight concerns another Balthasarian worry, namely the constitutive place of Christ in God’s plan of salvation. While Rahner unabashedly affirms such a place, Haight’s account of Christ’s role in human salvation is better classified as “normative” than “constitutive.” According to Haight, Christ remains universally *relevant* since his story is one of authentic salvation; however, Haight stops short of making any “constitutive” claims, and in fact denies that Christ “causes” salvation in every instance.

Finally, Haight makes an important remark near the end of *Jesus: Symbol of God* which underlines how he and Rahner differ over the “intrinsic” relation of the symbol and symbolized. Explicitly criticizing Rahner over the matter, Haight entertains the possibility (and even probability) of God’s Logos becoming incarnate in many different ways and media, stating that there’s “no hard reason” to rule it out. Indeed, even Thomas Aquinas affirmed the *possibility* of the Son (or even the Father and/or the Spirit) assuming other human natures (although Thomas held that only one such union ever

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332 Rahner opens his essay, “The One Christ and the Universality of Salvation” with a statement which he considers to be “dogmatically binding” (even if it has not been explicitly defined as such): “the achievement by any man of his proper and definitive salvation is dependent upon Jesus Christ” (*TI* 16:200).


334 “The particular saving action of God in Jesus Christ remains a particular story…. It is also a true story, and therefore it carries a universal relevance for all of humankind…. But it is not the only story of God saving…. the event of Jesus reveals the salvation of all in revealing God, but it is not the cause of the salvation of all” (Haight, *Jesus: Symbol of God*, p. 353). Also, “God alone effects salvation and Jesus’ universal mediation is not necessary” (ibid., p. 405).
But while Haight and Thomas may not have any “hard reason” to rule out multiple incarnations of the Logos, Rahner does: namely, his ontology of das Realsymbol. After all, the act of “incarnation” for Rahner is not one of the Son extrinsically assuming or uniting with any given “way” or “medium” of being. Rather, “when God, expressing himself, exteriorizes himself, that very thing appears which we call the humanity of the Logos.” Rahner’s insistence on the intrinsic connection between Symbol and symbolized, a connection which is absent in Haight’s account, rules out any possibility of multiple incarnations. God has indeed self-exteriorized, and the Christ-event is what occurred.

2.3.3 Summary: Distinguishing “Symbol” in Rahner from Other Usages

In “The Theology of the Symbol,” Rahner himself underlined the importance of distinguishing his usage of Symbol (precisely, das Realsymbol) from popular usage of the term. Such importance emerges from the potential for egregious misunderstanding of what Rahner means by referring to the sacraments, the humanity of Jesus, and even the Second Person of the Trinity as Symbole. The same goes for distinguishing Rahner’s

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335 ST III q. 3 a. 7; cf. aa. 5, 6, and 8.


337 In an interview in the final years of his life, Rahner was discussing his soteriology. Specifically, he considered the issue of whether a “from below” starting point, which identified Christ’s as the story of authentic human success, entailed the possibility of multiple “incarnations” (which might seem to follow from the possibility of multiple “success stories”). To his traditionalist detractors favoring strictly “from above” soteriological-christological approaches who might level such an objection, Rahner responded, “Dear scholastic theologian, you who come out of the Middle Ages, you least of all are able to prove that the Incarnation can only take place once.’ For my part I would say that it is nonsense to imagine and to think that it could take place several times. Perhaps I have even offered better reasons against such an idea than are ordinarily given” (Karl Rahner in Dialogue, p. 125, emphasis added). This last statement is almost certainly a reference to his theology of das Realsymbol (which operates, it should be noted, from above, and to which he still has recourse even in his final years).
usage of the term from that of other prominent theologians, such as Tillich and Haight. While each of them speaks of “symbol” in a specific, technical sense, Rahner diverges from those senses on several counts. While both Tillich and Haight, with Rahner, stress the ability of the symbol to render present the symbolized, they often cash out such statements in terms of “manifestation,” effecting “awareness,” or bringing something to “explicit consciousness.”

For Rahner, Realsymbol’s mediatory function occurs by way of the “self-realization” of the symbolized, a process which results in the “perfected unity” of the two. “Self-realization” and “perfected unity” stand as two Rahnerian criteria for das Realsymbol which reflect Rahner’s perennial insistence upon “intrinsicity,” and which are lacking in the concepts of symbol found in Tillich and Haight. That both Haight and Tillich entertain the idea of supplementary incarnations, an idea at which Rahner bristles, underscores the divergent ways in which Jesus is being identified as the Symbol of God.

2.4 Das Realsymbol and Christ’s Salvific Efficacy

Having considered the Rahner’s theory of das Realsymbol in general terms, its influences and origins, and the characteristics which distinguish it from other theologians’ conceptions of the symbol, let us finally turn to Rahner’s soteriological application. Although the basic moves which Rahner makes in this application have already been sketched in the previous chapter’s overview of secondary literature on Rahner, it is important to allow Rahner’s own writings to speak for themselves, at least as much as they can through my own (inevitably interpretive) treatment of them here. Although Rahner discusses his soteriology in a number of writings and interviews, the most pertinent articles, upon which the following overview will center, are “The One
Christ and the Universality of Salvation” (1975) and “The Christian Understanding of Redemption” (1981). I will proceed by considering once again the importance of sacramental or realsymbolisch causality (and its relation to other forms), and subsequently how this causality is operative for Rahner in both “objective” and “subjective” dimensions of human salvation in Jesus Christ.

2.4.1 By What Kind of “Causality” Does Christ Save?

As we have already seen, Rahner consistently introduces discussions of Christ accomplishing salvation via warnings against a popularized atonement theory according which centers upon Christ’s death as mollifying a furious Deity. According to such a theory, reconciliation with God is something which originates from Christ’s death, insofar as that death provokes God’s willingness to save (i.e., it “changes God’s mind” about humanity). In such a framework, God appears to be either capricious, an object for human manipulation, or intransigently set on getting his “pound of flesh”; in any of these cases, human salvation is something which is brokered by a particular act of appeasement or propitiation.

Christians would do well, Rahner suggests, to turn this framework on its head, so that the salvific Christ-event is primarily understood as a consequence of God’s desire for human salvation rather than vice-versa. Rather than originating from a brokered

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338 “First… the saving will of God in our regard is primarily not the result but the cause of the cross of Christ, preceding both the cross and the whole Christ event. He loved us and therefore sent his son to us (see John 3:16). The popular conception that presupposes a violently angry God who then in some strange way is reconciled through the cross of Christ, a God who would not himself therefore have been the free and unconditioned cause of redemption, is plain and simple nonsense” (Karl Rahner in Dialogue, p. 128). Cf. “The One Christ and the Universality of Salvation,” TI 16:207-209; “Jesus Christ in the Non-Christian Religions” TI 17:39-50, at p. 45; Opportunities for Faith: Elements of a Modern Spirituality (London: S.P.C.K., 1974), p. 29; FCF p. 282.
arrangement, the offer of salvific grace is then seen as flowing from God through Christ, and even as something grounded in God’s very identity as Love itself; accordingly, Rahner is inclined to speak about Christ’s salvific lifetime, including and especially its final hours, as the result of God’s salvific will rather than its “cause” (in the sense of “origin”).

That said, Rahner is not about to abandon his affirmation of the causal efficacy of Jesus and his death, for “it is part of the Christian confession of faith that the death of Jesus means something for the salvation of all men.” (Indeed, Hebrews 5:9 refers to Jesus as the αἰτιος (“cause”) of our salvation.) Rahner is able to affirm both (i.) salvation’s origin in God’s unswerving salvific will and (ii.) Jesus as the cause of that salvation in virtue of an important distinction: although Christ does not “cause” God to love us or suddenly to become inclined toward granting us salvation, Christ is indeed the

339 “[O]ne must not lose sight of the fact that the event of the cross is itself the effect and ultimately not the cause of an initiative of God himself which is a result of nothing other than God’s free love and his unmerited grace, of a God who reconciles because he is the love that forgives and overcomes all guilt” (“Reconciliation and Vicarious Representation,” TI 21:262).

340 Here, Rahner’s language has interesting parallels with that of Paul Tillich. In fact, one may legitimately wonder whether Balthasar’s evaluation of Rahner’s soteriology, particularly when it comes to “He-who-is-always-reconciled” (TD IV p. 276), was in some way shaped by Balthasar’s reading of Tillich as well. Tillich denounces “the type of doctrine of the atonement according to which God is the one who must be reconciled…. [T]he message of Christianity is that God, who is eternally reconciled, wants us to be reconciled to him…. Once more, it must be stressed that it is a basic distortion of the doctrine of atonement if, instead of saying ‘becomes manifest,’ one says ‘becomes possible’” (Systematic Theology vol. 2, pp. 169-170, 175).

341 “The One Christ and the Universality of Salvation,” TI 16:212. Elsewhere, Rahner writes that “the crucifixion certainly cannot be regarded (as by some modern Protestant theologians, appealing to 2 Cor 5:18-21) as an attestation (directed to us) of God’s forgiving love, which moves us to believe in this love; it has to be acknowledged as the cause of our salvation…. [T]he real problem, at least for understanding Christian soteriology in our situation at the present day, is why this original forgiving will of God does not simply effect forgiveness ‘vertically from on high’ in the same way and directly at all points of space and time, but comes to mankind from a definite historical event, which itself is the ‘cause’ of forgiveness” (“Salvation,” in Sacramentum Mundi: An Encyclopedia of Theology (henceforth SM), 6 vols. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968-1970) vol. 5, pp. 405-438, at p. 430; emphasis original).
“cause” of salvation with respect to us. That is, he is causally constitutive of salvation because it is only given to us through and in virtue of him. In other words, one might adjust Balthasar’s portrayal of Rahner’s God as “He-who-is-always-reconciled” this way: While God consistently wills that we be reconciled to him (1Tim 2:4), such reconciliation is only made available to us through the Mediator Jesus Christ (1Tim 2:5). Rahner’s God is thus “He-who-always-desires-reconciliation,” a reconciliation which is only possible for us through Jesus Christ, who thus exists as a genuine cause.

At this point, it should come as no surprise that the kind of causality best fit to account for this kind of causal efficacy is identified by Rahner to be that of das Realsymbol.³⁴² For it is in its Realsymbol that something self-realizes definitively and self-communicates; das Realsymbol “extends” a reality so as to incorporate its “other” into itself, bringing about an otherwise impossible presence of the most intimate kind.³⁴³ That is, das Realsymbol “causes” the reality precisely in signifying it. Since this kind of terminology is quite familiar to classical sacramental theology, Rahner uses

³⁴² “Of course, I must be able to say that I am redeemed through Christ, although Christ himself is the consequence, the effect and not the cause of the saving will that is (and insofar as it is) referred to me. One would have to develop here a category of causality that would perhaps be clearer than it is in our average soteriology. If and insofar as this history of salvation as supernaturally finalized and rendered dynamic necessarily tends to the Christ event [notwendigerweise auf das Christusereignis hinzielt] as its historical and historically irreversible manifestation [Erscheinung], then I can also understand such an event as the cause of the history of salvation…. The manifestation in which what is being manifested comes to its own fulfillment and definitiveness can rightly be conceived as the cause of what is being manifested. Here one might bring into consideration what I have said about the real symbol” (Karl Rahner in Dialogue, p. 128).

³⁴³ A “manifestation of this kind is not merely a subsequent promulgation of something which is in any case present even without such promulgation. Rather, it is something in which the reality promulgated brings its own individual history to its fullness and so extends its own real nature in that it integrates within its own individual history more ‘material’. In this sense, then, the manifestation is the ‘cause’ of that which is manifesting” (“Considerations of the Active Role,” TI 14:178).
realsymbolisch and sacramental causality as interchangeable terms when proposing proper “causal” language for speaking of Christ’s soteriological efficacy:

The life and death of Jesus taken together, then, are the “cause” of God’s salvific will (to the extent that these two things are regarded as different) insofar as this salvific will establishes itself really and irrevocably in this life and death, in other words, insofar as the life and death of Jesus, or the death which recapitulates and culminates his life, possess a causality of a quasi-sacramental and real-symbolic nature. In this causality what is signified, in this case God’s salvific will, posits the sign, in this case the death of Jesus along with this resurrection, and in and through the sign it causes what is signified.

Rahner’s solution is to posit that Christ and his death cause human salvation, without being its absolute origin, since the Christ-event stands as das Realsymbol of God’s salvation.

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344 See Karl Rahner in Dialogue p. 128, just cited above.

345 “[I]n a sacramental sign the saving will of God and grace find historical expression. Sign and signified are essentially one…so that the reality signified comes to be in and through the sign, and the sign therefore, in this specific and limited sense, causes the reality signified” (“The One Christ and the Universality of Salvation,” TI 16:215).

346 It should also be noted that Rahner’s favored soteriological causality is sometimes identified as “final causality” (e.g., Balthasar in TD IV p. 276, Ogden, Is There Only One True Religion, pp. 94-95). It is true that Rahner occasionally speaks in these classical Thomistic-Aristotelian terms (“Since… the goal of a movement sustains that movement itself as its secret activating force and does not merely come at the end, we can and must say that God gives himself to the world because of this event of the cross” (Opportunities for Faith, p. 30; cf. “Jesus Christ and the Non-Christian Religions,” TI 17:46; FCF pp. 194-195), and final causality does bear an important relationship to Rahner’s realsymbolisch category (particularly when it comes to “culmination” language and our orientation toward Christ as the source of grace). Yet, Rahner more consistently utilizes the Realsymbol-sacrament concept as his basic explication for soteriological causation; in places, “final cause” even seems to function for Rahner as a locution for das Realsymbol -- e.g., “intrinsic causa finalis” in “Salvation,” SM vol. 5 p. 431, which, sentences later, Rahner links to “the causality of the sacraments,” and even explicitly to Realsymbol (pp. 431-432).

347 FCF p. 284.

348 If, upon recalling that the human being Jesus Christ is das Realsymbol of the Logos (and ultimately of God himself), concerns arise that Rahner may be, so to speak, “double-booking” Christ’s standing as Realsymbol (Is he das Realsymbol of God via the Logos or das Realsymbol of human salvation?), it is helpful to recall that for Rahner, God himself is the content of human salvation: “Salvation here is to be understood as the strictly supernatural and direct presence of God in himself afforded by grace” (“The One Christ and the Universality of Salvation,” TI 16:200). Cf. Rahner’s remarks on
2.4.2 *Das Realsymbol* and Causality: The “Objective” Dimension

Joseph Wong has helpfully structured his analysis of Rahner’s soteriology by organizing it into “from above” and “from below” dimensions; that is, Rahner’s account of God effecting human salvation has both a descending “humanward” component and an ascending “Godward” component which converge in the Person of Jesus Christ. A second device, common in classifications of various soteriological models is the objective/subjective distinction. Of course, it is an almost universal desideratum to claim both objective and subjective components in one’s soteriology, and the facile assignment of a particular model entirely to one side or the other is usually more polemical than helpful. Nevertheless, the objective/subjective distinction (which Rahner himself utilizes), paired with the “descending” and “ascending” categories, is useful for exploring Rahner’s multifaceted account of human salvation.


349 This is true especially in Protestant literature on theories of atonement. The “moral influence” theory (by which Jesus impacts our actions as an exemplar) favored by Liberal Protestants is typically cited as the paradigmatic “subjective” soteriology, while more “traditional” Protestants tend to emphasize Christ’s “objective” act of taking on our sins and dying to balance the scales of justice (often articulated in penal substitutionary terms).

350 See “Salvation,” *SM* vol. 5, where Rahner differentiates “objective redemption” and “subjective redemption” (pp. 426–427, 437), as well as “The One Christ and the Universality of Salvation,” where Christ’s incarnation, death, and resurrection are said to constitute “redemptio objectiva” (*TI* 16:207).

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which has made (an otherwise impossible) human salvation available. As we just seen, the way that God causes salvation according to Rahner is *via* sacramental or *realsymbolisch* causality. To cash this out in descending and objective terms: since God is himself the content of human salvation, in God’s act of self-communicating, human salvation has been made available – in the Person of Jesus Christ – *via* a sacramental mode. Moreover, since this act of *realsymbolisch* self-communication is free (rather than the necessitated outcome of a Hegelian emanation), it is the definitive expression of God’s salvific will, a sacramental expression which *effects* that desired salvation *precisely in* revealing it. Human salvation, understood as God’s gracious and direct presence to and with humanity, has been objectively accomplished in the Christ-event.

One of the most consistent and frequent ways in which Rahner describes this dimension of his soteriology is his claim that the Christ-event has definitively rendered God’s salvific will “irreversible” and “irrevocable” (descriptors often paired with “victorious” and “unsurpassable”). Such language may seem to indicate that the objective accomplishment here amounts to “cornering” a wishy-washy God, so to speak, who might otherwise change his mind. One might ask: If what is significant is that

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351 See note 348 above.

352 “The sacramental salvation-reality of Christ – in the Incarnation and the sacrifice of the Cross – is the one and only truly valid and final saving act of God in the world and therefore the one and only final mediation between God and man. In so far as it is final, that is, in so far as it cannot now be surpassed by any event whether initiated by man or by God, the history of salvation is in principle concluded” (“Priestly Existence,” TI 3:239-262, at p. 247).

353 Some of Rahner’s formulations about “irrevocability” may, taken in isolation from other statements, seem to imply this line of thought. E.g., “Everything that is finite and subject to a historical process, when considered as such in itself, remains retractable, revocable, always the object of a divine freedom which never establishes itself absolutely through this finite object as such alone, nor is it able to do so. Therefore every revelation in which God objectifies and manifests his will through a finite word or a historical occurrence remains open-ended, capable of revision, provisional. Something that as such is
God’s salvific will is now irreversible and irrevocable, is it not implied that the alternative reality (now rendered impossible) is precisely God revoking or reversing his desire for salvation? However, this sort of interpretation of Rahner’s “irrevocable” language would render this thinker, recognized as highly “nuanced” by followers and critics alike, blatantly schizophrenic; after all, such language occurs in virtually the same breath as his (almost tirelessly repeated) condemnation of popular soteriologies which presuppose a capricious God who is “swayed” by Christ’s death.

I would suggest that Rahner’s “irrevocable” language is instead intended to communicate two ideas. The first is the freedom which characterizes God’s act of realsymbolisch self-communication, evidenced in a passage from “The Theology of the Symbol”: “[Jesus Christ] is not merely the presence and revelation of what God is in himself. He is also the expressive presence of what – or rather, who – God wished to be, in free grace, to the world, in such a way that this divine attitude [Haltung], once so expressed, can never be reversed, but is and remains final and unsurpassable.”354 Rather than locking an erratic God into a static disposition, the emphasis here is on who “God

merely finite in itself alone is of its very nature incapable of signifying and mediating to us a divine communication which cannot be superseded. The communication always remains provisional in view of the infinity of God’s possibilities and the sovereignty of his freedom. If, however, God communicates to us his self-promise as one that is irrevocable and definitive, then the created reality through which this takes place cannot simply stand at the same distance from God as other created realities. It must be the reality of God himself in such a unique way that God would disown his very self if he should supersede it because of its created finiteness” (“Jesus Christ—The Meaning of Life,” TI 21:218; cf. FCF p. 202). Notably, this statement puts the lie to Balthasar’s claim that Rahner’s Christ (i.e., this irrevocable self-communication of God) is not “essentially different” from any other human beings (TD IV p. 277).

354 TI 4:237. “God’s salvific will is not identical with his metaphysically necessary goodness and holiness, nor something strictly derived from this. It is not a metaphysical attribute of God which can be established everywhere and always, but a divine attitude in the nature of an event, which has to be experienced and proclaimed in history. This free attitude of God, which is directed towards the salvation of every man, has only become a manifest principle, definitively and irrevocably, in Jesus Christ” (“Salvation,” SM vol. 5, p. 406).
wished to be, *in free grace, to the world.*” Indeed, the classical notion of the soul’s formal-causal relation to the body is Rahner’s exemplary instance of *das Realsymbol*; however, he refrains from speaking of God’s grace (that is, God’s self-gift), particularly in the case of Christ’s incarnation, purely in terms of formal causality (instead appending the prefix *quasi*-formal causality) precisely because doing so would imply a necessary emanation and thus impinge on God’s freedom. Accordingly, while “irreversible” provokes thoughts of the possibility of God reversing a course set for human salvation, Rahner’s claim here is not about getting a fickle God to settle down. Rather, it’s about a steadfast God freely opting to take a definitive step: establishing a maximally intimate relationship with the world by making the world’s story his own.

The second idea which Rahner wishes to communicate through “irrevocable” language flows from the first. It is that in the *realsymbolisch* communication of the Logos to the world, God has definitively established a sort of soteriological “anchor,” or objective locus at which human salvation is achieved. Rahner writes of the “fact” that “in the human life of Jesus… the victory of [the believer’s] personal life has irrevocably and definitively been promised him, and that in this… the ultimate and definitive, the unsurpassable word of God has been promised him.”

This sort of claim should not understood so as to reduce Jesus to a “guarantee” that human salvation occurs, as its

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355 Cf. ibid. p. 431: “Christ and his destiny (the *complete* accomplishment of which appears in the resurrection) are the cause of salvation as historically constituting the historically irreversible saving situation for all” (emphasis original).

356 “Considerations of the Active Role,” *TI* 14:168. Cf. “[T]here is a man by reason of whose existence I may dare to believe that God has promised to give himself irrevocably and finally to me; there is a man in whom God’s absolute promise to give himself to every spiritual creature, and the acceptance of this promise by the creature, are both proved and rendered credible to me without ambiguity, irreparably and in a manner I can understand” (“Thoughts on the Possibility of Belief Today,” *TI* 5:3-22 at p. 12).
“most successful instance.” Rather, the key part of Rahner’s statement here occurs in the beginning: it is “in the human life of Jesus” that victory for the believer lies.\textsuperscript{357} Jesus does not merely guarantee that “we can make it,” but he is in fact God’s very self-promise.\textsuperscript{358} Indeed, Rahner speaks about the person of Jesus as “our reconciliation”:

Christians know full well that God’s forgiving and reconciling love that encompasses all guilt has entered the world in such a way that it can never be revoked. This love has revealed itself in the cross of Jesus Christ who has become our reconciliation…. God’s forgiving love has reached its historically visible culmination in Jesus’ death on the cross, because this love has become irrevocable and has found its acceptance in a human being…. God has reconciled the world to himself in Jesus the crucified…. [I]t also becomes reality for its part when human beings accept it.\textsuperscript{359}

As a sort of “soteriological anchor,” Rahner’s Christ does not “objectively” effect salvation simply by acting so as to alter a state of affairs (be those affairs understood in terms of penal justice, honor, etc.); rather, he \textit{is} the objectively wrought state of affairs, the free and “externalized” self-promise of God, the very reconciliation of God and the human family. The excerpt above brings us to consider the next two components of Rahner’s soteriology: the (objective) finalization of Jesus as “soteriological anchor” in

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{357} Similarly, Rahner writes that “God by his own sovereign efficacious grace has already decided… in favour of the salvation of the world in Christ, and in Christ has already promulgated this event” ("Salvation," \textit{SM} vol. 5 p. 408). Likewise, “This Jesus proclaims that with him God turns to us definitively and irrevocably in a love that is forgiving and that contains the offer of himself; that the ‘kingdom of God’ has come irrevocably; that on God’s part the triumph of God’s forgiving love establishes itself in human history in a way that cannot be overcome” ("Jesus Christ—The Meaning of Life,” \textit{TI} 21:216).
\item \textsuperscript{358} “Jesus is the consubstantial Son of God. His human reality, notwithstanding its genuine, free, human subjectivity, is the reality of the eternal Logos of God. For Jesus is the irrevocable, unsurpassable, and definitive self-promise of God to us. And he can only be this as the consubstantial Son” (ibid., \textit{TI} 21:218).
\item \textsuperscript{359} “Reconciliation and Vicarious Redemption,” \textit{TI} 21:261.
\end{itemize}

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his death, and the (subjective) realization of this salvation in our acceptance of it in relationship with Christ.

2.4.3 The Place of Cross: Christ’s Death and \textit{das Realsymbol}

The foregoing section considered Rahner’s soteriology from a descending and objective perspective. It is important to recognize that for Rahner, these two descriptors are not synonymous, nor inseparable. Indeed, an angle crucial for understanding his soteriology is at the same time objective and \textit{ascending}. Included within the objective achievement of salvation in the Christ-event is Christ’s own human acceptance of God’s grace “from below.” In the Person of Christ, Rahner explains, God communicates\[s\] himself to a man in such a unique manner that this man would \textit{[from above]} become the definitive and irreversible self-gift of God to the world. He would also \textit{[from below]} freely accept the divine self-gift in such a manner that this too would be irreversible, i.e., through his death as the definitive culmination of his free actions in history…. [T]his historically tangible occurrence must be a sign of the salvation of the whole world in the sense of a “real symbol.”

Recall, a constantly reiterated part of Rahner’s \textit{realsymbolisch} account of the incarnation is his insistence that Jesus is not simply the Logos donning a human nature, “something in which God dresses up and masquerades.”\textsuperscript{361}  Rather, the human Jesus who results from the “exteriorization” of the Logos is entirely free (anything less would result in a diminished human nature, and thus a sort of crypto-monophysitism).\textsuperscript{362}  A central and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{360} “The One Christ and the Universality of Salvation,” \textit{TJ} 16:214.
\item \textsuperscript{361} “The Theology of the Symbol,” \textit{TJ} 4:239.
\item \textsuperscript{362} “In accordance with the fact that the natures are unmixed, basically the active influence of the Logos on the human ‘nature’ in Jesus in a physical sense may not be understood in any other way except the way this influence is exercised by God on free creatures everywhere. This of course is frequently
\end{itemize}
essential part of the Christ-event is therefore Jesus’ exercise of genuine human freedom, which coincides with the reception of God’s grace. In fact, Jesus’ total openness to God throughout the course of his life constitutes the perfect human “Yes” to God’s self-offer in grace. Jesus Christ, considered as an “objective” soteriological “anchor,” stands at once as the definitive expression and establishment of God’s will for human salvation, as well as the definitive human acceptance of it. That is, in the Person of Jesus, descending and ascending movements of grace coalesce into a single “objective” basis for human salvation.  

It must be immediately added, however, that any such statement about the Person of Jesus and his lifelong “Yes” to God as an ascending, objective basis for Rahner’s soteriology is deficient without reference to the cross. It remains true that the entire Christ-event, including Jesus’ incarnation, life, death, and resurrection is forgotten in a piety and a theology which are tinged with monophysitism. All too often they understand the humanity of Jesus as a thing and as an ‘instrument’ which is moved by the subjectivity of the Logos (“FCF” p. 287).

The whole movement of this history of God’s self-communication lives by virtue of its moving towards its goal or climax in the event by which it becomes irreversible…. [T]his saviour, who constitutes the climax of God’s self-communication to the world, must be at the same time both the absolute promise of God to spiritual creatures as a whole and the acceptance of this self-communication by the saviour…. Only then is there an absolutely irrevocable self-communication on both sides” (“FCF” p. 195). Similarly, Rahner writes that the “absolute climax” of God’s self-communication “takes place in the incarnation of the Logos because here what is expressed and communicated, namely, God himself, and, secondly, the mode of expression, that is, the human reality of Christ in his life and in his final state, and, thirdly, the recipient Jesus in grace and in the vision of God, all three have become absolutely one” (“FCF” pp. 174).


“Because Christ’s bodily humanity is a permanent part of one world which has one dynamism the resurrection of Christ is soteriologically and objectively the commencement of the ontologically coherent event which is the glorification of the world; in this commencement the final consummation of the world has been decided in principle and has already begun. The resurrection of Christ is also more than his private destiny because it creates Heaven and is not (together with the Ascension, which basically is an
redemptive. Nonetheless, the final hours of Jesus’ life hold a particular prominence in Rahner’s thought. This prominence is grounded in Rahner’s theology of death; space permits only a cursory look at key, relevant points of this rich topic here.  

A person’s death, according to Rahner, is best understood as the finalization of that person’s life of freedom. One’s free actions are not merely functions of an already-established identify, but genuinely shape the person via acts of self-disposal. Moreover, the “supernatural existential,” an ever-present, transcendental offer of relationship to God, stands as an abiding backdrop to each free act of every human person. Inescapably, and regardless of one’s reflexive awareness of the matter, one’s free actions correspond with the possibilities of either being “freely given over to God in his grace or [someone] refused to God and thus condemned to [her] own finiteness.” This lifetime of decisions for and against God, of “Yes”s and “No”s, culminates in one’s death, which is an “event that gathers together the whole personal act of man’s life in to the one consummation.” In other words, as one’s final and culminating act of

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370 “Christian Dying,” TI 18:253. As Joseph Wong puts it, “death as the final and total act of freedom exercised by man gives definitive orientation to one’s whole life” (Logos-Symbol, p. 161).

371 “Death brings man, as a moral and spiritual person, a kind of finality and consummation which renders his decision for or against God, reached during the time of his bodily life, final and unalterable” (On the Theology of Death p. 26). Later in his career, Rahner is willing to at least entertain thoughts of
freedom, a person’s death recapitulates and integrates the whole of a person’s life within a single and final “Yes” or “No” to God. Since his death on the cross recapitulates the entire Christ-event (which, viewed from below, is an extended and perfect lifetime of “Yes”s to God), Rahner speaks of the whole and its summary almost interchangeably at times. Accordingly, the cross stands for Rahner as the singular moment which “sums up” the objective, ascending dimension of his soteriology.

relaxing the hardness of this “finality” for the difficult cases of those who die before ever having the chance to exercise freedom at all (“Christian Dying,” TI 18:237-241; “Purgatory,” in TI 19:181-193).

For Rahner, “death”, as a theological concept, need not correspond with one’s biological demise, though this is often the case (e.g., Jesus’ passion) (“Christian Dying,” TI 18:229).


“The life and death of Jesus taken together, then, are the ‘cause’ of God’s salvific will (to the extent that these two things are regarded as different) insofar as this salvific will establishes itself really and irrevocably in this life and death, in other words, insofar as the life and death of Jesus, or the death which recapitulates and culminates his life, possess a causality of a quasi-sacramental and real-symbolic nature. In this causality what is signified, in this case God’s salvific will, posits the sign, in this case the death of Jesus along with this resurrection, and in and through the sign it causes what is signified” (FCF p. 284, emphasis added). Indeed, given Rahner’s theology of death, there is a most intimate unity between one’s entire lifetime and one’s death, for it is in one’s death that one’s lifetime comes to expression and full realization; one would be justified in saying that there is a realsymbolisch quality of Rahnerian death.

I classify Jesus’ death on the cross as “objective” here with a view to the “saving situation” it establishes for us; of course, from Christ’s perspective, his free assent to God is “subjective” insofar as it constitutes his own “self-redemption.” As Rahner says, “the ‘objective redemption’ in Jesus Christ consists precisely in the subjective act of his obedience in death, in which he gave himself totally to God as a member of the human race” (“Salvation,” SM vol. 5 p. 437).
2.4.4 *Das Realsymbol* and Causality: The “Subjective” Dimension

Both God’s descending self-communication in grace and the human Jesus’ perfect and ascending acceptance that grace converge in the Christ-event, and so Rahner is able to say that, objectively, “God has reconciled the world to himself in Jesus the crucified”; but as we noted above, Rahner quickly adds the *subjective* qualification that this reconciliation achieved in the Person of Christ “also becomes reality for its part when human beings accept it.” ³⁷⁷ It is this subjective appropriation of objective reconciliation in Christ to which we now turn. ³⁷⁸

A central component of this subjective dimension to Rahner’s soteriological thought is a term which has been referenced and only briefly described a number of times already, the “supernatural existential.” Like his theology of death, Rahner’s notion of the supernatural existential is a rich and nuanced term to which an entire chapter (if not a dissertation) could be devoted. Once again, only a brief review of several salient and relevant points is possible here. ³⁷⁹ Though it is woven into the fabric of Rahner’s entire theological corpus, the supernatural existential is perhaps best located within his contribution to the nature and grace disputes in the first half of the twentieth century. At


³⁷⁸ Rahner laments that neo-scholastic treatments of soteriology neglect this subjective dimension: “The traditional doctrine of the *fides qua* remains very abstract, and soteriology speaks ordinarily only of the ‘objective’ redemption. The actual subjective structure of this salutary faith, insofar as it bears on the ‘objective’ redemption..., is not sufficiently analysed in itself and in its conditions of possibility in man” (“Salvation,” *SM* vol. 5 p. 437).

the extreme ends of the dispute were two unpalatable alternatives. If, following Cajetan and Suárez, human nature is understood as a self-sufficient reality without reference to God’s supernatural grace (a grace laid as a kind of superstructure upon our “pure” nature), how do we, as human, have anything to do with or find any fulfillment in the supernatural destiny (namely, participation in God’s own life) afforded by this grace? On the other hand, if human nature is naturally oriented toward God from the outset, how does one avoid the implication that God, having created us, owes the fulfillment of grace (which thus loses its pure gratuity) to his creatures?

Rahner’s solution posits that while human beings could meaningfully exist according to “pure nature,” in actuality there is no such thing since God has gratuitously infused human nature with an essential and constitutive openness to grace. This openness is at once “supernatural” (given freely by God for a transcendental finality) and an “existential” (a constitutive part of concrete human nature existing prior to any exercise of freedom); the former element safeguards the gratuity of grace while the latter avoids the extrinsicism of a Cajetanian superstructure framework.

While it is beyond the scope of the current project to address the success of the supernatural existential vis-à-vis the nature and grace disputes, the concept is important since it retains a prominent and abiding place in Rahner’s anthropology. In short, the supernatural existential is a gracious invitation to relationship with God that exists in the heart of every person. As such, it is the key for understanding how human beings subjectively appropriate the reconciling grace communicated in the Christ-event. It is

380 See translator’s note on FCF p. 16. Other “existentials” include human conscience, inquisitiveness, and freedom.
important to recall that God’s grace is, for Rahner, not simply an abstract self-communication of God, but fundamentally tied to the Person of Christ since he is, as das Realsymbol, the exteriorization of the self-communicating God. Accordingly, Rahner describes the supernatural existential as a person’s orientation toward grace in Christ.

This connection between every human person and Christ provides the basis for the “anthropological” procedure which Rahner consistently employs, especially in his later work. This procedure moves from the human person’s faith, hope, and trust in God’s final salvation (or even in her affirmation of her genuine humanity, as it is oriented toward this fulfillment) to the affirmation of Jesus Christ, who (objectively) realizes this state of affairs in his own Person. In addition to providing Jesus as an answer to the “meaning of life,” Rahner sees this “ascending” methodology as a valid and even ideal approach for conducting contemporary christology.

381 “Christ is God’s will for our salvation made historical, made flesh; God’s personal, loving will does not encounter man in some unattainable, intangible ‘inner realm’; since Christ, since the One who became man, all grace is Christ’s grace with a body, grace dependent on the historical event that at one particular space time point in our human history the Word became man and was crucified and rose again” (“The Parish Priest,” in Mission and Grace: Essays in Pastoral Theology, 3 vols. (London: Sheed and Ward, 1963-1966), vol. 2 pp. 35-52, at p. 39 (emphasis added).

382 Rahner explains that since the “free self-communication of God in Jesus Christ and in his Spirit must be accepted by the spiritual creature in a dialogical partnership that is equally free, it presupposes a permanent human constitution (freely determined by God)… one prior to God’s self-communication in such a way that man must receive this latter as an event that is free favour, unforeseeable in the light of man’s constitution, that is to say not transcendentally implicit in human self-realization, though man is essentially open to this self-disclosure of God (Potentia obedientialis, Supernatural existential) and involves his whole being in calamity if he foregoes it” (“Grace,” in Theological Dictionary pp. 192-196 at p. 193)

383 “Anyone who accepts his humanity fully, and all the more so of course the humanity of others, has accepted the Son of Man because in him God has accepted man” (FCF p. 228).

384 See the consecutive essays in TI 21 “Jesus Christ–The Meaning of Life” (pp. 208-219), “Christology Today” (pp. 220-227), and “Brief Observations on Systematic Christology Today” (pp. 228-238).
proposing any “deduction” of the Christ-event from foundational anthropological concepts; rather, he is clear that this approach is only possible in light of the Christ-event. Its strength lies not by way of deduction, but by way of presenting Christ as intrinsically related to human persons precisely in their transcendent longings and openness to God.

The subjective appropriation of salvation which occurs in positively responding to one’s openness and invitation to grace constitutes what Rahner calls “self-redemption.” Since God’s invitation precedes any acceptance on our part, an acceptance which is itself “also a gift of God’s grace,” Rahner uses this term with no Pelagian connotations. Instead it signifies that the human person does not “merely receive his salvation in a passive manner but rather realises it with total, and not just partial, freedom.” “Self-redemption accounts for the fact that salvation is not something realized entirely

385 “Speaking in the most general terms, there is no transcendental theology that would limit itself so exclusively to the realm of the transcendental, the aprioristic, and the speculative that it would omit any attempt to bring in a posteriori experience and to interpret it. Aristotle’s logic, for example, is an aprioristic transcendental logic. But even with its a priori character, universal validity, and transcendental validity it is obvious that it exists only because the peasants’ wives who sold potatoes in the marketplace engaged in logic. And so I would naturally not claim to have designed a transcendental theology if there had not been the a posteriori experience of Jesus of Nazareth” (“Jesus Christ—The Meaning of Life,” TII 21:235). Cf. FCF p. 207, “Thoughts on the Possibility of Belief Today,” TII 5:12.

386 “The One Christ and the Universality of Salvation,” TII 16:207.

387 Ibid. Cf. “redemption in the sense of ultimate salvation is impossible without faith, hope, and love, and that this redemption in its ultimate phase is nothing other than the perfection of faith, hope, and love” (“The Christian Understanding of Redemption,” TII 21:241).
externally to the human person;\textsuperscript{388} the “redemptio objectiva” wrought by the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ must be freely accepted by the human subject.\textsuperscript{389}

Finally, we must note that Rahner utilizes \textit{das Realsymbol} within this subjective and ascending dimension of his soteriology. First of all, he describes the very process of self-disposal in freedom in such terms, calling one’s life a “concrete process of self-fulfilment… a ‘real symbol’ under which the individual brings to fruition this basic attitude of his, his \textit{option fondamentale}.”\textsuperscript{390} In other words, one can legitimately think of the final “Yes” or “No” to God’s self-offer which sums up, expresses, and realizes the totality of a person’s free acts (i.e., what Rahner terms “death”) as \textit{das Realsymbol} of that person’s life. A person’s \textit{realsymbolisch} “Yes” in death constitutes “the radical and final coming of subjective redemption.”\textsuperscript{391}

Moreover, \textit{das Realsymbol} is not only operative in reference to a person’s own history of freedom, for the supernatural existential backdrop against which that freedom operates itself possesses a \textit{realsymbolisch} relationship to the Person of Jesus Christ. For

\textsuperscript{388} “Naturally Jesus’ death has a meaning and a dignity that we cannot attribute to our own. It was the once and for all, irrevocable and unrepeatable word of God’s power to us, the act of the Word of God. As fundamental as this is for Christians, it remains true that his abandonment of self in faith and hope into the incomprehensibility of death in which God dwells is also demanded of us in our death. In us too the redeemed and redeemer must become one; salvation by another and salvation by oneself, when seen in their ultimate significance, do not represent contradictions for a Christian” (“Good Friday: Gratitude for the Cross,” in \textit{The Great Church Year: The Best of Karl Rahner’s Homilies, Meditations, and Sermons} (New York: Crossroad, 1993), pp. 159-163 at p. 161).

\textsuperscript{389} “[I]f the cross of Christ (rooted in the incarnation of the Logos and reaching fulfilment in the resurrection) is made the cause of our salvation as the ‘redemptio objectiva’, then the causality of the cross must be understood in relation to the general and the individual conditions of possibility of self-redemption” (“The One Christ and the Universality of Salvation,” \textit{TI} 16:207).

\textsuperscript{390} “Considerations of the Active Role,” \textit{TI} 14:177.

\textsuperscript{391} “Salvation,” \textit{SM} vol. 5 p. 438.
Christ himself is the grace (i.e., self-communication) of God, fully exteriorized in its Realsymbol, to which every person is open and responds. Rahner thus makes claims like “anyone who seizes upon the grace of God as the radical dimension of his own personal life, as its ultimate and definitive hope, has ipso facto posited an assent to the historical manifestation of the definitive nature [read ‘Realsymbol’] of this grace in Jesus Christ.”

This realsymbolisch connection also enables him to argue for an “intrinsic unity” (rather than just an “extrinsic” or “factual” relationship) between Christ’s incarnation and “the self-transcendence of the whole spiritual world into God through God’s self-communication.” For “although the hypostatic union is a unique event in its own essence, and viewed in itself it is the highest conceivable event, it is nevertheless an intrinsic moment within the whole process by which grace is bestowed upon all spiritual creatures.” Far from being a mere “prime instance” of an ongoing activity on the part of God achieved at a high degree, the Christ-event “is already an intrinsic moment and a condition for the universal bestowal of grace.”

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392 “Considerations of the Active Role,” *TI* 14:168, emphasis added.

393 *FCF* p. 200.

394 *FCF* p. 201

395 *FCF* p. 199. “The reality of Christian salvation, being essentially something that is present to us in the word, calls on us for a free, personal assent. It is a reality for us and in us, giving us its blessings, gracing us in our free assent to it, just insofar as we not only undergo it but act it ourselves as well, with God. Christ becomes our life only when we are doing that which is done to us; when that word which blesses us with the tidings of his life, that word by which he himself enters into our life, is spoken by us too, with him, testifying to our faith and our love; when the primary sacramental word of Christianity becomes, simultaneously, the primary word of our co-operative fulfillment of this Christ-reality” (“The Parish Priest,” pp. 41-42).
The concept of *das Realsymbol* pervades the entirety of Rahner’s soteriology, considered in all of the dimensions. Viewed objectively and “from above,” the act of incarnation is the *realsymbolisch* exteriorization of the Logos. Viewed objectively and “from below,” Christ’s death on the cross is the summative *Realsymbol* of his entire, lifelong “Yes” to God. Finally, the ascending and subjective act of “self-redemption” is intrinsically bound by *das Realsymbol* to Christ since he *is* the exteriorized realization of the grace to which the human person’s freedom responds.

2.5 Connecting Points for Representative Thought

In this chapter, I have examined Rahner’s seminal article “The Theology of the Symbol,” exploring the concept of *das Realsymbol* via its general ontology as well as via several applications made by Rahner. I have also considered the influences, both spiritual and philosophical, which contributed to the formation of this concept, arguing that the former possess a certain primacy of place. I have furthermore distinguished Rahner’s *Realsymbol* from the concepts of symbol posited by Paul Tillich and Roger Haight, both of whom argue that the symbol manifests and even *makes present* the reality symbolized, but whose concepts lack the robust intrinsicity which characterized Rahner’s version. Finally, I have offered my own summary of Rahner’s soteriological application of *das Realsymbol*, considering his account of God’s reconciliation with humankind from various permutations of ascending, descending, objective, and subjective perspectives.

All of the above analysis has operated within the standard classification of Rahner’s soteriological thought as “sacramental,” with Jesus Christ communicating human salvation as the *Ursakrament* of God’s grace. As this second chapter comes to a close, I would like to expand the conversation by returning to the previously discussed
representative soteriological category, but without exactly leaving the sacramental one. To speak visually, if Rahner’s *sacramental* soteriological thought were to be considered a bounded area within a two-dimensional plane, the corresponding *representative* component might be said to develop along an intersecting, perpendicular axis, granting a full, three-dimensional body to his theology of human salvation. Although an extended historical and conceptual analysis of this new “representative axis” will occur in chapters four and five, I want here to briefly demonstrate that there truly is the “intersection” I have just described. That is, I will substantiate my earlier claim that Rahner’s sacramental soteriological thinking in fact *implies* a representative counterpart.

The most efficient way to demonstrate this implication is to return to the above exposition of Rahner’s sacramental soteriology and indicate its direct correspondence to the three “markers” of representative soteriology (centered on Jesus’ Person; God’s incarnational presence to the world in Christ; humanity’s divinized transformation in the New Adam) described in Chapter 1). The second of these markers is the most obviously “sacramental” of the three, and it corresponds with the descending and objective perspective of Rahner’s soteriology. The Logos’s exteriorization in its *Realsymbol*, namely the human being Jesus, obviously constitutes the saving presence of God to humanity. But almost any theology which recognizes some version of the incarnation could claim such a connection. What is especially interesting here is that Rahner’s own insistence that salvation itself consists precisely of God’s direct presence to humanity matches almost seamlessly with Brian Daley’s summary of patristic soteriological

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396 “Salvation here is to be understood as the strictly supernatural and direct presence of God in himself afforded by grace” (“The One Christ and the Universality of Salvation,” *TJ* 16:200).
thought-patterns\textsuperscript{397} (patterns which this dissertation is considering as normative for representative soteriology). For both sets of thought, the incarnation (considered as an “interval” rather than a “moment”) thus has great salvific significance.

The third marker of representative soteriology, the divinization of humanity through the New Adam, corresponds with Rahner’s soteriology viewed objectively and from below. Recall, Christ is not only for Rahner the culminating presence of God to humanity, but also humanity’s own culminating “Yes” to God. Christ is, for Rahner, quite literally the perfect human,\textsuperscript{398} a “New Adam” for the human race. Nor is he just the prime example or most successful instance but, as we saw above, his own perfect “Yes” is a “condition for the universal bestowal of grace.”\textsuperscript{399} This being the case, Rahner calls Christ “the one who is definitively affirmed and accepted by God,”\textsuperscript{400} and says that “in him God has accepted man.”\textsuperscript{401} Considering these claims, as well as the intrinsic connection between any human “Yes” to God and the Christ-event (just treated in the

\textsuperscript{397} “God must work our salvation by becoming one of us… because salvation cannot be conceived simply as a ‘work’… salvation simply is God’s personal presence among us” (Daley, “He Himself is Our Peace,” pp. 175-176).

\textsuperscript{398} Cf. Rahner’s well-known remark that “Christology may be studied as self-transcending anthropology, and anthropology as deficient Christology” (“Current Problems in Christology,” \textit{TI} 1:164).

\textsuperscript{399} \textit{FCF} p. 199

\textsuperscript{400} “Jesus Christ—The Meaning of Life,” \textit{TI} 21:216.

\textsuperscript{401} \textit{FCF} p. 228

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“subjective” considerations above), it is more than fair to say that Rahner’s Jesus stands as the head of a new humanity, marked by divinization through God’s grace.  

Finally, the first characteristic of representative soteriology is its person-centeredness. Rahner undoubtedly has a profound respect for the acts and events of Jesus’ life, particularly his passion and death. Nevertheless, as we have seen, Christ’s actions are for Rahner not carried out as those a super-agent attempting to alter a judiciary state of affairs or rebalance a system of honor. Rather, the import of Christ’s free human actions (especially in his final, summative “Yes” to God on the cross) reside in their establishing him as the definitive openness to God. Jesus Christ is himself the redemptive state of affairs, both “from above” as God’s definitive self-communication to the world (the irreversibly established “soteriological anchor”) and “from below” as the definitive human acceptance of it. Operating through sacramental or realsymbolisch causality, Rahner’s Christ does not simply effect our reconciliation with God, but, as seen above, he in fact is that very reconciliation.

It thus seems that an analysis of Rahner’s sacramental or realsymbolisch account of human salvation in Christ (as inevitably selective, yet textually grounded, as that analysis might be) leads to the very building blocks and constitutive markers of a


403 “Christians know full well that God’s forgiving and reconciling love that encompasses all guilt has entered the world in such a way that it can never be revoked. This love has revealed itself in the cross of Jesus Christ who has become our reconciliation… God’s forgiving love has reached its historically visible culmination in Jesus’ death on the cross, because this love has become irrevocable and has found its acceptance in a human being… God has reconciled the world to himself in Jesus the crucified… It also becomes reality for its part when human beings accept it” (“Reconciliation and Vicarious Representation,” TJ 21:261).
representative soteriology akin to those present in patristic theologies like that of Irenaeus of Lyons. Moreover, this connection between Rahner’s *realsymbolisch* soteriology and a figure like Irenaeus should not be entirely surprising, despite the fact that Rahner is typically associated with Thomism and transcendental philosophical thought and only rarely considered in connection with patristic theology. After all, the call for, most basic components of, and even some applications of his later “The Theology of the Symbol” are already present in the conclusion of his 1936 dissertation, a dissertation which focuses on the patristic typological claim of the Church as the New Eve emerging from the pierced side of the New Adam. That the category of *das Realsymbol*, according to which his soteriology is virtually unanimously classified, appears (at least in gestational form) within a meticulous analysis of Migne’s Greek and Latin patrologies provides a suggestive historical basis for understanding his soteriology in the manner which I am arguing here.

In the following chapter, I will examine the writings on the topic of human salvation from several figures who stand among the normative exemplars of representative soteriology, namely, Irenaeus and others of the Church Fathers. A further analysis of the historical connection between Rahner and such patristic figures, including an overview of his dissertation *E latere Christi*, will have to wait until Chapter 4. Finally, a more thorough consideration of how Rahner’s mature writings align with the constitutive markers of representative soteriology will occur in the fifth and final chapter. But while much more remains to be shown, the present chapter has sought to demonstrate that even if Rahner’s theology of salvation can (and should!) be characterized as “sacramental,” his is not an account of an abstract operation of *realsymbolisch* causality,
but of a person who is the Sacrament and Realsymbol, and as such is our reconciliation with God.
CHAPTER 3:

REPRESENTATIVE SOTERIOLOGY IN THE PATRISTIC PERIOD

The conclusion of the previous chapter marked a shift in this dissertation’s procedure. The previous two chapters have focused on readings of Rahner’s soteriology which are prevalent in the literature on the topic. These readings, both critical and sympathetic alike, largely agree that Rahner’s account of Christ as Savior is best understood through the category of sacrament or Symbol. However, as I have just argued, the way in which Rahner crafts this category himself entails a supplementary “representative” understanding of Christ. The remainder of the dissertation will focus upon this representative category. The fifth and final chapter will analyze arguments and passages from Rahner’s mature corpus which attest to representation in his soteriology. Prior to that, Chapter 4 will consider Rahner’s training and early career, particularly his prolonged engagement with patristic theology, through which he encountered classical articulations of representative soteriology and which formatively shaped his own theological system.

In the present chapter, the dissertation will take a hiatus from focusing on Rahner’s writings in order to make clearer precisely what is meant by “representative soteriology.” This clarification will, first of all, be rooted in this soteriological category’s three characteristic markers, which will be revisited momentarily. The bulk of the chapter will consist in a historical survey of early Christian thinkers who utilize the
representative category to varying degrees. The scope of this project will restrict this survey to the patristic roots (especially Irenaeus of Lyons, d. 202, in whose thought this category was first fully exemplified), although it will also make brief references to theologians from recent decades who, along with Rahner, articulated their accounts of salvation in accordance (again, in varying degrees) with representative soteriology.

3.1 Overview of Representative Markers

In the end of the first chapter, I suggested three characteristic markers which distinguish a representative soteriology from other models for Christian understandings of human salvation. None of these markers is exclusively associated with the category; indeed, one might even argue that all three could be predicated of another classical model. However, the way in which these three markers relate to one another, their particular configuration, is what differentiates this unique soteriological category. Since I will appeal to these categories throughout this third chapter, let us briefly review them.

The first characteristic of our soteriological category is that it considers Christ as God’s representative before us. This “descending,” human-ward characteristic, which is the centerpiece of a sacramental soteriology, accounts for our salvation. Indeed, salvation is nothing other than the fullest realization human flourishing, which supposes the direct, loving presence of God: Irenaeus’s celebrated dictum, *Gloria Dei vivens homo* (“The glory of God is a living human being”) is followed with *vita hominis visio Dei* (“human life consists in beholding God”). However, Jesus is not God the Father, nor

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404 *Against Heresies* (henceforth *AH*) IV 20.7. Unless otherwise noted and with occasional minor adjustments, quotations from *AH* are taken from Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland
even simply the divine Logos, among us but rather God’s Representative in our midst. The idea of representation at work here implies both identity and differentiation. God’s presence to us is accomplished through another, through the human being Jesus of Nazareth, whose differentness from God allows him to stand with us and whose sameness with God allows God to self-communicate through him. The incarnate Word, the Representative who “the Father…sent forth” (John 20:21), is the descending Mediator of salvation to humankind.

