

THE POSITION OF KARL RAHNER REGARDING THE SUPERNATURAL: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF NATURE AND GRACE

It is nearly twenty years since the appearance of De Lubac's *Le Surnaturel*. During those two decades Catholic theologians have shown remarkable interest in the subject of nature and grace.¹ If not an easy undertaking, an evaluation of the present state of the question is nevertheless highly desirable. The work of Karl Rahner that is under consideration here can, I submit, serve as at least an introduction to such an ambitious project.

When he takes up the question in *Nature and Grace*, he does so not because of any liking for idle speculation. In its inquiries today's theology is working to make tomorrow's preaching reach mind and heart. Such is his conviction.² Creature-man lived the Father-

¹ An extensive bibliography is neither possible nor required. The following works, however, deserve special mention: H. De Lubac, *Le Mystère du Surnaturel*, in *Rech. Sc. Rel.* 36 (1949), 80-121; E. Gutwenger, "Natur und Übernatur," in *ZKT* 75 (1953), 82-97; J. P. Kenny, "Reflections on Human Nature and the Supernatural," in *TS* 14 (1953), 280-7; L. Malevez, "La Gratuité du Surnaturel," in *NRT* 75 (1953), 561-86; 673-89; L. Renwart, "La Nature pure à la lumière de l'Encyclique Humani Generis," in *NRT* 74 (1952), 337-54; H. Rondet, "Le Problème de la nature pure et la théologie du XVI^e siècle," in *Rech. Sc. Rel.* 35 (1948), 481-521; H. Urs Von Balthasar, *Karl Barth, Darstellung und Deutung seiner Theologie*, Cologne (1951); H. Urs Von Balthasar, "Der Begriff der Natur in der Theologie," in *ZKT* 75 (1953), 452-64; J. Alfaro, *Lo Natural y lo sobrenatural*, Madrid (1952); ———, *La Trascendencia e inmanencia de lo sobrenatural*, in *Greg.* 38 (1957), 5-50; ———, *Persona y gracia*, in *Greg.* 41 (1960), 5-29; M. Seckler, *Instinkt und Glaubenswille nach Thomas von Aquino*, Mainz (1961); E. Schillebeeckx, "L'Instinct de la foi selon S. Thomas D'Aquin," in *RSPT* 48 (1964), 377-408; R. J. Pendergast, "The Supernatural Existential, Human Generation, and Original Sin," in *The Downside Review* 82 (1964), 1-24; T. Motherway, "Supernatural Existential," in *Chicago Studies* 4 (1965), 79-103; K. Rahner, "Natur und Gnade," in *Fragen der Theologie Heute*, Zurich-Cologne (1958), 209-30 English translations: London-New York: Sheed & Ward, 1963 (Stagbooks); and Milwaukee: Bruce, 1964 *Theology Today*, Vol. I; ———, "Concerning the Relationship Between Nature and Grace," in *Theological Investigations I* (Baltimore: 1961), 297-318 (a translation from *Schriften zur Theologie*, I [Einsiedeln-Zurich-Cologne: 1954], 323-45).

² Rahner, *Natur und Gnade*, p. 229: "Solche Leute merken nicht, dass eine lebendige, neu fragende, suchende Theologie von heute daran arbeitet, dass die Verkündigung von morgen Geist und Herz Menschen finde."

son relationship with God that grace-nature strives to express, long before he theologized about it in such terms. Moreover the living out of that friendship and fellowship with divine *You's* is far more important than any attempt to offer a systematic, methodical consideration of it. Still it was not to brute animals that God directed His invitation to join the divine family or society. His sons and daughters must keep their response consonant with and expressive of what they are: human beings. Deliberate motivation is no less effective than that which is blind and is a great deal more intelligent. Nor should the God who calls be expected to supply with His spontaneous inspiration what can often be obtained through conscientious reflection on His word. The theology of nature as related to grace is not all directly relevant as an object of preaching. It has, however, a far more definite and decisive role to play in forming the preacher than has often been accorded it in the past.

Rahner's goal, then, in this study, is ultimately and explicitly pastoral. If this involves the present and future, he recalls that certain historical antecedents led up to the renewal of interest Catholic theologians have shown with regard to divine grace.

