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The doctrine of sin in ecumenical perspective: A comparison of Karl Barth and Karl Rahner

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Rice University, 1988
RICE UNIVERSITY

THE DOCTRINE OF SIN IN ECUMENICAL PERSPECTIVE:
A COMPARISON OF KARL BARTH AND KARL RAHNER

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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April, 1988
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THE DOCTRINE OF SIN IN ECUMENICAL PERSPECTIVE: A COMPARISON OF KARL BARTH AND KARL RAHNER

Ronald Curtis Highfield

ABSTRACT

According to Hans Küng, Roman Catholic and Protestant theologians have reached fundamental agreement on the doctrine of justification. If this is so, then we can also expect to find such agreement on the doctrine of sin, for these two doctrines are but different sides of the same coin. This study tests this hypothesis by comparing Karl Barth's and Karl Rahner's views of sin.

Fruitful comparison of Barth and Rahner is made possible by the material overlap in their theologies resulting from Barth's move away from Protestant liberalism toward a more orthodox theology and Rahner's move away from Neo-Scholasticism to a more critical theology.

Comparison is made difficult by (1) the traditionally different points of departure of the Roman Catholic and the Protestant theology of sin, and (2) the difference between Rahner's transcendental method and Barth's narrative strategy.

While Rahner founds his theology of sin on the concept of human responsibility, Barth takes God's effective act of redemption as the basis for his thinking about sin. Proceeding from the concept of responsibility, Rahner seeks the transcendental conditions of its possibility, but Barth begins with the story of sin's conquest by Jesus Christ, interpreting all other biblical material in its light.
Despite their differences, Barth and Rahner essentially agree in all five areas in which they were compared. (1) They both argue that sin can be known truly only from the revelation of God. (2) Surprisingly, we find agreement in the cluster of issues surrounding the concept of freedom, Barth and Rahner agreeing that human beings have no neutral position vis-a-vis God, and that the sinful act is not free in the same sense as the obedient act. (3) They both describe sin as a three-fold "no": to God, to true human nature and to the neighbor. (4) For both theologians, the subject of the sinful act is the good human creature who is elevated by the address of God or the supernatural existential. (5) According to Barth and Rahner, sin results intrinsically in slavery and condemnation; sin is Hell, and Hell is sin.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to acknowledge my deep gratitude to my wife, Marty, and my children, Nathanael and Matthew, for their patience and support during my doctoral studies, without which I could never have finished this project. I would like to give my heartfelt thanks to Dr. Niels C. Nielsen, chairman of my dissertation committee, for his guidance in this investigation and his encouragement and support given throughout my academic career at Rice University. To the other members of my dissertation committee, Dr. Don C. Benjamin, Jr., Dr. Joe W. Hightower, and Dr. Clyde L. Manschreck, go my special thanks. I am grateful to Dr. Hans Küng for his encouragement given to me while he was a visiting professor at Rice University in the fall semester, 1987. His work toward ecumenical understanding among all Christians and all religions provided the model and the inspiration for this dissertation. I want to thank Dr. Lynn E. Mitchell, Jr., friend and advisor, for his special encouragement before and during my stay at Rice University. I owe a debt of gratitude to the elders of Bering Drive Church of Christ, Dr. Bill Love, preaching minister, and all of my family there, for their love, trust and support given to me over the past seven years. The elders' provision of employment during the summer of 1985 was crucial to my being able to continue my doctoral studies. I am grateful for the life of the late elder Bob Norris, Jr. and the encouragement he gave to me before his untimely death in 1985.
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<tr>
<td>CD</td>
<td><em>Church Dogmatics</em>  Barth.</td>
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<tr>
<td>CRNG</td>
<td>&quot;Concerning the Relationship between Nature and Grace.&quot; Rahner.</td>
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<td>DD</td>
<td>&quot;The Development of Dogma.&quot; Rahner.</td>
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<td>DS</td>
<td>&quot;Sin III. The Doctrine of Sin.&quot; Rahner.</td>
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<td>FChF</td>
<td><em>Foundations of the Christian Faith</em> Rahner.</td>
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<tr>
<td>GIF</td>
<td>&quot;Does Traditional Theology Represent Guilt as Innocuous as a Factor in Human Life.&quot; Rahner.</td>
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<td>GR</td>
<td>&quot;Guilt and its Remission: The Borderland between Theology and Psychotherapy.&quot; Rahner.</td>
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<td>GRP</td>
<td>&quot;Guilt, Responsibility, Punishment Within the View of Catholic Theology.&quot; Rahner.</td>
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<td>HW</td>
<td><em>Hearers of the Word</em> Rahner.</td>
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<td>JS</td>
<td>&quot;Justified and Sinner at the Same Time.&quot; Rahner.</td>
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<td>&quot;The One Christ and the Universality of Salvation.&quot; Rahner.</td>
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<td>OS</td>
<td>&quot;Original Sin.&quot; Rahner.</td>
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<td>&quot;Salvation IV. Theology.&quot; Rahner.</td>
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<td>SA</td>
<td>&quot;The Sin of Adam.&quot; Rahner.</td>
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<td>ScTh</td>
<td>&quot;Scripture and Theology.&quot; Rahner.</td>
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<td>SpW</td>
<td><em>Spirit in the World</em> Rahner.</td>
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<td>ThAn</td>
<td>&quot;Theology and Anthropology.&quot; Rahner.</td>
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<td>ThCC</td>
<td>&quot;The Theological Concept of Concupiscentia.&quot; Rahner.</td>
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<td>ThF</td>
<td>&quot;Theology and Freedom.&quot; Rahner.</td>
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INTRODUCTION

At certain decisive moments in Christian history, such as Paul's fight with the James party, Augustine's challenge to Pelagius, and Luther's battle with the papacy, the ideas of sin and salvation became the focal point of intense controversy. After long and bitter debates in which each side did little more than caricature the other, the Reformation period ended in a stalemate. Each of the resulting positions, Roman Catholic and Protestant, was one-sided, for it excluded the insights of its counterpart.

Roman Catholics and Protestants are again discussing the concepts of sin and salvation, this time in an ecumenical spirit. Disagreement over the nature of sin contributed to the rift between Roman Catholics and Protestants which occurred in the Sixteenth Century, and agreement on this issue is vital to their reconciliation. Hans Küng, a pioneer of the dialogue between Roman Catholics and Protestants, argues in his 1957 work, *Justification*, that the Council of Trent's decree on justification (1547) teaches justification by faith alone, a major concern of the Protestant Reformers.

By 1981 Küng could announce that the breach between Roman Catholics and Protestants over the doctrine of justification had been healed (Küng, 1981:ix). In 1987 he spoke confidently of an ecumenical agreement on the "justification of the sinner" (Küng, 1987:13).
If Künig accurately assesses the consensus on the doctrine of justification, then a similar progress toward an ecumenical understanding of sin must in principle be possible. Agreement on the "justification of the sinner" would seem to imply agreement about what it means to be a "sinner." But, to my knowledge, no ecumenical study of the doctrine of sin tests this hypothesis. This study seeks to fill this gap.

Ideally, mastering the Roman Catholic and the Protestant traditions should precede any comparison. This is, of course, impossible. Even for one with complete mastery of the two traditions, the actual position of each remains elusive, a living entity which can be captured neither in confessional documents nor in classic works. I will attempt to deal with these difficulties by comparing the doctrine of sin, as developed by the Protestant theologian Karl Barth, with the view of the Roman Catholic theologian Karl Rahner. Thorough students of their own traditions, each has earned respect as a representative of his church. Clearly, this study's validity for testing the ecumenical hypothesis depends entirely on the degree to which each theologian truly represents the living tradition of his church.

Karl Barth and Karl Rahner have fundamentally altered the course of contemporary theology. Karl Barth revitalized Protestant thought in the first half of this century. Even twenty years after his death, Barth's
theology sets the agenda for discussion among theologians. Ironically, he has become the whipping child of both fundamentalists and neo-liberals, fundamentalists believing him a liberal who cloaks his unbelief in the language of orthodoxy, neo-liberals believing his *Church Dogmatics* to be a dinosaur irrelevant to the 1980s, worthy to be declared extinct. But both feel a need to attack him, proving the persistent power of his theology to elicit fierce opposition and defense.

Karl Rahner, a leader in the twentieth century movement to rejuvenate Roman Catholic theology, found turn-of-the-century Roman Catholic theology to be dominated by sterile neo-Scholastic philosophy. One of the second generation of renewal theologians, Rahner followed pioneers Peter Lippert, Romano Guardini, and Erich Przywara who limited their studies to non-controversial areas in order to avoid the modernist-hunts of those early years (*Vorgrimler*, 55, 56). However, Rahner pushed the renewal into new areas of theology, with great impact on the reforms of Vatican II (*Vorgrimler*, 94-101).

comparison yet exists of their respective doctrines of sin.

Borwarzik and Herberg discussed the Barth and Rahner material separately in two large blocks prior to the comparison. To facilitate a closer, more intense comparison, my investigation will instead divide the material into discrete thematic chapters. In this way we can gain the precision needed compare Barth and Rahner, who differ widely in their use of concepts and terms. Each chapter answers one of the following questions which were designed to isolate the fundamental aspects of the doctrine of sin: (1) How is sin known? (2) How is sin possible? (3) What is sin? (4) Who is the subject of sin? and (5) What are the results of sin?

Each chapter contains four levels: exposition, interpretation, evaluation, and comparison. To understand the conceptual structure of our study, imagine a circle whose surface is divided into five equal segments or "pie slices". Within the outer circle are three inner concentric circles. The "pie slices" represent the five aspects. Each slice has four levels which gradually focus toward the center where the five aspects meet.

The exposition will function only to provide a springboard into the interpretation, where the dialogic character of the investigation will come into play. Rahner's doctrine of sin will form the nearest horizon in which Barth's is viewed, and vice versa, each interpreted with one eye on the other. We will ask whether or not reading the
two together—with the strengths of one challenging and supplementing the weaknesses of the other—gives us a better grasp of the doctrine of sin than each does when read alone.

Barth and Rahner will be evaluated in terms of how well their doctrines of sin correspond to the norm which they both acknowledge, the message of the Bible. No doubt, they differ in the way they appropriate the biblical message. Barth gives it a narrative interpretation, ideas being secondary to the story of the Bible. Rahner concentrates instead on its ideas.

The point-by-point comparison seeks to discover in what areas Rahner and Barth agree and disagree, to make explicit the dialogue implicit in the earlier sections.

Our goal is to contribute to the present dialogue between Roman Catholics and Protestants, and we must keep this specific purpose in mind, differentiating it from other possible approaches. Our purpose is neither to defend a confessional position, whether it be Roman Catholic or Protestant, nor to offer an apologetic to the secular culture on behalf of the Christian faith as such. We will not attempt, as would an ethical study, to decide the right course of action in specific cases, nor as a practical study, to offer suggestions about how the church should preach about sin.

Barth's and Rahner's doctrines of sin were framed with the question of soteriology in mind. This investigation will, therefore, be limited in a similar
fashion. The ecumenical question to be probed is whether or not the Roman Catholic and Protestant doctrines of sin as they function in soteriology are in fundamental agreement. Building on the work of Hans Küng, we will begin with the hypothesis that this fundamental agreement exists. In the spirit of ecumenism we will seek, in so far as it is possible without superficial harmonization, to find a way to reconcile them.

At first glance there is little promise of a significant agreement between Barth and Rahner. For Barth, the sole object of dogmatics is the free God. For Rahner, dogmatics must be pursued as transcendental anthropology. Barth rejects anthropocentric theology; Rahner defends it.

But the impression given by this juxtaposition is misleading. Viewed from a larger frame of reference, a significant overlap in methodology persists. Barth has moved away from the subjectivism and individualism of Protestant liberalism toward an objective and churchly form of theology. Rahner, on the other hand, has moved away from the objectivism and ecclesiasticism of Neo-Thomism to a more existential and critical theology.

Barth’s move allows him to take the content of dogma seriously, without accepting a pre-critical objectivism. Rahner’s move allows him to develop a form of hermeneutics through which dogma can be understood and reformed, without denying its infallibility. This overlap in method gives us hope that a fruitful dialogue about the doctrine of sin can
take place. Barth said of his discussion with Bultmann that it was like the relationship between an elephant and a whale. Try as they may they could not get close enough to have a real engagement (Hesselink, 134). Such is not the case with Barth and Rahner.

Comparing Barth's and Rahner's doctrines of sin reveals some surprising and significant agreements. They both believe that human beings are solely responsible for sin, that all are sinners, and that sinners are redeemable. Each argues that sin is a willing, responsible "no" to the gracious God of Jesus Christ. They agree that sin results in slavery and condemnation.

Where Barth and Rahner disagree it is for one of two reasons: (1) the traditionally different points of departure of Roman Catholic and Protestant theologies of sin, or (2) the difference between Rahner's transcendental method and Barth's narrative strategy.

Rahner, in line with the Roman Catholic tradition, founds his theology of sin on the concept of human responsibility. Barth, consistent with Reformation theology, takes God's effective act of redemption as the basis for his thinking about sin. Rahner proceeds from the idea of responsibility, seeking, in the spirit of Kant, the transcendental conditions of its possibility. Barth begins with the story of sin's conquest by Jesus Christ and interprets all other biblical material in its light. Rahner presses for conceptual coherence among the Christian
doctrines. Barth translates the story of redemption into philosophical language, which results in dialectic or paradox.

Barth's and Rahner's terminology and methods are so different that extreme care must be taken comparing them. We cannot be satisfied with agreement or disagreement on a mere verbal level. When Rahner designates original sin and concupiscence as "sin", he does not mean what Barth does. Both Barth and Rahner affirm verbally that sin is universal and forgivable, but they do not intend the same thing. They both tend toward belief in universal salvation, but for very different reasons. On the other hand, when Barth affirms that the concept of sin necessarily excludes freedom and Rahner affirms that it necessarily includes it, what seems like a contradiction proves to be one of the most surprising and promising agreements of all.

In spite of the difficulties, a dialogue between Barth and Rahner proves worth the effort. Reading Barth with Rahnerian eyes and Rahner with Barthian eyes discloses hidden potential and problems in each. Rahner's transcendental method forces Barth's ontological presuppositions to the surface. Barth's narrative method provides a check on Rahner's latent idealism. Reading Rahner in the light of Barth allows us to see the weakness of Rahner's idea that human beings have the ability to give a free and definitive "yes" or "no" to God. But it also allows us to discover in Rahner the building blocks for
another, more biblical view. Reading Barth in the light of Rahner enables us to be sensitive to those places where Barth hedges his extreme statements about the absence of freedom in sin and the total corruption of "the man of sin", and allows us to discover a more balanced and biblical view than appears on the surface.
Chapter I
THE SOURCE OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF SIN

Where do we learn about sin? On what basis can we assert its reality and wickedness, and by what rule may we measure its depth and breadth? Can it be recognized and described in the light of the law or the gospel? Or is the knowledge of sin available apart from the biblical revelation in a natural law or a religious sensibility?

It is important that Barth's and Rahner's answers to these questions be defined precisely. In assessing the merit of each's doctrine of sin, it must be determined, not only how sin is defined, but also on what basis the definition is founded. If Barth and Rahner define sin in the same words but point to different sources for their views, it remains questionable whether or not the two really agree. Therefore the present chapter is crucial to the comparison.

Obviously, we are asking the question which, since Kant, has become the central question of modern theology, the question of method. Barth devoted the first volume of his Church Dogmatics to this question, and at the beginning of every new topic he deals with it historically and dogmatically. Rahner also deals with method throughout his work. It is not possible in this study to give a complete discussion of Barth's or Rahner's theological method, nor is
it necessary. However, we will give a summary of their primary methodological concerns to facilitate the comparison. Subsequently, we will deal specifically with each's position on the knowledge of sin.

KARL BARTH ON THE KNOWLEDGE OF SIN

Method, for Barth, is not a problem which should be dealt with in a prolegomena to dogmatics, proper—outside the circle of faith. Barth will not allow the epistemology and method of dogmatics to be determined by an independent philosophical hermeneutics nor a "prior anthropological possibility" (CD I 1, 41). The method and the content of dogmatics are inseparable. Indeed, contrary to the trend of modern theology, Barth argues that the content of dogmatics is prior to the method of its explication.

For Barth, the unity of method and content is assured by the content of revelation, i.e., God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ. With any other view of revelation, we would be dealing, not with a revelation of "God", but with a projection of our own self-consciousness, an idol. The content of revelation is the free God who remains free throughout the event of revelation, not becoming an idea which can be grasped and manipulated. The philosopher cannot anticipate or grasp revelation from outside of it, for every attempt to do so reduces the free God to a human idea.
According to Barth, God is God's own proof. Before the metaphysician and the theologian have spoken God has made self known. The knowledge of God is secure before the work of dogmatics begins. Dogmatics does not begin with the questions "Whether God is known?" or "Whether sin is known?" but "How God is known?" and "How is sin known?" (CD II 1, 63). Faith seeks understanding.

The Analogy of Faith

How can the human person know and speak about the "object" of theology (the free God) in human terms? Is God merely the negating limit of human understanding which makes us aware of our finitude? Is God's self-revelation an undifferentiated experience of transcendence about which we must remain silent (Wittgenstein) or speak only arbitrarily? No. According to Barth, God is really known in faith, for in revelation God gives an analogy or a likeness in which God renders God "erkennbar und sagbar" so that we may think and speak truly of God, (Körtke, 1983:8).

Making use of Anselm's famous definition, fides quaerens intellectum, Barth affirms that faith is intelligible, not merely a blind experience. The mind does not impose alien categories upon the object of faith so that the understanding of faith is alienated from it. On the contrary, God-given faith is the human counterpart of God's self-revelation. It contains an analogy, a likeness, which truly corresponds to God. For Barth, it is:
the likeness of the known in the knowing, of the object in thought, of the Word of God in the word that is thought and spoken by man....Precisely when we describe both the conformity of man to God that takes place in faith and also the point of contact for the Word of God posited in this conformity, not as an inborn or acquired property of man but only as the work of the actual grace of God, our only final word at this point can be that God acts on man in His Word. Because man's work in faith is that on which God's work is done, man can know the Word of God. He knows as he is known by God (CD I 1, 243-44).

According to Barth, the analogy present in the human word about God (proclamation and theology) is not a static quality inherent in or imparted to human language, for this would be an analogy of being, and for Barth, there is not even "eine teilweise Ähnlichkeit zwischen Gottes Sein und unseren Worten" (Körtke, 1983:8). The likeness is "there" only as God acts in revelation, renewing its being every moment, so it must not be taken for granted nor manipulated.

Full understanding of this analogy is not attained at once, but must be sought through the human work of dogmatics. Only thus does the work of dogmatics have its legitimacy and scientific status.

It is legitimate because the Church is charged with witnessing rightly to the Word of God, and dogmatics is the Church's work of testing its proclamation to discover whether or not it is keeping true to its charge (CD I 1, 4). Dogmatics has scientific status, for it has its own proper object which can be explicated well or badly (CD I 1, 7,8).
The work of dogmatics, like that of preaching, does not share the same certainty as that of faith itself, being a fallible human work. It is well done if it points toward Jesus Christ and not away from him.

True to his method, Barth insists that we learn about sin from the story of the crucified and risen Jesus, and nowhere else. We may know from other sources that we are finite and are estranged from our ideal self. But we cannot know that we are the enemies of God, neighbor and self. We cannot escape the servum arbitrium of sin. The mind blinded by sin is not short of excuses for our evil behavior. Therefore, in constructing the doctrine of sin, we should not use the understanding we have of ourselves "even as a preparation or a kind of initial understanding in relation to the knowledge of sin" (CD IV 1, 361).

However, Barth does admit that once we grasp the nature of sin from the proper source, we gain a deeper insight into the human situation. Wilfried Härle finds in Barth a distinction between knowledge which has its source (Quelle) in revelation and that which has its presupposition (Voraussetzung) there (Härle, 1975:278). Barth accepts both of these forms of knowledge, rejecting only supposed knowledge which has neither its source nor its presupposition in faith. Harle says,

Damit lässt sich folgendes Ergebnis festhalten: Es gibt für Barth die Möglichkeit wahrer Erkenntnis, die nicht in der Christusoffenbarung ihre Quelle hat. Es gibt für Barth aber keine Möglichkeit wahrer Erkenntnis, die nicht die
With the Christian revelation as a presupposition, we may perceive in the human lot of estrangement and death an analogy to the truth that humans are sinners (CD IV 1, 360-61). Barth says, "It is true that while this [alienation] is not identical with man's disharmony with God and his neighbor and himself, with the real breach in his existence, it can be an analogy to it which may help to make his guilt and need all the more plain" (CD IV 1, 360-61).

Is Barth admitting, after all, that there is an analogy of being, an analogous relation between the revelation of God and ordinary human self-knowledge? Hans Urs von Balthasar deals with this question in his book on Barth, _The Theology of Karl Barth_ (1971). According to von Balthasar, there are three stages in Barth's efforts to find a way to speak truly of God. The first is the dialectical stage. In this period Barth contends that whatever is affirmed of God must also be denied immediately. Theology proceeds dialectically, with a yes and a no. This stage ran from the first edition of _Romans_ (1919) to _Prolegomena to Christian Dogmatics_ (1928).

Barth's second stage is a transition period which von Balthasar designates "the shift to analogy". In this stage Barth searches for some way to save the temporal sphere from being swallowed up by the eternal, hoping to salvage culture and philosophy and ethics and the Church (von Balthasar, 1971:80). The book on Anselm, _Fides
Quaerens Intellectum (1931), provided Barth with the intellectual equipment to rid his theology of any need for a philosophical prolegomena. The move to the analogy of faith is evident in Church Dogmatics, I 1, but not pervasive, for the analogy of faith is "as yet unrelated to Christology" (von Balthasar, 1971:94). Barth attempts to build his theology on the "Word of God" alone. But the "Word of God" has not escaped the formalistic quality, characteristic of the first stage, not yet being limited to concrete person of Jesus Christ who lives on the pages of the Gospels.

Only with volume three, "The Doctrine of Creation" (1945), does Barth's analogy of faith become the central theme. Von Balthasar calls this stage "the analogy in full bloom" (1971:100). Here, the opposition between God and human beings is overcome. God became human in Jesus Christ; therefore, humanity cannot be alien to God. Good human nature can be abused by fallen humans, but cannot be destroyed by them. At this stage Barth accepts the analogy of being "within the context of an all-embracing analogy of faith" (von balthasar, 1971:149).

Von Balthasar (1951) and Sohngen (1956) contend that Barth's analogy of faith includes an implicit analogy of being. Kreck (1956) and Jüngel (1962, 1965) take issue with von Balthasar. Further inquiry into the complex debate among Barth scholars and critics about the precise status of the analogy of faith would not serve our task. The question which concerns us further is, how it makes itself available
for exposition.

**Narrative Theology**

Concretely, the analogy of faith can be understood only by grasping the story of Jesus Christ as it is told on the pages of the Gospels. For Barth, the Bible is not a source from which to reconstruct historical events, nor a book of revealed propositions from which to construct a system of doctrine. Rather, it is the story of God's activity of creation and salvation.

David Ford considers Barth a narrative theologian. He says, "Barth is claiming that God chooses to bring people to faith through certain stories; that this does not depend on us being able to verify the stories historically or affirm them as inerrant; but that it does depend on us following the stories carefully and trusting that their subject, who is still alive to confirm them, is rendered adequately for God's purpose" (Ford, 1985:22). According to Ford, it is Barth's use of the biblical narratives which distinguishes him from Anselm. Through his study of Anselm, Barth learned that the meaning of the word "God" and certainty of God's existence can be established only by God's self-revelation. Anselm's definition of God ("that than which no greater can be conceived") was derived from the "creed and church authority" (Ford, 1985:23). Barth, however, uses the biblical narratives to give content to the word "God". "God" is the one who "loves in freedom" and is
revealed as the Lord (CD II 1, 257). The God who is revealed as Lord cannot be doubted.

Barth attempts to derive all of the attributes or perfections of God from the story of Jesus. Most comprehensively, God is "the One who loves in freedom" (CD II 1, 257); but we must also speak of the one simple being of God under the headings of various perfections (CD II 1, 322). These fall into two categories, the perfections of the divine loving and the perfections of the divine freedom.

According to Barth, the distinctions in the being of God cannot be founded on anthropological or ontological insights, nor deduced from the concept of "that than which no greater can be conceived" (CD II 1, 336-41). Our knowledge of these perfections is derived solely from the revelation of God, i.e., from the story of Jesus. Robert Jensen boldly says, in his book *God after God*, that for Barth Jesus' story is God's story (Cited in Ford, 1985:137).

Ford contends that the best way to understand Barth's narrative method is to compare his view of the biblical narratives to the nineteenth century realistic novel. To grasp Barth's use of Scripture in theology, Ford uses Peter Stern's interpretation of realism as a "middle distance" perspective. The "middle distance" perspective "is the fictional creation of people, of individual characters and lives informed by what in any one age is agreed to constitute a certain integrity and coherence" (*On Realism*, 1973:120 cited in Ford, 1985:55). According to
Ford, Barth views the biblical narratives from a middle distance perspective, not seeking the meaning of the narrative behind the text in an historical event, as does historical criticism, nor outside it in myth or science, as do philosophical theologies. The meaning of the text is the story itself, the historical inaccuracies and internal contradictions being taken up into it and given meaning.

Barth also pursues a narrative type theology for the doctrine of nothingness and sin. He says:

The true nothingness is that which brought Jesus Christ to the cross, and that which he defeated there. Only from the standpoint of Jesus Christ, his birth, death and resurrection, do we see it in reality and truth, without the temptation to treat it as something inconclusive or relative, or to conceive it dialectically and thus render it innocuous. From this standpoint we see it with fear and trembling as the adversary with whom God and God alone can cope (CD III 3, 305).

The central theme of Jesus' story is the humiliation of the Lord (the cross), the exaltation of the servant (the resurrection) and the testimony of the true witness. All the individual biblical stories exegeted within Barth's treatment of the doctrine of sin, (Jeremiah and the fall of Jerusalem in CD IV 1, 468-78; Abigail, Nabal and David in CD IV 2, 424-32, Amos in CD IV 2, 445-52, David and Bathsheba in CD IV 2, 464-67, Moses and the rebellion in the desert in CD IV 2, 478-83; and an extended treatment of Job in CD IV 3, 383-88, 98-408, 421-34, 453-61.), are interpreted in the light of this central story. Barth retells the biblical story, understanding nothingness and sin as the antagonists
of God which are defeated once and for all. Human sin cannot be explained within the narrative framework, for God remains faithful to the covenant, offering human beings perfect freedom and fulfillment, but the human creature inexplicably and irrationally refuses God's offer, declining to be God's faithful covenant partner.

Barth does not merely repeat the story. To grasp the matter more fully and dialogue with philosophy and traditional theology, he translates narrative relationships into ontological concepts. Sin corresponds to "nothingness". Since it has been defeated by Jesus Christ, it is not really real. In terms of Barth's "temporal ontology", (described by Ford, 1985:103) sin and nothingness have no future. "In short, the reality of God is eternal, with past, present and future coinciding in pure duration; the reality of creation is historical, with past, present and future in succession; and the reality of nothingness is only past" (Ford, 1985:103). Barth's idea of nothingness will be treated more fully later on; for now, "nothingness" must be understood as an ontological term pointing to a relationship within the biblical narrative.

Now, we return to the analogy of faith for a summary look. The analogy of faith is given only in God's self-revelation which is encountered in the biblical narrative alone—or more specifically, the central story of the cross and resurrection of Jesus. The analogy of faith is a one-way street. Only in faith can it be known that
human brokenness and alienation is analogous to sin. The truth about human existence, that humans are sinners, does illuminate our experience. But we cannot deduce from our experience that we are sinners, i.e., the enemies of God, others and self.

The Knowledge of Sin in Protestant Church

Barth does not concern himself with refuting those who openly derive a doctrine of sin from human self-knowledge. "All serious theology," writes Barth, "has tried to win its knowledge of sin from the Word of God and to base it on that Word" (CD IV 1, 361). He directs his criticisms to those who claim to derive their view of sin from the Word, but are not consistent.

According to Barth, Protestant theologians have always agreed in principle that sin can be known only from the biblical revelation. But this formal commitment, laments Barth, was not carried out materially. The Reformation leaders (Luther, Calvin and Melanchthon) carelessly allowed a distinction between God, the Creator and God, the Redeemer to creep in. The notion of God, the Creator became the basis of an abstractly constructed relationship between Creator and creature or Lawgiver and transgressor. The Reformers were protected from the consequences of this method by "the happy inconsistency" of biblicism which would not allow them to go too far away from the "centre and substance" of the biblical revelation (CD IV
1, 367). However, during the period of Protestant Orthodoxy, the transition "from a strictly formal fidelity to the Bible to pure rationalism did take place" (CD IV 1, 388). In an extended note (CD IV 1, 369–372), Barth traces this history from Piscator (1589) through Bucanus (1605), Polanus (1609), Wolleb (1626), the Leidner Synopsis (1624) and Burmann (1671) to Heidegger (1696).

At first, the idea that there is natural knowledge of God and the moral law was safeguarded by the assertion that an unregenerate person could not benefit by this knowledge. But, by the end of the century, the natural law, known by reason, was equated with the law given by revelation in Scripture. The latter was given merely to call attention to the natural law written on the heart. With this transition, sin becomes a transgression of the natural law written on the heart rather than that hate of God, others and self which is disclosed by Jesus Christ. The Orthodox Protestants never thought of the two laws as in competition, but they unwittingly set things up for the transition to the Enlightenment where the so-called natural knowledge of God overpowered the revealed knowledge of God, making it seem superfluous.

In the Nineteenth Century, the implications of the transition made in Protestant Orthodoxy became explicit. In his second extended historical note (CD IV 1, 374–387), Barth traces this story from Wegscheider (1815) through Bretschneider (1838), Schleiermacher, Schweizer (1877),
Biedermann (1869), Lipsius (1879), Ludemann (1926), Ritschl, and Troeltsch. In all these authors, sin is worked into the whole system, becoming something necessary, and even good when seen in the light of the totality.

And so, argues Barth, when we presuppose a source of the knowledge of sin in addition to Jesus Christ, we start down the road that leads ultimately to the trivialization—or worse the transvaluation—of sin. When biblical law becomes a source for the knowledge of sin apart from Jesus Christ, it will not be long until the natural law known by human reason is declared to have the same content as the biblical law. With this position secure, it is simple matter for reason to declare its autonomy from revelation and to begin making its own decisions about what is good and evil. The implication is obvious, believes Barth: "if we do not want the consequences we must not want the presupposition" (CD IV 1, 389).

Barth's Criticisms of the Protestant Theological Method: An Evaluation

We will now reflect on Barth's criticism of the Protestant doctrine of sin. How does Barth's criticism of the methods of others help us understand and evaluate his own method?

Barth, in one of the essays in the Barth/Harnack debate (1923), laments the "determinative character of method" in modern theology (Rumscheidt, 1972:41-42). He
argues against liberal thought that the content of revelation ought to be the controlling factor in theology. Ironically, Barth's struggle against the primacy method insures that the method question will pervade all of his work.

For Barth, method and material imply each other, the choice for one determining the choice for the other. This conviction leads him to root the Enlightenment self-emancipation from revelation in a faulty methodological decision of the Reformers. The dominant historical motif in the *Dogmatics* traces the snowball-like effect of this mistake: Reformers to Orthodox to Enlightenment to Liberalism. Barth repeats this story from almost every perspective, always concluding the same thing: "But, if we do not want the consequences we must not want the presupposition" (CD IV 1, 389).

As a preliminary hypothesis, it is safe to assume that Barth and Rahner will part company most decisively at the point of method. Barth said that the disagreement about the source and criterion of theology is the difference which separates Roman Catholic from Protestant theology, making it impossible for him to be a Roman Catholic (CD I 1, xiii). If this assertion is taken with full seriousness, Roman Catholic/Protestant dialogue about any material point of theology, such as the doctrine of sin, becomes impossible. An investigation comparing Barth's with Rahner's doctrine of sin would be a fruitless work, for the doctrine of sin would
be so determined by the method employed that any Roman Catholic/Protestant discussion—even if it ostensibly concerns the material question—would be reduced to a debate about method.

On a theoretical level Barth is correct about the unity of method and material. Practically, however, every theology is situated within history, and no methodological decision can overcome its own historicity completely. In addition, no method can applied consistently, for even if it is accepted theoretically, it will be departed from in practice. On the other hand, actual practice may imply a method which is theoretically denied. In any case, inherited material commitments determine to some extent how consistently the method is applied.

The evolution toward Enlightenment autonomy was not inevitable, but at times Barth gives this impression. In doing so, he tends to identify logical consistency with historical inevitability, two ideas which must be carefully distinguished. At any time the material commitments could have revolted against the method and limited or modified it.