The second characteristic (inversely related to the first) states that Christ is our Representative before God. This category requires looking at the Person of Christ “from below,” in an ascending, God-ward manner. Again, the idea of “representative” implies both sameness and difference; Jesus is at once fully human but set out from among us in a unique, distinct way. Somewhat ironically, part of this distinctiveness arises from his being fully human, for the others of us, insofar as we are sinners, fall short of fully realized, authentic humanity. Christ is the “New Adam” among us, whose sinless life of love for God encapsulates what we are called to be. Moreover, as our Representative, Christ is this Perfect Human “for our sakes” and “on our behalf,” different from us, yet communicating us to the God whom he has so perfectly loved. This ascending, God-ward elevation of the human race is classically expressed in terms of divinization or theosis, a transformation of humanity unto God. The deification of humanity is possible through God’s prior self-communication to us, together with our incorporation into the Person of Christ, whose “Yes” to God becomes our own.

Finally, a representative soteriology is characteristically person-centered. Unlike soteriological schemas according to which the human Jesus is fully divine in order to perform a great redemptive task (e.g., making satisfaction, defeating Satan, being penalized in our stead as a substitute), the representative view takes Christ’s tasks as oriented toward his Person. On this view, salvation is not the extrinsic result of the saving agent’s action, but rather salvation finds its very locus in the Representative himself. That is to say, our reconciliation with God is realized via our incorporation into Jesus Christ, the nexus point in which God is united fully with creation, as his members. The incarnation, life and ministry, death, and resurrection of Christ are thus not primarily about balancing the cosmic scales of justice, vanquishing the “evil one,” or restoring divine honor, but more fundamentally aimed at establishing a new humanity united with God and rendering it accessible to us in our current state. Our salvation is not only through Christ but in Christ. As we saw Brian Daley argue in Chapter 1, this sort of soteriological vision provides an answer quite different from the one which Anselm provided to his famous question, *Cur Deus homo?* Moreover, it is an answer which, as Daley attested, is pervasive among the thinking of the Fathers. Let us now turn to this patristic thought.

3.2 Christ the Representative: Patristic Literature

A reader with a careful eye could detect strands of representative soteriology in writings which span the entirety of the Christian tradition from the New Testament onward. However, it was in the post-NT period of the Fathers that the idea became the object of prolonged, sustained theological attention. The watershed moment for representative soteriology was Irenaeus’s formulation of “recapitulation,” an idea which
he utilized in a variety of ways but which seems primarily ordered toward accounting for the unity of salvation history over and against dualistic, “Gnostic” systems of thought. Irenaeus’s logic for reading the contents of Scripture as a whole, with Christ as their recapitulating culmination, proliferated in the patristic theologians who wrote after him.

Since Irenaeus stands as a monumental figure in the development of representative soteriology, his theology will be considered at some length below. Moreover, since Irenaeus’s writings are known to have spread and taken root in Egypt within his lifetime, subsequent repetitions of and development upon his soteriological thought will be traced through three influential patristic theologians from Northern Africa: Clement of Alexandria (d. c. 215), Athanasius of Alexandria (d. 373), and Augustine of Hippo (d. 430).

3.2.1 Irenaeus: Recapitulation as a Kind of Representative Soteriology

More than a single instance of representative soteriology, Irenaeus of Lyons and his notion of recapitulation constitute the standard for the category as it has been defined in this dissertation. Accordingly, significant space will be dedicated to Irenaeus’s articulation of this idea. Below, we will consider the sources which he drew upon, his person-centered theology of Christ the New Adam, his “descending” connection of the

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405 In order to guard against the common and false idea of a singular religious tradition and system of thought called “Gnosticism,” which is in fact a loose label used to group a variety of related movements, I will often put words like “Gnostic” in quotation marks.

Word’s incarnation with human divinization, and his “ascending” theology of human maturation throughout history, reaching its apex in the Person of Christ.

3.2.1.1 Irenaeus’s Sources

Before addressing Irenaeus’s theology of recapitulation, it is important to recognize the interlocutors with whom he was engaged and the source material to which he had frequent recourse. As Matthew Steenberg, an Orthodox patrologist who has published extensively on Irenaeus, has demonstrated, Irenaeus was deeply engaged in dialogue and dispute with Christian and non-Christian thinkers, figures like Justin Martyr, Theophilus, Plato, the Stoics, and representatives of several strands of Judaism. But, as it is well known, Irenaeus’s most direct and primary conversation partners were a variety of esoteric religious groups which have come to be labeled “Gnostic.” In Steenberg’s judgment, Irenaeus’s main task, especially in his monumental work Against Heresies (Adversus Haereses), was biblical in character; Irenaeus was

\[\text{\footnotesize 407} \text{ Justin merits particular mention here, in light of the fact that Irenaeus specifically cites a (now lost) work of Justin’s, Προς Μαρκιώνα (“Against Marcion”), in which Justin mentions the idea of recapitulation: “In his book against Marcion, Justin does well say: ‘I would not have believed the Lord Himself, if He had announced any other than He who is our framer, maker, and nourisher. But because the only-begotten Son came to us from the one God, who both made this world and formed us, and contains and administers all things, summing up [\textit{recapitulans}} His own handiwork in Himself, my faith towards Him is steadfast, and my love to the Father immoveable, God bestowing both upon us’” (\textit{AH IV}.6.2).}
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\[\text{\footnotesize 408} \text{ Steenberg, Irenaeus on Creation: The Cosmic Christ and the Saga of Redemption (Leiden: Brill, 2008), p. 10.} \]
keenly aware of the fact that Valentinus and other Gnostics read and utilized Scripture, but in doing so they managed to neglect the heart of the apostolic message.\textsuperscript{409}

Thus, the Bible stands as the main source for Irenaeus’s theology, including his distinctive notion of recapitulation. In particular, Ephesians can be singled out for containing the terminology which Irenaeus adopted for the concept. The tenth verse of the first chapter speaks of God’s plan (\textit{oikonomia}), that is, God’s gradually unfolding management of creation. The verse goes to say that the culminating moment of God’s “economy,” the content of his plan, is to gather up or recapitulate (\textit{anakephalaiosasthai}) all things in Christ.\textsuperscript{410} The idea of \textit{anakephalaiosis} used in Ephesians is borrowed from Greek literary terminology and references the summative end of a story. For Irenaeus, taking his cue from the author of Ephesians,\textsuperscript{411} “God saves by taking over the human story and appropriating it to himself,” reversing points of derailment in that story and fulfilling past promises.\textsuperscript{412}

Another significant locus for the idea is Paul’s references to Adam and Christ in Romans 5. There, in vv. 12-21, Paul describes how death, which emerged through sin,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{409}Irenaeus thus set out “to exegete those same scriptures, particularly around the points raised by the groups in question, but to do so after a manner he considers authentic to the reading and exegesis of apostolic heritage” (Steenberg, \textit{Of God and Man}, p. 20).
\item \textsuperscript{410}“[H]e has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan (\textit{oikovomy}a) for the fullness of time, to gather up (\textit{anakephalaiosasthai}) all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth” (Eph 1:9-10).
\item \textsuperscript{411}Cf. Irenaeus’s explicit citation of the Ephesians text in \textit{AH} V.20.2, immediately after which he elaborates, “These things [on earth], therefore, He recapitulated in Himself: by uniting man to the Spirit, and causing the Spirit to dwell in man, He is Himself made the head of the Spirit, and gives the Spirit to be the head of man: for through Him (the Spirit) we see, and hear, and speak.”
\end{itemize}
spread to all following upon the sin of the one man, Adam. To this description, he adds that God’s life-giving grace also proliferates from the one man, Jesus Christ. While Paul here juxtaposes Adam and Christ when it comes to their lives (sin and trespass vs. righteousness) and the subsequent results (death vs. life and justification), Paul’s more basic insight here in comparing Adam and Christ concerns their similarity: it is “because of” and “through” the one that the many are affected.\textsuperscript{413} Likewise, Irenaeus frequently juxtaposes Adam and Christ within a framework of their similarity.\textsuperscript{414}

Irenaeus’s use of the Bible as a source for his theology of recapitulation is, however, significantly more wide-ranging. Richard Clifford and Khaled Aanatolios have argued that Irenaeus’s soteriology ought to be understood as part of a larger model or system which they classify as “prophetic.”\textsuperscript{415} According to this model, the other two cited examples of which are the Book of Isaiah and Luke-Acts, God effects salvation in a long process within history by means of human instruments.\textsuperscript{416}

The Book of Isaiah, which is generally agreed to have been written by several authors over hundreds of years (beginning in eighth century B.C.), is situated within a context of an Ancient Near Eastern worldview. A common part of this worldview,

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{413} “If, because of the one man’s trespass, death exercised dominion through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. Therefore just as one man’s trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man’s act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all” (Rom 5:17-18).
\textsuperscript{414} E.g., “He became incarnate, and was made man, He commenced afresh the long line of human beings, and furnished us, in a brief, comprehensive manner, with salvation; so that what we had lost in Adam—namely, to be according to the image and likeness of God—that we might recover in Christ Jesus” (\textit{AH} III.18.1)
\textsuperscript{415} Clifford and Anatolios, “Christian Salvation,” passim. The other models discussed are the “liturgical” and “sapiential” models.
\textsuperscript{416} Ibid., p. 741.
\end{quote}

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Clifford and Anatolios explain, is the attribution of political change to a shift in power within the pantheon of the gods. Along similar lines, Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah all interpreted major political events in terms of the (vulnerable) relationship between God and Israel, a relationship damaged by human sin but open to restoration via Israel’s repentance. The Book of Isaiah is particularly unique in that its long period of composition and multiple authors allow it to follow this process of sin, exile, and repentance over the course of a 250 year period. It testifies to a drawn out process of Israel’s loss and eventual restoration through God’s providential care, which brings about Israel’s return from exile by way of Cyrus the Great and the Persian conquers of Babylon.

Though Isaiah is constantly cited in the NT, Luke in particular picks up on Isaiah’s interpretation of history. The author’s continuity with this tradition can be seen in his account of Jesus’ inaugural announcement of his public ministry. There, Jesus adopts the theme of the lengthy process of Zion’s renewal, explicitly citing Isaiah 61, situating the present day within this process, and identifying his new movement as its fulfillment. In fact, as the Gospel of Luke continues to unfold, it becomes clear that this fulfillment occurs not only in Jesus’ ministry, but in his very Person.

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417 Ibid., p. 742-743.


419 “[T]he Temple and the traditions will be ‘destroyed’ in that the presence of God and the authoritative word will move from the Temple and Torah to Jesus himself” (Clifford and Anatolios, “Christian Salvation,” p. 747). Cf. Jesus’ self-referential statement, “The kingdom of God is among you” (Luke 17:21).
Irenaeus appropriates this lengthy, historical view of redemption through his careful reading of Scripture, including Isaiah and Luke.\textsuperscript{420} As will be discussed more below, Irenaeus understands human salvation primarily in terms of God’s saving presence within history, a presence which comes about as a part of a lengthy, multi-stage economy, which utilizes human agency, and which interacts with our own free history.\textsuperscript{421} As Steenberg puts it, an interpretive foundation for understanding Irenaeus’s theology (particularly of creation) is that God’s act of creation is the “initiation of a coherent, unified economy that shall advance to the eschaton,”\textsuperscript{422} an economy which hinges on the New Adam who brings it to completion in himself.

3.2.1.2 Soteriological Pluralism in Irenaeus

Despite the helpful “prophetic soteriology” categorization of Clifford and Anatolios and my own use of the “representative” soteriological,” I should make clear that a careful reading of Irenaeus yields a variety of soteriological models. As David Brondos has argued, Irenaeus, who is writing at a time when Christian theology was still remarkably young and undeveloped, relies on several traditions which result in “a range of ideas that are often difficult to reconcile with one another.”\textsuperscript{423} According to Brondos’s lights, Irenaeus appeals at various points to a “physical” model of redemption (in which

\textsuperscript{420} Ibid., p. 748.

\textsuperscript{421} Ibid., p. 747.

\textsuperscript{422} Steenberg, \textit{Irenaeus on Creation}, p. 60.

the incarnation infuses humanity with immortality), a “Christus victor” model (in which Christ defeats Satan, rescuing humankind from his possession), and by revealing God to humankind.\textsuperscript{424} Some earnest scholars even claim to find the doctrine of penal substitution in Irenaeus.\textsuperscript{425} No orderly and tidy synthesis of these (in many ways inconsistent) models can be achieved, Brondos insists, for Irenaeus was first of all a polemicist, not a systematic theologian.\textsuperscript{426}

It is certainly the case that, like the New Testament, Irenaeus’s works contain a variety of explanations for how precisely Christ restored humanity’s relationship with God. Indeed, Irenaeus’s primary purpose was to demonstrate how this multifaceted body of sacred texts refuted the ornate Gnostic system of thought, and so it should come as no surprise that such a demonstration itself reflects the New Testament’s variety of soteriological motifs. Nonetheless, key to Irenaeus’s constant hermeneutical theme was the unity of salvation history, an idea which has as its cornerstone the notion of Christ, the New Adam, recapitulating the human race within himself. More than simply a model for understanding atonement, recapitulation was theological idea which allowed Irenaeus to confute the dualistic, “Gnostic” worldview with a theology of a united human history.

\textsuperscript{424} Ibid., p. 52.

\textsuperscript{425} See, for instance, Howard Marshall, “The Theology of the Atonement,” in Tidball, Hilborn, and Thacker (eds.), \textit{The Atonement Debate} (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), pp. 49-68, at pp. 61-62. Marshall cites Joel Green and Mark Baker (\textit{Recovering the Scandal of the Cross} (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), p. 121), who in turn find evidence of Irenaeus’s reliance on a doctrine of “propitiation” in \textit{AH} V.17.1 (“in the last times the Lord has restored us into friendship through His incarnation, having become the Mediator between God and men; propitiating indeed for us the Father against whom we had sinned, and cancelling our disobedience by His own obedience; conferring also upon us the gift of communion with, and subjection to, our Maker.”).

\textsuperscript{426} Brondos, p. 50.
unfolding in a Godward direction. As such, recapitulation is a central and privileged idea for Irenaeus. Moreover, recapitulation is also one of the ways in which Irenaeus frequently articulates how Christ accomplishes our salvation. Thus, it is with an understanding of recapitulation as a privileged, though not absolute, soteriological concept for Irenaeus that we offer the following exploration of Irenaeus as an instance of representative soteriology.

3.2.1.3 Person-Centered: Christ the New Adam

Irenaeus’s idea of recapitulation is thoroughly person-centered and thus meets one of our three criteria for representative soteriology. It is true that in places Irenaeus indeed speaks of recapitulation as Christ’s “work”; however, even the context of these comments makes it clear that the notion of recapitulation is not primarily about Christ performing a singular task as an agent, but rather about Christ bringing about a definitive reconciliation between God and humankind, between heaven and earth, in his Person. For instance, immediately before writing that Christ “has therefore, in His work of recapitulation, summed up all things,”427 Irenaeus, reflecting on the “things on earth” spoken of in Eph 1:10, writes, “These things, therefore, He recapitulated in Himself: by uniting man to the Spirit, and causing the Spirit to dwell in man, He is Himself made the head of the Spirit, and gives the Spirit to be the head of man.”428 Irenaeus considers Christ’s “work” of

427 AH V.21.1 (emphasis added).

428 AH V.20.2 (emphasis added).
recapitulating to consist in *being* the nexus point between God’s Spirit and the human person, between “things in heaven and things on earth” (Eph 1:10).

The person-centered character of Christ’s recapitulating work is particularly evident in the way that Irenaeus cites the idea of recapitulation in order to counter Docetist Christians who denied the reality of Christ’s humanity. He explains that by hermetically sealing God off from human flesh in their Christological accounts, Docetists have entirely missed the rationale of Christ’s coming among us in the first place. For “if the Lord became incarnate for any other order of things… He has not then summed up human nature in His own person.”

Rather, Irenaeus argues, Christ “had Himself, therefore, flesh and blood, recapitulating in Himself not a certain other, but that original handiwork of the Father…. [T]he righteous flesh has reconciled that flesh…and brought it into friendship with God.”

In the background of this person-centered refutation of Docetism is Irenaeus’s overarching theology of history, according to which the One God’s original creation is brought to its completion in Jesus. Indeed, perhaps Irenaeus’s most important theological contribution is his persistent and careful effort to show how understanding Christ as the New Adam allows for a unified reading of the Bible. This reading consists of a gradually unfolding economy of several covenantal stages. The dramatic occurrence of this

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429 *AH* V.14.2

430 Ibid.

431 “Irenaeus adopts this notion in his account of the divine *oikonomia* as comprised of four stages or ‘covenants’: the covenant with Adam, the covenant with Noah, the covenant with Moses, and the definitive fulfillment—the summing up or ‘recapitulation’ of God’s salvific engagement with humanity in Christ” (Clifford and Anatolios, “Christian Salvation, p. 750, citing *AH* III.11.8).
economy, recorded in Scripture, provides for Irenaeus what William Loewe has described as a kind of orthodox “countermyth” vis-à-vis the elaborate, dualistic Gnostic narratives.\footnote{432} In constructing this overarching narrative, Irenaeus became, to use the words of Jacques Dupuis, “the founder of the theology of history.”\footnote{433}

According to Dupuis, Irenaeus’s overarching history can be divided into three stages, at the center of all of which is God’s self-manifestation.\footnote{434} The first stage consists of God’s act of creation, for creation itself is part of God’s self-disclosure. Unlike Maricon, according to whom the Creator was evil, and unlike many “Gnostic” Christians for whom creation was an unintentional mishap, creation according to Irenaeus was the one, good God’s act of love. As Steenberg summarizes Irenaeus’s logic, “God the creator is good, the creation itself is good, and the creative act is a manifestation of divine beneficence….God will create in order to bring this goodness to another.”\footnote{435} For Irenaeus, God created with human beings particularly in mind as the recipients for this self-communication, and the whole of creation contributes to the “ripening” of humankind as it prepares to receive this gift.\footnote{436}


\footnote{433} Dupuis, Toward a Christian Understanding of Religious Pluralism, pp. 56, 60.

\footnote{434} Ibid., p. 60ff. Dupuis draws heavily on AH IV.20, discussing God’s creation of human beings for full life and the economy of progressive divine manifestations through the Logos.

\footnote{435} Steenberg, Irenaeus on Creation, p. 22.

\footnote{436} “All such [things as have been made] have been created for the benefit of the man who is saved, ripening for immortality that which is possessed of its own free will and its own power, preparing
The second stage, according to Dupuis, is the “old dispensation,” recorded in the Old Testament. God’s relationship with Israel ought to be seen in continuity with God’s initial creative act, testifying to God’s ongoing, intimate involvement with creation.\textsuperscript{437} Once again, this continued involvement with creation is particularly geared toward the process of perfecting the human creature,\textsuperscript{438} as Irenaeus attests by recounting the series of intensifying covenants beginning with Adam and continuing with Noah and Moses (and, in the next “stage,” Christ).\textsuperscript{439} These covenants, as Dupuis has pointed out, are not for Irenaeus simply a matter of God the Father being in relationship to human beings; rather, the OT “theophanies” are in fact “Logophanies.”\textsuperscript{440} Irenaeus insists that it is not the case that “the Word began to make the Father manifest only when he was born of Mary; but he is present at every point in time…. in all things and through all things there is one God and Father, and one Word, his Son, and one Spirit, and one salvation to all who believe in him.”\textsuperscript{441} Even from the outset of creation, God’s involvement with humanity and the

\textsuperscript{437} As Steenberg writes, the OT attests to God’s “consistent engagement of God’s salvific design with the material fabric of creation” (ibid., p. 33).

\textsuperscript{438} “God’s perfection of the human creature is distinct from, but a continuation of, the act of creation proper – both flow from God’s goodness” (ibid., p. 36).

\textsuperscript{439} There “were four principal (καθολικαί) covenants given to the human race: one, prior to the deluge, under Adam; the second, that after the deluge, under Noah; the third, the giving of the law, under Moses; the fourth, that which renovates man, and sums up all things in itself by means of the Gospel, raising and bearing men upon its wings into the heavenly kingdom” (\textit{AH} III.11.8).

\textsuperscript{440} Dupuis, \textit{Toward a Christian Understanding of Religious Pluralism}, p. 64.

\textsuperscript{441} \textit{AH} IV.6.7
whole of creation has been that of the Father, Son, and Spirit, with the second of the three
“rehearsing his future coming in the flesh.”

It is precisely this “coming in the flesh” which inaugurates the third stage in
Irenaeus’s economy. And although his entire overarching series is one of continuity,
Irenaeus marks this epoch out as the one in which Christ “brought something completely
new, for he brought himself, who had been heralded.” Although the Word had hitherto
been active in creation, in Christ the Word becomes fully, tangibly visible in human
flesh. As Dupuis summarizes, the Christ-event is for Irenaeus “a sacramental
Logophany.” (To use Rahnerian language, one might even call it the Realsymbol of
that which was previously present only fragmentarily.) And importantly, this
“Logophany” is simultaneously the New Adam, the perfect human who recapitulates the
“original handiwork of the Father” in himself.

Thus, the two strands wending their way through Irenaeus’s overarching
economy, namely, the human race which is being gradually prepared for perfection and
the self-revealing God who relates to it, intersect in the person of Jesus Christ, who is
both the New Adam and the Word Incarnate. Irenaeus himself adeptly summarizes his
person-centered, overarching vision:

There is, therefore, as I have pointed out, one God the Father, and one Christ
Jesus, who came by means of the whole dispensational arrangements connected
with Him, and gathered together all things in Himself. But in every respect, too,
He is man, the formation of God; and He took up man into Himself, the invisible

442 Dupuis, Toward a Christian Understanding of Religious Pluralism, p. 64.

443 AH IV.34.1, qtd. in Dupuis, Toward a Christian Understanding of Religious Pluralism, p. 65.

444 Ibid., p. 66.
becoming visible, the incomprehensible being made comprehensible, the impassible becoming capable of suffering, and the Word being made man, thus summing up all things in Himself so that as in supercelestial, spiritual, and invisible things, the Word of God is supreme, so also in things visible and corporeal He might possess the supremacy, and, taking to Himself preeminence, as well as constituting Himself Head of the Church, He might draw all things to Himself at the proper time.\textsuperscript{445}

For Irenaeus and his concept of recapitulation, Christ’s work \textit{is} his person, the New Adam who sums up humanity, thus allowing human beings to reach their fulfillment by being included in him.\textsuperscript{446}

3.2.1.4 Christ, God’s Representative Before Us

A major part of Irenaeus’s soteriology is God’s descending movement in Christ in order to bring about reconciliation with us. As Brian Daley has noted, Irenaeus consistently utilizes “communication” imagery of God’s self-revelation through Christ in order to express this saving, descending movement.\textsuperscript{447} Christ is the Father’s self-expression, “for the Father is the invisible of the Son,” and “the Son the visible of the Father.”\textsuperscript{448} (Such language bears remarkable similarity to the “exteriorization” language

\textsuperscript{445} AH III.16.6

\textsuperscript{446} As Trevor Hart writes, “we must affirm that in some sense for Irenaeus the person of Christ is his work, the incarnation is the atonement. The becoming man on the part of the Son is not merely a prerequisite of something else which is his work, but is in itself a redeeming of humanity, a uniting of mankind to God” (“Irenaeus, Recapitulation and Physical Redemption,” in T. Hart and D. Thimell (eds.), \textit{Christ in Our Place: The Humanity of God in Christ for the Reconciliation of the World} (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1989), pp. 152-181 at p. 167). Hart continues, “In the person of the New Man the entire race is ‘summed up’. Christ’s humanity is not merely reiterative, but also \textit{inclusive}, such that all men are implicated in his actions….[He is] the part which represents the whole, and in which the whole is in some sense included” (ibid., p. 175).

\textsuperscript{447} Daley, “He Himself is Our Peace,” pp. 154-155.

\textsuperscript{448} AH IV.6.6
used by Rahner.) God’s revelatory advancement toward us in Jesus allows us to see God, and “those who see God are in God, and… those… who see God, do receive life.”

Although the Irenaeus discusses the incarnation frequently in terms of revelation, he does not understand the Christ-event’s saving value as simply “manifestive.” Rather, the revelation which Irenaeus envisions in an effective one which entails human union in God, a union which flows from the Person of Christ who “was truly man, and… was truly God.” He makes this point clear when he writes that the “Word was manifested when the Word of God was made man, assimilating Himself to man, and man to Himself.” Irenaeus even goes so far to speak of the Word’s descent to us as “the sign of salvation,” but an effective sign through which humankind is reborn into life.

Irenaeus is clear throughout his writings that human salvation depends first and foremost upon God’s initiative and saving disposition toward us. It would be impossible, he argues, for humanity to be joined to God unless God had first joined himself to us:

For it was incumbent upon the Mediator between God and men, by His relationship to both, to bring both to friendship and concord, and present man to God, while He revealed God to man. For, in what way could we be partaken of the adoption of sons, unless we had received from Him through the Son that

\[449\] AH IV.20.5
\[451\] AH IV.6.7, translation slightly adjusted.
\[452\] AH V.16.2
\[453\] “How was mankind to escape this birth into death, unless he were born again through faith, by that new birth from the Virgin, the sign of salvation that is God’s wonderful and unmistakable gift?” (AH IV.33.4)
fellowship which refers to Himself, unless His Word, having been made flesh, had entered into communion with us? 

Perhaps the most famous way in which Irenaeus expressed the saving value of God’s descending movement toward us is his pithy dictum that “our Lord Jesus Christ...did, through His transcendent love, become what we are, that He might bring us to be even what He is Himself.” God’s becoming human, his “attaching man to God by his own incarnation,” entails the symmetrical result of humankind’s “passing into God” and being “promoted into God.” This latter idea of humankind entering into God’s own life is termed “deification” or *theosis*. Once again, for Irenaeus this divinization of humankind is only possible because the Son first assumed that which was to be redeemed, to use Gregory of Nazianzus’s later language. As Steenberg summarizes the descending element of Irenaeus’s recapitulative soteriology, “That which

454 *AH* III.18.7; cf. *AH* IV.20.4

455 *AH* V.pref

456 *AH* V.1.1

457 “How shall man pass into God, unless God has [first] passed into man?” (*AH* IV.33.4).

458 *AH* III.19.1

459 “He was made an infant for infants, sanctifying infancy; a child among children, sanctifying childhood, and setting an example of filial affection, of righteousness and of obedience; a young man among young men, becoming an example to them, and sanctifying them to the Lord. So also he was a grown man among the older men, that he might be a perfect teacher for all, not merely in respect of revelation of the truth, but also with respect to this stage of life, sanctifying the older men, and becoming an example to them also. And thus he came even to death, that he might be ‘the first born form the dead, having the pre-eminence among all, the Author of Life, who goes before all and shows the way’ (*AH* II.22.4). Cf. “the Son of God, although He was perfect, passed through the state of infancy in common with the rest of mankind, partaking of it thus not for His own benefit, but for that of the infantile stage of man's existence, in order that man might be able to receive Him” (*AH* IV.38.2).
Christ comes to save, he saves by becoming…. Christ’s salvific action is primarily to become human, to exist as human, redeeming what is human by joining it to God.”\textsuperscript{460}

However, it must be emphasized that Irenaeus does not envision any sort of automatic infusion of salvation into the whole of humankind to follow upon the incarnation. Although those who have categorized Irenaeus as a proponent of physical redemption (a category analyzed later in this chapter) have associated him with such an idea, Irenaeus places a great emphasis on the need for faith and the very real possibility of being separated from God. The “effective” nature of God’s incarnation over the course of the Christ-event is best understood as the necessary but not entirely sufficient basis for the salvation of all humankind. To “actualize” this reality, human beings must freely participate in Person through whom God has come among us, as we will consider more in the “ascending” dimension of recapitulation.\textsuperscript{461}

3.2.1.5 Christ, our Representative before God

In the last two sections treating the “person-centered” and “descending” dimensions of recapitulation, we have already encountered the idea of Christ as the New Adam who “present[s] man to God,”\textsuperscript{462} so the idea of Christ as the Representative of

\textsuperscript{460}Steenberg, \textit{Of God and Man}, p. 44.

\textsuperscript{461}Brondos has noted that for Irenaeus heretics and unbelievers remain separate from God, and “the ‘man’ who has been redeemed set free from bondage, restored to health, and joined to God is neither one particular man alone nor all human beings collectively, since ‘he’ is distinct from them….While ‘man’ in general has been saved ‘potentially’ or ‘in principle,’ in order for that salvation to become ‘actual,’ particular men and women must believe and be baptized: only those who do so come to be joined to this redeemed ‘man.’” (Brondos, “The Redemption of ‘Man,’” p. 54).

\textsuperscript{462}AH III.18.7
humankind is already on the table. However, there are four elements of Christ’s identity as our Representative which merit further discussion, namely, his place in the process of human maturation, his overturning of sin, his role as Teacher, and the place of God’s Spirit in the concept of recapitulation. These latter two, especially, concern the need, just mentioned, to freely “actualize” our salvation by being incorporated into the Person of Christ.

3.2.1.5.1 Ascending: Christ and Human Maturation

A widely known part of Irenaeus’s theology of history is his account of humanity’s ascending development from “infancy” into adulthood and friendship with God. This theme of maturation is best understood in light of a “Gnostic” objection to Christians who insisted on a single God behind all of salvation history: If one good God creates, that God would produce good results; however, the world is clearly flawed in many ways, so there cannot be a just a single, good Creator.⁴⁶³ Irenaeus responds to this argument by agreeing with the rationale that a good God gets good results. However, after affirming the goodness of the world, Irenaeus adds that the world is yet incomplete and still on its way, much like a good infant who nonetheless has to grow and mature before coming into her own.⁴⁶⁴ By appealing to the “infantile” state of humanity, Irenaeus is able to account for its flaws without recognizing an evil or rival god.⁴⁶⁵

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⁴⁶³ Cf. AH IV.38


In his reading of Genesis, Irenaeus describes Adam as “infantile… unaccustomed to, and unexercised in, perfect discipline.” Irenaeus does not intend such “infant” and “infantile” descriptors perjoratively. Rather, they are meant to point out the cause of human imperfection – for Irenaeus, human “‘infancy’ is in fact logically antecedent to [human] imperfection.” (Moreover, it may be noted, it is likely that in reading Genesis, Irenaeus in fact envisioned Adam and Eve quite literally as children.) Irenaeus’s overarching series of covenantal stages from creation onward is at the same time a “coming of age” story for humanity. By these lights, salvation history is not simply a perfection-fall-redemption narrative, but rather one of imperfection, growth, and maturation. And, as Irenaeus indicates from the outset of explicating this idea of maturation in AH IV.38.1 by describing Christ’s humanity as “milk” for receiving God’s

466 AH IV.38.1


468 Irenaeus thus understands Adam’s and Eve’s “unashamedness” in light of their youthfulness: “they had been created only a short time before and possessed no understanding of the procreation of children” (AH III.22.4). Steenberg notes that only recently have scholars began taking Irenaeus’s “youthful” descriptor at face value, that is, that he wasn’t speaking metaphorically, but that he actually did envision Adam and Eve as “prepubescents” (Steenberg, Irenaeus on Creation, p. 143).

469 “Salvation, for Irenaeus, is not so much God’s unexpected intervention in history to rescue his faithful ones from destruction as it is the end-stage of the process of organic growth which has been creation’s ‘law’ since its beginning. So eschatology, in this apocalyptic sense of the expectation of a wholly new age, is replaced in Irenaeus’ theology by a grand, continuous conception of salvation history” (Daley, The Hope of the Early Church: A Handbook of Patristic Eschatology (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1991), p. 29 (qtd. in Brondos, “The Redemption of ‘Man,’” p. 51)).

470 Steenberg, Irenaeus on Creation, p. 143, cf. p. 153. As Steenberg notes, such reading shares much in common with contemporary scholarship and Jewish readings of Genesis.
Word, it is through Christ the New Adam that this maturation finally occurs. As Steenberg puts it, “Perfected humanity and the person of Christ are theological synonyms.”

3.2.1.5.2 Ascending: Christ Overturning Sin

It is important to note that while Christ’s perfect human life anchors human salvation teleologically, it also stands as a corrective to Adam’s imperfect life. In other words, Christ’s saving identity as the New Adam is wrapped up in both the perfection of Adam as well as his purification. This latter element of Irenaeus’s thought, which Trevor Hart stresses, draws heavily upon Paul’s own treatment of Adam and Christ in

471 “[I]n Christ God… brought the human race to maturity” (Loewe, “Irenaeus’ Soteriology: Transposing the Question,” p. 176).

472 Steenberg, Irenaeus on Creation, p. 7.

473 Christ “points out the recapitulation that should take place in his own person of the effusion of blood from the beginning, of all the righteous men and of the prophets, and that by means of Himself there should be a requisition of their blood…. the Lord… summed up these things in Himself… saving in his own person at the end that which had in the beginning perished in Adam” (AH V.14.1).

474 Speaking of the latter, Jeff Vogel writes, “Christ’s central role in [Irenaeus’s] theology is to be the man who receives from God, undoing the disobedience of Adam and reorienting humanity to God” (“The Haste of Sin, The Slowness of Salvation: An Interpretation of Irenaeus on the Fall and Redemption,” Anglican Theological Review 89.3 (2007), pp. 443-459, at p. 451). Irenaeus explains, “as, at the beginning of our formation in Adam, that breath of life which proceed from God, having been united to what had been fashioned, animate the man, and manifested him as a being endowed with reason; so also, in [the times of] the end, the Word of the Father and the Spirit of God, having become united with the ancient substance of Adam’s formation, rendered man living and perfect, receptive of the perfect Father, in order that as in the natural [Adam] we all were dead, so in the spiritual we may all be made alive. For never at any time did Adam escape the hands of God, to whom the Father speaking said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness.’ And for this reason in the last times (fine)...His hands formed a living man, in order that Adam might be created [again] after the image and likeness of God” (AH V.1.2, emphasis original).

475 Irenaeus’s Christ offers “a radical reversal of the essential direction of man’s life before God, from disobedience to obedience, from sin to faith, from apostasy to fellowship, and hence from death to life” (Hart, “Irenaeus, Recapitulation and Physical Redemption,” p. 171). In offering this corrective, however, Hart seems to overemphasize Irenaeus’s focus upon human sinfulness. This overemphasis even leads Hart to say things like “Christ assumed flesh and blood in order to suffer and die” (ibid. p. 173).
Romans 5, and it demands that our understanding of Irenaeus’s theology of history as progressively ascending be nuanced. Although his model is indeed one of steady progression, Irenaeus does take human sin very seriously as presenting a major obstacle to that progression. As Steenberg explains, the “saga of creation” is “drastically altered by sin. The economy will advance still, and its course shall continue to be the perfection of that which was first called forth from the void. Henceforth, however, it shall make this advance in and through the context of the obstacles caused by human transgressions.”

Thus, while Steenberg deems it more fitting to describe Irenaeus’s overall vision of salvation history as one of maturation rather than rescue, he also cautions that “to read Irenaeus as presenting no scheme whatever of an Edenic ‘fall’ would be to over-estimate the case.”

The narrative of progressive human maturation and serious attention to sin need not be seen as competitive with one another. As Jeffrey Vogel has recently argued, Irenaeus understands Adam’s sin (and the very heart of human sinfulness itself) to be a premature “grasping” after something for which we are not yet adequately prepared, namely, sharing in divine life. Rather than something to be too quickly “grabbed,” this

However, Irenaeus never makes such statements, and Hart himself acknowledges six pages earlier that the “becoming man on the part of the Son is not merely a prerequisite of something else which is his work.”


477 Ibid., p. 143.

478 Ibid., p. 168.

479 Vogel, “The Haste of Sin, the Slowness of Salvation,” *passim*. Cf. “[H]umanity’s proper life is one expressive of and participatory in the life of the triune Father, Son and Spirit” (Steenberg, *Irenaeus on Creation*, p. 137). Steenberg goes on to explain that Genesis presents a “positive affirmation of the proper
authentic goal of human life is something to which we must be raised only gradually. And it is Christ, the Word of God himself, refusing to “grasp” equality with God,\textsuperscript{480} who brings the process of maturation to its completion through his life of obedience to God. Thus, as Vogel writes, we shouldn’t understand the initial \textit{moment} of the Word’s incarnation as sufficiently redemptive for Irenaeus, but rather it is the case that the entire incarnate life of Christ, including his own ascending “consent to the necessity of growth over time,” effects our salvation.\textsuperscript{481} Irenaeus’s theology of the cross, on Steenberg’s reading, confirms this point: Christ’s obedience to God, even in the face of death, “epitomizes” and “actualizes”\textsuperscript{482} his summing up of the human story, providing humanity with both a summative \textit{telos} and a corrective.\textsuperscript{483}

3.2.1.5.3 Ascending: Christ the Teacher

The third “ascending” aspect of Irenaeus’s theology of recapitulation which will be mentioned here is Christ’s identity as Teacher. Irenaeus’s frequent references to this teaching role make it easy to recognize, and it is important not to simply attribute these references to Irenaeus’s soteriological pluralism. In fact, Christ’s role as Teacher is

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\item limits of human knowing in its present stage of development” (ibid. p. 154), and states, “Knowledge must not ‘exalt’ humanity to a state of self-professed grandeur that exceeds ‘its own measure’” (ibid. p. 155).
\item Phil 2:6
\item Vogel, “The Hast of Sin, the Slowness of Salvation,” p. 444. Cf. “Christ’s “acts are redemptive inasmuch as he lives out, as man and as a man, the perfect relationship of Son to Father, sanctified by the Spirit, obedient unto death” (Steenberg, \textit{Of God and Man}, p. 51).
\item The marriage of “epitome” and “actuality” once again bears a striking resemblance to Rahner’s own \textit{realsymbolisch} theology of salvation discussed in the last chapter.
\item Steenberg, \textit{Of God and Man}, p. 49.
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intimately bound up with this theology of recapitulation, particularly in the “ascending”
dimension in which he represents humankind before God.\(^{484}\)

The relationship between Christ’s pedagogical activity and his theology of
recapitulation is particularly evident at the beginning of \textit{AH}’s fifth book. In its preface,
Irenaeus identifies Christ as the “true and steadfast Teacher,” directly following this title
with the assertion that the Word was made incarnate so that “He might bring us to be
even what He is Himself.”\(^{485}\) Here, Irenaeus does not speak as if the incarnation were a
\textit{fait accompli} in which humanity is mechanically or automatically “recapitulated” in the
Person of Christ. Rather, he includes Christ’s enabling us to be what he is within the
same breath as Christ’s role as the “true and steadfast Teacher,” indicating that our
learning from Christ is closely related to our transformation in him.

Irenaeus immediately confirms this connection in the opening of book five.
There, Irenaeus blends together his theme of human maturation, Christ’s pedagogical
function, and a person-centered soteriology. He explains that our learning occurs in

\(^{484}\) William Loewe understands this teaching role to be at the very heart of Irenaeus’s theology of
salvation, and he links it to Irenaeus’s thoughts on Christ’s victory over Satan and the incarnation
Regarding the former: Although Gustaf Aulén (\textit{Christus Victor Christus Victor}: \textit{An Historical Study of the
Irenaeus’s soteriology primarily according to this idea of the devil’s defeat, Loewe reads Irenaeus in such a
way that Christ’s victory is \textit{itself} pedagogical. That is, for Loewe Christ’s defeat of Satan (which is
essentially a victory of Christ’s will) on the cross is a kind of extension of the earlier temptation episode in
the desert (Loewe, “\textit{Christus Victor Revisited},” pp. 7-8). Regarding the latter, Loewe understands
Irenaeus’s emphasis on Christ the Teacher in relation to emphasis elsewhere on the incarnation:
“Knowledge of the Father comes through acting as Christ acts and doing what he bids, and in that activity a
relationship of communion with Christ, the eternal Word incarnate, is forged” (Loewe, “\textit{Christus Victor
Revisited},” p. 4). I will take up this latter point below.

\(^{485}\) Irenaeus proposes to refute heresies by “following the only true and steadfast Teacher, the
Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, who did, through His transcendent love, become what we are, that He
might bring us to be even what He is Himself” \textit{(AH V,pref)}. 

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“seeing our Teacher, and hearing His voice with our own ears, that, having become imitators of His works as well as doers of His words, we may have communion with Him, receiving increase from the perfect One.” 486 Here we see that the pedagogical aspect of Irenaeus’s Christ-centered soteriology is at the service of grounding communion with Christ himself. Christ’s pedagogical activity is, at its root, aimed at instructing us so we may exist in communion with him. Thus, Irenaeus speaks elsewhere of discipleship not in terms of following a set of teachings, but as following a Person. 487

Irenaeus’s Christ is thus both Teacher and Representative, and identity which can be characterized as “ascending” since our following Christ fulfills a dynamic, Godward aspect of our humanity. 488 From its infantile outset in Adam, humanity is growing dynamically toward its fullness of life, which is life in God. 489 Christ’s teaching, done at the service of bringing about our incorporation into him, helps to bring about this telos which God intends for humanity. 490

486 AH V.1.1

487 “For to follow the Saviour is to be a partaker of salvation, and to follow light is to receive light” (AH IV.14.1, qtd. in Loewe, “Irenaeus’ Soteriology: Transposing the Question,” p. 172).

488 Cf. Steenberg, Of God and Man, p. 52.

489 “For the glory of man is God” (AH III.20.2); cf. Irenaeus’s oft-quoted remark that “the glory of God is a living man; and the life of man consists in beholding God” (AH IV.20.7).

490 Irenaeus’s goes so far as to say, “Man had been created by God that he might have life. If...vhe were not to return to life...then God would have been defeated” (AH III.23.1).
3.2.1.5.4 Ascending: God’s Spirit

Central to Irenaeus’s vision of human incorporation into the Person of Christ is the Holy Spirit. Vogel emphasized this point, explaining that for Irenaeus, the goal of the incarnation is the complete indwelling of the Spirit in Christ’s humanity, in virtue of which Christ can give “the Spirit to those who participate in him through faith. As Irenaeus writes, ‘The Lord, receiving this as a gift from his Father, does himself also confer it upon those who are partakers of himself, sending the Holy Spirit upon all the earth [AH III.17.2].’ It is precisely the Spirit which links the blessed to Christ, who is the preeminent locus of the Spirit in the world.

As it is well known, Irenaeus speaks of the Son and the Spirit as God’s two hands, and, as Vogel explains, these two hands work in tandem to recapitulate humanity in the Person of Christ:

The Spirit is the incorporating agent, the hand of the Father that does the gathering up…. This is the cooperation between the two hands of God: Christ recapitulates all things in himself (omnia in semetipsum recapitulans; III.16.6), restoring to human beings the capacity to grow into the image and likeness of

491 Cf. Steenberg, who explains that “without the Spirit the incarnate Son is not fully redeemer, since he who redeems recapitulatively does so by uniting humanity to the full life of God, which is only and ever the life of ‘the Father with his two hands’” (Of God and Man, pp. 36-37).

492 Vogel, “The Haste of Sin, The Slowness of Salvation,” p. 453. Cf. AH III.9.3, qtd. in Steenberg. Of God and Man, p. 36: “So the Spirit of God descended upon him, the Spirit of him who through the prophets had promised that he would anoint him, that we might be saved by receiving from the abundance of his anointing.”

493 “According to Irenaeus, Jesus Christ proved a site where the Spirit of God could once more dwell among human beings and work to join them to the Father” (Vogel, “The Haste of Sin, the Slowness of Salvation,” p. 453).

494 E.g., AH IV.pref.4, IV.20.1, V.6.1
God, and the Spirit gathers creatures into himself (complectens hominem in semetipsum; V.8.1), thus realizing in them the potential recovered by Christ.  

This reading of Ireaneus’s Trinitarian theology is confirmed in the soteriological rich opening of AH V, where he says that Christ “has also poured out the Spirit of the Father for the union and communion of God and man, imparting indeed God to men by means of the Spirit, and, on the other hand, attaching man to God by His own incarnation, and bestowing upon us at his coming immortality durably and truly, by means of communion with God.” Irenaeus’s pneumatology thus presupposes the person-centered soteriology of recapitulation, and, likewise, the latter cannot be understood apart from the former.

3.2.1.6 Conclusion: Irenaeus’s Representative Soteriology

In his theology of recapitulation, Irenaeus establishes the standard for that which I have termed representative soteriology. In identifying Christ as the “visible of the Father” whose effective “manifestation” accomplishes salvation in revealing God to us, Irenaeus constructs a robust descending component of his soteriology which holds Christ to be God’s Representative unto us. Likewise, he establishes Christ’s ascending identity as our Representative before God in numerous ways: Christ is the New Adam who “present[s] man to God,” who both perfects and purifies an infantile humanity intended for growth toward divine life; he is both the “true and steadfast Teacher” and the Source of God’s Spirit, working to incorporate us into the locus of grace which is his Person.


496 AH V.1.1
This last point brings us back to our third characteristic of representative soteriology, its person-centeredness. Christ saves us by recapitulating the human family within himself, allowing us to share in the abundance of grace which he has received as the authentic human being with us and among us. “The story of human salvation… is an economy of recapitulation in which the ends and the beginnings unite in the person of Christ, through whom the creation of the cosmos and of the child Adam eventually reach perfection in beholding the glory of the Father, Son and Spirit, ‘becoming a perfect work of God.’”

3.2.2 Irenaeus’s Heirs

In addition to standing as the paradigm case of representative soteriology, Irenaeus’s theory of recapitulation had a significant impact on subsequent Christian theology. In fact, in the judgment of J.N.D. Kelly, Irenaeus’s theory was woven within the very fabric of patristic soteriological thought:

Running throughout almost all the patristic attempts to explain the redemption there is one grand theme which, we suggest, provides the clue to the fathers’ understanding of the work of Christ. This is none other than the ancient idea of recapitulation which Irenaeus derived from St. Paul, and which envisages Christ as the representative of the entire race. Just as all men were somehow present in Adam, so they are, or can be, present in the second Adam, the man from heaven…. Because, very God as He is, He has identified Himself with the human race, Christ has been able to act on its behalf…. All the fathers, of whatever school, reproduce this motif.

Clearly, a survey of the Fathers sufficient to support Kelly’s claim is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Nevertheless, since this chapter does seek to indicate the


importance of prevalence of representative soteriology in the Patristic Period, a few figures will be treated below (though in less detail than Irenaeus received above).

Irenaeus’s *AH* is known to have made its way to Egypt (even within Irenaeus’s own lifetime) and so I have selected several figures from Northern Africa for this brief overview.⁴⁹⁹ In addition to drawing on Irenaeus, this group of influential figures drew upon each other as time progressed, leaving a significant impact on both the Western and Eastern Church. While their theologies bear their own distinctive characteristics and exhibit developments (for better or worse⁵⁰⁰) on Irenaeus’s thought, I will make a limited attempt to show important ways in which their writings draw on Irenaeus’s motifs and rationale described above, relying once again on the three markers of representative soteriology as a touchstone. The following glimpses into the theology of Clement of Alexandria, Athanasius of Alexandria, and Augustine of Hippo are not intended as full explications of their soteriological writings,⁵⁰¹ but rather as demonstrations of how key components of Irenaeus’s theology of recapitulation redounded through the broader patristic heritage.

⁴⁹⁹ Steenberg, *Of God and Man*, p. 19. Steenberg reports that while Irenaeus’s thought and themes were influential in the centuries which followed him, few Christian writers (with the exception of Eusebius) explicitly cited him or reflected at much length upon him as a major figure (ibid.).

⁵⁰⁰ McDermott detects a monophysite tendency which creeps into the theologies of Alexandrians like Athanasius and Cyril (*Word Become Flesh*, pp. 198-199, 202). Irenaeus’s theology, McDermott argues, did not have this feature: “According to this soteriology, the human reality of Christ is intrinsically important as a contributor to our salvation; it is not, as in some other patristic views, simply an instrument of the Logos, who is then regarded as the only truly saving principle” (ibid. p. 212). McDermott may overstate the monophysite tendency in Athanasius (cf. the section on Athanasius below).

⁵⁰¹ Even the lengthier treatment of Irenaeus above does not stand as an effort to fully explicate his plural and multifaceted soteriological thought, but as an examination of “recapitulation” specifically.
3.2.2.1 Clement of Alexandria († c. 215)

Born roughly a generation after Irenaeus in A.D. 150 and dying around ten or so years after Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria was roughly a contemporary of the Bishop of Lugdunum (modern day Lyons, France). Nevertheless, their geographical distance from one another seems not to have prevented Clement from learning from Irenaeus. As stated already, the latter’s major work had already traveled to Egypt by at least the end of his life (circa 200 AD). Moreover, as Veronika Černušková has recently argued, Clement’s use of Irenaeus’s terminology, specifically that of recapitulation, indicates that he was both familiar with and borrowing from Irenaeus’s theology.

Černušková points out that Clement’s use of recapitulation language closely mirrors that of Irenaeus in its application to God’s gradual self-revelation within creation. For example, Clement speaks of Jesus’ crown of thorns as a “recapitulation” of the burning bush seen by Moses, the latter marking the beginning of the Logos’s self-manifestation through the Law and the former concluding the Logos’s earthly incarnation before “His departure from this world to the place whence He came.”

Clement also writes that Jesus’ commandment to


503 “For when the Almighty Lord of the universe began to legislate by the Word, and wished His power to be manifested to Moses, a godlike vision of light that had assumed a shape was shown him in the burning bush (the bush is a thorny plant); but when the Word ended the giving of the law and His stay with men, the Lord was again mystically crowned with thorn. On His departure from this world to the place whence He came, He repeated the beginning of His old descent, in order that the Word beheld at first in the bush, and afterwards taken up crowned by the thorn, might show the whole to be the work of one power, He Himself being one, the Son of the Father, who is truly one, the beginning and the end of time” (The
love “recapitulates” the entirety of the Law (cf. Romans 13:9⁵⁰⁴), echoing Irenaeus’s overarching vision of God’s gradual self-revelation throughout history, summed up in the Christ-event.⁵⁰⁵

Like Irenaeus, Clement infuses his theology of history with soteriological and pedagogical motifs. The following passage, worth quoting at length, is a prime example of this phenomenon:

The Saviour has many tones of voice, and many methods for the salvation of men; by threatening He admonishes, by upbraiding He converts, by bewailing He pities, by the voice of song He cheers. He spake by the burning bush, for the men of that day needed signs and wonders. He awed men by the fire when He made flame to burst from the pillar of cloud—a token at once of grace and fear: if you obey, there is the light; if you disobey, there is the fire; but since humanity is nobler than the pillar or the bush, after them the prophets uttered their voice,—the Lord Himself speaking in Isaiah, in Elias,—speaking Himself by the mouth of the prophets. But if thou dost not believe the prophets, but supposest both the men and the fire a myth, the Lord Himself shall speak to thee, “who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but humbled Himself,”—He, the merciful God, exerting Himself to save man. And now the Word Himself clearly speaks to thee, shaming thy unbelief; yea, I say, the Word of God became man, that thou mayest learn from man how man may become God.⁵⁰⁶

Here, a number of Irenaeus’s motifs are present: the activity of the Word in the OT, the divine economy of gradually increasing intensity, the pedagogical function of

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⁵⁰⁴ “The commandments, ‘You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet’; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’”


Christ, and finally the culminating exchange dictum, in which we previously saw
Irenaeus combine God’s saving descent, humanity’s divinizing ascent, and the person of
Christ.\textsuperscript{507} Although all three characteristics of representative soteriology are touched
upon in this dictum, Clement’s thinking here is predominately “from above,” testifying to
the Word’s descending action in which God himself, rather than simply fire or an
emissary-prophet, comes among humanity in Christ, his Representative.

The pedagogical function of Christ echoed in the passage above occurs frequently
in Clement’s writing, sometimes combined with another of Irenaeus’s favorite motifs:
infancy and maturation. Like Irenaeus,\textsuperscript{508} Clement identifies Christ as “milk,” milk for us
“infants” which comes from “the Father’s breasts of love.” (Clement also refers to Christ
as milk in his “Hymn to Christ the Savior,” where he likewise identifies us as “infants,”
but renders the imagery more complex with references to the Church and the Spirit.\textsuperscript{509})
He goes on to affirm that the one who regenerates us is also our Creator, the loving
Father who continues to nourish with his own Word that which he began. Moreover, the
goal of such nourishment is that “In all respects, therefore, and in all things, we are

\textsuperscript{507} This dictum is, once again, found in \textit{AH} V.pref: “our Lord Jesus Christ…did, through His
transcendent love, become what we are, that He might bring us to be even what He is Himself.”

\textsuperscript{508} Cf. \textit{AH} IV.38.1, cited above.