In the realm of philosophy, the work of Joseph Maréchal and kindred spirits had much to do with this. An orientation toward God Himself is that which makes man what he is and experiences himself to be. In his very essence, he is a real if conditioned desire for the Vision of God, one that is implicitly affirmed in every human act.³ This made the relation of man as spirit to the personal God a very central principle in a Christian philosophy of man. It had as well a theological reverberation, not merely in terms of questions regarding its orthodoxy but moreover as a positive stimulus to determine how grace affects man already by nature or essence so disposed toward God.

A second source contributing to the phenomenon in question is to be found in the historical studies of the way in which what Bernard Lonergan has called the "theorem of the supernatural"⁴ was introduced into Catholic theology. Man was seen to have theol-

³ *Ibid.*, 212-3.

⁴ B. Lonergan, S.J., "St. Thomas' Thought on Gratia Operans," in *TS* 2 (1941), p. 301.

ogized about his divine sonship long before he made the neat distinction between nature and grace. This is certainly not to say the distinction in question is illegitimate or unworthy of retention. It does show that real Christian theology was not always based on it or centered around it. The fact became equally clear that with its adoption, however justified and even necessary, efforts to understand other aspects of the mystery of man's deification gradually lessened.⁵ One example of this is the question whether the nexus between the order of grace and incarnation of the Son-Logos may be more than merely factual. Is it possible that precisely His incarnation (because He is Son and Word), is the condition for the possibility of a divine call to sonship for man? Does the assertion that any of the divine persons could have become man do full justice to the truth that for us men and our salvation the Son alone did? Are there implications in the contingency of His second generation that His brothers and sisters have not grasped because of preoccupation with a rightful distinction between the graced nature that is and a pure nature that could have been? The significance of such avenues of approach could be considerable for Trinitarian and Christological investigations as well as those concerning grace-nature.

Finally Rahner sees ecumenical studies as having had a most important role to play in the reawakening of concern regarding the supernatural. Observing that not many Catholics have applied themselves to this aspect of the question, he holds that some who have are responsible for a reconsideration of an issue very much in the foreground of the intellectual divisions among Christians since the sixteenth century.⁶

With this causal analysis of the *status quo*, he proceeds to express his own ideas by means of contrast. He describes another position regarding grace. This he calls standard,⁷ considers very prevalent in the period of Neo-scholasticism,⁸ and finally terms Molinistic.⁹

⁵ Rahner, *op. cit.*, 214-5.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 216.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 209: "Wenn man den Versuch macht, dieses durchschnittliche Verständnis von Natur und Gnade in der nachtridentinischen und neuscholastischen Theologie zu umschreiben, muss betont werden, dass es wirklich um das "durchschnittliche" Verständnis handelt."

⁸ *Ibid.*, 209-10.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 222.

It would serve little purpose here to offer a detailed exposition of his stand; that is easily enough determined by reading the essay in either of its two English versions or the original.¹⁰ What is intended is to present certain major themes he develops and compare them with corresponding positions taken on the same matter by a limited but representative group of his fellow theologians. This is done with the hope of making a start toward a slightly more unified and synthetic picture not merely of the work under consideration but also of the state of the question in Catholic theology today.

It is quite clear that Rahner holds firmly and explicitly for the distinction between nature and grace.¹¹ He states very definitely that difficult though it may be to determine precisely what nature is concretely, still it would not be without sense and meaning even if it were all by itself.¹² Now that is open to serious misrepresentation for a number of reasons.

It must not be interpreted in such a way that nature is the historically prior member of the pair, which arises from union with grace that arrives subsequently.¹³ In historical man, Original Sin is a deprivation and consequently involves a relationship of its subject to the order of grace. Otherwise how could one understand it as a real need or indigence on man's part? The latter is related to grace right from the start; this is not equivalent to saying he is justified

¹⁰ In place of either of the translations, the German text is cited when necessary; cf. note 1.