This is precisely what happened, according to Barth, in the case of the Reformers and the Orthodox Protestants. Calvin departed from the Christological basis and norm of Christian theology, appealing to another source of knowledge, knowledge deduced from an abstract concept of a holy, all-powerful, all-determining God. Implicitly, this departure undercut the whole of his theology. An abstract
god cannot co-exist with the God of Jesus Christ. They are in total contradiction.

However, Calvin's "happy inconsistency" of biblicism preserved him from straying too far from the "sum and substance" of the Bible, Jesus Christ (CD IV 1, 367). Therefore, his theology as a whole--except where Barth does criticize it materially, e.g., election and original sin--is sound. According to Barth, Calvin's material commitments overcame his faulty method. Perhaps this same approach could be taken to other theologians as well, e.g., Rahner.

Barth, too, objects to his theology being judged solely by what it implies. He wants it to be interpreted, not as a system of concepts with a "Christological" center, but in the light of that to which it points, the "living person of Jesus Christ" (IV. 3., 176). Rational consistency cannot be the final test of a theology's validity, for is it not "happy inconsistency" which protects any theology from destroying that which it intends to build?

With a touch of irony, Langdon Gilkey observes that all the "Death of God" theologians received their training in the age of the dominance of Barth's theology (Gilkey, 1969:87-106). Reversing Barth's historical motif, Gilkey discerns the Death of God movement's historical presupposition in Barth's exclusion of all non-biblical sources for knowledge of God. Barth allied himself with Kant's critique of traditional metaphysics and Feuerbach's critique of religion. For Barth, this criticism of
metaphysics and religion removes only idols and makes way for true knowledge of God. However, if belief in the supernatural revelation crumbles, argues Gilkey, there is nothing left to sustain belief in God, or any type of transcendence. There is no sense of the sacred, no sympathy for God's immanence in the world, and no recognition of the religious nature of humanity. The world is purely secular. God is dead. Barth did it.

Pannenberg agrees with Barth that the separation between natural and revealed knowledge of God eventually leads to some form of naturalism. Barth deals with this problem by limiting the knowledge of God to the revelation in Christ, excluding natural theology as alien. But Pannenberg attempts to overcome the division by using the category of universal history; revelation is the whole of history. According to Pannenberg, Barth's solution only makes the problem worse by legitimating the offending distinction between supernatural knowledge and natural knowledge, playing into the hands of the critics of theology who, all along, have contended that theology is based on purely subjective postulates (Pannenberg, 1976:271-275). Theology is dead. Barth killed it.

Thus, the history of Protestant theology can be interpreted in a way totally different from Barth's understanding. We can take warning from this: a theology's validity must not be judged solely by the presuppositions implied in its method. We must not let methodological
differences—as important as they are—overshadow the possible material agreements between Barth and Rahner in their respective doctrines of sin.

**Jesus Christ: The Mirror of Sin**

Barth criticizes others for allowing the doctrine of sin to be determined by alien sources, but how can he avoid making the same error? According to Barth, Jesus Christ, and him alone, is the one to whom we must look to find the true knowledge of sin. For Barth, the obedience of Jesus Christ is "the mirror in which we can see the man of sin as such" (CD IV 1, 397).

Barth does not try to show that Jesus Christ is this "mirror", for Barth presupposes this in faith. He asks only how Jesus is this mirror. How is it that Jesus Christ is free from the ambiguity which allows us to fall into the arbitrariness which was the downfall of the Orthodox Protestant and Enlightenment theologians. How can we be sure that the name "Jesus Christ" will not be used as a void into which we project the content of our own ideal self?

Barth is not asking the typical epistemological question, i.e., how sin, as it is revealed Jesus Christ, may be confirmed as the truth by our experience or reason, for to ask this would be to depart from his faith presupposition. Nor is he asking the hermeneutical question of how one may be sure that a particular theology of sin truly reflects what is said in Jesus Christ. Barth is
asking, rather, about the intrinsic clarity and certainty of the revelation in Jesus Christ which do in fact make it plain what sin is and exclude all other sources for this knowledge. He seeks the understanding of faith.

According to Barth, we find the answer to this question by concentrating on the story of the crucifixion of Jesus. This story is that by which all others are to be measured and interpreted, for in it sin is revealed in its "absolutely pure and developed and unequivocal form" (CD IV 1, 397). The human actors, who represent all human beings, are completely and undeniably guilty of murdering the one who is God and human. Thus, they are infallibly judged as those who hate God, others and themselves (CD IV 1, 398). Jesus is the representative of all humans before God; thus, when he died totally, he showed that the whole human being is completely corrupt, "the man of sin" (CD IV 1, 407). We know that sin has no positive part to play in God's plan; it is the object of God's "uncompromising 'No'" (CD IV 1, 410). We can be sure of this, not because of an abstract notion of good and evil, but because that is the way Jesus, the representative of the "man of sin", was treated in the narrative of the cross.
KARL RAHNER ON THE KNOWLEDGE OF SIN

Rahner, unlike Barth, does not make a special point of dealing with method in his work on the doctrine of sin. He asserts in a general way that the knowledge of sin is theological knowledge. We must take care to maintain, says Rahner, that "it is only from God's revelation of grace that the revelation of his anger comes to man" (DS, 1589). He says in another place:

It could be said that an understanding of the real nature of guilt is not possible until we have discussed the absolute and forgiving closeness of God in and through his self-communication; or that the real truth about a person's guilt can come home to him only when he experiences forgiveness and his deliverance from this guilt. For it is only in a radical partnership with and immediacy to God in what we call grace and God's self-communication that a person can grasp what guilt is: closing oneself to this offer of God's absolute self-communication (FChF, 93).

Rahner's intention is clear. The knowledge that the human person is a sinner or that the essence of sin is the culpable refusal of God's self-communication cannot be gained by our own self study. Human self analysis, be it ever so honest—even pessimistic—cannot arrive at the Christian doctrine of sin. It is gained only from revelation.

Even so, we are not yet in a position to understand precisely what Rahner intends, for we do not know what he means by "theological knowledge". In order to compare him with Barth we must gain that precision. Barth, in his
treatment of this subject's history, did not take such a claims at face value, but demanded that the assertion be borne out in practice in the construction of the doctrine. This demand is justified. To do this we will introduce Rahner's theological method in its broad outlines before inquiring again about the knowledge of sin.

**Dogmatics as Transcendental Anthropology**

Rahner usually begins his theological reflections with the problem which the modern person faces in understanding and assimilating the dogmas of the Church. The dogmas are expressed in a conceptuality which, to modern ears, sounds not only strange but downright unintelligible. At best, these teachings are accepted as "mysteries", and, at worse, rejected as "merely poetic concepts and indemonstrable mythology" (ThAn, 37).

Rahner, however, accepts these dogmas as infallible, irreformable and absolutely binding doctrine. He attempts to interpret them in such a way that the believer may accept them with intellectual honesty. But he is careful not to reduce them to moments of the subject's self-knowledge. According to Rahner, the way to accomplish this task is by practicing dogmatics as "transcendental anthropology" (ThAn, 29). He writes:
Therefore, if one wishes to pursue dogmatics as transcendental anthropology, it means that whenever one is confronted with an object of dogma, one inquires as to the conditions necessary for it to be known by the theological subject, ascertaining that the a priori conditions for knowledge of the object are satisfied, and showing that they imply and express something about the object, the mode, and method and limits of knowing it (ThAn, 39).

Pursuing dogmatics as transcendental anthropology allows one to find an anthropological referent in dogmas about God, the Trinity, Christology and other Christian doctrines. All statements about God are at the same time statements about the human person.

Revelation as Historical and Transcendental

Before the method of dogmatics as transcendental anthropology is explained further, Rahner's thinking concerning revelation, Holy Scripture, the origin and development of dogma and theology must be clarified.

For Rahner, the pastoral and apologetic concern of communicating the Christian faith to the modern person provides the point of departure for theology. But it is not origin of dogma and theology as such. The origin of dogma, as well as of faith and of the whole theological process, is revelation. Revelation in its most original sense is not the communication of truths about God but God's self-communication to the human person. God remains God in the event of revelation. The one revelation of God has two aspects, the transcendental and the historical.
Transcendental revelation is the offer of God's self-communication which constitutes an ever present aspect of the human person.

In Rahner's early philosophical work, *Spirit in the World*, he describes this "existential" (transcendental revelation) from an epistemological perspective as a dynamic openness for infinite being which makes it possible to know finite objects. In his philosophy of religion, *Hearers of the Word*, he understands it as the ground, not only of knowledge, but also of will. It constitutes the human person as a potentiality for obedience, as one obligated to listen for a possible word of God, a space-time (historical) revelation.

Rahner's essay of 1950, "Concerning the Relationship of Nature and Grace," was programmatic with respect to future discussion of the relationship between nature and grace. He used the conceptuality developed in *Spirit* and *Hearers* to find a middle path between the Scholastic extrinsic view and the intrinsic view of the *Nouvelle Theologie*. The *Nouvelle Theologie* used the Augustinian idea that human beings have a "natural desire" for God as a point of contact between nature and grace (Vass II, 1985:59–62).

In this discussion, Rahner coined the term "supernatural existential" (übernatürliches Existential) to describe this "capacity for the God of self-bestowing personal love" (CRNG, 312). Soon, Rahner changed the
definition of the supernatural existential from the capacity for grace to the permanent offer of God's self-communication (Taylor, 1986:127 fn. 50). In its fully developed form the "supernatural existential" is a theological interpretation of the human person's experience of transcendence, i.e., transcendental revelation. It is not a purely philosophical concept, but a deduction from the already achieved theological knowledge of God's universal will to impart self in grace.

The term "transcendental revelation" appears for the first time in Rahner's writings in J. B. Metz's footnotes to the second edition of Hearers. The term was used with the blessing of Rahner, and he himself uses it afterward ("Revelation," 1975:1460-68). Vass explains the relationship between the supernatural existential and transcendental revelation: "Now the reasoning behind the connection of the supernatural existential with transcendental revelation is very simple: just as God's grace presupposes the supernatural elevation of man (supernatural existential), so does the concrete historical word of God presuppose something of revelation itself in the intimate being of man" (1985:120).

Now we are in a position to understand what Rahner means by his twofold conception of revelation. Transcendental revelation is a universal experience. "It is the transcendental experience of the absolute and merciful closeness of God, even if this cannot be conceptually
expressed at will by everyone" ("Revelation," 1975:1461). Transcendental revelation is the supernatural existential in its aspect as illuminating and confronting the human person with God in such a way that a choice must be made to accept or reject God's offer.

The counterpart of transcendental revelation is historical/categorical revelation. It is "the historical mediation and conceptual objectivation of this supernaturally transcendent experience" ("Revelation," 1975:1461). This historical revelation has a history. Indeed, it "constitutes the whole of history" ("Revelation," 1975:1461). The definitive event of this history is the event of Jesus Christ. Rahner says:

> The unique and final culmination of this history of revelation has already occurred and has revealed the absolute and irrevocable unity of God's transcendental self-communication to mankind and of its historical mediation in the one God-man Jesus Christ, who is at once God himself as communicated, the human acceptance of this communication and the final historical manifestation of this offer and acceptance" ("Revelation," 1975:1462).

A question naturally arises at this point: does Rahner's concept of transcendental revelation threaten to engulf the historical revelation of Jesus Christ? If historical revelation is merely "the historical mediation and conceptual objectivation" ("Revelation," 1975:1461) of transcendental revelation, are we left with a Christianity which is merely the purest and highest expression to date of the human quest for transcendence?
Rahner is not unconcerned about this possibility. He insists that we that can know about transcendental revelation only because we have in fact experienced the historical revelation of Jesus Christ. It can be known only as the ground of the possibility of historical/categorical revelation. Historical revelation has noetic priority of over transcendental revelation, though the two are ontologically one ("Jesus Christ," 1975:764; "Revelation," 1975:1461). The human person can know God as the horizon of infinite being which grounds human knowing and willing without being aware of Jesus Christ, but he or she cannot know God as the infinite, holy mystery who speaks and offers itself as a gift.

Indeed, Rahner does conceive of Jesus Christ as the highest and most radical case of what concrete human nature is, but this does not destroy the uniqueness or gratuitous nature of the incarnation. Rahner reminds us again that the concrete human person is not simply pure nature, but rather is constituted by God's offer of self-communication, the supernatural existential. To be sure, the concrete human person is already a potential for the hypostatic union (the incarnation) which was realized in Jesus Christ ("Man," 1975:892). But this potentiality is made possible by a gratuitous presence of God. Therefore, the actual incarnation is completely gratuitous and cannot be surpassed. It is the free act of God, not something immanent in created human nature. The full presence of the
mystery of God, met as the nameless One in transcendental revelation, is made present in the God-man, Jesus Christ. The mystery of God is not removed, but the self-offer of God is present as received and concretely realized in an historical individual. This is the meaning of the dogma of the incarnation.

**Holy Scripture, Dogma, and Theology**

Where, then, do Scripture, dogma and theology fit into the picture? To understand the place of theology, one must make the distinction between the pre-conceptual experience of God and the conceptual, propositional language about this experience. Care must be taken at this point, for Rahner's distinction between transcendental and historical revelation must not be conceived of as corresponding merely to the difference between a pre-conceptual experience of God and the concept of this experience. It is more like the distinction between something hidden and something manifest. The historical revelation of God is the manifestation in concrete history of the mystery of God. As such, it is primarily pre-conceptual and experiential knowledge—or more precisely, personal. It is known cognitively in faith and volitionally in love in one unified experience.

Rahner uses the analogy of love between human persons to clarify the distinction between the unified, intimate experience of revelation and the fragmented,
secondary knowledge of propositions. The love itself "is infinitely richer, simpler and denser than any body of propositions about the love could ever be" (DD, 64). One "knows" more than one can say.

The apostles had a "global experience" of Christ which lies behind what they expressed in propositions (DD, 65). Holy Scripture is their conceptual exposition of the original revelation. The teaching of Scripture is dogma, i.e., a binding conceptualization of revelation. Since Christ is the definitive, eschatological revelation, everything that happens in the Church must look back to him. By virtue of the Apostles' historical placement and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the Scripture is "the pure objectification of this eschatological beginning of the end" (ScTh, 89).

Scripture is the Apostles' theology in so far as it merely points to the original "global experience" of Jesus Christ. It "is itself derivative theology with regard to a more primordial utterance of revelation" (CDD, 6). And, even though this "theology" truly, authoritatively and normatively speaks of the original revelation, it does not exhaust it. Therefore, there is room for a development of new and truly binding dogma. Of course, any later new dogma must be implicitly contained in the original revelation. In a way to be explained shortly, it must be contained even in the propositions of Holy Scripture.
The Church possesses, not only the Scripture, but through the Scripture, the Holy Spirit and the sacraments, the reality to which the Scripture points, the "global experience" of Jesus Christ (DD, 68). The Church can be led to conceptualize an aspect of this experience in the form of a new dogma. But the Church does not form new dogma out of whole cloth, merely on the authority of a supposedly immediate experience of Jesus Christ. As we indicated above, the new dogma must be contained in some way within Scripture.

If the propositions of Scripture were taken as self-contained truths, the only form of development possible would be a gradual explication of the content formally implicit in a propositional truth. By "formal implication" Rahner means a logical move, similar to that of logic and mathematics, which states explicitly something already contained in the original proposition, and does not tell us anything new (DD, 57). This does not square with the actual historical development of dogma in which doctrines were promulgated which were really new. There are teachings which the Church has set forth from her "consciousness of faith" as dogma which are neither directly taught nor "formally implicit" in Scripture (DD, 57). Yet, a dogma must be contained in Scripture.

There is another way in which one proposition contains another: by "virtual implication." Rahner explains it as follows:
All men born more than two hundred years ago are now dead. If I do not know that there was a Socrates who was born more than two hundred years ago, I cannot know that the general proposition includes Socrates as a particular case, not only in the real state of affairs under consideration but in the proposition as such. But if I do know the second proposition, the first contains something 'virtually' implicit: Socrates is dead, an implication which could never have been explicated by a mere analysis of the first proposition as such (DD, 58).

Something which is virtually implied in a proposition cannot be known by grammatical analysis or hermeneutical reflection. One must acquire information from outside, either in the form of another proposition from revelation or some natural knowledge, which can be used as a minor premise. Rahner limits his minor premises to revealed knowledge, something the post-Reformation theologians Cano and Vasquez did not do (McCoo1, 1981:180). In a classic example of this method, Rahner struggles to understand the 'new' dogma of the Bodily Assumption of Mary by combining two articles of the creed, "born of the Virgin Mary" and "raised from the dead" ("The Interpretation of the Dogma of the Assumption," 1961:225). Without going into Rahner's reasoning, the meaning of the Assumption is that "she who by her faith received salvation in her body for herself and for us all, has received it entire. And this entire salvation is a salvation of the entire human being, a salvation which has already begun even in its fulness. Mary in her entire being is already where perfect redemption exists, entirely in that region of being which came to be through Christ's
Resurrection" (225).

**Theological Understanding as Reduction to Anthropology and Mystery**

So far, we have seen what Rahner means by revelation, Scripture and dogma, and how they interrelate. We have yet to clearly differentiate theology from dogma. All dogma is theology, i.e., conceptual reflection on the original pre-conceptual revelation, but not all theology is dogma. A dogma is a conceptual statement which is guaranteed to be the truth by the Holy Spirit working through the Church's teaching office, and is binding on the faithful. Theology which is not dogma, however true it may be, does not have such a guarantee.

As we have indicated above, the concrete point of departure for the theologian is the infallible dogma of the Church. From this point the theologian performs two moves in order to achieve understanding: (1) the reduction of dogma to the one mystery and (2) its reduction to anthropology.

As the term "reduction" indicates, theological understanding is achieved when individual, seemingly isolated dogmas are reduced to a common term. The "reduction to one mystery" is concerned essentially with the inner coherence and unity which the Christian dogmas are given by understanding them as pointers to the one mystery of God. The Christian dogmas are not self-contained packets of information received direct from heaven, which, if not
understood, must be excepted as "mysteries". On the other hand, neither do they find their unity in one overarching abstract concept or idea. It is found only in the "silent mystery of God" which is experienced in grace (MTh, 103).

Reducing the doctrines of Christianity to the one mystery of God avoids "the danger of invoking mysteries in those areas in which all that is really needed is a more penetrating consideration, or perhaps even the 'de-mystification' in some respect of a given proposition of theology" (MTh, 106-107). As we saw earlier, dogmas originate from reflection on the experience of God given in revelation. To be comprehended rightly, they must not be isolated and alienated from that origin, but be referred back to it. This dialectic between original, pre-conceptual revelation and concepts constitutes the understanding of faith. To paraphrase Kant's famous dictum: the experience of mystery without concepts is blind; concepts without the experience of mystery is empty. But what precisely does Rahner mean by mystery?

In the most proper sense, only God is mystery (MTh, 105). "A finite being as such can never be a mysterium in the strict sense of the term, but is, of its very essence, merely that which has not yet been understood (MTh, 106). God is the only mystery in the strict sense of the term; yet, if Rahner ended with this principle, he could make no progress toward understanding the inner coherence of the Christian dogmas. Each doctrine would be left isolated from
all the others and directly related to the mystery of God. Even if doctrines were not considered self-contained bits of information about God but pointers to the incomprehensible God, they would still retain their status as individual, isolated mysteries to be accepted on authority. Must there, after all, be an overarching concept to which all the other concepts of the Christian faith can be reduced?

There is such a concept, according to Rahner. To prepare the way for it, Rahner lays down two conditions for its possibility:

Insofar as there are propositions in theology over and above this [mystery of God] which do constitute mystery in the strict sense, this can only mean two things: on the one hand, in accordance with what we have said, they must refer to God himself, while on the other, in order for them not simply to be identical with the mystery thus mentioned, even formally speaking so far as we are concerned, they must signify God himself in his reference to us (MTh, 107. Emphasis mine.).

There is some ambiguity here, for Rahner seems to say that there may be propositions which are in themselves mysteries. What makes this unlikely are the two words "refer" and "signify" which I have underlined in the above quotation. The question is whether there are propositions which refer to mysteries other than God as such. Traditional theology pointed to the doctrines of incarnation, supernatural grace, the Trinity and others as further examples of doctrines which point to authentic mysteries. Rahner lays down the criteria by which one can judge whether any of these other doctrines point to
mysteries which are not identical to the mystery of God. The doctrine in question must point to God "in his reference to us" (MTh, 107).

These criteria cannot be met by a reality founded on God's relationship to human beings as Creator. The created entity which results from God's creative activity is not God, and therefore cannot be a true mystery. The concept we seek must refer to the situation in which God "makes not some entity different from himself, but rather himself (in his freedom and abiding sovereignty) the specification of the creature" (MTh, 107). He says further:

Let us put the same point in a different way: over and above the mystery intrinsic to his own nature God can only be a mystery in virtue of his self-bestowal, in which that which is bestowed is formally speaking God himself as mystery (MTh, 107).

Here we have Rahner's overarching concept, called from the Godward side the self-bestowal or self-communication of God and from the human side the elevation or divinization of the human person. It points to the one authentic mystery to which all Christian doctrines must be reduced to gain significance. It is the mediating concept to which the dogmas of the incarnation, supernatural grace, and the Trinity are reduced on the way to the final reduction to the one mystery of God.

But the theologian cannot be satisfied to stop at the conceptual level, as if the concept of God were the true object of theology. Rahner is not a rationalist, for
theology, according to him, should "constitute a 'mystagogia' leading men to the experience of grace, and should not merely speak of grace as of a material subject which is present in man's life solely through the conceptions which he forms of it" (MTh, 111).

We are now in a position to see that the reduction to mystery and the reduction to anthropology are really one move viewed from two different perspectives. Dogmas are reduced to statements about concrete human nature which is the union of the mystery of God and pure human nature. Whereas the specific concern of the reduction to mystery is the inner coherence of the Christian doctrines, the concern of the reduction to anthropology is their meaning.

According to Rahner, a doctrine's meaning is constituted by a reference to human experience. The concept to which the Christian doctrines must be reduced to find their meaning is the elevation or divinization of the human person. The divinization of human being is the self-communication of God viewed from the human side. The concept of divinization points to the human experience of God's self-communication, at least as an offer. Concrete human nature can be understood as a potential for divinization. In this way, all the Christian doctrines can be viewed as speaking of some aspect of the universal human experience of divinization (salvation), and thus gain meaning.
Rahner insists that the human experience to which the Christian doctrines are reduced is not a purely secular experience of self and world. There is no such thing. Even apart from the Christian revelation, human beings experience themselves as a question, a mystery. In *Spirit in the World* and *Hearers of the Word*, Rahner insisted that the discovery of the mystery of human existence leads to the conclusion that human beings are constituted as spirit (judging and willing beings) by a reference to God as the horizon of infinite being. We learn from the Christian revelation that God does not will to remain a distant horizon, but offers to communicate self freely to all human beings in absolute closeness, and has actually accomplished this plan in one person, Jesus Christ. This offer of self-communication constitutes a permanent existential of the human person. The experience to which the Christian doctrines must be reduced is, thus, already the experience (albeit anonymous) of the mystery of God. The Christian doctrines gain meaning by being referred to the universal human experience of God, the Mystery.

**Summary**

Returning to the Rahner's doctrine of sin, we find, as expected, that his point of departure is the concrete teaching of the Church and its obscurity to modern people. As taught by Trent, original sin is a lack of obligatory sanctifying grace. The theologian's task is "to make it
intelligible how the divine obligation of this holiness is conceivable in respect of the individual without its becoming a directly moral demand on the individual, which would be meaningless if addressed to a person who could not fulfil it" (OS, 1150).

The Church teaches that sin in the strict sense is a "denial of God" and an "offensa dei" (DS, 1589). Rahner considers it the theologian's job to show that a denial of God is possible, given the human person's "transcendental orientation towards God, in which he is at his own disposal (in every choice he makes between individual objects) and, what is more, as a fundamental relationship with God" (DS, 1589).

True to his method in general, Rahner presupposes that the dogmatic teaching of the Church about sin is a true conceptualization of the original revelation, and makes it his task to explain it so that modern people can grasp its truth and meaning. Whether or not he accomplishes his aim can be decided only by a thorough study of his doctrine of sin as such. As a first step is this direction, we must now compare Barth and Rahner on the subject of method in general, and, specifically, on the knowledge of sin.

A COMPARISON OF BARTH AND RAHNER ON THE KNOWLEDGE OF SIN

The Concept of Revelation--An Agreement

At first reading, the differences between these two theologians seems immense, even where they are not
determined by church loyalties. Barth's understanding of revelation appears irreconcilable with Rahner's twin ideas of the supernatural existential and transcendental revelation. But the contradiction is not as stark as it first appears, for Rahner also denies the existence of any purely natural knowledge of God, the human person being not a pure nature, but already the beneficiary of God's grace which imparts the capacity for hearing the historical revelation. Transcendental revelation, being noetically secondary to historical revelation, cannot criticize or replace it.

Barth, like Rahner, admits that the reception of revelation presupposes the capacity for hearing it. But Barth, to be sure that the "capacity" never gains any autonomy vis-a-vis the historical revelation and begins to determine its content, conceives of this "capacity" as a dynamic event, removing any vestige of a static conception which the word "capacity" conjures up. Rahner also attempts to protect God's freedom in revelation, replacing, in his later work, the static concept of "capacity" with that of God's permanent offer of self addressed to the human person.

Thus, we find an agreement between Barth and Rahner about the nature of revelation. For both, God is always free in the event of revelation, the human capacity for receiving revelation is a dynamic gift imparted by revelation itself, and historical revelation has precedence over transcendental revelation.
Dogma as The Common Point of Departure

Barth and Rahner agree that dogma or church proclamation forms the theologian's material point of departure. But, for Rahner, it is also the theologian's destination (being infallible and irreformable), so he cannot use the critical potential of his distinction between the experience of grace and theology to criticize the Roman Catholic Church's official teaching. Rather, the theologian's task is to show how dogma finds its truth in the mystery of God's self-communication and its meaning in human experience. Rahner, then, writes confessional dogmatics.

For Barth, church proclamation is not infallible or irreformable. The task of the theologian is to test the Church's proclamation in the light of the word of God. So, Barth writes critical dogmatics.

The Reduction to Anthropology

Rahner's method has two aspects: the reduction to mystery and the reduction to anthropology. The first reduction seeks to show the inner coherence of the Church's dogmas by disclosing their origin in the one mystery of the self-communication of God. The second seeks to find their meaning in the human experience of supernatural elevation or divinization. Barth rejects the latter reduction. He made that clear in his controversies with Brunner, Bultmann and
his life long love/hate relationship with Schleiermacher.

Barth would probably question Rahner's understanding of experience as the origin of dogma along the same lines in which he questioned Schleiermacher. Barth had serious doubts as to whether Schleiermacher's theology, which begins with the human religious consciousness, ever escapes the subjective realm. It seems that Schleiermacher, contrary to his deepest intention, allowed theology to be reduced to anthropology (Barth, 1959:353). I do not wish to defend or challenge Barth's interpretation of Schleiermacher. It has been called "sloppy, fragmentary and piecemeal" (Williams, 1978:xi). We are concerned here only with Barth's thought. At least there is enough similarity between Barth's "Schleiermacher" and Rahner to warrant the comparison.

Rahner's "experience of grace" functions in a way similar to Schleiermacher's "feeling of absolute dependence", both referring primarily to human religious experience rather than to theology's content, Jesus Christ. For Schleiermacher, "Christian doctrines are accounts of the Christian religious affections set forth in speech" (Schleiermacher, 1976:76). For Rahner, dogmas are "accounts" of the human experience of grace. Uncovering the transcendental ground of the possibility of dogma's truth, Rahner arrives at an anthropology which views the human person as always already related to God by the offer of Godself. This model is used to interpret the dogmas
somewhat as Schleiermacher does.

Is Rahner susceptible to the criticism which Barth makes of Schleiermacher, reducing theology to anthropology? Rahner is not unaware of this pitfall, and deploys two safeguards to ward off this danger, both of which we mentioned already in other contexts. First, he emphasizes that his anthropology is the result of reflection on human experience of God, grace. The historical revelation of Jesus Christ, made present in Word and Sacrament, is the noetic presupposition of Rahner's anthropology. It is not an autonomous secular anthropology, so when he makes the reduction to anthropology, he does not reduce theological statements to the mere human dimension. His anthropology describes the human person in relation to the God revealed in Jesus Christ.

However, we still have no control to guarantee that our concepts (dogmas) actually grasp our experience, not misrepresenting, distorting nor finally extinguishing it. Plainly put, are the doctrines true? Rahner deals with this problem by resorting to what he believes is the presupposition of all Roman Catholic theology, infallibility. For Rahner, though church dogma merely points us to the primary unthemematic experience of God, we do not have independent access to this experience so that we can validly understand it apart from dogma. Dogma structures experience and experience illuminates dogma.
This dialectic is manifest in Rahner's doctrine of sin where he says that sin can be known only in its fullest sense as a "no" to God's offer of self-communication in Christ. He does not begin with the blind experience of grace, building up a doctrine of sin from scratch, but works within the Church's official teaching on sin, re-interpreting it in view of this fundamental notion.

Reduction to Mystery--A Unexpected Similarity

Surprising as it may seem, Barth's theology contains an element similar to Rahner's reduction to mystery. As we have noted, the third stage of Barth's development brings the humanity of God to the center of attention, with all Bible stories referred to the story of Jesus for their interpretation and all Christian doctrines related to Christology for their meaning. Nevertheless, Barth continues to reject every attempt to find a systematic conceptual coherence among the doctrines in an overarching concept which precedes the final reduction to the Word. The "Word of God" continues to function in Barth, even in his third stage, as "experience" does in Rahner, as un-thematic knowledge of God, critical of every thematization. Neither Barth nor Rahner is a rationalist. For both, concepts (dogma) cannot grasp the being of God; they can only point toward it. God is the free Mystery whose Word relativizes all human words.
Scripture and Dogma—An Agreement

For Rahner, dogma infallibly conceptualizes the analogy given in the experience of grace, and is the medium in which it is given. For Barth, however, there are no infallible conceptualizations of faith, not even in the Bible, much less among the dogmas of the Church. But Barth does not start from scratch and build a conceptual system, as if there were no Bible and no history of theology. Rahner has a very good reason for not doing this. What is Barth's reason?

Barth presupposes in faith that the free God has chosen to mediate the knowledge of God through the appointed witnesses whose testimony is deposited in Holy Scripture. De facto, there is no knowledge of Jesus Christ other than that which is mediated by Holy Scripture. That testimony to Jesus Christ proves itself to be the truth by virtue of who it mediates—God. And God is God's own proof. If the testimony is proven true by God, reasons Barth, then the witness is proven to be God's chosen mediation of the Word. Holy Scripture, interpreted in the light of the One to whom it witnesses, Jesus Christ, is also the Word of God, authoritative for those to whom it witnesses. It is not a mere source which can be cast aside after we experience for ourselves the object of its witness.
But Barth does not consider Scripture and the individual theologian's knowledge of the free Jesus Christ the only partners in the dialogue. For him, theology is done in and for the Church, in the company of all theologians and others who have gone before. Whatever the Church has confessed as necessary and important is to be listened to with great reverence, for it is the material starting point for the theologian, considered "innocent till proven guilty".

Again, we know Rahner's reason for his presupposition of the truth of the historic dogmas. But what is Barth's reason for his presumption of "innocent till proven guilty" in favor of the Church's proclamation and confession? Barth's reason is something like the following: our relationship with Jesus Christ has been mediated through Holy Scripture, which itself has been mediated through the Church. The Scriptures are always understood in the light of the Church's rule of faith and tradition of exegesis. If we believe the Christian faith, we must take the Church's concrete proclamation, tradition and confession seriously, for belief presupposes that, for all their faultiness, God has used them to reveal God.

Now we can see the parallel with Rahner. For Rahner, theological knowledge is a dialectical whole composed of the interaction of dogma (thematic) and the experience of grace (unthematic). For Barth, theological knowledge is a dialectical whole composed of the interaction
of the biblical witness, confessions, and theology (thematic) and the knowledge of the free Jesus Christ (unthematic).

Summary

The methodological similarities between Barth and Rahner can be summarized as follows: For Rahner, within the experience of grace is an analogy to the being of God which the Holy Scriptures and the dogmas of the Church infallibly mediate and make explicit. For Barth, the human response (faith) to the revelation of God contains an analogy which corresponds to the Word of God, and Holy Scripture is the authoritative human word analogous to the Word of God. Our human word of theology must conform to the norm of Scripture, interpreted in the light of its center, Jesus Christ. The task of the individual theologian, acting for the Church corporate, is to consider how far that which the Church proclaims is in conformity to the Word of God.

Barth's methodological move away from a subjective and individual to a more objective and churchly form of theology provides the possibility of a material dialogue with Roman Catholic theology on subjects such as the doctrine of sin. Barth's high estimation of Scripture and church dogma or proclamation enables them to become again common ground on which to discuss particular issues. Where that overlap concerns topics determined by Scriptural statements, (e.g., the doctrine of sin), rather than
deductions from theological positions, (e.g., the Marian doctrines and Papal infallibility), there is the possibility of fruitful dialogue and the hope of finding a common understanding underneath the differing terminology.