\textsuperscript{509} “Holy shepherd / of sheep of the logos, / lead, o king, / the unharmed children; / the footprints
of Christ, / are the path to heaven. / Ever-flowing word, / unlimited age, / undying light, / source of mercy, / artesan of virtue / of those who praise God / with their holy life. / Christ Jesus, / heavenly milk / pressed
from the sweet breasts / of the bride, / gracious gifts / of your wisdom. / The tiny infants / with tender
mouths, / suckled / at the nipple of the logos / and filled / with the dewy Spirit” (“Hymn to Christ the
Schatkin Hetrick writes that this hymn is “appended to manuscripts of Clement’s \textit{Paedagogus}” [“The
Instructor”] and “is considered to be the most ancient hymn (text) of the Christian Church” (“Musical
brought into union with Christ,” for this “nourishment… flows from the Word; and into immortality, through his guidance.” Here, Clement’s theology matches with both “ascending” maturation element of Irenaeus’s theology of recapitulation, as well as Irenaeus’s person-centered concluding point and telos of that maturation.

Finally, Clement combines the “ascending” and “person-centered” elements again in The Stromata, once again emphasizing the theme of Christ’s pedagogical function. “[H]e who listens to the Lord, and follows the prophecy given by Him,” Clement writes, “will be formed perfectly in the likeness of the teacher—made a god going about in the flesh.” Taken together with his descending and person-centered thinking quoted above, these ascending remarks testify to a representative soteriology present in Clement’s theology. For him, Christ is simultaneously the Word of God himself sent among us, the heavenly milk on which infantile humanity grows, the Teacher guiding us toward mature life, and the human being the union with whom constitutes our maturation.

3.2.2.2 Athanasius († 373)

Athanasius was born at the end of the third century, almost 100 years after Irenaeus’s death. Like Clement, he was a theologian who spent a good portion of his life...
in Alexandria; unlike Clement, however, Athanasius became the Archbishop of the region, being elevated to the position shortly after the Council of Nicaea (A.D. 325). Although his theological writings address a range of issues, Athanasius is best known for his fierce opposition to Arianism, a task which dominates his corpus. Accordingly, important parts of his soteriology are visible through the window of his carefully reasoned rejoinders to Arian theology, which held that Christ was less than divine. For Arius and his followers, Christ was a figure analogous to an Archangel above the rest of creation, but still, in some sense, himself created. (A favorite dictum among Arians was “There was [a time] when he was not.”)

Athanasius’s arguments against such a position, a large portion of which are exegetical in nature, are too manifold to review here. But one significant method for undercutting Arius’s low Christology is Athanasius’s soteriological rationale, a rationale which is thoroughly “representative” in character. Although it is difficult to say whether this rationale was taken directly from Irenaeus, Athanasius was almost certainly familiar with his writings, which by this point had impacted both Greek- and Latin-speaking worlds of the Christian Church.512

Perhaps the most direct point of continuity between the two thinkers is the exchange dictum which encapsulates the three markers of representative soteriology and which we saw Clement also utilize. Athanasius’s most explicit use of this dictum, which may be the most oft-cited instance of it, occurs in his On the Incarnation of the Word,

512 Reinherr, “Irenaeus Lugdunensis,” pp. 16-19. Specifically, he writes, “Irenaeus was also known to several later authors either through their personal reading of his writings or through florilegia; among these are Methodius of Olympus (d. 311), Athanasius (d. 373), Cyril of Jerusalem (d. 386), and Basil of Caesarea” (ibid. p. 16).
where he writes that “He was made man that we might be made God.” But the logic is operative elsewhere, even if not expressed in so pithy of terms. For instance, in *Against the Arians* (the text on which most of our attention will focus here), Athansius writes, “for as the Lord, putting on the body, became man, so we men are deified by the Word as being taken to Him through His flesh, and henceforth inherit life ‘everlasting.’” This instance, in fact, includes an even more detailed picture of Athansius’s soteriological rationale. The dictum as stated in *On the Incarnation* leaves the manner of human divinization understated, appealing only to the Word’s becoming human. Here, Athanasius elaborates, grounding human deification in our “being taken to Him through his flesh.” Here, an ascending dimension, according which Christ exists as our Representative, is apparent in Athanasius’s thought. Our “becoming God” is grounded in our incorporation into Christ’s own body.

This ascending component of Athanasius’s soteriology is apparent in other parts of *Against the Arians*. Athanasius argues that Christ’s own exaltation as a human among us is on our behalf, that we too may receive such glorification in virtue of our *being in* him: “as a man, He is said because of us and for us to be highly exalted, that… in Christ Himself we might be highly exalted, being raised from the dead, and ascending into

513 “On the Incarnation of the Word,” in Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (eds.), *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series* (henceforth *NPNF II*), 14 vols. (Buffalo: The Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1890-1900), vol. II/4 (1892), pp. 36-67, at 54.2-3 (*NPNF II/4* p. 65). The exhortation preceding the dictum reads, “marvel that by so ordinary a means things divine have been manifested to us, and that by death immortality has reached to all, and that by the Word becoming man, the universal Providence has been known, and its Giver and Artificer the very Word of God. For He was made man that we might be made God.”

514 *Against the Arians*, in *NPNF II/4* pp. 306-447, at Disc. 3 ch. 26 n. 34 (*NPNF II/4* p. 413).
heaven.” Here, Athanasius describes Christ precisely as our Representative before God, the “from below” component of representative soteriology.

This ascending rationale is employed by Athanasius specifically to counter the Arian suggestion that Christ’s title, “Son of God,” was a sort of reward bestowed upon him, or a status earned by one who was “man, and then became God.” Against this sort of adoptionistic ascending thinking, Athanasius deploys an alternative ascending logic which in turn relies upon a descending complement: Christ descended precisely in order to promote those things which were not yet divinized to his own status, in virtue of his relation to them.

Accordingly, a strong descending component, according to which Christ is God’s Representative among us, is inherent in Athanasius’s soteriological thought. Put simply, “He was God, and then became man, and that to deify us.” Christ’s humanity is, for Athanasius, clearly a medium through which God’s divinizing grace becomes available to

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515 Ibid., Disc. 1 ch. 11 n. 41 (NPNF II/4 p. 330).

516 Ibid., Disc. 1 ch. 11 n. 39 (NPNF II/4 p. 329).

517 “He had not promotion from His descent, but rather Himself promoted the things which needed promotion; and if He descended to effect their promotion, therefore he did not receive in reward the name Son of God, but rather He Himself has made us sons of the Father, and deified men by becoming Himself man” (ibid., Disc. 1 ch. 11 n. 38 (NPNF II/4 p. 329)).

518 Ibid., Disc. 1 ch. 11 n. 39 (NPNF II/4 p. 329).
And yet (though some places seem to indicate the contrary), this descending component does not render Christ’s humanity a sort of static “tool,” effectively effacing (in a sort of pseudo-monophysite way) what would eventually be defined as Christ’s full “human nature” at the Council of Chalcedon. For although Athanasius clearly condemns any sort of adoptionist thinking, he does speak of Christ’s “exalt[ation] as man,” specifically in his death and resurrection. Athanasius blends descending and ascending representative thinking, insisting that Christ both presents humanity to God via exaltation, and simultaneously that, as God from the very outset, Christ presents God to us through the incarnation: “For as Christ died and was exalted as man, so, as man, is He said to take what, as God, He ever had, that even such a grant of grace might reach to us.”

Finally, these interwoven ascending and descending soteriological strands of Athanasius’s thought coalesce in a person-centered understanding of human salvation.

We have already seen how Athanasius’s rationale for the exchange dictum relies on our being “taken to Him through His flesh,” and our exaltation is understood to occur “in

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519 McDermott writes, “The eternally begotten Son mediates the Father soteriologically, in the incarnation, by being the full coming of the Father into the world. To the question ‘If the Father loved us so much, why didn’t he come in person, instead of sending an emissary, the Son?’ Athanasius long ago gave the answer: The Son’s coming in the Spirit is the full and complete arrival of the Father; the incarnate Son is the full self-communication of the Father and the only, and complete adequate, way in which the Father comes into the world” (Word Become Flesh, p. 169). This kind of logic closely mirrors Irenaeus’s notion of the Son as the “visible of the Father,” as well as Rahner’s idea of “exteriorization” explored above in Chapter 2.

520 “For the Word was not impaired in receiving a body, that He should seek to receive a grace, but rather He deified that which He put on, and more than that, ‘gave’ it graciously to the race of man” (Against the Arians, Disc. 1 ch. 11 n. 42 (NPNF II/4 p. 330)).

521 Ibid..
Christ Himself.” Rather than an extrinsic effect produced by an agent, divinization for Athanasius is something effected in our union and participation in Christ’s very Person.

He sanctifies Himself to the Father for our sakes, not that the Word may become holy, but that He Himself may in Himself sanctify all of us…. He himself should be exalted, for He is the highest, but that He may become righteousness for us, and we may be exalted in Him…. And if the Son be Righteousness, then He is not exalted as being Himself in need, but it is we who are exalted in that Righteousness, which is He.522

3.2.2.3 Augustine of Hippo († 430)

Although Irenaeus’s AH were originally composed in Greek, the original work in its entirety has been lost, although a translation into Latin has survived. This Latin translation opened Irenaeus’s thought to the Church in the West, although major western theologians like Tertullian and Jerome seem to have read Irenaeus in the original Greek.523 The final theologian exhibiting a representative soteriology which will be considered here is Augustine, who is widely regarded as the preeminent theological authority in the West in the centuries which followed those just considered. Augustine certainly relied upon the extant Latin translation of AH, quoting it in his Contra Julianum (A.D. 422)524 and possibly relying upon it for several other works, including some composed relatively early on after his conversion.525

522 Ibid., Disc. 1 ch. 11 n. 41 (NPNF II/4 p. 330).


525 “When writing De catechizandis rudibus in 400, he may have used as a model Irenaeus’ Demonstratio apostolicae praedicationis, a work which perhaps also influenced his De doctrina christiana (largely written in 396-397, but completed only in 426” (Reimherr, “Irenaeus Lugdunensis,” p. 18). As his
As with Athanasius, it is difficult to definitively draw any direct connection between Irenaeus's and Augustine's soteriologies. Like Clement and Athanasius, Augustine had recurrent recourse to a version of Irenaeus's exchange dictum (although it was so ubiquitous by that point that Augustine could have encountered it any number of places). Augustine proclaimed versions of this dictum during his Christmas homilies, asking his congregation “what greater grace could have shone upon us from God, than that having his only-begotten Son he should make him a Son of man, and thus in exchange make the son of man into the Son of God?” and declaring that “in order to make gods of those who were merely human, one who was God made himself human.” However, Augustine did not restrict the soteriological logic of exchange and divinization to his preaching on the Christ-event’s inauguration. As David Vincent Meconi has recently written, Augustine returned to this theme in his preaching on Easter as well, giving it even greater emphasis.


527 “Sermon 192” (Christmas after 412). Augustine continues, “without forfeiting what he was, he wished to become what he himself had made. He himself made what he would become, because what he did was add man to God, not lose God in man” (Sermons (184-229z) in Rotelle (ed.), The Works of Saint Augustine vol. III/6, 192.1, p. 46).

528 David Vincent Meconi, S.J., “O Admirabile Commercium: The True Christmas Exchange” Homiletic and Pastoral Review 111.3 (Dec. 2010), pp. 47-50. Several of the citations in this section from Augustine’s corpus have been reproduced from Meconi’s short article.

529 “A marvelous exchange! He became flesh, these became spirit. What have we got here? What exquisite courtesy, my brothers and sisters! Lift up your spirits to hoping for and taking hold of the things that really count…. For your sakes the Word became flesh (Jn 1:14). For your sakes the one who was the Son of God became the Son of man, in order that you who were sons of men might be turned into sons of God. What was he, what did he become? What were you, what have you become? He was the
As with all of the Fathers, Augustine’s soteriological writings are multifaceted and it is difficult (and likely impossible) to systematize all of them into any singular theory of the atonement. Moreover, in the judgment of J.N.D. Kelly, the exchange logic of deification at work in the homilies above constitutes a “secondary motif” in Augustine’s soteriology, the primary focus of which is “redemption as our release from Satan’s bondage” (a release which, Kelly goes on to say, is “consequent upon and… presuppos[es] our reconciliation” with God). Nonetheless, Augustine’s soteriological writings certainly include sufficient appeals to the “representative” rationale of redemption to include him here. Let us therefore briefly turn our attention to a few instances in Augustine’s corpus, specifically his scriptural expositions, which correspond with the three markers of representative soteriology, and then finally to one locus in which he integrates all three.

Augustine understands Christ to effect our redemption as God’s Representative in our midst, descending in order to bring God among us. As he begins his “Exposition of Psalm 145,” Augustine exhorts his listeners to attend to God’s word as it is recorded in the Psalms, playing on “verbūm” to transition into a reflection on the Second Person of the Trinity:

we must be so entirely present to the word of God which sounds here on earth that we are exalted by it, and are no longer held by the earth. God is with us in order that we may be with him; he who came down to us in order to be with us is at work now to draw us up to himself, so that we may be in his company. Until this Son of God and he became the Son of man. You were sons of men and you have become sons of God.” (“Sermon 121” (Easter 412 or 413) in Sermons (94a-147a) in Rotelle (ed.), The Works of Saint Augustine vol. III/4 (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1992), 121.5, p. 236).

should be finally accomplished he did not disdain to share our exile, though he who created all things is nowhere an exile himself.\textsuperscript{531}

Here, the emphasis is clearly on God’s coming to be “with us,” the God who “came down” to “share in our exile.” Nevertheless, Augustine connects this theme of the presence of God’s Word on earth to ascending (“we are exalted,” “draw us up”) and person-centered (“that we may be with him,” “draw us up to himself”) themes as well.

Elsewhere, Augustine emphasizes the ascending theme, characterizing Christ saving as our Representative before God. Commenting on Psalm 82:6 (“I say, ‘You are gods, children of the Most High, all of you’”), he endeavors to tease out the nuances of deification. The Psalmist calls human beings “gods,” Augustine explains, “in the sense that they were deified by [God’s] grace, not because they were born of his own substance.” The \textit{one who} defies, on the other hand, must be “God of himself,” who in deifying us has made us, by adoption, “gods,” that is, “children of God.” In other words, “Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is the unique Son of God; he is God…. Others, who become gods, become so by his grace. They are not born of God’s very being in such a way that they are what he is; it is through a gracious gift that they have come to him and become with Christ his coheirs.”\textsuperscript{532} Three major points are operative here. First,


\begin{quote}\textsuperscript{532} “Exposition of Psalm 49,” \textit{Expositions on the Psalms, 33-50} in \textit{The Works of Saint Augustine} vol. III/16 (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2000), 49.2, p. 381. The section preceding this quotation reads, “It is quite obvious that God called human beings “gods” in the sense that they were deified by his grace, not because they were born of his own substance. It is proper to God to justify us because his is just of himself and not by derivation from anyone else; and similarly he alone deifies who is God of himself, not by participation in any other. Moreover he who justifies is the same as he who deifies, because by justifying us he made us sons and daughters of God: \textit{he gave them power to become children of God} (Jn 1:12). If we have been made children of God, we have been made into gods; but we are such by the grace of him who adopts us, not because we are of the same nature as the one who begets” (\textit{ibid.}). \end{quote}
deification does not somehow render us equal to the Persons of the Trinity. Second, we are nonetheless “sons and daughters of God” (“gods” in the Psalmist’s language) who participate in the Trinitarian life. Lastly, the first two points are mutually possible only in virtue of Christ, the Mediator and Representative of humankind who by grace allows us to be his co-heirs.

Augustine’s soteriology is also representative in that it is centered on the Person of Christ (the third marker). Psalm 31 begins with words of fear, “In you, O LORD, I seek refuge; do not let me ever be put to shame.” Commenting on these words, Augustine explains how Christ, too, can be said to have “feared,” precisely as the “Head” of his “body,” the Church. As he continues, Augustine spells out the soteriological import of this connection within the Person of Christ:

But in fact he who deigned to assume the form of a slave, and within that form to clothe us with himself, he who did not disdain to take us up into himself, did not disdain either to transfigure us into himself, and to speak in our words, so that we in our turn might speak in his. This is the wonderful exchange, the divine business deal, the transaction effected in this world by the heavenly dealer…. Without him, we are nothing, but in him we too are Christ.533

Here we hear more from Augustine precisely how we become the co-heirs of Christ, our Representative before God. It is because he has “take[n] us up into himself…transfigur[ing] us into himself.” Augustine so emphasizes the centrality of Christ’s Person to our salvation that he declares, “in him we too are Christ.”

Finally, the three markers of representative soteriology are woven together with Augustine’s characteristic eloquence in his comments upon John 3:13.

And [the Lord] goes on: “And no man hath ascended into heaven, but He that came down from heaven, the Son of man who is in heaven.” Behold, He was here, and was also in heaven; was here in His flesh, in heaven by His divinity; yea, everywhere by His divinity. Born of a mother, not quitting the Father. Two nativities of Christ are understood: one divine, the other human: one, that by which we were to be made; the other, that by which we were to be made anew: both marvelous.... He had taken a body of Adam,—for Mary was of Adam,—and was about to raise that same body again.... God has willed to be the Son of man; and willed men to be sons of God. He came down for our sakes; let us ascend for His sake. For He alone descended and ascended, He who saith, “No man hath ascended into heaven, but He who came down from heaven.” Are they not therefore to ascend into heaven whom He makes sons of God? Certainly they are.... Then how is it that no man ascends, but He that descended? Because one only descended, only one ascends. What of the rest? What are we to understand, but that they shall be His members, that one may ascend?534

Although the explicit word “recapitulation” is absent from these remarks, it pervades Augustine’s thoughts here. Not only does the skilled orator movingly blend the ascending and descending movements of human salvation with the idea of our incorporation into Christ’s body, but in the midst of doing so he identifies Christ as Adam exalted, the Son of God through whom we have been made “sons of God.” Whatever one judges to be Augustine’s primary soteriological emphasis in his voluminous corpus of writings, representative soteriology was clearly within them as a choice theme which appears time and again.

3.3 Physical Redemption: Distorting a Theme of Patristic Soteriology

At this point, having reviewed four instances of representative soteriologies in patristic thought, we must address a common soteriological category for the important

purpose of distinguishing it from the representative one operative in this dissertation. This common soteriological category is that of “physical redemption” (alternatively “physical,” “natural,” even “magical” theory of the atonement, “physicalism,” “naturalism”). Distinguishing physical redemption from our representative soteriological category is important here for two main reasons. First, especially over the past century and a half, theologians have commonly associated physical redemption with Irenaeus, with his idea of recapitulation, and with the associated idea of deification which runs through the fabric of the Fathers’ theologies surrounding human redemption. Second, many of these same theologians, including those who coined the category, have sharply criticized the physical theory for traits (to be explicitly enumerated below) which, I will argue, can only be unfairly predicated of Irenaeus and (at least many of) his heirs; such criticism has resulted in the category and patristic figures which allegedly exemplify it being quickly dismissed and marginalized in many discussions of redemption and atonement. Specifically, physical redemption functions as a kind of straw-man by which the profound category of representative soteriology has been marginalized, especially by Liberal Protestant theologians advocating the thesis of Christianity’s Hellenization. Let us consider physical redemption and its origins, followed by some reasons to believe that the category is problematic when attributed to the Fathers broadly, and especially to Irenaeus in particular.

3.3.1 Origins in Liberal Protestantism

The idea of physical redemption as a soteriological category seems to have first gained currency among Liberal Protestant theologians around the end of the nineteenth century. Chief among this group was Adolf von Harnack, who refers to the theory
throughout his monumental *History of Dogma*. According to Harnack, the theory was roughly approximated by Justin Martyr, nearly (and in places virtually) endorsed by Irenaeus, and came to fully flourish in the theologies of many Church Fathers who followed. For Harnack, the theory of physical redemption which the Fathers came to adopt is a prime example of Christianity’s Hellenization, an overarching subject of *History of Dogma*. Irenaeus and his “formula” of recapitulation, in Harnack’s view, end up (albeit inadvertently) setting the trajectory toward the Hellenization of soteriology which would come with the full emergence of physical theory.

Fellow Liberal Protestant Friedrich Loofs defines the physical theory as “the understanding of redemption as the removal of the *phthora* [corruption] from human nature, completed through the union of manhood and Godhead in Christ.” As it is


536 “Yet we certainly find hints [in Justin] pointing to the notion of a physical and magical redemption accomplished at the moment of the incarnation. See particularly the fragment in Irenæus [AH IV.6.2] (already quoted on page 220), which may be thus interpreted, and Apol. I. 66” (Harnack, *History of Dogma*, vol. 2 p. 223).


538 Harnack lists Gregory of Nyssa, Hilary of Poitiers, Basil of Caesarea, Ephraim, Apollinaris, and Cyril of Alexandria, his “etc.” indicating that he believed there to be many more (ibid., vol. 3 p. 301.

539 “The pronounced hellenising of the Gospel, brought about by the Gnostic systems, was averted by Irenæus and the later ecclesiastical teachers by preserving a great portion of the early Christian tradition, partly as regards its letter, partly as regards its spirit, and thus rescuing it for the future. But the price of this preservation was the adoption of a series of ‘Gnostic’ formulæ. Churchmen, though with hesitation, adopted the adversary’s way of looking at things, and necessarily did so, because as they became ever further and further removed from the early-Christian feelings and thoughts, they had always more and more lost every other point of view. The old Catholic Fathers permanently settled a great part of early tradition for Christendom, but at the same time promoted the gradual hellenising of Christianity” (ibid., vol. 2, pp. 246-247).

typically described, physical redemption concentrates the entirety of human salvation in the moment of Christ’s incarnation, when human nature and God’s nature were united to one another. Moreover, this unity is thought to have “mechanically” or “magically” transmitted to all humans the immortality which properly belongs to God, doing so solely in virtue of these abstract, Platonic natures [\textit{physeis}] being united in the God-man (hence, “natural” or “physical” redemption). Finally, the full permeation of human nature with immortality which follows upon the hypostatic union logically entails \textit{apokatastasis}, or universal salvation. This theory, Liberal Protestants lamented, smacked of Greek concerns about immortality and ontology, marginalizing the cross and the moral imperative which they read within the Gospel’s message about salvation.\textsuperscript{541}

To Harnack’s credit, his careful reading of Irenaeus led him to stop short of pinning him with the “physicalist” label. Harnack recognizes that at least in parts of Irenaeus’s theology, salvation is neither completely accomplished in the moment of the incarnation,\textsuperscript{542} nor mechanically communicated to the entirety of the human race. Nevertheless, in working out his theory of recapitulation,\textsuperscript{543} Irenaeus is said by Harnack

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{541} “The point would seem to be that Irenaeus substitutes metaphysical categories for moral ones in his presentation of the Gospel, reflecting an essentially Greek interest in man’s ontological standing with regard to the eternal realm (his ‘being’), as opposed to a more biblical concern with his moral standing in relation to the categories of sin, judgment, and guilt…. Redemption is consequently seen as \textit{complete} in the very joining of manhood to Godhead in the person of Christ, the \textit{acts} of Christ being obscured by a concentration upon his \textit{nature}, and in the incarnation usurping the place of the cross as the focal point of Christian soteriology” (Hart, “Irenaeus, Recapitulation and Physical Redemption,” pp. 154-155).

\item \textsuperscript{542} “[B]eing in earnest with his idea of Christ as the second Adam, [Irenaeus] was able to contemplate the whole life of Jesus as redemption in so far as he conceived it as a recapitulation” (Harnack, \textit{History of Dogma}, vol. 2, p. 290). See also note 491 in ibid., p. 241, quoted below.

\item \textsuperscript{543} “Now the sole way in which immortality as a physical condition can be obtained is by its possessor uniting himself \textit{realiter} with human nature, in order to deify it ‘by adoption’ (‘\textit{per adoptionem}’), such is the technical term of Irenaeus. The deity must become what we are in order that we may become what he is. Accordingly, if Christ is to be the Redeemer, he must himself be God, and all the stress must fall upon his birth as man. ‘By his birth as man the eternal Word of God guarantees the inheritance of life
\end{itemize}
to “verge” on “soteriological naturalism,”” his historical theology of the first and second Adams possessing “an almost naturalistic shape.” Moreover, he reads Irenaeus’s soteriology as “dominated” by concern about human immortality and Christ’s ontological status. And while Irenaeus understood himself to be simply expositing the NT, in Harnack’s estimation, he was in fact infusing it with Greek and even Gnostic concepts.

544 “In working out this thought Irenæus verges here and there on soteriological naturalism… But he does not fall into this for two reasons. In the first place, as regards the history, of Jesus, he has been taught by Paul not to stop at the incarnation, but to view the work of salvation as only completed by the sufferings and death of Christ (See II. 20. 3…; III. 16. 9: III. 18. 1-7 and many other passages), that is, to regard Christ as having performed a work. Secondly, alongside of the deification of Adam’s children, viewed as a mechanical result of the incarnation, he placed the other (apologetic) thought, viz., that Christ, as the teacher, imparts complete knowledge, that he has restored, i.e., strengthened the freedom of man, and that redemption (by which he means fellowship with God) therefore takes place only in the case of those children of Adam that acknowledge the truth proclaimed by Christ and imitate the Redeemer in a holy life” (ibid., note 491, p. 241).

545 Ibid., p. 275 (Harnack’s treatment of the two Adams in Irenaeus spans from pp. 273-275 of ibid.).

546 “[D]ominating everything, we find [Irenaeus’s] firm belief in the bestowal of divine incorruptibility on believers through the work of the God-man” (ibid., p. 245).

547 “[I]nasmuch as this view represents Christ not as performing a reconciling but a perfecting work, his acts are thrust more into the background; his work is contained in his constitution as the God-man” (ibid., pp. 292-293).

548 “[C]ertain interests, which had found expression in the speculations of the so-called Gnostics, were adopted in an increasing degree among all thinking Christians, and also could not but influence the ecclesiastical teachers” (ibid., pp. 231). He continues, “Irenæus uttered most urgent warnings against subtle speculations; but yet, in the naivest way, associated with the faithfully preserved traditional doctrines and fancies of the faith theories which he likewise regarded as tradition and which, in point of form, did not differ from those of the Apologists or Gnostics. The Holy Scriptures of the New Testament were the basis on which Irenæus set forth the most important doctrines of Christianity…. Whilst stating and establishing the doctrines of tradition with the help of the New Testament, and revising and fixing them by means of
Although Harnack, who also has a profound respect for Irenaeus, expressed serious qualms about the “Greek” flavor of his soteriological writings, his most ardent denunciations of the physical redemption which Hellenized Christian soteriology occur in his treatment of Gregory of Nyssa. Gregory, Harnack explains, pushed Irenaeus’s thinking about Adam and Christ “represent[ing] all mankind as their head”\textsuperscript{549} to the problematic affirmation that

Christ did not assume the human nature of an individual person, but human nature. Accordingly, all that was human was intertwined with the Deity; the whole of human nature became divine by intermixture with the Divine. Gregory conceives this as a strictly physical process: the leaven of the Deity has pervaded the whole dough of humanity, through and in Christ; for Christ united with himself the whole of human nature with all its characteristics. This conception, which was based on the Platonic universal notion “humanity”… also led to the doctrine of Apokatastasis (universalism), which Gregory adopted.\textsuperscript{550}

Here, Harnack sees full-fledged naturalistic redemption at work. It is entirely “physical” insofar as human nature (\textit{physis}) has been taken \textit{in toto} to God in the incarnation, infusing humankind with immortality in the hypostatic union’s inaugural moment and resulting in universal salvation.\textsuperscript{551}

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intelligent deduction, the Fathers think they are setting forth the faith itself and nothing else” (ibid. pp. 233-234).

\textsuperscript{549} Ibid., p. 274. Johannes Zachhuber has rebutted Harnack’s reading of Nyssa in his \textit{Human Nature in Gregory of Nyssa: Philosophical Background and Theological Significance} (Brill, Leiden, 1999). For more on this matter, see Morwenna Ludlow’s \textit{Gregory of Nyssa, Ancient and (Post)modern} (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2007), pp. 100-101.

\textsuperscript{550} Harnack, \textit{History of Dogma}, vol. 3 pp. 297-298.

\textsuperscript{551} “The way in which this transfusion of humanity with immortality is conceived as having been achieved is vaguely described as ‘realistic’ or ‘physical’… [T]hrough the physical joining of divine and human natures in the person of the God-man this condition [of divine immortality] is communicated to the human race, being infused into the humanity of Christ, and thereby passing in a ‘naturalistic’ or
3.3.2 Impact of Physical Redemption in Subsequent Theology

By coining the soteriological category of physical redemption, and furthermore pairing it with the overarching thesis of Christianity’s Hellenization in the patristic period, Liberal Protestants like Harnack had a significant impact on how redemption in the theology of the Church Fathers has been understood. According to Gustaf Aulén, writing in 1930, physical redemption was the standard category according to which Irenaeus’s theology had come to be understood. Aulén even cites Harnack himself as interpreting Irenaeus in this way.

Thus, as Rahner and his contemporaries were undergoing their theological training, the association of the Fathers with the category of “physical redemption” would be fairly strong. For instance, Joseph Ratzinger exhibits a wariness of this category in his commentary on the first chapter of Vatican II’s *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, making sure to clarify that its concluding article (n. 22, which appeals to incarnational and “final Adam” thinking) is not an instance of it. Rahner himself

‘mechanical’ manner to all men by virtue of a ‘mystical union’ with the Redeemer” (Hart, “Irenaeus, Recapitulation and Physical Redemption,” pp. 154-155).

552 “Irenaeus has been commonly interpreted by theologians of the Liberal Protestant school as teaching a ‘naturalistic’ or ‘physical’ doctrine of salvation; salvation is the bestowal of ‘divinity’ – that is, immortality – on human nature, and the idea of deliverance from sin occupies quite a secondary place. The gift of immortality is regarded as dependent on the Incarnation as such; by the entrance of the Divine into humanity, human nature is (as it were) automatically endowed with Divine virtue and thereby saved from corruption. This is, then, a theology primarily of the Incarnation, not of the Atonement; the ‘work’ of Christ holds a secondary place” (Aulén, *Christus Victor*, p. 18).


554 Although he does not use the title physical redemption, Ratzinger writes, “A theology of the incarnation situated too much on the level of essence, may be tempted to be satisfied with the ontological phenomenon: God’s being and man’s have been conjoined. This appears as the real turning-point, and in comparison with it the factual life of Jesus and his death are secondary, as it were the realization of a
explicitly (and also disapprovingly) refers to the physical theory a number of times.\textsuperscript{555} J.N.D. Kelly utilizes the label,\textsuperscript{556} as do more contemporary theologians like Brian McDermott\textsuperscript{557} and David Brondos. McDermott is quite positive in his treatment of the Fathers’ soteriology, especially that of Irenaeus, so it seems he uses the “physical” label without implying the objectionable characteristics which the Liberal Protestant tradition associated with it.

These associations, however, do seem to have lived on (at least in part), for instance in Brondos’s evaluation of Irenaeus. As Brondos critiques elements of Irenaeus’s soteriology, he echoes many Harnackian talking points. “If what actually saves and transforms human beings is the union of the earthly and heavenly in Christ’s incarnation,” he writes, “then it would appear that Christ’s real work of salvation was already completed when he become incarnate as a man to unite the immortal divine nature to the fallen human nature.”\textsuperscript{558} Brondos elaborates, saying that at points Irenaeus envisions not “merely some type of restored relationship of friendship and communion

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\textsuperscript{558} These will be discussed below, in Chapter 4.

\textsuperscript{556} Kelly,\textit{ Early Christian Doctrines}, p. 375f.

\textsuperscript{557} “The type of soteriology formulated by the Fathers of the Church, again particularly in the East, has been called ‘natural’ or ‘physical,’ in the sense that the focus falls on the divine nature communicated in Christ and on the Spirit transforming out human nature” (McDermott,\textit{ Word Become Flesh}, p. 215).

\textsuperscript{558} Brondos, “The Redemption of ‘Man,’” p. 55.
between God and humanity, but instead conceives of the divine nature as some type of incorruptible and immortal substance that, when brought into contact with the substance of human nature, made it immortal and incorruptible as well."\textsuperscript{559} This idea, he judges, “would appear almost magical, as if the union of God to ‘man’ at the incarnation automatically brings about the union and reconciliation of God with all women and men independently of any subjective response on their part.”\textsuperscript{560}

3.3.3 Responses to Physical Redemption

Despite the associations of Irenaeus (and the theology of the larger patristic period) with physical redemption which flourished in Liberal Protestantism’s heyday and beyond, many theologians have recognized the problematic nature such associations. Several authors have explicitly dissociated Irenaeus from physical redemption. Aulén, after noting this connection between Irenaeus and this theory made by “the Liberal Protestant school,” says that it “seriously misinterprets his meaning.”\textsuperscript{561} J.N.D. Kelly, who continues to use the label, nonetheless distinguishes “physical theory” from Irenaeus’s idea of recapitulation, saying that the former is an “elaboration” upon the latter, “parting company with it when, under the influence of Platonic realism, it represents human nature as being automatically deified by the incarnation.”\textsuperscript{562} Kelly also seems to soften the category itself, clarifying that while it emphasizes the soteriological

\textsuperscript{559} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{560} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{561} Aulén, \textit{Christus Victor}, pp. 18-19.

value of the incarnation, it is usually not done so to the exclusion of the cross.\textsuperscript{563} (William Placher, citing Kelly in his call for a return to a “mystical” or “physical” theory of redemption, softens it in the same manner).\textsuperscript{564}

Irenaeus’s most staunch defender in this regard, however, is Trevor Hart. As he notes, any talk of a “mechanical” or “automatic” infusion of immortality into the whole of humanity ignores Irenaeus’s insistence of the “need for faith” for salvation,\textsuperscript{565} as well as the import of Christ’s death for such a communication.\textsuperscript{566} Moreover, Hart continues, the mortality which follows upon human sin remains of secondary concern to Irenaeus, who is much more attendant to the relationship between God and human beings which is perfected and purified over the whole Christ-event.\textsuperscript{567} In fact, Hart argues, the two concerns are intimately related in Irenaeus’s mind: “Throughout \textit{AH} the language of immortality and incorruptibility is inseparable from the language of atonement and reconciliation…. For Irenaeus it would seem to be the case that what man \textit{is} (his essence

\begin{footnotes}
\item[563] “In most forms of the physical theory… the emphasis on the incarnation was not intended to exclude the saving value of Christ’s death” (ibid., p. 376)
\item[564] William Placher. “How Does Jesus Save?” In advocating for “physical redemption,” Placher nonetheless insists that Christ redeems us through the “whole course of his obedience” (ibid., p. 26).
\item[566] Irenaeus, Hart writes, “often links together the communication of immortality to man and the death of Christ” (ibid., p. 166).
\item[567] “Sin and disobedience do no result in merely ‘physical’ consequences…, but serve to separate man from that fellowship with God for which he was created…. man’s plight is described by Irenaeus in relational language as well as that which has been termed ‘physical’” (ibid., p. 157). He continues, explaining that Irenaeus “certainly gives full credence to the relational consequences in terms of guilt and condemnation, and to the interpretation of salvation as consisting essentially in an \textit{atonement} of reconciliation between God and man, worked out in the life and death of Jesus Christ. It is untrue, therefore, to suggest that he sees the incarnation in itself as the sum of Christian soteriology, beyond which nothing more needs to be said” (ibid., p. 158).
\end{footnotes}
or nature) is not considered in a static manner, but is bound up with his relationships, and
more particularly with his relationship to his Creator.” 568

Likewise, Christ’s saving us through who he is, as the New Adam, recapitulating
humanity in himself, cannot be understood in a static, “physical” way either. The
incarnation is, for Irenaeus, itself centrally redemptive, but in reference to its extension
and duration rather than as accomplished in its first moment. 569 As Loewe puts it, “for
Irenaeus, the incarnation embraces the whole earthly career of Jesus.” 570 Balthasar goes
even farther, declaring that the idea of Greek theology positing a redemption achieved at
the moment of the incarnation, with cross as an “epiphenomenon,” is a “widely
disseminated myth of the theological textbooks.” 571

Along with Balthasar, other theologians have gone beyond the apologetic task for
Irenaeus, questioning the category itself. Romanus Cessario notes the shift in scholarship
away from using “physical” as a descriptor for soteriological accounts of Christ’s
relationship to us, a relationship of mystical membership in Christ’s body which is alive
and well in the theology of Thomas Aquinas. Admittedly, Cessario says, we can

568 Ibid., p. 166. Cf. “It is in this establishing of man in his proper relationship of communion with
God, therefore, that the communication of immortality consists, life itself being defined in terms of this
fellowship, and death or non-existence in terms of its absence” (ibid., p. 169).

569 “[I]t is truer to Irenaeus to see ‘nature’ as defined not in some absolute or static sense, but
rather in terms of man’s existence as creature in relation to his Creator and other men, then we may say that
for him the union of ‘natures’ takes place in and through this entire history, from the conception in the
virgin’s womb, through the ministry and death upon the cross to the resurrection and ascension of Christ”
(ibid., p. 168).


571 Hans Urs von Balthasar, Mysterium Paschale, p. 22.
trace the theory that some kind of ontic communion exists between Christ and his members as far back as Irenaeus of Lyon and his theory of recapitulation. As its root ‘physis’ suggests, ‘physical’ points initially to a union based on common nature, but not, for that reason, an automatic incorporation of all rational creatures into Christ. Rather, the possession of an individual human nature establishes the threshold condition for direct and personal participation in the mystery of Christ.⁵⁷²

Our “natural” or “physical” connection to Christ in virtue of the incarnation, far from entailing salvation as a matter of course in virtue of a purely ontological mechanism, is rather a “threshold condition” which needs to activated, so to speak, by the subjective act of faith.

Moreover, this somewhat potential “physical” connection need not be understood as baptizing a Platonic theory of universal natures into Christian theology. Although several contemporary advocates of the retrieving a patristic representative soteriology presume that the Fathers rely on this Platonic theory (e.g., McDermott⁵⁷³ and Walter Kasper,⁵⁷⁴ each of whom suggest circumventions for contemporary soteriological appropriations), others have suggested that such a theory is not necessitated. Placher, pointing to Athanasius’s story of an entire town being transformed by a new person who

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⁵⁷³ In Word Become Flesh, McDermott explains that Gregory Nazianzus understood his idea that what “was not assumed by Christ was not healed because it was not united to God’… in terms of a Platonic theory of universals,” while contemporary theologians “would anchor Christ’s universal inclusion of all humanity in his presence through the Spirit as the Risen One, but the point made remains true for all Christians: in assuming human nature Christ assumed the whole of it and in taking to himself all that is concretely human (as good creation and sinfulness) through his ministry, death, and resurrection, he saved it. Christ assumed fallen human nature and thus healed it” (p. 213).

⁵⁷⁴ In his Jesus the Christ, Kasper notes that the “idea of representation seems strange to the modern way of thinking mainly because the starting-point of modern thought is the autonomy of the person,” and suggests, “For the future of faith much will depend on whether the biblical idea of representation and the modern idea of solidarity are successfully combined” (p. 221).
enters it, writes “There are many ways, in short, to think of humanity as sufficiently one whole that Christ could transform it,” and Kathryn Tanner insists that the imagery used by the Fathers is “not of a technical philosophical sort but rather ‘homey’ and commonsensical even to modern ears—darkness overcome by being drawn to the light, wood catching fire when put next to a flame.”

3.3.4 Distinguishing Representative Soteriology from Physical Redemption

The clarifications which these various theologians have made in order to dissociate the Fathers from physical redemption help to show how representative soteriology differs from it as well. In many ways, the physicalist theory coined by Liberal Protestants stands as an exaggeration of elements which are genuinely part of representative soteriology. That is, while important aspects of the physicalist category are reflected in patristic thinkers, these aspects are singled out and overemphasized in a way which ultimately distorts the Fathers’ thinking. It is likely no coincidence that these isolated and emphasized elements resonate particularly strongly with Hellenistic (especially Platonic philosophical) thought, providing the Liberal Protestant coiners of physical redemption a tool for furthering the thesis of Christianity’s early Hellenization, particularly on the soteriological plane. Let us consider a few of this distortions and how

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575 Placher, “How Does Jesus Save?,” p. 27.

576 Kathryn Tanner, “Incarnation, Cross, and Sacrifice,” p. 45. Tanner continues by comparing this (non-)issue with concerns about other theories of atonement (e.g., penal substitution and satisfaction): “There is nothing particularly objectionable here, compared to modern worries, say, about the justice of putting innocent people to death, and nothing especially time-bound its incomprehensibility to contemporary people, as the feudal code of honor underlying the vicarious satisfaction model might now seem to be” (ibid.).
they relate to representative soteriology, a category which I have argued better encapsulates much of the Fathers’ soteriological thought.

Although eternal life is God is part and parcel of salvation, salvation on a representative schema cannot be reduced to ideas like immortality or incorruptibility. As stated at the beginning of this chapter, salvation consists of the full human flourishing, at the heart of which is the direct, loving presence of God. Hart’s apology on behalf of Irenaeus likewise applies here: everlasting life for human beings is wrapped up in our relationship to God, and representative soteriology only attends to the former insofar as it is entailed by the latter.

Moreover, just as Loewe clarifies that for Irenaeus the salvific value of the incarnation concerns Jesus’ *entire* life, representative soteriology cannot be reduced to a salvific moment. Indeed, the category is *person*-centered, not moment-centered. In fact, a physicalist shifting of the emphasis entirely onto the moment Christ became incarnate renders the category just another “act-centered” theory of atonement, the act here occurring at the *beginning* rather than the end of Jesus’ life. The person-centered marker of representative soteriology means that we must think of the salvific encounter between God and humankind as having its nexus point in the *interval* of Christ’s incarnation rather than its first moment.

Likewise, Christ’s identity as our Representative in this person-centered schema does not deprive it of a subjective dimension, a deprivation associated with the “mechanical” transmission of salvation to humanity in physical redemption. As Dorothee Sölle insists repeatedly in her classic *Christ the Representative*, the representative does
not replace the one represented, for this would amount to substitution. Rather, the representative holds open a place for the one represented, not negating her freedom but rather allowing it to fully develop. To be incorporated into Christ himself (and the person-centered marker of representative soteriology depends on this incorporation) means to participate in Christ’s own “ascending” and affirmative stance toward God. Moreover, a legitimate subjective dimension to representative soteriology obviates the objection about a necessarily entailed universal salvation.

Finally, this idea of incorporation may be explained by appealing to the idea of Platonic universals, but it certainly need not. As Placher and Tanner have explained above, there are many methods and images for describing how one human being, Christ, can stand in an intimate relationship and have a most profound effect upon other human beings. In addition to their explanations, I would like to briefly make reference to two biblical ideas, the Pauline notion of our being “members” of Christ’s body (1Cor 12, cf. Eph 4-5, Col 1-2), as well as the Johannine description of Christ as the Vine and us as the branches (John 15). Although the idea of Christ as “head” and the Church as “body” in Ephesians and Colossians sets discrete parts in relation to one another, the Pauline imagery in 1 Corinthians and that of the Fourth Gospel are radically inclusive: we are the parts, while Christ is himself the whole.

577 “In substitution, what is replaced is treated as unavailable, useless, or dead. Substitution demands permanence, not a merely provisional status. The replacement represents the other person completely and unconditionally…. The substitutionary way of thinking, … by speaking of man as a replacement turns him into a thing” (Sölle, Christ the Representative, p. 21).

578 “Any act of representation can turn into substitution if the place of the one who is represented is no longer held open, but is seized by the representative for himself.” Thus, “Anyone who is represented runs the risk of being replaced” (ibid., p. 48).
It may be tempting to appeal to Platonic universals (or even the troublesome notion of the Word assuming the entirety of human nature rather than a single instance of it) to cash out these images and representative idea of incorporation, especially given the difficulty of accounting for the relationship between this first-century Jewish man and humans far removed in time and space from him. However, the presence of the Spirit, Christ’s own mysterious glorified and resurrected status, and Christ’s sacramental presence, especially in the Eucharist, stand as important ways for Christians to account for this relationship. The sacraments are particularly essential for understanding this unity and participation in Christ, as Augustine so eloquently attests: as he preaches, the sacraments of initiation shape us into a single “loaf,” a loaf which we are and yet which we become when receive it.⁵⁷⁹

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter has sought to argue that the category of representative soteriology, with its ascending, descending, and person-centered markers, is a central and reoccurring

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⁵⁷⁹ From Augustine’s “Sermon 227” (Easter 414 or 415): “That bread which you can see on the altar, sanctified by the word of God, is the body of Christ. That cup, or rather what the cup contains, sanctified by the word of God, is the blood of Christ. It was by means of these things that the Lord Christ wished to present us with his body and blood, which he shed for our sake for the forgiveness of sins. If you receive them well, you are yourselves what you receive. You see, the apostle says, We, being many, are one loaf, one body (1 Cor 10:17). That's how he explained the sacrament of the Lord's table; one loaf, one body, is what we all are, many though we be. In this loaf of bread you are given clearly to understand how much you should love unity. I mean, was that loaf made from one grain? Weren't there many grains of wheat? But before they came into the loaf they were all separate; they were joined together by means of water after a certain amount of pounding and crushing. Unless wheat is ground, after all, and moistened with water, it can't possibly get into this shape which is called bread. In the same way you too were being ground and pounded, as it were, by the humiliation of fasting and the sacrament of exorcism. Then came baptism, and you were, in a manner of speaking, moistened with water in order to be shaped into bread. But it's not yet bread without fire to bake it. So what does fire represent? That's the chrism, the anointing. Oil, the fire-feeder, you see, is the sacrament of the Holy Spirit” (in Sermons (184-229z) in The Works of Saint Augustine vol. III/6, p. 254).
part of patristic theology about human salvation. More specifically, I have sought to show how Irenaeus’s idea of recapitulation, in particular, is a paradigm case of representative soteriology which quite likely had significant influence on subsequent theologians in both the Greek- (e.g., Clement of Alexandria, Athanasius) and Latin-speaking (e.g., Augustine) Church. But more important than definitively proving any Irenaean soteriological lineage is the widespread presence of representative soteriological thinking, whatever the cause.

It is important to distinguish the Fathers’ theology regarding salvation from the category of physical redemption, a soteriological theory coined by Liberal Protestants which helped advance the thesis of Christianity’s Hellenization, but which seriously distorted aspects of patristic thought. The Fathers’ representative thinking centers not on human immortality and incorruption, but on the relationship with God which entails those qualities; it affirms the value of the incarnation, not as an isolated salvific moment, but as the entirety of the Christ-event, including the cross; it locates the communication of salvation within our incorporation into Christ, but not in any mechanical or automatic way; finally, it insists on the whole being represented in the one, but not in a way which necessitates baptizing Platonic universal forms.

For theologians in the early part of the twentieth-century, the association of the Fathers with physical redemption would have been well known. However, close readers of patristic theology, especially of Irenaeus, would have been able to identify this association as a false one, as Balthasar (who cited the theory as a “myth of the theological

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\[\text{580} \text{Even Harnack refrained from formally labeling Irenaeus a proponent of the theory, as stated above.} \]

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textbooks”) proves. Some of these close readers may even have been so affected by the Fathers’ pervasive representative thinking that it would come to eventually influence their own creative soteriological efforts. As I will argue in the following chapter, Karl Rahner was one such close reader.
CHAPTER 4:
RAHNERIAN RESSOURCEMENT:
A HISTORICAL BASIS FOR PATRISTIC SOTERIOLOGICAL INFLUENCE

The preceding chapters have functioned primarily to set the stage for my thesis that, contra Hans Urs von Balthasar’s analysis of it, Karl Rahner’s soteriology can be legitimately classified as “representative” in character. This stage-setting includes (i.) specifying what I mean by representative, utilizing the three characteristic markers as well as the contentious term *Stellvertretung*, (ii.) demonstrating that Rahner’s sacramental or *realsymbolisch* concepts entail representative counterparts when he utilizes them in christological and soteriological writings, and (iii.) considering other major proponents of representative soteriology, especially patristic theologians like Irenaeus of Lyons. The connection on the “conceptual” level between Rahner and representative soteriology, made in a somewhat limited way in Chapter 2, will be the focus of the fifth and final chapter below.

My focus now, however, will be upon establishing the *historical* plausibility of identifying Rahner as a representative thinker, a plausibility rooted in his early engagement with and ongoing appreciation for theology and dogma from the age of the Church Fathers. I will proceed with some initial biographical considerations, followed by an examination of Rahner’s doctoral dissertation on patristic typology, *E latere Christi* (“From the Side of Christ”). This dissertation, to which little attention has been paid,
focuses its ecclesiological and soteriological claims upon the idea of Christ as the New Adam, an idea paramount within the theology of the Fathers (who receive the lion’s share of Rahner’s attention in his dissertation). Finally, I will argue that in addition to having a formative impact on Rahner’s own creative systematic theology, the theology and dogmatic pronouncements of the early centuries of Christianity remained indispensable for Rahner throughout his career. Although he is known primarily for his efforts to render the Gospel intelligible to the contemporary person (efforts which might be accurately summarized by the term aggiornamento or “updating”, heard frequently in discussions surrounding Vatican II), Rahner made it clear in his final years that he saw himself as a deeply “historical” (or, to once again use conciliar parlance, ressourcement) theologian. Rahner’s recourse to “the sources” of Christian soteriology, particular as seen in *E latere Christi*, provide a historical and biographical explanator for the fact that he articulated a representative soteriology in common with patristic thinkers like Irenaeus.

4.1 The Biographical Status Quo

For a well-known and heavily studied figure like Rahner, short biographies abound. In their treatment of Rahner’s early years as a student and, eventually,
lecturer, the majority of such biographies devote their attention to his philosophical interests, particularly his reading of various philosophers (e.g., Immanuel Kant, Maurice Blondel, Pierre Rousselot, and especially Joseph Maréchal), his participation in Martin Heidegger’s seminars at Freiburg, his philosophy dissertation (*Spirit in the World*), and his subsequent work on anthropology and philosophy of religion, *Hearer of the Word*; reference to Rahner’s interest in the Fathers is either made in passing or, more typically, entirely omitted.\(^{582}\) It is of course true that these philosophical interests and the corresponding figures significantly shaped Rahner’s career as a theologian. Rahner himself cites Maréchal as a major influence\(^ {583}\) and even identifies Heidegger as his “master,” the “only one whom I can revere as my teacher.”\(^ {584}\) Yet, it is important not to overestimate these influences as if Maréchal and Heidegger more or less determined Rahner’s theology.\(^ {585}\) In fact, he denies that either figure even had this kind of decisive

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\(^{582}\) While the publications in the previous note more or less exemplify with this tendency, exceptions to it include Neufeld’s authoritative work *Die Brüder Rahner: Eine Biographie* (Freiburg i.Br.: Herder, 1994); Wong *Logos-Symbol*; Annice Callahan, R.S.C.J., *Karl Rahner’s Spirituality of the Pierced Heart: A Reinterpretation of Devotion to the Sacred Heart* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1985); and Herbert Vorgrimler, *Understanding Karl Rahner: An Introduction to His Life and Thought* (New York: Crossroad, 1986), pp. 64-67.

\(^{583}\) *Karl Rahner in Dialogue*, p. 13.

\(^{584}\) “On Martin Heidegger,” in Sheehan, *Karl Rahner*, p. xi (emphasis original). Also, “I have to confess...that I would not have done philosophy in a transcendental manner had I not studied the philosophy of Maréchal and of Heidegger” (*Karl Rahner in Dialogue*, p. 132), and “I owe my most basic, decisive, philosophical direction, insofar as it comes from someone else, more, in fact, to the Belgian philosopher and Jesuit, Joseph Maréchal. His philosophy already moved beyond the traditional neoscholasticism. I brought that direction from Maréchal to my studies with Heidegger and it was not superseded by him” (ibid., p. 190).

\(^{585}\) “Insofar as it is philosophical, my theology does not really show the systematic and thematic influence of Heidegger. What he communicated was the desire to think, the ability to think...I would say that Martin Heidegger was the only teacher for whom I developed the respect that a disciple has for a great master. That had little to do with individual questions or individual formulations of my theology. I would
Rahner specifies that Heidegger’s effect upon him came via “a style of thinking” rather than any “specific doctrines.”

Unfortunately, the widespread tendency to portray Rahner’s theology as emerging from the crucible of modern continental philosophy has led many of his readers, both enthusiasts and critics alike, to overestimate the role that philosophical considerations played in his theological career. Slightly more than two years prior to his death, Rahner declared to an interviewer, “I refuse to be condemned as a theologian to being subject exclusively to a completely determined philosophical system.” A full appreciation of Rahner’s thought requires giving serious (rather than mere passing) attention to other early, formative factors which shaped his theology.

say that Heidegger had little influence on my philosophy or even my theology, although I am really extremely grateful to him” (ibid., p. 257).