¹¹ Rahner, *op. cit.*, p. 224: "*Es ist klar: im Vollzug seines geistigen Daseins erreicht der Mensch immer auch seine 'Natur,' auch in dem theologischen Verständnis, in dem dieser Begriff der Gegenbegriff ist zur Gnade und dem Übernatürlichen.*" Cf. also p. 227.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 225: "*Die faktische Natur ist 'nie' eine 'reine' Natur, sondern eine Natur in einer übernatürlichen Ordnung. . . . Und diese 'Existenziale' seiner konkreten Natur (seiner 'historischen' Natur) . . . machen sich in der Erfahrung des Menschen geltend.*"

Ibid., p. 228: "*Der Mensch ist dann durchaus in seinem 'undefinierbaren' Wesen erst dann ganz erkannt, wenn er 'als' potentia oboedientialis für das göttliche Leben erfasst ist und dies seine 'Natur' ist. Seine Natur ist eben so, dass sie ihre 'absolute' Erfüllung als Gnade erwarten muss und, weil so, von sich aus mit der 'sinnvollen' Möglichkeit des Ausbleibens einer absoluten Erfüllung rechnen muss.*"

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 222.

or other than in need of justification.¹⁴ Similarly, nature is not related to grace as the humanly interior to that which comes from without. Faith comes from hearing but to a subject that is not pure nature but already related to and affected by grace. Preaching is a grace that awakens and corresponds to another already there.¹⁵ Nor must nature be thought of as a permanent substratum in man which is now and again affected by grace. There is no reason to hold that the latter because of its transcendence is therefore rare, transient, and passing.¹⁶

Now if all this is true, there is still another relevant point made very explicitly by Rahner. Grace does not belong to the realm of the unconscious and nature to that which man experiences through introspection or reflection on his internal states. It was precisely this notion of grace as unconscious that led at least in theory to a certain dualism in the religious-moral life of historical man.¹⁷ What was conscious supposedly belonged to nature; consequently the acts of love and religion of which man was experientially aware were psychologically natural. As such they could not be salvific, which meant they had to have their counterparts in the order of grace. There resulted two series of acts: one conscious, the object of experience, and natural; the other unconscious, the object of faith, and supernatural.

All this tells what he rejects as the sufficient basis for distinguishing nature and grace. It remains that for him nature is the *must-be* in man and grace the *is-contingently*.¹⁸ Now creatureliness and contingency are coextensive; still some things in creatures are hypothetically necessary. In historical man, nature is the hypothetically-necessary element required for the factual life of sonship God

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 225.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 224.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 223.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 212. One cannot but observe the similarity of this with an allusion of H. De Lubac, "*Le Mystère du Surnaturel*," in *Rech. Sc. Rel.* 36 (1949), p. 89.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 224: "Denn er (der Mensch) erfährt sich in der Frage nach sich selbst, in jedem Urteil, in dem er sich ein Objekt gegenüberstellt und vor dem Horizont einer unbegrenzten Transcendenz begreift, als etwas, was er notwendig ist, was eine Einheit und Ganzheit ist, die nicht in variable Grössen aufgelöst werden kann, die als ganze oder gar nicht gegeben ist: er begreift sein metaphysisches Wesen: Geist in Transcendenz und Freiheit."

has called him to share.¹⁹ The corresponding element, namely grace, is that which is contingently verified in man because of the astonishing paternal invitation of God to His human creature. Now this must not be forgotten when Rahner states that it is extremely difficult through reflection to determine which of the data of consciousness in man belong to human nature as such and which to its historically-graced condition. It is one thing to profess difficulty in drawing precise limits; it is altogether another to assert that, this notwithstanding, limits necessarily exist. The two are mutually compatible statements.

The real problem, as Rahner sees it, is located precisely here. Certain things man experiences in himself belong clearly to that which must be there if he is to be man at all. Nor does he consider *animal rationale*²⁰ or *created spirit in transcendence and freedom*²¹ altogether inapplicable as definitions of human nature. More yet, he states that the method of introspection, sometimes called transcendental analysis, has definite validity in assigning certain experienced phenomena to the realm of nature where man is concerned. For example, the spiritual transcendence present in human self-awareness is surely something that belongs to man as such and is therefore part of his *hypothetically must-be*. Other elements of his nature would be his social character and worldly immanence.²² In other words, it is not an accurate assessment of Rahner's position to say that he posits nature in the theological sense and then proceeds to say that it is an unknown in its content.