On the other hand, Rahner has moved away from the objective and churchly pole of traditional Roman Catholic theology toward recognizing the existential/experiential character of theology. For Rahner, theology arises from the experience of grace. The dogmas of the Church truly express and thematize the experience of grace for a particular time and place, but after a while these propositions become estranged from the living experience of grace and must be interpreted afresh. In this way, Rahner can have it both ways. He can believe in infallible, irrefordable dogma, and in the necessity of a continual reformation of dogma in the light of the experience of grace.

Rahner's method of understanding and reforming dogma through his hermeneutics and Barth's method of testing and reforming church proclamation by the criterion of the Word of God provide a significant overlap in methodology and give hope that an agreement on the doctrine of sin is possible.
Chapter II
THE POSSIBILITY OF SIN

KARL RAHNER AND THE FREEDOM TO SIN

According to Karl Rahner, human beings have the freedom to say "yes" or "no" to God, the freedom to sin or not to sin. God's offer of self-communication forms a permanent existential of every human being, giving each the freedom to decide whether or not to accept it, thus grounding sin's possibility.

Autonomous Freedom?

As simple as this summary sounds it literally bristles with ambiguities and difficulties, which we will attempt to clarify in this section, so that what Rahner says may be precisely stated and accurately evaluated.

What Rahner means by "freedom" is the key to his understanding of sin's possibility. First, we must lay aside the notion that Rahner believes human beings have autonomous freedom in the Pelagian sense. Even for the simpleminded Pelagius human beings do not have absolute autonomy; God only is absolute. Human beings are contingent on God's creative act. In this sense all our capacities and acts are dependent on the God's grace, the grace of creation. If God had not created us we could do neither good nor bad.

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But, for Pelagius, the human creature was given the autonomy needed to fulfill its created nature. Men and women can decide freely whether to do good or evil. According to Pelagius, this ability is intrinsic to created human nature, needing no further help from God to do deeds which merit salvation (Seeberg, 1977:331-338). Stated in Rahner's terms, human beings need nothing beyond the gift of their created nature to decide about God and the totality of their being, whether to accept or refuse God's offer of self-communication, whether they will become good or evil.

Rahner denies the Pelagian thesis, for it presupposes that concrete human nature is a pure nature which has the power to conduct itself in a way so as to merit eternal life. For Pelagius, human beings have the natural power to live sinlessly, though, if they do sin God will forgive them. Rahner, to the contrary, considers "pure nature" a "limiting concept", without expression in concrete human existence which is the result of the interaction of (pure) nature and grace. Pure nature is a concept that is needed only to guarantee the gratuity of sanctifying grace (CRNG, 297-317).

The Background of the "Supernatural Existential"

Rahner's view of freedom was not developed vis-a-vis Pelagius, which would be beating a dead horse, but rather vis-a-vis the so-called "Nouvelle Theologie", originated in 1946 by de Lubac's Surnaturel (Vass II, 1985:60). The
Nouvelle Theologie was an attempt to replace the extrinsecism which plagued traditional theology's understanding of nature and grace with a more adequate view.

Extrinsicism is an effort to guard the gratuity of sanctifying grace against the challenges of the pure Aristotelian conception which considered it axiomatic that every fulfillment of human nature must be anticipated by a potentiality intrinsic to it (Vass II, 1985:61). To the contrary, grace is seen by extrinsecism as having practically no anticipation in nature, hovering, as it were, over it without touching it. As far as practical and conscious life is concerned, concrete human nature can be considered a pure nature.

In the traditional idea of "pure nature", there is "a certain autonomy of man with his own natural goal, and this natural goal is related only by God's positive will (hence extrinsically) to his 'other' destiny in grace and glory" (Vass II, 1985:62). The potentiality of nature for grace is of a purely negative kind, a "non-resistance of nature in receiving grace and glory--a potency only in an analogous sense" (Vass II, 1985:62). Describing this view, Rahner says, "nature does indeed acknowledge the end and means of the supernatural order (glory and grace) as in themselves the highest goods, but it is not clear why it 'should have time for' these highest goods" (CRNG, 298).
The *Nouvelle Theologie* advanced a theory designed to avoid extrinsecism and preserve the gratuity of sanctifying grace. It reached back into the Patristic period for Augustine's concept of the restless human heart and combined it with the forgotten *desiderium naturale* of Aquinas. It found in this way a means of mediating nature and grace: human beings have a natural desire for the vision of God. Grace is not alien to human nature, for human nature can be human in the fullest sense only when it is glorified by the vision of God (Vass II, 1985:63,64). This position was censured by the encyclical of Pius XII, *Humani Generis* (Aug. 12, 1950), which says, "Others destroy the gratuitous character of the supernatural order by suggesting that it would be impossible for God to create rational beings without ordaining them for the Beatific vision and calling them to it (Vass II, 1985:172 fn. 18).

Rahner's first response to the *Nouvelle Theologie* came as a reaction to an anonymous article appearing in the journal *Orientierung* (Volume 14, 138-141) entitled, "Ein Weg zur Bestimmung des Verhältnisses von Natur und Gnade." Rahner agrees with the *Nouvelle Theologie* in its criticism of extrinsecism and in its basic thesis that grace must be "an interior ontological constituent of his [the human person's] concrete quiddity" (CRNG, 302). Rahner differs, however, in the precise status he gives to this "interior ontological constituent." According to the *Nouvelle Theologie* the desire of human nature for the vision of God
is "an intrinsic, inamissible constituent of man's nature," given unconditionally, i.e., God's withholding the fulfillment of this desire is, barring a guilty refusal, "incompatible with the wisdom and goodness of God" (CRNG, 304). With this position, the Nouvelle Theologie crosses a forbidden boundary, implicitly denying the gratuitous nature of grace and glory (CRNG, 304).

Rahner is not accusing the Nouvelle Theologie of denying the gratuity of grace absolutely, something not even Pelagius did. Rahner argues, rather, that the gratuity of grace in the conception of the Nouvelle Theologie "goes no further than the unexactedness which is proper to creation" as such (CRNG, 304). If this ordination to grace and glory were given with the essence of human being, could God, asks Rahner, refuse its fulfillment "without offending against the meaning of this creation and his very creative act itself?" (CRNG, 306). Rahner continues along the same lines:

But if this disposition is conceived of as belonging to nature, grace would be unexacted merely as something given in just the same way as nature and with it; in fact it would represent the highest (because uncreated) gift essentially distinguished from other (created) unexacted gifts (though not under the formal aspect of unexactedness). In neither case does it cease to be impossible to say: grace is unexact in respect of this nature (CRNG, 308).
If Rahner can make his point stick here, he has won the day, for all Roman Catholic theology must assume as an "indubitable axiom" the "absolute unexactness of grace" (CRNG, 304). If Rahner's is correct, the Nouvelle Theologie's conception of the relation of nature and grace allows only for a relative unexactness of grace, and is guilty of an implicit Pelagianism.

The "Supernatural Existential": The Ground of Freedom

Rahner now turns to his own understanding of the relationship of nature and grace. Here, for the first time, he proposes his "supernatural existential", laying down four conditions which an adequate understanding of nature and grace must fulfill: (1) If human beings are to receive God's gift of Godself, they must have the capacity or potency for it, and have it at all times, for they are "always addressed and claimed by this love" (CRNG, 311). This capacity must be "the centre and root of what he is absolutely" and be the "central and abiding existential of man as he really is" (CRNG, 312).

But (2), human beings must be able to receive the gift of Godself as "a free gift", requiring that even the capacity for it (an existential) be considered "supernatural", not given with the created essence of human being (CRNG, 313). (3) The concrete human being results from the interaction of this supernatural existential and
pure nature, so pure nature is what would be left if the supernatural were removed, a "remainder concept" (CRNG, 313). (4) There are no human beings who are pure nature, and we have no way of knowing what kind of life such beings would have. But it is necessary to postulate such a possibility, for human life must be possible without the fulfillment of God's self-bestowal, if its gratuity is to be protected.

To satisfy these four conditions, Rahner makes use of Heidegger's concept of the existential which is an "intermediary" concept, standing between the concepts of essential and existentiell, designating an aspect of existence given always and universally with human being (Vass II, 1985:65). It is not of the essence of human being; yet it precedes and conditions all our free acts, unlike an "existentiell" which is "a quality which accrues to a personal existent on account of his free action" (Vass II, 1985:65). The concept of a supernatural existential gives Rahner a tool to accomplish what the Nouvelle Theologie failed to accomplish, to show that the capacity for grace and glory is a universal condition, but not an essential constituent of the human person.

We will not enter the debate about Rahner's theory of the supernatural existential and its refinement in his later work (Vass II, 1985:67-83). It is enough to understand what Rahner means by the term: in concrete human life we are always already confronted with the offer of the divine
self-communication. Ontologically, this offer endows us with the capacity to receive this gift. Noetically, the capacity to receive the gift presupposes the offer as the condition of its possibility. Both the offer and the capacity to receive it are implied in the term "supernatural existential", the offer corresponding to the "supernatural" part of the term, the capacity to receive the offer corresponding to the "existential" part.

Freedom as Freedom of Choice?

Now, we can further clarify what Rahner means by freedom. He differentiates freedom in its true nature from freedom conceived as mere freedom of choice, the freedom to choose from among alternative possibilities given a posteriori, a neutral capacity to make choices without being ourselves changed in the process. The freedom to say "yes" or "no" to God is not limited to the possibility of accepting or rejecting a certain concept of God, obeying or disobeying a positive command or honoring or dishonoring a created structure willed by God (ThF, 179).

According to Rahner, the concept of "freedom of choice" cannot do justice to the Christian faith's demand that we answer to God for the totality of our lives, for all we become (ThF, 183). Every concrete choice we make "is always a choice arising out of a given situation" ("Freedom in the Church," 1963:92), a situation already determined by our finitude and the guilt of others, extending, not only to
our external conditions, but also to the internal determinations (existentials) of our being.

Is there a freedom which transcends the totality of our situation, allowing us to decide who we will be before God? For Rahner, the transcendental aspect of freedom is precisely its true nature.

**Freedom as Self-Determination Before God**

There are four steps in Rahner's thinking about freedom. (1) As usual, his material starting point is the proclamation or dogma of the Church. The Christian faith teaches that we are responsible before God for the totality of our lives. (2) The Christian dogma of the responsibility is then reduced or referred to the theological anthropology of the supernatural existential. (3) The understanding resulting from step two is then referred to the mystery of the God-creature relationship, i.e., the "reduction to mystery." (4) The understanding of step two is related, on the other hand, to the "profane" understanding of freedom, i.e., freedom of choice, as its fulfillment. We will treat these four steps in greater detail.

Step one: Rahner begins with a dogmatic affirmation. Christian faith teaches the possibility of a free, subjective "yes" or "no" to God, the one experienced as the transcendental ground of freedom (ThF, 188). Rahner does not attempt a lengthy proof of this dogma from the Scriptures, for he is more concerned to understand the it
than to establish it. He simply assumes that the Bible makes it plain that human persons are required to answer for themselves before God for the whole of their lives.

Step two: Rahner now seeks the transcendental conditions of the possibility for a decision about God, the ground of our transcendence (and not merely about a concept of God). How can the God who "cannot be mastered but consists in the infinite, silent mastery over us" become an object about which we can decide (ThF, 181)?

According to Rahner, a decision about God is made possible by the supernatural existential. The nature of the supernatural existential was discussed above, and I need only say here that the offer of divine self-communication (supernatural existential) presents us with a decision—a decision for or against God. This decision is not with reference to the God of the distant, receding horizon of our spiritual nature, but the God of infinite closeness.

Freedom, then, is an abiding existential of the human person, being posited along with the supernatural existential. God's offer of Godself presupposes the freedom to accept or reject it, but this capacity requires a gift of grace beyond the creation gift of our human nature. The ability is, therefore, not simply presupposed, but is itself made possible by the offer of the gift, a concept difficult to grasp. The pressure to opt for either a Pelagian autonomy or some form of determinism is almost overwhelming; however, according to Rahner, we must not yield to this
temptation, but rather refer to the mystery of God's relation to the free creature.

Step three: Rahner finds the answer to the question of God's relation to human freedom in the mystery of the incomprehensible God. Since God is the mystery, God's relation to the world partakes of the mysterious character of God. The paradox of the co-existence of human freedom and God's omni-causality can be reduced to the mystery of God's ability to create at all, to posit that which is other than God, the freedom of the creature to decide for or against God being merely the highest instance of God's co-existence with creation. To be created means to be subject to the causality of God, and to be other means to have some autonomy vis-a-vis God. This possibility is hidden in the mystery of God. Thus, Rahner reduces the less recognized mystery, the possibility human freedom, to the more recognized mystery, the possibility of creation ("Grace and Freedom", 1975:598; ThF, 190).

Step four: Rahner now attempts to relate the concept of transcendental freedom vis-a-vis God and the totality of the self to the "profane" concept of freedom of choice.

First, the ground of freedom of choice with respect to a finite object is the human person's dynamism of intellect and will which presses toward "the original unity of being as such" (ThF, 179). "Being as such" forms the receding horizon which allows the mind to transcend particular objects as it presses on toward it. As the
intellect knows and the will chooses particular existents, we are already in the presence of being as such. This pre-conceptual knowledge of being is the presupposition of the mind's and the will's ability to attribute being or value to a particular object.

In his book, *Spirit in the World*, Rahner attempts to show that the "being" which is presupposed by the act of knowledge cannot be finite being, as Heidegger supposed; rather, it must be infinite being, God (McCool, 1981:xvii). In his discussion of sin, Rahner simply assumes that the horizon of being as such is God. Thus, freedom has to do with God, not only when dealing with a finite conceptual representation of God among other finite concepts, but also "always and everywhere by the nature of freedom itself, since God is present unthematically in every act of freedom as its supporting ground and ultimate orientation" (ThF, 180). In every act of knowledge the mind co-knows God (pre-conceptually) and a particular object.

Similarly, in every act of will the human person simultaneously attributes value to God and to a finite object or person. Thus, the freedom to say "yes" or "no" to finite objects presupposes a constant pre-conceptual "yes" to the infinite horizon of our freedom, God. The "yes" is simply given with our spiritual nature, and even a free act which is against God's objective moral law or rejects a conceptual god affirms God as the possibility of the act of freedom.
Even though, in this "profane" understanding of freedom, we have to do with God, we are not able to say whether it is possible for us to do more than give to God the unavoidable "yes" given with our spiritual nature. We cannot judge whether it is also possible to utter a free, subjective "yes" or "no" to God (ThF, 201). The most we can say with respect to this possibility from reflection on our concrete human existence alone is that the human person is a potentia oboedientialis for the decision, should he or she be confronted with it.

But, from the perspective of the Christian view of freedom, freedom of choice ("profane" freedom) is revealed as the hidden form of transcendental freedom. Freedom vis-a-vis God is the true nature of freedom of choice (GRP, 205). There is a "unity in difference" between the two (ThF, 186). From the perspective of the already achieved transcendental decision, the individual choices we make appear as freedom's partial objectifications in the world (FChF, 96). From the perspective of ignorance of the transcendental decision, choosing from among finite possibilities appears as the historical process in which the transcendental decision is made (ThF, 182). It is the latter which concerns us here.

The Christian view of freedom makes it possible to conclude that our encounters within the world "are the historical concreteness of the encounter and projection of this source and goal that support our transcendence" (ThF,
182). God makes self present as an object in the human encounter with finite reality so that a decision about a finite existent is also a decision about its infinite ground. The supreme example of this process is the love of another human being. Love is such a radical venturing of our being that it requires a complete giving of ourselves over in trust to the ground of our freedom, so that when we love our neighbor we love God, even if we do not know of the Christian revelation (LGLN, 246-47).

"Yes" and "No": Equal Realizations of Freedom?

Some important questions arise at this point: are the possibilities of a "yes" and a "no" to God simply two possibilities of freedom, both equally realizing the nature of freedom? Is freedom a neutral, formal capacity vis-a-vis God?

As I have shown, Rahner argues that we must affirm the possibility of an absolute contradiction. As incomprehensible as it seems, freedom is the possibility of implicitly affirming God as the possibility, power and goal of the act of freedom, and yet subjectively denying God's offer of self. The human person can literally become a contradiction. This possibility cannot be thought; it is simply "the mystery of evil" (FChF, 103).

Is the "no" free in the same sense as the "yes"? In his article "The Punishment of Sins" Rahner argues that a "no" to God cannot fulfill human nature in the same way as a
"yes". Quite to the contrary, the "no" to God constitutes the essence of Hell, and the abiding unfilled supernatural existential, the torment of Hell (1975:1587). In what sense, then, is the "no" free?

We seem to find some help with this problem in the article "Grace and Freedom". According to Rahner, the "God-freedom" relation is primordial, with nothing prior to it to render it more intelligible (1975:601). Every free act of the human person also has its origin from "God in every respect", including the "morally bad action" (1975:601). Must we then conclude that "morally bad actions" are as free as morally good actions? Rahner offers this distinction:

Evil, in the source of its freedom and in its objective embodiments, has less of being and less of freedom. To that extent it can and must be said that in its deficiency as such it requires no origination by God....[this] show[s] the creature's capacity to retain "something" wholly its own, the responsibility for which cannot be shifted to God, yet which does not require (like a good deed) to be returned to him thankfully as his grace ("Grace and Freedom", 1975:601).

The "morally bad actions" of which Rahner speaks are concrete, objective transgressions of the moral structure of the world, and his distinction in the level of being and freedom between them and good actions is plausible. These actions, considered objectively, without regard to the level of their subjectivity, contain "less of being and freedom" precisely because they occur within a situation already partly determined by our finitude and the guilt of others. Our actions may not express our true subjectivity, being
simply expressions of oppressive structures, for hidden within these objectively bad actions, where only God can judge, may be a fundamental "yes" to God. And the opposite can be true of objectively good actions, for a 'good' action may hide a fundamental "no" to God (GR, 267-71).

But Rahner's distinction would be absolutely incomprehensible if it were meant to apply to the transcendental "no" uttered with complete subjectivity and finality, and he is not unaware of this problem. He admits that with respect to the fundamental decision

It seems impossible to have a 'more or less' with regard to freedom, since the subject either decides or does not decide about itself as a whole definitively...the decision of freedom which takes place in the whole of a life, does not actually admit of degrees, that in it the subject has decided completely about himself and that the possibility of freedom which was imposed on the individual subject is really completely converted into this definitive decision (GRP, 207).

In positing the difference between objective, "morally bad actions", which admit of degrees of freedom, and the subjective, fundamental "no" to God, which does not admit of degrees of freedom, Rahner makes a complicated and far-reaching distinction which it will be our task to follow closely throughout this investigation, especially in Chapter Three.

In *Foundations of the Christian Faith* Rahner argues that the "yes" and "no" are not equal. The subjective "yes" is made possible by the necessary "yes" given with our spiritual nature, and confirms it. The subjective "no" is also made possible by the necessary "yes" of our spiritual
nature, but constitutes its subjective denial. The "no" is therefore self-contradictory, and implies its own self-destruction (FChF, 102). Thus, transcendental freedom is not, for Rahner, a neutral possibility which could be as well realized in a decision against God as for God. Freedom has a destiny or a nature that can be realized only in the human person's "yes" to God's offer of self-communication.

But we can say more. Elsewhere, Rahner says that the degree of freedom is directly proportional to the level of dependence on God ("Freedom", 1975:545). If so, when freedom radically denies its dependence on God it implicitly negates itself. And if the subjective "no" definitively defines the human person who utters it (FChF, 95, 96), freedom, not only implicitly negates itself, but also really obliterates itself.

Throughout his work Rahner argues that the "yes" and "no" are parallel in their ability of self-determination, of establishing something definitive. But is this really so, even on Rahner's own terms? Obviously, it is so with regard to the "yes". If the human person gives a free, subjective "yes" to God she or he also affirms his or her true nature which is a necessary "yes" to God. The subjective self-determination, in this case, is a confirmation of reality, the human person becoming subjectively what she or he is by nature, a "yes" to God. This self-determining "yes" is final and definitive, for freedom's nature has been fully realized and is fully aware of itself as finalized,
the possibility of temptation being gone forever.

This cannot be not true of the free subjective "no" to God, for in this decision the human person determines his or her nature as self-contained and self-sufficient, and God as no-God; they deny reality. In no way, however, is real human nature or God's real nature "determined" by this false proclamation. Persons who give a "no" to God and their true nature cannot succeed in making themselves a "no", but only in making themselves a contradiction.

Uttering a "no" to God cannot fulfill freedom's nature, for the necessary "yes" of human nature remains as a 'temptation' to reconsider the "no" decision. This state cannot be considered intrinsically definitive, for to establish a definitive "no" to God, a subjective self-determination must change the necessary spiritual nature of the human person from a "yes" to a "no", resulting in complete annihilation.

The only other way to conceive of the "no" and the "yes" as equally definitive is to think of God as confirming the "no" as definitive extrinsically by refusing to allow any reconsideration of the 'final' decision. This is something Rahner explicitly denies in his article "The Punishment of Sins" (1975) where he understands the finality of Hell as the intrinsic structure of the "no" to God. All this shows that there is a deep contradiction in Rahner's treatment of the fundamental option, the "yes" or "no" to God.
The Concept of Freedom: A Proposed Revision

If I am correct about the contradiction in Rahner's treatment of the fundamental option, his basic conception of freedom must be revised. Indeed, it calls for revision from within, for if Rahner does hold that freedom self-destructs when it says "no" to God's offer of self-bestowal, then in what sense is there a "freedom" to say "no" to God's offer of self? If the free "no" and the free "yes" are not parallel in their realization and finality, how could they be parallel in their potentiality? Must we not conclude that when we say the human person has the 'freedom' to say "no" to God, we are using 'freedom' in an improper, analogous sense?

It is just here that Rahner's concept of freedom as the possibility of a "yes" or a "no" to God must be revised. The freedom to say "yes" and the 'freedom' to say "no" are (even as Rahner uses the term) only formally or analogously alike. They are alike insofar as a choice is made of one object or end over another. They have the characteristic of "freedom of choice" in common, for the choice decided on is not necessary or compulsory. But the similarity ends there. In the exercise of the 'free' "no", the nature of freedom is 'realized' only in the limited sense of exercising the capacity of choosing one alternative over another, for there is no possibility of it realizing the essence of freedom, not being able to establish anything definitive.
Another indication of the analogous nature of the 'free' "no" is the problematic status of a free "no" which is thought to be made possible by supernatural grace. There is no problem with a free "yes", for it is the gift of the self-communication of God which bestows itself and the freedom to say "yes" to it. To be able say "yes" to God, the human person must know God, but in order to know God a person must say "yes." Both are accomplished in the actual bestowal of supernatural grace.

But this cannot be true of the "no" to God, for in it supernatural grace is refused. Rahner assumes that God gives self to the human person in such a way that he or she can truly and freely, and therefore definitively, say "no" to God. But this is impossible, for it is only in a loving "yes" to God, in the actual bestowal of supernatural grace, that God can be truly known. It is not possible to know God truly and to say "no" to God. Therefore, the "no" cannot possibly receive its 'freedom' from supernatural grace, as Rahner supposes. In fact, the "no" has only the possibility given with our spiritual nature as such, i.e., the freedom of choice. Thus, from another perspective, we see that freedom is used in two different senses when Rahner uses it of the possibility of a "yes" and of a "no" to God.

This discussion will be continued in the third part of this chapter as we compare Barth's and Rahner's understanding of the freedom and possibility of sin. In the light of our exposition and immanent criticism of Rahner,
the possibility is opened up of an agreement with Barth in one of the last places we would think to look: the status of the possibility or freedom to sin.

KARL BARTH ON THE POSSIBILITY OF SIN

For Karl Barth, human beings have no freedom to sin, to say "no" to God. Sin has no possibility except that of an "impossible possibility" (CD IV 1, 463), being a form of nothingness. But it is not nothing; it is a fact—a brute fact. As such it cannot be thought; only described.

This short summary leaves us dizzy. What are we to make of this elusive language? Is it paradoxical, poetic, or just plain nonsense? The key terms are "freedom", "nothingness" and "possibility." As Barth uses them, they are technical terms taken from the history of philosophy and theology; yet they are used in a sense which overturns the philosophical tradition out of which they are taken. The goal of traditional philosophy, from Plato to Hegel, was to place everything in our experience within a unified vision of the whole of reality, with understanding being synonymous with perceiving the part's relation to the whole. By using these terms in an inverted sense, sin, a fact of experience, is denied a relationship with the whole of reality, which is, judged by the philosophical tradition, nonsense
Barth's Doctrine of Sin as a Narrative Interpretation

Barth's doctrine of sin is a narrative interpretation of the salvation story of the Bible, in which sin is described as the will and action of one of the characters in a drama. In humility, the rightful Lord becomes a servant for the human being's sake, whereas the proud human being attempts to scale the walls of heaven to become a lord. The humble Servant is exalted to the kingly office, but the proud and slothful servant refuses to be exalted. The one who is humble in his exaltation and exalted in his humility reveals the truth and glory of God; the false 'servant' conceals the truth and loves falsehood.

The action of the human character in this drama is inexplicable. There is no excuse, and nothing good comes of it. The biblical drama is not a Greek tragedy. Prometheus came into his own when he defied Zeus. Not so in the Bible story, for when the servant of God defies God, he or she becomes absolutely alienated from his or her own true being. Were it not for the saving response of God, the drama would end in absurdity. Yet, even with the positive resolution of the story, it does not become a comedy; everything does not simply work out all right in the end. There is a discontinuity between the act of rebellion and the positive resolution, for God's act is the pure destruction of the rebellion and the rebel. The human person on the other side of the caesura is a totally new being, with absolutely
nothing in common with the rebel on the far side.

Whenever Barth transposes this narrative structure into traditional philosophical language, as he must if he is to engage the history of the doctrine of sin and the contemporary thought concerning sin, the result is his nonsensical use of terms. The story is primary, philosophical terms merely pointing to narrative relationships. In narrative terms, the action of rebellion against the God of this story is inexplicable, with nothing to be gained, and self-annihilation is the obvious result. Narrative inexplicability translates into philosophical terminology as "impossibility".

But narrative inexplicability cannot be rendered fully intelligible by philosophical impossibility. We can imagine a character performing a action which is inexplicable in terms of its story world, but we cannot imagine a brute fact which cannot be related to the whole of reality in terms of the possibility/actuality or part/whole schema. From Barth's perspective this is not a problem, for talking about sin is talking about nonsense, and talk about nonsense must be nonsensical talk.

In this chapter, we will attempt to explain what Barth means by terms the "freedom", "nothingness" and "possibility", with reference, both to the philosophical and theological tradition from which he takes them, and to the narrative framework to which he refers them.
**Sin as "Impossible"**

Since sin is a fact of our experience, there is an almost irresistible drive to rationalize it, giving it a place in the whole of reality. Since it exists, it must have come into existence. If it came into existence, it must have 'existed' as a potentiality before it existed as an actuality. If it exists and has effects on the world, it must be related to the whole of reality, if only as the shadow which gives perspective to the whole picture. Barth unambiguously calls a halt to this line of thought:

But in the final meaning of the term it [sin] is inexcusable. It has no basis. It has, therefore, no possibility—we cannot escape this difficult formula—except that of the absolutely impossible. How else can we describe that which is intrinsically absurd but by a formula which is logically absurd? (CD IV 1, 410).

Sin has no possibility, for nothing in the creaturely nature of human beings, the world, or God can explain its existence. It cannot be explained as a lower good or a necessary moment of the dialectic of becoming, but is a brute fact, and as such can only be described.

Barth's paradoxical position was hammered out vis-a-vis the philosophical and theological tradition of the "newer Protestantism", on the one hand (CD IV 1, 374), and the biblical story on the other. What he means will become transparent as these two relationships are unfolded.
In a long note recounting the Nineteenth Century Neo-Protestant doctrine of sin, Barth shows how sin was given a place in the whole of reality and in the nature of the human being (CD IV 1, 374-387). From the beginning, with Wegschneider and Bretschneider, through Hegel, Schleiermacher, Schweitzer, Biedermann, Lipusius and Ludemann, all the way to Ritschl and Troeltsch the underlying premise was the same:

The grace of God and the sin of man must be approached as states on the one level, in a relationship which—if it has been disturbed—cannot be really jeopardize or broken, and therefore at bottom does not have to be renewed. Sin must be seen as a possible element in this relationship, not altogether unprofitable, indeed in its way indispensable (CD IV 1, 373).

Further behind this premise, according to Barth, lies the "grandiose" philosophical teaching of Leibniz: "Wrong is simply the negation of good, that which (like evil and death) is not willed and caused by God, but which since the possibility of it was necessary to man as a free rational creature He had to permit for the sake of the relative imperfection and therefore the perfection of the world distinct from Himself" (CD IV 1, 407).

According to Barth, Neo-Protestantism accepted these premises only because the way was prepared for it by Protestant Orthodoxy's acceptance of a natural law in addition to Jesus Christ as a source of the knowledge of sin. Barth advocates a return to Jesus Christ, the proper source for our knowledge of sin. And we meet Jesus Christ
as protagonist in the drama which is unfolded in the Bible, and sin is his antagonist.

According to Barth, sin is confronted, in the biblical narrative, by a God completely superior to it. God overcomes sin, and everything is set right in the end, which is the element of truth in the Leibnizian optimism (CD IV 1, 408). But sin, the antagonist, (contrary to Leibniz) is not taken up into the whole but utterly destroyed, absolutely negated (CD IV 1, 408). Jesus assumed our sinful nature and carried it to the cross where it was destroyed, revealing God's absolute "no" to sin.

When this narrative structure of protagonist/antagonist, victor/vanquished, and living/dead is translated into Leibnizian or Neo-Protestant terms the result is the "impossibility" or absurdity of sin. There can be no "harmony enfolding God and sin" (CD IV 1, 409). Its possibility is a presupposition to no end in God's plan. It is positively forbidden, occurring only by transgression. "The possibility of doing this is not something he has from God" (CD IV 1, 409), but is "absolute impossible" (CD IV 1, 410).

**Freedom to Sin?**

If sin has no possibility rooted in God, and serves no purpose in world history, perhaps we must root it in the nature of human beings, in the capacity of freedom to choose between good and evil, to give a "yes" or a "no" to God.
For our purpose here, it does not matter whether this freedom is posited along with creation (Pelagius) or is gratuitous vis-a-vis created nature (Rahner). In either case, sin is rooted in the free will of the human person alone. Is not this the only way to protect both the responsibility of human beings and creation's goodness?

For Karl Barth, the answer is an unequivocal "no", for "turn it how we will, if we regard this as a possibility of the created nature of man, we shall always find it excusable because it is grounded in man as such" (CD IV 1, 410). To admit that it is grounded in created human nature, reasons Barth, is to imply that it is grounded in the will of God as a means to the end of human nature. This is precisely what is denied by the cross of Jesus Christ.

To grasp the full meaning of Barth's use of the term "freedom", we must anticipate Chapter Four. Who is the subject of this free or unfree willing and activity? As I pointed out in Chapter One, Barth intends to speak the message of sin only from the knowledge of Jesus Christ; therefore, when Barth speaks of "man" as the subject of a free act or a sinful act, he does not mean human existence as we experience it, the phenomenon of the human. He criticizes traditional theology for its mistake of applying the biblical statements about the complete sinfulness and creaturely goodness of human being to the one phenomenon of experienced human being (CD IV 1, 492). It is not a matter, objects Barth, of placing the goodness of concrete human
being before a historical fall and the complete sinfulness on this side, as the Augustinian-Reformed side does. Nor is it "a quantum which is confronted by his sinfulness as a greater or lesser quantum, more or less counterbalancing it according to the optimistic view of Roman Catholic" theology (CD IV 1, 493).

On the contrary, argues Barth, the one human person is at the same time completely sinful and completely the good creature of God. What we have, says Barth, are "two qualitative determinations of the one undivided being of man" (CD IV 1 494). God "determines" (wills, declares, plans, decides) that the human being will be God's obedient servant, God's covenant partner, and God has never cease to be faithful to the covenant. God's determination, the true nature of human being, is manifested in Jesus Christ, the living and effective Word. But fallen human beings determine themselves to be 'lords', 'judges' and 'helpers' of self, which is impossible, unreal, and has no being before God, and therefore is nothingness. But this self-deception is a fact, a fact human imagination, with the being of a vain dream, a doomed plan.

In all that follows we must keep Barth's distinction in mind. It is the human being in its mode of existence as evil self-determination, which is completely fallen, has no freedom for God, and no being before God. It is the human being in its mode of existence before God as God's determination, which is God's faithful covenant partner, has
freedom for God, and being before God. The absurdity of sin is disclosed as the completely good creature of God makes no use of the freedom God has given to it, determining itself as God's enemy.