“Certainly, while Maréchal influenced me, it cannot be said that my philosophical ideas were completely and adequately determined by him. There were many other profound influences that help elaborate and at times transform what Maréchal said” (ibid., pp. 13-14).

“One may perhaps say that it is not specific doctrines that I have taken from Heidegger, but rather a style of thinking and of investigating which has proved most valuable. This may be described as a method or approach by which one does not examine dogmatic truths merely as evidence derived from the positive sources, but one seeks to construct a synthesis. One takes the various dogmatic propositions and reduces them to certain fundamental principles. In that way an internal, coherent body of dogmatic truth is established. The modern person is thus able to perceive the order and harmony in the mysterious truth of the Church and Christianity. The modern person no longer is satisfied with taking a collection of the truths and various opinions that are proven in Denzinger and thinking no more about it. Rather, he or she looks for some synthetic idea, even though it might be quite simple, to organize the immense material of Christian dogma. Once this is achieved, other specific truths are able to be understood as obvious and necessary consequences of the principle idea” (ibid., p. 13). Elsewhere, Rahner writes that “surely [Heidegger] has taught us one thing: that everywhere and in everything we can and must seek out that unutterable mystery which disposes over us, even though we can hardly name it with words. And this we must do even if, in his own work and in a way which would be strange for a theologian, Heidegger himself abstains from speech about this mystery, speech which the theologian must utter” (in Sheehan, Karl Rahner, pp. xi-xii, emphasis original).
Especially beginning in the 1980s, such attention began to appear in writings on the significance of Rahner’s Ignatian spirituality. Joseph Wong,\textsuperscript{589} Annice Callahan,\textsuperscript{590} and Herbert Vorgrimler\textsuperscript{591} offered somewhat brief but important forays into the manner in which Rahner’s Jesuit training, specifically Ignatius’s \textit{Spiritual Exercises}, heavily shaped his projects.\textsuperscript{592} In more recent years, increasing attention has been rightfully called to this topic.\textsuperscript{593}

With the exception of Neufeld and Batlogg (whose relevant work is only available in German), the efforts to examine Rahner’s early non-philosophical influences have focused almost entirely on prayer and spirituality. And, as with that on Rahner’s philosophical influences, such a focus is of course warranted and valuable. However, Rahner’s writings (including his theology dissertation) which concern the Church Fathers

\textsuperscript{589} Wong, \textit{Logos-Symbol}, pp. 46-70

\textsuperscript{590} Callahan, \textit{Karl Rahner’s Spirituality of the Pierced Heart}, pp. 79-80, 86-90.


\textsuperscript{592} It should be noted that only four months before his death in March of 1984, Rahner expressed approval of Wong’s emphasis on Rahner’s devotional life, particularly to the Sacred Heart, impacting his theology: “above all, considerations essential to my Christology are drawn together here which I had indeed developed in the course of writing a theology of devotion to the Sacred Heart but which I had overlooked in producing my first brief systematic Christology during my years in Münster. The reassertion of my considerations on devotion of the Sacred Heart, however, enriches and deepens an otherwise somewhat too formal and abstract outline of systematic Christology which resulted both in the work I did in Münster and in my \textit{Foundations of Christian Faith}” (“Foreword,” in Wong, \textit{Logos-Symbol}, p. 7).

have received sparse attention, especially in the English-speaking world. Accordingly, the short biography immediately below is not intended to be at all comprehensive nor balanced in its attention to the variety of sources which influenced Rahner. Rather, it is intended to fill in lacunae concerning historical theology which exist in many biographical summaries of Karl Rahner, situating these lacunae within the more widely reported timeline of Rahner’s early years.

4.2 A Biographical Corrective: Rahner’s Early Years

Rahner entered the Jesuit novitiate in Feldkirch, Austria during April of 1922, having turned 18 about a month earlier. Within two years, Rahner composed his first publication, on “Why we need to pray.” During this time, his brother Hugo, who preceded Karl into the novitiate, reports that the two of them undertook “timid, early attempts at collaborative work… to sense and present in the field of scholarship the presence of God to the world.” Karl Rahner studied philosophy at Feldkirch in 1925 and then continued his philosophical studies in Pullach through 1927. Following the convention of his Order, Rahner spent some time doing “practical” work between his

594 This dissertation, *E latere Christi*, was only published relatively recently (1999) in vol. 3 his collected works, *SW*.

595 This biographical summary draws extensively on the “Editionsbericht” of Neufeld and that of Batlogg in *SW* vol. 3. Cf. also Batlogg’s “Karl Rahner in Innsbruck: Aus der Wissenschaftsbiographie eines Jesuitengelehrten-zugleich ein Stück Fakultätsgeschichte,” in *Zeitschrift für Katholische Theologie* 129 (2007), pp. 397-422.


philosophical and theological studies, returning to Feldkirch as a Latin instructor. During this period, he also studied Greek at Innsbruck (1928). In the fall of 1929, Rahner set out for Holland to begin his theological studies in Valkenburg, where he would stay until 1933.\textsuperscript{598}

Although Rahner’s Jesuit Provincial had by this time decided that his future lay in teaching philosophy for the Order, Rahner immersed himself in these theological studies. Although the theology taught to him at Valkenberg was markedly neo-Scholastic in its approach, Rahner “enjoyed” it (and even opined that he would prefer it to the theology being taught by the German theological faculties in his final years).\textsuperscript{599} That said, Rahner certainly recognized the shortcomings of neo-Scholasticism, which tended to reverently treat the works of Thomas Aquinas as a sort of “second Scripture” to be commented upon; this theological approach which dominated Valkenburg was in large part a matter of “mere decoration. I certainly didn’t have a living and inspirational contact with Thomas then.”\textsuperscript{600}

Rahner’s enthusiasm for his theological studies seems to have been rooted in additional historical reading which he took up during this period. In fact, Rahner maintained a reading list for self-guided study, a list which Karl Neufeld has described as a “probably quite exhaustive” record of Rahner’s reading beyond his courses’ neo-

\textsuperscript{598} During this period, Rahner was ordained a priest in Munich on July 26, 1932.

\textsuperscript{599} K. Rahner, \textit{Faith in a Wintry Season: Conversations and Interviews with Karl Rahner in the Last Years of His Life} (New York: Crossroad, 1990), p. 42.

\textsuperscript{600} Ibid., pp. 45, 42.
Scholastic textbooks. Neufeld has described in detail a section, entitled “Valkenburg 1929/30,” of this record:

First, a group of patristic texts catches one’s eye. Named are: the letters of Ignatius [of Antioch]; Shepherd of Hermas; Polycarp; the Apologies of Justin Martyr, as well as his Dialogue with Trypho; Pseudo-Justin and his “Oratio ad Graecos”; Epistle of Barnabas; Acta of the second-century martyrs; the “Muratorian Fragment”; Irenaeus and his Adversus Haereses as well as his Demonstratio apostolicae Praedicationes; the complete works of Tertullian; the complete works of Clement of Alexandria. Further added are Chrysostom’s De sacerdotis; Gregory of Nyssa’s On Prayer; Augustine’s De praedestinatione SS. And De dono perseverantiae; also, Aponius’s commentary on the Song of Songs.

Astoundingly, this extensive program of additional readings concerned only Rahner’s first two (of eight total) semesters at Valkenburg.

As Heinrich Bacht has noted, Rahner’s spare time during this period was, as the program above would indicate, consumed with patristic studies. Bacht reports that during the course of his four years at Valkenburg, Rahner’s relentless reading of the Church Fathers so dominated his time that his peers were moved to designate him accordingly: “With unfailing persistence Karl Rahner worked his way through the tomes of Greek and Latin patrology by Abbé Migne… When he sat behind his tomes, he was not easily distracted. It is no wonder that on account of his stubborn doggedness, he was nicknamed ’the wood-head.’” (Any reservations one might have about possible

601 Neufeld, Die Brüder Rahner, p. 98.

602 Ibid., p. 99.


604 Ibid.
exaggeration on this count are quickly put to rest when looking at the staggering number of citations of Jacques Paul Migne’s patrologies605 in Rahner’s dissertation, *E latere Christi.* Given his rigorous program of self-directed study in his spare time, it is hardly surprising that Hermann Lange, the Dean of the theology faculty at Valkenburg, praised Rahner for his “exceptional independent work.”606 This extra-curricular program of study at Valkenburg led to several published articles during his final years there (discussed below) and would directly contribute to his theology dissertation at Innsbruck; Batlogg has further referred to this program as “the fund and pool from which [Rahner] could draw throughout his entire life.”607

Rahner’s (predominately patristic) program of reading cultivated an “extensive and intensive engagement with the issues of penance and conversion.”608 Specifically, Rahner’s reading of secondary literature on these topics at Valkenburg centered on Augustine’s treatment of them.609 This fascination, which Rahner maintained throughout his theological career,610 led him to produce an article on the topic which would be

605 There are 161 volumes of the Greek *Patrologiae Cursus Completus* (PG), 221 of the Latin (*PL*). It should also be noted that several volumes have multiple codices, and each volume typically exceeds 1000 pages. (*Patrologiae Cursus Completus: Omnium SS. Patrum, Doctorum Scriptorumque Ecclesiasticorum Sive Latinorum, Sive Graecorum. (Paris, 1844)).


609 This secondary literature is listed in ibid., p. 99.

610 Cf. vol. 15 of *TI*, devoted to the topic. Penance and the related topic of indulgences also contributed to Rahner’s treatment of purgatory, a topic with which he continually grappled into even his later years.
published in 1934, shortly after he completed his theological studies at Valkenburg in 1933.

Rahner’s Provincial, deeming him “‘destined’ to become a professor of the history of philosophy,” assigned him to Freiburg in 1934 to attain his degree. Rahner enrolled as a doctoral candidate under Martin Honecker, a Catholic, neo-Scholastic professor of philosophy; he also participated in Heidegger’s seminars over the next two years. Rahner chose to write his dissertation on Thomistic epistemological metaphysics. Honecker, who read the completed dissertation in the early summer of 1936, protested that Rahner imported a modern “subjective” focus into Thomas’s thought. Vorgrimler, and even Rahner himself, has suggested that Honecker detected Heidegger’s influence in the dissertation and, judging this influence to be excessive for a dissertation purportedly on Thomas Aquinas, failed the project. Rahner exmatriculated from Freiburg on June 25, 1936.

Within days, Rahner arrived back at Innsbruck, where his Provincial now intended for him both to receive a doctorate in and teach theology. When asked about this transition and Honecker’s rejection, Rahner has reported that he was not disappointed over the matter. In addition to providing an opportunity for further collaboration with his

611 Vorgrimler, *Understanding Karl Rahner*, p. 58. This period has been written on extensively; only basic information will be included.


613 Rahner has stated that the move had less to do with Honecker’s rejection at Freiburg than with the need for theology professors at Innsbruck after the departure of Johann Stufler and Joseph Müller (Faith in a Wintry Season, p. 44).

614 The first official record of Rahner’s presence at Innsbruck is June 29, 1936.
brother Hugo, it allowed Rahner to reengage the material into which he had poured himself at Valkenburg. Perhaps obliquely referencing the dissertation he would write at Innsbruck (on Christ’s pierced side), Rahner said of this transition, “to be frank, I myself had no great inner attraction to the history of philosophy: Certainly I would have been a quite respectable historian of philosophy, but my heart didn’t bleed.”

Incredibly, it only took Rahner about two weeks from his arrival at Innsbruck to submit his completed theology dissertation, *E latere Christi*. As Arno Zahlauer has noted, “Even for a man with the talent of Karl Rahner, two weeks would have been too short of a time to write a dissertation.” Clearly, Rahner had done significant work on this project prior to his arrival at Innsbruck.

This work began more than five years earlier in collaboration with his older brother, Hugo, whose own dissertation (entitled *Fons vitae*) already nodded in its foreword to the patristic insight upon which Karl’s own dissertation would focus: The early Church, Hugo Rahner writes, saw in Christ the Source of life, “in that miraculous stream of blood and water, which flowed from the pierced side of the Lord. In this Source of life, the Church, the *Domina*-Mother of the living, was born.”

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615 *Faith in a Wintry Season*, p. 44

616 Batlogg notes that the dissertation appears to be “hurriedly typed” (“Editionsbericht: Teil A,” p. xxiv).


618 *Fons Vitae: Eine Untersuchung zur Geschichte der Christusfrömmigkeit in der Urkirche. 1.-3. Jahrhundert* [“Fount of Life: A Study of the History of Devotion to Christ in the Early Church (1st to 3rd Centuries”)]. Hugo completed this dissertation in Feb. 1930 and received his doctorate at Innsbruck on 2 May 1931.

619 Qtd. in Neufeld, *Die Brüder Rahner*, p. 91
upon which the Rahner brothers worked in their doctoral dissertations,\textsuperscript{620} namely devotion to the person of Christ and the Church’s origin from Christ’s pierced side (and heart), overlapped significantly, and Karl has himself acknowledged that Hugo influenced his selection of topic.\textsuperscript{621} Moreover, there is an extant letter to Hugo dated 13 June 1930 in which Karl, writing from Valkenburg, requests sources and materials related to Hugo’s recently completed dissertation and specifically to “the Ecclesia ex latere Christi.”\textsuperscript{622}

Thus, it was clear that Karl Rahner was already collecting materials for \textit{E latere Christi} in the summer after his first year of theological studies at Valkenburg, six years before he would formally complete it at Innbruck. Batlogg has recorded several undated preparation materials from within this six-year interim period. One such artifact is a compilation of excerpted patristic writings, “excerpts of Tertullian, Justin, Clement, Athenagoras, Irenaeus and other authors – a kind of card-catalogue, as it were.”\textsuperscript{623}

Together with this “card-catalogue” is a 34-page (double-sided A5) manuscript in


\textsuperscript{621} Batlogg, “Editionsbericht: Teil A,” p. xxxvii. Batlogg further notes that the Rahner brothers would frequently edit each other’s writings, especially during the 1930s (ibid., p. xxxvi).

\textsuperscript{622} “If you could send from Innsbruck all of the material that you are finished with, i.e. everything in any way related to the Ecclesia ex latere Christi or to the Fons vitae, I would be very happy” (qtd. in ibid., p. xviii).

\textsuperscript{623} Ibid., p. xxxi-xxxii
Rahner’s own handwriting. From its lack of Heideggerian terminology, Batlogg estimates that this draft predates Rahner’s time at Freiberg. Thus, Rahner’s independent research in his years at Valkenburg basically amounted to dissertation research for a degree which, from 1934-1936, it looked like he would never receive. Although it was undoubtedly influenced by his brother, *E latere Christi* was a labor driven by Karl Rahner’s own sheer fascination with this patristic *topos*. As Neufeld has noted, “Rahner developed and freely chose this point of emphasis of his work; no one invited or compelled him.”

Rahner had more success with the evaluation of this second dissertation, which was approved by Paul Gächter (professor of New Testament studies), in mid-September 1936. Gächter, in an official statement cosigned by Franz Mitzka (professor of dogmatics), declared that *E latere Christi* “is not only suitable as a doctoral dissertation according to present applicable standards of the local theological faculty, but it far exceeds typical instances of such work and is, also, by all means ready for publication.” At this point, Rahner began preparing for doctoral examinations, which occurred between

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624 This manuscript and the “card catalogue” are located in the Karl Rahner Archives (KRA I, B, 3). There is also an 80-page typescript covered with Rahner’s handwritten marginalia; this copy, unlike the (certainly older) manuscript and like the finalized copy, contains a final section on the significance of the events of Christ’s life (KRA I, B, 4). The unbound and official copy of his dissertation filed in the Office of the Dean at Innsbruck is (KRA I, B, 6).


mid-October and mid-December. On December 19, 1936, the Leopold-Franzens University of Innsbruck awarded Rahner his doctorate of theology.

Before Rahner could begin teaching theology at Innsbruck, he had to satisfy the qualifications, including the completion of a Habilitationschrift, which typically amounts to a second dissertation. However, Rahner’s established presence in academic publications (more on this below) sufficed to fulfill this requirement. During the following summer in 1937, during which he began a series of 15 lectures in Salzburg which would later coalesce into Hearer of the Word, Rahner was appointed a Privatdozent to the Innsbruck faculty. This same summer, Rahner was instructed by his Order to conclude his philosophical studies at Freiburg. Although he continued to take classes there and at Innsbruck, this desired conclusion never came to pass.

Beginning that winter semester, Rahner taught a course on the doctrine of grace, for which he customized his own textbook which emphasized the centrality of Christ. Neufeld has noted that while the theme of Rahner’s Hearer of the Word lectures in Salzburg was pre-determined for him when he was invited to deliver them, Rahner’s

628 What precisely qualified as Rahner’s Habilitationschrift is somewhat unclear. Rahner’s semi-official bibliography (“Bibliographie des Schriftums von Karl Rahner,” updated 20 Dec. 2012, http://www.ub.uni-freiburg.de/fileadmin/ub/referate/04/rahner/rahnersc.pdf) lists a single article as the Habilitationschrift accepted by Innsbruck in 1936 (“Sünde als Gnadenverlust in der frühkirchlichen Literatur,” in Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie 60 (1936), pp. 471-510; a revised version of this article was included as “Sin as Loss of Grace in the Early Church,” in TI 15:23-53). Vorgrimler, on the other hand, lists several: “According to the laws which used to apply throughout Austria [teaching qualification] was not difficult if one had already published academic studies. So the five articles on the spiritual theology of Origen, Evagrius Ponticus and Bonaventure, which had been published between 1932 and 1934, were enough. On 1 July 1937 he completed the postdoctoral work (Habilitation) required for university teaching” (Understanding Karl Rahner, p. 63).

629 The lectures, which were completed by the winter semester of 1937, were entitled “On the Basis of a Philosophy of Religion.” Four years later they were published as Hörer des Wortes (1941).

course on grace had “no such requirements… In other words, here Rahner decided entirely according to his own discretion.”\footnote{Ibid., p. xvi.}

Rahner’s customized textbook on grace was not the only such text he worked on in 1937. That same year, he received permission from Marcel Viller, to undertake a translation and expansion of his \textit{La spiritualité des premiers siècles chrétiens},\footnote{Marcel Viller, \textit{La spiritualité des premiers siècles chrétiens} (Paris: Bloud & Gay, 1930).} which Rahner would publish as \textit{Aszese und Mystik in der Väterzeit} (“Asceticism and Mysticism in the Patristic Period”), a textbook on the Church Fathers which Rahner intended to serve as a complement to the theological manuals of the day.\footnote{Neufeld, “Editionsbericht,” p. xiv.} Rahner’s own additions to the text resulted in nearly doubling its length. Hugo Rahner has testified to his brother’s “love for the Church Fathers,” a love which bore “a final, even ripe fruit” in \textit{Aszese und Mystik}, which was completed in the summer of 1938 (its foreword is dated June) and published the following spring.\footnote{H. Rahner, “Eucharisticon fraternitatis,” p. 896.}

The summer of 1938 marks an end to this first, formative period of Rahner’s theological development. Although Rahner continued to engage patristic sources and do historical theology, his own more properly “constructive” work began to command an increasingly greater portion of his (considerable) output. Part of this may be attributed to a divergence between Karl and Hugo,\footnote{Hugo himself judges, “From 1938 onwards our theological paths parted ways” (ibid., p. 896).} the latter of whom engaged in a movement called
“kerygmatic” theology around this time. Karl worried that this approach was dangerously satisfied with statements and formulae of the past, which, in the contemporary setting, were kinds of relics; one could not simply construct a “preachable” theology subsequent to and alongside a repetition of theologies from the past, whether those theologies be scholastic or patristic. Rather, constantly addressing new questions and situations in a constructive retrieval of the Church’s heritage, Karl ventured in an oft-cited remark critiquing his brother’s movement, “is itself in the long run the most kerygmatic.” In addition to standing as a sort of intellectual caesura for Rahner, the summer of 1938 was a professional one as well. After having marched into Austria months earlier, the Nazis disbanded Innsbruck’s theological faculty that July. Rahner’s subsequent teaching at the Jesuit college Sillgasse lasted only around a year before it too was shut down and Rahner retreated into work on the diocesan administrative staff in Vienna for most of the war, though he continued to travel, teach, lecture, and publish.

4.3 Bibliographical Remarks

Rahner’s most genuine and ardently pursued interests during this early and formative period are recorded in the publications and teaching which he undertook completely on his own initiative, activities which had no particular restrictions established externally for him. As we have just seen, these interests include prayer and


spirituality, the theology of the Fathers, the Person of Christ, and grace. Having established the overarching timeline of this formative period from Rahner’s time as a student through his initial course as a professor of theology, let us turn to Rahner’s early publications. I will explore this portion of his bibliography in three “periods”; the second will consist entirely of Rahner’s completed theological dissertation at Innsbruck (which will be considered in detail), and the other two will be divided chronologically around it. No book reviews will be explicitly considered. The first section will be exhaustive, while the third “professional” period, which includes hundreds of entries, will selectively arranged to indicate some continuity with Rahner’s earlier writings. This third period will come to a close with the 1940s, after which Rahner (at this point a well-known figure) began including his writings in his *Theological Investigations* series.638

4.3.1 Student Essays and Publications

Rahner began writing and submitting publications early on. His first publication, at the age of 20 in 1924, concerned the theme of prayer and spirituality. This brief, two-page piece addressed “Why we need to pray” and was published in a monthly journal for German youth.639 Rahner’s next publication occurred eight years later toward the end of his theological studies at Valkenburg. However, Rahner was actively writing in the interim period.

638 As will be seen below, Rahner did end up retrieving and revising some of his very early articles for inclusion in later volumes of *TI*.

639 “Warum uns das Beten nottut,” planned for inclusion in *SW* vol. 1.
In 1928, on the occasion of their father’s sixtieth birthday, the aspiring academics Hugo and Karl Rahner presented their father with the lone copy of a typewritten *Festschrift* prepared in his honor. Included within it are five essays by Karl, which Hugo describes and excerpts in his contribution to a *Festschrift* for Karl on the latter’s own sixtieth birthday. Several of Karl’s essays, completed by 1928, are direct forerunners to papers which he would eventually publish, as will be noted below. Others, which we will presently consider, appear not to have been developed any further.

The first essay in the 1928 *Festschrift* is entitled “History and Historical Knowledge in the Spirit of Thomistic Metaphysics.” At this point, Rahner had just completed his three years of philosophical studies at Feldkirch and Pullach, and it seems he had already immersed himself in the issue of knowledge in Thomas’s metaphysics, on which he would eventually write his (both ill-fated and wildly successful) philosophy dissertation at Freiburg. In fact, Hugo refers to this 1928 piece as “a veritable prelude to the work which would follow, *Spirit in the World*.” The essay emphasized the historical situatedness of the human person’s spiritual life in what he would later call the “categorical” world, and also attested to the restless (indeed “transcendental”) longing of that person for “the restful clarity” which is God himself. Notably, this early

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640 Hugo addresses Karl, “Perhaps you do not remember yourself any longer in the face of this first-born of your mind. May I therefore show it to you to prove, that even the later metaphysically-clarified beliefs of sixty-year-old scholars have their history and their youth? God always comes into this world only slowly and timidly” (“Eucharisticon Fraternitatis,” p. 897).

641 “Gesichte und Geschichtserkenntnis im Geiste thomistischer Metaphysik” (ibid., pp. 897-898).

642 Ibid., p. 898.

643 The excerpt cited by Hugo reads, “So the spiritual life of the human person ‘occurs’ in time. It ‘is’ slowly in the vicissitudes of the ages. An always-striving effort is possible for the human, a daily self-
expression of the self-transcending person coming to realization in the categorical world is expressed in undeniably Augustinian terms of a “restless heart” finding its rest in God.\textsuperscript{644} This theme of longing for the clarity of God’s self-revelation recurs in the second essay of the 1928 \textit{Festschrift}, entitled “The Doctrine of Happiness in Aristotle and Thomas.”\textsuperscript{645}

The fourth essay, which brings Augustine explicitly into Rahner’s writings, is entitled “St. Augustine’s Theory of Illumination.”\textsuperscript{646} As Hugo notes, this essay concerns “both the theology of the Fathers as well as… metaphysical speculation” about human knowledge. In this essay, Karl Rahner writes that Augustine’s understanding of illumination “leads him into the depths of his own soul, and to the one who he sought and found, whom we also seek. For it is eternally true, what constitutes the most profound meaning of St. Augustine’s theory of illumination: Cognition means participation in the eternal Logos.”\textsuperscript{647} It is clear from the excerpts provided by Hugo that by 1928, Karl

\begin{quote}
conversion, with all the hope and all the fear that such a word contains. She can die and become. So also is humanity interwoven into the eternal, restless changes of nature, until all Geist is received into the blessed unchangeableness of God, into the restful clarity of the eternal Spirit” (ibid.).
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{644} Cf. Augustine’s famous prayer in the opening of his \textit{Confessions} F.J. Sheed (trans.) (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2006).

\textsuperscript{645} “Die Lehre von der Glückseligkeit bei Aristoteles und Thomas.” Hugo includes an excerpt concerning Thomas’s conception of the beatific vision: “In any case, this teaching shows how high St. Thomas’s ideal of intellectual bliss is, and how stupid it would be to confuse with ideal with the pleasure of professors and philosophers. The Thomist visio contains much more than the \textit{theoria} of Aristotle, all the personal, the near, the unique as it only can be in the blessed communion of Spirit with the beloved God. The human person longingly awaits his revelation: I pray that it be that which I so desire” (“Eucharisticon Fraternitatis,” p. 898).

\textsuperscript{646} “Die Illuminationstheorie des heiligen Augustinus” (ibid.).

\textsuperscript{647} Ibid.
Rahner had developed interests in the Church Fathers and the metaphysics of human
knowledge, interests which intersect with his ongoing themes of spirituality and the
Person of Christ.

Karl Rahner’s publishing activity resumed in 1932 in his final years of studying
theology at Valkenburg. Given the intense, independent schedule of patristic readings
which Karl undertook at the outset of these studies, it is no surprise that these early
publications demonstrate a commitment to the Church Fathers’ world of thought, a
commitment which his brother has said begat a genuine “love” for patristic theology.\textsuperscript{648}
Such an interest was by no means unique to Rahner. Indeed, the so-called \textit{nouvelle théologie} movement was gaining momentum in France as a reaction to the neo-scholastic
approach (increasingly viewed as stultifying) regnant in Catholic theology and was
gaining followers in other parts of Europe. As Vorgrimler has noted, Hugo Rahner
embraced this movement and “made important contacts in Louvain, Brussels and Paris”
in connection with studies at the University of Bonn, which began in 1931 and were
completed with a dissertation in 1934; these connections, Vorgrimler writes, “were very
helpful for his brother Karl.”\textsuperscript{649}

Rahner’s one publication from 1932 is in French and published in the French
journal \textit{Revue d’Ascétique et de Mystique (RAM)}. This article, entitled “The Debut of a
Doctrine of the Five Spiritual Senses in Origen,” was included in shortened form in a

\begin{footnotes}
\item[648] Reflecting on their later methodological parting of ways, Hugo writes, “At the beginning, from
1932 on, as the first entries of your bibliography prove, it looked as if you wanted to commit yourself to the
wisdom of the Fathers, and a final, even ripe fruit of this love of the Church Fathers is the reworking of M.

\end{footnotes}
later volume of Rahner’s *Theological Investigations*. However, it has a predecessor as well in the 1928 *Festschrift*, in a piece called “The Sources of the Doctrine of the Five Spiritual Senses.”

In addition to generating the 1932 piece on Origen, this predecessor also provided the basis for another publication in *RAM* the very next year entitled “The Doctrine of the ‘Spiritual Senses’ in the Middle Ages: Especially in St. Bonaventure.” Rahner’s one other publication in 1933 is yet another piece on historical (in particular, patristic) Christian spirituality, “The Spiritual Doctrine of Evagrius Ponticus: Its Basic Structures.” This piece was not in *Revue d’Ascétique et de Mystique*, but in the similarly titled journal *Zeitschrift für Aszese und Mystik (ZAM)* out of Innsbruck, in which Rahner would also begin publishing frequently.

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650 “Le début d’une doctrine des cinq sens spirituels chez Origène,” in *Revue d’Ascétique et de Mystique* 13 (1932), pp. 113-145. An abridged version, “The ‘Spiritual Senses’ according to Origen,” can be found in *TI* 16:81-103. The unabridged original is planned for inclusion in *SW* vol. 1, pp. 16-65.

651 “Die Quellen der Lehre von den fünf geistlichen Sinnen” (“Eucharisticon Fraternitatis,” p. 898). Hugo writes of this piece, “it grapples immediately the problem of God and the world with evidence that the highest and most spiritual, the divine and its action on the soul, can be best expressed only with the images of immediate sense-knowledge: ‘Mystical experience in its immediacy is always described with images of immediate sense-perception’” (pp. 898-899).


654 This journal would eventually be renamed *Geist und Leben.*
As Rahner began his philosophical studies at Freiburg in 1934, he continued to publish historical studies on Christian spirituality. The first, “The Concept of ‘Ecstasis’ in Bonaventure” (published in \textit{ZAM}) is largely excerpted (though now in German) from the previous year’s piece on Bonaventure in \textit{RAM}.\textsuperscript{655} Another 1934 piece in \textit{ZAM} is “The Meaning of Frequent Confessions in Devotion,” which situates frequent confession within the more general sacramental movement of God within the world and as identifies it as a means for developing one’s spiritual life.\textsuperscript{656} Rahner maintained a keen interest in the topic of frequent confession, which recurred as a theme in the very last entry of \textit{Theological Investigations}.\textsuperscript{657} Another minor publication from 1934 on sacramental thought is “On the Sacrament of Charity,” which occurred in two brief pieces.\textsuperscript{658} Rahner also published a short piece in \textit{RAM} this year entitled, “Jesus’ Sacred Heart in Origen?”\textsuperscript{659} According to Hugo, this article is an expanded version of Karl’s third essay in the 1928 \textit{Festschrift} for his father.\textsuperscript{660} Rahner would return to the relationship between Origen and


\textsuperscript{659} “‘Coeur de Jésus’ chez Origene?,” in \textit{Rivue d’Ascétique et de Mystique} 15 (1934), pp. 171-174. The original German draft is planned for inclusion in \textit{SW} vol. 1.

\textsuperscript{660} “Your third essay argues that Origen does not come as a witness for the question of thought pertaining to the Sacred Heart, and it then appeared in expanded form in a 1934 essay, as your bibliography demonstrates” (“Eucharisticon Fraternitatis,” p. 898).
the Sacred Heart in his dissertation, the basis of which was likely written by or being written at the time of this publication.\(^{661}\) Indeed, the conclusion of this brief article and that of his dissertation bear remarkable similarities.\(^{662}\)

Hugo and Karl Rahner teamed up in 1935 to co-author an article on Jesuit devotional theology entitled, “On the Grace of Prayer in the Society of Jesus, According to Jerónimo Nadal, S.J.”\(^{663}\) Although explicit co-authorship between the two brothers was very infrequent,\(^{664}\) Hugo has described this period as marked by regular collaborative work between them. He and Karl had a “shared concern to engage the problem of ‘God

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\(^{661}\) E latere Christi, p. 32: “Now, what is the symbolic meaning which John saw in the outstreaming of blood and water from the pierced side of Christ? Following the early Origen, the answer is not too difficult. The Messiah is indeed according to his own words the Source of living water. From his ‘heart,’ his interior flows the stream of the Spirit. The source of the Spirit, however, can only be the Messiah lifted onto the cross, the ‘glorified’ Messiah. He is source of the water and the spirit only in the blood. That was why blood and water streams from the pierced heart of the crucified Redeemer.” Cf. pp. 47, 54-55, and Rahner’s concluding remarks on p. 83: “So when we seek in the patristic period an analogue or traces of a of our Sacred Heart devotion, we must not mechanically search for texts in which the Heart of Jesus somehow mentioned. This method leads nowhere. We must instead ask whether the early Christians had a Symbol in which everything that they knew of the redeeming love of God was summed up in an object of their devotion (Whether this Symbol was already the object of a special adoration is another question). But this was for them the pierced side of Jesus.”

\(^{662}\) Compare the conclusion of E latere Christi (cited in the previous note) to this article’s concluding remarks: “But if, in our text, Origen does not employ the same word ‘Sacred Heart of Jesus’, it remains true, however, that the passage in question reflects corresponding patristic ideas which are, in some manner, ideas underlying our modern devotion to Jesus’ Sacred Heart. For the Fathers, Jesus Christ was always the flowing spring of the water of grace. It is from his pierced side that these rivers of grace flow, in which humans draw the sacraments, and from there the emergence of the holy Church, our virgin mother, the second Eve, issues from the side of the second Adam. And it is from this side that John, the prophet, drew the mysteries of his sublime doctrine. Thus, for the Fathers, the pierced side of Christ was a lively symbol of the Savior’s redeeming love for his spouse, whom he sanctifies by the blood and water which sprung forth from the wound of his heart” (“Coeur de Jésus’ chez Origene?” pp. 173-174).


\(^{664}\) The next item of Rahner’s bibliography co-authored with Hugo, Prayers for Meditation (New York: Herder and Herder, 1962), occurs more than 20 years later (Gebete der Einkehr (Salzburg: Otto Müller), 1958).
in the world’ as realized in the theology of the holy Father Ignatius,” and this publications stands as a “first fruit of this effort.”

Aside from a review, Rahner’s other publications from 1935 consist of three homiletic articles published consecutively within the span of about a month that fall. The first is “On the Feast of the Lord’s Transfiguration.” The only figure quoted in this homiletic piece is Augustine. In it, Rahner discusses the transfiguration in terms of Jesus fully revealing himself as the locus of human “union with God.” Continuing, he makes several remarks which anticipate (or, at this point, perhaps echo) themes in his dissertation about Jesus as “Source of the Spirit,” which is poured out from his pierced side upon believers, sanctifying them.

Three weeks later, a second homiletic piece from Rahner, on “The Feast of St. Augustine,” was published. The essay focuses on two main Augustinian ideas. The first is the notion of the human “restless heart,” which, recall, Rahner wrote on in his first entry in the 1928 Festschrift, an entry Hugo called a “veritable prelude” to Spirit in the

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667 “Union with God, which Jesus otherwise holds hidden in the ultimate depths of his soul, now fills up all the chambers of his soul, it embraces his body, drawing it, too, into the blessedness of God’s light and God’s unity” (“The Transfiguration of the Lord,” The Great Church Year, p. 342).

668 “[Jesus] is the wellspring and the plenitude of every Spirit at work in the prophets and presently to be poured forth upon all who believe in him…. [A]ll redemption and all Holy Spirit takes its departure from the cross” (ibid.).

World. The second is Augustine’s directive to “put on the Lord Jesus Christ.” An excerpt from this article is worth quoting at length:

We only discover God in Christ, for no one comes to the Father except through him. Only he knows the way, the truth, and the life, because he is these things himself…. We approach God, the rest of our restless hearts, only through God become man. Only if we believe him and in him, love him with our whole heart, are joined to him by grace, are made living members of his mysterious body, the church, healed and divinized by the life of the Head that streams down upon us, his body, in the sacraments, only then are we in the truth and in God. So Augustine lived and taught: Draw near to the Lord Jesus Christ.670

This excerpt, and the article as a whole, brings together themes (namely, restless hearts and the mystical body of Christ) at the heart of Rahner’s two dissertations from the following year, Spirit in the World and E latere Christi. In it, we witness Rahner appropriate several Augustinian (and, more generally, patristic) ideas as his own: Christ as in his Person salvation (the Way, Truth, and Life), incarnational soteriology, divinization, and participation in the body and Person of Christ by being joined to it as “members.”

Rahner’s third essay published the following week, which I will not discuss here, is “On the Angels.”671 I will also pass over Rahner’s Freiburg dissertation, Spirit in the World, at this point, due to the scope of this biographical/bibliographical overview discussed above. Examinations and summaries of this important work, which has

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670 “Feast of St. Augustine,” The Great Church Year, p. 354.

received abundant attention, are already widely available in Rahner literature in English.⁶⁷²

In this overview of Rahner’s writings prior to his theology dissertation, we have seen Rahner’s fascination with and dedication to (especially Jesuit) spirituality, which has rightly generated a renewed appreciation in recent years for how this spirituality shapes the whole of his theology from the beginning.⁶⁷³ These years also show Rahner’s genuine philosophical interests, especially concerning the metaphysics of knowledge, well before his time at Freiburg. But together with these widely recognized interests is that of the theology of the Church Fathers, particularly Origen and St. Augustine. In the topic of the Jesus’ Sacred Heart, Rahner’s interests in spirituality and historical theology clearly overlap, as devotion concerning Jesus’ Person intersects with patristic soteriological thought regarding that Person as salvation itself, to whom we are joined to realize union with God. This intersection comes to a height in Rahner’s dissertation at Innsbruck, which we will consider at length.

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⁶⁷³ See notes 589-593 above.
4.3.2 Innsbruck dissertation: E latere Christi [From the Side of Christ]: The Origin of the Church as Second Eve from the Side of Christ the Second Adam. A Study of the Typological Meaning of Jn 19:34

Most references to “Rahner’s dissertation” which one encounters in theological conversation concern his philosophical work at Freiburg; as it was mentioned at the outset of the chapter, many biographical accounts of Rahner’s life omit any mention of E latere Christi at all. Even Rahner himself has downplayed the value of the work, calling it “a small, miserable, but by former standards sufficient theological dissertation.”674 On the one hand, Rahner, who has also claimed not to have any significant impact on the Second Vatican Council, has a tendency to understate the value of his own work.675 As it has been noted above, the Innsbruck faculty assessed Rahner’s dissertation in terms quite different from “small, miserable, but by former standards sufficient,” calling the project “not only suitable as a doctoral dissertation according to the present applicable standards…, but it goes far beyond the norm for such work and is… ready for

674 In an interview during the mid-1970s, Rahner said of his transition from Freiburg to Innsbruck in 1936, “A spectacular transition from philosophy into theology did not occur, not on that account, since I myself even during my religious studies in Valkenburg was really interested in theological questions, over all in spiritual theology and religious history, in patristic mysticism and also Bonaventure, and also produced a small, miserable, but by former standards sufficient theological dissertation” (“Gnade also Mitte menschlicher Existenz. Ein Gespräch mit und über Karl Rahner aus Anlaß seines 70. Geburtstages,” in Herder-Korrespondenz 28 (1974), pp. 77-92, at 79f.).

675 “I must say that I did not exercise any great influence at the [Second Vatican] Council. To say anything else is just not true. There were so many periti and collaborators at the Council that no one, except the pope himself and the moderators, could be said to influence the Council in any significant way. It is true that I attended almost all of the meetings of the Theological Commission and that I collaborated with the other theologians. As you know the most important schemata of this commission were on the Church and revelation. I was a member of certain subcommissions that worked on these, but my contribution was not great” (Karl Rahner in Dialogue, p. 20). For more on Rahner’s understatement regarding his contribution to Vatican II (a phenomenon impacted by more than just humility), see Wassilowsky, Universales Heilssakrament Kirche, p. 102.
publicaion.” On the other hand, his lack of enthusiasm may be rooted in more than just modesty.

Rahner’s reservations about the value of *E latere Christi* later on in life might be, at least in part, attributed to a pair of factors. The first has to do with the dissertation’s central, typological idea that the Church (styled as the “Second Eve”) originated from the pierced side of (“sleeping”) Jesus (the “Second Adam”). At this point in his career, Rahner seems to have been fascinated with Johannine thought, and indeed, the birth of the Church roughly around this time of Christ’s death makes considerable sense within a Johannine framework, in which Christ’s death, resurrection, ascension, and giving of the Spirit are largely collapsed into a singular event of glorification. However, later in his career, Rahner seemed more inclined to relate his “dogmatic” theological reflections to contemporary biblical scholarship of the time and less to particular frameworks like that of John. Most historical critical scholars, Rahner writes in *Foundations of Christian Faith*, recognize that “something like the constitution of the church is found soon after Easter.” Not only the chronology of the Church’s origin, but his manner of utilizing the Bible in these early years may have tempered Rahner’s enthusiasm for the dissertation.


679 *FCF* p. 327, emphasis added.
A second factor may be a later hesitancy about his bold historical undertaking in *E latere Christi* to demonstrate that this particular typological idea about the emergence of the Church from Christ’s pierced side can be traced back to the preaching of the apostles themselves. This claim, which occurs in multiple, prominent places in the dissertation, about the very words of the apostles, is a difficult one to substantiate. Moreover, undertaking such a task may reflect the influence of a kind of Catholic dogmatic positivism (i.e., anything authoritative said by the Church and not explicitly in the Bible came directly from the apostles, if not from the mouth of Christ himself!) which abounded during this largely “anti-modernist” period. While Rahner was certainly no warrior against “modernism,” he did receive a very traditional, neo-scholastic theological training that impacted his method for doing theology, and this environment may, at least in part, help to explain Rahner’s attempt to make this historical claim. Although such an endeavor may have been relatively routine in the 1930s, it sounds somewhat bizarre to the later Catholic ear, including, quite likely, that of Rahner. Whatever they may be, Rahner’s reasons for later belittling of *E latere Christi* seem to go beyond just modesty. Even ten years before Rahner’s remarks in the mid-1970s cited above, his brother Hugo referred to their dissertations, “to this day buried in the faculty archive,” as “probably belong[ing] to the writings about which we smile and count among the ‘prehistory’ of our scholarship.”

Nevertheless, even if the Rahner brothers considered *E latere Christi* to be a “prehistorical” effort which preceded Karl’s more developed theology, it still holds great

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value for understanding his thought. After all, the theme of “God in the world” which might best summarize the whole of Rahner’s scholarly corpus was, as Hugo reports, already a central interest of Karl’s back in 1922.\footnote{Ibid., see note 597 above.} If the formative beginnings of Rahner’s intellectual trajectories are detectable some 14 years prior to the completion of \textit{E latere Christi}, this early project, “pre-historic” as one may consider it to be, certainly deserves attention as a formative moment itself. Its importance is even more evident when one considers the length of time Rahner was involved in this project; recall, Karl was soliciting bibliographical material on “the Ecclesia ex latere Christi” from Hugo six years earlier in June 1930.\footnote{See note 622 above.} In addition, \textit{E latere Christi} was undertaken for entirely independent reasons while Rahner was completing numerous actual requirements during his formal theological and philosophical training. Even taking into account what come across later on as minor embarrassments, the sheer energy which Rahner spontaneously invested into this project attests to the value it harbors for understanding the history and even early foundation of his thinking.

And yet, relative to the enormous body of secondary literature on Karl Rahner, very sparse attention has been dedicated to \textit{E latere Christi}, which seems typically to have been regarded (inasmuch as it is regarded at all) simply as a degree requirement.\footnote{The modest attention it \textit{has} received focuses heavily on the work’s brief conclusion, which lays a (fascinating) agenda for Rahner’s future work. Joseph Wong’s short analysis (\textit{Logos-Symbol}, pp. 40-45) and the even briefer remarks of James Buckley ("On Being a Symbol: An Appraisal of Karl Rahner" \textit{Theological Studies} 40.3 (1979), pp. 453-473, at pp. 458-459) and Bernd Jochen Hilberath and Bernhard Nitsche ("Das Symbol als vermittelnde Kategorie zwischen Transzendentaltät und Geschichte in der transzendentalen Theologie Karl Rahners," in M. Laarmann (ed.), \textit{Erfahrung-Geschichte-Identität: Schnittpunkt von Philosophie und Theologie} (Freiburg i.Br.: Herder, 1997), pp. 239-260, at pp. 242, 258) consider Rahner’s early references to \textit{Symbol} in \textit{E latere Christi}. A. Callahan’s treatment is oriented}
A testimony to this dearth of interest is the fact that *E latere Christi* was only published in 1999 (and even then not as a standalone publication, but within Rahner’s “Collected Works” project). In the introductory remarks to volume three of these collected works, Andreas Batlogg explicitly laments that *E latere Christi* has generally been ignored, dismissed as randomly chosen and only marginally related to his later work.⁶⁸⁴ Karl Neufeld shares Batlogg’s complaint, asserting that Rahner’s interests motivating *E latere Christi*, a work which was “more than just a ticket of admission into academia,” serve as a “substratum” underlying parts of his later work, even if Rahner did not openly identify them as such.⁶⁸⁵

4.3.2.1 *E latere Christi*: Introduction

On the lookout for themes in continuity with the later soteriology from Rahner addressed in earlier chapters of this dissertation, let us turn to *E latere Christi* itself.⁶⁸⁶

toward Rahner’s interest in devotion to Jesus’ Sacred Heart (*Karl Rahner’s Spirituality of the Pierced Heart*, pp. 2-9). A. Batlogg’s interest, at least for his own (now published) dissertation, lies in the soteriological import of the events occurring over the course of Jesus’ earthly life (*Die Mysterien des Lebens Jesu bei Karl Rahner*, pp. 288-299). Rahner’s intense engagement with historical theology, especially that of the Fathers, which comprises the majority of the dissertation, has elicited little interest.


⁶⁸⁵ *E latere Christi*, Neufeld writes, “represents more than just a ticket of admission into the academic arena. Rahner has developed and freely chosen this point of emphasis of his work; no one invited or compelled him. The free choice of the theme of the theological dissertation and hence the further interest in the thinking of the Church Fathers up through *Aszese und Mystik* allows a deeper bond to come to light, which was long ago established to the end even without explicit references and citations – established as a substratum in places, where they are not explicitly and thematically named” (Neufeld, “Editionsbericht,” p. xiv).

⁶⁸⁶ Hilberath and Nitsche explicitly note the soteriological import of *E latere Christi*: “Rahner’s theological dissertation analyzes the interpretation of John 19:34, presenting the image of Christ’s wounded side in the theology of the Fathers. This theology read the outflow of water and blood as the birth of the Church, which is completed anew in the sacraments of the baptism (water) and the Eucharist (blood). Simultaneously, the theology of the early Church understood the emergence of the Church typologically, placing it parallel to the emergence of Eve from the side of Adam. Just as Eve, the mother of the living,
The central idea around which the dissertation is constructed (I will call this “Rahner’s theme” or “Rahner’s type”) is a typological idea: Just as Eve was formed from the side of sleeping Adam, so the Church (the “Second Eve”) was originated from the pierced side of Christ (the “Second Adam”) “sleeping” on the cross. Adam and Eve are thus “antetypes” \([\text{Vorbilder}]\) to Christ and the Church.\(^{687}\) Although \(E\) latere Christi, with its focus on the Church as the Second Eve, may very well be described as an “ecclesiology” dissertation, it could also be accurately described as a dissertation on typology, on biblical exegesis, on historical content of apostolic preaching, and also of the Person on Christ (the Second Adam) and soteriology, and perhaps even pneumatology. The dissertation’s ecclesiology is not focused so much on the Church \(\text{in se}\) as a phenomenon, but upon the relationship of the body of Christians to the Person of Christ through the Holy Spirit, as expressed in biblical terms.\(^{688}\)

In his introduction, which spans just two and a half pages, Rahner explains that when he uses the words “type” or “typology,” especially concerning the event of Christ’s pierced side, he intends to convey a twofold meaning. The first facet is that a typological moment like the piercing is deeply \textit{symbolisch}, insofar as this moment demonstrates an intimate, \textit{symbolisch} interrelationship between Christ (the Source), the Spirit (the

\(^{687}\) \(E\) latere Christi, p. 9.

\(^{688}\) In one of the dissertation’s opening sentences, Rahner writes, “From the pierced side of the Crucified flows the living stream of the Spirit, which creates humanity anew, able to be born again to the Church. For all who are born again in the waters of baptism, have \textit{one} life, they form a mysterious unity, a body, the Church” (ibid.).
Renewer), the Church (the renewed); the second facet is the more temporal antetype/fulfillment relationship between Adam and Eve in the OT and Christ and the Church in the NT. Although Rahner does not elaborate here on the first facet (the second is fairly standard), he returns to the idea of *Symbol* throughout the dissertation, especially in its conclusion.

As Rahner closes his introduction, he asserts that although his theme is not articulated explicitly in the NT, it is “biblical” insofar as it can be traced back to apostolic preaching; it is present in the NT in the mode of an idea of which John is “reminding” his readers in John 19:34. In order to better understand this theme, Rahner will turn to the early Church and its exegesis of John 19:34. These patristic theologians, he argues, remained within the (Johannine) world of thought which produced John 19:34, so we ought to read *it* in light of *them*; the Fathers do not only build upon it, but also provide a window back to it.

4.3.2.2 *E latere Christi*: Chapter 1 – Biblical Foundations

Although the Bible itself does not explicitly contain Rahner’s theme, it does contain the “essential elements” of which the theme is composed. Rahner identifies these

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689 “‘Typological’ is meant in a double sense: [1.] the act by which the blood and water emerged from the side of Christ is a *Symbol*, that the Church as founded in the Holy Spirit draws its origin from the Crucified, insofar as he as such (blood) is the Source of the Spirit (water). And insofar as the emergence of blood and water is the *Symbol* of the emergence of the Church, the second Eve, it is [2.] the fulfillment of that antetype (*typos*) which was included in the formation of Eve from the side of Adam” (ibid., p. 10).

690 Ibid. John 19:34 states, “one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out.”

691 *E latere Christi*, pp. 10-11.
elements by exploring Pauline and Johannine writings in the New Testament, in that order. Paul’s use of “types” is well known, especially his appeal to Christ as the “New Adam” (Rom 5:13, 1 Cor 15:45-47). Echoing his introduction, Rahner insists that “type,” as Paul uses it, indicates a robust theological (even symbolisch) correspondence between two realities. This is especially true of the Adam/Christ typology, which centers on the way in which the one relates to the many or to all. As Rahner exegetes Romans 5, “One man stands against the rest of humanity in a way that the destiny of all humankind hangs on his conduct”; he continues, “the fact that one particular individual can have such a significant influence on all other people, must somehow be rooted in the nature of this individual, in a deeper-lying relationship of this individual to the rest of humanity.” Such a “nature,” according to which the one truly represents the many, is that of the first and second Adams.

Rahner’s attention to strands of representative Christology in Paul becomes even more interesting when he shifts to explicitly soteriological considerations. Rahner underlines that Christ’s restoration of humanity is not just the result of his actions, but is rooted in the Christ-event itself, in Christ’s being the incarnate Word of God. Still reflecting on Romans 5, he writes, “Christ is ancestor and head of all the spiritually living and not only through his redemptive activity, but rather by his very nature as the God-

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693 E latere Christi, p. 12.

694 Ibid., pp. 13-14.

man, and as such he shares, as new life-source, the supernatural life with all people, so that this life can only be found in him.\textsuperscript{696} That is, Christ constitutes the very \textit{locus} of supernatural life (i.e., salvation), which is realized in our incorporation into his body (i.e., the Church). Paul’s preferred way of speaking about the Church is always in terms which are intimately related to Christ himself, either as his body\textsuperscript{697} or in conjugal imagery as his bride.\textsuperscript{698} While Paul does not go so far as to name the Church the “Second Eve,” Rahner writes, the idea is latent in his theology, which knows the Church to be the bride of the Second Adam.\textsuperscript{699} The place of Christ’s wounded side, however is entirely absent from Paul.\textsuperscript{700}

Unlike in Paul, typology is not an object of explicit reflection in Johannine theology.\textsuperscript{701} Nevertheless, Rahner argues, typological thinking is operative (e.g., the brazen serpent, bread of life and manna, the Passover lamb, etc.). Again echoing his introduction, Rahner insists that Johannine types do not simply relate past (OT) and newer (NT) events, but have a symbolic, soteriological significance: “According to John,

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{696} Ibid., p. 15. Rahner evaluates 1Cor 15 similarly, saying of v. 22 that “Both, Adam and Christ, stand to determine the fates of all” (ibid.), and of vv. 48-49: “the two Adams bequeath their essential properties, which arise out of their origin (1 Cor 15:47), to the people…. The first Adam is thus the ancestor of the ‘physical/natural’ being of humankind, while Christ, the final Adam, is the origin of the ‘spiritual’ mode of human being…. Both transmit to all of their descendents the life that they themselves possess.” (ibid., p. 16).
  \item \textsuperscript{697} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{698} Ibid., pp. 16-21
  \item \textsuperscript{699} Ibid., pp. 18, 21
  \item \textsuperscript{700} Ibid., p. 21.
  \item \textsuperscript{701} Rahner considers the Fourth Gospel, Johannine epistles, and Revelation under this “Johannine” category.
\end{itemize}
the individual events of the Jesus’ life themselves have a symbolischen sense, are expressions of the fundamental relationships in the Reign of God and redemption.”

