

Karl Rahner claimed that the more scientific theology is the more spiritually and pastorally relevant it will be. We can begin to test that claim by examining some of the building blocks of his Christian anthropology, as they developed in relation to his spiritual journey and academic career. Born on March 5, 1904, in Freiburg, im Breisgau, Germany, he grew up as the middle child of seven in a family deeply steeped in the Catholic tradition. In that family setting, he developed a positive sense of human nature that sustained him throughout his whole life. When asked as a renowned theologian why he was a Catholic Christian, he responded that he remained a Catholic because he was born one and had found nothing better to help him understand the great questions of life and to live more nobly and responsibly. At the center of the faith that he maintained throughout his life was the intuition that we human beings are positively oriented to God.

Jesuit Training

In 1922, Karl, following his older brother Hugo, joined the Society of Jesus, beginning a lifelong relationship with the Jesuits that had a profound influence on his religious sensibilities. His prayerful engagement with the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius deepened his intuitive sense that human beings can find God, who surpasses all our words and images, in all things, including the most mundane experiences. He saw the *Spiritual Exercises* as a valuable instrument for achieving a greater openness to the mystery and discerning the divine will.

From 1924 to 1927, Rahner continued his Jesuit training by studying the traditional scholastic philosophy in Pullach near Munich. Not content with this approach, he also read substantial parts of a five volume work on metaphysics by the Belgian Jesuit, Joseph Maréchal, who introduced him to the transcendental approach to philosophy practiced by Immanuel Kant. Maréchal accepted Kant's emphasis on the input of the knower in the knowing process, but placed this subjective factor in the context of the dynamism of the human spirit that actively searches for the truth that always exceeds its grasp. Rahner appropriated this fundamental notion that human beings have an unlimited drive for truth and later expanded his sense of the dynamism of the human spirit to include the unquenchable desire for a love that is satisfying and imperishable.

Even when immersed in philosophical study, Rahner's theological interests were never far from his mind, as some of his early spiritual writings suggest. For example, in 1932, he published in French an article on the spiritual senses in Origen and a year later addressed the same topic in the thought of Bonaventure, showing in both studies that human beings have the fundamental capacity to know something of the always mysterious God.

Influence of Heidegger

In 1934, Rahner's Jesuit superiors sent him to Freiburg for doctoral studies in preparation for assignment as a professor of philosophy. During this time, he was admitted to the famous seminar conducted by Martin Heidegger and, in fact, was given the prestigious responsibility of taking notes for the group. I recall a private conversation with Rahner in 1976 when he played down the influence of Heidegger on his theology, by sternly reminding me that Heidegger did not write about important theological topics like Christ and the Church. Rahner's early philosophical works, however, are clearly influenced by his teacher, as is his general theological method and his treatment of particular theological issues, such as the meaning of death. In an article written in 1940, "*The Concept of Existential Philosophy in Heidegger*," Rahner highlights themes of special interest to him from Heidegger's *Being and Time*. He is taken with Heidegger's method of inquiring about being in its totality by analyzing the a priori conditions necessary for human existence in the world. This analysis uncovers general structures of human existence that Heidegger calls "existentials."

Human beings find themselves thrown into the world subject to a restlessness unsatisfied by any particular reality. Human existence is temporal, a movement toward the ultimate boundary of death. We human beings have the root power of free self-disposal, of taking up an attitude toward our given situation in the world. Rahner recognized that Heidegger's own analysis moves toward a radical atheism, but he was also convinced that a more complete and deeper examination of human existence could be profoundly religious and open to a possible divine revelation.

Rahner's philosophical and theological works follow the Heideggerian methodology of searching for ultimate reality through an analysis of human existence in the world, especially the a priori conditions that make knowing and loving possible. In his early philosophical works, Rahner follows his teacher's method by analyzing human beings as capable of unrestricted questioning, and in his theological writings he often begins with human experiences that can be correlated with Christian doctrines. This methodology grounds Rahner's bold assertion that the experience of self is the experience of God. Furthermore, he makes use of Heidegger's existentials to describe human existence in the world: for example, that we are historical beings moving toward death. To Heidegger's list, he adds the supernatural existential, our fundamental God-given orientation to the holy mystery. Rahner's studies with Heidegger convinced him that the turn to the subject in modern philosophy could be used to disclose the spiritual dimension of human existence and to ground a theology open to the contemporary world.

Study of Aquinas

In pursuing his doctorate in philosophy, Rahner wrote a dissertation on the metaphysics of knowing according to Aquinas. He explored in depth the Thomistic thesis that it is impossible for humans to know anything without an imaginative element, that Aquinas called "turning to the phantasm." Rahner interpreted the treatment of knowing in Aquinas from the perspective of the transcendental philosophy he appropriated from Heidegger and from Kant through Maréchal. At the same time, he went to great lengths to show that his interpretation was faithful to Aquinas, who had already recognized a subjective element in human knowing. This effort did not satisfy Rahner's supervisor, Martin Honecker, who rejected the dissertation as too influenced by modern subjectivism. Despite this harsh judgment, Rahner published the work in 1937 under the German title *Geist in Welt*.