**Freedom is Not the Ability to Say "Yes" or "No" to God**

According to Barth, human beings have no "freedom" to choose between good and evil, and even the desire for it is already an "evil desire" (CD IV 1, 449), for only God can decide between good and evil. The human attempt to be like God discloses a desire to stand at the side of God "and affirm and accept the cosmos and deny and reject chaos" (CD IV 1, 450), to go beyond the limits set for it and question whether there is the possibility of another choice other than the one God has already chosen.

To the contrary, human beings must not even as much as desire to know the opposite of the good God sets before them (CD IV 1, 450). Far from being "freedom", the desire to judge between good and evil is the absolute negation of freedom. "This desire means finally that at once and irrevocably man loses his freedom" (CD IV 1, 450). In so far as human beings desire to be judges at God's side, they are not free for the God who is the incomparable Judge.

Our questionable position is not simply a result of our creaturely finitude; we are already judged and the verdict is in: we are those who have always already chosen wrongly. There never was a time in which we had not already
chosen against God (CD IV 1, 495). For Barth, there is no neutral position from which to decide, no process of becoming a "yes" or a "no" to God, and no doubt as to whether we are sinners in the full sense of the word. We are declared by the verdict of God to be Adam's descendants, i.e.,

those whose free will and commission and omission, whose actualisations of their good human nature, always follow the rule and perverted order which, according to the prophetic witness, is manifested at once at the very beginning of world-history, in the person and act of Adam, which are typical for the persons and acts of all his successors (CD IV 1, 510).

For Barth, freedom is not the neutral ability of definitive self-determination, for Jesus exposed himself to the helplessness of death on the cross, and "My God, my God why hast thou forsaken me" is the cry of one who could not in any sense save himself. The cross reveals our utter helplessness with regard to ourselves. "He," says Barth, "is completely helpless in relation to himself (CD IV 1, 459). We have no place to stand for such a work, for only God is in such a position. Attempting to help ourselves is simply "moving into the void" (CD IV 1, 459). Human beings cannot get outside the circle of their sin to decide about themselves.

Thus, for Barth, the idea of a freedom to sin is a contradiction in terms. This becomes more obvious when we examine his positive understanding of freedom.
Freedom as Obedience to God

What is freedom, according to Karl Barth? Rahner uses the term in a philosophical sense. "Freedom", for him, is the ability to decide before God about the totality of the self, of accomplishing a definitive self-determination, literally making oneself a "yes" or "no" to God. Such an understanding of freedom is not found explicitly in the Bible, admits Rahner, but is the transcendental presupposition of the dogma of complete human responsibility for sin.

Barth, however, uses the word freedom as it is used in Romans 8 where it is practically synonymous with eschatological salvation, freedom from sin and death, and freedom for God, the freedom of the new creation where the willing and acting of the new human being is in perfect accord with the good will of God. In no sense is it freedom to decide about sin, death and God. We will return in the third section of this chapter to the contrasting use Barth and Rahner make of the word freedom.

For Barth, freedom is practically synonymous with obedience to God. He says:

He is a free man—free in his thinking and deciding and acting—only as he is willing to accept this. He does that which is good and right, he acts in order, as one who really is, when he regards that which God has chosen for him as self-evident and indeed the only thing which is possible, when he accepts and is perfectly satisfied with this divine choice without questioning the reasons for it, without trying to manipulate or verify or correct it or to ratify it
by his own choice (CD IV 1, 449).

According to Barth, God's command to be God's servant is at the same time permission to be free, for God never commands that which would alienate the human person from his or her true being. "God does not ask of man that he should be something different, but simply that he should be what he is, the man who is loved by Him, that he should freely confess himself the one to whom God has already freely addressed Himself" (CD IV 1, 488). Freedom is realized in the human being when its self-determination is a repetition of the divine determination. Freedom is being in self-consciousness (in our own willing and acting) what we really are before God.

On the other hand, slavery is synonymous with disobedience and refusal of the grace of God. The degree to which a person finds it difficult to accept the grace of God but insists on being free on her or his own terms "is the degree to which he finds it difficult to be free, to affirm himself, to realize his subjectivity, to accept his responsibility" (CD IV 1, 464). For Barth, there can be no free decision against God, for the "yes" to God is the essence of freedom, the realization of our true nature. Thus, freedom against God is an impossibility.

However, Barth argues that human beings are not forced to sin. They do it because they want to (CD IV 1, 419). We are Adam's descendants "freely and on our own responsibility" (CD IV 1, 509), as a "human decision and
act" (CD IV 1, 510). We do it of our own "free will" (CD IV 1, 510), even if it is a "chaotic and unfree freedom" (CD IV 1, 503). According to Barth, it is no overhanging fate which compels human beings to will and do the evil; they do exactly what they want.

Original sin, according to Barth, is not a fate which overtakes us or a sinful situation into which we are cast. God simply declares that every human being invariably does in a more or less obvious form what Adam did in a "trivial form" as a "beginner" (CD IV 1, 509). Our solidarity with Adam in sin is not grounded in or known by some mechanism of transmission, but is known and assured only by the verdict of God: every human being is Adam. There was no "golden age" before sin; "the first man was immediately the first sinner" (CD IV 1, 508). The same is true of all other human beings, for "they all sin at once as well" (CD IV 1, 510). There is no time of innocence, no process of deciding for or against God.

We will deal with the issue of original sin in greater detail in Chapter Three where it becomes important for our understanding a major difference between Barth and Rahner.

A Summary of Barth's View of Freedom

Now, we will summarize what has been said so far about Barth's understanding of freedom. Human freedom, for Karl Barth, is self-conscious obedience to God, the complete
fulfillment of created human nature which cannot be fulfilled by a decision to be God's enemy. To the contrary, the evil decision is the complete alienation, even destruction, of created human nature. Therefore, there is no freedom to sin, and the one who does sin does so because she or he refuses to be free.

Sin as Nothingness

It should now be apparent what Barth means when he calls sin das Nichtiges "nothingness". Nothingness is not nothing—the Greek concept of not-being, me on, nor is it pure potentiality—the Greek concept of not-yet-being, ouk on. Nothingness, in Barth, is not defined vis-a-vis being as the all-embracing term for actuality, but rather vis-a-vis the will of God. "Being" is that which God wills, and nothingness is that which God does not will. Barth understands sin as the manifestation of that which "God has not willed and does not will and will not will, of that which absolutely is not, or is only as God does not will it, of that which lives only as that which God has rejected and condemned and excluded" (CD IV 1, 409).

Barth treated the concept of nothingness at length in Church Dogmatics (III 3, 289-368) as the opposition to God's lordship over the world. There Barth tells us that nothingness is broader than sin. "There is real evil and real death as well as real sin" (CD III 3, 310). It is everything that God does not will, existing only because God
does not will it. When God elects, God rejects what is not elected. In positing the creature as a loving covenant partner, God excludes everything which opposes this creature. God wills life, holiness, good and salvation, and thus excludes death, sin and evil and Hell as nothingness.

Nothingness is neither God nor a creature of God, needed neither to complete the definition of God nor of the creature. It is often confused with the "shadow" or "negative" side of creation (CD IV 1, 296), for creation is not God, and therefore is subject to the threat and temptation of nothingness. But this limitation is not nothingness, but rather part of the perfection of the creature.

Evil is not the dialectical counterpart of good, for nothingness has no power or being before God. However, the creature is helpless against it and for this reason God has made the cause of the creature God's own, taking nothingness seriously. In threatening the creature, nothingness threatens the cause and glory of God. Therefore God is its "primary victim and foe" (CD III 3, 360). And God has overcome it in the event of the cross, making it a thing of the past, even though, according to God's good purpose, God permits it to have a limited existence now. We live "'as if' He had not yet mastered it for us" (CD III 3, 367).

Sin "is the concrete form of nothingness because in sin it becomes man's own act, achievement and guilt" (CD III 3, 310). But nothingness does not have its origin in human
sin. It exists prior to the human act, finding its origin in God's "no" to it. It exists only as that which God has negated and in this form it tempts and attacks the human being. When the human being sins, not only does it willingly cooperate with nothingness, but it also falls prey to it. Sin is the willful human act of "surrender to the alien power of an adversary" (CD III 3, 310).

Sin as is not nothing. It is a fact, and creates other facts, even world-shaking facts. The creature has no power to resist its might. Were it not for God's gracious will to redeem human beings, they would indeed fall prey to it. By describing sin as nothingness, Barth attributes the same quality to it which he did with the term "impossible": the factual existence of that which God does not will, with no basis in and no future before God.

Free Will and Human Responsibility
for Sin: Some Internal Tensions

Before we move into the questions which arise in comparing of Barth and Rahner, we will address some tensions within Barth's conceptual framework. Though Barth's primary concern is the interpretation of the salvation story of Jesus, he has one eye on the problem of how the perfectly good creature could commit sin, and that in such a way that he or she is fully and solely responsible for it.

Barth does not consider this problem in the abstract, seeking the ground of the possibility of responsibility, as does Rahner. This procedure assumes that
we know what "responsibility" means as an abstract concept, and if we follow this way consistently it leads to the impossible conclusion that only God can be responsible. If responsibility requires knowledge of all the alternatives, and all the alternatives are interconnected with all that is, then omniscience is required. If one must know God as God really is to be responsible for the desire to be God, then only God can be responsible.

Barth, on the contrary, insists on letting the biblical narrative determine the meaning of the term "responsibility". In it human beings are declared responsible for sin, without excuse, even though they are not God, and do not truly know God. Barth argues that human beings are always, universally, and totally sinners, but he judiciously avoids the Reformation idea that human beings "necessarily" sin. Calvin, at least, did not mean by this term that human beings are forced to commit sin against their will and inclination (Institutes II.III.5., 294). He meant approximately what Barth means, i.e., that human beings, being sinners through and through, have no desire or resources to do otherwise. Barth insists that human beings sin of their own "free will" (CD IV I, 510) and are "responsible" because when they sin they do what they want; they are not forced internally or externally.

For Barth, then, responsibility does presuppose "free will", as is evident in his treatment of original sin where he rejects the concept of hereditary sin, Erbsünde,
because with regard to sin "we have always to think of a human decision and act" (CD IV 1, 510). But this "free will" is not a free will now for good and then for evil. It always wills the evil, and cannot transcend itself to do otherwise, for it is itself an evil will. Full responsibility, obviously for Barth, does not presuppose a neutral position before or above good and evil, nor omniscience nor absolute subjectivity.

According to Barth, human beings will what they will, no matter what information they lack about possible objects of desire. They will to be lords, and no new knowledge can change this decision. In their rebellion they cannot know the true God, for God is known only in obedient faith; nevertheless, their evil willing is a rejection of God's lordship, a rebellion for which they are fully responsible.

Must we simply accept God's verdict that human beings are responsible for sin without asking for further understanding? Does Barth's narrative method rule out seeking, as does Rahner, a type of anthropological presupposition for sin? Indeed, given the characterization and action of God in the biblical narrative, the human rejection of God's lordship is inexplicable. But the narrative inexplicability of sin does not exclude its formal possibility, and Barth himself does not deny this, for he admits that it can be done. But, for Barth, its possibility remains formal, only a vain imagination, not corresponding
in the least to reality. It is intrinsically and absolutely impossible for a human being to be as God. Sin actualizes no potential of created human being.

It would have made Barth's presentation less confusing if he had made it clear that he was using the term "impossibility" to mean lacking potentiality for fulfillment in sin, and not to mean lacking the formal possibility of willing and doing it.

**Barth's Idea of Freedom: A Restatement**

Given Barth's admission of a "formal possibility" in sin, we must restate his idea of freedom less dialectically and more analogically. The "formal possibility" of sin is at least analogous to the possibility of freedom for God, for Barth himself designates both of them "determinations."

When the human being makes use of its freedom for God, it determines itself according to the determination of God, but when it makes no use of its freedom, it "determines" itself against God's determination. If we use the same word to describe these activities, we admit an analogy between them. The sinful determination of the human being is an imitation; it projects a false human being, just as it projects a false god. Stated in narrative terms, the human being apes God, and therefore plays the fool. But even in a caricature there must be an analogy to the character. It cannot be in reality, but it can 'be' in the form of a dream.

Thus, we have discovered in Barth an anthropological
presupposition of sin, so that we may speak of the "possibility" of sin, if we understand that it is an improper, analogous 'possibility'. All it has in common with possibility of freedom for God is that it is not prevented from happening by external or internal force. Human beings can dream of being God. Nothing outside of them forces them to desire to be as God; they do what they desire and desire what they do.

**A COMPARISON OF BARTH AND RAHNER ON SIN'S POSSIBILITY**

At the verbal level Barth and Rahner contradict at every point. For Rahner, sin can be done in freedom; for Barth, it can have no freedom. For Barth, sin has no possibility; for Rahner, its possibility is co-posed with the possibility of salvation. For Rahner, the human person can utter a free "yes" or a free "no" to the true God; for Barth, there can be no such thing as a free "no" to the true God.

Must we leave it at that, concluding that there is no basis for dialogue? On the contrary, I believe there are areas of agreement underneath the different terminology. Hegel said that a great man condemns those who come after to understand him. In the same way, two great theologians condemn those who follow to harmonize them. We instinctively believe that two people in whom we recognize greatness cannot contradict at every point. And how much more so two Christian theologians who, for all their
linguistic and philosophical differences, attempt to speak of the one Christian faith?

The Possibility and Freedom of Sin:
A Surprising Similarity

Barth flatly denies that there is any freedom to sin, but he hedges his denial by his affirmation that human beings sin of their own free will. He denies sin's freedom in order to protect the omnicausality and holiness of God and the goodness of creation, and he affirms free will to assure that human beings are held responsible for their sin.

Rahner, on the other hand, unequivocally affirms the freedom to say "yes" or "no" to God, but he hedges his affirmation by his denial that the "yes" and "no" are ontologically equal. The "no" is a contradiction, and implies the annihilation of the subject. Rahner affirms sin's freedom in order to protect the responsibility of human beings, and he denies the equality of the "yes" and the "no" in order to protect the holiness and omnicausality of the Creator and goodness of creation. According to Rahner, human nature was not created for the rejection of God, for only the self-communication of God can fulfill it.

Clearly, Barth and Rahner have the same concerns, but with different emphases, Rahner's being on the responsibility of the human person, without neglecting the goodness and omnicausality of God, and Barth's being on the holiness and omnicausality of God, without overlooking the responsibility of human beings. This difference is no
mystery, for it corresponds to the historic emphases of their respective traditions. It is simply a truism that the Reformers were more sensitive to any encroachment on the glory of God as Creator and Savior and the unilateral nature of salvation than they were about human responsibility for sin and responsiveness in salvation. On the other hand, the Counter-Reformation, in reaction to the extremes of the Reformation, was sensitive to an eclipse of human responsibility by the brightness of God's glory. Both positions were extreme.

Is it possible that when Rahner hedges his Roman Catholic "yes" to the freedom and possibility of sin, and Barth hedges his Reformation "no" to the same, they meet somewhere in the middle? As I have demonstrated, Rahner attributes only an analogous 'freedom' to the "no" decision, a 'freedom' which can neither fulfill itself nor human nature, nor achieve anything definitive. On the other hand, Barth posits an anthropological presupposition of human responsibility for sin, free will, which is analogous to true freedom, having the formal, empty quality of a choice--the willing of the desired and the desire of the willed--in common with it.

Are not Barth and Rahner saying the same thing about the ontological status of the "no" to God? In the thought of both theologians the freedom to sin is limited to the empty formal 'possibility' of dreaming, projecting, or determining that which cannot be. For both, only a "yes" to
God can fulfill the nature of freedom. For both, a "no" to God is abortive and self-contradictory.

We must admit that this "agreement" is not on the surface. Certain tensions remain between the thought of Barth and Rahner about the idea of freedom. But reading Barth with Rahnerian eyes and Rahner with Barthian eyes has disclosed a hidden tendency toward convergence. Surprisingly, this convergence occurs in one of the traditional areas of sharpest disagreement between Roman Catholics and Protestants. It is the task of ecumenical theology to exploit this tendency.
Chapter III
THE NATURE OF THE ACT OF SIN

THE NATURE OF SIN IN BARTH

Pride, Sloth, and Falsehood

We have established the source of the knowledge of sin as Jesus Christ who lives in the Gospels. We have seen that sin, whatever it is precisely, has no possibility, and is absolutely forbidden. Now we proceed to the material question of what, according to Barth, the human being does when it sins.

Barth, too, derives his understanding of sin from the narrative of the death and resurrection of Jesus. Four aspects of the humility of God expose sin as pride. The Word became flesh, showing that the arrogant human attempt to be as God is "paradoxical and absurd" (CD IV 1, 419). The Lord became a servant, exposing the proud human attempt to become a lord as evil and inhuman. The Judge submitted to judgment, revealing the heedless human attempt to judge between good and evil as "impossible" (CD IV 1, 446). The Helper became helpless, showing that human beings' attempts to help themselves is a refusal of the help of God.

Sin is also sloth. Sin has a "Promethean" form, pride, but it also takes the form of laziness, sloth. Pride is "evil action," but sloth is "evil inaction" (CD IV 2, 403), a refusal to live in the freedom of Jesus as the
risen, exalted Lord (CD IV 2, 407), a refusal to be human.

Sloth is defined from four Christological perspectives seen the Gospel story. Jesus lives in the freedom of obedience to the Word of God, but human beings refuse to listen, and therefore are fools (CD IV 2, 409). Jesus was wholly free for his neighbor, but human beings refuse to be a fellow to their neighbor, and therefore are guilty inhumanity (CD IV 2, 436). Jesus lived in the freedom of self-discipline, but human beings refuse this freedom, and therefore live in dissipation (CD IV 2, 452). Jesus found freedom in giving up his life into the hands of God, but human beings refuse this freedom, and therefore are prey to the dread of death (CD IV 2, 468).

Sin is Falsehood, evasion of the truth manifested in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is not merely the idea of a human relationship with God, but rather confronts human beings with the truth concretely, so that the encounter "becomes an absolutely vital, binding, decisive and even revolutionary affair" (CD IV 3, 440). The maturest form of falsehood is idolatry, false religion in which the free God is replaced by the idol of a "supreme being" (CD IV 3, 448).

Barth's material definition sin as pride, sloth and falsehood is not out of line with Reformation tradition. Nor is Rahner's definition of the essence of sin as a "no" to the gracious God inconsistent with Barth's definition. What distinguishes Barth from the Reformation tradition and from Rahner is that original sin and concupiscence are
reduced to what, in Rahner's terms, would be called "personal sin". Pride, sloth, falsehood--these are all personal, responsible, active, malevolent, not to say diabolical, actions. Can what has been traditionally treated under the titles of original sin and concupiscence be accounted for under Barth's definition of sin?

Original Sin

For Karl Barth, the doctrine of original sin teaches that human beings are evil, not only in their acts, but also in their being. The expression peccatum originale teaches "us that we are dealing with the original and radical and therefore the comprehensive and total act of man, with the imprisonment of his existence in that circle of evil being and evil activity" (CD IV 1, 500). But even in this "imprisonment" human beings sin, i.e., they are imprisoned because they so will. Original sin is still a responsible and voluntary life of act and being.

Barth rejects the concept of hereditary sin. What comes upon us as an inheritance cannot be our responsible act, and responsibility is a sine qua non of sin. We must let go of one half of the formula; either "hereditary" or "sin" must go. According to Barth, both halves together make a contradictio in adiecto in the face of which there is no help for it but to juggle away either the one part or the other" (CD IV 1, 501).
The doctrine of hereditary sin teaches that we are sinners because of our biological connection with Adam. Barth contends, however, that our solidarity with Adam in sin is known and assured only by the verdict of God: you are Adam. You are those "whose free will and commission and omission, whose actualisations of their good human nature, always follow the rule and perverted order which, according to the prophetic witness, is manifested at once at the very beginning of world-history" (CD IV 1, 510).

The traditional doctrine of hereditary sin is an explanation or an aetiology of our present situation in which there seems to be no time at which we have not already sinned. It proposes a mechanism for the transmission of the sin of the first human being. As we shall see in the next section, Rahner freely admits that his doctrine of original sin is an aetiology. For him, original sin is a situation into which we are thrown. The guilt of others, and especially that of the first human being(s), is an existential of our concrete being which conditions all our free acts and makes them at least objectively guilty.

Barth criticizes the aetiological and mechanistic conceptions, asserting that the connection between us and Adam is established by God's declaration alone. There is no mechanism of transmission. We simply, invariably do what Adam did. Obviously, if sin must be thought of as a personal, voluntary, and responsible act, there can be no aetiology of origin or mechanism of transmission in the
doctrine of sin.

Barth's "Original Sin": A Contradiction?

Barth argues that the concept of hereditary sin—and the same would hold for Rahner's concept "sinful situation"—is a contradiction in terms. But is the concept of "original sin" any less contradictory? If there was no time in which we were not already sinners, in what sense are we responsible for our sin? If we become sinners at the time of our creation, are we constituted sinners because of our creation? If we do not account for sin in a historical fall, and yet take its reality seriously, must we not account for it as given with creation?

In order to solve this riddle, we must again return to Barth's conception of the being of the "man of sin". The being of the sinner is the self-determination of the good creature of God against the determination of its Creator. The "man of sin" has being only as the self-determination of God's good creature. Its act and its being are one. For Barth, the concept of original sin means that the very first act of God's good creature is invariably a wicked self-determination. This act posits and constitutes the being of the "man of sin". We do not receive our being as sinners by being cast into the world, for we are created as God's good creatures and, in spite of our sin, remain so. In our very first act of self-determination—Barth does not speculate when this occurs, but there is certainly no age of
innocence—we constitute ourselves sinners, entering that
circle of act and being from which there is no exit.

This explains why the Barth's term "original sin" is not a contradiction, but it does not explain why the first act of self-determination of God's good creature is always an evil act. According to Barth, there is no explanation. It is simply a brute fact. He will say no more.

**Concupiscence**

Concupiscence is an evil desire, an inverted and perverted love of the creature more than the Creator, forsaking the higher good for the lower. While, for Augustine, it seems almost synonymous with inordinate sexual desire, it has its spiritual forms as well. The Council of Trent considered concupiscence both sin and a punishment for sin. In the unbaptized person concupiscence is practically equivalent to original sin. In baptism the guilt of original sin is removed, whereas concupiscence remains. It is "of sin, and inclines to sin" but is not "truly and properly" sin itself, and it remains behind only "for our exercise" (Schaff II, 1977:88). For the Reformers, original sin and concupiscence are completely equal, and the concupiscence which lives in the baptized person is sin in the full sense of the word.

Barth does not use the term concupiscence, neither in the context of the "fall of man" and original sin (CD IV 1), nor in the context of human dissipation (CD IV 2).
Nevertheless, it is obvious where he stands on the material issues involved. In unison with the Reformers, Barth rejects the traditional distinction between original sin as guilt and as a punishment or a situation, collapsing original sin and concupiscence into one with so-called "personal sin".

In Barth's discussion of sin as dissipation, where he treats the material usually discussed under the name of concupiscence, sin is revealed as "evil desire", "carnal lust" and "the lust of this world" (CD IV 2, 454, 456). Human beings are given the freedom to be disciplined, authentic persons, but they refuse to make use of it, preferring rather the chaos of dissipation. The soul should rule the body, and the body should serve the soul. But in dissipation the body renounces the rulership of the soul and sinks into laziness, indiscipline, sensuality and animality. The soul declines to rule the body and flies off into heights of irresponsibility. Dissipation, for Barth, is sin in the most proper sense of the word. We have no freedom of ourselves to rise above this circle of evil act and evil being; it is a situation. Nevertheless, it is our act and being, what we truly will and desire. We are our own situation.

Barth does not agree fully with the Reformers. In fact, he agrees almost as much with the Council of Trent, but he radicalizes both the Reformer's and the Tridentine Father's positions. The Tridentine Fathers wanted to
protect the real sanctification of human beings against the imputation theory of the Reformers. The Reformers seemed to be saying that, whereas the real sinful nature of the baptized person had not been altered, they were declared righteous by God anyway. The Council Fathers, therefore, argued for a real justification and sanctification of the baptized. Barth, in effect, rejects and accepts both positions by radicalizing them. For him, human beings in their self-determination are sinners totally (with the Reformers). But this sinful self-determination has been done away in Christ, remaining only as that which is past, real only in its unreality. In the determination of God, the concrete and real Jesus Christ, human beings are fully justified and sanctified, having their true and real being in Jesus Christ. Therefore, those who are baptized into Christ are really justified and sanctified (with the Tridentine Fathers).

We see, in Barth's treatment of original sin and concupiscence, his zeal to avoid any tragic interpretation of sin in which sin is viewed as a fate we have to endure rather than something we do freely and knowingly. We are sometimes cast into borderline situations in which there seems to be complete moral ambiguity with no way to do the right thing. And, with enough subtlety, all moral situations can be interpreted after the pattern of the borderline situation. Looking back on our objectively sinful acts, we can see how the situation out of which we
acted all but determined our action. Our genes, our environment, our lack of information had a decisive, if not overwhelming, impact on our behavior. Perhaps underneath that objectively sinful act lies a good, albeit misguided, heart which seeks the good in the best way it can under the circumstances. We are like babies who cry and kick and break things, not out a desire for evil as such, but simply because we are hungry.

This subtle and plausible line of thought is rejected absolutely and totally by Barth. It is no wonder that our own motives are so mystifying to us; sin blinds us to sin so that we cannot know sin by looking within ourselves. The opacity of our being is due to our willing blindness, not to an alien fate. The cross of Jesus Christ declares us to be sinners from head to foot. The tree and the fruit are bad. We know from the cross that all our deeds—the good ones as well as the bad—reflect an evil heart.

We are surprised and offended by the accusation. How can we accept it when all our experience denies it? But that is precisely what we must do, according to Barth. Barth's thought on this subject may be summed up in the words of Paul and John: "Let God be true and every man a liar" (Romans 3:4) and "For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything" (I John 3:20).
THE NATURE OF SIN IN RAHNER

For Karl Rahner, the act of sin is the human person's refusal of God's loving offer of self, a total life-act, and therefore cannot be known in its actuality by reflection on actions occurring in the categorical (space/time) realm. Its possibility is known only by transcendental reflection on the Christian dogma of the human responsibility for the totality of life (Chapter One). Its ontological possibility is grounded in the supernatural existential (Chapter Two).

The Transcendental Nature of Sin

In _Foundations of the Christian Faith_ (1978) Rahner gives his most extended treatment of the transcendental nature of sin. According to him, modern people cannot grasp the nature and possibility of real guilt and responsibility. It seems to them that the "absurdity and universal misery" of human life bear more the nature of an evil fate into which human beings are cast than something for which they are responsible (FChF, 92). Rahner's efforts are expended in an attempt to make the Christian idea of "man as a sinner" understandable and credible to the modern mind (FChF, 92). The key to his argument is his differentiation between freedom of choice vis-a-vis finite objects and values and freedom as the capacity of disposing of the whole self before God. We have discussed the details of this
argument in Chapter Two, and we need not repeat them here. Suffice it to say that, once the possibility of this kind of freedom is granted, the possibility of a responsible "no" to God can be understood.

What about this "no"? We have considered its possibility, but what of its actuality? According to Rahner, the "no" to God is not a "no" to a law of God or an offer of a created good, not a "no" to an idol or a concept of God. It does not happen in response to any categorical reality as such, for is a transcendental act, a real "no" to the true God, the one who infinitely transcends all finite existents. God's offer of self (the supernatural existential) gives the human being the capacity to transcend the totality of the self and to decide whether or not it wants the gift of God's self-communication. God is really present to the human "in absolute closeness" and "immediacy", so that the decision "becomes in the most radical way the capacity to say 'yes' or 'no' to God" (FChF, 101).

This "absolute closeness" is still only in the form of an offer, so a question must be asked: the experience of an offer is not the same as the experience of the reality offered and accepted—is it? No. If not, the offer (supernatural existential) must have some deficiency vis-a-vis the bestowed reality. The offer, to use Rahner's terms, lacks some knowledge and being. The bestowed reality completes or fulfills the human person, whereas the "offer"
only looks toward this completion.

But the transcendental decision about God must be definitive, Rahner contends. No further knowledge must be able to reverse this decision, once it has been made. But the deficiency of the offer compared to the bestowed reality seems to preclude a definitive decision. We will return to this problem in the evaluation part of this section.

The Categorical Side of the Transcendental Decision

The decision about God is indeed a transcendental decision, but it is not made in Gnostic fashion, in a pre-incarnational state. Nor is the spacio-temporal existence of the free subject a facade which merely reflects an already accomplished subject. On the contrary, freedom and subjectivity are historical, being achieved precisely in the process of historical reality.

Rahner presents a metaphysics of the human person in just this context in his article "Guilt and its Remission: The Borderland Between Theology and Psychotherapy", describing the human person as a process of movement out from the original (ursprüngliche) person into an "intermediary reality" (Mittleren) and back to the achieved, endgültigen, person (GR, 272-273). Every person has a spiritual core which has an "intentional" (GR, 271) direction toward God (the necessary, pre-conceptual "yes" of our metaphysical nature). This core gives human person the capacity transcend finite reality, ask the question of God
and hear a revelation of God, should God decide to give it.

In order to know itself and achieve itself, the original person must constantly objectify itself in the medium of spacio-temporality, i.e., the "other" (GR, 273). The medium is somewhat intractable, so the objectification is self, and yet not self. It is self-in-the-other. Only by returning from the partially alienating state of being-in-the-other can the person be fully present to self. Rahner calls this being-present-to-self the endgültigen person.

Rahner's intention is to show how the human person is historical, but we might question whether he has succeeded, for does this description fully historicize human being, as is necessary to escape a Gnostic dualism? Is there time lapse between the ursprüngliche person and the endgültigen person? Is the definitive state of the human person achieved through a process in time where there is a real becoming and the end is not already given in the beginning? Is the subjective decision really "achieved" or merely "reflected" in categorical reality? Rahner used both terms. Fortunately, finding the solution to this problem is not necessary to achieve our goal. Most often we will use the term "reflected" to refer to the relationship between the transcendental decision and its categorical manifestation.
According to Rahner, if a subjective "no" has occurred, a particular objective offense against the structure of human nature or the law of God is a "constitutive sign" of subjective guilt (GR, 270). It is a sign of real guilt only in so far as it is a categorical objectification of the subjective "no". It is a constitutive sign because subjective guilt can realize itself only in objectifications in the medium of the spacio-temporal world of things and persons (GR, 271). Taken in and for itself, an objectively evil deed does not necessarily indicate real guilt before God, for a categorical action can be caused by any number of external reasons. The medium in which the original person posits self has a pre-history and structures of its own, and therefore we cannot be sure how far our being-in-the-other reflects our own final person or those intractable and oppressive structures inherent in the "other".

The subjective, transcendental decision, whether it be "yes" or "no", invariably manifests itself in the categorical action of the person. Only God, however, is the judge of whether a particular action reflects a transcendental "yes" or a transcendental "no". In an objectively evil action, such as murder or explicit atheism, a subjective "yes" to God may lie hidden, while the objective evil of the action simply reflects a "pre-personal situation" (FChF, 102). On the other hand, an objectively good action such as feeding the hungry or reading the Bible
may hide a transcendental "no" to God (GR, 212).

Rahner applies his distinction between transcendental and categorical actions to the eschatological statements of the Bible which seem to indicate that there will be those who are finally and utterly lost. According to Rahner, these statements must be interpreted as statements about the possibilities which lie before us, and are to be read in keeping with their literary form as "threat-discourse" and not as descriptions of fact ("Hell", 1975:603). They are intended to reinforce the "absolute seriousness of the human decision" (FChF, 103). "We never know with ultimate certainty whether we really are sinners", but we can "know with ultimate certainty that we really can be sinners" (FChF, 104).

Sin as a "No" to the Neighbor and Human Nature

The "no" to God is at the same time a "no" to the neighbor and the essence of human nature. In Rahner's article, "Reflections on the Unity of the Love of Neighbour and the Love of God" (LGLN), he argues that the love of neighbor is not merely motivated by the love of God, but also is ontologically united with it (LGLN, 247). In Spirit in the World the human being comes to itself by going out into the material world and back to itself. But, in the article mentioned above, Rahner argues that the human being becomes present to self only by the mediation of a "Thou" (LGLN, 241). Indeed, the encounter with "the world of
things is of significance only as a factor for man and for his neighbour" (LGLN, 240). But it is not merely an egocentric knowledge of oneself in the Thou that fulfills human being. It is only in the free act of "loving communication with the Thou" that human being truly finds itself (LGLN, 240). Rahner says further:

The act of personal love for another human being is therefore the all-embracing basic act of man which gives meaning, direction and measure to everything else. If this is correct, then the essential a priori openness to the other human being which must be undertaken freely belongs as such to the a priori and most basic constitution of man and is an essential inner moment of his (knowing and willing) transcendentality. This basic constitution...is experienced in the concrete encounter with man in the concrete. The one moral (or immoral) basic act in which man comes to himself and decides basically about himself is also the (loving or hating) communication with the concrete Thou in which man experiences, accepts or denies his basic a priori reference to the Thou as such (LGLN, 241).