The events described by John which fulfill OT antetypes also effect human salvation in a particularly symbolic mode. Rahner explains, “Jesus’ miracles are for John clearly not seen merely as ‘signs’ [σημα] in the general sense, as ‘notifications’ [Anzeigen] of his messianic mission in general, but rather they are also Symbole for certain aspects of the messianic efficacy of Jesus in particular.” (For our purposes, Rahner’s early distinction here between “signs” and Symbole, only the former of which stand as “notifications”, is particularly important, insofar as it anticipates the distinction between Vertretungssymbole and Realsymbole in “Theology of the Symbol” two decades later and also militates against reading his soteriological role for Christ as God’s “Notifier.”)

The majority of Rahner’s treatment of the Fourth Gospel centers around two loci, 7:35-37 and 19:34-35. The first of these loci concerns the idea of Christ as the “Source of the Spirit” or the “Fount of Life” (fons vitae). Rahner argues that John’s account of Christ’s piercing in chapter 19, which depicts water flowing forth from his side, is directly foreshadowed earlier in chapter 7. The interconnection of water, the Spirit, and

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702 E latere Christi, p. 22

703 Ibid., pp. 22-23.

704 See Chapter 2 and Chapter 1 above for these (respective) points.

705 Notably, this second descriptor was the title of Hugo Rahner’s own dissertation at Innsbruck. The interplay of the two brothers’ research is readily apparent in this section of E latere Christi.
Jesus Christ permeate the Gospel of John. Christ promises to give the gift of God himself in outpouring water (John 4:10, 14). Christ invites those who thirst to come to him (John 7:37), for his water is the Holy Spirit (John 7:39).

In this regard, John 7:38 is especially important: “Let the one who believes in me drink. As the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.’” As Rahner notes, the “his” (αυτου) is ambiguous, although it is usually understood to refer to “the one who believes in me.” Rahner, however, vigorously argues that John intended for it to refer to Christ. He reasons, “When Jesus says… that one should come to him in order to drink, he describes himself as the Source of the living water (7:37). If now Scripture, which leads Jesus to affirm this idea, explains the faithful as

706 “Since the gift of the Spirit, which is the means of salvation (Acts 2:16, 33, 38), appears as a gift of water, thus the Messiah must give this water, he must give this living water to all to drink, he must himself be the Source of the living Spirit-water” (E latere Christi, p. 25, emphasis original).

707 “Jesus answered her, ‘If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, “Give me a drink”, you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water…. [T]hose who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.’”

708 “On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, ‘Let anyone who is thirsty come to me.’”

709 “Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified.”

710 “… Ποταμοι εκ της κοιλιας αυτου ρευσουσιν.”

711 I.e., “Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.” (This is the NRSV translation.)

712 I.e., “Out of Christ’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.”

713 Rahner states that the “Scripture” to which Jesus alludes most likely refers to God pouring out the gift of water: Prov. 10:11 (“The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence.”), Prov. 18:4 (“The words of the mouth are deep waters; the fountain of wisdom is a
the Source of the living water, it would generate an unlikely leap in thought, and it would introduce a thought which would be entirely external to the previous thinking of his listeners and Jesus’ words.”

Since God himself is the source of the Spirit and thus human salvation, Rahner concludes, “Jesus can rightly claim, as Scripture says, that rivers of living water will emanate from the interior of the Messiah (as the Representative [Stellvertreter] of God and the Mediator of God’s gifts).”

Rahner links this claim in John 7 about Christ as the Source of the Spirit (fons vitae) to the piercing episode in chapter 19, during which water and blood flow from the wounded side of the Crucified, via Christ’s “heart” [κοιλιας], out of which the living water to said to flow (John 7:38). The likely Hebrew ancestors of this words, as well as their Greek, German, and English counterparts, “have, in addition in addition to their physiological meaning of ‘belly,’ ‘womb,’ and ‘bowels,’ a common, distinct spiritual sense: the ‘inside’ of a person, the ‘heart’ as the seat of the soul and of private spiritual stirrings.”

This double sense of “heart” ought to shape our understandings of both John 7:38 and 19:34, in which case “the ‘heart of the Messiah is the source of the stream of living water. From his heart pours out the water of salvation, from which we should draw gushing stream.”

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714 E latere Christi, p. 26

715 Ibid. It is clear here that Rahner’s (clearly favorable) use of the term Stellvertreter does not connote the idea of a proxy or substitute, but rather one who participates intimately in and in fact is the represented “other.” This usage, which demonstrates how intimately linked the ideas of das Realsymbol and (authentic) representation are for Rahner even early on, accords with his qualified approval of the term in his mature years (see Chapter 1.3.1 above).

716 Ibid., p. 29.
in joy (cf. Isa 12:3).” On Rahner’s understanding, Jesus’ words about his heart as the source of living water in John 7:37 are brought to fulfillment in the piercing of his side, out of which John reports water to have flowed (19:34).

Rahner also links the flow of blood in 19:34 to Jesus’ earlier words. In John 7:39, Jesus explains that the gift of the Spirit (i.e., water from the heart of the Messiah) can only occur subsequent to Christ’s glorification (i.e., his being ‘lifted up’ on the cross). Christ’s bloody glorification/crucifixion is bound up inextricably with the symbolisch fulfillment of his being the cleansing Source of the Spirit, both in John 7:38–39 (“rivers”, “glorified”) and John 19:34 (“water”, “blood”). Rahner estimates that John strongly married the “blood” and “water” components of his fons vitae thinking in order to ward off a restrictive focus on Christ’s baptism (to the exclusion of his crucifixion) as soteriological noteworthy, a focus advocated by some Gnostic groups. Thus, the water from Jesus’ side ought not to be understood exclusively or even principally in terms of baptism, but even more fundamentally as the Holy Spirit, as grace itself.

717 Ibid.

718 Like “typology,” Rahner’s idea of “fulfillment” is not simply a past-future correspondence, but a profound symbolisch relationship. “The outflowing of blood and water from the side of Jesus is thus a symbolic [symbolische] fulfillment of the prophecy which Jesus gave in Jn 7:38, according to which from his ‘heart’ the stream of living water will flow, that, as John notes the same, only from the glorified Messiah on the cross could be realized” (ibid., p. 33, emphasis added). That is, Christ’s identity as the Fons Vitae in fact comes to pass fully precisely in the piercing of his side.

719 “Now [Jesus] said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified.”

720 E latere Christi, p. 34. Rahner, almost certainly relying on Irenaeus (cf. AH III.11.1) specifically posits John to have been countering the thought of a Gnostic by the name of Cerinthus. Rahner sees the effort to combat this thinking in other Johannine literature as well, e.g., 1John 5:6, 1:7b, and 2:2).

721 “From the wounded side of the Messiah flows, with the blood, the sign of the redemptive suffering, also the water, the Symbol of the outpouring of the Spirit…. So we need to think about water
Rahner concludes the chapter by noting that the *fons vitae* thinking of John 7:37-39 and 19:34-35 stands as a central component of his typological theme about the Second Eve emerging from the side of the Second Adam. John’s *fons vitae* Symbol-typology, together with Paul’s typology of Christ as the New Adam and his bride, together provide all of the “elements” of which Rahner’s theme is composed. However, explicit articulation of the theme itself only occurs in the Fathers. Did the Fathers then, Rahner asks, build upon these Johannine and Pauline elements to construct the theme for the first time, or were they rather restating an idea which, John particularly, presumed his readers to know? In his subsequent chapters, Rahner sets out to argue for the latter.

4.3.2.3 *E latere Christi*: Chapter 2 – The Patristic Literature Up to the Mid-Third Century

There is about a century-long gap, Rahner estimates, between the Fourth Gospel (c. A.D. 90) and an extant record of the first full-fledged articulation of Rahner’s theme by Tertullian (*De Anima* c. A.D. 200). In his second chapter, Rahner seeks to show how the biblical “elements” for his theme were transmitted and developed during this intervening period. Rahner’s emphasis, once again, is on the transmission of these elements, which he believes to already have formed a completed version of his theme during the time apostolic preaching, a version which was repeated within a broad, typological oral tradition.⁷²² Elements which Rahner seems to think are apostolic in from the wounded side of Jesus not exclusively in terms of baptism, but rather as the ‘Holy Spirit,’ as grace in general” (*E latere Christi*, p. 35).

⁷²² Rahner ventures that “the NT types are not only the foundation of the patristic doctrine of types, but rather only scattered testimony to a much richer, typology of oral tradition existing from the beginning, so that one could speak of types without the use of the NT.” Rahner continues, citing examples: “where Adam appears as a type, immediately equality-relations between Adam and Christ are worked out which are missing in Paul. So, for Irenaeus (AH III.21.10; Epid. 32) Adam, in his creation, is a prototype
origin, but only recorded during this intervening period, include the idea of Adam as a prophet as well as the theme’s “sleeping” motif (Eve emerges while Adam sleeps in the garden; the Church emerges as Christ “sleeps” on the cross).

Although the “element” of Christ as the Second Adam is quite clear during this intervening period, Rahner struggles to demonstrate the element of the Church as the Second Eve, which is much more inchoate in this early patristic literature. Rahner cites language about the Church as bride, virgin, wife and mother in a host of these writers, but the actual descriptor “Second Eve” remains rather implicit, entailed by (but not specified within) their works. Irenaeus presents an especially interesting challenge, as he appears to identify Mary, rather than the Church, as the “New Eve” in AH III.22.4. In fact, Rahner does not mention this verse, but focuses rather on passages about the Church as Christ’s bride, and, in a footnote, argues that other Irenaean passages about of the virgin birth of Jesus, since he was formed from the untilled, virgin earth. The same thinking guides Tertullian (De res. carn. 6; Adv. Jud. 13)” (E latere Christi, p. 37).

Clement, Tertullian, and Origen regard Adam as a prophet insofar as he spoke about Eve not primarily in terms of marriage but in looking forward to Christ and the Church (ibid., pp. 37-38).

Rahner cites this sleeping motif in Justin Martyr, the Sibylline Oracles, Irenaeus of Lyons, Clement of Alexandria, Hippolytus, Tertullian, and Cyprian of Carthage (ibid., p. 38).

These writers include Ignatius of Antioch, Clement of Rome, Shepherd of Hermas, Eusebius of Caesarea, Odes of Solomon, Sibylline Oracles, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Hippolytus, Novatian, Cyprian (ibid., pp. 39-41).

“Insofar as [the Church] becomes one flesh, one body with Christ, which communicates new life (particularly in peoples’ baptism), she is the true mother of the living. Insofar as she herself carries all of these features which were possessed by Eve in paradise, she is the second Eve” (ibid., pp. 38).

E.g., “For what the virgin Eve had bound fast through unbelief, this did the virgin Mary set free through faith.”

“rebirth” and a “virgin” better correspond to the Church than to Mary.\textsuperscript{729} The inchoate nature of the “Church as Second Eve” element during this period seems to be a weak point in Rahner’s argument for the apostolic origin of his full-fledged theme.

Rahner is able to garner patristic witnesses for a much more robust demonstration of another element, namely, Christ’s wounded side as source of the Spirit.\textsuperscript{730} Rahner offers an impressive and wide-ranging survey of early Christian attestation to this idea, citing the \textit{Gospel of Hebrews, Epistle of Barnabas, Ignatius, Odes of Solomon,\textsuperscript{731} Justin,\textsuperscript{732} Sibylline Oracles, Apocalypse of Baruch, Letter from Vienna and Lyons,\textsuperscript{733} Apollinaris Claudius of Hierapolis,\textsuperscript{734} the Gnostic Pistis Sophia,\textsuperscript{735} and Clement of Alexandria.\textsuperscript{736} But

\textsuperscript{729} Note 52 on ibid. These passages state that our rebirth is a “rebirth of a virgin through faith” (\textit{AH} IV.33.4). Christ has, as “pure, and in pureness opened a pure womb, that same womb which gives us a new birth into God, which womb he himself made pure” (\textit{AH} IV.33.11).

\textsuperscript{730} Specific loci for explicit claims made by the Fathers to this effect include “water as \textit{Symbol} of the Spirit; the Messiah as Source of life, Christ as the split, water-giving rock; the springing-forth of Spirit-Water on the Cross; the profound meaning of the piercing of Jesus’ side and the flowing forth of blood and water; baptism and the cross hanging together” (\textit{E latere Christi}, p. 41).

\textsuperscript{731} “The origin of the living, speaking, immortal water is, according to Ode 30, ‘from the heart of the Lord,’ from the heart of the Messiah” (ibid., p. 43).

\textsuperscript{732} Rahner (ibid., p. 44) cites \textit{Dial.} 138, which is infused with recapitulation theology: “Christ, being the first-born of every creature, became again the chief of another race regenerated by Himself through water, and faith, and wood, containing the mystery of the cross.”

\textsuperscript{733} “It is one unique example which shows that the Asia-minor Johannine tradition of Polycarp and the other \textit{presbyteroi} was transplanted into Gaul. John’s thought did not live on in the thought of Irenaeus alone” (\textit{E latere Christi} p. 44).

\textsuperscript{734} “Blood and water are for Apollinaris certainly a \textit{Symbol}, are purifying and expiatory streams of salvation” (ibid., p. 46).

\textsuperscript{735} “Water and blood from the side of Christ are thus a \textit{Symbol} of his redemptive operation” (ibid.).

\textsuperscript{736} Ibid., pp. 42-47.
longer than his treatment of any of these figures is his treatment of Irenaeus and his attestation to the Spirit issuing forth from Christ’s side, establishing the Church.\footnote{Rahner’s treatment of Irenaeus spans pp. 44-46 of ibid.}

Rahner cites a veritable catalogue of pneumatological and ecclesiological excerpts from Irenaeus’s \textit{Adversus Haereses} concerning the Spirit in various respects: within the faithful (\textit{AH} V.18.2), as the living water promised by Christ in John 4:11-14 (\textit{AH} III.17.2), as the dew (\textit{AH} III.17.3), as the water that “binds us as one dough lump, one bread, to become one Church (III.17.2),” and as the a stream which “irrigates the chosen people of God (IV.33.17; \textit{Epid.} 89).”\footnote{Ibid., pp. 44-45.} However, Rahner notes in a section worth citing at length, for Irenaeus, the Holy Spirit only so permeates the Church on account of the Person of Christ:

all of this water of the Spirit flows to the Church from Christ. The Spirit first arose in descending on him, “becoming accustomed in fellowship with Him to dwell in the human race, to rest with human beings” (III.17.1). So Christ is as the rock, from which the water streamed, already announced in the OT (IV.14.3, 27.3; \textit{Epid.} 46…; \textit{Frag.} 3). This gift (the drink, which swells unto eternal life, the Spirit), which the Lord received from his Father, he gives also to those, \textit{who have a share in him}, in whom the Holy Spirit is sent to the whole earth (III.17.2). III.24.1 says: “where the Church is, there is the Spirit of God; and where the Spirit of God is, there is the Church, and every kind of grace; but the Spirit is truth. Those, therefore, who do not \textit{partake of Him}, are neither nourished into life from the mother’s breasts, nor do they enjoy that most limpid fountain which issues from the body of Christ.”\footnote{Ibid., p. 45, emphasis added.}

In the theology of Irenaeus, Rahner is able to connect the ideas of Spirit, water, the Church, Christ, and even the \textit{fons vitae} of Christ’s body to form a considerable
portion of his dissertation’s theme. Moreover, and important to the thesis of my own
dissertation, Rahner is operating in thoroughly Person-centered, representative categories.
Christ is *himself* the fount of the Spirit, granting salvation to the faithful. It is through
“hav[ing] a share in him,” by “partak[ing]” of the God-man that we receive “every kind
of grace.”

Turning to Irenaeus’s more explicit reflections on Christ’s pierced side, Rahner
further underlines Irenaeus’s representative soteriology, expressed in the concept of
recapitulation. In doing so, Rahner provides one of the most important passages for my
argument about his own genuinely representative soteriology. Rahner writes,

Irenaeus speaks frequently of the opening of Jesus’ side and the outpouring of
blood and water. It is for him a “*symbolon* of the flesh, which had been derived
from the earth, which He had recapitulated in Himself, bearing salvation to his
own handiwork” (III.22.2). For him this blood and water is first of all a sign of
the true humanity of Christ, against all Gnostic Docetism. However with and in
this truth of the true humanity of Christ, he defends the whole order of salvation,
*because Christ is the acceptance of true humanity, the “flesh” which
“recapitulated” all flesh.* Since for Irenaeus the incarnation and redemption hang
together so tightly, so each sign of Christ’s true humanity is precisely a “*Symbol*
of that “flesh which he recapitulated in himself.”

That Rahner (accurately) describes Irenaeus in Person-centered, “representative”
terms is hardly a surprise. But this passage is genuinely remarkable in two respects.
First, Rahner explains Irenaeus’s representative soteriological thought in terms of
*Symbol*. According to Irenaeus, Christ saves humanity by recapitulating humanity in
himself, the True Human. Moreover, every part of Christ’s true human life stands as a
*Symbol* directly linking him to the humanity which he saves via recapitulation. In other

740 Ibid., pp. 45-46 (emphasis added).
words, as a doctoral student, Rahner already understands our “subjective” redemption as occurring according to symbolisch terms, terms which he expressly links to our participation and partaking in the saving Person of Christ. Rahner here provides an explicit connection between patristic, representative soteriological thought and the category of Symbol, which figures prominently in his own mature soteriology.

Second, this connection is further underlined as Rahner cashes out the ideas of recapitulation and Christ’s “true humanity”. He writes, “with and in this truth of the true humanity of Christ, [Irenaeus] defends the whole order of salvation, because Christ is the acceptance of true humanity, the ‘flesh’ which ‘recapitulated’ all flesh.” In this sentence, Rahner identifies the idea of Christic recapitulation (i.e., the “flesh” which “recapitulated” all flesh) with that of Christ being “the acceptance of true humanity.” While these ideas are certainly conceptually close to one another, Rahner’s identification here is incredibly significant in light of his own later soteriological language. As we saw in Chapter 2, in considering the descending and ascending objective aspects of his mature soteriology, the later Rahner speaks in incredibly similar terms: “God’s forgiving love has reached its historically visible culmination in Jesus’ death on the cross, because this love has become irrevocable and has found its acceptance in a human being,” Christ is “the one who is definitively affirmed and accepted by God,” “in him God has accepted

741 See the section on “Subjective Redemption” above in Chapter 2.4.4.


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man,”744 and Christ is “God’s… acceptance of the world into God himself in person and as a person… the unsurpassable and final event.”745 In Rahner’s mature thought, the Christ-event stands as the moment in which the most genuine human, fully open to his transcendent orientation, accepts God and is accepted by God; and at the outset of his career as a theologian, he had more or less equated a basic version of this idea with Irenaean recapitulation.

4.3.2.4 E latere Christi: Chapter 3 – The First Explicit Testimony in the Third Century

Three third-century sources are the first to explicitly contain Rahner’s typological theme. The earliest of these is Tertullian’s De anima, particularly a section of the De anima having to do with philosophical debates over the phenomenon of sleep. Tertullian argues against philosophers who hold sleep to be “unnatural” and “morbid,” appealing to Adam’s act of sleeping in the paradisal garden. Within this discussion, Tertullian remarks, “For as Adam was a figure of Christ, Adam’s sleep shadowed out the death of Christ, who was to sleep a mortal slumber, that from the wound inflicted on His side might, in like manner [as Eve was formed], be typified in the Church, the true mother of the living.”746

Rahner makes two observations about this passage. First, it occurs as a kind of “aside,” a marginal remark within a discussion over philosophical account of human

744 FCF p. 228


physiology. Such a context would hardly be the case to propose a novel typological reading. Second, he notes that Tertullian’s reference to this typological theme does not even include explicit reference to Eve. Such an omission seems to indicate that Tertullian presumed his audience would “fill in” this part of the type. Both of these observations, Rahner convincingly argues, indicate that the type not only predates Tertullian, but that it was fairly established and widely known.747

Rahner’s next move, however, stands more tenuous ground. After establishing that the theme is older than Tertullian, Rahner muses about how easily a text like De Anima might have been lost, in which case many might presume that Tertullian too, in his other writings, had only the “conditions” for or “elements” of the type but hadn’t yet assembled them in other to invent the full-fledged theme. Such a presumption would obviously be faulty. Rahner ventures, “Then, however, tracing it backwards, no certain terminus a quo can any longer be determined, for these ‘conditions’ were always the same, alive. The Church from the side of Christ is good to the earliest Christian tradition.”748 While there is something to be said for dating the type prior to Tertullian, in placing it within “the earliest Christian tradition,” Rahner seems to overstate his case.

The next text, De [duobos] montibus Sina et Sion, originates in early/mid-second century Africa and its author is unknown. This text too explicitly contains Rahner’s

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747 As Rahner puts it, “Tertullian does not discover this idea here for the first time, but rather he casually mentions a long-known thought which is common to him, and also without having to spell out all of its details and conditions, as he can presume they are understandable and known to his readers” (E latere Christi, p. 49).

748 Ibid., p. 50.
theme,\textsuperscript{749} and like Tertullian’s, it contains no explicit reference to Eve; again, Rahner cites this omission as evidence for the audience’s familiarity with the theme. Rahner also discusses Methodius’s allusion to the theme,\textsuperscript{750} followed by a treatment of other authors from this time period\textsuperscript{751} whose writings contain the theme’s “conditions” or “elements.”

Rahner then returns to his argument about the type’s (apostolic) antiquity, doubling down on his previous reasoning rooted in counterfactual thought-experiments about lost manuscripts.\textsuperscript{752} Again, Rahner succeeds in arguing that Tertullian almost certainly stands as an arbitrary “beginning” point, and so the doctrine ought not to be thought of as originating with him. Nonetheless, Rahner’s bold conclusion about the

\textsuperscript{749} “Pierced in the side: out of his side streamed a profuse mixture of blood and water, and so he formed for himself the holy Church, in which he consecrated the Law in his passion, saying: Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. For out of him streams living water” (qtd. in ibid., p. 51).

\textsuperscript{750} Methodius writes, “the Church is formed out of His bones and flesh; and it was for this cause that the Word, leaving his Father in heaven, came down to be ‘joined to his wife;’ and slept in the trance of His passion, and willingly suffered death for her, that he might present the Church to Himself glorious and blameless, having cleansed her by the laver…. For he may fitly be called the rib of the Word, even the sevenfold Spirit of truth, according to the prophet; of whom God taking, in the trance of Christ, that is, after His incarnation and passion, prepares a help-meet for Him – I mean the souls which are betrothed and given in marriage to Him. For it is frequently the case that the Scriptures thus call the assembly and mass of believers by the name of the Church” (Symposium III.8, qtd. in E latere Christi, p. 52; translation from The Banquet of the Ten Virgins; or, Concerning Chastity, in ANF vol. 6, pp. 309-355 at pp. 319-320).

\textsuperscript{751} Namely, Hippolytus, Cyprian, and Origen (E latere Christi, pp. 53-56).

\textsuperscript{752} “If Tertullian’s De Anima and De Montiubus Sina et Sion would have been lost, which for such writings really easily could have been possible, we would not know of a single direct testimony to the teaching in the third century. Without the background-tradition provided by Tertullian and De montiubus Sina et Sion, then Methodius’s testimony, in its ambiguity, also loses much of its worth. The first clear witness would then be Hilary of Poitiers: 150 years later than Tertullian” (ibid., pp. 57-58).
apostolicity of the typological theme\footnote{If we bring together all of these individual considerations, then one may well say with some certainty that the doctrine of the generation of the Church from Christ’s side as antitype of the formation of Eve from the side of Adam goes back to the apostolic age (ibid., p. 57).} seems to rest on a rather vague rationale: “following it backwards, an earliest \textit{terminus ad quo} cannot be specified.”\footnote{Ibid., p. 60.}

Following up on his earlier remark that the Fathers do not only develop apostolic themes but also \textit{transmit} them, Rahner returns to Irenaeus to spell out what precisely he believes John (the apostle to whom the theme can be supposedly traced back) had in mind in teaching the typological doctrine of the Church’s origin. In doing so, he again draws on two concepts from his previous chapter: \textit{Symbol} and soteriology. The piercing of Christ’s side is a \textit{symbolisch} event\footnote{“If for Irenaeus Christ is the water-giving rock and the Source of the living water of the Spirit, then Jn 19:34 must have significance as ‘\textit{Symbol} of the recapitulated flesh’ for him, significance which goes beyond that from which his path of anti-docetic polemic initially takes off” (ibid., p. 59).} of great soteriological significance, even for the apostle John, Rahner asserts.\footnote{Ibid., p. 60} It is a \textit{Symbol}, he explains, of “the soteriological significance of the true human nature of Christ,” more than “merely a defense [against the Gnostics] of the true human nature of Jesus as such, but rather its truth, insofar as through it the salvation of humanity is actually given. This connection is explicitly declared by [Irenaeus].”\footnote{Ibid., p. 59.}

Christ is for John (as Irenaeus attests) the \textit{True Human}, i.e., the New Adam, \textit{in whom} humanity itself is recapitulated and thus \textit{through whom} human salvation is
“actually given.” This giving of salvation is expressed “symbolically”758 in the
soteriologically crucial event of the piercing, in which the Spirit is poured forth and the
New Adam’s “Bride” comes to be, a “Bride” which consists of the “body” of the Church,
the members of which are the baptized faithful.759 By returning to Irenaeus and the
concepts of Symbol and salvation, Rahner is able to show how the logic of fons vitae
thinking about Jesus, something undeniably contained in John, comes to full expression
in the typological theme of the Church as Second Eve. This Irenaean conclusion of the
third chapter thus seems to make an appeal on the conceptual, theological level to the
doctrine’s antiquity and apostolicity, an appeal which supplements his early arguments,
which were more historical and textual in character.

For our purposes, Rahner’s return to Irenaeus at this point, in a chapter on the
century subsequent to Irenaeus himself, shows just how central a thinker the bishop of
Lyons and his Person-centered soteriology are to Rahner’s argument. As Rahner thinks
about human salvation, a reality achieved and given in the human Jesus himself, Irenaeus
and his doctrine of recapitulation stand as a kind of central axis and reference point
around which Rahner constructs both his historical arguments about his typological
theme, as well as his own soteriological reflections about the event of the piercing and the

758 Recall, Rahner intends this word to mean more than “sign.” See note 703 (ibid., pp. 22-23)
above, as well as his return to this distinction in E latere Christi’s conclusion.

759 “That the totality of the redeemed is, for John, a unified whole, is in any case clear, since he
speaks of her as his woman, the bride, etc. This Church as the Reign of God is now established through the
water and the Spirit, for through this the individual (and so also the whole) is reborn into the ‘Reign of
God’ therein (Jn 3:5)” (E latere Christi, p. 60).
Having already reviewed the earliest complete and explicit references to his typological theme, Rahner sets out in his fourth chapter to track repetitions of this theme from the “heyday” of patristic literature up through the end of this Patristic Age in the eighth century. The chapter is rather short compared to the others, but nevertheless contains a host references to patristic theologians and demonstrates Rahner’s extensive reading of texts from this period.

Rahner begins by addressing writings from the height of patristic theology around the beginning of the fifth century, dividing them into Latin, Greek, and Syriac language groups. The Latin group is the largest; it begins in the mid fourth century with Hilary of Poitiers and includes the articulations of the theme by Zeno of Verona, Ambrose of Milan, Jerome, and Augustine of Hippo. Augustine, Rahner reports, repeats the
typological theme of the Second Eve more than any other of the Fathers,⁷⁶⁰ and his particular take on this theme is unique in its emphasis on the sacraments.⁷⁶¹

Augustine’s counterpart as the theological giant of the East is John Chrysostom, who also mentions the theme. “Just as his wife was formed while Adam slept,” Chrysostom writes, “so, when Christ died, the Church was formed from His side.”⁷⁶² The other Greek figure which Rahner treats from this period is Philo Carpasius; two other theologians writing in Syriac mentioned by Rahner are St. Ephrem and Jacob of Serugh.⁷⁶³

Rahner then turns to the later Patristic Age. Although Rahner is able to cite a host of figures referencing the theme, most of them, he notes, simply repeat the doctrine as

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⁷⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 66. Rahner includes two full quotations from Augustine’s Tractates on John: “Adam sleeps, that Eve may be formed; Christ dies, that the Church may be formed. When Adam sleeps, Eve is formed from his side; when Christ is dead, the spear pierces His side, that the mysteries may flow forth whereby the Church is formed” (9.10) and “This second Adam bowed His head and fell asleep on the cross, that a spouse might be formed for Him from that which flowed from the sleeper’s side” (120.2) (translations from NPNF I/7, pp. 66-67, 435). Rahner also cites several other places in which Augustine mentions the theme: On Genesis: A Refutation of the Manichees II.24.37; Reply to Faustus the Manichaeans II.7.8; Expositions on the Psalms 40 n. 10, Ps. 56 n. 11, Ps. 103; Sermon 4 n. 6; Ps. 128 n. 2; Sermon 5 n. 3, Sermon 336 5.5; City of God XXII.17.

⁷⁶¹ Rahner writes that “the sacraments flow forth from the pierced side of Christ, sacraments by which the Church is formed. None of the Fathers implemented more clearly than Augustine the idea that the sacraments flow from Jesus’ side, as a constructive agent, in order to clarify how the Church could result from Jesus’ side. The sacraments arise from Christ’s side, sacraments which in turn give rise to the Church, and so the Church is from the side of Christ. This construction is then the norm during the Middle Ages” (E latere Christi, pp. 66-67).


⁷⁶³ E latere Christi, pp. 67-68.
articulated by either Augustine\textsuperscript{764} or Chrysostom.\textsuperscript{765} The idea, he judges, becomes “frozen,” handed on more or less “formulaically.”\textsuperscript{766} Even so, he says as he concludes the chapter, the doctrine is so ubiquitous that it ought to be regarded as having the authority of a “common opinion of the holy Fathers” \textit{(communis sententia sanctorum Patrum)}.\textsuperscript{767} The Fathers, Rahner judges, held “this Eve-Church parallel as a genuine ‘type’ in the theological sense,” and moreover, they “considered this idea as an integral part of the faith tradition.”\textsuperscript{768}

4.3.2.6 \textit{E latere Christi}: Chapter 5 – The Middle Ages and Modern Times

Rahner’s stated goal for his fifth chapter is like the fourth chapter in its modesty: to trace the typological theme in a rapid survey of the last twelve centuries in order to show that it “did not disappear…, to follow the survival of this Johannine thinking.”\textsuperscript{769} Usage of the doctrine in the early Middle Ages basically consisted of preserving its articulation by patristic thinkers in excerpts, most often in work of scriptural exegesis

\textsuperscript{764} Latin authors subsequent to Augustine in whose writing Rahner finds the theme are Quadrultdeus of Carthage, Prosper of Aquitaine, Eugippius, Fulgentius of Ruspe, Leo the Great, Maximus of Turin, Avitus of Vienne, Pseudo-Ambrose, Gregory of Tours, Gregory the Great, Isidore of Seville, and Ildephonsus of Toledo (ibid., pp. 69-70).

\textsuperscript{765} Nilus of Sinai, Anastasius of Sinai, John Damascene \textit{(Sacred Parallels)} and Theophylakt of Ohrid are cited by Rahner as late Greek patristic figures leaning on Chrysostom to various extents (ibid., p. 68).

\textsuperscript{766} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{767} Ibid., p. 70.

\textsuperscript{768} Ibid., p. 71.

\textsuperscript{769} Ibid.
(but also the occasional sermon). Once, again, Rahner provides citations from a host of theologians leading up the High Middle Ages.\textsuperscript{770}

Beginning in the twelfth century, references to Rahner’s theme increasingly occur “in speculative theology, and migrates from this time even further to specific points in the \textit{Summae} and commentaries on Lombard’s \textit{Sentences}.”\textsuperscript{771} Anselm of Laon and Hugh of St. Victor include the doctrine within systematic treatments of humanity’s creation, and once it found a place in Lombard’s \textit{Sentences}, it “found its place in medieval theology… in the theological textbook of the Middle Ages and so could no longer be forgotten.”\textsuperscript{772} Thomas Aquinas and Bonaventure have recourse to the theme in both their “speculative” and “exegetical” writings, Rahner notes.\textsuperscript{773} But by this point, Rahner laments, the doctrine had largely been transformed into “a piece of learned knowledge from the academy. For that reason, this thought could be thought no longer to be living as it was in the Patristic Period, since all of ‘fount of life’ thinking was no longer clear and alive in the theological depth which the Fathers knew.”\textsuperscript{774}


\textsuperscript{771} Ibid., p. 72.

\textsuperscript{772} Ibid., p. 73.

\textsuperscript{773} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{774} Ibid., p. 74.
Nevertheless, Rahner points out that the doctrine did manage to survive on a more popular level through hymns,\textsuperscript{775} sermons,\textsuperscript{776} occasional appearances in Christian artwork. One such piece of art mentioned by Rahner is a thirteenth century miniature (Figure 2) described by Karl Künstle as follows: “At the feet of the Crucified, God creates Eve from the side of Adam; and from the side of the dying Savior, the Church emerges as crowned, naked figure with a chalice in hand, in which she collects the blood of Christ. Immediately beneath her rises the catechumens’ baptismal font.”\textsuperscript{777} Rahner also notes that several Bibles depict images from the life of Christ flanked by other “typologically” related scenes from the Bible. One such common grouping (e.g., Figure 3, which also dates to the thirteenth century and which Rahner cites) is the piercing of Christ’s side, flanked by images of the creation of Eve and of Moses striking the rock for water in the desert.

\textsuperscript{775} Rahner specifically cites Peter Abelard (ibid., p. 76).

\textsuperscript{776} E.g., those of Bonaventure, Bernardine of Siena, Lorenzo Giustiniani, Thomas à Kempis, Ludolph of Saxony and Hendrik Herp (ibid.).

Figure 2: Thirteenth-century miniature, “Eva und Kirche.” Reproduced from Karl Künstle, *Ikonographie der christlichen Kunst*: vol. 1, pp. 276-277, labeled as “Bild 110.”

Figure 3: Thirteenth-century Bible illustration. Image reproduced from Karl Atz and Stephen D. Beissel, *De kirchliche Kunst in Wort und Bild* (Regensburg: Manz, 1915), p. 72, labeled as “Abb. 134.” For better use of space, I have rearranged the panels to proceed from left to right (horizontally) rather than from top to bottom (vertically).
In both academic and more popular reference to the theme in the Middle Ages, Rahner sees a significant departure from its context and moorings in the early Church. In medieval times, Rahner explains, the “great fundamental truths of faith” are more central to religious life than is their content, which capacitates human beings to elevated life; such content was immediately apparent in the Patristic Age and its “fount of life” thinking. Divorced from the larger “fount of life” thinking of which it was a part, medieval reflection on the piercing of Christ’s side differed significantly from its patristic forbearer. For the Fathers, the piercing of Christ’s side was a symbolisch event in which Christ was revealed and realized as “Source of the Spirit,” the Spirit in which Christians are born anew in baptism as part of the “body” of the New Eve. But subsequently, the event was dealt with either in speculative, academic terms or in devotional terms which were much more individualized. The pierced side became increasingly associated with Christ’s suffering and his pierced heart as a source of “comfort” (rather than the grace of the Holy Spirit) which Jesus personally offers Christians.

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778 E latere Christi, p. 75. Rahner continues, “This inner transformation – or organization, if you will – in the piece of the patristic period to the Middle Ages makes itself palpable in the ‘fount of life’ thinking. It is as if the old patristic formulas, filled with the most profound dogmatic content, from the closing of the patristic period and the early days of the Middle Ages would gradually be depleted, as if one has forgotten their profound content gradually or at least unlearned to find it behind these formulas.”

779 “For the Fathers the pierced side of Christ, from which blood and water streamed forth, was a Symbol indicating that the Messiah is the Source of the Spirit, which the Christian receives in baptism and makes him to be born anew; thus the Church is constructed” (ibid.).

780 “In the Middle Ages there is also an observation, attributed to William of St-Thierry: ‘out of the side of Christ flow the sacraments of redemption,’ however the wounded side of Christ is for William even more the portal through which the believer enters, in order to rest in the Heart of Jesus…. And if the side of Jesus is the Source of ‘grace,’ then ‘grace’ is to be understood in the sense of ‘comfort.’” During the Middle Ages, the soul sees in the wounded side, in the pierced heart a tender Symbol, deep love, with which Jesus, the crucified beloved of the soul, loves in a wholly personal way. The side of Christ is no longer so much the source for the waters of the Holy Spirit, but rather the ‘Heavenly source full of all sweetness’, as described in a Rhenish mystical manuscript…., and a Symbol of the bitter suffering of Jesus. So, the words
Rahner’s sweeping historical survey concludes by considering the Council of Vienne (1312) and a string of figures leading up to the time of his writing. The Council of Vienne makes mention of the typological doctrine in condemning the idea (associated with Peter Olivi) that Christ had not yet died when his side was pierced. However, Rahner judges after carefully analyzing its statement, the council is best understood as not in fact authoritatively defining the typological doctrine itself. Additionally, Rahner demonstrates that the theme was discussed as a possible addition to a draft Vatican I’s De Ecclesia Christi, an addition which never came to pass. His overview of theologians mentioning the theme in the intervening period includes figures such as Suárez, Bellarmine, and Leo XIII (in his 1897 encyclical Divinum illud).

Chapter 5 thus largely consists of Rahner cataloguing a host of historical figures who have written on his theme. As with the previous chapters, this cataloguing is of interest for my own dissertation insofar as his intense historical research testifies to just how seriously Rahner takes the history of theology and the faith’s tradition. However, Rahner’s brief transition from historical accounting into his more “speculative” observation about the theological nature of medieval devotion vis-à-vis that of the Fathers is even more valuable for our own purposes. By lamenting the shift away from fons vitae thinking about the Person of Jesus, Rahner tips his own hand when it comes to his preferred Christology, ecclesiology, and soteriology. Remarks like this make it clear that in the Patristic and Middle Ages may often seem to be similar, but the spirit is different in the words of the medieval mystics than that of the Church Fathers” (ibid.).

781 Ibid., pp. 77-79.

782 Ibid., p. 80.
E latere Christi is more than a foray into purely historical scholarship, but is in fact the basis for an effort of retrieval, i.e., ressourcement.

4.3.2.7 E latere Christi: Conclusion

Whereas the foregoing material in E latere Christi offered only brief indications that Rahner saw the work as a basis for a project of “retrieval” which could renew contemporary “speculative” theology, his conclusion intently focuses upon precisely this point. Accordingly, this conclusion likely contains the material which would be deemed most interesting for today’s readers of Rahner. Rahner begins it with a more “historical” claim: since his typological theme “is a general teaching of the Fathers,” it ought to be deemed a genuine, theological “type” along with those mentioned completely and explicitly in the Bible. But genuine types, he reminds us, are imbued with profoundly symbolisch meaning.

Elaborating upon the suggestion that the piercing has symbolisch meaning, Rahner says that this particular event (as do other events) of Jesus life has great soteriological import. This event, he suggests, is part of a soteriology which cannot be confined within terms of vicarious merit or exemplarism:

the life of Jesus stands, in the life of the Christian, as soteriological not just entirely though the grace merited on the cross and as moral through the individual mysteries in their exemplarity, but rather that also the individual mysteries as individual (even if, of course, they are thereby parts of a salvific life of Christ)

783 Ibid., p. 81.

784 For more on the soteriological import of the events of Jesus’ life to which Rahner attests throughout his career, see Batlogg’s Die Mysterien des Lebens Jesu bei Karl Rahner.
work their way into the life of the Christian as a saving power beyond their moral exemplarity. 785

This soteriology, which Rahner has argued emerges out of a patristic and indeed apostolic fons vitae world of thought, has its basis primarily in the Christian’s direct encounter with Jesus himself – the events of his life, which are salvific in se, “work their way into” the lives of Christians scattered throughout the ages.

Providing more theoretical underpinnings for this kind of soteriology, Rahner suggests, would require pursuing two paths. The first concerns the “philosophy of history”: one must “work out a general ontology of the presence of a human historical process to a ‘later’ time.” 786 Second, one must then “apply such an ontology to considerations of the necessary theological moments of the presence of the events in the life of Jesus in the life of the Christian.” 787 The key for doing this lies in Rahner’s insight that the events of Jesus’ life are Symbole. Rahner explains that the events’ “typological character indicates, indeed precisely, that these events are not merely retrospectively considered by their contemporary observer as Symbole of the timeless work of the redeeming Logos in the life of the Christian, but rather that they through their setting in historical, spiritual person are such ‘Symbole’ from the outset.” 788 That is, an event like Jesus’ piercing is not salvific insofar as we project soteriological meaning upon it, but insofar as it has that meaning for us in virtue of itself.

785 E latere Christi, p. 82.

786 Ibid.

787 Ibid.

788 Ibid.

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If such talk about a *Symbol* does not already point blatantly toward his concerns about “intrinsicity” more than 20 years later in “The Theology of the Symbol,” the remark which follows it does. “But then the question arises, by what and how a *Symbol* in the first sense [i.e., retrospectively considered as such] inwardly distinguishes itself from *Symbol* in the second sense [being “Symbole” from the outset].” This question, which echoes the call he just issued for the development of a “general ontology,” is the question of what distinguishes a *Vertretungssymbol* from *das Realsymbol*, to use his later language. This much is clear as Rahner continues, applying the distinction to the “abiding presence [*Gegenwärtigbleibens*]” of the life of Jesus, saying that “if an event of Jesus’ life has this *Symbol*-character from the outset,” it stands “internally and from the outset…[as] an ‘address’ to the later person.”

It thus appears that by 1936 (and perhaps earlier) Rahner already envisioned a project which shares the structure of and even distinctions within “The Theology of the Symbol.” Saying, “This cannot all be carried out here,” Rahner uses the conclusion of his dissertation to issue the call for a “general ontology” which would undergird specific, theological applications to account for the presence of Christ and his life to Christians and theirs. And the initial theoretical move, it seems, is the distinction between extrinsic “signs” and intrinsic *Symbole*. Likewise, “The Theology of the Symbol” is structured so as to begin with “The Ontology of the *Symbolwirklichkeit* in General” and subsequently treat the “Theology of *Symbolwirklichkeit*.” Moreover, the former section commences

789 Ibid., pp. 82-83.

790 Ibid., p. 83.
with the distinction between extrinsic *Vertretungssymbole* and intrinsic *Realsymbole*, and while the latter applicative section is by no means devoted exclusively to considerations of Christ’s “abiding presence” to the Christian, his treatment of the Church therein indeed discusses this issue (among many others), having recourse to the Church’s *symbolisch* nature to explain the phenomenon.  

Finally, the conclusion of *E latere Christi* ends on the same topic which frames the entirety of “The Theology of the Symbol,” namely, Jesus’ Sacred Heart. Recall, the conclusion of “The Theology of the Symbol” sought to resolve debates about the object of Sacred Heart devotion (i.e., physical heart or saving love) by positing Jesus’ physical heart as *das Realsymbol* of God’s saving love. As *E latere Christi* attests, Rahner had formulated such an idea decades earlier. Rahner’s purpose for identifying the Sacred Heart as a *Symbol* of God’s redeeming love isn’t here, however, at the service of resolving disputes about the devotion. Rather, it is to posit that as such a *Symbol*, Jesus’ Sacred Heart has an earlier, patristic analogue in Christ’s pierced side, which is also such a *Symbol,* “the sign of their redemption, Source of the Spirit, all grace and power unto

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791 “[T]he Church is the persisting presence [Gegenwärtigbleiben] of the incarnate Word in space and time... it continues the symbolic function of the Logos in the world” (“The Theology of the Symbol,” *TI* 4:240). Rahner supplements this idea in a later essay by identifying the Spirit as the “medium” of Christ’s presence to the Church (“The Presence of the Lord in the Christian Community at Worship,” *TI* 10:73-74), thus repeating another of his themes from *E latere Christi.*

792 “Our Sacred Heart devotion today certainly adores the physical heart of Jesus. This physical heart has a priority to other parts of Jesus’ humanity, which are also worthy of adoration, but it is only the object of a special devotion because it is a *Symbol* to us of the redemptive love of the God-man for us, summing up all of the achievements of this love in a sign” (*E latere Christi*, p. 83).

793 “So when we seek in the patristic period an analogue or traces of a of our Sacred Heart devotion, we must not mechanically search for texts in which the Heart of Jesus somehow mentioned. This method leads nowhere. We must instead ask whether the early Christians had a *Symbol* in which everything that they knew of the redeeming love of God was summed up in an object of their devotion.
martyrdom. It was for them the Source of Life which flowed to them through baptism,”
by which they are “united with Christ.”\textsuperscript{794} The Fathers understood this unity in
accordance with what I have called a Person-centered soteriology, for in their baptism,
they understood that “the Spirit flowed to them from the body of the Messiah. When
they drank the blood of Christ in the Eucharist and were thus filled with the love of
Christ, then they thought that this blood also flowed from Jesus’ side.”\textsuperscript{795} In other words,
for the Fathers, the sacraments are indeed about participating in the Person of Christ and
the “abiding presence” of the event in which he literally poured himself out to us on the
cross.

Ending the dissertation, Rahner notes that the contemporary thinking about the
Sacred Heart, while analogous to the pierced side for the Fathers, perhaps sharpens the
\textit{Symbol} insofar as it presents a more easily identifiable “special object of devotion.” Yet,
he asks, “can’t today’s Sacred Heart devotion also learn something from the early
Church?”\textsuperscript{796}

When the devout Christian in the heart of the Savior in turn sees the sign that this
heart entirely, personally loved her and has given itself for her, when this heart is
a reminder to her to consecrate her most inner and personal love in gratitude and
penance to this heart, then she should also, in the Spirit of the early Church, not
forget that the love of this heart encompassed an entire world, redeemed a

\textsuperscript{794} \textit{E latere Christi}, p. 83.

\textsuperscript{795} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{796} Ibid., p. 84.
humanity, and also that she only loves in the love with which the Word become human encompassed the Church, the holy virgin, his bride and our mother. 797

Behind this remark is Rahner’s earlier observation about the “individualization” which occurred in the medieval West in reflections about Christ’s pierced side. *E latere Christi* ends with Rahner’s call for contemporary Christians to infuse their devotion to the Sacred Heart with a *fons vitae* Christology, according to which Jesus encompassed and thus redeemed the entire world in the very center of his being, and that our love is that of the Savior to whom we have been conjugally united. That is, Rahner’s dissertation seems to call for the retrieval of a patristic mindset, a major part of which is a person-centered, representative soteriology.

4.3.3 Early Publications Post-*E latere Christi*

After the completion of his theology dissertation, Rahner’s publications began to proliferate. In particularly, Rahner composed a host of reviews on contemporary literature in patristic studies. 798 Since a full accounting of his work at the point demands more space than is available here, the following section will serve to highlight Rahner’s continued interest in historical (especially patristic) theology and point out some works which help us to trace the development of his understanding of Christ as Savior.

In the same year that he submitted *E latere Christi* (1936), Rahner published five articles, four of which were eventually included in his *Theological Investigations*. The

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797 Ibid.

798 These reviews can be found SW vol. 3, pp. 393-420.
topics included laity and Christian life, \(^{799}\) the Eucharist and human suffering, \(^{800}\) Ignatian mysticism, \(^{801}\) Protestant Christology, \(^{802}\) and the early Church’s understanding of sin, grace, and penance. \(^{803}\) The penultimate article picks up on a theme directly related to \textit{E latere Christi}, considering how various Protestant Christologies account for the “presence” of Christ. The final entry is of special import for two reasons. First, according to Rahner’s bibliography, \(^{804}\) the 40-page “Sünde als Gnadenverlust in der frühkirchlichen Literatur” was recognized by Innsbruck as Rahner’s \textit{Habilitationsschrift}, thus permitting him to teach very soon after he received his doctorate in theology in December 1936. Second, this essay on penance, which traces up to the third century the idea of sin as forfeiting the sanctifying grace received in baptism, once again confirms Rahner’s dedication to early Christian theology at this time. Within this article, \textit{Shepherd of Hermas}, “Gnosticism,” Tertullian, Origen, Cyprian, and Irenaeus of Lyons all receive attention.

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\(^{804}\) Available at <http://www.ub.uni-freiburg.de/fileadmin/ub/referate/04/rahner/rahnersc.pdf>
The following year in 1937, Rahner continued to publish works on spirituality and early Christianity, the latter in essays on Clement of Alexandria and the “supernatural”806 and on baptism and Messalianism (a fourth century heretical movement).807 In addition to these essays, Rahner constructed a manuscript, De Gratia Christi, for the private use of his students at Innsbruck for his first course, devoted to the subject of grace.808 Roman Siebenrock has written about this manuscript in his “Gratia Christi. The Heart of the Theology of Karl Rahner,” though his own purposes for doing so concern Rahner’s Ignatian spirituality more than Rahner’s patristic interests.

Nevertheless, Siebenrock’s general summary of the text from Rahner’s first course shows a work which resonates deeply with the Person-centered, fons vitae thinking which Rahner mined from early theologians like Irenaeus and dwelt upon in E latere Christi:

Grace is first of all uncreated grace, the person of Jesus Christ himself. In the Holy Spirit this grace touches the whole of humankind in Jesus Christ, as the head of redeemed humanity, and wishes to transform it by redemption into the life of God. Therefore, the world exists that Christ can be. The hypostatic union is the goal (finis) of creation. Because in Christ, as the new Adam, this goal of creation has been realised in history, the completion of the life and love of Christ becomes


806 “De termino aliquo in theologia Clementis Alexandrini, qui aequivalet nostro conceptui entis “supernaturalis,” in Gregorianum 18 (1937), pp. 426-431. To be included in SW vol. 5.


the distinguishing sign of (‘supernatural’) salvation: ‘Our supernatural life is the prolongation and explication of the life of Christ.’

The presence of New-Adam, representative soteriology in Rahner’s *De Gratia* course confirms that Rahner was not only fascinated with it, but he furthermore saw it as a soteriological basis for teaching about God’s grace. Christ is himself, as “the head of renewed humanity,” the “finality of grace,” in union with whom humankind encounters the immediacy of God and his universal salvific will.

Rahner continued to attend to the themes of spirituality and patristic theology during his writings in 1938. Rahner wrote on the love of God, and also composed a collection of prayers and meditations for the Vienna Seminary which were published as his first autonomous book (translated as *Encounters with Silence*). Furthermore, he wrote an article on Augustine and semi-Pelagianism and that summer, he completed *Aszese und Mystik in der Väterzeit*, his expansion and translation of Viller’s work discussed above. This monumental work in patristics, which Rahner had nearly doubled in size with his additions, was published the next year in 1939. This year also saw the

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809 Summary of *De Gratia Christi* in Siebenrock, “Gratia Christi. The Heart of the Theology of Karl Rahner,” p. 1267. The latter quote is directly from p. 1 of Rahner’s *De Gratia Christi*.


812 *Worte ins Schweigen* (Innsbruck: Rauch, 1938). Translated as *Encounters with Silence* and included in *Prayers for a Lifetime*.

publication of an essay on lay holiness in the age of the Fathers, as well as a work in which Rahner’s historical and more “speculative” interests coalesced, “Some Implications on the Scholastic Concept of Uncreated Grace.” This same year also saw the publication of his now famous *Spirit in the World*.

We have thus brought our bibliographical overview up to date with the biographical section above, as many of these 1939 publications were being composed while Rahner wrote and taught at Innsbruck before its theology faculty was disbanded by the Nazis mid-1938. Looking over Rahner’s writings and publications from this period reveal that he had fervent and often intersecting interests in both Christian spirituality and patristic theology. As I have already said, only the former has received widespread attention in contemporary literature on Rahner, especially in the English speaking world. But, as a matter of fact, Rahner devoted enormous time and energy into working with patristic theology in these formative years as a seminarian, doctoral student, and young professor. As Neufeld has remarked, “The number and scope of his articles reveal that he felt at home in this area and that one cannot speak of this first phase of independent academic work as a side-interest.” Indeed, patristic theology was a primary interest, and it was within this crucible that we observe Rahner generating fundamental insights about and programs for developing theology about the Sacred Heart, *Symbol*, Christ’s

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816 Neufeld, “Editionsbericht,” p. xv
presence and the Church, penance, the “supernatural,” uncreated grace, and even human salvation. All of these concepts would play significant if not major roles in the mature theology for which he is so well-known.