But it is no less true that a precise delimitation of that nature in relation to supernature or man's ever-present, grace-effected modification is extremely difficult. The introspection and reflection on the

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 227: "Dort, wo der Mensch die visio beatifica als Gnade durch die Wortoffenbarung weiss und sie in der Sehnsucht nach ihr als Wunder der freien göttlichen Liebe erlebt, muss er sagen, dass sie ihm (als Natur) ungeschuldet ist, und zwar als dem existierenden (so dass die Ungeschuldetheit der Schöpfung als Tat der Freiheit Gottes und die Gnade als freie Gabe an das Geschöpf als schon existierendem nicht ein und dieselbe Gabe der Freiheit Gottes sind).

²⁰ Rahner, "Concerning the Relationship between Nature and Grace," *op. cit.*, p. 314. Cf. also p. 301.

²¹ *Idem*, *Natur und Gnade*, *op. cit.*, p. 224.

²² *Ibid.*

data of consciousness that are involved in transcendental analysis by no means reach a nature that stands out pure in isolation from everything else in its subject. This must not be forgotten. The qualities of historical man, from a religious-moral point of view, have never been and are not all human, no more and no less; he has never been man pure and simple in relation to God; not all his properties in that sphere belong to him precisely because he is man. Historical nature, the one that manifests itself in such analysis, is supernaturally finalized and always has been. Entering the world, man is because of Original Sin utterly unproportioned internally in terms of powers or wherewithal for attaining union with divine persons. But that does not mean for a minute that he is finalized otherwise; that the be-all and end-all of his historical existence is other than fellowship with the Trinity, through Christ Jesus.

To express his point of view in the form of a quasi-equation, historical man for Rahner is the unity of nature and supernatural existential. Nature is therefore what he has called the *Restbegriff*,²³ that which is left when the supernatural modification that is prior to external grace, faith, and Trinitarian inhabitation is subtracted *mentally* from man in this order. It is true that Rahner does not explicitly use the term *supernatural existential* in the work under consideration. The idea, however, is unquestionably there. He may not insist on its character as explaining the penalty of loss for the damned, who are otherwise without supernatural determination; that he does elsewhere.²⁴ He may not be as explicit as in other contexts in asserting that precisely this existential is the result of the unalterable, irrevocable divine decree or love calling all men to the possibility of becoming sons of God. Still he has attributed to historical man a real, intrinsic finality or ordination to union with Divine Persons—this prior to hearing the word of faith from without, prior to the remission of Original Sin, and despite the divinely-permitted privation of the slightest wherewithal to live out save through Christ the friendship God has offered.

To put this in a somewhat different way, Christian theology in the past has concerned itself very often with the question of nature

²³ *Idem*, "Concerning the Relationship . . .," *op. cit.*, p. 313.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 312, note 1.

and grace. At the time of the Reformation, surely one of the pressing questions was the extent to which the image of God in man was modified by Adam and restored by Christ Jesus. The ultimate concern was clearly soteriological. The reality and extent of Christ's redemptive work is presented and grasped partially if not exclusively in terms of His function toward historical man; that is, sinful man. What comparison was to be made between man in his religious-moral condition prior and subsequent to the Fall? To speak in more biblical terms, is there anything besides the name that man has in common in Genesis 2 and 3? Emil Brunner has pointed out that in this matter, the Catholic-Protestant polemic has led to conclusions with which no Christian can be fully content. One can get the impression that the Catholic position saw the image of God in man quite unimpaired by Original Sin with Christ merely restoring a likeness to what is already the divine image. The Reformers on the other hand wished to emphasize the Christian restoration and could be interpreted at times as forced to assert as its precondition the total loss of the divine image through Original Sin with the consequent reduction of man to the level of the sub-human.²⁵