Human beings not only find themselves in the loving encounter with the Thou; they also find God. The transcendental experience of God is had only in the encounter with the world, but this encounter reaches its full intensity only in the love of the Thou. By turning in love to the Thou, human beings experience the "transcendental conditions of this act" (i.e., God) in a unique way (LGLN, 246). According to Rahner, "the act of love of neighbour is, therefore, the only categorized and original act in which man attains the whole of reality given to us in categories, with regard to which he fulfills
himself perfectly correctly and in which he always already makes the transcendental and direct experience of God by grace" (LGLN, 246). The love of neighbor, then, "is the primary act of the love of God" (LGLN, 247). Thus the "no" to the neighbor is at the same time a "no" to God and to one's own nature, imprisoning "the whole of man within the deadly lonely damnation of self-created absurdity" (LGLN, 242).

To sum up: The act of sin is a three fold "no"--to God, to human nature and to the Neighbor. The "no" to the neighbor is also a "no" to the transcendental ground of the neighbor, God. Since the basic structure of human being cannot be fulfilled except in a loving "yes" to the Neighbor and God, the "no" to the neighbor is also a "no" to the human essence and its fulfillment.

Venial Sin, Concupiscence and Original Sin: Some Preliminary Statements

If the act of sin is a transcendental and--since concerned with the whole person and God--a definitive "no" to God, personal fulfillment and the neighbor, what place is there for different types and intensities of sins? What about the traditional categories of venial sin, concupiscence and original sin? If Rahner is serious about his definition of sin, has he not put himself in a dilemma? Will he not either have to reduce venial sin, concupiscence and original sin to sin proper or deny their sin character altogether, explaining them in terms of a fate into which we
are cast?

In his article "Guilt, Responsibility, Punishment" (GRP) Rahner lays down a basic premise, "there can only be guilt in the theological sense where there is freedom and responsibility" (GRP, 197). For him, freedom and responsibility, in the theological sense, are found only where "man disposes over the totality of his being and existence before God and this either towards Him or away from Him" (GRP, 200). In a passage even more emphatic he says:

the notion of freedom seems really to be in indivisibili and it seems to be impossible to have a 'more or less' with regard to freedom, since the subject either decides or does not decide about itself as a whole definitively....In fact, it will have to be said in view of this basic theological starting-point ...that the decision of freedom which takes place in the whole of a life, does not actually admit of degrees (GRP, 207).

In spite of his radical definition of sin and freedom, Rahner defends the Roman Catholic sensitivity to the different intensities and types of sin, which refuses to reduce original sin and concupiscence to personal sin, as did the Reformers. For Trent, baptism really takes away "that which has the true and proper nature of sin", rather than merely giving assurance that it is not imputed (Schaff II, 1977:87). Concupiscence is not "truly and properly sin", but is merely "of sin and inclines to sin" (Schaff II, 1977:88).
Rahner attempts to understand this gradation in terms of his anthropology. The basis for it cannot involve the transcendental decision directly, for there is no more or less where it is concerned. It results, rather, from the varying categorical circumstances—internal and external—in which the free transcendental decision unfolds. In Rahner's own words, "the objective material offered to freedom by the inner dispositions of man and the external situation in which the personal decision of freedom, understood as self-mastery over oneself, realizes and must realize itself can be finite, variable and greater or less" (GRP, 208).

In no one act does freedom fully express itself. As we pointed out earlier, an objectively evil act may be the result more of the pre-given situation into which the person is cast than the result of a free decision. In this case, the level of freedom exercised in any one particular act may vary according to the intensity with which the pre-personal situation determines the objective behavior of the person. Two acts may differ in the level of freedom realized in the act so much that they can be gathered under the one concept of a free act only analogously (GRP, 209). This principle of the difference between the transcendental, absolute act, and the categorical, conditioned act is the key to Rahner's thinking about venial sin, original sin and concupiscence.

Venial Sin--Sin?

Now, the difference between a mortal and venial sin
becomes obvious. A mortal sin is one in which a subjective "no" to God is reflected, freedom in the proper sense being present. In a venial sin a subjective "no" is not reflected, the badness of the act being wholly constituted by the pre-personal situation of the person.

Rahner uses the distinction between venial and mortal sins in his attempt to expound the Roman Catholic sense of the Reformation formula, simul justus et peccator (JS, 218-230). According to Rahner, Roman Catholic theology cannot accept the formula as it was intended by the Reformers, as a statement of an ontological reality. In this sense the formula is self-contradictory, and it denies the scriptural doctrine of the ontological reality of the new creation.

But there is a Roman Catholic sense of the formula. Though it cannot refer to an ontological reality, it can refer to the experience of the Christian (JS, 225). The Christian cannot know for sure whether he or she is individually a participant in the justification and sanctification accomplished in Christ, whether or not they have not or will yet utter a "no" to God. The Christian experiences self as a sinner, as one threatened with the possibility that she or he may turn out to have been a sinner. Thus, according to Rahner, the Roman Catholic sense of the formula is: "Even though he must and may hope with all firmness that he is personally justified before God, he must at the same time fear, in spite of and within this
hope, that he is a sinner" (JS, 225).

What makes this insecurity all the more troubling is that every Christian undoubtedly commits acts which are, from the objective point of view, bad. But in the one who has subjectively, transcendentally decided for God, the justified person, these acts are all venial sins. Of course, we cannot tell from mere observation or introspection which are venial and which are mortal sins. A "little" sin may reflect a subjective "no" to God, and hence be a mortal sin. A "great" sin may reflect only the pre-personal material given to the person, not a subjective "no" to God, and hence be a venial sin.

When Rahner says that the Christian must continue to confess that he or she is a sinner and ask for God's mercy (JS, 228), he is not saying that we must confess that we are sinners in the true and proper sense, for only God can judge that. Indeed, if we were sinners in this sense, it would do no good to confess it, for the confession itself would again—for all its good appearances—be a mortal sin reflecting the subjective "no" to God. What we must confess is that we commit venial sins, that without God's grace we would always go wrong, and that we are always threatened with the possibility that we may turn out to be sinners.

For Rahner, the two parts of the Reformation formula can be made acceptable to Roman Catholic theology if they are understood as referring to two ontological levels. The "justified" part refers to the real person in his or her
subjectivity, the transcendental level. The "sinner" part refers to the phenomenal person as she or he is conditioned by her or his pre-personal internal and external situation. In other words, the justified person is designated a "sinner" only analogously, for if the "freedom" of a venial sin is only analogous freedom (GRP, 209), then so is the "guilt" of venial sin.

That venial sin is called "sin", even if in an analogous sense, means that there is some reference to God in it. Were this not so, venial sin would have to be interpreted tragically as an evil fate, without moral any qualification whatsoever. It is here that Rahner's doctrine of original sin comes into play. It is an attempt to account for the 'sin' character of the pre-personal internal situation which conditions our actions in an evil direction.

Original Sin--Sin?

There has been a large movement within Roman Catholic theology in the last forty years to re-interpret the traditional doctrine of original sin. Its point of departure was the difficulty of reconciling the traditional doctrine with an evolutionary view of human origins and the mythic character of the Genesis creation and fall stories, uncovered by biblical criticism (Vandervelde, 1981:42-44). Trent assumed that the Adam and Eve of Genesis were real individuals who were the biological origin of all other human beings. When Adam sinned, he "was changed, in body
and soul for the worse" (Schaff II, 1977:85) and lost for himself and us "that holiness and justice" which God had given to him (Schaff II, 1977:85). All Adam's descendants receive, not only "death and the pains of the body" and the lack of that original holiness and justice, but also his sin "which is the death of the soul" (Schaff II, 1977:85). This solidarity with Adam in sin is assured by our physical connection with him (propagazione) and not "by imitation" (Schaff II, 1977:85).

Rahner, too, was involved in the reinterpretation of original sin. In the early Fifties he wrote a reflection on the encyclical "Humani Generis" which declared that all human beings descended from a single human being (monogenism). In this article, entitled "Theological Reflections on Monogenism" (1961), he attempts to develop a monogenistic view which is also compatible with an evolutionary view of human origins and the mythic view of Genesis 1-3. But, by 1968, Rahner could write that "the idea that polygenism is not irreconcilable with the doctrine of original sin is no longer exposed to the danger of being censured by the authorities of the Church" (SA, 252). However this may be, Rahner's contribution to the debate concerning human origins and its implications for the doctrine of original sin does not concern us here so much as his understanding of the nature and sin character of original sin.
According to Rahner, the dogma of original sin declares that all human beings are born with a lack of sanctifying grace which they ought to have. Rahner accepts the traditional teaching of the Church, but does not merely repeat it; rather he seeks to understand it in terms of his anthropology of the transcendental and categorical aspects of human existence. For Rahner, there must be "confrontation...between the content of this faith and the totality of the believer's own understanding of himself prevailing at any given time" (SA, 248).

Rahner argues that the human being is historical and must see itself as deriving from the past, open to the world, and headed for the future. A discussion of original sin must begin with the "fact of our sinfulness, which we assert of ourselves, is a sinfulness that has been 'derived'" (SA, 249). He says:

For invariably we encounter ourselves as those who have already come to a free decision, and we never encounter ourselves at that original starting-point which there must once have been....The beginning which has been withdrawn from our control (we might call it Urgeschichte is constituted as now in force in virtue of that original stage which is prior to our own freedom and hidden from us....[Our] freedom is always exercised throughout in a situation which creaturely freedom, whether our own or another's, has already helped to shape, a situation which has rendered that which belongs to the origins withdrawn from us, so that we can no longer draw upon its nature to illumine our own acts (SA, 254).
Since, for Rahner, original sin is situation which precedes all our free acts, he takes word "sin" in the term in an analogous sense. According to Rahner, much confusion can be avoided if the analogous nature of the term is recognized. Otherwise, the term "sin" could not be used to describe the given situation of the human being. "The reason for this is that all along there has been a danger of misinterpreting this word so as to suggest that it is through Adam and our descent from him that we have in the strict sense been constituted as sinners, whereas we are such and become such as a result of our own personal and inalienable decision, unique in each particular instance, to go against God" (SA, 252).

Our situation ought not to be one of original sin, for mere human descent ought to have provided the medium of the pre-personal holiness required for salvific deeds. Its absence must "the outcome of the guilt of those men who existed at the beginning of the human race and provided the origins of the rest...At all events: the only possible reason for the non-existence of something which, according to God's will, should exist can be personal guilt" (SA, 257). This guilt, since it happened at the very beginning of history, conditions all subsequent history. This kind of guilt cannot be inherited by or accounted to the descendants of these first human beings. Thus the analogous character of original sin becomes apparent:
That state of analogous guilt which is called original sin is not a projection of the personal state of guilt 'of Adam' to us, but is constituted by the absence of the holy Pneuma which, prior to any moral decision, sanctifies man interiorly when it is present, or would sanctify him if it were so, but the absence of which correspondingly, prior to any personal decision, constitutes an analogous state of guilt, seeing that this deficiency consists not merely in the fact that the holy Pneuma is not present, but implies a deficiency which is the opposite of the situation which ought to exist (SA, 257).

Now we are in a position to see what Rahner means when he says that original sin is sin analogously. Original sin is an existential of the human situation, which ought not to be, i.e., it is not God's will that it be so. The free decision of the first human(s) thwarted God's will and established this situation which ought not to be as the situation in which all subsequent human beings must exercise their freedom. As long as it is present, it conditions all our free acts as "sin", objectively viewed, i.e., they can never be completely according to the will of God (good) because of their starting point.

But we must never think that original sin could thwart God's will in the absolute sense. Sin was permitted only within God's "unconditional and stronger salvific will" to impart self through Christ (OS, 1151). We must always think of original sin as in dialectical tension with the universal salvific will of God which is effective ("at least as offered") in the sanctifying grace of Christ (SA, 259).

"Original sin and grace, therefore, to the extent that both these realities are prior to the personal decision of man,
do not, properly speaking, follow one another in a temporal succession, but rather both together imply a single dialectical situation of man (as a being endowed with freedom) to the extent that a specification is imparted to him both by the 'beginning' (that which provides the origins of mankind) and by Christ as the 'end' and 'goal'" (SA, 259). Thus the human's situation is that in freedom it must decide which of the existential determinations it will make definitively his own (OS, 1151).

Summing up, Rahner understands original sin as a lack of sanctifying grace, which ought not to be, brought about for all human beings by the sinful act of the first human being(s) at the beginning of history. Original sin is thus an existential which precedes, conditions and provides the material in which our freedom must be exercised. Human beings, being born without sanctifying grace, cannot but act in such a way which, objectively viewed, is evil.

Now it ought to be evident how Rahner's understanding of the distinction between mortal and venial sin is related to his view of original sin. Original sin is the negative part of our pre-personal situation, conditioning all our bad acts, allowing them to be interpreted as "venial" sins. Simply by being born into the human family, which lacks sanctifying grace, we are thrust into a situation in which we are bound to do acts which reflect our unholiness. But these acts, which are objectively bad, may not reflect a subjective "no" to God.
They may reflect only that "no" given at the beginning of history.

Concupiscence—Sin?

Many Christian theologians, especially Protestants, have not been satisfied to view original sin as a mere lack, even a lack which ought not to be. There seems to be a pre-personal drive toward the bad, away from the good. Traditionally, this drive has been called concupiscence. Our study of Rahner's doctrine of sin would not be complete without taking up his thought on this point.

Rahner's only major study of concupiscence is found in the first volume of the *Theological Investigations* (ThCC, 347-382). According to Rahner, the doctrine of concupiscence must account for two facts which are in apparent contradiction: concupiscence is called sin by Paul in Romans 7, so it must be "sin" in some sense; but on the other hand, the state of integrity—freedom from concupiscence—must be conceived of as a supernatural, unowed gift. How can it be a sin to be without that which is a supernatural gift? This is the question.

For Rahner, the traditional doctrine of concupiscence (of the "textbooks" as he calls it) has not made it clear how the above dilemma can be solved. It defined concupiscence (in the strict theological sense) as "the sensitive appetite (Begehrungsvermögen) and its act, in so far as this strives after its sensitive object in
opposition to the law of the moral order independently of
the higher, spiritual conative potence, and thus resists the
spiritual free decision of man's will" (ThCC, 350).
According to this definition, concupiscence is experienced
as something which ought not to be. But freedom from
something which ought not to be vis-a-vis created nature
cannot be thought of as a supernatural and unowed gift.
Rahner offers an alternative understanding which he thinks
solves the dilemma.

Rahner distinguishes three senses in which the word
concupiscence can be used: (1) In the broadest sense it is
"any witting (bewusste) reactive attitude adopted to a value
or good...as opposed to a receptive act of awareness".
(ThCC, 358). What distinguishes it from those senses that
follow is that it includes free acts as well as merely
spontaneous acts. (2) In the "narrower" sense it is "the
act of the appetite in regard to a determinate good or a
determinate value, in so far as this act takes shape
spontaneously in the consciousness on the basis of man's
natural dynamism, and as such forms the necessary
presupposition of man's personal free decision" (ThCC, 359).
Rahner insists that this second kind of concupiscence is
really necessary for any free act to take place, for finite
freedom must be given its object if it is to freely adopt an
attitude to it. But freedom does not receive the object in
a purely passive way as a mere neutral object of knowledge;
it receives it already as a value or good, striven toward by
this natural dynamism which Rahner here designates concupiscence.

The third sense of concupiscence is the strictly theological sense: "Man's spontaneous desire, in so far as it precedes his free decision and resists it" (ThCC, 360). Concupiscence is not only the necessary presupposition of free acts; it anticipates them and resists them. This anticipation and resistance is the object of the theological concept of concupiscence in the strict sense.

In order to clarify his understanding of concupiscence, Rahner makes a distinction between person and nature, "person" designating the human being as it freely adopts an attitude vis-a-vis God and the totality of the self, "nature" denoting that which the human being is "prior to this disposal of himself, as its object and the condition of its possibility" (ThCC, 363). Nature here does not mean essence but "objective presence" (Vorhandenheit) (ThCC, 362). It has a "non-free character and is essentially pre-moral" (ThCC, 360).

A free decision aims at shaping the totality of the human being. But it can never totally achieve this, for there always remains in the nature of things a tension between what man is as a kind of entity simply present before one (as 'nature') and what he wants to make of himself by his free decision (as 'person'): a tension between what he is simply passively and what he actively posits himself as and wishes to understand himself to be. The 'person' never wholly absorbs its 'nature'(ThCC, 362).
Concupiscence is, for Rahner, this tension between person and nature, the resistance nature offers to being wholly shaped by the free decisions of the person. It is not simply resistance to good decisions, as textbook theology defines it, but resistance to any free decision, good or evil. It is non-moral and natural, so the term "evil concupiscence" inappropriate (ThCC, 370).

This conception solves the problem of the gratuity of the gift of integrity, for if concupiscence is natural, then the gift of freedom from concupiscence is supernatural and gratuitous. Of course, this notion raises new questions about the precise nature of the gift of integrity, but that is not our concern here.

Now we have the opposite problem from that which plagued the textbook definition. How can something natural can be called "sin" in any sense or experienced as something which ought not to be?

Rahner points out that vis-a-vis nature—now used as opposed to supernature and not as objective presence—concupiscence is natural. If the concrete human being were pure nature then concupiscence would be experienced as something natural and harmless, not as something which ought not to be. But human experience of our concrete existence is shaped by the supernatural existential as well as by pure nature. The supernatural existential calls the human being to a supernatural end which includes freedom from concupiscence, i.e., the gift of
integrity. In this light, the free good decision should not meet with resistance from the nature of the human. This resistance contradicts the supernatural existential (ThCC, 379-38).

For Rahner, this line of thought breaks the second horn of the dilemma, how something natural could be sin. Concupiscence is experienced as something which ought not to be vis-a-vis the human being's supernatural end. And "something which ought not to be" which is, nevertheless, a pre-personal situation of freedom can be called 'sin', but only in an analogous sense, as was original sin.

Now, we will sum up this section which has concerned venial sin, original sin and concupiscence. Original sin is a state (situation) of being without the sanctifying grace which enables humans to perform saving acts. This lack ought not to be, and therefore is sin in an analogous sense. Baptism restores the lack of sanctifying grace and enables the person to perform the salutary act, which is, for Rahner, a free "yes" to God. This good decision does not, however, completely shape the objective presence (nature) of the person according to its intentionality, for nature resists the implementation of the free decision. The restoration of sanctifying grace does not restore the gift of integrity, i.e., the ability to fully implement the free decision. This lack, vis-a-vis the call of the supernatural existential and sanctifying grace, ought not to be. It is sin in an analogous sense.
Objectively bad acts, in so far as they arise out of the 'sinful' situation in which freedom must operate, are 'sin' only in an analogous sense. These acts, if they do not reflect a transcendental "no" to God, are called venial sin.

Sin: More Than a possibility?

We will now address an important question which arises from considering Rahner's view of the act of sin: has not Rahner defined sin in such a way that the Christian confession "I believe in the forgiveness of sins" is weakened? If sin is the free, radical and definitive "no" to God, then there can no forgiveness for sin in the proper sense, for the "no" to God is also a "no" to the forgiveness of sins. Of course, we could still confess, "I believe in the forgiveness of analogous sins" or "I believe the ultimate removal of evil". But could we confess our sins, evil which is knowingly and willingly generated by us? The thought of evil's removal would still be an occasion of great joy and gratitude, but could it be the joy of one who was really converted from evil or the gratitude of one raised from death to life?

Perhaps we have misunderstood Rahner, for he speaks of "grace as forgiving" ("Grace", 1975:591) and confesses, "Of ourselves we are always sinners" (JS, 228). Anselm Grun, in his book _Erlösung durch das Kreuz_ (1975), argues that, for Rahner, the self-communication of God effects not
merely the "divinization" (Vergöttlichung) of human nature, but also the "forgiveness" (Vergebung) of sin (91-105). Perhaps the most clear statement of Rahner's conviction appears in a passage where he shows the ground of redemption's possibility. He says:

Guilt in the concrete order as "sin" is the free No to God's...offer of his self-communi-
cation....Through a No to divine love of that kind, man of himself can no longer reckon on the continuance of that love, especially as it is the love of the absolutely holy and just God who is the absolute contradiction of such a refusal. Only if that love freely endures even in the face of such a refusal and, as divine and of infinite power to set free, goes beyond that guilt, is forgiveness possible, i.e., is there any possibility of man freely loving, responding in a genuine dialogue, made possible by God (S, 1519).

Does this text not end all doubt about Rahner's ability to confess, "I believe in the forgiveness of sin"? At least, does it not show that Rahner holds both positions, i.e., that real sin is definitive and not definitive, which only proves him to be inconsistent? Indeed, Rahner may be inconsistent on this point, and from Rahner's own perspective that is neither unexpected nor problematic.

He addressed a similar concern in his article "Does Traditional Theology Represent Guilt as Innocuous as a Factor in Human Life?" (GIF), where argued that it would be a mistake to push the traditional Roman Catholic doctrine of sin to logical consistency. There is an inescapable pluralism in the doctrine of sin, two foundational experiences, the one of being threatened by guilt, the other
of hope in God who can remove the guilt, being at its root. These two experiences do not mutually imply each other, and they cannot be raised to a higher synthesis.

The tension in Rahner's doctrine of sin is caused by this fundamental pluralism. When he has human responsibility in view, he emphasizes the radical freedom and finality of the act of sin, but when he is concerned with salvation from sin as a possibility he gives the impression that even the free act of sin does not have finality, due to the overriding finality God's salvific will.

But we have not yet solved the riddle of the text quoted above. Does this text really show an inconsistency in Rahner's doctrine of sin--which would be the optimistic reading--or is it saying something other than what it appears to be saying, i.e., other than that sin in the most proper sense can be forgiven? Assuming that it refers to sin proper, Grun quotes this text to show that "Schuld ist eben nicht ein Verstoss gegen irgendwelche innerweltliche Normen, so dass der Mensch die Folgen seines Verstosses wieder selbst bereinigen konnte", but rather is a "Nein" to the offer of the self-communication of God (43). Against Grun, we must interpret this article in another way, for Rahner cannot be saying that the transcendental, fully subjective, whole-life "no" to God can be reversed or forgiven, affirming an intrinsic contradiction.
There are also material reasons for concluding that Rahner has a different "no" in mind. The article in which this text appears ("Salvation," 1975:1519-1530) begins by affirming two conditions of redemption, one on the human side and one on the divine, arguing that the human being can be saved "ultimately because even his freedom is finite and remains comprised within God's creative love" (S, 1519). What does "finite freedom" mean, and why and how is it a condition of possibility of redemption? Can it be identical to radical freedom vis-a-vis the totality of the self before God?

Rahner contends further that the guilt from which humans need to be saved is both "the state of original sin" and "the action of individual freedom" (S, 1519). We know what he means by "the state of original sin", but what is the ontological status of "the action of individual freedom"? Is it the total life-act of the radical freedom to say "yes" or "no" to God?

The lengthy text we quoted above gives us a third expression which requires careful interpretation, "guilt in the concrete order." Is this the guilt incurred by the free, transcendental "no" to God?

Before we answer these questions we will examine the second condition of redemption: our acts "remained comprised within God's creative love" (S, 1519). Later on Rahner gives content to this expression when he says that our "no" is always a response to God's offer of self. Our
sinful act "has a dialogal character", for when the human being says "no" to God's offer, God goes beyond the "guilt" and renews the offer (S, 1519). This "going beyond" is the forgiveness which makes possible further dialogue and a possible future "yes" (S, 1519-20). This dialogue presumably goes on until a definitive decision is made.

Now we are in a position to ask the decisive question: If God "goes beyond" the "no", does not God treat the "no" as less than radically free, total and definitive? If there is to be any hope that God's renewed offer could be met in the future with a "yes"—since God has only Godself and hence nothing new to offer—does this not mean that the human person had not fully known God in God's prior, rejected offer?

Since this "no" of "finite freedom" cannot be the "no" of transcendental freedom, it must be the categorical "no" conditioned by the "situation" of freedom, venial sin. The "no" given "in the concrete order" or "the action of individual freedom", is the result of concupiscence and original sin, and is only analogous sin. And this puts us right back where we began: Rahner's conceptuality makes it impossible to confess "I believe in the forgiveness of sins".

But this is not the whole story, for Rahner knows that Christian theology must affirm the possibility of the forgiveness of sins, not only of analogous sin, but of real sin. The problem is that Rahner's conceptuality of
transcendental versus categorical will not handle any intermediary levels. Sin as transcendental is free and definitive, and sin as categorical is unfree, and is sin only in so far as it reflects a transcendental "no", analogously. There is no place from which human beings can sin with full subjectivity and still be redeemed. Yet, his treatment in the article analyzed implicitly calls for such a place. The confusion which we have been trying to clear up results from contradiction between Rahner's commitment to the kerygma of the forgiveness of sins and the limitations of his conceptuality.

The Act of Sin: A Re-statement

The first step needed to solve this problem is related to the study in Chapter Two. We must reject the idea that human beings commit sin from the heights that Rahner thinks. If sin must be committed from the height of freedom vis-a-vis the totality of the self and before God, then all actual sin is demonic, and all sinners are fallen angels. If humans ever arrive at such heights it will be as a result of full, definitive salvation. It cannot be a neutral potentiality for a "yes" or "no".

An understanding must be developed of an intermediate ontological position between the heights of angelic freedom and situational unfreedom, between sin as a definitive act of self-determination and sin as an evil happening. How this task might be carried out is beyond the
scope of this investigation. Only a few indications can be given here.

The point of departure for Rahner's understanding of the act of sin is the Christian dogma of the human person's responsibility for sin and the basic Christian understanding of sin as an offense against God. According to Rahner, full responsibility for an offense against God implies freedom vis-à-vis God and the totality of the self, sin being conceived of as a free "no" to God, the true God. Since sin is committed from such a height, it is final and definitive, and no objectively bad act not done from this height can be sin in the proper sense.

But is Rahner's starting point for the doctrine of sin the only one possible? What if we also assume, in addition to Rahner's assumptions, that the biblical affirmation "all have sinned" affirms that all have sinned in the most proper sense? It seems most unreasonable to assume otherwise.

If real sinners can be saved, then sin must be committed from an intermediary place. It must be understood as a responsible act which, nevertheless, does not dispose of the whole person definitively; done with full subjectivity, but without absolute subjectivity; done knowingly, but without knowing God as God truly is.

In dealing with this problem, the distinction between the Creator and the creature must be kept firmly in mind. Human beings have their own level of being, their own
place. Humans are not God nor part of God. Neither naturally, nor by grace do humans have the freedom to make a judgment about God. We are rightly called sinners because with whatever subjectivity we have and gain, we invariably say "no" to whatever we perceive of the true God. Whatever the situation into which we are cast, we invariably affirm, with whatever subjectivity we attain, the "sin" which came before us. We may not know the true God, but God has allowed every one to know that he or she is not God. Yet, we act as if we were God, lording it over creation and our fellow human beings. This alone is enough to make us responsible. This is sin in the proper sense.

A COMPARISON OF BARTH AND RAHNER ON THE ACT OF SIN

In what ways and to what extent do Barth and Rahner agree on the nature of the act to sin? How do they diverge?

The Essence of Sin—An Agreement

If we ask only about the material content of the act of sin in the most strict and proper sense, Barth and Rahner agree. They agree, not only with each other, but also with the central tradition from Paul to Augustine to Luther to Trent to today.
The concrete act of sin in its most proper sense has always been defined as the responsible and culpable "no" of the human person to God. This is so to speak the kerygma of the doctrine of sin. The kerygma says that this "no" is what the human person does, but ought not to do. This "no" has been described as pride (Augustine) and unbelief (Calvin). It has always been seen as a refusal to be human (sloth) and a denial of the truth (falsehood). It is a breaking of covenant with God and other human beings. Neither Barth nor Rahner add anything materially to the traditional understanding of the act of sin.

Barth and Rahner agree that sin is an offense against God, that it contradicts human nature and implies its annihilation, that it is a closing of self to the neighbor. Neither one abandons the biblical message for some sort of philosophical modus vivendi between good and evil. Sin is not reduced to a necessary means to a greater good. For both, sin is sin. It is abortive and accomplishes no good. It is incomprehensible; it ought not to be.

The Possibility of Redemption and Human Responsibility for Sin—Are They Related?

The present chapter is the pivot of this study. Here we are concerned with the kerygma, the point of departure, for a Christian doctrine of sin. Barth and Rahner faithfully proclaim this kerygma. When, however, they begin to deal with the questions which the kerygma
raises (the understanding of faith), Barth and Rahner begin to diverge. Chapter One dealt with how we know about this act. Chapter Two dealt with the possibility of this act. There were differences between Barth and Rahner in both of these areas. And these differences have implications for the topic of this chapter also.

Rahner begins with a transcendental analysis of the kerygma, asking for the transcendental conditions of the possibility of sin, as defined in the kerygma, and he deduces the idea of freedom vis-a-vis the totality of the self before God (Chapter Two). Since this type of freedom decides about the totality of the self, sin must be thought of as a final and definitive act. If a human being sins, freedom is exhausted; there is no return or salvation. All humans are potentially sinners, for they may freely decide for or against God. With this the transcendental analysis is complete.

But there is more material to be accounted for than can be reconciled with Rahner's analysis. The Christian confession also proclaims the universality of sin and the forgiveness of sin. And Rahner attempts to incorporate these other ideas into his thought, for, though he considers real sin to be final and definitive, he argues that Christians must confess themselves as sinners. In order to be able to do this, however, Rahner uses the word "sin" in two senses, a strict sense referring to the transcendental "no" and an analogous sense referring to the universality of
sin and to the forgiveness of sin. Sin's universality is made conceivable by the doctrine of original sin (SA, 260), and the forgiveness of sin is rendered understandable by the idea of venial sin. All these, it must be kept in mind, are sin only analogously, as a situation which precedes and conditions the free act.

The difference between Barth and Rahner comes into clear focus here. Barth takes the biblical idea of sin's universality to refer to "sin" in the most proper (and traditional) sense as a willing, responsible and culpable "no" to God. Nothing which does not meet these conditions should be called "sin", even in an analogous sense. Whereas Rahner takes the responsibility of sin as the primary notion and co-ordinates the other biblical notions (universality and the possibility of redemption) around it, Barth attempts to take universality, responsibility and the possibility of redemption all on the same level as equally determined by Jesus Christ. Barth renounces the conceptual link which Rahner seeks between universality and responsibility, for God declares all human beings to be (responsible) sinners, and that is that.

Obviously, Barth is much less disposed than Rahner to seek rational coherence among the Christian doctrines. Whereas Rahner pushes for a connection among the biblical concepts of sin's universality, the forgiveness of sins and full human responsibility for sin, Barth is more willing to repeat the paradoxical juxtaposition of these three ideas.
But in Barth, too, there is a systematic impulse. The relationship between human responsibility for sin and the possibility of redemption from sin is not assured merely by a declaration of God, as was the relation between sin's universality and human responsibility for sin. In fact, Barth does with the possibility of redemption what Rahner does with human responsibility. He makes it primary, subordinating human responsibility to it. Real sin is forgiveable because God has in fact forgiven it in Jesus Christ, but sinners are responsible simply because God declares them so.

Barth aims to let the free act and person of God in Jesus Christ be the center and hermeneutical principle in theology. He illustrates this with the example of the spokes and the wheel. The center is a hole, representing Jesus Christ in his freedom. The spokes are the loci of Christian doctrine: God, creation, reconciliation and redemption. The loci are related to each other only as they proceed out of the center. There is no overarching doctrine or speculative principle to which the loci may be reduced; therefore no theological system is possible.

This is Barth's aim. In practice, however, a particular Christology forms the center and hermeneutical principle of his dogmatics. This Christology is reflected in the doctrine of sin, with the three divisions truly God, truly Man and God-Man, corresponding negatively to the three forms of sin, pride, sloth and falsehood. The possibility
of redemption from sin has more Christological currency than human responsibility, for it is taken as primary, and human responsibility is relegated to a secondary position. If real sin is forgiveable, then it can not define the total person before God. Therefore, whatever human responsibility means (Chapter Two), it cannot mean freedom vis-a-vis God and the totality of the self. It is, in a negative way, a function of the possibility of redemption.

Barth affirms a "responsibility" without definitiveness. Evaluated from Rahner's perspective this use of the word responsible is, ironically, an analogous use, for it lacks full transcendental freedom. Implicitly, Barth places humans in an intermediate ontological position where they can be said to fully will their sin with all the subjectivity possible at their ontological level. This state would be definitive were it not for God's intervention. Yet, forgiveness and salvation are conceivable because sin is not committed from a position of absolute subjectivity and a complete grasp of God.