In the next section, I will argue that rather than being a “phase” which Rahner eventually abandoned, this early period marked by interest in the theology of the Fathers had an ongoing impact on Karl Rahner’s theology. However, I would like to close the present bibliographical considerations by drawing attention to one particular passage from 1943, in the midst of a kind of “interim” period between Rahner’s “early” years (which we have just considered) and his more well-known theology from the 1950s onward. In this passage, worth quoting at length, Rahner offers yet another articulation of a Christocentric world of grace and its corresponding Person-centered, representative soteriology. Moreover, he appeals to Gregory Nazianzen’s famous patristic dictum about the “assumed” and “redeemed” to do so:

the saving reality of Christ is the consecration, in principle, of the whole creation. If anything was not assumed, neither was it redeemed; but whatever has been united with God has also been saved, says Gregory Nazianzen. But everything has been assumed, for Christ is true man, true son of Adam, truly lived a human life in all its breadth and height and depth, has truly become a star of this cosmos in which everything depends on everything else, a flower of this earth which we love. And hence everything, without confusion and without separation, is to enter into eternal life; there is to be not only a new heaven but a new earth. Nothing, unless it be eternally damned, can remain outside the blessing, the protection, the transfiguration of this divinization of the world which, beginning in Christ, aims at drawing everything that exists into the life of God himself, precisely in order that it may thus have eternal validity conferred upon it. This is the reality of Christ, which constitutes Christianity; the incarnate life of God in our place and our time. A reality to which belongs the word; a reality in which all human reality is called to God and blessed.817

817 “The Parish Priest,” p. 42. The same recapitulation-based “Nazianzen” logic is operative in another essay from 1959 on prison ministry where Rahner writes “It is with such sinners that this love has,
4.4 Ongoing Impact of Rahner’s Early Interests

Like many scholars, Rahner can, and has, been (correctly) understood to have grown through various “periods” in his thought. As noted above, Joseph Wong has noted Rahner’s shift in emphasis from a “descending” to an “ascending” Christological approach as his career progressed.\textsuperscript{818} Moreover, Vorgrimler has noted that Karl Rahner consciously broke with his brother Hugo’s heavily historical and “kerygmatic” movement in the late 1930s in favor of a more integrative approach to contemporary re-expression of the Church’s faith.\textsuperscript{819} Legitimate as such shifts indeed are, Rahner’s intense interest in patristic theology and spirituality was not simply a “phase” beyond which he moved in his more “speculative” career after World War II. Rather, this period was a formative one which continued to exercise influence in his later, mature writings; many basic and central theological insights which continued to guide Rahner’s theology surfaced during this period, and although Rahner consciously decided to craft his theology in a more “contemporary” than strictly “historical” mode of expression, he was also conscious of the indispensable role that the Church’s tradition and history of dogma played in shaping that expression.

\textsuperscript{818} Wong, \textit{Logos-Symbol}, pp. 35-36.

\textsuperscript{819} \textit{Understanding Karl Rahner}, pp. 65-66.
The ongoing impact of this early period has yet to be appreciated by Rahner scholars writing for the English-speaking world, although Batlogg and Neufeld have already presented such a thesis in German publications. Acknowledging the lack of explicit references to patristic theology in Rahner’s mature work, Neufeld nonetheless asserts that there are deep resonances between this work and that of Rahner’s early period:

The free choice of the theme of the theological dissertation and hence the further interest in the thinking of the Church Fathers up through Aszese und Mystik allows a deeper bond to come to light, which was long ago established to the end even without explicit references and citations – established as a substratum in places, where they are not explicitly and thematically named.\textsuperscript{820}

More particularly, Batlogg argues that \textit{E latere Christi} sets the stage for Rahner’s later work. He rightly testifies to the fact that the conclusion to \textit{E latere Christi} stands “as a kind of prelude, indeed an outline with programmatic elements, which Rahner will take up in the following period over and over again.”\textsuperscript{821} Terms like mystery-presence \textit{[Mysteriengegenwart]}, ontology of presence \textit{[Gegenwärtigkeit]} (of the life of Jesus), and symbol-character \textit{[Symbolcharakter]}, among others, Batlogg observes, make meaningful appearances in Rahner’s “De gratia Christi” (1937-1938), \textit{Hearer of the Word} (1937/1941) and “Current Problems in Christology” (1954).

Batlogg’s point here can be expressed even more strongly: as I noted earlier in Chapter 2 and above in 4.3.2.7, this “prelude” in the conclusion of \textit{E latere Christi} even

\textsuperscript{820} Neufeld, “Editionsbericht,” p. xiii.

\textsuperscript{821} Batlogg, “Editionsbericht: Teil A,” p. xxxii.
stands as a call for, and sketch with the most basic parts of, for Rahner’s later “Theology of the Symbol” (1959). Underdeveloped as this “sketch” was in 1936, the central place of das Realsymbol within Rahner’s overall theology illustrates how significantly his early interests impacted his mature theology. The instance of Symbol is one instance of a major component of Rahner’s theology the full expression of which results from his attempts to work out the implications of insights made during the course of his early, patristic work. Another such instance is Christ’s (not unrelated) role as Savior, the full expression of which will be considered in the next and final chapter.

Yet another instance of Rahner’s early interests living on is the topic of Jesus’ Sacred Heart, which receives ongoing attention over the course of Rahner’s career. A small sample of Rahner’s writings on this theme include a homiletic reflection from 1938, spiritual essays from 1947 and 1958, and more technical treatment also in

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822 Batlogg makes a similar observation elsewhere, which also appears overly tentative: “The beginnings of 1936 could be read as enlightening for the background of this later article from 1959” (Die Mysterien des Lebens Jesu bei Karl Rahner, p. 304).

823 For more on this topic, see Annice Callahan, Karl Rahner’s Spirituality of the Sacred Heart, as well as M.J. Walsh, The Heart of Christ in the Writings of Karl Rahner: An Investigation of its Christological Foundation as an Example of the Relationship between Theology and Spirituality (Rome: Gregorian Univ. Press, 1977).


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1958, a 1966 address to seminarians at Innsbruck, and essay from 1982 which begins by noting the sharp decline in the devotion and which argues for its continued relevance and import. Part of this argument concerns the importance of the Church’s historical patrimony. Rahner writes that the “Church always brings her history with her into the present and in this way carries it on.”

Such statements about the Church’s history were not mere lip service for Rahner, and Rahner in particular is well-positioned to rebut any claims to the contrary. Included among Rahner’s various editing duties was an intense stint editing Denzinger’s *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, a compilation of magisterial statements spanning the Church’s history, which was among the most commonly cited texts of Catholic dogmatic theology in the first part of the twentieth century. Rahner himself was in charge of producing the 28th through 31st editions of this text. Thus, paired with his intense concern for giving Catholic theology contemporary purchase was an avid interest in particular, historically established doctrines which provided bounds within which that theology

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could operate. In fact, as Harvey Egan has noted, Rahner was at times criticized by “progressive” theologians of the generations which followed him for the privileged place which he gave such statements.  

With respect to the particularly important place patristic theology held throughout Rahner’s career, I will briefly note two items. First, as John McDade has observed, Rahner once made a remarkable statement about the center of his theology: the most “fundamental and basic conception of Christianity,” according to Rahner, is “the divinization of the world through the Spirit of God.” Rahner continues by adding that “the Incarnation and soteriology arise as an inner moment” out of God’s basic, divinizing act within creation. The idea of divinization or deification, commonly cited with reference to 2 Peter 1:4, is commonly expressed in Western theology in terms of God’s “elevation” of human nature to share in God’s life, but is most frequently associated with Eastern, Greek theology, particularly that of the Fathers. The overall worldview out

832 “It is one of the ironies of Karl Rahner’s life that many of his critics have accused him of neglecting the historical, the cultural, the particular, the finite, the ‘categorical.’ These critics assert that Rahner focuses almost exclusively on the human spirit’s drive beyond the finite, that is, the spirit’s ‘transcendence’… However, other critics chide Rahner for allegedly being too traditional, for being a ‘Denziger [sic] theologian,’ for defending seemingly outdated church thinking and living, for taking too quickly the church’s actual living faith as the starting point for his theology” (“Foreword,” in Callahan, Karl Rahner’s Spirituality of the Pierced Heart, pp. iv-viii, at p. iv).


834 Karl Rahner in Dialogue, p. 126.

835 God “has given us…his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of lust, and may become participants in the divine nature.”

836 Cf. Thomas Aquinas’s ST I-II q. 109 a. 2; I-II q. 110 a. 3.
of which the concept of divinization emerges is strongly Irenaean: human beings exist with the divine intention of gradually maturing, through the gift of God’s grace, into their fullest calling, which consists of participating in God’s triune love, and even nature.

Francis Caponi has recently demonstrated how central the idea of divinization is to Karl Rahner’s metaphysics, anthropology, and theology of the incarnation.  

The second item concerns Rahner’s short *Theological Dictionary*, published with Herbert Vorgrimler first in 1961 and which was reissued in multiple editions through the 1970s. Two entries, “Anacephalaeosis”[i.e., recapitulation] and “Redemption” are particularly noteworthy. The former is sufficiently brief to cite in its entirety:

Literally a summary or recapitulation (Gr. αναχεφαλαίωσις); its theological usage, relating to saving history, derives from Ephesians 1:10 and was employed notably by St Irenaeus. It denotes that the whole of creation is referred to the Incarnation of God in such a way that creation as such must be understood as a preparation for collaboration with God made Man. In the present economy, therefore, Christ is not only the goal of creation and the apogee of Adam’s race, but having borne our sins and risen as the first-born from the dead, his radical acceptance of every phase of human history has redeemed and “re”-constituted that creation which up until his coming had been subjected to vanity.

Of particular note here is the two-pronged treatment of recapitulation offered by Rahner. The first aspect concerns Christ’s Person is strictly ontological terms: Christ, in his being, precisely is “the goal of creation and the apogee of Adam’s race.” The second concerns the “acceptance” language, which, as we noted above, characterizes both

837Francis Caponi, O.S.A. “Karl Rahner: Divinization in Roman Catholicism.”

838 *Theological Dictionary*, p. 17.

839 Ibid., pp. 395-397.

840 Ibid., p. 17.

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Rahner’s treatment of Irenaeus in *Elatere Christi* as well as his own mature soteriology. Here, he writes, Christ’s “radical acceptance of every phase of human history has redeemed and ‘re’-constituted… creation.” While this second aspect concerns Christ’s act of “acceptance,” it too concerns his being – his saving “act” isn’t a singular, one-off feat of a super-agent, but is rather the ongoing act of radically accepting “every phase of human history.” In other words, Christ’s saving “act” is the Person-centered act of “truly liv[ing] a human life in all its breadth and height and depth,” as Rahner put it nearly two decades earlier.\(^{841}\)

Rahner’s (significantly longer) entry on “Redemption” bears this same, two-pronged structure. He begins by noting human guilt before God and the need for God’s forgiveness, which comes in the form of redemption. Rahner then distinguishes between the content of redemption (i.e., “divine life given with the remission of sin”) and our appropriating this content in freedom, both of which are depend entirely on God’s gratuity. Next, Rahner explains that the phenomenon of redemption is “wholly bound up with the historical Person and work of Jesus,” in whom God, rather than “simply setting aside and the provisional character of the whole man in need of redemption,” “giv[es] his redemptive grace… historical tangibility, presence and power in a world that is to be preserved.” Rahner continues, “Jesus’ being (as the union of God’s life and human existence) and activity (as the acceptance, in loving obedience, of human existence characterized by sin…) taken together are the historically real, eschatologically victorious bestowal on the world of God’s self-communication despite, and in, the

\(^{841}\) “The Parish Priest,” p. 42.
world’s sinfulness.” 842 Elaborating further, he says that “in Jesus God has definitively accepted the one world and humanity, as a whole, in spite of sin and precisely in their culpable destiny,” 843 and that “God willed the human life of his Son to be a total surrender of loving obedience.” 844

Once again, Jesus’ Person and act are distinguished as the two-pronged origin of our salvation. The first aspect is described in highly ontological terms – “Jesus’ being” is described as the saving “union of God’s life and human existence.” The second aspect pertains to Jesus’ act, but once again concerns his being as well. The activity is precisely that of “acceptance, in loving obedience, of human existence characterized by sin.” As with the second aspect of “Anacephalaeosis,” this second “activity” aspect of Christ’s redemption consists of Christ’s “acceptance,” and not simply the acceptance of the cross and death, but of his human existence in its entirety.

These remarkably parallel entries in Rahner’s Theological Dictionary offer a valuable testimony to how Rahner’s own favored account of redemption in Christ draws heavily upon (his understanding of) patristic, particularly Irenaean theology. While the genre of the majority of his writings (i.e., somewhat lengthy ad hoc essays on challenges faced by contemporary Christians) do not easily lend themselves to demonstrating the

842 Theological Dictionary, p. 396, emphasis original.

843 Ibid.

844 Ibid., p. 397.
historical influences behind his theology, the genre of short, pithy dictionary entries do. Although Rahner does not here elect to elaborate “redemption” in explicitly patristic terms, the parallels of his account with that of “recapitulation” are striking. It is precisely this sort influence, as an unidentified yet formatively operative “substratum,” that the Fathers’ theology has on Rahner’s soteriology.

4.5 Factors Contributing to Rahner’s Decrease in Explicit Engagement with the Fathers

One may, perhaps, object to my (as well as Batlogg’s and Neufeld’s) contention that Rahner’s early fascination with and use of patristic theology continued to operate as a “substratum” underlying his later theology by appealing to his lack of explicit reference to the Fathers and their theological categories. Doesn’t this absence, one might retort, indicate that Rahner abandoned his earlier “historical” mode of doing theology (in favor of a more contemporary, speculative, and “transcendental” approach), and perhaps even wanted to dissociate himself with these figures?

First, it should be noted, the perceived “absence” of patristic references in Rahner’s later theology is an exaggerated perception. As Karl Neufeld has noted, Rahner does make such references and even focuses on particularly patristic issues (especially concerning penance) throughout the course of his career:

Rahner himself has gradually tried different approaches, depending on which task faced him and what means seemed appropriate. He was not indifferent to the “catchy” problems and the day’s methods of handling them. However, if he could determine on his own what he wanted to handle in what way, then with

845 Nonetheless, I will attempt to identify and analyze several portions of such texts in order to demonstrate how Rahner’s mature theology indeed conforms to the characteristic markers of a representative soteriology in the next chapter.

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astonishing regularity—e.g. concerning the question of penance—he had recourse to the world of the Church Fathers.⁸⁴⁶

That said, the language and categories utilized most often in Rahner’s writings seem to be Thomistic and transcendental. Even if use of Fathers later in his career is not totally absent, it is relatively sparse (especially in comparison to some of Rahner’s contemporaries, whose theology has also been identified as having patristic influences and substrata⁸⁴⁷). The question remains: Might the relative scarcity of such references reflect a conscious move on Rahner’s part to dissociate himself from the historical, particularly patristic, theology which shaped his early career?

Here, I would like to respond to this sort of reaction by positing two likely explanators for the sparse patristic references in Rahner’s soteriological writings after the 1930s. These two explanators, I would contend, stand together as an alternative to a theory according to which Rahner deserted historical approaches to theology and wished to distance himself from patristic soteriology. According to my suggested alternative, Rahner sought (i.) to dissociate himself not from the Fathers’ soteriological insights, but from the distorted category of “physical redemption” (discussed above in Chapter 3) which, thanks in large part to Adolf von Harnack, had come to be almost synonymous with “patristic soteriology” in the minds of many (especially German) theologians, and


(ii.) to *infuse*, rather than replace (or even supplement), a historically grounded approach to theology with contemporary concerns, categories, and terminology.

4.5.1 The Fathers and “Physical Redemption”

The first likely explanator for Rahner’s reluctance to explicitly articulate and/or categorize his own soteriology in patristic terms is the widespread association of patristic soteriology with the troubled notion of “physical redemption.” This theory of atonement, attributed by many Liberal Protestants and others to Greek Fathers like Irenaeus but which is most likely somewhat of a strawman,⁸⁴⁸ posits that human salvation is accomplished at the first moment of the Incarnation, at which point the abstract natures of humanity and divinity coalesce somewhere in the Platonic heavens; this Hellenized, pseudo-philosophical myth, it is said, renders the cross devoid of any soteriological meaning, entails a kind of mechanical and universal salvation, and depletes soteriology of any moral imperative.

Although Gustaf Aulén’s famous *Christus Victor*⁸⁴⁹ had countered this Liberal Protestant association on a prominent stage by 1930, it was still held in the minds of many, as Rahner was well aware. Let us consider three places in which Rahner explicitly mentions the connection. In “The One Christ and the Universality of Salvation,” Rahner begins a section on “Jesus and All Men” by asserting that “the death and resurrection of

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⁸⁴⁸ See Trevor Hart, “Irenaeus, Recapitulation and Physical Redemption,” as well as Chapter 3 above.

⁸⁴⁹ See “Irenaeus,” in *Christus Victor*, pp. 16-35 at pp. 18-19.
Jesus, taken together, *do possess soteriological significance.*" He then adds that “Jesus possesses *that* relationship to every man which connects all men together,” and “history and humanity… do not merely consist in a sum of individual human beings and isolated biographies.” This “soteriological connection between Jesus and the whole of humanity,” he explains, “plays a role in the doctrine of redemption found among the Greek fathers, in that in their view humanity has a form of existence which enables the eternal Logos to enter into communion with the single race of mankind.” Thus far, his explicit reference to the Fathers is made approvingly, at least insofar as Jesus’ relationship to the whole of humankind, a fundamental axiom for Rahner’s soteriology, “plays a role” in that of the Fathers as well.

Rahner then goes on to discuss the problems entailed by “say[ing] that the redemption was achieved through the incarnation alone,” first among which is that such a view deprives Christ’s death and resurrection of any soteriological significance. Accordingly, “all forms of causality of a physical… type fail.” The quick succession Rahner’s references to the “doctrine of redemption found among the Greek fathers,” “redemption… achieved through the incarnation alone,” and “forms of causality of a

850 “The One Christ and the Universality of Salvation,” TI 16:210 (emphasis original).

851 Ibid. (emphasis original).

852 Ibid., TI 16:210-211.

853 “The death and resurrection of Jesus must possess universal importance in themselves for salvation and cannot merely be regarded as isolated events, of no significance in themselves, in a life which only has universal relevance for salvation in being the life of the eternal Logos” (ibid., TI 16:211).

physical... type” illustrate Rahner’s acute awareness of the Liberal Protestant category of
“physical redemption” and the problems entailed with it. However, Rahner does not
directly attribute the view to the Fathers themselves.

Writing one year later, Rahner mentions physical redemption again in
*Foundations of Christian Faith*. In a brief treatment of “classical” soteriology, Rahner
makes only a brief allusion to “a ‘doctrine of physical redemption’ which is found in the
Greek Fathers *[einer in der griechischen Patristik gegebenen ‘physischen
Erlösungslehre’]*, and according to which the world appears as saved because it is
physically and inseparably united to the Godhead in the humanity of Jesus,” opting “to
prescind” *[absehen]* from even examining the theory.855 Here, the association of physical
redemption, of which Rahner clearly disapproves, with the Fathers seems to come from
the lips of Rahner himself. The English translation could be refined a bit so it would
(more literally) read, “a ‘doctrine of physical redemption’ given in Greek patristics,”
attributing the category directly to the study of the Fathers rather than to the Fathers
themselves. But the passage raises an important question: Did Rahner, after his early
years, eventually come to believe that the Fathers themselves held a deficient
soteriological theory like “physical redemption”? Such a possibility would support a
narrative in which Rahner would indeed want to dissociate his own theology from that of
the Fathers.

However, a third locus in which Rahner writes on the topic suggests that this
possibility is, in fact, not the case. In his entry on “Salvation” in *Sacramentum Mundi*, he

once again warns of the dangers of physical redemption, and while he doesn’t employ the term itself, it is clear (especially in light of the other two entries just considered) that he has the theory in mind:

If in an incarnational doctrine of redemption it is emphasized too one-sidedly that mankind was redeemed by the fact of the divine Logos assuming a human nature as member of the one mankind (“quod assumptum est, redemptum est”), then redemption is one-sidedly envisioned only under cosmic and objective aspects and Scripture is not taken seriously when it sees the redemptive event in Jesus’ love and obedience even to the Cross.856

One might take the reference to Gregory Nazianzen’s famous dictum (“quod assumptum est, redemptum est”) to signal Rahner’s attribution of “physical redemption” to the soteriology of the Fathers. However, it is important to recognize that Rahner is here denouncing an excessively “one-sided” emphasis upon the salvific role of the incarnation, a salvific role which he articulates using Nazianzen’s dictum and which, properly related to the cross, he openly affirms.857 The “one-sided” distortion of this truth appears when the mere “fact” of assumption, operating on a “cosmic” scale, suffices for salvation, to the exclusion of Christ’s death and resurrection.

The key remark which Rahner makes, however, comes a page later as Rahner undertakes a historical overview of historical contributions to soteriology. There he writes, “In the Fathers what is most important (over and above the transmission of biblical doctrine) is Irenaeus’s recapitulation theory (mystical-incarnational theory of


857 “The incarnation itself is a divine movement which is fully deployed only in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (cf. Jn 3:17; 1 Tim 11:15; D 86: the descensus is itself propter nos homines et propter nostram salutem)” (ibid., p. 428).
redemption) which, without denying the Pauline theory of ransom and atonement by the
Cross, teaches on the basis of Eph 1:10 the reunion of mankind with God in Christ as the
all-embracing head.” Here, Rahner does not saddle Irenaeus with the “physical”
category, but describes his soteriology instead as “mystical-incarnational,” and with the
familiar term “recapitulation.” Moreover, Rahner makes sure to explicitly head-off any
association of Irenaeus with his criticism on the previous page, noting that the
recapitulation theory does not exclude “atonement by the Cross.” This passage makes it
quite clear that, at least in the case of Irenaeus, “physical redemption” is not at issue. It is
also worth noting that while Rahner offers criticisms of every other soteriological
category in this historical overview, Irenaeus and recapitulation receive no such
critique.

Taken together, these three treatments of physical redemption from relatively late
in Rahner’s career do not show an antipathy toward the theology of the Fathers on
account of this category, but rather an acute awareness of their widespread association
with it (an awareness which led to Rahner’s conscious effort to dissociate at least
Irenaeus from the “physicalist” framework). Cognizant of this strong association, and
perhaps not wanting to invest time into a lengthy historical project disproving it
(notwithstanding the brief apologetic assertion on behalf of Irenaeus), it seems quite

858 Ibid., p. 429.

859 Christus victor, attributed by Rahner to Origen, is described as “strongly mythological” (ibid.);
Anselm’s satisfaction theory is “situated in the categories of Germanic law,” can obscure the fact that the
salvific initiative originates with God, and is only extrinsically connected to the resurrection of the body
and transfiguration of the world (ibid., p. 430); Liberal Protestant exemplarists cannot sufficiently
acknowledge God’s forgiving love “as the cause of our salvation” (ibid., emphasis original); and theories
according to which God is changed by the Christ-event and the cross “fall into primitive
anthropomorphism” (ibid.).
plausible that Rahner refrained from articulating his own soteriology in explicitly patristic terms for fear of guilt by association.

4.5.2 Contemporary Terms for the Contemporary Person

The second explanator for Rahner’s omission of explicit references to the Fathers while articulating his own soteriology is perhaps even more likely than the first, as well as less particular to the field of soteriology: especially after 1940, Rahner made a conscious effort to do his theology in contemporary terms for the contemporary person. As stated above, the late 1930s saw an adjustment to Rahner’s method, which until that point had been shared largely with his brother Hugo. As Hugo began pursuing the “kerygmatic” theology movement, Rahner consciously diverged, wary of what he saw as a theology which simply proclaimed anew the New Testament and Church Fathers while adapting a contemporary message alongside them. What was needed, Rahner judged, was a retrieval of these sources in such a way that the retrieval itself rendered their insights intelligible today.⁸⁶⁰

Rahner expressed his desire for such an infusion of contemporary intelligibility and relevance into the theology of the Church’s tradition not only in his more explicit theological reflections on method,⁸⁶¹ but also in his preaching. In an admonition to newly ordained priests in 1955, Rahner urged,

Preserve the Church’s heritage of truth and experience while reaching out boldly to take hold of the future, which belongs to God precisely in the same way as the past…. When you defend the heritage of the past, it must not be out of lazy-

⁸⁶⁰ See Vorgrimler, Understanding Karl Rahner, pp. 65-66; the end of section 4.2 above.

mindedness or a false craving for security, but out of loyalty to the truth of God, ever ancient and ever new, to which you are bound. When you are striving for anything that is new, let it be done in humility and with serene courage. \[862\]

A year earlier, in an essay called “The Student of Theology,” Rahner expressed the important truth “that every age… has to have its own theology (and has had it, from the time of the Fathers to that of the post-Tridentine Baroque).”\[863\] The theology particular to a given age, he goes on to say, cannot be an “encyclopedic” learning of the brain, but rather a “living possession.”\[864\] “Obviously,” he admits, “no-one is opposed to this ideal in theory. But it is time to face the fact that the gap between ideal and reality has grown so great that there is need for a new, conscious attempt at closing it.”\[865\]

Although a host of examples for Rahner’s implementation of this effort could be cited, Rahner’s insistence on developing an “ascending” Christology true to Chalcedon is a prominent one to which he returned repeatedly in the last thirty years of his life. In his famous 1954 essay from the first volume of *Theological Investigations*, “Current Problems in Christology,” Rahner insists that the doctrine of Chalcedon should be viewed

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\[863\] Rahner continues by exorting his reader, “try to gauge the gap between the general intellectual situation in the world of today and the situation which it has replaced—approximately, the Baroque world; then measure the gap between a late Baroque treatment of dogmatic theology and a modern one…. It seems to me that if anyone does not admit that the second gap is too small in relation to the first, that, in fact, despite all its learning, the modern period has not done the job in theology for its own age that earlier theologies did for their age, then that person is past helping” (“The Student of Theology,” in *Mission and Grace* vol. 2 pp. 146-181, at pp. 163-164).

\[864\] Ibid., p. 180.

\[865\] Ibid.
as a beginning, not an end.\textsuperscript{866} The fruit which Rahner envisioned this “beginning” producing in our time is expressed ardently in a personal letter sent during the Second Vatican Council, in which he longs for an ascending Christology that expresses the Church’s faith regarding the Person of Jesus but without the “mythological” overtones which the modern ear detects in descending approaches\textsuperscript{867} – even the “progressive” theologians at the Council, he lamented, did not appreciate how important this matter was.\textsuperscript{868} Still in 1980, Rahner was insisting that theologians strive to rescue Chalcedonian Christology from contemporary “suspicion of being mythological” by reflecting and restating the Church’s traditional doctrine “with all fidelity, all respect, all deference to the past, with all the normative force established by traditional Chalcedonian Christology.”\textsuperscript{869}

If Rahner’s primary objective with his own later Christology was to express the Church’s doctrine in contemporary (rather than mythological) terms, it would be no surprise that his insights (shaped though they might have been by his early reading of the Fathers) were not couched in patristic terms (especially considering the mythological

\begin{footnotes}
\item[868] “I also notice here that I’m not yet all that old, even when I sit at a table with Daniélou, Congar, Ratzinger, Schillebeeckx and so on. I find that these still do not realize clearly enough how little, e.g., a christology ‘from above’, which simply begins with the declaration that God has become man, can be understood today. And the same is true in so many other instances. Of course one can hardly expect that another way of thinking will already make a mark on the schemata of the Council, but I do not find it explicitly enough among the progressive theologians themselves” (Vorgrimler, \textit{Understanding Karl Rahner}, p. 158).
\end{footnotes}
stigma associated, however unfairly, with them). “Contemporary terms for contemporary people” seems to be the answer to a related question, namely, why did Rahner omit his many patristic “history of dogma” essays when he began publishing *Theological Investigations* in the mid-1950s? Such an answer is implicit in the rationale which he offers in the series’ preface, which occurs immediately after he calls attention to the absence of these historical essays:

we have attempted here to disinter a few essays from periodicals, leaving out work concerned purely with the history of dogma…. The presumptuous intention of this modest collection of theological studies will be achieved if they help just a little (before they are finally forgotten) to confirm young theologians in the conviction that Catholic theology has no reason to rest on its laurels, fine though those may be; that on the contrary it can and must advance, and in such a way that it remains true to its own laws and its tradition.

The theology which Rahner wanted to influence the next generation was one which *advanced* the Church’s doctrinal heritage in a way suitable for reception in his day. If such a program was on the forefront of his mind, allowing the Fathers and their theology to operate at the level of “substratum” would make a great deal of sense. As we close this consideration of a second likely “explanator” it is important to note that even if contemporary relevance was on the forefront of Rahner’s mind later in his career, he

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870 In his classic *Christus Victor*, Gustaf Aulén argues that the earliest, patristic model of Christian soteriology was not “physical redemption,” but one according to which Jesus definitively defeat Satan, redeeming those who had fallen in to the latter’s possession. One objection against this “Christus victor” theory of atonement, an objection which Aulén himself anticipated, concerns its “mythological dress” (*Christus Victor*, p. 47). As William Placher succinctly puts it, the theory’s “interpreters need to specify whether its battle imagery refers to a metaphorical, spiritual battle (in which case Christus Victor theory turns into something like moral influence theory) or an honest-to-goodness swordfight battle (in which case the questions about mythological imagery become very pressing indeed)” (“How Does Jesus Save?” p. 24).

871 *TI* 1:xxi-xxii
never lost sight of Catholic theology’s need to “remain[] true to its own laws and its traditions,” maintaining “all fidelity, all respect, all deference to the past.”

4.6 Traditional and Contemporary, Historical and Speculative

In this chapter, I have offered an overview of Karl Rahner’s early life and writings in order to demonstrate that his early career was marked by an intense and prolonged engagement with patristic theology, particularly that of Irenaeus of Lyons. More specifically, Rahner’s theology dissertation *E latere Christi*, which takes as its starting point the idea of Christ as the New Adam, testifies to Rahner’s early fascination with representative soteriology. In exegeting Paul, Rahner dwells on the idea that Christ, like Adam, is the one whose very nature allows him to represent the many: “Christ is ancestor and head of all the spiritually living and not just through his redemptive activity, but already by his very nature as the God-man, and as such he shares, as new life-source, the supernatural life with all people, so that this life can only be found in him.”\(^{872}\) The redemptive character of Christ’s Person, the very locus of supernatural life, is one of the salient markers of representative Christology; it is also a theme in Rahner’s early Christological reflections that continued into the 1940s\(^{873}\) and, we will see in the subsequent chapter, late into his theological career.

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\(^{872}\) *E latere Christi*, p. 15.

\(^{873}\) “the saving reality of Christ is the consecration, in principle, of the whole creation. If anything was not assumed, neither was it redeemed; but whatever has been united with God has also been saved, says Gregory Nazianzen. But everything has been assumed, for Christ is true man, true son of Adam, truly lived a human life in all its breadth and height and depth” (“The Parish Priest,” p. 42).
Furthermore, I have argued that this early portion of Rahner’s career was not simply an abandoned phase or project which he scuttled in a methodological about-face. Jesus’ Sacred Heart, das Realsymbol, Christian spirituality, penance, God’s gracious self-communication, and salvation in Christ the True Human all stand as major streams of continuity linking his later thought to this early period. Finally, I have argued that it is plausible that Rahner allowed patristic soteriological categories to operate at the level of “implicit substratum” in his later writings on human salvation in order to circumvent association with the wrongheaded category of “physical redemption,” as well as to aid his project of promoting contemporary relevance.

Before closing this chapter and its foray into Rahner’s early patristic interests, it is worth reiterating that even with his concern for contemporary relevance, it is clear that Rahner did (even and especially late in his career) want to be considered a historical as well as a speculative theologian. After consciously electing to omit his earlier “history of dogma” essays when inaugurating his Theological Investigations volumes, Rahner eventually began integrating these older writings into the series, even devoting the entire fifteenth volume to the topic of penance and the early Church. In the preface to this volume, Rahner explains that he did so in an attempt to reverse the perception that he is a purely “speculative” theologian:

874 “We also need to ask afresh how we can do still more than has been done to bring into closer relationship theology and the spiritual life, theological instruction and the personal formation of the student’s character…. It is not that lectures should be sermons and the lecture-hall turn into a chapel. But of all sciences, theology… simply is the one to which, as a science, existential acceptance is most indispensable. But it is the case that among theologians, young and old alike, theology is often very undevotional…, while piety (in the seminaries) is very untheological” (“The Student of Theology,” pp. 176-177).
I am suspected by many people of being only a speculative theologian who works without reference to history and who, in some circumstances, attempts to dispel difficulties which arise in understanding statements of the Church’s magisterium by the merely speculative interpretation of such statements. I am absolutely convinced that genuine Catholic theology must always proceed on the basis both of exegesis and of the history of dogmas and theology, even if it must be the free choice of the individual theologian whether, in a study of a particular point, he wishes to work “speculatively” or “historically”. It is possible, therefore, that the present volume will dispel the suspicion that I have no appreciation of historical theology.  

The later Rahner, too, proclaimed the indispensable role of history for systematic theology.

It is for precisely this reason that, in the closing years of his life, Rahner began to lament the current state of systematic theology. In addition to chiding systematic theologians for a “weariness” which had settled upon the discipline, he suggested that neo-scholastic manual theology, problematic as it was, fared significantly better than its successors when it came to conceptual precision and attention to the magisterium’s body of teachings. Moreover, he explained that his own theology was grounded in this

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875 TI 15:viii.

876 In “The Present Situation of Catholic Theology,” (1979), Rahner judges, “All things taken into consideration I really do feel that Catholic theology today by and large does not rate a higher mark than Grade C” (TI 21:70-77 at p. 75).

877 “Today a certain weariness and resignation seems to have settled on systematic theology. This is certainly not due to the Council, which supplied theologians with many half-forgotten questions” (“Forgotten Initiatives of the Second Vatican Council” (1982) TI 22:97-105 at p. 105. Rahner also wrote that “signs of fatigue can be detected in the theology of the last ten years: an escape into pastoral studies and religious educational theory or to a false anthropocentrism which closes man up in himself” (“The Abiding Significance of the Second Vatican Council” (1979) TI 20:90-102 at p. 95).  

878 “[O]ne could wish that students of theology even today were a little more aware of the conceptual exactitude of neoscholasticism and of its orientation to the declarations of the magisterium” (ibid., TI 20:94).
Thomistic foundation, the bounds of which he nonetheless sought to advance beyond.\textsuperscript{879} Such a historical, particularly Thomistic basis, Rahner worried, was lacking in the generation of theologians emerging during his final years: “If young theologians can no longer begin with this Thomistic heritage, that’s a bad sign - not for Thomas, but for present-day theologians.”\textsuperscript{880}

Rahner made clear elsewhere that this “beginning point” extended beyond Thomas Aquinas to the whole of the Church’s historical and doctrinal patrimony, particularly the Christological doctrines of the early centuries and their foundational loci in Scripture. In the final days of his career, Rahner began emphasizing the former part of his celebrated dictum that Chalcedon was a beginning, not an end. Taking this point to the pages of Concilium, he wrote,

when we come to deal with Christology, we cannot move beyond the traditional formulation of the dogma to the point where we can do without it…. We theologians of today… have to be people not only who think that they have learned something from the history of faith but also who are still willing to learn from it. If we really do have this willingness, how could we possibly entertain the desire simply to abandon the old christological formulations in favor of new formulations of our own? …. I have no patience with Catholic exegetes whose work manifests no awareness whatsoever of the Council of Chalcedon. There must be an authentic integration of the past if Christology is to have any future…. I can accept the words of the Johannine prologue with a faith so steadfast that I am ready to die for it. These words will always be accepted as a real and vital foundation of my own theology.\textsuperscript{881}

\textsuperscript{879} “I tried to ferret out the inner power and dynamism which is hidden within scholastic theology. Scholastic theology offers so many problems and is so dynamic that it can develop within itself, and then by means of a certain qualitative leap, can surpass itself” (\textit{Faith in a Wintry Season}, p. 17).

\textsuperscript{880} Ibid., p. 48.

Rahner insisted on a robust historical basis for systematic theology, an insistence which received particular emphasis toward the end of his career when, with the demise of neo-scholastic manual theology, the balance of “historical” and “speculative” seemed to him to have undergone an overcorrection in favor of the latter.

For as many legitimate developments and shifts can be rightly attributed to Rahner as his career advanced, his overall appreciation for and dependence upon historical theology was a hallmark of that career its entirety, from his patristic-steeped beginnings to the sometimes grumpy complaints voiced in his final years. Rahner’s exhortation in his twilight that today’s theologians “have to be people not only who think that they have learned something from the history of faith but also who are still willing to learn from it” echoes the words in his dissertation’s conclusion that we “can learn something from the early Church.” Words from the preface of his 1939 compendium of patristic spirituality may well be said of his entire career: “A spiritual science, especially a theological one, can never dispense with the knowledge of the history of its own life. Only in the lasting engagement with its own past does it gain its ultimate object

communication of properties mean, would be deprived of the obvious and requisite tools of Catholic Christology. It goes without saying that things like these are indispensable even today. If we show just a little respect for two millennia of the history of thought, if we still regard Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Kant, Descartes, and others as our masters and can still learn something new from them even though we philosophers of today are of an entirely different breed, then the same obviously holds true in the case of the Church’s traditional two-thousand-year Christology. Far from being embarrassed, we ought to feel obliged to dig deeper into this christological tradition” (“Brief Observations on Systematic Christology Today,” *TI* 21:228).

*882* *E latere Christi*, p. 84.

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vis-à-vis its breadth and openness, which enables it to judge appropriately and find its way into the future.”

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883 Aszese und Mystik in der Väterzeit, p. v.
5.1 A Sacramental and Representative Soteriology

In 1965, Rahner was asked whether “the primary end of theology is the contemplation of truth.” He responded sharply, “No. The salvation of man is the primary end…. Here on earth all reflective knowledge of God’s truth that we call theology must be directed toward the salvation of human beings and nothing else.”

Since the whole of theology is oriented toward human salvation as its foremost telos, the subfield of soteriology, the explicit study of that salvation and how it comes about, is paramount within Rahner’s thought.

When considering the “what” of Rahner’s soteriology, i.e., the content of salvation, the answer is quite clear and succinct: Salvation is the “supernatural and direct presence of God in himself afforded by grace.” The “how” question, namely the way in which Rahner understands God’s gracious presence to humanity to be effected, is the matter at hand in this dissertation.

Summarizing our previous findings, we could say that Rahner’s answer to this “how” question appears as a twofold picture with God’s grace as its subject. On the one

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hand, salvation comes about on account of God’s universally operative grace, which fully self-expresses and self-realizes in the Person of Christ, its Realsymbol. As demonstrated in the first two chapters, this rationale is at the center of most secondary accounts of Rahner’s soteriology, and it is indeed clear that Rahner understands Christ’s salvific efficacy largely in terms of a sacramental or realsymbolisch conceptual framework. On the other hand, salvation occurs on account of God’s universally operative grace, which is always and everywhere oriented toward the saving Person of Christ, the Representative in whom our redemption is achieved. This dimension of Rahner’s thought, which has received far less attention than its sacramental counterpart, is readily apparent in his (also largely neglected) early work, especially E latere Christi.886

In the present chapter, I contend that this second representative dimension to Rahner’s soteriology is an important part of his later (and more well-known) writings on Christ and salvation. While this dimension is not articulated during these later years in explicit connection to patristic figures (as was often the case in his earlier writings), it is nevertheless present. Moreover, this dimension occupies such an important place in Rahner’s thought that a failure to appreciate it (a failure into which both Rahner’s critics and sympathizers have often fallen) can lead to significant misunderstandings of Rahner’s theology (e.g., Balthasar’s contentions, explored in Chapter 1, that the salvific efficacy of Rahner’s Christ amounts in large part to a “notification” to the world that God

886 In claiming that this dimension has received less attention, I am of course aware that the so-called anthropocentric (i.e., “ascending” or “from below”) approach is a dominant and well-recognized theme within Rahner’s entire theology. And indeed, even within the sacramental framework, many Rahnerians (especially J. Wong, cf. Chapters 1 and 2 above) have pointed out the bidirectional (ascending and descending) character of Rahner’s soteriology. However, I do propose that insufficient attention has been paid to how Rahner understands this “ascending” movement as something Christ brings about for us and as our Representative; in his Person we may thus share in the movement’s completion.
is “already reconciled,” and that Rahner’s thought is inimical to the idea of Christ as our “representative”). Below, I will identify places in which this representative dimension is operative in works from the second half of Rahner’s career, such as essays included in his Theological Investigations series, Foundations of Christian Faith, entries in Sacramentum Mundi and Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche, and a very late set of essays (which, though not advertised as such, stands as a consciously made rejoinder to Balthasar’s aforementioned assessment) called The Love of Jesus and the Love of Neighbor. The treatment of these loci will be organized according to the threefold markers of representative soteriology which have been used throughout this dissertation: Christ as our representative before God, Christ as God’s presence to us, and salvation as something primarily achieved in (rather than by) Christ’s Person.

5.1.1 Sacrament and Representative: A Symbiotic Relationship

Prior to delving into the task of analyzing representative elements within Rahner’s later work, it must be reiterated that for Rahner, the ideas of Christ as Sacrament and as Representative are necessary complements to one another. As stated above in the conclusion of Chapter 2, the two are for Rahner intrinsically related as two sides of the same conceptual coin – a coin which, too often in Rahner scholarship, has been analyzed as it lies face up on the ground, without being handled and examined in its totality.

As the primordial Sacrament, the Realsymbol of God’s salvation for humanity, Christ certainly is oriented toward us as the universal instrument of God’s self-communication in grace. But, as Rahner makes clear, the Christ-Sacrament cannot be understood in a simple unidirectional sort of manner. In fact, as he states in the essay
“One Mediator and Many Mediations,” it is in many ways preferable to think of Christ as the universal Mediator not “from above” as the source of descending grace (dispensed through further subordinate mediations), but as the “eschatologically perfect” culmination of human life in relation to God – “the highest, the unique ‘case’ of intercommunication before God.”

It is understandable how such “case” language may provoke concern in Rahner’s reader that he may render Christ a sort of supreme example who functions more or less as an exemplar. Anticipating such a concern, Rahner himself makes clear that his answer must account for Christ’s genuine salvific efficacy. And, as do his followers and apologists (reviewed in Chapter 2 above), Rahner accounts for such efficacy in realsymbolisch terms – Christ, the Ursakrament, stands as a kind of final cause which sustains all other instances of graced humanity, in virtue of its being the highest of such instances. However, Rahner’s explanation here does not consist simply of an appeal to a confluence of realsymbolisch and final causality. Jesus is “the Mediator of God’s self-communication,” “the eschaton of the history of this self-communication,” and in the Christ-event, Rahner claims, that very history “is as it happens throughout its whole

887 Contained in TI 9:169-184, this is a revised 1966 lecture at Mainz presented to the Institute of European History, “Der eine Mittler und die Vielfalt der Vermittlungen.”


889 “How can Jesus do more than give us courage to believe in the forgiving love of God, which exists but is not effected by him?” (ibid., TI 9:175)

890 “[I]n so far as the highest and ultimate factor in any action must always be called its ‘reason’…”, the “highest and ultimate factor…determines and sustains everything else” (ibid., TI 9:180). Such a principle in operative throughout the thought Thomas Aquinas (e.g., ST I q. 2 a. 3, ST I-II q. 90a. 2; cf. Aristotle’s Metaphysics 993b24-26), including Thomas’s explanation for how Christ causes grace in us (“capital” grace) in virtue of his own pre-eminent “personal” grace (see especially ST III q. 8 a.5).
course, and it takes place in reference to its fulness and its victorious end” – Jesus is the “eschaton” upon which all of “history hangs.”891 In other words, the entire economy of God’s grace is summed up or recapitulated in Jesus Christ, its ontological anchor in the world. As such, Christ the recapitulator is not only “the God-given apogee of this history,” but its “one goal”892 – a goal which stands not simply as a metaphysical-soteriological principle, but as a “concrete, historical” Person “capable of being loved.”893

It is precisely at this point that the oft-overlooked representative dimension of Rahner’s soteriology emerges as a necessary complement to his sacramental framework. The culminating, sacramental cause of our salvation is at once a Person to whom we are lovingly directed through grace and who recapitulates (and enables) our own “Yes” to God in himself. One might summarize the symbiotic relationship between sacramental and representative soteriologies in Rahner as follows: Salvation is expressed fully and sacramentally in the world in order to serve as a soteriological “anchor”; at the same time, the blessed are oriented toward and incorporated into Christ precisely because his is the fullness of grace in the world.

891 “One Mediator and Many Mediations,” TI 9:179, emphasis original.

892 Ibid., TI 9:181-182, emphasis original.

893 Roger Haight begins to address this connection by claiming that in their revelation-based soteriological schema, both Rahner and Karl Barth are laying the groundwork for an understanding of human salvation which centers on our encounter with God. “Jesus saves because Jesus is God’s being for human beings, God’s turning in freedom to be with human beings…. Jesus Christ is God with us and this is salvation” (Jesus: Symbol of God, p. 345).
5.2 Christ: Our Representative Before God

Let us now turn to the main task of this final chapter, namely, an overview and analysis of representative soteriology contained in Rahner’s mature theological writings. To be clear, the representative dimension, while intrinsically linked to his sacramental articulations of Christ’s salvific efficacy, is not simply a conceptual complement implicitly present within Rahner’s mature work. Rather, Rahner’s later theological writings include considerations which directly pertain to what I have called representative soteriology. These considerations will be presented under the three markers of representative soteriology, beginning with Christ representing the human family before God.

5.2.1 Salvation History Summed up in Christ-event

The notion that all instances of God’s self-communication in grace to the world are in some way directed toward the Christ-event is a widely recognized aspect of Rahner’s thought. But Rahner’s soteriological vision for Christ as the telos of salvation history consists of much more than Christ being a “meaning-giving end.” For Rahner, the persons who are oriented to that end are themselves participants in it; the Christ-event in fact draws all of history into itself, not simply as a conceptual parallel to or even highest instance of other events like it, but as the event which ontologically supports the others. Indeed, the best way to describe this dimension of Rahner’s thought is to say that Jesus Christ sums up or recapitulates the entirety of salvation history in his own Person.

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894 E.g., Haight acknowledges that for Rahner, “all fragmentary historical realizations of communion between God and human beings, for example, in other religions, are oriented toward this hypostatic union as toward their meaning-giving end” (ibid., p. 434).
While this patristic, specifically Irenaean language of recapitulation is not used frequently by the mature Rahner (possible reasons for which were explored in the previous chapter), he does make use of it on occasion. One such instance occurs as Rahner proposes an alternative entry point for understanding the Christological dogma of Chalcedon. Making a point that he would repeat frequently during his theological career, Rahner proposes that the Christology of Chalcedon need not be approached by beginning with the standard terms of one divine *hypostasis* possessing both divine and human *physes*, but can be accessed through the perspective of salvation history reaching its all-encompassing “entelechy” in Christ. It is in suggesting this latter point that Rahner has recourse to Irenaeus’s language:

> [I]f we take at all seriously the unity of this history as centered upon Christ, it follows that Christ has always been involved in the whole of history as its prospective entelechy.... Is it not possible so to conceive of Time and History *theologically* (not merely in terms of the philosophy of history) that one has conceptually stated the Christ of Chalcedon when one has said of him that he is the fullness of times, who as their Head definitively comprehends and recapitulates the aions [*der die Äonen endgültig als Haupt zusammenfaßt, rekapitiuliert*] and brings them to their end?\(^{896}\)

According to Rahner, Christ is the most authentic human, the one whose “Yes” to God stands without parallel, and Christ is simultaneously (and without contradiction, since human freedom and grace are *directly* rather than *inversely* proportional)\(^ {897}\) the

\(^{895}\) To be clear, Rahner had no illusions of discarding such language; his suggestion here is about discovering an alternative point of *access* to people who may find the ancient terminology and concepts to be (n unnecessarily) difficult point of departure for understanding the doctrine.


\(^{897}\) Cf. *FCF* pp. 75-80, especially p. 79.
definitive instance of God’s self-communication. This “vertical” Christological axis (God’s definitive self-offer and the definitive, human acceptance of that offer) intersects with a “horizontal” axis, consisting of Christ’s relationship to the rest of humanity. From this point of intersection, which consists of his own life, Christ extends the “entelechy” (which he himself is) as a possibility for all with whom it exists in solidarity. Thus, Rahner frequently couples his Christological articulations (i.e., the Chalcedonian, “vertical” axis) with a soteriological consideration of the human Christ’s “horizontal” relationship with God’s creation. For instance, he writes, “Here is a human being who lives in an attitude of matchless nearness to God – someone who lives in pure obedience to God and at the same time in unconditional solidarity with beings, regardless of how the latter may behave toward him.”\textsuperscript{898} Once again, Rahner does not simply posit Christ as an abstract final-\textit{realsymbolisch} cause, but one whose life of “matchless nearness to God” is \textit{inclusive} – precisely in virtue of his intimate cohesion with the human family, which he recapitulates in himself.

A pithy summary of this soteriological action can be found in Rahner’s essay “Thoughts on the Possibility of Belief Today” (1962). There, Rahner calls Jesus “God’s pledge to the world and the acceptance of the world into God himself in person and as a person… the unsurpassable and final event” of the world’s history.\textsuperscript{899} He continues: “the end of this history – which is supported by the Godman and is bound together in him, the absolute Mediator – is the absolute nearness to God of all those spiritual creatures who

\textsuperscript{898} \textit{The Love of Jesus and Love of Neighbor}, p. 58.

\textsuperscript{899} “Thoughts on the Possibility of Belief Today,” \textit{TI} 5:14.
are saved, and their final, and utter immediacy to God, in the same way as this immediacy constitutes of its nature the inner divinization of the Godman in his human reality”; the Godman is the “basis” for all spiritual creatures’ closeness to God. Once again, Christ is not simply a conceptual telos impacting history via final causality from afar, but as a Person mediates – in fact, “is” – the absolute nearness of the blessed to God. He divinizes us through his own (as fully human) divinization, for we find salvation precisely in him, our Representative.

The idea of Christ saving us as our Representative can be found in one of Rahner’s most famous mature work, Foundations of Christian Faith. There, Rahner suggests that the “late” soteriology of the New Testament, which understood Jesus’ death as a salvific expiatory sacrifice (an understanding which, Rahner states, is “legitimate” when “understood correctly”), was preceded by a more fundamental soteriological rationale, which Rahner refers to as “the original experience of this salvific significance, which is simply this: we are saved because this man who is one of us has been saved by God, and God has thereby made his salvific will present in the world historically, really and irrevocably.” Here, Rahner couples his frequently used soteriological language of “irrevocability” (see Chapter 2.4.2) with what he understands to be a primordial soteriological insight: we are saved because Jesus is saved. The causal element in this claim is not that Christ has performed a great expiatory act by which we are saved – such a suggestion, to which Rahner is not opposed, is a “secondary and derivative expression”

900 Ibid., TI 5:15.

901 FCF p. 284.
of Jesus’ saving significance, a “possible but not absolutely indispensable interpretation” of a more basic idea: our salvation hangs on that of Jesus, precisely because it is in Jesus that God’s definitive gift to us (which constitutes salvation) occurs. In other words, particularly those being used in this dissertation, Jesus effects salvation as our Representative: “the actual redeemer is not mankind as a whole, but mankind – as a whole, however – is redeemed by one man.”

5.2.2 Revisiting Stellvertretung: “Reconciliation and Vicarious Representation”

At this juncture, we must return a previously considered topic and a corresponding question, namely: If the idea of Christ as Representative is a component both important and lasting for Rahner’s soteriology, did he ever offer any rejoinder to Balthasar’s rather sharp criticism (noted in Chapter 1) that his theology is completely inimical to any idea of Christ “representing” us? Although it seems that Rahner was somewhat hesitant to name Balthasar and engage in an explicit debate over this matter (or any of several others), it is also clear that Rahner took this criticism quite seriously and

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902 “[I]n addition to history in general there is also a history of salvation and not merely a situation in relation to salvation which remains the same for all at all times), and…the actual redeemer is not mankind as a whole, but mankind – as a whole, however – is redeemed by one man” (“Salvation,” SM vol. 5, p. 421). Cf. “Soteriology should not merely discuss the opening up of salvation to all, as the sum of individuals. It must be the soteriology of the one whole race of man as such” (ibid. p. 437).