Now Karl Rahner has faced up to this difficulty. In addition to human nature, in addition, that is, to those necessary conditions of intelligibility required for humanity whenever and wherever it is realized, there is in historical man and always has been something more. The basic, metaphysical prerequisites for humanity are not the only historical constant in all man's states; there is another. It belongs to the religious-moral sphere; namely the supernatural existential. Man has always been called to a personal union with divine persons or *You's*. His finality has never been purely natural. Consequently from the first moment of his existence, a human being after Adam is teleologically different from what he would have been in the state of pure nature. This is necessarily so; otherwise an absolute finalizing divine decree of love would have been frustrated. Man is free to accept or reject that finality; he did not posit it, nor can he assign Himself another. Now what precisely that supernatural

²⁵ E. Brunner, *Die christliche Lehre von Schöpfung und Erlösung* (English Translation: *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption*, Olive Wyon: Westminster Press, Philadelphia, p. 77).

existential is metaphysically does not receive as definite an answer from Rahner. It is quite probable that he holds it to be a positive modification or factual constituent of man's concrete quiddity in each and every case, one which is already a grace, the finite element corresponding to the irrevocable act of divine love offering absolutely to historical man divine sonship for acceptance or rejection.²⁶ This is prior to grace coming from external revelation in the case of the individual.

Certain consequences follow from Rahner's position. First of all, there is the necessity of considering the relation found in all men of the present order to God through Christ and His Church. Membership in the latter is not constituted by the supernatural existential but is surely affected by it. Ecclesiology must take this into consideration.

Secondly the question of what humanity is presupposed in pre-theological arguments enters the picture very definitely. In the so-called metaphysical considerations of man, who is being discussed? It can hardly be the man of pure nature, who never existed. Nor must one assume in such discussions that everything in historical man is there necessarily because of his humanity or even that all historical man habitually experiences of himself belongs to his necessary metaphysical makeup. The non-Christian, just by being human in this order, is from the start affected by grace, even when he is still unjustified due to Original or personal sin. This likewise affects his conscious life though he may little suspect it and it affords him food for thought as well as material for elaboration in his theories regarding man. Theological recognition of the supernatural existential may have much to contribute to an eventual lessening of the gap between philosophy and theology. If the same religious-moral phenomena are available in introspection to both philosopher and theologian, these two must perforce come into contact more than was often thought possible in the past.²⁷ Their interpretations of these phenomena may not always be the same; the basis for the

²⁶ Rahner, "Concerning the Relationship . . .," *op. cit.*, p. 302.

²⁷ That Christian philosophers have not ignored the question is attested to by the respective "Notes" of H. Dumery and G. Van Riet in *RPL* 62 (1964), 692-704.

difference being that the theologian holds the phenomena in question open to interpretation through a source from which the philosopher as such methodically prescind to the extent that is possible; namely external revelation. Both however in their reflections on concrete humanity in the religious-moral sphere particularly will exercise caution in proceeding from *what is* to *what must be* in the sense that it could not be otherwise.

But what of natural law ethics if it is difficult to determine what nature is in counter-distinction to its gratuitous but ever-present historical modification? It may be worthwhile to investigate the possibility of forming an ethics or set of conduct-norms for concrete humanity without concluding that man must act this way because he is man. It cannot be *a priori* excluded that from the exigencies and relations found in historical man, one can assert only that he must of necessity act this way if he is to be in accord with what by God's will he actually is. In that case, the *what he is* would be understood not as an expression of necessary nature but of the latter plus the contingent effect of God's miraculously loving offer of Himself.

In comparison with his contemporaries in Catholic circles, Rahner finds himself at one with all in his assertion that the gratuity of God's call to historical man requires the distinction between grace and nature. He is somewhat less hesitant than Hans Urs Von Balthasar in holding that the *gratuity* in question justifies the conclusion that man could have been created otherwise. The latter has at least asked the question whether the *gratuity* of the present order of grace establishes as *necessarily* and *absolutely* possible an economy in which man would have been ordered other than to the beatific vision.²⁸