Another irony follows from this: from Rahner's perspective Barth uses "sin" in an analogous sense. It is committed from a higher level of subjectivity than Rahner attributes to acts determined by the concupiscent situation of humans, but it does not have the level of subjectively required to be sin in the proper sense.
For Barth, unlike Rahner, original sin and concupiscence are sin in the proper sense, all of our objectively bad deeds being also subjectively sin. The term "original sin" does not signify a situation brought about by someone else's sin, but is the term which proclaims that the very first act of the human is already subjectively sin. From the beginning, we are creatures of pride, sloth and falsehood. That is what we want to be. Since Barth has already secured the idea of the possibility of redemption from sin and the actual forgiveness of sin, he can indulge painting the darkest picture of the sinner possible. He need not make excuses for human behavior by reference to the bad situation of freedom.

Rahner, on the other hand, has to secure the possibility of redemption from sin precisely at this point, making it appear as if he is trying to give human beings excuses for their sin. This is not the case. He is forced into this, ironically, by his decision to begin with the proclamation of the full human responsibility for sin. For humans to be fully responsible for sin, Rahner thought it necessary that sin be committed from a transcendental height which creates a final and definitive situation. For this reason, he had to show that there is the lack of freedom (and therefore lack of real sin) in original sin, concupiscence and venial sin (which are universal) in order to secure the possibility of redemption. For Rahner, "sin" is forgiveable as long as we understand that forgiveable sin
is analogous sin.

From Rahner's perspective, however, it is Barth who gives excuses to the human. Barth makes all sin equal (personal sin, concupiscence, original sin and venial sin), but at the price of reducing the level of freedom in the act of sin proper and raising the level of freedom in analogous sin (original sin, etc.). The result, from Rahner's perspective, is a sort of average which renders everything unintelligible, for one cannot understand sin at all without the concept of sin as the free and definitive "no" to God and the totality of the self. Anything less lacks full responsibility and culpability.

Original Sin: A Comparison

Let us now compare Barth's and Rahner's understanding of original sin at closer range. Concupiscence and venial sin will be treated implicitly in this discussion.

Barth rejects the idea of inherited sin. If it is inherited it cannot be sin; if it is sin it cannot be inherited, he argues. This is axiomatic for Barth. He believes that there was no original sin in the sense of a first sin which was unique in its presuppositions and effects. The term "original sin" is retained only as a cipher for the biblical proclamation of the universal and total sway of sin. All human beings sin with and from their first act of self-determination.
Rahner, on the other hand, defends the idea of inherited sin, not simply because he is bound as a teacher of the Roman Catholic Church to the canons of the Council of Trent, but also because his own conceptuality demands it. His understanding of the essence of sin requires that he reject a personalistic view of original sin, such as Barth's. What has traditionally been called "inherited sin" is the situation in which freedom must operate. It is the situation of being conditioned, internally and externally, by the guilt of others who came before us—but above all by that of the archetypical first sinner.

Why is this situation called "sin"? Rahner's definition of the essence of sin does not require it. Indeed, it seems to exclude it. But the biblical message of sin's universality demands it, so Rahner understands it as sin in an analogous sense.

From Barth's perspective, Rahner's solution is merely term juggling. It refuses to face the dilemma. One must choose one of the horns, either situation or sin, but one cannot escape through the middle with the concept of "analogous" sin. The concept of analogous sin, though not addressed directly by Barth, bears too great a similarity to Protestant Liberalism's understanding of sin as some sort of privation which can be overcome within history. Sin is removed from concrete life and made into a mere possibility which is rarely, if ever, realized. As far as daily life is concerned, the sin with which we must deal and from which we
suffer is sin only analogously. We need not think of ourselves as subjectively sinners. Probably, most human beings have chosen the God of transcendental experience, and, in spite of all appearances to the contrary, are struggling as best they can to express this decision in the categorical realm.

Barth might have protested against Rahner's conception of original sin in this way: "what difference is there between this view and that of Protestant Liberalism? Rahner views human beings precisely as does Liberalism, as basically good but conditioned by pre-personal limitations which can be overcome. Adding the theoretical possibility that someone somewhere might sometime become a sinner does not change the overall implications of the system. And objecting that it is only by God's help (grace) that these limitations can be overcome does not change a thing. Such "grace" is not radical forgiving grace which contradicts the human being's contradiction (real sin), but it is merely helping grace which aids the human being in attaining the goal which is at the end of the already set human trajectory. Sin may not be theoretically eradicated in Rahner's thought, but it is practically domesticated."

On the other hand, Barth can be criticized from Rahner's perspective. Barth demands that we choose either to call original sin a situation or sin, but he is not consistent with this demand. What Barth calls sin is not sin in the fullest sense, according to Rahner, because it is
not done in freedom vis-a-vis the totality of the self before God, but from some intermediate level at which there is a lack of knowledge of God and lack of self-possession. Does not this intermediate level constitute a situation? Yes, it is a situation—a situation of finitude which renders the sin done at that level venial, i.e., lacking in subjectivity, and therefore not definitive, forgiveable. Thus, Barth does not hold to his radical demand.

**Summary**

Barth and Rahner agree about the definition of sin in the proper sense. For both, it is a "no" to the gracious God of Jesus Christ. Both accept the biblical message of sin's universality, forgiveness, and full human responsibility for it. But, when it comes to the concrete order, the disagreements seem irresolvable. For Barth, sin in the proper sense is universal and the real sinner is redeemable; for Rahner, the sin which is universal and forgiveable is sin only analogously. For Rahner, original sin and concupiscence are venial or analogous sin; for Barth, they are sin, proper.

But there a faint hope that we may find, if not an agreement, at least that the contradiction about the status of analogous sin can be somewhat softened. Reading Barth through Rahner's eyes has forced Barth's ontological presuppositions to the surface. The affirmation of the possibility the sinner's redemption implies that biblical
"sin", for Barth, is only analogous to the concept of sin as Rahner defines it, i.e., a free and definitive "no" to God. This results from Barth's strict use of the biblical narrative to define sin, rather than a transcendental deduction from the concept of responsibility.

In principal, Barth and Rahner agree about the analogous nature of original sin and concupiscence. This, by no means, resolves all the disagreements, but it puts the questions of original sin and concupiscence in a different light. We must not think that Barth says that original sin and concupiscence are done with full transcendental subjectivity. Original sin means, for Karl Barth, that with the first emergence of subjectivity in the human person, sin is chosen as what it wants to do and be. But the level of subjectivity in original sin and other categorical sin is left an open question. There room for discussion on this point.
Chapter IV
THE SUBJECT OF THE ACT OF SIN

Who is the subject of the act of sin, the one who says "no" to God? I am not speaking of angels or demons, and it is not appropriate to attribute sin to animals. The doctrine of sin concerns the relationship of human beings to God. What or who is this "human" who stands before God as a creature and sinner?

The question of human identity can be approached in many ways, for we are many things, matter, life, animals and homo sapiens. Biochemistry, biology, sociology, psychology all concern human beings. We may study ourselves as one entity among others, likening and differentiating ourselves from things like us and unlike us within the cosmos (Scheler, 1928). Since we are human, we view the world anthropocentrically, understanding ourselves as the center of a world of lower things, such as rocks, plants and animals; things on our level, other human beings; and things higher, such as mythical creatures, angels and God (Moultman, 1974). Human beings also participate in being as such, so anthropology can be pursued as the question the beingness of beings (Heidegger, 1962).

We are concerned with the question of who the human being is before God, in its self-chosen identity, willing and freedom. It is a question which concerns the person of the human being, so it must be answered in personalistic
language, unlike the question, "What is a human being?" which concerns the human being in the givenness of its nature, prior to its free self-chosen determination.

A phenomenology of the human being cannot disclose who we are before God, for it attempts to grasp who we are within whole cosmos of concrete beings, or the whole abstractly considered, being as such. To know ourselves we must grasp the whole, for we exist only in relation to the whole; yet we have no assurance that we can get outside ourselves to grasp the whole.

Barth and Rahner agree that the human being can be known truly only in confrontation with the revelation of God. Encounter with the whole of the finite world (or abstractly considered, being itself), if that were possible, cannot give us the knowledge of self, but in the encounter with God's self-revelation, we encounter the whole world, and ourselves as well.

We will not attempt to describe the entire theological anthropology of Rahner and Barth, but confine ourselves to the core of their anthropologies, to that part which is necessary for the solution to the questions raised by the doctrine of sin. This part of their work is especially concerned with the "who" of the human before God, for it is only the personhood of the human before God which gives any meaning to the idea of sin.
RAHNER'S ANTHROPOLOGY OF THE SINNER

For Karl Rahner, the human being who sins is a nature supernaturally elevated, not merely with an extrinsic gift or capacity (created grace), but with God as an inner constituent of its being (uncreated grace). The resultant person is placed in a position which no being unelevated by grace could be, continually before God in such a way that the infinite God becomes an object of choice. The Human is that being who may and must choose whether to say "yes" or "no" to God, and is constituted as a subject by being given this choice. The human subject is an openness to the destiny, either of being forever closed against God or being in absolute closeness to God. By the choice for or against God the human subject completes itself and comes into its definitive realization.

Human Being as Spirit in the World

Perhaps the best way to characterize Rahner's early anthropology is by the title of his early book, Spirit in the World. This book focused on the nature of the human being as a knower who becomes aware of itself by its encounter with the material world, whereas in his later works Rahner's concept of spirit is broadened out to include the concepts of person and subject (FChF, 26). Indeed, in the later writings (60s and 70s) Rahner is almost totally
concerned with the human being as a free self-determining person, rather than a knowing being (Taylor, 1986:59).

For Rahner, being a person "means the self-possession of a subject as such in a conscious and free relationship to the totality of itself" (FChF, 30). We know that we are conditioned and determined by our being in the world, by our material, biological and psychological makeup, and precisely as we recognize our determinedness we posit and experience our personhood, affirming a "more original" unity, not fully comprehended by the plurality of our observable makeup (FChF, 31). We transcend our determinedness whether or not we make this transcendence an object of reflection.

The ground of this transcendence is the human being's unthematic grasp of being itself, for only within the infinite horizon of being and in the medium of the world of persons and things can we grasp ourselves and become persons. And because we grasp ourselves we are responsible, open ended, and free to become what we are not yet. According to Rahner, the human person "begins his existence as the being who is radically open and incomplete. When his essence is complete it is as he himself has freely created it" ("The Experiment with Man", 1973:213).

But we must look at the concrete makeup of the human person more closely, and from a more explicitly theological viewpoint.
The "Supernatural Existential"--Again

We will now consider again Rahner's idea of the supernatural existential. In Chapter One the idea was introduced in its historical context as a response to the Nouvelle Theologie and discussed for its significance as the ground of freedom, the possibility of a "no" to God. With as little repetition as possible, the supernatural existential will now be viewed from the perspective of its role in constituting the human subject, the one who sins.

As was pointed out above, the supernatural existential was originally the theological postulate of a readiness, a potentiality or a need of the concrete human being for grace and glory. The postulate was designed, on the one hand, to avoid extrinsicism which makes the human's eventual endowment with grace a mere external addition to human nature rather than its fulfillment, and, on the other hand, to avoid intrinsicism which assumes that this potentiality is essential to human being. This potential is given with the presence of a supernatural existential in the makeup of the concrete human being. It is supernatural not being given with the human essence; thus a pure human nature is thinkable, if only as a "remainder concept" (CRNG, 313). On the other hand, it is an existential and thus it precedes and conditions all our free activity. Its fulfillment can be experienced as a fulfillment of concrete human nature, if not essential human nature.
By the time of *Foundations* (1976), the supernatural existential had been filled out with content, becoming the self-communication of Godself in the mode of an offer (FChF, 126), God's presence elevating the human's transcendality, making the free reception or rejection of God possible (FChF, 129).

Rahner proposes a way within traditional causal categories of understanding how God can be an existential the human being. It cannot be by efficient causality, for this would mean that God is present merely by means of created entities. Strict formal causality will not do either, for that would imply that God's being becomes an essential feature of the human.

Rahner offers instead the concept of "quasi-formal causality", whereby God can become a constitutive feature of the human being without losing God's essence and freedom (FChF, 121). He insists that his treatment of God's self-communication cannot be interpreted in a pantheistic way, for God is said to maintain God's freedom even in the giving of self, and the creature remains other than God (123). God remains a mystery, even in the absolute closeness of God's self-communication.

There is an ambiguity in Rahner's idea of the supernatural existential. On the one hand, the supernatural existential concerns the "what" of the human, being a component of its ontological makeup. Rahner can use causal language to describe it, i.e., quasi-formal causality. On
the other hand, it concerns the "who" of the human, for it is a dialogic relationship between God and the human person. In keeping with the general trend of his thought, the Rahner of the Foundations plays down the ontological and emphasizes the dialogic nature of the supernatural existential, introducing the idea of quasi-formal causality with the qualification, "if, then, one wants to bother with such analogous application of ontic concepts at all..." (FChF, 121). Obviously, the human being as a person, the "who", has moved to the center of Rahner's thinking. There is also a corresponding linguistic shift to the language of dialogue to describe the God/human relationship.

Though the supernatural existential is the uncreated presence of God, there are created effects of this presence (FChF, 121), such as the elevation of transcendality to include the possibility of the "yes" or "no" to Godself. The subject, then, can be thought of as having a mode of existence prior to the decision about God, which is as yet undetermined by the possibilities that lie before it.

The elevated subject is not, however, in a neutral position, for it has an obligation to say "yes" to God. The offer of Godself represents the offer of the fulfillment of human nature and freedom, and the subject must be able to recognize the offer for what it is, salvation and fulfillment, and the other alternative for what it is, absolute alienation, Hell.
For Rahner, this elevated subject, who knows God in absolute closeness as the One who offers self in love, is the subject of sin. It can make a valid, and thus final and definitive, decision about God and the totality of self. There is no difference, before the decision, between the subject who will decide against God and the one who will decide for God, the free act of the subject constituting the dividing line. The subject who says "yes" to God becomes subjectively what it is objectively, for it fulfills the supernatural destiny offered in the supernatural existential. The subject who says "no" becomes subjectively what it is not objectively, aborting the destiny offered in the supernatural existential.

Subjectivity and Concrete Evil Acts

Up to this point we have been concerned with the subject of the transcendental act of sin. Now, we must ask about the subject of concrete acts which are evil, considered objectively. After all, the evil will of a subject is revealed in evil acts of the kind which we observe in ourselves and in others daily. Indeed, all human beings sin consciously—even premeditatedly—in the psychological and juridical sense.

For Rahner, neither the objective quality of a deed nor the psychological state of a person is an infallible indication of subjective sin, for, however premeditatedly an evil act is done, it may be, from the transcendental point
of view, merely suffered. We have to work out our final subjective identity within situation of universal original sin and concupiscence, as well as our own more or less constricting historical circumstances, so an evil deed may reflect more the pre-personal situation in which we have to operate than our subjective decision about who we really want to be.

Rahner is not saying that an evil deed can be done without any subjectivity, for nothing can simply happen to us, not even death. We take up a subjective stance to everything in our situation, every deed reflecting the subject, either in the form of suffering or acting. The evil deeds of a person who has subjectively decided for God reflect his or her subjectivity as the best he or she can do in the circumstances. On the other hand, for the person who has decided against God, evil deeds reflect an evil subjective decision, the subject not merely suffering the evil situation, but subjectively affirming it.

Thus the subject of the objective evil deed is the same as that of the definitive decision of the "yes" or "no" to God. The subject externalizes self in all of its objective deeds; yet no deed can, objectively viewed, unambiguously reveal the subjective decision about God. Some more or less approximate it and these—viewed as objective deeds—can be said to embody more of the subjectivity of the person than others. But again this "more or less" is a quality only of the objective deed.
From the subjective perspective there is no more or less, all deeds, either as passively endured or actively perpetrated, either openly or hiddenly, embodying the final decision for or against God.

*The Subject of the Transcendental "Yes" or "No": An Evaluation*

Even though Rahner attributes great possibilities to the freedom of the human person, he is still clear that it is finite, limited by an inner necessity to relate to God. To be sure, it can relate as a "yes" or "no", but there is no freedom to dispense with having to do with God. Furthermore, the human being's freedom has to do with God, not directly, but indirectly by relating to a world of limited possibilities ("ein begrenztes Feld von Möglichkeiten") (Eicher, 1970:354). Eicher summarizes:

> der Mensch frei nur sein kann, weil er implizit schon immer auf das Absolute bezogen ist; seine Freiheit bleibt aber eine endliche, weil er durch diesen vorgegebenen Bezug frei nur ist in einer vorgegebenen endlichen Welt. Jede innerweltliche Wahl wirkt aber zurück auf den fundamentalen Transzendenzbezug zu Gott und also auf das eigentliche Selbst des Menschen: durch seine freie Tat wirt der Mensch erst zur Person (354).

Rahner, then, has no intention of attributing to the human person a capacity which is God's alone; yet, we cannot but ask whether, in spite of his intentions and safeguards he has left himself open to this charge. Rahner's concept of the self-realization (selbstvollzug) of the human person attributes to the person the ability (God given of course!)
to achieve his or her own salvation or damnation—a thought which jars Protestant sensibilities. For Rahner, salvation "means rather the final and definitive validity of a person's true self-understanding and true self-realization in freedom before God by the fact that he accepts his own self as it is disclosed and offered to him in the choice of transcendence as interpreted in freedom" (FChF, 39). To be sure, it presupposes "what we know as free creation and free grace", but the human really is free "to determine himself to his ultimate state" ("The Experiment with Man", 1973:212).

For the salvific self-determination to be possible, the human person must gain, or more precisely, be given a position vis-a-vis the totality of the self. This is possible only if the human at the same time gains or is given a position from which to decide about God—God, not a law of God, a concept of God or a created gift of God. From what position could such a decision about God be made? The human must either transcend God—which is absurd—or participate in God's being. If the human were God, there could be no decision about God but simply recognition, the Absolute coming to itself.

But Rahner denies that the human being is or ever will be God, for God remains forever incomprehensible, the Mystery ("An Investigation of the Incomprehensibility of God in St. Thomas Aquinas", 1979:244-254). The human person must decide about the incomprehensible God, not from a
position above, nor within, but before God—before the dark, silent, holy mystery of God. God's incomprehensibility makes a decision possible and necessary, for were God fully comprehensible no decision need be made.

The human person must decide whether or not to understand self as originating from and destined for this Mystery. We are not in a position to decide about God in terms of some standard known to us—the good, the true, and the beautiful—to which God must conform; but rather whether we will allow all our notions of the good, true and beautiful to be infinitely transcended in the unfathomable mystery of God.

Now we are in a better position to decide whether or not Rahner has left himself open to the charge of attributing to the human a position which only God can occupy. The answer is no, for the freedom in which the human person decides about God is clearly finite, without complete comprehension of God, made as a surrender, a venture. The duality between subject and object, will and knowledge, is not sublated into absolute knowledge.

Rahner is saved from the tendency toward idealism inherent in his transcendental method because he holds tenaciously to the incomprehensibility of God. The method of beginning with the abstract concept of responsibility and asking for the grounds of its possibility tends toward the reduction of the subject/object duality. Absolute responsibility implies absolute knowledge, and absolute
knowledge implies the self-knowledge of the absolute subject. But Rahner calls a halt, perhaps arbitrarily, to the transcendental logic with the theological postulate of God's incomprehensibility.

Again we come up against a linguistic problem, for Rahner uses the terms "freedom", "free decision" in a sense which is confusing and has to be unpacked. He does not mean, as I have shown, absolute freedom, and yet this is the direction which his transcendental logic takes him. No matter what he calls it, Rahner implies a "freedom" on a level between free choice from among finite alternatives and absolute freedom. Barth's position implied a similar position (Chapter Two), and his raises the interesting possibility that Barth and Rahner, despite their linguistic differences, may approximate each other here in a surprising way concerning the place from which the subject makes the decision. We will keep this possibility in mind in the next section and test its plausibility in the third section.

The Subject of Concrete Evil: An Evaluation

What about the subject of concrete evil acts? These may or may not reflect a subjective decision against God, for even the best act may embody a wicked subjectivity and the worst act may embody a good subjectivity, implying a complete separation between the actuality of a deed and its meaning. It may have evil effect in the world but a good origin in the transcendental subject, an evil intention
(psychologically) but a good intentionality (ontologically). Why does Rahner insist on this separation, and what is its validity?

Earlier, I pointed out that Rahner interposed the theological postulate of God's incomprehensibility to call a halt to the transcendental logic which would have led to absolute idealism. Here is a case in which Rahner allowed the transcendental logic complete consistency, concluding that full responsibility implies definitiveness, the exhaustion of freedom's possibilities. Rahner accepts this conclusion because it seems to be consistent with the Christian notion of human accountability for the whole of life.

Rahner also seems to be convinced of near universal salvation. And this raises a problem: how can Rahner hold to the universality of sin, the definitiveness of the sinful decision and yet have hope of universal salvation? Rahner is able to reconcile these concepts by making a separation between the actuality and the meaning of the evil deed. The transcendental decision and the categorical act are noetically separated, opening up a sort of a "Kantian ditch". No extrapolation from the categorical acts to the transcendental subject is possible. "You can't judge a book by its cover--nor by the story inside--but only by its unknown author!"
Rahner could have followed his earlier precedent, calling a halt to the transcendental logic by interposing a theological idea, such as the universality of sin in the proper sense, stopping the transcendental logic before it reached the conclusion that subjective sin must be definitive. Or if Rahner had taken the redemption of real sinners as seriously as he did the universality of (analogous) sin, he would have had to reconsider his radical separation of categorical evil acts from their subjective meaning.

Rahner's use of the idea of God's incomprehensibility ought to have led to this result, for if God is incomprehensible, then the human person cannot be in a position to make a definitive decision. If God is as Rahner considers God to be, the inexhaustible, the ever new, and the "ever greater" ("Being Open to God as Ever Greater", 1971:25-46), then the human negative decision must in principle reformable—though only through God's renewed initiative, so there is no need to labor hard to show that a categorically evil deed can reflect a transcendently good decision.

KARL BARTH AND THE GOOD CREATURE WHO SINS

For Karl Barth, it is the good creature of God who sins. The human creature who was created for obedience, faith, and love to God refuses to be that for which it was
created. Created for freedom and salvation, to be before God and with God, it makes no use of the freedom given it, spurning the salvation offered it. It has no permission and no freedom to sin, but it transgresses the bounds set for it, selling itself into slavery. True humanity is in no way neutral, for it is by definition a "yes" to God. The human creature, however, attempts to be human against the essence of its humanness, falling prey to nothingness.

The good creature of God remains the good creature of God even in its sin, for its true humanness is accomplished, resides and is disclosed in Jesus Christ by God's gracious election. The human creature—whose true being is in Jesus Christ—sins, positing itself in contradiction to its own being, defining itself other than it is defined in Jesus Christ. Therefore it posits the unreal, the absolutely impossible.

Barth's Anthropology: An Introduction

In Barth's three-fold treatment of the doctrine of sin (CD IV 1-3), he rarely speaks of the subject of the act of sin, but the fully developed theological anthropology of Volume III. 2 is assumed throughout. Barth reminds us that the human person has no freedom to sin, for sin "contradicts the concept of man" (CD IV 1, 419).

When discussing the fallen state, i.e., the being of the sinner or the "man of sin", Barth makes an important distinction between the good creature of God and two
"qualitative determinations of the one undivided being of man" (CD IV 1, 494). The totally fallen "man of sin" is a determination (a self-positing) of the good creature against the determination (positing) of God. The human person is both totally the faithful covenant partner of God (God's determination) and totally a sinner (the creature's self-determination). Thus, Barth hopes to escape the whole discussion concerning a possible remnant of goodness in fallen human being (CD IV 1, 493).

In his doctrine of sin Barth uses four terms to describe the human being: "the good creature of God", "phenomenal man", "the faithful covenant partner of God" and the "man of sin". Which of these is the subject of the act of sin?

Two of these terms ("the covenant partner of God" and the "man of sin") are qualitative determinations of a third (the good creature of God), and "phenomenal man" is the human being as it is accessible to the human sciences and direct introspection.

Each of these terms denotes the human creature viewed from a certain perspective, and it is crucial to differentiate them with precision, for Barth's doctrine of sin cannot be understood without it. And it is doubly hard for the American reader, who is heir of the Baconian/Lockean/pragmatic tradition, to understand these distinctions which are Kantian and existentialist in spirit. What is a "phenomenon" and a "qualitative determination"?
Yet, within his doctrine of sin proper the resources are not there to grasp what he means by these terms, so it is important for this study that we refer to Barth's anthropology for a solution to the riddle posed by these distinctions.

For Karl Barth, theological anthropology seeks to understand what is revealed in the Word of God, human self knowledge being excluded from any critical or normative role, for it deals with the phenomena of the human, not with the real human being. The natural sciences attempt to describe and delimit the bio-psyched organism of the human. The ethical idealism of Fichte attempts to fathom the nature of the human as a person (CD III 2, 96-109). The existentialism of Karl Jaspers sees the human person led to relate to the transcendent by threat of temptation, suffering and death, and thus experience "his real existence" as openness (CD III 2, 113). In each case, says Barth, we are dealing with the phenomenal, not the real human being.

The True Human being

According to Barth, we must look at the revelation of God to find the true human being. But there we see the human being, not "in the wholeness of his created being, but in its perversion and corruption" (CD III 2, 26). The corrupt being, the "man of sin", is not true human being, but a de facto state of creaturely human nature,
contradicting true human being at every point. The "man of sin" exists only as the sinful willing and doing of the good creature of God, and has no being before God, for God has rejected it, treating it as nothingness, destroying it in Jesus Christ.

But the human creature is also the faithful covenant partner of God. How can both determinations be true? For Barth, the human being is a sinner in the radical sense which has been pointed out, but "with God and from God he has a future which has not been decided by his self-contradiction or the divine judgment which as the sinner guilty of this self-contradiction he must inevitably incur, but which by the faithfulness and mercy of God is definitely decided in a very different way from which he deserves" (CD II 2, 26). This future being, the determination of God, is the human person's real being. Sin cannot make void the plan of God to have the human being for God's faithful partner.

Is true human being, then, an eschatological concept, only a hope for the future, merely the plan of God which God is in the process of bringing about? For Barth, the answer is yes and no. True humanity is our future destiny, and we are still sinners now. But in Jesus Christ the "man of sin" is really dead, the new humanity has really been raised from the dead and the future is a reality now. According to Barth, God has declared that all humans are included in the dying and rising of the Son of God, and what
God has declared in the act of Jesus Christ is not a matter of mere words, a bare possibility or the legal fiction of imputed righteousness, but the most real of all (Küng, 1964:60, 61; 65-68). For Barth, the event of the Atonement was a real transaction, an event in space/time history in which something happened which changed the status of all humans before God (Rupp, 1974:53). Barth says:

And because of that our wrong has in fact become a thing of the past. It is no longer there. It is extinguished. It is present only as something which has been eternally removed and destroyed. And we men as the doers of it, as those who willingly identified ourselves with it, are dead and buried. We, too, are in fact a thing of the past. We are present only to the extent that our existence as such has this past. In Him our sin and we ourselves have perished (CD IV 1, 553)

Thus, we exist as true human beings only in Jesus Christ, where true humanity exists as concrete reality. We are true human beings now in reality (before God), but only in the future will we exist as such, de facto i.e., as our own self-positing.

The "Man of Sin"

We have not yet answered our question about the identity of the subject of the act of sin. Phenomenal humanity does not qualify, being but appearance. True human being cannot be the subject of the act of sin, for it has its being in Jesus Christ, and the very concept of true human being excludes sin. The human being cannot be at the same time de facto truly human and de facto a sinner. It is
rather _de facto_ sinful and _de jure_ true human (really righteous).

What is left? Is the "man of sin" the subject of sin? No, for Barth defined the "man of sin" as the mode of being of the fallen human person, a circle of wicked act and being. The subject of the act of sin is offered the freedom not to sin, but it chooses to make no use of that freedom. The "man of sin" has no freedom and no being before God, for it must be completely destroyed.

The Good Creature of God

Now, we come to the crux of our discussion. The "good creature of God" is the subject of the act of sin, but who is this good creature of God, and what is its ontological status? As Barth uses the term within the doctrine of sin, his meaning is unclear. He says, "Man in his fall cannot cease to be the creature and covenant-partner of God" (CD IV 1, 480). Here we see the three ideas distinguished, fallen human being, creaturely human being and true human being. Referring to the _status corruptionis_, Barth says: "Nothing is subtracted from what according to this Word is the will of God and therefore the determination of man, the obedience demanded from man. And man himself is none other than the one he always was in relation to God, sharing the same creaturely being and capacity" (CD IV 1, 482). Here again the distinction is made between true human being (God's determination) and the
"creaturely being and capacity" (CD IV 1, 482).

This is not a redundancy, for notice again the text that has been quoted so often in this study: "We are confronted by a contradiction in which there are no 'relics' on either side, because it is a contradiction which does not consist merely in that of two quantities, but of two qualitative determinations of the one undivided being of man" (CD IV 1, 494). Here again we have three entities, the determination of God (true human being), the sinful self-determination of the human (the "man of sin"), and the one undivided being of man (created human nature).

It is not yet clear just what Barth means by the "creaturely being" of which there are two qualitative determinations, but it is clear from these citations that it has a logical or ontological status of its own. It can be defined, and to understand this definition we must now turn to the "The Creature" (CD III 2).

According to Barth, Jesus' becoming human has so altered the ontological determination of human beings that they would not be human had not Jesus become a human being. "And the ontological determination of all men is that Jesus is present among them as their divine Other, their Neighbour, Companion and Brother" (CD III 2, 135). "To be man is thus to be in this the true and absolute counterpart" (CD III 2, 135).

This ontological determination is both objective and subjective. God elects the human being to be God's covenant
partner because it is the fellow human of the Elect One, and humanity is a possibility only because of the election of God. But that election is not merely an offer to be accepted or rejected. No, to be human does not mean to have the ability to hear the word and then decide; rather, it means to be the obedient hearer of the Word. God elects us to be those who elect God in return. To be human means to be the one creature of God to whom God addresses the gracious Word, and who responds as God's faithful covenant partner. The creature who does otherwise contradicts true humanity and, were it not for God's election, would forfeit it. Sin is thus an "ontological impossibility" for the human being (CD III 2, 147).

The Creature Elevated by the Word of God

The focus of Barth's study, "The Creature" (CD III 2), is the true human being. But what of this creature to whom God speaks, this creature among the other creatures of God? Is the idea of God positing this creature with whom God intends to speak, logically separable from God's actually speaking to it and it responding as God's faithful covenant partner? Does the human have an objective nature which is the presupposition of God's address and its subjective self-determination? Is there a creature posited by and for the Word of God; yet, when it is summoned by that Word, can refuse to be the faithful covenant partner of God?

It would seem that Barth excludes this possibility
when he says that human being is a history of dialogue between God and the human creature. "It does not 'have' a history from which it can itself be distinguished as a substratum. But it 'is' in this history, i.e., it is, as it takes place that the Creator is a creature and the creature Creator" (CD III 2, 159). Or when he argues,

He is the being among all others whom we know that God has directly made Himself known to him, revealing Himself and His will and therefore the meaning and destiny of man's own being. Man is the being which is addressed in this way by God. He does not become this being. He does not first have a kind of nature in which he is then addressed by God. He does not have something different and earlier and more intrinsic, a deeper stratum or more original substance of being in which he is without or prior to the Word of God (CD III 2, 150).

Care must be taken here. Barth is not saying anything which we have not noted so far. For him, true human being—he simply says "man" here—is not to be found apart from an I-Thou, covenant relationship with God. True human being is not found in a relatively autonomous nature which precedes the saving event of Jesus Christ, a nature with its own natural ends, but with a sort of potentiality for elevation by supernatural. It is the reverse. The saved human being of the eschaton (Jesus Christ and we in him) is the true human being; the so-called "elevated" human nature is the true human nature. The human person's original being is its future being. But Barth does not thereby exclude the existence of an unelevated nature or a presupposition of the address of God. He only argues that such a nature cannot be
considered as the "true human", for the true human cannot be defined apart from the call of God and a positive response.

Now to return to the question of whether the created nature of the human can be logically separated from the creature addressed by the Word of God. In spite of the limitations shown above, I will argue that Barth implicitly makes this distinction, and that on his own presuppositions it must be made.

Barth makes the distinction between a state and a history. History happens when "a being begins, continues and is completed when something other than itself and transcending its own nature encounters it, approaches it and determines its being in the nature proper to it so that it is compelled and enabled to transcend itself in response and in relation to the new factor" (CD III 2, 158; my emphasis). The essence of a state is that the being never escapes the circle of the potentialities and activations of its state. A state does not exclude activity and movement, but it cannot transcend its own possibilities (CD III 2, 158). Even the being that is a history is still in a state; however, it is "no longer merely the sum of its state" (CD III 2, 158). Its state is not its being, but its mode of being.