903 In this sense, Rahner was a rather irenic figure when it came to his public interaction with his fellow theologians. (A rare instance in which, during an interview, he discusses an explicit “counterattack” directed at his critics is treated below toward the end of 5.1.4.3.) Given his reluctance to engage in public spats with his colleagues (despite multiple, and sometimes acerbic, de facto invitations to do so), it is a sad irony of history that Rahner is often used today as a sort of polemical lightning rod with or against whom various theological factions often line up. In fact, I imagine that Rahner himself would feel uncomfortable with the majority of his contemporary sympathizes as well as detractors. For more on this, see my “Critical Voices: The Reactions of Rahner and Ratzinger to Schema XIII (Gaudium et Spes),” forthcoming from Modern Theology (Oct. 2014).
offered equally serious responses. The most concentrated of such responses is an essay called “Reconciliation and Vicarious Representation” (“Versöhnung und Stellvertretung”), a lecture given two years after the publication of Balthasar’s “Excursus” on Rahner’s soteriology in Theo-Drama IV.

Once again, a term at the center of Balthasar’s critique and Rahner’s response is the word Stellvertretung, which can mean representative, vicar, proxy, stand-in, or any number of designations for taking the place (Stelle) of another. As he does elsewhere (cf. Chapter 1), Rahner expresses a profound wariness of this term, a wariness which emerges from his respect for human freedom. Indeed, Balthasar’s critique is that Rahner so values the inviolability of human freedom and “self-redemption” that his theology is inimical to any idea of Stellvertretung.

904 Rahner was, beyond doubt, painfully aware of the critique. Rahner’s longtime friend and colleague Herbert Vorgrimler, citing Balthasar’s “Excursus” on Rahner’s soteriology, reports that “Rahner suffered very much under the attacks of Balthasar, especially as von Balthasar later also accused him of specifically heretical errors” (Understanding Karl Rahner, p.125). In an interview from February of 1982, Rahner explicitly references the “Excursus,” but does not directly respond to it: “When Hans Urs von Balthasar criticizes my theology of redemption in his book or others perhaps find my theology of the Trinity not quite correct, then naturally questions are raised that must be reconsidered. What seems to be correct now? Has something been overlooked? Can anything be done differently? Or after such criticism and after detached examination can we still remain set in our opinion?” (Karl Rahner in Dialogue, p. 335). Though it would be anachronistic to call it a “response,” Rahner touches on his ongoing soteriological disagreement with Balthasar in a 1974 interview which can be found in ibid., pp. 126-127.

905 Another such response, which can be found within his The Love of Jesus and the Love of Neighbor, will be addressed later in this chapter.

906 This essay was originally a November 1982 lecture in Stuttgart to the Academy of the Diocese of Rottenburg-Stuttgart, presented as, Maximilian Kolbe und die Kraft der Versöhnung. It was first published in Geist und Leben 56 (1982), pp. 98-110; it can also be found in TI 21:255-269.

907 Theodramatik III (the English translation is numbered TD IV) was published in 1980.

908 TD IV pp. 274-277, cf. 1.1.1 above.
First, what does Rahner understand *Stellvertretung* to mean? He makes it clear that purely juridical concepts like “one person acting on another’s behalf” (*Setzung*), as in the case of contracting a marriage through by proxy (*Prokurator*), cannot adequately capture the idea⁹⁰⁹; likewise, the papal title *Vicarius Christi* (Germ. *Stellvertreter Christi*; Eng. “Vicar of Christ”) is too juridical to directly coincide with the term’s soteriological usage. Rather, the meaning which Rahner has in mind suggests that “it is conceivable that another person can relieve me of a moral debt before God which, in fact, I myself owe to God,” a suggestion which leads Rahner to question: “Can another person really relieve me of a task, or an attitude or a deed before God and oriented to him, of demands which are in fact imposed on me, but which I am not capable of meeting?”⁹¹⁰

Before answering this question, Rahner considers whether Scripture itself makes use of this concept, particularly with its (especially Pauline) language about Christ dying “for us.” Although Balthasar interprets the New Testament’s *pro nobis* terminology as an attestation to a soteriology of Christ as our *Stellvertreter*,⁹¹¹ Rahner says that such a connection is spurious – rather, he suggests, this formula can just as well mean “for the sake of” rather than “in the place of.”⁹¹²

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⁹¹⁰ Ibid., *TI* 21:264-265.

⁹¹¹ *TD* IV p. 274.

⁹¹² “One cannot appeal to the New Testament term *hyper hemōn* to justify this notion of vicarious representation [*Stellvertretung*]. It is certain that *hyper* is used in a great number of passages to mean ‘for the benefit of,’ and in none of these passages is it necessary to understand it in a different sense” (“Reconciliation and Vicarious Representation,” *TI* 21:265; cf. *SzT* 15:261).
To be clear, Rahner insists that our redemption is something accomplished only in virtue of the Word incarnate, crucified and risen (i.e., Christ is “constitutive” of our salvation). However, does this dependency necessarily entail that Christ perform some act on our behalf which God expects of us and which we fail to perform ourselves? Against such a suggestion, Rahner makes two interrelated claims. First, no person can be culpable for not doing something which he or she is incapable of doing; second, God does indeed expect each individual to do what he or she can. When one’s freedom, directed toward the self-communicating God, assents to God fully and definitively, the second of these claims is positively actualized – i.e., “self-redemption” occurs. Rahner’s suggestion, however, is that this very actualization, self-redemption, is entirely dependent on Jesus Christ and the grace he definitively establishes within the world. In other words, “self-redemption and redemption from outside are not two mutually exclusive concepts.” Rahner elaborates:

“Redemption from outside” by Jesus Christ does not mean that human beings would be exempted from doing something that they are obliged to do by means of their own freedom or that something would be conceded to them that they cannot do themselves and which would nevertheless be demanded of them. It means that God by his grace, in view of Jesus Christ and his cross, grants and offers people the possibility, in the most radical self-surrender of their existence through faith, hope, and love, of constituting their own ultimate validity in the order of salvation.

913 “Reconciliation and Vicarious Representation,” TJ 21:266.

914 Ibid.

915 Ibid.
The idea of Christ “taking our place” indeed safeguards the indispensable and constitutive place that the Paschal Mystery has in the accomplishment of human redemption. Nevertheless, Rahner maintains, \textit{Stellvertretung} as it is widely used seems to presuppose an interrelationship between human agency and grace which amounts to a zero-sum game, whereas in fact they increase in direct (rather than inverse) proportion to one another. “To put it another way, redemption from outside is the gratuitous bestowal of our own self-redemption.”\textsuperscript{916} Thus, Rahner concludes, “it seems to me that the concept of vicarious representation [\textit{Stellvertretung}], when used in the area pertaining to the realization of salvation, is at the very least a concept that leads to misunderstandings, and it would do no harm if we avoided it.”\textsuperscript{917}

Suspicious as Rahner is of the soteriology of Christ “taking our place,” he nevertheless acknowledges that there “are the true and valid elements that are evidently envisaged in this problematical notion of vicarious representation [\textit{Stellvertretung}].”\textsuperscript{918} It is as Rahner teases out these authentic soteriological elements that we begin to see a how he can positively evaluate the claim that Christ “represents” us. He begins his explanation by noting that human beings do not exist as solitary, self-determining monads but rather as mutually-related and mutually-conditioned parts of an entire network. Thus, there is “a solidarity of human beings with one another and with the God-

\textsuperscript{916} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{917} Ibid., cf. \textit{SzT} 15:262.

\textsuperscript{918} Ibid., \textit{TI} 21:267, cf. \textit{SzT} 15:262.
man.” That said, Rahner emphatically clarifies, the influence of Christ as constitutive of our salvation cannot be exhausted by Christ’s membership within a broad network of solidarity. In other words, Christ’s soteriological efficacy is not reducible to the idea that Christ is part of this web of interconnectedness, even a very important part of it (though he is that!). Rather, the entire network itself has its foundation in the God-man:

this single field of unlimited solidarity is ultimately constituted [konstituiert], or, if you will, consolidated [verdichtet] by the deed [Tat] of the one Jesus Christ who in love freely given remained steadfast in his predestined solidarity with human beings and did not renounce it even when it meant for him the cross and the death of one forsaken by God.

The “deed” which Rahner mentions here, Jesus’ act of total submission to God on the cross, is the act which “recapitulated” his entire life; indeed, it stands as das Realsymbol in which Jesus expresses and actualizes who he is, his very Person. The proper and authentic idea of “representation” which Rahner has in mind consists not of

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919 “[T]he sum total of everything that happens and the deeds that other people do are the biological and social elements which are always at work determining us, and there is no escaping them” (“Reconciliation and Vicarious Representation,” TI 21:267).

920 It should be noted that Balthasar’s “Excursus” on Rahner’s soteriology occurs within a subsection on modern soteriologies of “solidarity,” and Balthasar himself strongly voices his assessment of “solidarity” as an insufficient concept when it comes to accounting for Christ’s salvific efficacy (TD IV pp. 266-284, 297).

921 “Each one of us determines by our own free actions what we will ultimately be in eternity, and this ultimate validity is our own and it cannot be transferred to someone else” (“Reconciliation and Vicarious Representation,” TI 21:267). This act, of course, is the self-determinative recapitulation of who Jesus is. Since Rahner sees who the human is as ultimately a determination of grace-driven freedom, such a statement does not contravene my thesis of a “person-centered” soteriology for Rahner (though it would contravene an “act-exclusive” or purely-ontological soteriology (cf. later considerations of “physical” redemption in Chapter 4).


923 FCF p. 284.
Christ functioning as a super-agent performing tasks unattainable for others, nor of Christ simply standing as a very important member among others in the “field of solidarity,” but of the fact that his very Person “constitutes” the very field by summing the whole of it up in himself (a self which was, in turn, definitively summed up in his death). To return to the language of Scripture and the Fathers, one could say that Christ’s pro nobis salvific efficacy consists in his identity as the New Adam who recapitulates the whole human family in his own Person.

5.2.3 Rahner on “Repräsentation”

Without doubt, Rahner (especially in his mature years) remained very suspicious of Christologies and soteriologies built upon the notion of Stellvertretung. Nevertheless, rather than fully repudiating the notion in all respects, he admits that it coincides with elements of truth, and, as we have just seen, describes Christ’s saving significance in alternative terms of solidarity. This alternative description, which includes Christ “constituting” the whole network of solidarity “in himself,” coincides with the concept of “representation” as used in this dissertation. Given Rahner’s allergy to the term Stellvertretung but his openness toward (and even advocacy of) soteriologies of Christ as our Representative, it is not surprising that in several places Rahner positively discusses Christ’s pro nobis salvific efficacy in yet another alternative term, namely, Repräsentation.

5.2.3.1 Theological Dictionary (1965)

Rahner’s Theological Dictionary provides a unique pathway into his thinking. Although its short entries lack the detail and rigor of his preferred form, the article-length
essay, the Dictionary allows us to see what Rahner makes of particular theological terms and the concepts associated with them, something which is of great advantage for considering the representative dimension of his soteriology. Rahner’s entry, “Repräsentation,” is brief (and rich) enough that it is worth quoting in its entirety:

The objective unity of the world, which one God has created for one purpose and destiny and which reveals itself in the comprehensive unity of man’s intellectual horizon, must also obtain in the personal sphere, though in a special manner. Hence there can be no absolute individualism where supernatural salvation is concerned, though this salvation is the fruit of a free decision which is unique and which one must take for oneself. Even here we are in part sustained by the decisions of others and their consequences. Now when such a decision by an individual has special significance for the salvation of others (or everyone), because of the nature of the agent or of his decision, one can speak of representation, in the theological sense: then this one man really stands for all [dieser eine steht dann wirklich für viele oder alle], “represents” [repräsentiert] them, without, of course, depriving them of their own free decision, for they must at least decide whether they will accept for themselves the meaning and effect of the other man’s representative decision [repräsentativen Entscheidung des anderen]. Thus Jesus Christ, the *Mediator, is the supreme representative of mankind in his vicarious redemption [der absolute Repräsentant der Menschheit in seiner stellvertretenden Erlösung].”

Rahner begins this entry the same way he begins his distillation (above) of the “true and valid” elements in Stellvertretung, namely, with a discussion of the individual and the whole body of humanity. In both instances, Rahner explains that although human persons are genuinely free and make real decisions about themselves, their salvation is not compatible with robustly individualistic anthropologies. Instead, we are all mutually

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924 Indeed, Rahner almost invariably begins his shorter essays (often intended as hour-long talks) with caveats about their non-exhaustive nature, their inevitably limited scope, and/or the “randomness” of the few (out of many) themes or examples he chooses to treat.

925 Theological Dictionary, pp. 404-405.
shaped and co-determined, realizing our ultimate destinies in light of the consequences of an entire network of free actions.

As with his previously considered treatment of the matter, Rahner explains in this entry that Jesus uniquely impacts this network of relations both in his “nature” and in his “decision” (which, we have seen, definitively establishes who he is). This one Jesus “stands for” the many or even the entirety, not in a way that deprives them of their freedom, but gives their freedom an available object toward which it can be directed and in which they self-realize: namely, himself, the most authentic human who is simultaneously God-in-the-world. As such, Jesus is the absolute Repräsentant, he is the definitive Representative of humanity. Given this context for understanding Repräsentation, Rahner even goes so far as to here describe the redemption effected by Jesus as stellvertretenden (“representative”). Thus, one might say that while Rahner finds the predominant usage of Stellvertretung problematic, such usage is in fact a distortion of an authentic, even essential Christian idea, which Rahner here reclaims under the term Repräsentation.

The centrality of this concept to Rahner’s understanding of Christianity is apparent in another entry in his Theological Dictionary, namely, “Participation.” There, Rahner connects the ideas of representation, intrinsic realsymbolisch causality, grace, and the Christ-event, assessing the overarching idea of “participation” as paramount for Christians: “it is clear that the concept of participation – very mysterious in itself (two
beings remain two and yet are one by participation in each other) – must be of key importance in theology.”

5.2.3.2 Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche (LfTK) (1963)

Two years earlier, Rahner wrote entry on “Repräsentation” which is both lengthier and more technical than the one just seen in his Kleines Theologisches Wörterbuch. In LfTK, he writes that “Repräsentation,” which has not yet achieved the status of a terminus technicus in theology, describes an “existing relationship between two realities which rules between the creature and God and between the created realities among themselves.” He continues, “The concept of representation is biblically grounded through expressions such as mediator, huper, and through the idea that the action of an individual affects all.”

Rahner then addresses the breadth of the term, noting that its meaning can range from that of a “cause” to a “standing-for some other” (the other being incapable of acting

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926 Ibid., p. 337. The entry in its entirety reads: “A general term signifying the various ways in which the nature of one being may affect that of another. Every efficient cause which produces something different from itself inevitably gives the thing caused some likeness to itself, and thus a ‘participation’ in itself. But in addition, the one may grant the other a participation in itself through self-communication, and this in turn may happen at the most various levels and in the most various ways. The soul gives the body a participation in its own life by actual ontic ‘information’ (one of the kinds of ‘intrinsic’ *causality). In mutual personal *communication two spiritual personal beings may each give the other a participation in itself. This kind of participation reaches its summit in Gods [sic] communication of himself (*Self-communication of God). If everything has a single origin and thus participates in God, and if God’s exinanition which is love, perfects itself in grace and glory as divine self-communication, it is clear that the concept of participation – very mysterious in itself (two beings remain two and yet are one by participation in each other) – must be of key importance in theology” (ibid., pp. 336-337).


928 Ibid., p. 1244.
or of being present), and even up to “the bringing about of full presence and efficacy by something through something,” though, Rahner adds, “ultimately in every representation a certain presence [Gegenwart] of the represented is necessarily implied.”

Introducing the idea of the network of relations discussed above, Rahner explains that the “possibility of representation ultimately rests on the continuous connection of being, effect, and meaning between God and finite beings and between the latter among themselves.”

Thus, God’s presence to us and our presence to each other occur through this network of relations. Moreover, the “nature and intensity of representation depends on the essence of the one representing and the character of its connection with the one represented and the third party [toward whom the representation is directed]…. The bearer of representation can be a person (office and authority as representative of God, mediator, Stellvertretung) or a cause (sacrament, Symbol, sign).” And in the case of Christ, the Person and Ursakrament, we have one whose essence and connection with those represented bring about the most intense of representations. Rahner closes by noting the applications of this concept, which includes (in addition to Christ’s mediating activity) “why and how Adam could act in the history of salvation for the whole of humanity (original sin...),” the priesthood and offices in the Church, the authority of

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929 Ibid.  
930 Ibid.  
931 Ibid.
administering the sacraments, mariological titles such as “co-redemptrix,” and the principle of solidarity.  

5.2.4 Conclusion: Christ the “Representative”

Even within Rahner’s mature writings, the idea of Christ “summing up” the human race within himself and representing us before God persists in important ways. Christ is the “absolute nearness” of the human family to God, and our salvation hinges on the fact that Jesus himself is saved. On occasion, the mature Rahner even explicitly employs “recapitulation” language to express this idea, though such cases are exceptional. The idea also surfaces in Rahner’s critical treatments of the term Stellvertretung, which Rahner understands to be adulterated by a distorted framework for understanding God’s grace and human freedom (which, in fact, increase proportionally to one another). Despite the term’s shortcomings, Rahner perceives in it a kernel of truth, which he describes in terms of a network of human solidarity (in which everyone’s freedom is mutually conditioned) which is itself “consolidated” in and “constituted” by Person of Christ in his summative death. Elsewhere, Rahner gives his own alternative term to this very kernel of truth dwelling within the problematic idea of Stellvertretung: namely, “Repräsentation.”

5.3 Christ: God’s Presence to and Encounter with Us

The second marker of representative soteriology which we will now consider concerns Christ as God’s Representative before us, the one who brings about God’s

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932 Ibid., pp. 1244-45.
presence to the blessed definitively and intimately. Of course, the notion of Christ as Sacrament and das Realssymbol of God’s salvation, a notion which is already widely associated with Rahner’s soteriology, is itself an instance of this marker. However, the following observations will not simply be a reiteration of Chapter 2, but rather a look at how Rahner’s understanding of Christ’s identity as God’s Mediator is articulated in ways which draw upon the other two markers as well. Once again, it is not simply the markers themselves which make representative soteriology a unique category for understanding human redemption, but rather it is their particular configuration and mutual dependency. Two particular theological themes illustrate this mutual dependency within Rahner’s thought, namely, the eternal significance of Christ’s humanity for our salvation and the personal in-breaking of God’s basileia in the Christ-event.

5.3.1 Christ’s Ongoing, Eternal Mediation

Perhaps one of the strongest indications of a person-centered understanding of Christ’s mediatory salvific efficacy comes in a 1953 article, “The Eternal Significance of the Humanity of Jesus for Our Relationship with God.”

933 The motivating concern underlying this article (especially in its first half) is the danger of contemporary Christian spirituality collapsing all beatified created realities (e.g., saints, angels, Jesus’ Sacred Heart) into God’s own divine essence, or at least using these divinized realities as circumlocutions for God in Christian thought and, especially, prayer. Out of this concern emerges a thesis, summarized by the title, which directly pertains to Rahner’s

soteriological framework currently under consideration: the human Christ is not simply someone who once performed a great task and has since vanished into his Godhead – or at least faded in soteriological importance – but rather Christ’s humanity continues to exercise an ongoing role, mediating God to humanity and vice-versa. Heaven is not, Rahner insists, simply a matter of the saints enjoying the beatific vision, but of God being made available to the blessed continually through their Savior. Having thus summarized Rahner’s thesis, let us consider the article itself in a bit more detail.

As in his writings on *das Realsymbol* and Christ, Rahner begins the article by considering “the sacred heart devotion in theology,” particularly reflecting on whether Christ’s Sacred Heart, which “is the original source of all our Lord’s saving actions,” belongs essentially to “the world” or to “God.” Although Rahner is quick to answer that, “objectively speaking,” the Sacred Heart (along with the saints, angels, etc.) are created by God and thus belong to the world, he notes that when it comes to religious experience of contemporary Christians, these realities are at least treated as if they belong to God. While the average Christian would not set out to explicitly conflate, say, Michael the Archangel with a Person of the Trinity, most Christians tend to pray as if Michael were indeed part of God rather than the world. “[W]ho among us has ever really and genuinely realized in the *Confiteor* that he is confessing his sinfulness to Blessed Michael the Archangel, and that this really is not just a rhetorical amplification of a confession to God?”

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935 Ibid., *TI* 3:37.
The reason behind such a conflation seems to be an insufficient way of understanding the eternal union of creaturely realities with God. The day’s predominate understanding, as reflected in theology of the manuals, allows the greatness of God to almost entirely overcome the identity of creatures as creatures, including the human nature (and Sacred Heart) of Jesus. Rahner explains,

Let us take a look at an average theological treatise on the Last Things, on eternal happiness. Does such a treatise mention even a single word about the Lord become man? Is not rather everything swallowed up by the visio beatifica, the beatific vision, the direct relationship to the very essence of God which is indeed determined historical by a past event – namely, the event of Christ – but which is not now mediated by Jesus Christ?936

A good starting point for addressing this tendency toward conflation, Rahner proposes, is the humanity of Jesus, his Sacred Heart in particular. “This heart – if it is not turned into just another, more colourful word for God and for the incomprehensibility of his unbounded love – is a human heart. It must not be extolled merely in the actions which at one time flowed from it.”937 Rather, Rahner will argue, it should be “honoured, adored, and loved”938 in an ongoing manner, not as a circumlocution for “God” but as a created reality which nonetheless continually impacts the status of the blessed in heaven.

To set up this conclusion, Rahner returns once again to an anthropological and soteriological theme seen earlier in this chapter, namely, that God’s grace and human freedom grow in direct (rather than inverse) proportion to one another. Against a

936 Ibid., TI 3:37-38, emphasis original.

937 Ibid., TI 3:38-39, emphasis original.

938 Ibid., TI 3:39.
tendency to think that the greatness of God would somehow occlude or supplant the creaturely reality’s status as such, Rahner argues, “The nearer one comes to [God], the more real one becomes; the more [God] grows in and before one, the more independent one becomes oneself.”

God’s love for and proximity to his creature does not rob it of its identity, but rather augments it. Thus, the “framework” out of which a proper devotion to Christ’s humanity (including his Heart) underlines this relationship:

the fact that God himself is man is both the unique summit and the ultimate basis of God’s relationship to his creation, in which he and his creation grow in direct (and not converse) proportion. This positive nature of creation, not merely measured in relation to nothingness but also in relation to God, reaches its qualitatively unique climax, therefore, in Christ.

The advent of the God-man is not only the unique “summit” and “climax” of a general relationship (of direct proportionality) between God and creation, but Rahner claims here that Jesus also stands as the “ultimate basis” of that general relationship. “For, according to the testimony of the faith, this created human nature is the indispensable and permanent gateway through which everything created must pass if it is to find the perfection of its eternal validity before God. He is the gate and the door, the

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939 Ibid., TI 3:40.

940 "When we come thus in a religious way to this God of the truly serious and unconditional love of created reality, however, then we must love him as he is, then we must not maliciously try to turn him in our religious act into someone he precisely is not, viz. into a God without a world…. We today are in danger of honouring God (or at least trying to honour him) and of letting the world itself be God-less. The Christian attitude, however, would be to honour the world as something willed and loved by God” (ibid., TI 3:41-42).

941 Ibid., TI 3:43.
Alpha and Omega, the all-embracing in whom, as the one who has become man, creation finds its stability."

At this point, Rahner’s thesis for the eternal significance of Jesus’ humanity for our salvation emerges in full force. Though Rahner, using Johannine language, calls Christ the “gate and the door,” Christ is not simply a soteriological portal through which one passes and then leaves. Again, he is the “all-embracing” One, “in whom” we find our salvation. Rahner continues, “Jesus, the Man, not merely was at one time of decisive importance for our salvation, i.e., for the real finding of the absolute God, by his historical and now past acts of the Cross, etc. but – as the one who became man and has remained a creature – he is now and for all eternity the permanent openness of our finite being to the living God of infinite, eternal life.”

On a conceptual level, Rahner admits, many Christians may realize Christ’s humanity in heaven can, “alongside” the beatific vision, be occasion for some “accidental” joy to the blessed. Still, Rahner presses, where is the clear knowledge, expressed in ontological terms, of the fact that it remains eternally true to say that no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom he wishes to reveal it: he who sees him, sees the Father? Where is the clear consciousness that, here and now and always, my salvation, my grace, my knowledge of God, rests on the Word in our flesh? …. Every theologian should allow himself to be asked: have you a theology in which the Word – by the fact that he is man and in so far as he is this – is the necessary and permanent mediator of all salvation, not merely at some time in the past but now and for all eternity?

942 Ibid.

943 Ibid., TI 3:44.

944 Ibid., TI 3:44-45. Rahner’s talk of Christ here as an providing eternal mediation may seem at odds with the words of Pope Benedict XII (in Benedictus Deus (1336)), who declared that the blessed in heaven “have seen and do see the divine essence with an intuitive vision, and even face to face, without the mediation of any creature” (DS 1000, cf. CCC 1023). However, it should also be noted that even Thomas
At this point, Rahner concludes his essay by returning to the topic with which he opened it, namely, Jesus’ Sacred Heart. This Heart “really means the human heart,” which is at the same time “the original centre of the human reality of the Son of God.” That is, as Rahner says elsewhere, Jesus’ Sacred Heart is das Realsymbol of his whole human reality. This reality, and the Heart which sums it up, are not simply of past interest as, at a point in history long ago, having brought about a new state of affairs, in which human salvation is possible. Rather, Jesus’

heart itself, taken both as object and as goal, or better, as mediating centre, [is] the centre of mediation, through which all our movement must pass if it is really to arrive at God. Ut apertum core ... piis esset requies et poenitentibus pateret salutis refugium… (so that opened heart … might be a resting place for the pious and be open to the penitent as a refuge of salvation…). Such words are not just vague pious phrases and sentimentalities; they form an absolutely exact statement which academic theology has not yet been able to surpass.945

Although Rahner does not endeavor to tease out all of its implications, he does “postulate” a very clear thesis for academic theologians to work on: “The heart is not only the original centre of our Lord’s human being, but even within this it is the centre of mediation, without which there can be no approach to God…. one can never leave this entrance behind as a thing of the past. Rather, one arrives continually by passing through this mediating centre of Christ’s humanity.”946

Aquinas, while affirming an “immediate” vision of God, nonetheless acknowledges a “created medium” “by which God is seen; and such a medium does not take away the immediate vision of God” (ST I q. 12 a. 5 ad 2).


946 Ibid.
This article provides perhaps the best evidence of how Rahner’s “sacramental” soteriology is one which is both representative and Person-centered. Here, Rahner touches on the important elements of his soteriology as it is typically understood – Christ is the unique climax of the God’s self-communication in history and of the human response to that self-communication. And as such, he is also the Ursakrament, the Mediator and Realsymbol of that grace throughout the world. But here Rahner adds several crucial pieces of his soteriological picture. Christ’s role as Mediator is not that of an agent accomplishing a one-off feat. Nor is he a dispenser of grace which, once his grace is received, is rendered of mere historical interest and importance. Rather, echoing Paul (1Cor 12) and Irenaeus, Rahner speaks of salvation as something that occurs “in” Christ’s Person, and subsequently of Christ’s Heart as a “refuge” of salvation. Such talk, he stresses, is not vague or pious, but expresses a fundamental truth which theologians must address: salvation is something that occurs not simply because of Christ, but has its locus precisely in Christ. Accordingly, the divinized, human Christ is of the utmost and ongoing importance for the rest of humanity.

Support for this Person-centered and representative view of Christ as Mediator can be found both in Rahner’s academic and pastoral writings. In a 1975 essay of the latter type, Rahner underlines how God’s self-communication in Christ in conceptually coupled with our salvation being realized in our unity, even identity with him. He writes that our gratitude for the Cross is

rooted in the experience that in Jesus God appeared and that through God’s act the redeemer and the redeemed are one and the same. To carry this reflection a step further, this unity of redeemer and redeemed is intended, through the grace of God which comes to us from the cross of Jesus and which leads on to the universal triumph of his resurrection, to become a reality in us. What is characteristic of our gratitude for the cross consists precisely in our identity with the crucified one.

One could very well sum-up Rahner here in patristic language by stating that God became human in order to become one with us, and that we, in turn, are called to become one with God in and through the Word made flesh.

This same line of thought is present in a series three radio addresses from 1966, revised and published as the essay “Hidden Victory” (1966). Daniel Pekarske summarizes this essay, which is at points quite Balthasarian, as follows: “There is no depth to which death can drag us that has not already been experienced and redeemed by Christ’s victory over death.” Focusing on what the Paschal Mystery means in particular for those who suffer greatly, Rahner writes that “in death [Christ] has overcome and redeemed for ever the very heart and centre of all earthly being…. Christ is already at the heart and centre of all the poor things of this earth, which we cannot do without because the earth is our mother. He is present in the blind hope of all creatures

948 Ibid., p. 160.

949 Rahner continues, “In us too the redeemed and the redeemer must become one; salvation by another and salvation by oneself, when seen in their ultimately significance, do not represent contradictions for a Christian” (ibid., p. 161).

950 “Hidden Victory,” TI 7:151-158.

951 Cf. Balthasar’s Mysterium Paschal and TD vols. IV and V.

who, without knowing it, are striving to participate in the glorification of his body.”

This essay, as did the last, underlines the unity of Christ and the blessed, and it further supports Rahner’s earlier thesis regarding the eternal significance of Christ’s humanity by accounting for human salvation in terms of “participat[ing] in the glorification of [Christ’s] body.” Once again, Rahner’s particular account of Christ mediating grace to the blessed presupposes a Person-centered understanding of that mediation. Our glorification consists of Christ’s own glorification, since the blessed are participants in him, or in Pauline terms, his body’s members.

The final piece reaffirming Rahner’s “eternal significance” thesis which we will consider is Rahner’s entry on “Resurrection” in *Sacramentum Mundi*. Here, Rahner critiques those theologians, perhaps even of the dominant opinion in the age of manual theology, who slight the soteriological magnitude of Christ’s resurrection since, unlike his crucifixion, it is not a “morally meritorious cause of the redemption.” Such a theological position, Rahner protests, unduly separates Christ’s death and resurrection. Christ’s resurrection, Rahner insists, has great soteriological import, which Rahner articulates in a quite remarkable way. Augmenting his vision articulated in “Eternal Significance,” Rahner makes the startling claim that the event of Christ’s resurrection in fact *created* heaven, rather than enabling entry into a “heaven” which was already extant: “[T]he occurrence of [Jesus’] resurrection created ‘heaven’ (to the extent that this implies

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954 “Resurrection,” *SM* vol. 5 pp. 323-342.

955 Ibid., p. 332.
more than a purely spiritual process) and taken together with the ascension (which fundamentally is an element in the resurrection), is not merely an entry into an already existing heaven."  

It is difficult to imagine a more Person-centered account of human salvation that one which posits that heaven’s *very existence* has its advent in Christ’s resurrection and ascension – such a claim, radical as it indeed sounds, it perfectly sensible given Rahner’s insistence upon the enduring importance of Christ’s humanity as the locus of salvation.

Through his academic articles ("Eternal Significance," “Resurrection” in *SM*) and more pastoral pieces (“Hidden Victory,” “Gratitude for the Cross”), Rahner offers a portrait of how Christ mediates God’s presence to us in a way which is both Person-centered and representative. Christ is not an agent who enables our salvation through a redemptive act and then steps onto the sideline, but is rather in his *very Person* of abiding significance. This is because, as members of his body, the blessed are glorified as he is glorified, for the redeemed and the Redeemer are “one and the same.” Moreover, the “heaven” to which the saved attain is not a pre-existing place or even state, but a reality which comes into being with Christ’s own resurrection, for *he is himself* salvation’s content, God made present to creation. Christ is, for Rahner, not only the Sacrament of salvation, but he is its very locus.

5.3.2 Christ-Event as the In-breaking of God’s Reign in a Person

One other important way in which Rahner discusses Jesus as God’s presence to and encounter with us is Rahner’s Christological account of God’s Reign or Kingdom

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956 Ibid., p. 333.
(basileia). As with his discussion of the eternal significance of Christ’s humanity and Christ’s resurrection “creating” heaven, Rahner’s account of God’s Kingdom breaking into history via the Christ-event gives his sacramental soteriology a heavily person-centered dimension. Let us consider his discussion of God’s Reign in two works from late in his career, *Foundations of Christian Faith* (1976) and *Was heißt Jesus lieben?* (1982).⁹⁵⁷ Mark Fischer summarizes Rahner’s thesis well, writing that Jesus meant in his preaching “to proclaim a historical event. The event was the breaking-in of God’s kingdom. It had been achieved in his person.”⁹⁵⁸

For as fascinated as Rahner was with the Gospel of John in his early career, he makes it quite clear in *FCF* that during Jesus’ earthly ministry, it is almost certain that the explicit centerpiece of Jesus’ preaching was God’s Reign rather than himself.⁹⁵⁹ However, this is not to say Jesus was not himself an integral part of inaugurating the Reign that he proclaimed.⁹⁶⁰ In fact, Rahner understands the Person of Jesus, in his words, deeds, and overall ministry, to have initiated God’s *basileia* within the world in a

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⁹⁵⁹ “It is true and need not be glossed over that Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of God and not himself. This man Jesus is the perfect man in an absolute sense precisely because he forgot himself for the sake of God and his fellow man who was in need of salvation” (*FCF* pp. 250-251).

⁹⁶⁰ “Hence a statement of Jesus about himself… is conceivable to begin with only if and because it appears as an unavoidable element in that closeness of God’s kingdom which Jesus proclaims as taking place now for the first time. The ‘function’ of Jesus reveals his ‘essence’” (*FCF* p. 251).
new, transformative, and irrevocable way, so that it is “inseparably” bound to his
Person. Rahner writes of “an inseparable connection between the closeness of God’s
kingdom preached by Jesus as new and his ‘person’… the pre-resurrection Jesus thought
that this new closeness of the kingdom came to be in and through the totality of what he
said and what he did.”

Rahner’s articulation of the Christ/basileia connection in FCF draws, though not
explicitly, upon his sacramental soteriology and its ontology of the Symbol. As we saw
in Chapter 2, Rahner (unlike, say, R. Haight) allows for only a single occurrence of the
Christ-event, for Jesus of Nazareth simply is what occurs when God’s Word self-
exteriorizes within time and space – there can be no other event in which God’s presence
to the world is surpassed or even paralleled. Likewise, Rahner writes of Christ in FCF
that he “is the final call of God, and after him no other follows or can follow because of
the radical nature in which God, no longer represented [vertreten] by something else,
promises himself.” With this realsymbolisch framework showing occasionally in the
background, Rahner further emphasizes how Jesus’ inauguration of God’s basileia is, as
Fischer summarized, something achieved in his Person. Jesus

experienced his new and unique ‘relationship of sonship’ with the ‘Father’ as
significant for all men by the fact that in this relationship God’s closeness to all
men has now come to be in a new and irrevocable way. In his unique and yet for
us exemplary relationship to God, the pre-resurrection Jesus can experience the
new coming of God’s kingdom as grounded in his person…. He is already before

961 “The closeness of God’s kingdom… is for the pre-resurrection Jesus already inseparably
connected with his person” (FCF pp. 251-252).

962 FCF p. 252 (emphasis original).

963 FCF p. 253 (emphasis original).
the resurrection the one sent, the one who inaugurates the kingdom of God through what he says and what he does in a way that it did not exist before, but now does exist through him and in him. ⑨64

Once again, since Rahner understands Christ’s actions, his self-surrendering death in particular, to be a free self-determination in grace on Jesus’ part, what Jesus says and does is closely bound to “his person,” allowing Rahner to say that God’s basileia has been established both “through him and in him.”

Rahner elaborates on the Christ-basileia relationship a few years later in Was heist Jesus lieben? There he specifies that the one who inaugurates the basileia in this unique, definitive, and irrevocable way is the “Messiah.”

Jesus understands himself as the Messiah. He is convinced that with himself the definitive, unsurpassable Kingdom of God has arrived—that in him God shares himself and communicates his own glory and excellence, consoling a sinful world with his irrevocable pardon, speaking his last, definitive Word, after which there shall be no other—and that this Word is indeed God himself, in his own excellence. ⑨65

The final point here – that “this Word is indeed God himself” – is another important indicator (in Johannine language) of Rahner’s realsymbolisch framework operating in the background. Recall, das Realsymbol is the self-expression of an original unity, making that original present fully to another. As the Messiah, the one who inaugurates and mediates the basileia in his Person, Jesus is God’s presence to and

⑨64 FCF p. 254 (emphasis original).

⑨65 The Love of Jesus and the Love of Neighbor, p. 27. Rahner goes on to argue that “Messiah,” as he uses the term here, and later Christological terms like “Incarnate Word” and “Son of God” are “entirely identifiable with each other, provided we clearly understand that ‘Messiah’ means substantially more than just any sort of prophet sent by God – that ‘Messiah’ means the vehicle and bearer of a definitive message that can basically no longer be transcended, a message in which God definitively ‘commits himself’” (ibid. p. 28).
encounter with us. Indeed, even the basileia, according to Rahner, is nothing other than God: “in every case the Messiah is the person with and through whom the definitive Kingdom of God has come. And ultimately, if we may be permitted something of a metaphysical observation here, this Kingdom of God is simply God himself, and not something distinct from him.”966 One could fairly say that Rahner here envisions Christ as das Realsymbol of the basileia. To this realsymbolisch articulation of God’s Reign, Rahner marries his consistent usage of “person” language, clarifying that the arrival of this Kingdom is not simply an event that achieved through an agent-Jesus, but through the One who abides as Messiah. One of Rahner’s more pastoral pieces from the late 1960s provides an accessible look at this very point:

Jesus teaches in the desert but the word which he preaches and wishes to preach is really his revelation of himself as the kingdom of God’s mercy come upon the earth. Thus this word of Jesus tends directly to the end that what he reveals – namely, himself as the grace of God made flesh – enters really into the being of the human person, not just in thought but in all truth, in his spirit, in his grace, and in their historical manifestation, the sacraments and the sacrament.967

5.3.3 Conclusion: Christ, God’s Presence to Us

Rahner’s sacramental articulations of Christ’s saving work are well known in the secondary literature, and thus the second marker of representative soteriology (Christ as God’s presence to and encounter with us) is in one sense the easiest to establish. Yet, the

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966 Ibid., p. 27.

ways in which Rahner’s “sacramental” Christology from later in his career draw upon the other two markers is underappreciated.

As we have seen, Rahner insists in “Eternal Significance” that Christ’s humanity (his Sacred Heart in particular) does not have the soteriological importance of an instrumental agent with a one-off task of making the grace of salvation available. Rather, Rahner understands Christ’s Heart as an enduring “refuge” of human salvation, the locus through which the blessed continually pass in their eternal knowledge of God in heaven. Thus, Rahner openly speaks about the unity, even identity of the Redeemer and the redeemed, going so far as to say that heaven itself was not a pre-existing reality to which Jesus grants access, but rather than with his resurrection and ascension, Jesus *creates* heaven in his own *Person*, in whom the blessed participate.

The Person-centered character of his sacramental Christology is also evident in his writings on God’s Reign. This *basileia*, according to Rahner, is not something established simply through a program or particular efforts undertaken by Jesus, but is inaugurated in “his person.” His death of self-surrender on the cross definitively establishes God’s Reign, for it simultaneously establishes (by recapitulating the “Yes” of his entire life) who Jesus is. For Rahner, Jesus is the Messiah, and the Messiah is precisely the One who brings about the Kingdom (which is, basically, God himself) with his own Person as its basis.

5.4 Salvation in Christ’s Person

Let us now turn to the final marker of representative soteriology, namely, its person-centered character. The foregoing treatment on Christ as God’s presence to us has already engaged this marker, for the way Rahner understands Christ, God’s *Ursakrament*,
to communicate grace to us centers upon Christ’s identity (rather than any particular act he undertook). In addition to the person-centered elements of Rahner’s theology which we have already explored in this regard, there are a number of other instances in which Rahner’s soteriology shows itself to be strongly person-centered. These instances can be divided up into two main groups, the first of which concerns our salvation as bound up in our relating to the Person of Jesus Chris, the second of which explicitly concerns the import of Christ’s being (rather than doing) our salvation.

5.4.1 Rahner’s Person-centered Soteriology: Relating to Christ

To underline the importance of having a relationship with Jesus is a commonplace in Christian spirituality. But for a soteriology which is robustly person-centered, relating to the Person of Christ takes on special theological weight. For in this case, one does not relate to Christ in order to simply share the fruits of his saving work as a partner, but one’s salvation hangs on relating to Christ since he is *its very locus*. Below, we will consider several manners in which Rahner’s soteriology, precisely as person-centered, gives special theological weight to this relationship.

5.4.1.1 Christ as Constitutive of Our Salvation

In Chapter 1.1.4, we encountered the distinction between constitutive and normative theories of Christ’s role in salvation. To briefly review, those who endorse normative Christologies would affirm that human salvation has Jesus Christ as its ultimate paradigm, the prototype provided by God to which all other instances conform; on this model, salvation is indeed possible apart from Christ (though he would still stand, at the very least, in a relationship of resemblance to other occurrences). In comparison,
constitutive Christologies go farther and claim that Christ uniquely inaugurates human salvation and is indispensible to its realization. In other words, if it weren’t for Christ there would be no human salvation, and there cannot be any human salvation without him. A variety of different soteriological models can legitimately claim to grant Christ a constitutive role – whether it is Christus victor, satisfaction theory, penal substitution, a Person-centered soteriology of representation, or some other, the crucial factor is that Christ genuinely effects salvation.

Rahner (contra some of his readers968) understands Christ as constitutive of human salvation, and when he discusses the matter, the particularly person-centered character of his soteriology is apparent. In a 1980 lecture, “Jesus Christ—The Meaning of Life,”969 Rahner addresses a group of Austrian physicians, explaining at one point how Christ can be understood to bring about our redemption. He begins, “Jesus of Nazareth as a human being with a concrete human history, as one who has died and risen, has a constitutive significance (let us attempt to formulate the question in this way) for the total meaning of our lives.”970 He then turns to Scripture and Christian tradition to give examples of how this significance can be understood.

First, Rahner states, “In the incarnation of the eternal Logos in Jesus of Nazareth God has accepted the whole of humanity and in this, since he has the same nature as we

968 Recall, both Ogden and J.T. Farmer understand Rahner’s Christ to have a normative role in human salvation; J. Wong has convincingly demonstrated the contrary (see 1.1.4).


970 “Jesus Christ—The Meaning of Life,” 77/21:212.
do, he has become one with the whole of humanity.”⁹⁷¹ Here, the emphasis lies on who Jesus is, the one who shares our nature, in whom God has accepted the human race, and who is “one with the whole of humanity.” He then turns to a classical act-centered explanation, focusing on Jesus satisfying God’s justice in his death. But even here, as in the foregoing one, Rahner ends the explanation by appealing to the logic of Christ’s unity with the whole of humanity. “By the obedience of his passion Jesus, as the loving immaculate one who was utterly guiltless, has opened to us sinners the way to the Father. For he has been totally one with us.”⁹⁷²

In his brief survey of classical ways for understanding Christ’s constitutive role in salvation, it’s clear that Rahner has the soteriological distinction between Christ’s being and Christ’s actions in mind. Not only does the passage just described indicate this, but Rahner also includes a footnote about “prescinding” from further discussion about the division between “ontical” statements (which understand Christ’s being as already salvific) and those statements (“about sacrifice, blood, obedience, etc.”) which understand his being “as a preposition of salvation” (which occurs “in its proper sense” with his act of dying).⁹⁷³ What is particularly interesting about Rahner’s short treatment of the groups of “ontical” and act-centered classical statements in this passage is the way he presents both of them as turning on Christ’s unity with the whole of humanity. While he may “prescind” from a lengthy discussion of the matter, it is apparent that he sees a singular

⁹⁷¹ Ibid.
⁹⁷² Ibid., TI 21:213.
⁹⁷³ Ibid., note 1.
logic behind both strands: Christ is constitutive of our salvation, “For he has been totally one with us.” He is thus able to color not only the “ontical” statements, but also more act-centered ones in Scripture and the tradition, as having an ultimately person-centered rationale.

5.4.1.2 Christology of the Quest

Although, as discussed in Chapter 2, Rahner continued to affirm elements of both “ascending” and “descending” Christologies throughout his career, his middle and later years were focused predominately on the former, “from-below” methodology. Driven by his perennial concern that the “from-above” approach (while doctrinally unobjectionable) strikes the modern ear as rather mythological, Rahner pushed the theologians of his day to (re-)introduce Christ to contemporary people by beginning with things in their lives with which they were already familiar. One way in which Rahner attempted to do this in his own theology is with an idea he called a “searching Christology,” or a “Christology of the Quest.” This widely-known idea also attests to the person-centered nature of Rahner’s late Christology, for it depicts the human person as inexterminably (even if non-explicitly) directed toward Jesus, who can be personally present to the mass of humanity despite its large spatio-temporal diversity. In other words, the centerpiece of Rahner’s

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974 In a letter sent from Rome during the first session of the Second Vatican Council (1962), Rahner wrote, “I also notice here that I’m not yet all that old, even when I sit at a table with Daniéloú, Congar, Ratzinger, Schillebeeckx and so on. I find that these still do not realize clearly enough how little, e.g., a christology ‘from above’, which simply begins with the declaration that God has become man, can be understood today. And the same is true in so many other instances. Of course one can hardly expect that another way of thinking will already make a mark on the schemata of the Council, but I do not find it explicitly enough among the progressive theologians themselves” (Vorgrimler, Understanding Karl Rahner, p. 158).
anthropology, as attested by his searching Christology, is a genuine relationship with Jesus Christ.

Rahner gives a concise overview of his Christology of the Quest in the 1975 essay, “The One Christ and the Universality of Salvation” (previously considered in Chapters 2 and 4). Leading up to this section, Rahner has been discussing those who are not explicit Christians but nonetheless possess the grace of salvation – i.e., “anonymous Christians.” Rahner is quite clear that such individuals do not simply receive their salvation through a general, nondescript God, but that each such individual in fact stands in an intimate association with Christ: “the heathen in his polytheism, the atheist in good faith, the theist outside the revelation of the Old and New Testaments, all possess not only a relationship of faith to God’s self-revelation, but also a genuine relationship to Jesus Christ and his saving action.”

What isn’t immediately clear, Rahner goes on to say, is how these (explicitly, at least) non-Christians have such a relationship with Christ. Although it is rather easy to speak of such individuals having a transcendent relationship to an eternal God, it is more difficult to account for how they (or any person removed from the Holy Land during the early part of the first century!) can relate to the particular person Jesus of Nazareth. Rahner’s proposed solution is the “searching Christology,” which is perhaps even more anthropological than Christological:

A person who is searching for something which is specific and yet unknown has a genuine existential connection, as one alert and on the watch, with whatever he is seeking, even if he has not yet found it…. [T]he search is brought about by grace, which has found its historically tangible expression and its irreversible force in

975 “The One Christ and the Universality of Salvation,” TI 16:220.
Jesus. This means that if the search is caused by this grace, a person engaged on such a quest is directed in some measure to this goal. While it is not explicitly mentioned, the notion of Christ as das Realsymbol of grace is central to Rahner’s explanation. The human person, enlivened by God’s grace, seeks her goal – and the goal itself is the full realization of that very grace, which simply is Jesus, the exteriorization of God’s self-communication into the world. On Rahner’s anthropology and Christology, there is an intimate connection between the seeker and the Sought, who are bound together by grace. His concept of das Realsymbol serves as a conceptual bridge binding the two together, but Rahner’s motivation for making this conceptual move is his commitment to a person-centered soteriology. Salvation occurs through one’s intimate relationship to Jesus, who is every person’s telos.

Notably, it is precisely the issue of making Jesus present to spacio-temporally distant persons which emerged prominently in the conclusion of E latere Christi. The task of offering an account of this presence was constant undertaking throughout Rahner’s career, from his theology dissertation to the above account of “searching Christology” from the final decade of his life. Splitting the difference between these two moments, a 1954 essay called “Advent” takes up the same theme, offering an even more

976 Ibid., TI 16:221.

977 “Because a man engaged upon the Christological quest is prepared without conditions or qualifications to accept the goal wherever and however it can be found, this Christological search is in fact directed to Jesus, for it is Jesus who in reality is its proper goal. This means that the Christological quest possesses a relationship to Jesus, even if a man does not know how to call him by his proper name” (ibid., TI 16:222).
person-centered account of Christ, the blessed, and time itself.

The following passage is worth quoting at length:

Through the work of God in Christ, time has become what it was supposed to be. Time is no longer the bleak, empty, fading succession of moments, one moment destroying the preceding one and causing it to become “past,” only to die away itself, clearing the way for the future that presses—itself already mortally wounded. Time itself is redeemed. It possesses a center that can preserve the present and gather into itself the future, a nucleus that fills the present with a future that it already really effected, a focal point that coordinates the living present with the eternal future. The advent of the incarnate God, of the Christ who is the same yesterday and today and eternity (Heb 13:8), from whom neither the things of the present nor of the future can separate those who believe in him and who are united with him in love (Rom 8:38, 39)—this advent has penetrated into this time that is to be redeemed… The believer does not only have certain thoughts and opinions about something, thoughts which remain separate from the [Christ-]event thought about. His ‘outlook on life’ does not merely look upon something that remains external to him and that should be represented [vertreten] in him only by his thoughts about it. In faith the believer “thinks” not only his “thoughts.” Faith is more than this: in and through us and our freedom, faith is God’s grace working to assimilate the very reality of the event thought about. By means of faith the salvation of the believer really takes place in the believer himself. Salvation itself comes out from the past into his present, into him…. Christ lives in him…. In a mysterious way he becomes a contemporary of the incarnate Son of God. He dies and lives with him.

This Christ at the center of time and history is related in such a way to the individual Christian that he is in fact present “with him” and even “in him.” Another remarkable element of this treatment of the issue is how Rahner simply uses “salvation” and “Christ” interchangeably. Whereas Rahner’s typical articulation of the issue concerns how Jesus can be accessible from spatio-temporal distance, here he declares, “Salvation itself comes out from the past into [the believer’s] present, into him.”


979 “Advent,” in The Great Church Year, pp. 3-4.
identification of Christ with salvation itself makes perfect sense for a theology in which Christ is the locus of salvation.

5.4.1.3 The Centrality of “Love of Christ” to Rahner’s Theology and Spirituality

Finally, let us consider one more late account of understanding Christ’s presence throughout time, namely, that in *Was heißt Jesus lieben?* (1982). This text, which Andreas Batlogg has situated well within Rahner’s Christology, soteriology, and spirituality, begins with Rahner’s suggestion that one of the greatest dangers in contemporary Christology is treating Jesus “as an idea.” That is, Rahner worries that too often theologians render Jesus a mere cog within a conceptual system, whereas the fact is that even the “system” of Christian theology depends on the historicity and tangibility of the particular human being, Jesus of Nazareth. Lurking in the background is Rahner’s awareness that his own Christology-soteriology of Christ as *das Realsymbol*, taken in a certain way by itself, is insufficient – even dangerous: “Jesus Christ, ever so easily, is but a kind of algebraic symbol for God’s absolute self-bestowal upon the world, so that if you do not arrive at this figure, or if you substitute another quantity for it, you have not

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981 Indeed, when considered in isolation from other parts of Rahner’s thought, his Realsymbol soteriology (“God’s absolute self-bestowal upon the world”) seems especially vulnerable to precisely this criticism. Rahner seemed well-aware of this fact late in his career as he was composing *Was heißt Jesus lieben?* Factors within Rahner’s overall though which safeguard against this sort of critique include, first and foremost, his meditational and devotional writings, especially those concerning Jesus’ Sacred Heart (cf. section 5.4.2.3 below). Within his writings which are more properly theological, the person-centered aspects explored in this chapter stand as important elements which militate against Jesus’ reduction to a conceptual cog. Nevertheless, Rahner’s overall thought could be further protected from this vulnerability by making better use of narrative theology, particularly in his exegesis. On this point, see R. Krieg, “The Crucified in Rahner’s Christology: An Appraisal,” *The Irish Theological Quarterly* 50 (1983-1984), pp. 151-167; on narrative and Christology more broadly, Krieg, *Story-Shaped Christology: The Role of Narratives in Identifying Jesus Christ* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988).
actually lost anything. We forget: It is precisely in this concrete Jesus, and only in him, that what this symbol refers to has actually come to pass.”\textsuperscript{982} Jesus cannot be treated as a placeholder for an “idea,” but rather any theological “idea” about Jesus must be sincerely rooted in a Person to whom we have devoted ourselves: “our relationship to Jesus must involve more than an abstract idea of Christ—otherwise we should be simply hypnotized by our own idea of him and riveted to that, instead of loving a concrete, actual human being.”\textsuperscript{983}

Here, Rahner’s perennial question arises once more: How can we love this concrete, actual human being? After all, precisely this particularity places us at an enormous distance from him. Rahner begins his answer with an analysis on the nature of love, which he understands to render the lover and the beloved “in” one another. Using language which harkens to his earlier writings on \textit{das Realsymbol}, Rahner writes that “human beings necessarily commit themselves, entrust themselves, to others, and… indeed they must do so… Only if one thus abandons oneself, and lovingly sinks into the other, does one succeed in finding oneself.”\textsuperscript{984} Rahner explains that this idea is perhaps

\textsuperscript{982} The Love of Jesus and the Love of Neighbor, p. 16. The surrounding text reads, “I readily admit that when I was young I read Paul more than the synoptics – precisely because there, in Paul, the magnificent Christ-idea was to be seized in all its clarity and immediacy. In Paul, in John, the eternal Word of God comes right down from heaven. Here is the one who has created the world from the beginning and holds it in his hand. And now this Absolute Logos, the World-Reason, appears concretely in Jesus of Nazareth, bears witness to itself, and accomplishes the deed of redemption on the cross, thereupon to return to the glory of God the Father. And there it more or less disappears, indistinguishable from the absolute God. Jesus Christ, ever so easily, is but a kind of algebraic symbol for God’s absolute self-bestowal upon the world, so that if you do not arrive at this figure, or if you substitute another quantity for it, you have not actually lost anything. We forget: It is precisely in this concrete Jesus, and only in him, that what this symbol refers to has actually come to pass. And forgetting this, we find it easy to present Jesus Christ as, for example, the Omega of a cosmic evolutionary process” (ibid., pp. 15-16).