²⁸ H. Urs Von Balthasar, "Der Begriff der Natur in der Theologie," in ZKT 75 (1953), p. 458: "Halten wir, der Klarheit halber, zwei Überlegungen scharf auseinander: 1) Ist eine Welt möglich in welcher 'Gott vernünftige Wesen geschaffen hätte, ohne sie zur seligen Anschauung hinzuordnen und zu rufen'? (Enzyklika Humani Generis.) 2. Folgt aus der Gratuität der faktischen Gnadenordnung analytisch, dass eine Welt ohne Gnade möglich sein muss? . . . Der erste Satz könnte zur Bejahung einer 'einfachen Möglichkeit' führen, der zweite müsste, wenn er schlüssig wäre, zur Setzung einer 'notwendigen Möglichkeit' führen, so notwendig wie die Necessität der wirklich bestehenden Ordnung, die, sofern sie ist, nicht nicht sein kann und als Bedingung der Möglichkeit ihres Soseins das Seinkönnen einer anderen Weltordnung einschliesse."

To those who look at man and experience in him an unconditional reference or desire for personal union with God, Rahner does not disagree but has a word of warning. This, he says, may very well be true; man is actually such and may experience himself this way. One must however beware of concluding in this case from *what is* to *what must be*; from the factual to the necessary character of the phenomenon in question.²⁹ If there are any who hold that man could not be man without this reference, Rahner equivalently asks the question: "How do you justify concluding from what factually is to what must necessarily be?" It may well be the case that man could not be what he has historically always been without this; but that he could not be man as such—this cannot be answered from experience, history, and introspection. It would require a comparison of the phenomenon in question with a purely natural man; but the latter has never existed and is consequently not available.³⁰

With regard to the supernatural existential itself, he feels it is required to make man of this order and in Original Sin intrinsically different from man of pure nature. This has been more or less endorsed by the Louvain theologian Malevez³¹ along with others like Pendergast³² and Kenny.³³ Alfaro holds that the supernatural existential may be invoked to describe man's experience of himself permanently in an economy of grace.³⁴

Recently in an issue of *Chicago Studies*, Motherway stated that he considers open to serious question the principle which Rahner uses to deduce the supernatural existential; namely, that every absolute divine decree must necessarily have a corresponding ontological effect in creatures.³⁵ Von Balthasar finds it hard to distinguish

²⁹ Rahner, *Natur und Gnade*, *op. cit.*, p. 227.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 226.

³¹ L. Malevez, *La Gratuité du Surnaturel*, *op. cit.*, p. 678.

³² R. J. Pendergast, "The Supernatural Existential . . ." *op. cit.*, p. 4.

³³ J. P. Kenny, "Reflections on Human Nature and the Supernatural," *op. cit.*, pp. 281, 286.

³⁴ J. Alfaro, *Persona y gracia*, *op. cit.*, p. 10: "La acción interna de la Gracia y su correspondiente experiencia pertenecen a la existencia humana concreta: el hombre histórico se encuentra permanentemente en una Economía de Gracia. En este sentido es lícito hablar de un sobrenatural existencial en el hombre. . . ."

³⁵ T. Motherway, "Supernatural Existential," *op. cit.*, 91-3.

in the concrete case between the necessary constituents of humanity and its ever present historically gratuitous determination in the order of finality.³⁶ If the supernatural existential for Malevez is an accident affecting the very essence of man³⁷ and for Rahner a constituent of the concrete human quiddity,³⁸ for Von Balthasar it is so central to historical man that one is not to hypostatize nature without it.³⁹ Finally, Schillebeeckx in a lengthy review of a work in which he sees a position very similar to that of De Lubac, criticizes both its author, Max Seckler, and Karl Rahner for the same assumption; namely, that prior to personal determination by sin or sanctifying grace, a human being in this economy is in a supernatural order.⁴⁰

In summary, Rahner is more definite than De Lubac and Seckler and Von Balthasar on the question of the possibility of pure nature. He is surely at one with them in insisting that it never existed though he makes the point that as a possibility it is a necessary if negative way of putting the dogma of the gratuity of grace.⁴¹ He further elaborates and makes every effort to convey the conviction that

³⁶ H. Urs Von Balthasar, "*Der Begriff der Natur . . .*" *op. cit.*, p. 460.

³⁷ L. Malevez, "*La Gratuité . . .*" *op. cit.*, p. 685: "*Pour traduire d'un seul mot la double condition de cette modification, de cette détermination à la fois non-constitutive et pourtant tout à fait intérieure, on pourra peut-être dire d'elle qu'elle est un accident atteignant notre essence même (et non pas seulement nos facultés).*"

³⁸ Rahner, "Concerning the Relationship . . ." *op. cit.*, p. 302.