Barth applies this distinction to the human being. The true being of the human being is a history, the history of God's address to the human creature and its response of obedience. The human being has its being in the event of
this history. Barth says, "The fact that as a creature it [the human] exists in specific conditions is not its being but only the attribute and modality of its being" (CD III 2, 159). Its being is in the history which is Jesus Christ, in which God comes to the aid of the creature. "There comes upon the creature the _new fact_ that above and beyond _its actual being_ God gives Himself to it as the Deliverer in order that it may itself be the Deliverer. There comes upon it the fact that it is elected by God and may therefore elect Him in return" (CD III 2, 159; my emphasis). Or again: "To be summoned is to be called out of oneself and beyond oneself. Because it is God who speaks here, what is said has the right and power to enable the creature to transcend itself" (CD III 2, 166). Or again: "It takes place by the Word of the grace of God, in which He transcends from the very outset the limits of the human condition and makes the being of man a history, that the latter becomes what it is, a being open to God" (CD III 2, 167).

Does not Barth imply here a distinction between the creature in its circular mode of existence and the true human who posits itself as it is posited by the Word of God? Is not there a distinction between "the nature proper to it" and nature in the act of transcending itself? Is not there a difference between "its actual nature" and its actual nature as it is empowered by the "new fact" of God's call?
The "new fact" of God's call enables the creature to transcend itself and posit itself as a subject. As a subject, Barth says, "I will recognize the fact that my being is not simply a gift with which I am endowed but a task for which I am commissioned" (CD III 2, 180). God calls the human "out of the chorus of other creatures" which thank God but do not know they do so and enables it to posit itself as a grateful being (CD III 2, 173). In this call the human creature is given the possibility and the freedom to decide that it will be the faithful covenant partner of God, i.e., to be a Thou, a genuine subject before God. Only as the creature chooses the choice of God is it a subject or a real human being at all.

The Good Creature, Elevated by the Word of God as The Subject of the Act of sin

The good creature of God is the subject of the act of sin. There are creatures which are summoned by the Word of God but refuse the summons, who hear, but do not obey. They are no longer simply creatures among the others, for they are already distinguished by the fact that they are addressed as responsible and free subjects, and are given the freedom to choose to be so. But instead of positing themselves as the faithful covenant partners of God they posit themselves as proud, slothful and lying servants. Barth calls their mode of being "the man of sin". But it is only a mode of being and not their true being which is created and kept in Jesus Christ. The good creature
actualizes itself in this false way, but it is still the good creature of God addressed by the Word of God.

Were this creature not summoned by the word of grace, it could not be a sinner, but would remain among the creatures which obey and praise God without knowing it. But it is addressed by that word, and it refuses to obey and praise God. Barth can therefore say, "the grace of God is the presupposition of man's sin" (CD III 2, 35). Barth does not mean that sin is one possible way this creature addressed by God may be its true self or fulfill itself, for sin is not a possibility of true humanity, but its pure negation. But the creature summoned by God is not yet de facto true humanity, objectively and subjectively the faithful covenant partner of God, where sin is ruled out by definition. The creature summoned by God is objectively the faithful covenant partner of God and has the freedom to be so subjectively, de facto. But it can sin without falling into nothingness, i.e., without destroying its objective being as a creature and covenant partner of God. It can do this only because God does not abandon it but graciously continues to sustain its creaturely being, and moment by moment renews the word of grace which is its true humanity.

As true humanity, the human creature really transcends itself, becoming a history and a subject by exercising its freedom to obey God. The creature among others is the sum of its state, objectively praising God, but it has no subjectivity, no self-transcendence. What,
then, is the ontological status of the creature summoned by
God which is not yet de facto true humanity? It must have
self-transcendence and subjectivity or it could not be a
sinner, anymore than the beasts of the field. On the other
hand, self-transcendence and subjectivity are attained only
in true humanity in which sin is by definition excluded.
Barth does not address this question directly, so we must
attempt to discover what he really intends "between the
lines".

What we observed in Chapter Two is also applicable
here. Barth's treatment of the "impossible possibility" of
sin implies for the subject of the act of sin an
intermediary position. At this position there is a kind of
subjectivity, self-transcendence and a knowledge of self and
God, but there is a deficiency also. Barth implies this in
many turns phrase: Freedom is available but "not used" (CD
IV 1, 485) or "forfeited" (CD IV 1, 495). God is
"confronted" (CD II 2, 139), but not obeyed. The human
creature is neither a beast nor a devil, having its own
status. Barth says, "Is it not obvious that the ontological
impossibility of sin can be realised only where God is
revealed and therefore known to the creature which is with
Him, so that the creature can also be revealed and known to
itself in confrontation with God?...This situation is the
peculiarity of the human sphere" (CD II 2, 139).
John Calvin was also sensitive to this issue. He did not want to say that the human being had no more knowledge of God than the beasts, for this would relieve it of responsibility. On the other hand, it cannot have a full saving knowledge of God, for it is a sinner, blinded by sin. He used an illustration to get at the point. A person is walking in dead of night. Nothing can be seen. Lightening flashes, and for a split second all is clear. But then the darkness comes back all the blacker (Institutes II.2.18., 1960:277). Just so, God makes the truth clear to all people. But no sooner is it seen than it is suppressed, and the darkness closes in all the thicker.

Barth has something similar in mind. The word of grace is continually addressed to human creatures. This "new fact" (over and above created nature) of being summoned by God does actually enable the human creature to transcend the state of the beast. There is sort of an objective self-transcendence which is not yet true self-transcendence. It transcends itself in spite of itself. The presence of the Thou forces it outside itself.

The call of God, which releases the creature from its circular mode of existence, is given only for the purpose of the further move into true humanity, not to bestow on the creature a status from which it could give a "yes" or a "no" to God. But the good creature misuses its new status, willing not to hear this word or to know this Thou; yet it could will nothing at all outside its limited
circle of being were it not for the word of this One. The human creature hears the voice of God which comes from outside the circle of its potentiality and actuality. And as long as it hears this voice, it can never settle back into bestial innocence. The light flashes; it automatically raises its eyes and sees its true being from afar, but it immediately lowers them again, this time knowingly and willingly; it is no longer innocent. What we have called automatic, forced or objective self-transcendence in contrast to a state, on the one hand, and full and proper self-transcendence in faith and love, on the other, is the intermediate ontological status which is presupposed, but not stated, in Barth's work on the subject of the act of sin.

The sinful willing and doing of the good creature is indeed outside the circle of the natural state, but it is not above or beyond it on the side of its true being. It is rather below it. It is not trans-scendence but de-scendence. It moves downward toward nothingness. The creature steps outside the sphere of the other creatures which, unknowingly but unfailingly, obey and praise God, abandoning even its objective being, and moves toward non-being. It contradicts the grace of God which posits it and sustains it; yet it lives by that grace even as it sins, for were it not for God's continual contradiction of the human move toward the void, the human being would fall into it and cease to be. Again, "the grace of God is the presupposition of man's sin"
One final consideration. In order for the human to descend below itself it must transcend itself. To reject God it must have some knowledge of God; to refuse to obey it must in some way hear; to turn away from its true being it must have caught a glimpse of it. It is not a knowledge of God as God really is, as the human being's true being and destiny, but only of God as Another, a Greater. In sin the human rejects the otherness of that Other, the thouness of that Thou, and wills to remain alone within its circle of being. It now knows that there is Another. It knows it is not alone. It knows that this Other transcends it and is not included in its being; yet it rejects this knowledge and attempts to live a lie.

The creature addressed by God is a subject only in the sense that it is forced into self-awareness by the presence of Another who transcends it. It is not a true subject until it posits itself subjectively as corresponding to its true being. Even then it is only secondarily a subject, for God alone is the Subject (CD III 2, 192). Human subjectivity is always a response, a validation of God's objective positing of its being, not a positing its own being ex nihilo The 'subjectivity' of the sinful act must be thought of as a tertiary subjectivity. There is a self-awareness in the face of the Other. It knows that it can exist only as being-with-Another. It now knows that it is finite and confronted be an unassimilable Thou. It has
been forced out of the false infinity of immediacy into the awareness of its conditionedness. Yet, in the face of this knowledge it affirms itself as absolute. It sins. There is nothing to gain and everything to lose. But, inexplicably, the good creature of God is the subject of the act of sin.

A COMPARISON OF BARTH AND RAHNER
ON THE SUBJECT OF THE ACT OF SIN

Is it possible that Barth and Rahner have any significant overlap in their understanding of the one who commits sin, or any way in which their different understandings complement each other? I believe the answer is yes in both instances.

The Subject of Sin as an Elevated Nature

The subject of the act of sin, for both theologians, is an elevated nature. I admit that Barth does not use the terms "pure nature", "elevated nature" or "supernatural existential", but I am not claiming a terminological overlap. As far as the content is concerned, however, there is significant agreement.

The term "elevated nature" is, of course, Rahner's. We will not review his position here except to say that he is not wedded to the term, for he can and does say the same thing in other words. As we noticed above, Rahner moved in his later work toward the use of dialogic/personal language to describe the God/human relationship of the supernatural
existential. He can speak of being before God looking upon the mystery of God, or being in the presence of God listening to the word of God. It comes to the same thing: the concrete human being cannot be thought of except as one who has a relationship with the God who plans (or offers) salvation. The orders of creation and salvation cannot be thought of as discrete ontological layers in the human being or epochs succeeding each other in history, but as forming an ordered unity. Rahner's supernatural existential is a concept designed to bridge the gap between the two orders. For Rahner, the concrete human creature is one who is always already addressed by the offer of salvation or the self-communication of God.

Barth does not use the terms "elevated nature" or "supernatural existential", but he does have their functional equivalents. For Barth, creation is the external basis of the covenant, and the covenant (the order of salvation) is the internal basis of creation. Creation and salvation form an ordered unity, with salvation having precedence. The human subject is constituted by the summons of the Word of God and cannot be defined or understood apart from its reference to God and the destiny which it has in Jesus Christ. Barth uses predominately dialogic/personal terms to describe the relationship of the good creature to God. Despite the difference in terms, Barth and Rahner have the same thing in view.
The "good creature of God", considered apart from God's address, is the functional equivalent of Rahner's "pure nature". For both theologians, there is no such thing as pure nature or an unaddressed human creature in the concrete order. All humans are de facto addressed by God and called to God's salvation. For both men, God remains free in this relationship, for nature has no claim to God's salvation. It is gratuitous. For both, this call or offer enables the natural creature to transcend itself and become a self-positing subject. This creature, elevated by the call or offer of God, is, for both, the subject of the act of sin.

We must not overplay the similarities at this point. For Rahner, this elevated subject is true human being. The offer of Godself constitutes the subjectivity and the humanity of the human without reference to the direction of its self-positing, whether it says "yes" or "no" to God. The elevated human subject comes into its own by deciding about itself as a whole before God. The decision to say "no", as well as the decision to say "yes", is an exercise of true subjectivity. It seems that, for Rahner, the essence of humanity can be fulfilled even by the decision to contradict the created structure of humanity and the rest of the cosmos. We have discussed this more fully in Chapter Two.
Barth, of course, would disagree with Rahner. The creature of God, elevated by the summons of God, if it can be thought of at all as existing prior to its self-positing for or against God, is not yet true humanity, nor does it have true subjectivity. True humanity and true subjectivity come de facto only with the creature's self-positing as the faithful covenant partner of God. (Of course, true humanity exists de jure in Jesus Christ.) The self-positing of the elevated creature against the decision of God can happen only by the creature making no use of the freedom offered to it. In that negative decision, it contradicts its true being and in no way fulfills the idea of the human.

The differences between Barth and Rahner could be multiplied, but that would not serve the purpose of this study. We must, however, note briefly one other difference which has been pointed out already in Chapter Two. For Rahner, this elevated creature may de facto choose for or against God. But there can be no certain knowledge that anyone has ever subjectively decided against God. A discussion of the basis for this optimism will be reserved for Chapter Five. At any rate, for Barth, quite the opposite is true. We have certain knowledge that all of these elevated creatures, summoned by the word of God, refuse it. We have already discussed the reasons for this disagreement.
For Rahner, the idea of responsibility demands the full subjectivity and finality of sin. To recognize the universality of sin (in the proper sense) is out of the question, for this would be a doctrine of universal damnation. To the contrary, Rahner leaves open the possibility of universal salvation.

For Barth, the message of the cross plainly declares everyone a sinner in the most proper sense, for it is the story of the salvation of real sinners. But Barth denies the subject of the act of sin the ontological status which Rahner gives it. The human person does not have full subjectivity so as to be able to define itself as a "no" to God.

In spite of the differences, there is a great overlap in the thought of these two men about the one who sins. In both theologians the human creature is elevated by the call or offer of God to a position where a "yes" or "no" can be said. We took pains in Chapter Two to show that, though Barth argues against the "possibility" and "freedom" of a "no" to God, he allows for the "ability" and "free will" to sin.

In the present chapter we have discovered a sense in which the summons of God and its elevating effects makes it 'possible' for the human creature to sin. Barth and Rahner agree to this extent: it is only the gracious offer or summons of God which makes the human creature able to sin. Sin is always sin against the grace of God, and it can be
known as sin only in the face of grace. There is full agreement on this one point, even if there are significant differences in the way they understand the precise nature and effects of the sinful "no" to God.

As far as the ability of the human creature to say "yes" to God—or as Barth says, to posit itself as the covenant partner of God—Barth and Rahner are in full agreement, despite the terminological differences. For Rahner, the human person creates itself or saves itself in its subjective decision for God. Barth does not use this un-Protestant sounding language. Rahner, however, is neither advocating a human autonomy in self-creation nor a crude self-salvation. He makes it abundantly clear that salvation is totally a gift from God, and that the freedom of the creature grows in direct proportion to its dependence on God. The free "yes" to God is a gift of God. There is no doubt about Rahner's position here.

Barth, too, makes the same point. Salvation is subjective as well as objective. The human creature really freely posits itself as the faithful covenant partner of God. This is a fully human, fully free, and fulfilling self-positing. Of course, it is totality a gift of God. For both men, salvation is completely subjective and objective at the same time. The statements are left in dialectical tension and referred to the freedom or mystery of God, not sublated into a subjectivity beyond the subject/object distinction.
Salvation: Subjective and Objective?

There is no doubt about the intention of Barth and Rahner to teach that salvation is fully subjective and fully objective, but the question is whether or not their theologies can account for it. Precisely in their handling of the doctrine of sin our doubt arises in its most acute form.

The seriousness of Barth's affirmation that salvation is subjective as well as objective is made questionable by his treatment of the "no" to God. If God's "yes" is so overpowering that it wipes out the human creature's "no", denying it validity and definitiveness, how can we really believe that the human creature's "yes" is a real self-positing? Is not the human creature replaced by the "yes" of God? If the human person cannot say a real "no" can it say a real "yes"?

On the other hand, the seriousness of Rahner's fully objective salvation is called into question by his treatment of the "no" to God. Can the human creature veto God's plan for humans? Can God's will for universal salvation (objective) be thwarted by the decision of the human (subjective), without the objectivity of salvation being compromised. If, on the other hand, we limit God's objective will merely providing everyone a chance to decide for themselves, we picture God as indifferent to the final salvation of human beings. Again, salvation's objectivity
is compromised, for God is the mere provider of the possibility of salvation but not "the author and perfecter of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2). Is salvation really objective for Karl Rahner?

The Subject of Sin—A Restatement

The dialogue between Barth and Rahner has exposed the weakness of both positions. I have already argued that Rahner cannot be consistent with his starting point in his discussion of the "yes" and "no". On the one hand, the subjectivity and freedom of the "no" must be equal to that of the "yes", if the "no" is to be definitive. Both the "yes" and "no" are spoken from the same position of total self-mastery. On the other hand, the "no" must not be seen as an equal realization of the human essence. It is a contradiction and results in Hell. It cannot be both ways. Rahner's position must be revised at the point of the first co-ordination of the "yes" and "no" as equally definitive. Here Barth can serve as corrective against Rahner. The human creature which utters the "no" must not be thought of as having an ontological status which gives final validity to it.

I am not arguing that Barth is correct and Rahner is incorrect, for Barth goes almost to the opposite extreme, playing down the ontological status of the subject of the "no" to such an extent that it is hardly recognizable as a subject. In fact, Barth denies the designation "subject" to
the one who sins, reserving it for the "true man" who posits self as the faithful covenant partner of God. God is a subject in the primary sense, and the true human is a subject only in a secondary sense. But Barth, in spite of himself, implicitly teaches that the human creature elevated by the summons of God has tertiary subjectivity and freedom in the act of saying "no" to God. The details tertiary subjectivity were outlined in the Barth section of this chapter. We must admit that this tertiary subjectivity is not on the surface of Barth's presentation. This exposition is not a simple exegetics of Barth, but is the result of asking the Rahnerian questions of the Barthian text. I believe that the method of dialogic reading has given us an understanding of the subject of the act of sin which does justice to the biblical message better than either theologian does standing alone.

**The Phenomenal Human and the Categorical Human—A Correspondence**

Barth's phenomenal human being corresponds to Rahner's categorical human being, both representing the human being as it can be studied by external and introspective observation. In both cases, nothing can be known for certain about the God/human relationship from the phenomenal human being. For both, the phenomena of the human reflect the real subjective being of the human person. According to Barth, if one knows what true human being is, then one can interpret the phenomena of the human as signs
of our true situation. If we know for sure—and we do—that human beings have not been abandoned by God, we can see signs of God's grace in the human phenomena. If we know that the human is a sinner to the core, we can see the signs of this universal state. We cannot go in the other direction, however, establishing God's grace from hopeful signs in the world. And we cannot establish the sin of the human being from the estrangement we see all around.

Rahner is much more skeptical than Barth about interpreting the categorical (phenomenal human) realm by his knowledge of the transcendental realm (true human). The phenomena of the human—deeds, words, thoughts, feelings—cannot be securely interpreted as indications of the God/human relationship. As we have pointed out already, a good subjective decision can lie behind an objectively bad act. And a evil subjective decision can lie behind an objectively good act.

The ground of Rahner's skepticism is his understanding of the true human, who, for Rahner, is the subject who potentially decides "yes" or "no", and not, as for Barth, the one who actually decides "yes". The true human or transcendental subject is undecided. Thus, all categorical manifestations of that subject are ambivalent.

All four of Barth's designations of the human (the good creature of God, the "man of sin", the phenomenal human, the true human) find a counterpart in Rahner. There are differences between Barth and Rahner in each of these
areas, but the similarities and agreements are significant, pointing to the fact that these two men are speaking of the same human being, reading the same Holy Scripture and trying to protect and to understand the same message of sin and salvation.
Chapter V
THE RESULT OF SIN

KARL BARTH AND THE FUTILITY OF SIN

What happens when the good creature of God, addressed by the Word of God, sins? Is sin innocuous, a mere accident of human nature, or does it corrupt it completely? Is it possible to put the sinful creature right, or is it irremediable? What is Hell, and will any one be there? These and other questions will be addressed in this chapter.

For Karl Barth, the result of sin is a fall (CD IV 1 478ff.), and this fall is a fall into a state of misery (CD IV 2, 483ff.) and condemnation (CD IV 3, 461ff.). When the good creature of God sins, it falls into a closed circle of wicked act and being from which it cannot and does not want to remove itself. It looses its freedom, and becomes a slave of sin. In this wicked circle of act and being no semblance of the image of God remains. And sin is not simply a matter of thought and will; it creates facts, phenomena. All the little sins and big sins; all the robbery, murder and lying; and finally that beast of chaos itself, war, in which all distinctions between right and wrong, lawful and unlawful are erased—all these are the result of sin. In this situation the human being "is
obviously punished by God" (CD IV 3, 467).

Finally, however, sin is futile. It aims at destroying the work of God and nullifying the plan of God, but it cannot succeed, sin cannot change the good creature into an evil creature. It cannot counteract the effectiveness of God's determination that the human should be God's faithful covenant partner. The "man of sin", that wicked circle of act and being, has been killed and negated on the cross of Jesus Christ. It is no more. It has no future except that which is past, no being except that of nothingness. Thus, sin has no real and lasting results.

The Fall into Misery and Condemnation

When the human sins it falls—or better said, its sin is its fall. It falls away from its being and its future in Jesus Christ. But what is the character of this fallen state? In the first place, it is a fall into debt (CD IV 1, 484). God does not have to find or establish a basis for God's mercy, as Anselm assumed (CD IV 1, 486), for God is by nature nature merciful. It is God's glory to be merciful. When the human being refuses the demand of God, which is completely one with the mercy of God, it attempts to detract from the glory of God (CD IV 1, 485). It finds itself insolvent, for when the human being pits itself against God and the plan of God he "places himself in the void, in nothingness, were he would inevitably perish were it not that God still restores and maintains it in his favor
even as the order which he has disrupted" (CD IV 1, 489). In this situation the human has spent all its resources and depends on God's grace in spite of its intentions.

The human debtor exists under the wrath of God, for, to the human being who contradicts God, God's gracious "yes" takes the form of a wrathful "no" (CD IV 1, 489). The love of God takes the form of a consuming fire (CD IV 1, 485). Using the distinctions established in Chapter Four, we can say that God's "yes" to the true human person must at the same time be a "no" to the "man of sin". If the human being could simply slip into the void and cease to exist, its position would not be as bad as it is (CD IV 1, 484). But God will not let it go and exist in forgetfulness of God, but troubles the human creature in view of its salvation.

In the second place, the corruption of the good creature of God is "radical and total" (CD IV 1, 492). The human is corrupt in its vicious circle of activity and being. Barth says, "Man is what he does. And he does what he is. And in the circle of his being and activity he lives in this turning away--backwards and forwards from sin to sin" (CD IV 1, 492). Barth maintains, as we have already seen, that the human creature has not lost the good created nature to become a devil or a beast. But the human must not be thought of as having a relic of good in the middle of the mass of corruption. Rather, the good creature has not lost any of its created nature. It is totally the good creature of God. Its totally corrupt being exists in its activity of
posing itself as self-sufficient (CD IV 1, 492). Its being as the good creature of God exists in God's positing of it as the object of grace (CD IV 1, 492).

The human being not only sins, it is a sinner, involved in a circle being and activity, so that "the very fact that he is means that he transgresses" (CD IV 1, 495). Barth says further:

At every point man is in the wrong and in arrears in relation to God. Because he himself as the subject of these activities is not a good tree, he cannot bring forth good fruit. Because his pride is radical and in principle, it is also total and universal and all embracing, determining all his thoughts and words and works, his whole inner and hidden life, and his visible external movements and relationships. He is not just partly but altogether 'flesh.' He does not act in a fleshly way only in certain actions and passions and things done and things not done, but in all of them (CD IV 1, 496).

Barth offers his understanding of original sin under this second proposition. This topic has been treated at length in Chapter Three, so it need not be belabored here. Suffice it to say, the doctrine of original sin means that humans are caught in a circle of wicked doing and being for which they are responsible (CD IV 1, 500). There never was a time of innocence, for the human always was a sinner, the very first act of self-determination being sinful.

In the third place, the fall is universal (CD IV 1, 501). Barth does not use Romans 5:12-21 as a primary proof-text, but rather, Romans 11:32 (CD IV 1, 501), where Paul says that God has declared that all are sinners in order to have mercy on all. God's will to have mercy on all
is co-extensive with God's verdict of guilty on all. We know that all human beings are sinners because Christ died for all. There are two humanities—or better, the same group of all humans stands under two determinations. Our being as sinners is our past, and our being as faithful covenant partners of God is our future.

Thus there are two histories: the history of obedience lived in Jesus Christ, which is our future and the history of disobedience lived in Adam, which is our past. The two determinations meet in the present. The present is always a time of decision, but the decision has been made for us in Jesus Christ and is proclaimed for us in the word of the Gospel (CD IV 1, 503). Our being as the "man of sin" is past, and if we continue to live as the "man of sin" we can only do so "as those who have already been set aside, in a nonsensical presentation of our own past, as our own shadows" (CD IV 1, 502).

The state into which the human falls is not that of a blessed forgetfulness of God, the happy-go-lucky sinner, but an abyss of misery, a mortal sickness which could end only in death had not Jesus took it upon himself (CD IV 2, 486). The true depth of our misery cannot be known by empirical investigation. Only the one who cried "My God, my God why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34) has tasted the cup of Godforsakenness to which our sin corresponds (CD IV 2, 487).
This misery is also a punishment, a condemnation, a state of falsehood to which the human is doomed because the truth remains unchanged (CD IV 3, 468). In our falsehood we seek to be without God. "The condemnation itself implies God's acquiescence in the cheerless disintegration of man's existence and situation" (CD IV 2, 473). To be condemned "is to have to be finally what we wish to be when we change truth into untruth and live in and by this untruth" (CD IV 3, 473). But our condemnation has fallen on Jesus. "For the reality of God and man in Jesus Christ is superior to the pseudo-reality to which we are delivered by our falsehood" (CD IV 3, 477).

The Futility of Sin

Though the fall is radical and total and aims at nothingness, it cannot achieve its goal. The "man of sin", the human being as it exists in its self-positing, is totally fallen, but its determination by God as the good creature and faithful covenant partner of God has not been destroyed. Sin is futile, for it cannot destroy the good created nature of the human, and keep the human being from its destiny with God.

As we noticed in Chapter Four, Barth views the human from four perspectives: "phenomenal man", created human nature, the "man of sin", and "true man". None of these four is designation for a neutral, objective nature or structure, apart from human self-interpretation or divine
interpretation and determination. Being, for Karl Barth, is not something "out there", waiting for a mind to comprehend it. Barth does not discuss what the human being is in itself, for to be is to will, know and act, and to be truly is to be willed and known by God as the creature who wills and knows God. The "true being" of the human person is the being willed (determined) by God. The human (un)willing and (un)knowing against God's determination is the 'being' of the "man of sin", and it has only the 'being' of nothingness, that to which God says "no".

Even the "good creature of God" has its being only as a determination of God. It was not posited by an act of God's will into some sort of God-indifferent realm called creation, after which God directed attention to some other goal. The good creature of God is not a self-contained object with a structured nature which cannot be altered, even by sin. Rather, it is the human creature as it is posited every moment by the gracious God of creation. Sin cannot destroy it because God sustains it and renews it every day. The good creature of God has its being in the determination of God which is the creative "no" to nothingness, and therefore to sin.

Salvation in Jesus Christ must not be considered an afterthought in view of the fall, for this would isolate creation from God's salvific purpose and compromise the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. To the contrary, creation must be interpreted Christologically, as the
external basis of the covenant, and the covenant as the internal basis of creation. Humans were not created for a decision about God, the world being a neutral realm in which such a decision is to be made, but for salvation, nothing else.

According to Barth, God's intention in creation cannot be thwarted or undone by the fall, for creation is itself already an act of salvation, a "triump of grace" (Berkouwer, 1956:52). In Orthodox Protestant thought salvation was always thought of as salvation from the sin which entered the world at the fall (Berkouwer, 1956:53), creation being good but not salvific. But Barth argues that in creation God saves human beings from the threat of chaos to which they would fall victim without the merciful action of God, for creation is not merely creation from nothing at all but from nothingness, a reality with "a deeply pregnant meaning" (Berkouwer, 1956:57). It is that which God has rejected, and because God rejected it, it has reality as a chaos. "He saw the threatening curse and the threatening misery. He rejected the reality of a creature that would be opposed to or that would be neutral with respect to Him" (KD III 1, 112 in Berkouwer, 1956:57). Thus, according to Barth, human beings are saved in creation, not merely from a neutral not-being, but from every possibility of being "neutral" or "opposed" to God.
We can see the close connection between creation as salvation from nothingness, and redemption as salvation from sin. Sin, a form of nothingness, is just as futile as nothingness itself, for just as God saves and protects human beings from the threat of nothingness, God saves and protects them from sin.

Berkouwer is correct when he calls this aspect of Barth's thought "decisive" for the whole of Barth's dogmatics (1956:56). It determines the way redemption from sin is treated, for sin is nothingness, and God deals with it the same way in redemption as God dealt with nothingness in creation. Creation takes on the characteristics of redemption, and redemption takes on the characteristics of creation, redemption being as objective as creation, and creation being as subjective as redemption. God speaks, acts, and it is done (objective), but what is done is that a creature is called forth who is determined to freely will the will of God (subjective). Humans no more cooperate in redemption than in creation, but creation itself is not the place of a creature with a neutral freedom of choice but of one who is determined to be faithful covenant partner of God.

The plan of God, revealed in redemption cannot be thwarted. The human may posit itself as the "man of sin", but God has determined that it will be the faithful covenant partner of God, destroying the "man of sin" in the cross, and raising the faithful human being from the dead. All
humans have their being *de jure* in this One, Jesus Christ, for sin cannot change God's plan for salvation.

**Universal Salvation?**

We come now to the question of Barth's universalism. Does Barth go on to say that all humans will have their being *de facto* in Jesus Christ? This question is raised by every part of Barth's dogmatics—God, creation, redemption and eschatology—but first, and perhaps most acutely, by Barth's 506 page treatise (CD II 2) on the doctrine of election (Berkouwer, 1956:112). There Barth thoroughly revises the Reformation doctrine, criticizing the Reformers and post-Reformation Orthodoxy for their concept of the "hidden God" who makes an absolute decree of election behind Jesus Christ (CD II 2, 60-76).

For Barth, there is no hidden God behind the revelation of Jesus Christ, so he recasts the doctrine of election Christologically, understanding Jesus as the electing God and the elected human being (CD II 2, 103). Election is manifest as the unambiguous "yes" of God to human beings in Jesus Christ, for Jesus took the "no" of our rejection, our being as "men of sin", on himself, destroying it in his cross, establishing our true being in Himself. The decision of God to have human beings as faithful covenant partners cannot be undone by a their decision to the contrary. Unbelief is an impossible possibility.
If our sin, our rejection of God's grace, was itself rejected and negated in Jesus and our election unambiguously manifested in him, why not draw the conclusion that everyone will finally be saved? Why not universal salvation? Barth answers "no". In _Gottes Gnadenwahl_ (1936), Barth said in response to this question, "We can be certain that God's lordship is and will be total in all, but what this signifies for us we must leave to God. And therefore dare not say that in the universal grace damnation is eliminated. The Holy Scriptures speak of election and rejection" (50, in Berkouwer, 1956:114). And later, in _Die Botshaft von der freien Gnade Gottes_ (1947), he said, "No, for grace which would in the end automatically have to reach and embrace everyone and anyone would not be sovereign, would not be divine grace" (1947: 7, in Berkouwer, 1956:115).

Both these answers are ambiguous. Berkouwer points out with respect to the first that Scripture indeed does speak of the "election and rejection", but Barth refers both of these to Jesus Christ (Berkouwer, 1956:114). Berkouwer asks whether or not there is a rejection of someone other than Jesus Christ? And does "leaving it to God" mean a reversion to a sphere behind what God has revealed in Jesus Christ (1956:115)? With reference to the second answer Berkouwer asks, what do the words "automatic" and "would...have to" mean? Of course we must reject an universalist doctrine which reasoned speculatively about what must automatically happen, but "we are not concerned
here with a question of human logic but with what Barth himself intended election and rejection to mean" (1956:116). The ambiguity remains.

Barth advocates an open situation of Gospel proclamation (CD II 2, 476). According to him, we must not speculate about whether all or few will be saved. "As we avoid one view, so we avoid the other" (KD II 2, in Berkouwer, 1956:117). In a section of the Dogmatics written after Berkouwer's book, Barth again addresses the question of universal salvation:

No such postulate can be made even though we appeal to the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Even though theological consistency might seem to lead our thoughts and utterances most clearly in this direction, we must not arrogate to ourselves that which can be given and received only as a free gift (CD IV 3, 477).

But on the other hand, says Barth, universal salvation cannot be ruled out as a possibility. We are forbidden to count on it, but "we are surely commanded the more definitely to hope and pray for it...that, in spite of everything which may seem quite conclusively to proclaim the opposite" that God will finally save all (CD IV 3, 478).

It is not difficult to see in what direction Barth leans. Berkouwer is correct when he concludes that Barth goes against the whole tendency of his thought when he denies the certainty of universal salvation (Berkouwer, 1956:116). Barth as good as admits this, but does not consider it as a defect, for what matters is not "theological consistency" (CD IV 3, 477) but faithfulness to
the person to Jesus Christ. In Barth's rebuttal to Berkouwer he makes exactly this point, arguing that Berkouwer evaluated him as if his intention was to work out the implications of an abstract concept of "the triumph of grace" (CD IV 3, 175). But, for Barth, Christological thinking is not consistency to a Christological principal but faithfulness to the person Jesus Christ (CD IV 3, 176). "We can trust a person...but we cannot grasp a person" (CD IV 3, 176). This is the key to the "inconsistency" in Barth's thinking about universal salvation. Jesus demonstrated himself the victor over nothingness, so we can now hope and pray for the salvation of all, but we cannot "grasp" it. The ambiguity remains.

It is not my aim to settle this question. Further consideration of it would lead far afield, and would not advance my argument. What is important for the comparison with Rahner is to note that, for Barth, sin cannot finally result in a state of affairs in which God's "yes" to human beings is thwarted by a human decision. Whether this can be the case without also implying universal salvation we must leave undecided.