\textsuperscript{983} Ibid., p. 18.

\textsuperscript{984} Ibid., pp. 16-17.
most easily observable in married couples, but that it applies to (and is even paradigmatic in) knowing Christ as well. Such knowing, he says, certainly requires the “grounds” of rational considerations, such as those occasioned by exegesis of the gospels, historical analyses, and psychological evaluations of the disciples after Good Friday. But in the end, a true knowledge of Christ requires that we love him (and not just an idea about him), thus existing in him and becoming “fully ourselves” in the process. The confluence of Rahner’s realsymbolisch language of self-realization and the logic of representation is unmistakable here.

Nevertheless, this explanation simply brings us back to our question: How is this love for such a distant figure even possible? In other words, isn’t loving the idea of Christ ultimately inevitable? Rahner answers to the negative in two parts. First, he explains, one might counter that Christ is risen, and thus alive with God. Indeed, Christ is not only risen, but his body (as recounted in the resurrection appearance stories recorded in the gospels) seems not to be restricted by space and time in the manner which it was prior to his resurrection. Such an answer, according to Rahner, certainly stands as one legitimate way to address the concern. But the bulk of his answer rests on a more

985 Ibid., pp. 17-18.

986 “But after all – or so it seems at first – the concrete Jesus is cut off from us, is he not, by geographical space, by the distance of history and culture, and by the span of two thousand years. Can one love a person in earnest when that person is that far away?” (ibid., p. 18).

987 Ibid., pp. 18-20.

988 Cf. Jesus’ mysterious entry into rooms (Lk 24:36ff), even if the doors were shut (Jn 20:26) and locked (Jn 20:19), his instantaneous disappearance from the table on the journey to Emmaus (Lk 24:31), and his apparent ability to appear in distance locations within very short periods of time (Lk 24:33-34; shortly after Jesus disappeared from the table, the eleven in Jerusalem report that he had just appeared to Simon Peter).
fundamental insight about the nature of love itself. Echoing Thomas Aquinas, Rahner states that love occurs “when, despite their diversity, two persons succeed in existing in such mutual exchange of themselves, such mutual communication and sharing, that it can be said that their love makes them one.” We can best address the concern about spatio-temporal distance between lover and beloved, Rahner advises, by first analyzing the unity they share:

When we observe human love, we see that this same basic diversity between two people, this basic division separating them, obtains even when they are very near one another, even when they actually seek to unite themselves bodily. They are different, they are distinct. Their respective existence is not a given a priori as if it sprang from one source and origin. With all their physical and physiological proximity, the two remain diverse, distinct. They fall back, or at least they seem to fall back, into separation again, even when, in the act of supreme love, they seem to have achieved unity, a oneness. But (and now we come to the point) even through this basic diversity obtains between two lovers, indeed abides in the very basis of their love, and yet does not cause their love not to be—difficult as it may be to explain the coexistence of diversity and unity in love speculatively—then neither can a seemingly great distance in space and time between two persons who seek to love, and actually do love, betoken an impossibility for love. After all, even before its encounter with this spatial and temporal difficulty, love must face a much more radical difference—and experience shows it is perfectly capable of doing so. For this earlier, greater difference is actually to be reaffirmed in this love—for the lover love and affirms the other precisely as other, certainly not seeking simply to absorb the beloved into his or her own peculiar way of being.

In other words, the concern about spatio-temporal diversity impeding a genuine love between two people would, pushed to its logical conclusion, end up undermining

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989 Thomas speaks of two individuals becoming “one person” (*ST* I-II, q. 87 a. 7 co.) or “quasi” one person (*De veritate* q. 29 a. 7 s.c. 3, ad 11; see Thomas Aquinas, *Truth*, 3 vols. (Chicago: H. Regnery Co., 1952–4)) when united by the bond of love.


991 Ibid.
any genuine instance of love. After all, all people, and thus any set of lover and beloved, exist in spatio-temporal diversity (to some degree) from one another. However, if love exists at all (and Rahner is wagering here that it does), it can create a genuine unity of persons despite their spatio-temporal diversity. The most perplexing part of love is, Rahner points out, the unity of diverse persons which it occasions – and if we are willing accept this perplexity, a larger degree of spatio-temporal diversity should not present any great difficulty.

Thus, in the last years of his life, Rahner provides the existence of love itself a response to the question of how Jesus can be present to the contemporary Christian. His soteriology cannot be adequately summarized by simply positing Jesus as the primal communicator of grace within a realsymbolisch conceptual framework. Rather, it must be understood in a more person-centered way which turns on our loving this particular historical individual in order that he, as our Representative, can in fact be one with us: “you’re actually only really dealing with Jesus when you throw your arms around him and realize right down to the bottom of your being that this is something you can still do today…. I think one can and must love Jesus, in all immediacy and concretion, with a love that transcends space and time, in virtue of the nature of love in general and by the power of the Holy Spirit of God.”

Before leaving Was heißt Jesus lieben?, it is worth reiterating that Rahner’s remarks within it (on being “in” Jesus through love) amount to the notion of “representation.” As is also the case with his dictionary entry and his de facto response

992 Ibid., p. 23.
to Balthasar’s excursus ("Reconciliation and Vicarious Representation"), Rahner begins his reflections here by insisting that human beings cannot be understood in an individualistic manner. Rather, they can only be truly themselves in relation to another. Moreover, the culminating moment of this inter-relationality is the love of Jesus, with whom we become “one.” Such an argument, I would wager, is yet another (at least in part) response by Rahner to Balthasar’s excursus on his soteriology, which claimed that Rahner was opposed to any idea of Christic representation.

There are several indicators that this is the case, namely, points within Was heißt Jesus lieben? at which Rahner explicitly addresses other concerns raised in Balthasar’s excursus. One such instance concerns Rahner’s “from-below” Christology, which leads (epistemologically, at least) from Christ’s perfect life/death for our salvation to the doctrine of the hypostatic union – Why, Balthasar asks, should this not render the immaculate Mary hypostatically united with God as well? Without mentioning Balthasar by name, Rahner ponders a very similar objection in Was heißt Jesus lieben, answering by more or less acknowledging the limitations of a purely “from-below” methodology and grounding Jesus’ uniqueness in God’s loving act of “condescension.”

993 “Why is Jesus’ self-surrender to death on the cross regarded as absolutely unique? …. [W]e would have to ask why the death of Mary (and her life, which was a preparation for it) did not lead to the same hypostatic union? …. [S]ince she was perfect, was her death not of the same quality as that of Jesus?” (TD IV p. 280).

994 “The following objection, after all, could be raised: Suppose some person, wherever he or she might be, to be in fact indissolubly united to God and, in virtue of an absolute predestination, to remain so. This person could then be loved with the unconditional love that we appear to reserve for Jesus alone. We have only to think of Mary. Such an unconditional love can, then, it would seem, rest on other grounds than we have required in Jesus in the hypostatic union” (The Love of Jesus and the Love of Neighbor, p. 43).

995 “To be sure, the definitiveness of a human being’s union with God opens the way for a true definitiveness of love for him or her (even where one’s love for someone else may be greater on other
While the content of the exchange itself is interesting, the fact that it is occurring in the first place raises the likelihood that *Was heißt Jesus lieben?* was written with Balthasar’s soteriological critique on Rahner’s mind.

Another piece of evidence that Balthasar’s excursus lurks in the background of *Was heißt Jesus lieben?* is what appears to be a counter-attack upon Balthasar’s own soteriology in the second part. Again, Rahner never explicitly names Balthasar here, but it seems almost certain that Rahner has him in mind. Balthasar’s soteriology, articulated most famously in *Mysterium Paschale* but in more detail in his later volumes of *Theo-Drama* (especially the fourth and fifth), is centered upon the Trinitarian love between the Father and the Son encompassing (and hence redeeming) all of reality, and act which is particularly effected in the Son’s descent into dark realm of sin and godlessness, hell itself.

In the second part of *Was heißt Jesus lieben?*, Rahner distinguishes between “pure-Chalcedonian” and “neo-Chalcedonian” Christologies. The latter, he explains,

understand the oneness of divinity and humanity as the ground of salvation so emphatically as oneness that, while maintaining the Chalcedonian doctrine of the nonconfusion, or non-commingling, of divinity and humanity in Jesus, they nevertheless proceed to regard Jesus’ history and lot as the history and lot of God as God. They thus interpret the Chalcedonian dogma in the manner of Cyril of Alexandria: God has suffered; the eternal Word of God has himself undergone our grounds). But on what does the definitiveness of the union with God which forms the basis of such love rest? It rests on God’s love-creating condescension. But this love-creating condescension has become unequivocally accessible and irreversible in the salvation history of the world only in Jesus. For it when God has affirmed and bestowed his concrete love (not in a theorem) on the world in the form of a love that is irreversible from his side that the unconditional reliability and utter self-assurance of a love for a human being is possible. But this affirmation and bestowal is available only in Jesus” (ibid.).

condition and our death and thereby our condition and our death are saved and redeemed; the Word of the Father has personally taken on our condition, with its mortgage of sin and death, and thereby redeemed it.997

To be clear, Rahner recognizes that many truths, even those (such as the communication of idioms) which “belong per se to Catholic Christianity’s deposit of faith,” exist within the Neo-Chalcedonian approach to soteriology. However, he also believes that this kind of soteriology stands in danger of exaggerating and distorting those truths, excessively restricting itself to such truths to the exclusion of other crucial theological factors.

Speaking of this view’s “representatives in theology today” and without naming names, he writes that they end up rendering the soteriological action a completely divine drama, one which disrespects the proper division of attributes (in constant danger of rendering the communication of idioms an identity of idioms) and occluding the humanity of Christ. The final part of his critique, which he calls an “excursus” on neo-Chalcedonian soteriology, comes across as an especially pointed message to Balthasar:

“We would then have the eternal, impassible God, who transcends all history—in a spirit of gnosticism or Schellingism or what you will—suffering in himself, suffering as God. We would be positing the redemption of our condition as occurring in virtue of a transposition of that condition to the interiority of God himself.”998 More than a quarter-

997 The Love of Jesus and the Love of Neighbor, p. 55.

998 The majority of the entire critique is as follows: adherents of neo-Chalcedonian soteriology “understand redemption as a matter of God’s having suffered, God’s having died, and thereby having redeemed us. While not forgetting that we are dealing with a mystery here, the neo-Chalcedonian understands the expression ‘Jesus was obedient unto death’ of the divinity itself, as well as of the humanity. A representative of pure-Chalcedonianism, however, while continuing to maintain the hypostatic union of divinity and humanity in Jesus, will insist here that, in this union of divinity and humanity, the nonconfusion must also be safeguarded. Death and finitude belong only to the creaturely reality of Jesus. They remain ‘this side’ of the infinite distance separating God and creature; they remain on the creaturely
century later, Alyssa Pitstick would similarly criticize Balthasar for his treatment of divine passibility and the (lacking) soteriological consequence of Jesus’ humanity.\footnote{See Pitstick, Light in Darkness, pp. 131ff, p. 196, 238, 305-306.}

Moreover, in a rare instance which occurred during an interview, Rahner explicitly names Balthasar when articulating this criticism in virtually the same terms. Regarding those who critique his soteriology, Rahner states,

> If I wanted to launch a counterattack, I would say that there is a modern tendency (I don’t want to say theory, but at least a tendency) to develop a theology of the death of God that, in the last analysis, seems to me to be Gnostic. One can find this in Hans Urs Von Balthasar…. To put it crudely, it does not help me to escape from my mess and mix-up and despair if God is in the same predicament…. In Moltmann and others I sense a theology of absolute paradox, of Patr iPAssianism, perhaps even of a Schelling-like projection into God of division, conflict, godlessness, and death.\footnote{Karl Rahner in Dialogue, pp. 126-127. The passage is taken from an interview with Albert Raffelt in Freiberg in 1974.}

Once again, although the content of the critique is certainly worthy of attention, my interest concerns the fact that Rahner makes this critique within Was heißt Jesus lieben? When one considers the nature of the critique, Rahner’s choice to describe it as an “excursus,” and its similarity to explicit critiques of Balthasar made elsewhere, it seems quite likely that Was heißt Jesus lieben? stands, at least in part, as a rejoinder to Balthasar’s excursus. If this is the case, Rahner’s heavy focus on loving the Person of side of the one ‘God-man.’ The eternal Word, in his divinity, can undergo no such historicity nor any ‘obedience unto death.’ Pure Chalcedonianism is ever wary of the other soteriology, fearing it will make the surreptitious transition from a communication idiomatum, a communication or exchange of concrete attributes (in the two natures) precisely to an identity of concrete attributes (of both natures). We would then have the eternal, impassible God, who transcends all history—in a spirit of gnosticism or Schellingism or what you will—suffering in himself, suffering as God. We would be positing the redemption of our condition as occurring in virtue of a transposition of that condition to the interiority of God himself” (ibid., p. 56).
Christ unto unity with and “in” him would seem to be an apology on his own behalf, specifically to the effect of showing how “representation” is present in his own person-centered Christology and soteriology.

5.4.2 Rahner’s Person-Centered Soteriology: Christ’s Being Our Salvation

As we said above, Rahner demonstrates himself to have a person-centered soteriology in two ways. The first, which we just considered, argues that a relationship with the person of Jesus is central to our salvation. The second and final way in which we will consider how Rahner exemplifies the third, person-centered marker of representative soteriology is by focusing upon how he understands Christ not simply to do our salvation, but to be our salvation. Before proceeding any further, it is worth remarking once again that a person-centered soteriology does not understand Jesus to simply effect our redemption merely in coming into existence – that is, the incarnation is not the sole moment of import for a person-centered soteriology, as is the case with the so-called “physical” model of redemption. Rather, a person-centered soteriology holds that all of Jesus’ acts carry soteriological consequence since they facilitate our union with him, the one who is salvation’s locus as well as author and agent. Thus, although it is not the only important soteriological moment, the incarnation, and so Christ’s being, carries great soteriological weight in a person-centered schema.

One of the most salient person-centered components of Rahner’s mature soteriology is his insistence upon Christ being our salvation. Nevertheless, this component is in large part absent from secondary summaries of his soteriology, like those considered in the first chapter. One notable exception is Rahner scholar Mark Fischer,
who not only recognizes this component but even connects it with Irenaeus of Lyons.

Fischer writes,

The Christology of Rahner holds that Jesus saves humanity, not just by what he did, but by who he is. Christ, the absolute savior, comprises and thus saves the whole of reality. This teaching, which goes back to the theory of recapitulation, reflects the Greek-influenced world of Irenaeus of Lyons. Donald Gelpi implied that it is an example of inflated metaphysics. 1001 Rahner accepted the inflated metaphysical claim that the whole of creation stands under the influence of Christ. But that is not just Greek metaphysics, but Christian doctrine. Rahner, with his teaching about Christ as the absolute savior, was expressing the faith of Christians. 1002

In agreement with Fischer’s analysis, I will set out below to demonstrate Rahner’s emphasis on Christ’s being our salvation by considering how he unites Christology and soteriology, his explicit theological statements to this effect in Foundations of Christian Faith, and explicit spiritual statements, particularly some concerned with the devotion to Jesus’ Sacred Heart.

5.4.2.1 Unity of Christology and Soteriology: Jesus as Our Salvation

The best place to begin this demonstration is with Rahner’s entry on “Salvation” in Sacramentum Mundi. There, he laments that too often Catholic theologians have unduly separated Christology (who Christ is) from soteriology (how Christ effects salvation). “Soteriology and Christology form a closer unity than normally appears in the


1002 Fischer, “Karl Rahner’s Transcendental Christology,” presentation at the Catholic Theological Society of America annual convention in Miami, 8 June 2013, p. 8 <http://karlrahnersociety.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Transcendental-Christology-06.08.13.docx.doc>
handbooks of theology…. We now see more clearly… that the best approach to the
Christological dogmas is the recognition that Jesus is the historical, eschatological gift of
God’s salvation to us, the absolute bringer of salvation.” Indeed, if who Jesus is stands
as a central rationale for how he brings about salvation, Christology and soteriology are
in fact two sides of the same coin.

As he makes this claim, Rahner is sure to avoid possible misunderstandings by
providing a number of clarifications. First, the unity of Christology and soteriology
cannot be construed in such a way as to exclude Christ’s life and acts from having
saving significance. Writing about this unity earlier in the entry, Rahner makes this first
warning explicit.

Kerygmatically it inevitably leads to misunderstandings if in soteriology the
person and the work (death) of Christ are too sharply separated. If in an
incarnational doctrine of redemption it is emphasized too one-sidedly that
mankind was redeemed by the fact of the divine Logos assuming a human nature
as member of the one mankind (‘quod assumptum est, redemptum est’), then
redemption is one-sidedly envisioned only under cosmic and objective aspects
and Scripture is not taken seriously when it sees the redemptive event in Jesus’
love and obedience even to the Cross.

Once again, the specter of “physical redemption” makes an appearance and
Rahner is certain to distance himself from this troubled soteriological category.

Following this first warning, Rahner makes a second, even stricter warning about
overemphasizing Christ’s acts (especially his death) to the exclusion of his being, which
cannot simply exist as a necessary precursor.

1003 “Salvation,” SM vol. 5 p. 436.

1004 Ibid., pp. 427-428.
If only the... act is taken into consideration in a ‘staurological soteriology’ (cf. 1 Cor 1:18), and the incarnation regarded merely as the constitution of a subject who is capable of redeeming if he posits the requisite action, then soteriology inevitably falls into the purely juridical concepts of an exclusive ‘satisfaction theory’. The incarnation no longer appears as an intrinsic constituent of the redemptive event itself, redemption remains in a purely ‘moral’ domain and its profoundly world-transforming character is obscured.  

I refer to this warning as “stricter” since, while Rahner here says that Christ’s being cannot simply exist at the service of his eventually performing a saving act, he nowhere rules out the converse, namely, that Christ’s actions were done at the service of facilitating our union with his saving Person. In fact, I would suggest that this latter possibility is precisely what Rahner believes to be the case.

Evidence for this suggestion can be seen in Rahner’s synthesis, which follows his two warnings in this Sacramentum Mundi entry about improperly emphasizing Christ’s being (the “ontic” dimension) and Christ’s acts (the “moral” dimension). Rather than staking salvation entirely in one or the other of these dimensions, Rahner advises that we center it upon the self-realizing Person of Jesus.

A theology of the personal subject and of freedom, the specifically personal unity of nature and activity..., would have to show that the assumption of a human ‘nature’ by the Logos is the assumption of a ‘nature’ necessarily working in freedom towards its destiny. The incarnation itself is a divine movement which is fully deployed only in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (cf. Jn 3:17; 1 Tim 11:15; D 86: the descensus is itself propter nos homines et propter nostram salutem)”1006

1005 Ibid., p. 428, emphasis original.

1006 Ibid.
Here, Rahner reemphasizes the saving significance of Jesus’ incarnation. In fact he accounts for the saving significance of Jesus’ acts as extensions of it, as further moments in which God’s gracious movement in the incarnation is “fully deployed.” In other words, the Person at the center of Christian soteriology is genuinely free, and so the exercise of that freedom is part and parcel of this locus of our salvation. If “physical redemption” could be depicted as a single point at which salvation is effected, the person-centered soteriology for which, I propose, Rahner advocates here, can be depicted as an interval or line-segment at which salvation occurs. Accordingly, it is neither a singular performative act nor the bare metaphysical fact of his existence by which Jesus brings about human salvation, but rather his entire Person in all of its particularity and temporal-spacial extension. Jesus himself is our salvation.

5.4.2.2 Theological Rationale: Combating Individualistic Tendencies of the West

Although this person-centered soteriology is extant and detectable throughout Rahner’s corpus, nowhere is it more salient than in a soteriological discussion within his Foundations of Christian Faith (1976). There, Rahner explicitly critiques the standard categories according to which Christians, or at least those in the West, understand the idea of redemption. The solution, he suggests, is a renewed appreciation for how Christ’s being itself saves us. Let us turn to the context and then the passage itself.

The sixth chapter of FCF, titled simply “Jesus Christ,” is quite lengthy (it comprises nearly one-third of the nine chapter work) and treats a variety of issues.1007

1007 FCF pp. 176-321.
Subsection 7, “The Content, Permanent Validity and Limits of Classical Christology and Soteriology” contains Rahner’s discussion of classical and official Christological doctrines and their accompanying concepts. This discussion (parts of which have been considered in the chapters above) includes the concepts of “nature,” “hypostatic union,” and “hypostasis,” along with the various ways that these concepts can be misconstrued. (Rahner worries most about a contemporary overreaction to Nestorianism which would deny a created “subjectivity,” and perhaps even a created will, to Christ in virtue of his being a single divine Person.)

Among his other concerns are an improper utilization of the classical communications of idioms (namely, if one treats the “is” in terms of strict identity, in a monophysite manner) and his perennial objection that a Christology done purely “from above” risks being regarded as excessively mythological and also rendering Jesus’ humanity a mere “livery” donned by God’s Word. As he does in “Current Problems in Christology” (1954), Rahner here insists that while these normative, classical notions can never be disregarded and possess ongoing value, new expressions within contemporary Christology should not only be permissible, but are at times even necessary.

In a sense, one might be surprised to see this section cited as evidence for Rahner favoring a person-centered soteriology. Rahner expresses serious concern about the way

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1008 FCF pp. 287, 292.
1009 FCF p. 291.
1010 FCF p. 290.
1011 FCF p. 289.
“Person” language is used by theologians to describe Christ; especially since “person” today typically means “center of consciousness,” talk of Christ’s (divine) Person can result in a conception of the human Jesus as puppet of sorts. Moreover, in this subsection Rahner mentions the “physical redemption” often associated with the Fathers only to, in obvious disapproval, “prescind” from any substantive discussion of it. However, the person-centered soteriology which Rahner has in mind is not physicalist, and it does not center on the divine Logos simply garnering a new metaphysical property (namely, subsisting in a new, created human nature) in the incarnation. Rather, as we saw in *Sacramentum Mundi*, it understands Christ’s *being*, which is fully human, fully free, and extended in space and time, as the locus of salvation.

This point about Christ’s being our salvation is made explicit as he closes this seventh subsection of his chapter on Christ. In his final and culminating item on a list of shortcomings in classical Christological expressions (or at least in how they are frequently understood today), Rahner offers a critique, worth quoting at length, of Western act-centered soteriological thinking:

In its explicit formulation the classical Christology of the Incarnation does not give expression in a clear and immediate way to the *soteriological* significance of the Christ event. This is especially true of western Christianity’s understanding. Perhaps because of western individualism, the idea of an ‘assumption’ of the whole human race in the individual human reality of Jesus is rather foreign to their way of thinking. Within this horizon of understanding, then, the hypostatic union is the constitution of a person who performs redemptive activity, provided that his actions are moral and that his accomplishment is accepted by God as representative [*stellvertretend*] for the human race. But he does not mean in his very being salvation, redeemer and satisfaction [*nicht aber selbst schon in ihrem Sein Heil als solches bedeutet (Erlöser, Genugtuung)*]. But from the perspective of scriptural statements and of our own understanding today, it would be desirable

1012 FCF p. 288, cf. Chapter 4 above.
to have a formulation of the Christological dogma which indicated and gave immediate expression to the salvific event which Jesus Christ himself is, and which did this prior to explicit and special soteriological statements. Then the selected formulations could help to avoid more easily a monophysitic and hence a mythological misunderstanding.1013

A few remarks are in order. First, it should be made clear that by referring to “an ‘assumption’ of the whole human race in the individual human reality of Jesus,” Rahner is not advocating for an idea of the hypostatic union according to which the Word mechanically assumes humanity in general rather than a single, specific human nature.1014 As the foregoing material in subsection seven demonstrates, Rahner understands Christ as fully human, like us in all things but sin (and thus having one human nature, not every instance of human nature in toto!). What I believe Rahner does envision is the possibility for each human being, in the authentic exercise of her freedom, coming to participate in the unique Person of Christ, her fully human brother, and thus being able to share in God’s own saving life (cf. 2 Pet 1:4). It is precisely this free (rather than a purely metaphysical and mechanical) sharing in another which Rahner sees as unduly ignored by theologians in the West; his talk of “the whole” “in” the individual reality is best understood as shorthand for the larger, free process which I have described, one which is best encapsulated by the term “representation.”

Furthermore, the representation which Rahner has in mind is not that of Christ’s accomplishment simply being “credited” to humans whose own freedom is left out of the process. This alternative idea of “representation,” which we have seen Rahner frequently

1013 FCF p. 293, emphasis original.

1014 Cf. Thomas Aquinas’s treatment of this possibility in ST III q. 4 a. 5. According to Harnack’s reading, such a view is espoused by Gregory of Nyssa (cf. Chapter 3.3.1 above).
criticize, is raised and again censured under the descriptor "stellvertretend," and furthermore associated with a soteriology based on Christ’s “perform[ing] redemptive activity.” The authentic idea of representation for which Rahner advocates is one which considers Christ’s being not as a necessary precursor, in the sense that an act requires an agent, but one which holds that “Jesus Christ is” the “salvific event,” that Jesus is “in his very being salvation.” Although Rahner does not here explicitly point to his own Christology and soteriology as an exemplary instance which realizes this theological desideratum, the many instances (explored in this dissertation) in his corpus which testify to his person-centered, representative soteriology indicate that he made a serious effort to shape his Christology along these lines. Moreover, Rahner indicates elsewhere that he has tried to unite Christology and soteriology in precisely this way.\footnote{\textsuperscript{1015} “It is true that traditional textbook theology devoted too little attention to the unity of Christology and soteriology. It was not Luther but we Catholic, neoscholastic textbook theologians who had developed a Christology of the hypostatic union, the communication of properties, and so on, which initially had nothing at all to do with soteriology, with ‘Christ for us.’ After this Christology we turned over the page to a new treatise entitled \textit{De Deo redemptore}. We cannot do it this way anymore of course, and not just because people today are so convinced of their own importance and central position, and so on, that they cannot imagine a theology which does not constantly talk about human beings and their needs. This kind of mentality is, when all is said and done, highly questionable, even though nowadays it gives the appearance of being terribly obvious. But we do confess: \textit{qui propter nos homines et propter nostram salutem descendit de caelis}. From the outset Christology must be soteriology. The simple implication of this is of course that we have every right in the light of the New Testament or other more speculative viewpoints to attempt a formulation of the nature and meaning of Jesus which is from the outset a soteriological statement and at the same time really expresses the ‘nature’ of Jesus Christ in a truly orthodox way. It is my considered opinion that a reasonable ontology (or whatever else you want to call it) can and should be convinced from the outset that statements of function and statements of essence do not necessarily contradict one another. But from this it follows that one can quite properly construct a Christology which is called functional in full awareness that in so doing one has also constructed the essential Christology of classical church doctrine. I have already suggested a small example of such a formulation. But I cannot go into this in detail here” (“Brief Observations on Systematic Christology Today,” \textit{TJ} 21:233-234 [1980]).}
5.4.2.3 Spiritual Rationale: The Sacred Heart and Our Salvation

As we come to the conclusion of considering the person-centered dimension of Rahner’s soteriology, and having just considered his theological rationale for emphasizing Christ’s being our salvation, it seems fitting to return once more to Rahner’s spiritual motivations for the same idea. Recall, Joseph Wong convincingly argued that Rahner’s Ignatian spirituality was the primary force behind his theology of das Realsymbol. Likewise, Rahner’s thought regarding the devotion to Jesus’ Sacred Heart intersects with his soteriological considerations. Indeed, some of Rahner’s earliest scholarship, especially E latere Christi, was driven by his desire to make theological (and especially soteriological) sense of this devotion and its historical development.

Accordingly, let us take a final look at Rahner’s spiritual writing on this topic.

As we did before, let us split the difference between Rahner’s writing of E latere Christi and his works of his final years, turning to years in which Rahner was first gaining widespread international renown. Included within Rahner’s Kleines Kirchenjahr (1954) is a meditation for the feast of Jesus’ Sacred Heart, titled “Herz-Jesu-Fest,” as well as one the cross and Good Friday, “Karfreitag.”

Although it was written a few years before Kleines Kirchenjahr and thus falls within the first half of Rahner’s career, “Herz-Jesu-Fest” stands as a helpful complement to “Karfreitag,” which was first published in 1954. Rahner begins “Herz-Jesu-Fest” with a general discussion of the human person’s “heart” and her “center,” in which she fully

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1016 “Karfreitag” was first published in Kleines Kirchenjahr, pp. 68-74 (ET available as “Good Friday: ‘Behold the Wood of the Cross…’,” in The Great Church Year, pp. 149-154). “Herz-Jesu-Fest,” (ET available as “The Mystery of the Heart,” in The Great Church Year, pp. 239-244), was first published as “Geheimnis des Herzens,” in Geist und Leben 20.3 (1947), pp. 161-165.

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possesses herself. Echoing the realsymbolisch themes which he associates throughout his career with the idea of “heart,” Rahner explains that the human person is mysterious in that she only truly possesses herself by going outside of herself, giving herself away, seeking the other in order to return to and fully realize herself. What/who is this “other” into which/wom our own hearts go out in order to fully self-realize, the other who thus exists as somehow “interior” to each of us? While many answers could be given, Rahner explains that, in a most basic and fundamental sense, the ultimate other in whom we self-realize is God.

However, Rahner immediately cautions against too quickly settling for “God” as an answer to this question about the center of our own hearts. After all, such a proposal is rather disconcerting – God is uniquely infinite, uniquely one, uniquely perfect, and fundamental Mystery. To propose that we, as imperfect and finite beings, have such a reality as our very center seems not only hubristic, but terrifying: Does such a God, residing in our own flawed hearts, appear as swift justice or tender mercy?

Moreover, positing an inscrutable, ineffable God as our “heart of hearts” hardly begins to answer the

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1018 “[G]od is the central point, the heart of the world, in whom all reality is gathered up and yet is not pressed together in a stifling corner…. He is not, as we are, merely the heart of one solitary person, but the heart of all reality, the all-in-one inwardness of all things” (“The Mystery of the Heart,” The Great Church Year, p. 241-242).

1019 “[E]ven if we say that God is the mystery of our hearts, the salvation of our heart’s need, then, if we reflect rightly, it may appear to us in fear and trembling that it is most frightful to have God as the center of our center. For is not his own infinity, in which everything is the same, bearable only for him? …. [F]or us and for our narrowness it is precisely this that is frightful and terrifying, it is just this that causes all the seams of our finiteness to sag apart. He is always his whole self” (ibid., p. 242).
question about who we are. As Rahner puts it, “Just when we want to use his heart so that the needed calculation of our heart will come out right, we write the enigmatic number of his ambiguous infinity and the figuring of our heart becomes all the more a really insoluble riddle.” 1020 And yet, Rahner puzzles, the “center of our hearts has to be God.” 1021

The resolution to this dilemma about God as our “heart of hearts” occurs in virtue of the God’s incarnation in Jesus, whose heart, both fully God and fully human, is at the center of our own. 1022 Our own fulfillment as humans occurs in our coming to dwell in the heart of Jesus Christ, where we come to fully realize ourselves and thus our salvation – life with God himself, whose posture toward a sinful world is ultimately that of love. 1023

If he is our heart, our diversity can enter into the apartness of God without being burned to nothing in it. In him our dispersion can be collected without being confined and constricted, our heart can gush forth into the expanse of the world without being lost. The heart of Jesus is God’s heart in the world, in which alone the world finds its God as its blessed mystery, in which alone God becomes the heart of our hearts, in which our being finds its center: at one and the same time unified and all-embracing. 1024

1020 Ibid., p. 243.

1021 Ibid.

1022 God “make[s] at the center of our being a heart that is really the heart of the infinite God, and that nonetheless is a heart that is not everything…. For the mortal fear over his ambiguous infinity and for the need of our hearts to depart from us, he has to let his heart become finite…. He must let it enter into our narrow confines, so that it can be the center of our life without destroying the narrow house of our finitude, in which alone we can live and breathe. And he has done it. And the name of his heart is: Jesus Christ! It is a finite heart, and yet it is the heart of God” (ibid.).

1023 “Our heart becomes calm and rests in this heart, in his heart…. In him the enigmatic mystery of the world’s heart which is God becomes the crimson mystery of all things, the mystery that God has loved the world in its destitution” (ibid).

1024 Ibid., p. 244.
Thus, Jesus himself, as a Person (and not simply an agent), stands as the central nexus point between the world as it is as brought to its final salvation in the presence of God. Our salvation, and thus our telos and true selves, lies within Christ’s own Sacred Heart.

Having established within Kleines Kirchenjahr this approach to soteriology which is at once devotional, theological, and anthropological, we can better observe how Rahner’s soteriological meditation on Good Friday in “Karfreitag” serves as a powerful testimony to his person-centered representative soteriology. Rahner begins this meditation with the Good Friday liturgy, during which the priest unveils a cross, intoning, “Behold, the wood of the cross, on which is hung our salvation. O come, let us adore!”1025 In doing so, Rahner underlines from the outset the identity of our salvation with the Person of Jesus, who hangs on the cross (“on which is hung our salvation”). (In good Johannine fashion, he will close with this inclusio as well.) Continuing, Rahner asserts that this ritual of unveiling the cross is a “shadowy image” of something which occurs throughout all of human history, for the “cross of Christ has cast its shadow over all time. To be sure, historically speaking, the cross was erected only once in a definite place…and at a definite time…But all time had waited for this moment that seems so short. All that had gone before flowed together into this moment.”1026 And this moment, Rahner declares, stands as the “deciding word” in which God has definitively established his relationship to a world in need, a world filled with people who are thus oriented


1026 Ibid.
toward this decisive moment and exist in a *de facto* procession toward the cross which has been unveiled before them.\footnote{1027}

Rahner then turns to a series of reflections on how the various members of the human race today – the dying, suffering, children, elderly, homeless, lonely, grieving, lovers, scholars, priests, and even agnostics – react to their encounter with the cross. Do we scoff, pass by, or remain vigilant at its foot? As we process up toward the cross over the course of our lives, lives which are encapsulated by the procession in the liturgy, what is our demeanor toward it?

Given the structure of the meditation (beginning with the priest’s unveiling and intonation), these reflections occur as Rahner is nearing the cross itself during his own liturgical/life procession. As he approaches, he wonders at the many things which this cross means for us and offers a host of ways that the crucified Christ brings about our salvation. The themes he mentions include forgiveness and covenant renewal, \footnote{1028} Christ’s

\footnote{1027} “Yes, the ages before Christ were overshadowed by the cross. They were mysteriously mapped out to be a part of that divine and universal drama of the history of humankind, in which the cross of Christ, the glorification of the Lord on the cross, is the deciding word…. But before the word was actually spoken from the cross, no one knew what answer God would give to all the words of human history, to the cries of guilt and of need, of yearning and of complaint, and of urgent petition. Before the cross, no one knew definitively and equivocally what God would say to us. Now, however, God has spoken his final word in this world and in its history, the word that is the cross of his Son. And in the two thousand years since the cross, human beings have been advancing in a never-ending, drab procession to meet this unveiled cross – whether they knew it or not – in all the tangles and meaningless twisting of their path through life” (ibid. p. 150).

\footnote{1028} “…him who forever stretches his hands out toward a stubborn and rebellious people” (ibid., p. 153).
obedience to the Father, \textsuperscript{1029} satisfaction theory, \textsuperscript{1030} ritual sacrifice, \textsuperscript{1031} testimony to God’s love, \textsuperscript{1032} and the Omega who “fulfilled all things.” \textsuperscript{1033} Finally, he comes to his final soteriological theme, Jesus’ Sacred Heart.

At this point in the essay, Rahner is “at” the unveiled cross, having completed his procession and now disposing himself toward the cross before him. Simultaneously plumbing the theological implications of the Crucified One and offering a glimpse into his own inner, spiritual monologue, Rahner gives us perhaps the best look at the motivation behind his soteriology. Turning to the cross directly in front of him, he prays,

Do I kneel thus below the cross for the three hours of my life…? Am I one with the crucified? My soul thirsts for God my savior. I want to rise up and I want to see him who has drunk the most bitter cup of this world…. I want to kiss his bloody feet, the feet that pursued me even into the most monstrous inextricability of my sins. I want to see the pierced side of him who has locked me in his heart and who therefore took me with him when he went home, passing over from this world through death to the Father, so that I, too, am now where only God can be. I want to see the wood of the Cross, on which the salvation of the world, my salvation, hung. Come let us adore him.” \textsuperscript{1034}

Within this intensely personal spiritual reflection, the heart of Rahner’s own soteriological writings emerges into full view. Christ is God our savior and brother, the

\textsuperscript{1029} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{1030} “…the righteousness which the Son has satisfied” (ibid.).

\textsuperscript{1031} “…to be close to the Son of the Father, close to their dead brother who sacrificed himself for them…. the sacrifice that alone penetrates through all heaven” (ibid.).

\textsuperscript{1032} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{1033} Ibid., p. 154.

\textsuperscript{1034} Ibid.
Person in whom salvation is realized, and with whom Rahner thirsts to be “one.” For this is the Person whose side has been opened to us, in whose own heart we have been secured and thus carried into the intimate, saving presence of God.

5.4.3 Conclusion: Rahner’s Person-Centered Soteriology

Testimonies to the person-centered character of Rahner’s soteriology in his mature work can be divided into two major groups, one which emphasizes the necessity of relating to the saving Person of Jesus and one which underlines Christ’s very being as salvific. Regarding this first group, Rahner discusses the believer’s relationship with Christ in a number of ways. First, Rahner states that Jesus’ soteriological import does not lie in his being the origin of a particular act, but in being the one to whom one relates in order to realize salvation. This import is apparent when Rahner speaks of Jesus constituting our salvation by being “one with us”; in both it’s purely “ontic” and act-centered dimensions, soteriology is for Rahner about Christ uniting with us to effect our redemption. Second, this person-centered import is also apparent in Rahner’s “searching Christology,” which posits Christ as the telos of every human being; in fact, Christ is the full realization of the same grace which drives every person to question and search for life’s meaning. Finally, Rahner emphasizes how crucial it is for Christians to love the Person (rather than the idea) of Jesus, and how such love allows us to participate in Jesus himself.

The second group consists of various ways in which Rahner underlines the salvific value of Christ being (and not just doing) our salvation. In Sacramentum Mundi, Rahner warns against improperly emphasizing either the beginning or end of Christ’s life. Rather, he advises, the central emphasis should be placed on the Person of Jesus, who in
his entire, free, and authentically human life “fully deploys” the grace inaugurated in the incarnation. In *Foundations of Christian Faith*, Rahner chides Western theologians for limiting their Christologies and soteriologies to models according to which Christ *performs* our salvation, so that the hypostatic union exists only as a necessary precursor to a saving act. Rahner proposes that theologians in the west would be better served with Christologies which already acknowledge Christ’s *being itself* as already salvific.

Finally, Rahner’s spiritual writings in *Kleines Kirchenjahr* demonstrate the connection between his person-centered soteriology and his devotion to Jesus’ Sacred Heart. Jesus’ Heart, he explains in “Herz-Jesu-Fest,” exists as our own “heart of hearts,” through which we can have God himself as our “center.” Moreover, in “Karfreitag,” Rahner presents (particularly his own) life as a procession to the Crucified One, *in* whom we find our salvation. Jesus brings us into God’s presence by “locking” us within his Sacred Heart, which is open to us through his pierced side.

As this chapter has shown, the theology written by Rahner in the latter half of his career contains numerous instances which testify to a representative soteriology. That is, even in his mature writings, Rahner understands salvation to be effected in a person-centered way by Jesus, who is both God’s presence to the world as well as the one human being who sums up all others in himself. Although the excerpts above were divided according to these three markers of representative soteriology, we saw how many instances overlap and interact with the other two categories as well. Recall, Rahner’s idea of Christ *creating* (rather than simply *opening*) heaven with his resurrection not only explains how Christ mediates God’s presence to us, but it centers upon his Person and
depends on our participating in that Person, our Representative. Likewise, his definitions of *Repräsentation* underscore how the Person of Christ constitutes the entire network of human solidarity, as well as how *Repräsentation* accounts for the possibility of God’s presence to finite beings. Finally, his person-centered reflections on the salvific value of Jesus’ Sacred Heart posit Jesus as the mediator through which God becomes the center of our lives, as well as the one who gathers the human race together in his bosom. For Rahner, as was the case with Irenaeus and others of the Church Fathers, the three markers coalesce in a single, representative soteriological vision. And although Rahner’s direct engagement with the Fathers dwindled as his theological career advanced into its second half, their shared soteriological framework, readily apparent in early works like *E latere Christi*, continued to impact Rahner’s theology on through to his final writings.
CONCLUSION

As this study of Rahner’s soteriology comes to its end, I would like to conclude not by itemizing the various findings and theses which we have seen in the foregoing chapters, a task which has been completed (albeit in piecemeal fashion) in those chapters themselves, but rather by recapitulating its central thesis and then briefly suggesting several points for further reflection and study which arise in light of it. This dissertation’s central thesis can be framed in response to Balthasar’s “excursus” on Rahner’s soteriology, part of which insisted that for Rahner and his theory of sacramental causality, “it is not Christ who, in virtue of his uniqueness, embraces and contains mankind in order to reconcile it to God through his suffering—for we have already heard that such ‘representative’ action [Stellvertretung] is inconceivable.”  

Although it is fair to say that Rahner has serious qualms with the term Stellvertretung (qualms which, however, do not prevent him from approving the term and even using it in a qualified manner), the suggestion that Rahner’s Christ does not “embrace and contain”

1035 TD IV p. 276.

1036 Recall, Rahner affirms that the statement, “the human race is redeemed by the ‘vicarious’ suffering of Jesus [stellvertretende Leiden Jesu],” as well as “the human race is vicariously represented by Christ [Stellvertretung des Menschen durch Christus],” is “thoroughly valid [durchaus legitimen]” (“The Christian Understanding of Redemption,” TI 21:248).

1037 “Jesus Christ, the *Mediator, is the supreme representative of mankind in his vicarious redemption [der absolute Repräsentant der Menschheit in seiner stellvertretenden Erlösung]” (Theological Dictionary, p. 405).
humankind in order to bring about reconciliation with God, ultimately through Christ’s
death and resurrection, is egregiously false. For Rahner, God not only “reconciled the
world to himself in Jesus the crucified,” but Jesus Christ himself “has become our
reconciliation.” Rahner’s soteriology is a person-centered, representative one, with
Christ as the True Human in whom all the blessed freely and eternally participate. The
representative quality of Rahner’s soteriology can be traced back to his early fascination
with patristic theology (particularly that of Irenaeus of Lyons and his idea of
recapitulation), and this soteriology can only be fully appreciated when his idea of das
Realsymbol is supplemented by that of Repräsantation.

In light of this thesis, there are several points for further study and reflection
which, in good Rahnerian fashion, I would like to raise but not sufficiently explore at this
time. The first has to do with the relationship of theology and spirituality. In his
masterful work on a spirituality of liberation, Gustavo Gutiérrez has lamented a
fourteenth century divorce “between theology and spirituality that was to be harmful to
both.” Moreover, Gutiérrez explains, the fallout of this divorce included an

1038 To be fair, many of the texts which I cite here as evidence were written subsequent (and in all
likelihood, at least partly in response) to Balthasar’s critique. However, as this dissertation has shown, the
representative character of Rahner’s soteriology pervades his entire career.

1039 “Christians know full well that God’s forgiving and reconciling love that encompasses all guilt
has entered the world in such a way that it can never be revoked. This love has revealed itself in the cross
of Jesus Christ who has become our reconciliation…. God’s forgiving love has reached its historically
visible culmination in Jesus’ death on the cross, because this love has become irrevocable and has found its
acceptance in a human being…. God has reconciled the world to himself in Jesus the crucified…. [I]t also
becomes reality for its part when human beings accept it” (“Reconciliation and Vicarious Redemption,” TI
21:261).

1040 Gutiérrez, We Drink from Our Own Wells, p. 36.
individualizing and privatizing of Christian spirituality,\textsuperscript{1041} which at its heart should be understood as stemming from a communal encounter with the Person of Christ.\textsuperscript{1042} It is safe to say that Rahner, who once told Harvey Egan, “Beware the Christians with no devotions”\textsuperscript{1043} and who speaks of a similar privatization in the final pages of \textit{E latere Christi}, shares Gutiérrez’s perspective on both counts. Rahner’s own theology is best viewed in light of his Jesuit spirituality, and in particular with an eye toward his devotion to Jesus’ Sacred Heart.\textsuperscript{1044} Thankfully, as noted in Chapter 4, a movement to better appreciate the importance of Rahner’s spirituality is blossoming. As a contribution to this movement, I would add that Rahner’s devotion to Jesus’ Sacred Heart cannot be fully appreciated without paying serious attention to the patristic \textit{fons vitae} thinking which he explores in \textit{E latere Christi}, and thus to his representative soteriology. As he laments the privatization of the “Church as Second Eve” type and posits the Sacred Heart as a contemporary analogue to this type as it functioned for the Fathers, Rahner calls for a retrieval of their person-centered \textit{fons vitae} theology-spirituality, insisting that we “can learn something from the early Church.”\textsuperscript{1045} If we are going to better understand Rahner’s

\textsuperscript{1041} Ibid., pp. 14-15.

\textsuperscript{1042} Ibid., pp. 33-34.

\textsuperscript{1043} Egan, “Foreword,” in Callahan, \textit{Karl Rahner’s Spirituality of the Pierced Heart}, p. vi.

\textsuperscript{1044} Cf. Rahner’s remark, “\textit{Ut apertum core ... piis esset requies et poenitentibus pateret salutis refugium}… (so that opened heart … might be a resting place for the pious and be open to the penitent as a refuge of salvation…). Such words are not just vague pious phrases and sentimentalities; they form an absolutely exact statement which academic theology has not yet been able to surpass” (“The Eternal Significance of the Humanity of Jesus,” \textit{TI} 3:46).

\textsuperscript{1045} \textit{E latere Christi}, p. 84.
theology in light of his spirituality, we need to more seriously attend to his early, formative, and intense engagement with the theology of the Church Fathers.

A second suggestion concerns theological conversations about the Christ’s atonement during the last couple of decades. Shortly after Rahner’s death in 1984, a variety of theologians began to critique traditional notions of atonement centered upon the crucifixion, especially in light of insights connecting the atonement doctrine with abuse. Taking these concerns seriously, Kathryn Tanner has responded by suggesting that a patristic, non-physicalist, and incarnation-based soteriology is the best option for responsibly retrieving the doctrine of Christ’s atonement. Moreover, as noted toward the end of Chapter 3, a variety of other theologians have begun advocating for similar, patristic-inspired representative soteriologies. As the trend of retrieving recapitulation as a helpful contemporary category for rethinking atonement continues to advance, Karl Rahner’s soteriology should be part of the conversation.

One final suggestion is not restricted to his soteriology but instead concerns his overall approach to theology. Whether one wants to refer to Rahner as “systematic,”

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“constructive,” or “speculative,” it should have become evident throughout the course of this dissertation that Rahner is also a deeply historical theologian. That is, Rahner’s thought is profoundly shaped by his robust knowledge of and concern for the theology and overall Christian tradition which has preceded him. To use buzzwords in use around the time of the Second Vatican Council, Rahner’s approach to theology is not only one of aggiornamento (“updating”), but also one of ressourcement (“retrieval”). Though such terms are often coupled with bifurcations like Concilium and Communio, “liberal” and “conservative,” etc., and though Rahner’s name itself has for various reasons become somewhat of a point to or against which various tribes of Catholic theologians rally, Rahner is in fact a bit of a misfit when it comes to predominant contemporary factions.

On this point, it is worth recalling the suspicion with which many curial officials viewed Rahner at the outset of Vatican II. As noted in the beginning of Chapter 1, this suspicion even led to all of Rahner’s writings being censored at the beginning of the council. However, as these critics engaged Rahner and learned more about him, he began to defy their preconceptions, eventually gaining a profound respect and even friendship with him. One of his most decisive opponents prior to the council, Dutch dogmatic

1048 “During this period [beginning with the close of the first session in Dec. 1962] Rahner acquired a high reputation among those Roman theologians who were, objectively speaking, his opponents. He had a perfect mastery of the Latin language. He possessed an enormous knowledge of the patristic and Scholastic traditions. He could understand his opponents’ arguments from within. He opposed them with a striking logical sharpness. He left no doubt in anyone’s mind that he was concerned with the pastoral needs of the Church. And so he moved towards a resolution of his conflict with the Holy Office. In February 1963 during a break between sessions he talked with Cardinal Ottaviani about the censorship measure taken against him. Ottaviani explained to him that the measure had been taken out of friendship for him, that it had been wrongly interpreted, that it was for his defense, in short that it should have been regarded as a privilege. Rahner replied that he would willingly renounce such a privilege. In May 1963 the Jesuit General told Rahner that in the future he, the General, would choose Rahner’s censors, as before. With this the Holy Office retreated, and from then on until his death Rahner was spared further canonical penalties. In fact he came to have a genuinely friendly relation with his former enemies, and contributed essays to the
theologian Sebastian Tromp, remarked after working with Rahner at the council, “This Rahner is remarkable—when he starts talking Latin, then you can understand him.”

Similarly, I would suggest that Rahner may find supporters in unlikely places if they had the opportunity to encounter (especially the deeply historically informed) aspects of his thought which are not part and parcel of his popular reputation. Indeed, this man who was at once the editor of Denzinger and a creative force behind reform at Vatican II, the theologian who chided the subsequent generation of theologians for both their “whoring after relevance” and their lack of ingenuity, should challenge all of us today to be simultaneously better grounded in the Church’s heritage and more creative in our thinking.

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1049 Ibid., p. 299.

1050 “Rahner criticizes those who discard the past too quickly. He complained on more than one occasion that those ‘whoring after relevance’ by jettisoning precious elements in the church’s tradition had replaced these elements with nothing and created an un-Christian vacuum in so many lives” (H. Egan, “Foreword,” in Callahan, Karl Rahner’s Spirituality of the Pierced Heart, p. vi.).

1051 In “The Present Situation of Catholic Theology” (1979), Rahner observes, “In this earlier phase new ground was broken with a certain enthusiasm. Today one can speak of patient continuation at the most. In this second period everything has become a little more pallid. There is unmistakably a certain resignation, almost a danger of the actual Christian-ecclesial life no longer operating in the field of theological discipline but wandering off into other fields, and of scientific theological reflection becoming something like a withered branch on the tree called Church…. Perhaps one cannot deny that the generation of theologians associated with the groundbreaking of the new theology, men like von Balthasar, Chenu, Congar, Danielou, de Lubac, Malmberg, Schillebeeckx, Schoonenberg, has now grown old. They have – I hope I am wrong – not really found successors of the same stature” (TI 21:74-75). Rahner goes on to ask whether “theology in the Church today is less vibrant and active than it was in the first phase of the new theology?,” notes “a certain stagnation of ecumenical theology” and “a dearth of high-level theology which would bring Christianity to unbelievers of our time” (ibid., TI 21:75). He concludes, “All things taken into consideration I really do feel that Catholic theology today by and large does not rate a higher mark than Grade C” (ibid.).
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