³⁹ H. Urs Von Balthasar, "*Der Begriff der Natur,*" *op. cit.*, p. 453: "*Dass diese Abstraktion keine müßige Spekulation ist (falls man sie sein läßt, was sie ist, eine Abstraktion, und sie nicht in ein mögliches, selbstständiges Konkretum hypostasiert!) . . .*"

⁴⁰ E. Schillebeeckx, "*L'Instinct de la foi selon S. Thomas D'Aquin,*" *op. cit.*, p. 397: "*A mon avis, Seckler tout comme les auteurs de l'Existential surnaturel sont induits en erreur par la perspective illusoire selon laquelle même un pécheur reste réellement appelé et demeure dans un ordre surnaturel.*"

—, p. 399: "*Je me demande si les deux interprétations, d'un côté la tendance naturalisante de Seckler, de l'autre le recours à un existential surnaturel (distinct et de la nature et de la grâce), ne perdent pas de vue cette simple donnée que, dans l'homme, le terme de sa réelle destination à l'ordre surnaturel est précisément la grâce sanctifiante elle-même, c'est-à-dire le fait d'être posé réellement dans un ordre surnaturel, que ce soit par mode d'acceptation (grâce sanctifiante de réelle intersubjectivité avec Dieu), ou que ce soit par mode de refus (la situation réelle de l'être pécheur).*"

⁴¹ Rahner, "*Natur und Gnade . . .*" *op. cit.*, p. 227.

man must not be theologized about as if prescinding from all external influences, he were internally in the order of pure nature.

What has been said heretofore has been expository. It may not be amiss to conclude with a personal observation. Regarding the supernatural existential, there is much that remains to be said. It raises many questions that are as yet unanswered. One of these, in my opinion, must be faced squarely by theologians, more than it has been heretofore: in what sense is a human being just by existing, by being conceived or born into this economy that is Christian already part of a supernatural order?

The defenders of the supernatural existential lay no claim to an internal sufficiency or "at-home-ness" in the newborn child as far as that order is concerned. Still they most definitely claim that he is in it if in a state of real need and dependence on others. For the integration the child needs into that order or world-situation, Christ and external grace are necessary. Still even before baptism can one deny that the child is somehow in a supernatural order? He is affected by a supernatural community in the world even though his immediate family may not belong to it as fully as others do. Still they have not been unaffected by it and to a certain degree are what they are because of it. The grace of Christ may not justify the child, but surely it does reach and affect him through them. Furthermore, Catholic theologians are agreed that baptism is required for salvation and the classical way to express this is that the necessity involved is one of means. This has, I think, unrecognized implications. The one finality of the child is supernatural; a finality prior to baptism and requiring baptism is hardly one that can be conferred by baptism even though the latter may provide the initiation into living out that orientation. Justification may normally come in the form of preaching for the adult and sacrament for the child. Still both are not in the state of pure nature until this element from without affects them. They are already so constituted by divine love that their one ultimate personal fulfillment can come and is offered only through union with divine persons. When man comes into the world, he is affected by the first Adam but not to the extent that from the first moment he is without some influence of the second, who is Christ. Otherwise he could not from eternity be

created in Christ; without Christ, he would be nothing. Born in Original Sin, he is not wholly without Christ even before baptism. How can one express his belonging to an order of grace in such a way that without Christ he is wholly inadequate and out of place there? This is a problem that has plagued theologians down through the ages. It is one that Karl Rahner has faced. His theory will doubtlessly require refinement; it is nevertheless a real contribution. Retaining what is and will continue to be good and necessary in the nature-grace distinction, he has nevertheless tried to consider man's graced nature as one and ordered always, from the first moment of the existence of its personal subject, either in helplessness or Christ-afforded adequacy, to immediate union with divine *You's*. History will very likely be kind to one who has made such an effort, no matter what its ultimate verdict may be with regard to his theory.

CARL J. PETER
Catholic University of America
Washington, D.C.