Is Sin Made Innocuous?
Three Critics of Barth

Emil Brunner charged Barth with eliminating "the possibility of condemnation" and the "final Divine Judgment" (Brunner, 1949:348). Hell as been "blotted out, condemnation and judgment eliminated" (Brunner, 1949:348).
Barth, according to Brunner, goes beyond all the teachers of apokatastasis, "for none of them ever dared to maintain that through Jesus Christ, all, believers and unbelievers, are saved from the wrath of God and participate in redemption through Jesus Christ" (Brunner, 1949:348).

For Brunner, Barth's "objectivism" is the root of his error (Brunner, 1949:351). The decision is made objectively (in Jesus Christ) for all whether they know it or not. He illustrates:

They are like people who seem to be perishing in a stormy sea. But in reality they are not in a sea where one can drown, but in shallow water, where it is impossible to drown. Only they do not know it. Hence the transition from unbelief to faith is not the transition from "being-lost" to "being-saved". This turning-point does not exist, since it is no longer possible to be lost (1949:351).

In opposition to Barth, Brunner argues that the subjective decision must be raised to the same level as the objective. Thus, he says, "Where there is no faith there Christ is not; where there is not faith, there, too, there is no salvation in Christ" (1949:350).

Ellington asks whether Barth's thought does not lead to the conclusion that guilt is an "illusion" we need not be concerned with, "an explanation and hence a neutralization of sin?" (Ellington, 1965:263). He concludes: "Within this theological structure sin is without seriousness" (1965:263). He finds the root of Barth's error is his concept of das Nichtiges. Ellington understands Barth to be placing sin's origin in the chaos of neutral and negative
possibilities which God has rejected. "When analyzing sin, one finds that its basis is in man's choice for something which has already been rejected. The emphasis, however, is not on the choosing but on the something" (1965:262). Thus, the focus is shifted off the human on to the unreal reality of *das Nächstige*. Ellington questions whether this shift does not place humans in the role of victims, giving them an excuse for sin.

Berkouwer, with cautious judgment and painstaking documentation, questions the adequacy of Barth's thought at the point of the result of sin. Does Barth not, asks Berkouwer, "jeopardize the reality and the serious consequences of the guilt about which the Bible speaks so emphatically in terms of admonition, threat and judgment" (Berkouwer, 1956:232)? He finds the root of Barth's error in his concept of an eternal self-distinction of God from the not-God and the related idea of the ontological impossibility of sin.

In the doctrine of election Barth explains God's rejection of nothingness as the reverse side of God's election. Barth roots this distinction in God's inner being. He says, "As surely as God is *God* and not not-God, as surely He Himself lives in the eternal self-distinction from everything which He is not and does not will...." (KD II 2, 152, in Berkouwer, 1956:220). God is, in a sense confronted, with the not-God. For God, the victory over the not-God is an eternal and effortless triumph in which "there
is not for a moment or in any respect the slightest question," but for the human being it must "assume the form of this history, must in time and in this way become event" (KD II 2, 152 in Berkouwer, 1956:220). The life of the sinful but elect human being "becomes a demonstration in creaturely time and space of God's eternal self-distinction" (KD II 2, 153, in Berkouwer, 1956:221).

Thus, Berkouwer points out, a line is drawn from the being of God (God's self-distinction from the not-God) to the nothingness and sin which 'exists' because of God's not willing it and excluding it in God's salvific acts of creation and redemption (Berkouwer, 1956:219). Is this not, asks Berkouwer, an "explanation" of sin, proposing that a creation ad extra would necessary be confronted with the powerful 'reality' of nothingness by which it would be mastered. Berkouwer is asking a pointed question: Is not the conquest of human sin a mere repetition in the created sphere of the internal life of God, with the human person being merely the stage on which the drama is played out?

Even though his thought seems to give an explanation of sin, Barth strongly contends for the inexplicability of sin. How can he do so without giving up his understanding of nothingness as established by God's rejection? The question finds its answer, according to Berkouwer, in Barth's concept of the ontological impossibility of sin. This concept has nothing to do with the "noetic incomprehensibility" of sin (Berkouwer, 1956:225); rather,
"the mystery consists in the fact that sin is something which in the very nature of the case cannot be" (Berkouwer, 1956:225). Humans may forsake God, but they cannot make themselves ontologically godless because God has decided to have them as faithful covenant partners. Humans are sinners through and through, act and being, but God has established limits to their sin, for sin cannot destroy their true being which is God's grace in Jesus Christ.

If sin is an ontological impossibility, asks Berkouwer, why is it not also a mere "appearance" (Berkouwer, 1956:228)? Of course, Berkouwer recognizes that Barth asserts the fact and reality of sin (1956:233), but he contends that the concept of the ontological impossibility of sin must be rejected lest this assertion be robbed of its seriousness. The concept of sin's impossibility makes a "transition from wrath to grace in the historical sphere" unthinkable (Berkouwer, 1956:233), for is not the wrath of God excluded completely from the beginning (1956:235)?

**Barth's Answer to Berkouwer**

Barth addressed these questions in a long fine print response to Berkouwer (CD IV 3, 173-180). Barth's first point is one I have already mentioned. According to Barth, Berkouwer is mistaken to think that Barth's thought can be forced into consistency with an abstract principle such as "the triumph of grace" (CD IV 3, 175). On the contrary, Barth has written what he has heard while listening to the
"living person of Jesus Christ" (CD IV 3, 176).

In response to Berkouwer's criticism that Barth makes the triumph over evil simply a matter of course, Barth responds thus: If we were concerned with abstract principles of the divine nature and evil, the objection would have some force, for the principle of the divine nature would already from the beginning exclude the evil. But that is not the case, for "it is in the free act of this person, which cannot be comprised in any synthesis nor brought under any control, that the divine and therefore absolute superiority of this Partner is worked out and the situation between Him and His opponent is settled—and not otherwise" (CD IV 3, 176). But it is settled, so there need be no doubt. "Is this a bad thing?" (CD IV 3, 176). With respect to all other "victors" there is room for doubt. But with respect to Jesus, none. Jesus is victor. This is what, according to Barth, doctrine of nothingness means, nothing else. And of this there can be no doubt.

We noted earlier that the philosophical concepts Barth creates and adapts refer to narrative relationships, and must be understood in terms of the story of the Bible. When Barth describes the results of sin with a term such as "nothingness", he is referring to the story of how God in Jesus Christ has reacted to sin. And it is in the story, not in abstract concepts, that we confront the "living person of Jesus Christ" (CD IV 3, 176). It is on this ground that Barth must be understood and criticized. Has
Barth got the story of the Bible straight, and do the concepts he uses get at the meaning of the story?

Berkouwer criticizes Barth for his understanding of sin as "nothingness", an "impossible possibility" and an "ontological impossibility". These terms, according to Berkouwer, rob sin of its seriousness. Barth responds that it is not arrogant speculation "to seek the intellectus fidei in this respect instead of renouncing all understanding, and thus to strive at least for a true and clear conception" (CD IV 3, 177). Barth says that it is not speculation to say that evil is that which God does not will. And, if God does not will it, God "never did nor could will, nor ever will or can" (CD IV 3, 177). It is only on the basis of the victory of Jesus over evil that this definition could be arrived at. "Is this to deny its reality?" asks Barth (CD IV 3, 177).

The terms "nothingness", "impossible possibility" and "ontological impossibility" point to "insights which have been won from the Bible" (CD IV 3, 178). Berkouwer mistakenly concentrates on the words in abstraction from the biblical story which gives them their specific content. The terms "nothingness" and "impossible possibility" mean simply—and no more—that evil and sin, though they do exist inexplicably and factually, have no right to exist because they have been treated that way in Jesus Christ. Barth challenges someone to think of a better term (CD IV 3, 178).
Berkouwer found the term "ontological impossibility" especially troubling, for it seemed to him to deny the reality of sin. Barth says, "What it means is that the nature of evil as the negation negated by God disqualifies its being, and therefore its undeniable existence, as impossible, meaningless, illegitimate, valueless and without foundation" (CD IV 3, 178). Barth calls Berkouwer's charge that he rooted sin in God's eternal self-differentiation from the not-God a "linguistic misunderstanding" (CD IV 3, 178). What Barth had in mind was never more than God's "original turning aside from the possibility of chaos mentioned in Gen. 1:2" (CD IV 3, 178). Evil is what God calls evil "no other, no more and no less" (CD IV 3, 179). There is no dualism. It is an ontological impossibility.

It seems strange that anyone could accuse Barth of giving a rationale to sin or making it innocuous. Barth's point in using the term "nothingness" to denote sin is to communicate its irrational, merely factual nature. In order to give sin a rationale one would have to show how it has a place in the will and plan of God. And this is exactly what Barth criticizes Wegscheider, Hegel, Schleiermacher, Biedermann, Ludemann, Ritschl and Troeltsch for doing (CD IV 1, 374-87). Barth strictly forbids any such attempt.

On the contrary, sin has no ground, no value, and no contribution to make toward human salvation. There is, for Barth, no dialectical relationship of being and not-being as there is for Plato in The Sophist, so one cannot say, "Wenn
das Nichtige ist, ist auch die Schöpfung nichtig" (Krötke, 1983:35). And, for Barth, even das Nichtiges "is" in such a way that it has no participation "im Sein der Schöpfung" (Krötke, 1983:35). There is no reason why human beings should sin, for it has no place and completes no potentiality in their nature. It is absolutely inexplicable that humans do that to which God has said "no". There is nothing to which to appeal that would exonerate or exculpate human sin.

Sin cannot be explained in terms of human nature or the nature and will of God. Barth is firm on this point. But sin is a fact, and can be described and defined, and it is the theologian's duty to do so (CD IV 3, 177). In the light of Jesus Christ—and only there—sin can be described. All Barth's ontological language is an attempt to describe sin's factual but inexplicable character. He uses the ontological language of his opponents, who work sin into a system of thought including God, the cosmos and the human, to engage and defeat them. It is a misunderstanding to see anything else in it.

The charge that Barth makes sin innocuous also lacks substance. It is not only the theologian who believes in universal salvation, but also the one who believes in the salvation of even one sinner, who must brave the danger of making sin innocuous. Paul had to face the possibility that his gospel of grace could be changed into libertinism (Romans 6:1ff). According to Berkouwer's line of thought,
God's final victor over sin in one individual would make sin "innocuous" for that one. This implication is unacceptable. But, if it is not trivializing sin to believe in the salvation of one sinner, then neither is the idea of universal salvation necessarily a trivialization of sin. Believing that God will be the victor over sin does not make sin a light matter. Surely it is not necessary that some individuals be eternally lost for sin to be an urgent concern? Surely it is not necessary that God be defeated in some cases for sin to be taken seriously. But it seems the objections (e.g., Brunner, Berkouwer, and Ellington) to Barth's doctrine of sin require these presuppositions.

In order to trivialize sin, one would have to hold that sin is really a veiled good or that it inherently poses no threat to salvation or that it is not a problem for God to overlook it. The first two of these trivializations are treated in Barth's doctrine of sin, especially in CD IV 1 358-513. According to Barth, sin is in no way a veiled good, and it is a dire threat to the human being, from which there is no escape, unless it be by God's free act of deliverance. The third trivialization is addressed in the doctrine of justification.

The above criticisms of Barth center on his doctrine of election and creation and neglect his doctrine of justification. This is unfortunate, for precisely here he address the problem of how God is right to forgive human sin. He says:
The task of the doctrine of justification is to demonstrate the righteousness of God which overrules in the reconciling grace of God, and the grace of God which truly and actually overrules in the righteousness of God. It is the task of finding a reliable answer to the question: What is God for sinful man? and what is sinful man before God who is for him? (CD IV 1, 518).

In the doctrine of Justification we find the answer to the question of whether it is trivialization of sin to teach that God has overcome it in Jesus Christ. Sin was such a threat to the creature that God placed self in jeopardy by becoming a human creature, took the place of sinful humans and experienced the wrath of God for us— all to save us from the certain destruction coming to us as the wages of sin (CD IV 1, 553-68). God did not have to do this, but God was right to do it. This is where the doctrine of justification presupposes the doctrines of election and creation. God was right to do it because from all eternity God has said "no" to sin and "yes" to the good creature. From the beginning God has taken up the cause of the threatened creature. Something new really happened in the life of God with the creature in the incarnation and the cross, but it was not alien to the God of election and creation.

KARL RAHNER AND THE FINALITY OF SIN

What is the result of sin, according to Karl Rahner? How seriously does he take it? Will sin led some to Hell?
Or are the results (or punishments) of sin always remedial, detours on the way to salvation? If universal salvation is a hope, or at least a possibility, what is the basis of this hope? Does belief in universal salvation exclude taking sin seriously?

Many of these questions have been answered implicitly already in the course of this study. The universal situation of original sin, concupiscence and the negative character of death are the results of a sin which happened at the beginning of human history. The personal sin of the first human(s) became an existential of our situation (Chapter Three). These existentials, however, are 'results' of sin only analogously. As we pointed out in Chapter Three, original sin and concupiscence are sin analogously, forming a part of the human situation. The human being is not involved in personal guilt unless it takes these pre-personal existentials into its personal center, making them its freely chosen existence. In the same way they are 'results' of the sin of another, not the results of personal freedom. If one takes this analogous guilt into oneself by an act of transcendental freedom, it will become the result of sin in the proper sense. Since the distinction between sin in a proper and the improper sense was dealt with in Chapter Three, we will concern ourselves here only with the results of sin in the proper sense.
Sin as its own Result and Punishment: The Implications

The concept of "result" was chosen rather than other available concepts. A "result", in the ordinary sense of the word, is an effect which is implicit in its cause. Used with respect to human sin, it must be understood in a special sense. Rahner deals specifically with the material of what I have called the result of sin under the concept of the punishment of sin ("The Punishment of Sins", 1975:1586-88). The two concepts differ. The concept of punishment is taken from the juridical sphere. A "punishment" can be appropriate to an offense in a legal sense, but it is extrinsic, not a direct effect of the action, being imposed on the subject from outside.

The concept of a result is perhaps more appropriate when focusing on nature of sin as such, but it is morally neutral, so it cannot deal with persons. Thus, the concept of punishment is more appropriate when focusing on the subject of sin. A cause is, as it were, exhausted in its effect, but a subject is not exhausted in its 'effect'. An effect is not alien to its cause, but punishment is experienced as alien to the intention of the subject's act.

Rahner combines the two concepts in his article "The Punishment of Sins" (1975:1586-1588). He shuns the juridical concept of punishment with its "anthropomorphic notions of vindictive justice" (1975:1586). Instead he says, "The punishments of sin are the persistent
objectivations of the bad moral decisions, being themselves contrary to the true nature of the free subject....[Punishment] can and must be the conatural intrinsic consequence of sin" (1975:1587). Both components are present, for transcendental sin objectivates itself in the categorical realm, and the results of sin follow naturally and inexorably. But the act of sin cannot achieve the full intention of the subject, i.e., to be absolute. The subject cannot create, destroy or change its essence, or the essence of any of God's creation. The categorical realm has a God-given structure which cannot be created over according to the wish of the human subject.

The disparity between God's world and the human wish is experienced as pain, and God's persistent maintenance of God's world gives the pain the quality of punishment. The subject also has a God-given structure (the supernatural existential) which God maintains against the will of the sinner. God maintains the essential nature of the human being in spite of its "definitive obdurate refusal" to conform itself to that nature by accepting God's offer of self-communication (1975:1587), a disparity which constitutes the pain of Hell (1975:1587). Thus, for Karl Rahner, sin is its own result, and it is given the character of punishment only because God maintains the subject and the world in existence. But what is the character of this result?
The result of sin, for Karl Rahner, is the irreversible loss of God and salvation, the final human self-condemnation to complete loneliness, and the "absolute contradiction" of the human will to human nature (FChF, 99). These three results correspond to the three contradictions which constitute the nature of sin: sin contradicts God, human nature and the neighbor. In the same way, the result of sin is the definitive three-fold contradiction.

The Seriousness of Sin and The Question of Universal Salvation

Rahner takes the notion that sin is its own result seriously, for he understands sin as definitive by definition. Sin and the result of sin can be distinguished conceptually, but concretely they are the same, the definitive three-fold contradiction to God, human nature and the neighbor. This idea has far-reaching consequences, as I pointed out in Chapter Three. Sin is its own result/punishment, and is irreversible. Real sin is Hell, and Hell is real sin. All sinners (in the proper sense) are damned sinners.

No doubt this conception takes sin seriously. No doubt the human being is a "being threatened radically by guilt" (FChF, 90). The human person stands at the crossroads, and chooses Heaven or Hell, God or the Devil, salvation or damnation. The decision occurs at such a height that it is irreversible, for freedom exhausts itself in the decision, and there is nothing yet to be discovered
which could change it. Now that gives our decision weight, does it not? That shows the seriousness of sin, right? Or does it?

According to Rahner, God wills to save all humans. The Church has come to recognize this more clearly in recent times so that it "can no longer be denied" (S, 1501-02). The doctrine of universal salvation must, nevertheless, be rejected, but this does not mean that we must believe there will be those who are definitively lost. In fact, we cannot know whether few, many or all will be saved (FChF, 103). The eschatological statements of the Bible are not factual descriptions of last things; rather, they are statements of possibilities which confront each person with a deadly serious decision ("The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Assertions", 1966:340).

Salvation is a possibility for everyone. Rahner's distinction between the categorical and the transcendental realms allows him to say, "a man may be disposed in whatever way he will as far as empirical criteria are concerned, but the direct possibility of salvation cannot thereby be denied to him" (OCUS, 202-203). According to Vatican II, "non-Christians, polytheists and atheists can live in a subjective state of freedom from serious sin" (OCUS, 202).

God's offer of self-communication in the supernatural existential is part of the situation in which the decision for or against God must be made. The offer itself sets the human free to accept or reject it, for there
is a subjective as well as an objective side to salvation.

The objective redemption of the cross of Jesus is the "primary sacramental sign of grace" (OCUS, 212), i.e., of God's universal offer of Godself. Rahner describes sacramental causality:

But in so far as a sacrament can and should be conceived of as a 'real symbol', as a historical and social embodiment of grace, where grace achieves its own fullness of being and forms an irreversible gift (opus operatum), to this extent the sign is a cause of grace, although the sign is caused by this grace (OCUS, 213).

It is not my purpose to deal extensively with Rahner's understanding of the cross. But we must note that the objective aspect of salvation—the universal self-offer of God and its sacramental sign, the cross—forms part of the situation in which the subjective decision for or against God is made. Our objective salvation does not include our subjective salvation ... constitutes its possibility. It gives the human the freedom to decide whether or not to accept it. Despite objective salvation, the salvation of any one individual is an open matter, depending on his or her subjective decision.

Yet, for Rahner, the event of Jesus Christ assures us that "the world and the human race as a whole will find a blessed and positive fulfillment in Jesus Christ by the power of the grace of God ...[and] "the history of the world as a whole will in fact enter into eternal life with God" (FChP, 444). Thus, Rahner has a confidence in the salvation of "the race as a whole", but he leaves the salvation of
particular individuals in doubt. How these two ideas can be reconciled, we must leave undecided so that we may deal with a more important question.

Whence this confidence? If the final veto lies with the human person, what grounds the confidence that "the race as a whole" will be saved? Of course, Rahner would say that the ultimate ground is God's universal salvific will. But is that the last word? Since the human being can effectively and definitively refuse the offer of God's salvation, and the human subjective decision cannot be deduced from empirical behavior and beliefs, and free decisions are not predictable, how can Rahner be confident that all or nearly all people will be saved?

Rahner's optimism about salvation seems to rest on an optimistic view of human nature. Human nature is such that it can be fulfilled only in God; it is directed toward the good, so a subjective decision against God is a contradiction to human nature, an irrational and self-defeating move. Rahner seems to have a presumption that the human person is unlikely to make such an irrational choice, though he leaves the possibility open as the "mystery of evil" (FChF, 102).

Are we interpreting Rahner accurately? In order to remove lingering doubt, we will take account of another line of Rahner's thought. Arguing for the possibility of salvation outside the Church, Rahner refers to the Second Vatican Council: "Now, however, the Second Vatican Council
has recognized that even non-Christians, polytheists and atheists can live in a subjective state of freedom from serious sin" (OCUS, 202). Notice that the key to the possibility of outsider's and unbeliever's salvation is that they can "live in a subjective state of freedom from serious sin" (OCUS, 202). It is the distinction between subjective (or transcendental) sin and categorical sin that allows us to believe in the possibility of their salvation. There is a possibility of salvation of all because they might not be sinners subjectively, even though they are sinners categorically.

Summary and a Criticism

Now we return to the question we asked above. At least on one level, Rahner takes sin with radical seriousness. Sin is catastrophic and irreversible. Sin is its own punishment; it has the quality of Hell, i.e., complete self-contradiction and absolute loneliness. Yet, on another level, sin is not taken so seriously. We cannot know whether or not we or others really are sinners. In fact, there seems to be a presumption that most humans are in "a subjective state of freedom from serious sin" (OCUS, 202).

Care must be taken at this point. It will not do simply to evaluate Rahner by an abstract criterion. What does it mean to take sin "seriously"? Without further qualification, the term "seriously" is an abstraction which
can be filled with almost any content. Sin could be taken so "seriously" that it leads into dualism, for, in trying to avoid a monism where sin is taken up into the whole and becomes good, sin may be given such significance and power that not even God can deal with it. But then sin becomes merely a threat from an alien force, losing its character as a human willing and doing. And, if it is not a human willing and doing, the seriousness of sin is again in doubt, and we are back where we started.

The question should be "Does Rahner take sin as seriously as the Bible does and no more?" In the Bible, sin is an evil willing and doing from which the human being cannot extricate itself, leading to damnation. But sin can and has been dealt with by God in the cross of Jesus Christ. The human person can be saved, ransomed, and redeemed. Sin can be forgiven, atoned for and forgotten. In the Bible, the true measure of the seriousness of sin is found in what it cost God to overcome it, not in a transcendental analysis of the concept of responsibility. There sin is known in its seriousness as forgiven sin. Any other estimation is bound to trivialize it in some way.

Does Rahner take sin seriously as the Bible does? He sees it as a evil willing and doing from which the human cannot extricate itself, leading to damnation. But precisely here is the problem, for according to Rahner, not even God can overcome real sin. Thus, Rahner's idea of true freedom as the freedom to say "yes" or "no" to God prevents
him from taking God's ability to deal with sin as seriously as the Bible does. But Rahner does not want to be pessimistic about salvation of the human race; therefore he finds a basis of optimism--dare I say it?--in the hope that not many people will be so irrational as to say the final "no" to God. This will not do.

A COMPARISON OF BARTH AND RAHNER ON THE RESULTS OF SIN

In what areas do Barth and Rahner agree, and in what areas do they differ about the results of sin? How do their understandings of the material character of the results of sin compare? What about the question of universal salvation and the ground of this hope? And what about the ways in which they attempt to take sin seriously? These questions will be addressed in this section.

The Results of Sin: Its Concrete Character

There is substantial agreement between Barth and Rahner about the material character of the results of sin. For both, sin results in being enclosed in a circle of wicked act and being from which the human cannot extricate itself. It is, for both, a state of being in contradiction to God, the neighbor and human nature. The character of that state, for both, is godforsakenness, loneliness, misery and punishment. For both, sin is its own result; sin is Hell and Hell is sin.
However, when we move beyond the mere description of the concrete results of sin we discover differences. First, for Rahner the term "result", when used of the human situation which he calls original sin, is used only analogously, being the "result" of the sin of another. The same problem was dealt with in Chapter Three, where we asked about the status of the "guilt" (rather than result) of original sin. I pointed out that, for Rahner, original sin is analogous guilt and that, for Barth, it is guilt in the most proper sense. For Barth, the doctrine of original sin tells us that there never was a time when we were not sinners, i.e., those who will and do sin, though we do not have to will, do and be such. In the same way the results of sin are, for Barth, "results" in the most proper sense. The results of sin—the slavery, misery and punishment of original sin, concupiscence and death—are not results imposed from without because of someone else's sin, but are the results of our own sin.

Now, the line of thought begun in Chapter Three is complete. There we viewed categorical or objectively evil action from the perspective of its guilt, in Chapter Four from the perspective of its subjectivity, and now in Chapter Five, from the perspective of its results. The same tensions between Barth and Rahner were evident every step of the way. The root of the tension is their disagreement about freedom. To be sure, sin is, for both, a "no" to God, but for Rahner, the "no" is a free "no", and therefore final
and definitive. For Barth, though the "no" is what the human really wants and wills and is in no way compelled, it is not free, and therefore is not the last word. Rahner's understanding of freedom commits him to the distinction between categorical (analogous) and transcendental (proper) sin. Barth's understanding of freedom allows him to ignore such distinctions.

Rahner's view has the advantage that it attempts to make sense of our experience, for we experience ourselves as situated, even in our deepest selves, sensing an alienation of our true selves from our acts. As we look back on our actions, they seem opaque, lacking subjectivity. We can hardly feel fully responsible for an action which no longer makes sense to us. Rahner's view is also more consistent with the concept of responsibility, for responsibility presupposes freedom, and freedom presupposes self-mastery before God, and that implies definitiveness for the decision. The logic is compelling.

Barth certainly knows all this. He knows that our experience denies that we are simply what we will to be, sinners through and though. He knows what the abstract concept of responsibility implies. In the face of all this he asserts that the Bible teaches otherwise. The Bible teaches that we are sinners (categorically and transcendentally) of our own choosing. Therefore, our experience which contradicts the Bible is itself a part of the deceptiveness of sin which the Bible cuts through. We
must interpret our experience in the light of the Gospel rather than the other way around.

Barth is not concerned to be faithful to an abstract concept of responsibility, for it leads to impossible conclusions, implying an abstract freedom which implies absolute knowledge. Only then can a "responsible" decision be made. Rahner struggles to avoid this conclusion with his concept of God as the incomprehensible mystery, but can he really consistently avoid identifying God and humanity at the point of freedom (See Chapter Four)? For Barth, the freedom of God and the freedom of the human are different. The freedom of God is God's ability to be the loving God without limitation. For Barth, human freedom is the God given ability to be de facto what it is de jure in Jesus Christ, i.e., the faithful and loved servant of God.

Barth is more faithful to the Bible, but he leaves human experience unenlightened. It would be an advance to think out a doctrine of sin which would be as faithful to the Bible as is Barth and help human beings understand their experience as Rahner attempts to do.

The Final Results of Sin: The possibility of Universal Salvation

As was said above, for both Barth and Rahner Hell is sin, and sin is Hell. But will anyone experience this final result of sin? In the first two sections of this chapter we discovered that both Barth and Rahner hold out the possibility of universal salvation. Indeed, they have a
lively hope that all will eventually be saved, though of course they deny its certainty. The basis on which they deny it is not as important, for our purpose, as the basis of their hope of universal salvation.

Barth's confidence is based on the determination of the electing and saving God revealed in Jesus Christ. It is not the will of God that the human being should be given the freedom the choose whether to say "yes" or "no", for God has willed to have the human being for a faithful covenant partner, and God's victory over all that opposes this determination is certain. The human "no" is in no sense willed by God, and it has been overcome once and for all in Jesus Christ. Thus Barth's confidence in universal salvation is based solely on God's determination, and in no way on human good will.

Rahner, of course, recognizes that the salvation of one and all is absolutely dependent on God's will to save. Human beings have no claim on God's salvation, for it is totally by grace. But God's universal salvific will cannot be realized if someone refuses to accept God's offer of self. God gives the freedom to decide, but does not give the choice itself. The human person will not be prevented from finalizing itself as a "no" to God, for this would contradict the concept of freedom.

What, then, is the basis of Rahner's confidence in universal salvation? As I pointed out in the last section of this chapter, it is a presumption of human rationality.
The decision against God is absolutely irrational; therefore, we can hope that no one will choose it. But how can this be a basis of confidence when the Bible seems to affirm that, in spite of its irrationality, sin is the universal choice of humans? Rahner is on thin ice here.

If universal salvation (or even the salvation of one person!) is to be a realistic hope it must be based on God's will and ability to forgive, overcome and remove the radical, subjective and total "no" of the human to God. It must be based, not only on God's offer to save if the human freely chooses to allow it and God's gift of the possibility of a free choice, but also on God's determination and ability to give the actual choice.

Is Sin Taken Seriously?

Rahner and Barth both attempt in their own way to take sin seriously. Barth takes it seriously in two ways. First, it brings the human down into a corrupt state, a miserable slavery out of which the human cannot so much as lift a finger to extricate itself. Second, sin is serious because it cost God something to deliver human beings from it, requiring the Son of God to give his life on the cross, God taking the injury into self. But God can and did overcome sin, and therefore sin is limited, so it cannot be taken with final seriousness. In view of God's concrete victory in the cross, sin is nothingness—but only from that perspective.
Rahner also takes seriously in two ways. The first is the same as Barth's first way. The human cannot alone move a muscle toward deliverance out of his of her sinful state toward God. Humans are slaves to sin. Only with the help of God's offer of self-communication in the supernatural existential is the possibility of a decision for God opened up. If the decision for God is made, then thanks goes to God alone. The second way differs from Barth. Sin is taken seriously by Rahner by attributing to the human person the freedom to give God a "no" answer. That "no" answer is serious because it is final, total and irreversible, a serious matter, for not even God can reverse its consequences.

In spite of Rahner's good intentions, his second way will not do. The seriousness of sin is dealt with in an abstract way, just as was responsibility. Seriousness, abstractly considered, implies finality and irreversibility. To avoid a pessimistic view of the destiny of the human race, Rahner is forced to an optimistic view of the rationality of human nature, robbing sin of its seriousness in a backhanded way. Abstractly considered, sin is serious, but it is so monstrously irrational that it is an unlikely possibility for most people.

Over against Rahner, Barth is correct to measure the seriousness of sin by the biblical story of what it cost God to deal with it. Only there do we see sin in its most serious form as an attack on God's being, and yet as
overcome, defeated and forgiven i.e., an ontological impossibility.
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

We began this study with the working hypothesis that there is fundamental agreement between the Roman Catholic and the Protestant doctrine of sin. Our comparison of Barth and Rahner confirms this expectation, disclosing essential agreement on the theology of sin, despite persistent and troubling incongruities.

Barth and Rahner agree on the basics of the doctrine of sin, both arguing that the knowledge of sin comes from revelation alone, not from our self-study; that sin is a willing "no" to the gracious God of Jesus Christ, for which the human person is fully responsible; that sin is universal, and that the sinner is redeemable. For both theologians, the personal subject of sin is elevated by a "supernatural existential" or the Word of God so as to be able to sin. And Barth and Rahner both believe that the results of sin are slavery and condemnation, from which the human being can by no means free itself.

But their deeply rooted disagreements constitute significant obstacles to full ecumenical agreement. The deadlock over original sin and concupiscence continues. For Rahner, these are sin only analogously; for Barth, they are sin in the proper sense. The lexical problem of how the word "freedom" should be used remains troubling. For Barth, sin by definition excludes freedom, but according to Rahner, sin by definition includes freedom. Barth's and Rahner's
disagreement about nature of sin's universality is unresolved. For Barth, sin in the proper sense is universal; for Rahner only analogous sin is universal. Their different views about the reason redemption is possible and ground of the hope of universal salvation is unsettling. For Barth, real sinners are redeemable because they have been redeemed by Jesus Christ. For Rahner, sinners are redeemable only insofar as they have not yet spoken the definitive "no" to God, i.e. only analogous sin is forgivable. For Barth, there is hope of universal salvation because of God's "yes" given to all human beings in the election of Jesus Christ. For Rahner, there is hope of universal salvation because none may turn out to be a sinner (in the most proper sense) after all.

But there are signs of agreement even in these difficult areas. The disagreement about the "freedom" or "possibility" of sin is more verbal than substantive. When we press past the formulas to the deepest concerns of Rahner we find that the act of sin is not "free" in the same sense as the act of faith. And when we dig deeper underneath Barth's strident language we find that he admits that sin is made possible and free in an analogous sense by the elevating effects of the address of God.

Even in the matter of original sin and concupiscence there is some overlap, for, though Barth contends that original sin and concupiscence are sin in the most proper sense, his "proper" sense corresponds in substance to
Rahner's analogous sense. It is proper with respect to the biblical story and analogous with respect to the concept of a transcendentally free "no". Both agree, then, that the sin which is known to be universal is only analogous with respect to the concept of a transcendent "no". Of course, the disagreement about a historical fall remains.

The hope of an agreement about the basis of the possibility of redemption is weaker, though not dead. Since, for Barth, all sin is analogous with respect to Rahner's definition, there is some hope that their intention may be closer that it first appears. For Barth, too, Christ's redemption of humanity has ontological presuppositions, for it presupposes that the sin from which human beings are redeemed is not a definitive, irrevocable "no" to God, human beings not being in a position to make such a self-defining choice. In other words, for Barth, human beings are redeemable because they cannot give an irrevocable "no" to God, but for Rahner, human beings are redeemable only if they have not yet spoken a "no" which is a possibility for them. For both Barth and Rahner, then, the de facto absence of a transcendental "no" is the presupposition of the possibility of redemption.
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