Spirit in the World

Rahner's rejected dissertation, published in English translation as *Spirit in the World*, provides an insightful phenomenology of human questioning. Human beings necessarily question and cannot finally evade the question of being in its totality. The question about being has a transcendental dimension since it includes calling human existence itself into question. From the transcendental perspective, we appear as creatures open to the whole of reality, in contact with being without being able to master it. We can question because we are already with being in its totality, but we continue to question because being as such eludes our total grasp. In asking about being as a whole, we are already in contact with the goal of our inquiry, while our continual questioning means we are finite creatures limited by the world of time and space. Thus we are in the presence of being not as disembodied souls, but only as bodily creatures dwelling on this earth.

Rahner contends that the dynamism of the human spirit necessarily involves a pre-apprehension or a co-apprehension of being. This suggests that being is co-known in every act of knowing some particular being. In analyzing knowing, we can ask about the nature of self-transcendence and the scope or extent of the goal toward which it tends. Rahner argues that the goal cannot be a finite reality or a particular object, since it exceeds every effort to define or master it. The goal of human transcendence is, rather, the infinite that makes all knowing possible. The infinite goal cannot be directly grasped in itself, but is co-known in every apprehension of individual objects. Human knowing is possible only on the condition that the goal of our spiritual striving is open to

the whole of all possible objects. We know individual things only within the horizon of being as a whole and in the process have an unthematic or implicit knowledge of being itself.

In his early philosophical writing, Rahner used the Latin term *esse*, translated as the act or power of existence, to point to the goal of human transcendence that is more than all possible things and is the infinite power that makes all particular things actual. Only if being is infinite can it serve as the condition of possibility for the existence of any particular thing. For Rahner, being is not only the sum of all things known and knowable; it is, rather, the infinite power beyond all that human beings can know and comprehend. From this perspective, we see ourselves as spirit because our inner dynamism is oriented to a goal that is absolutely infinite. On the other hand, we are finite spirits because we cannot directly grasp the absolute as a possession, but can only know it indirectly as the horizon of our questing spirit. In short, we pre-apprehend the infinite in all of our acts of knowing.

For Rahner, being as the act of existence cannot be a mere regulative ideal or an impersonal force or sheer nothingness. This treatment of human transcendence and the dynamism of the human spirit demands the activity of a source and a goal that actually exists. His phenomenology of human questioning and his metaphysics of knowing discloses the existence of being in its totality. At the end of his long metaphysical study of knowing, Rahner describes human beings as spirit in the world, finite creatures with infinite longings, who are “in the world and on the way God.” We are “the midpoint suspended between the world and God, between time and eternity.” With these explicitly religious formulations, Rahner set the stage for his effort to develop a philosophy of religion and a contemporary theology.

Hearers of the Word

Rahner's second major philosophical work, *Hearers of the Word*, repeats some of the major themes from *Spirit in the World*: the luminosity of being that reveals its intelligible structure and essential unity with knowledge; a metaphysical anthropology that emphasizes the dynamic drive of the human spirit for being as a whole; and the hidden aspect of being that always exceeds our grasp. Rahner expands these familiar themes with less explicit reference to Aquinas and with greater freedom in identifying absolute being with God. Rahner sees *Hearers* as a contribution to a philosophy of religion that prepares for a theology of revelation. He wants to demonstrate that human beings are fundamentally open to a possible revelation from God. To do this, he moves beyond the cognitive categories of *Spirit in the World* and analyzes human beings from the viewpoint of freedom and love. Through a free decision, we are called to accept our position in the world as finite creatures before an infinite Creator. Freedom is our root capacity to take up an attitude toward ourselves and our most important relationship to God. Freedom is not merely stringing together a series of good or bad decisions; it is, rather, the essential ability to determine ourselves in our totality as persons. As Rahner puts it, “freedom is the capacity for the eternal,” the root power to make ourselves to be what we will be forever. Our task is to get our desires in proper order, to direct our decisions to what is truly good, and to orient our will to God. For Rahner, metaphysical anthropology can arrive at the conclusion that human beings stand in free love before the God of a possible revelation. As free creatures, we are called to overcome the temptation to direct our desires and longings in destructive directions that will narrow the horizon of our openness to being as such. We must stay open to whatever content God wishes to communicate to us and to whatever method the holy mystery may employ to instruct us.

Rahner's philosophy of religion puts great emphasis on the concrete, bodily and historical dimension of human existence. We apprehend the material world through our senses, and our knowledge always contains an imaginative element. As finite beings, we are embodied spirits immersed in a world of time and space. Human beings can actualize themselves and determine their relationship to the absolute only through a succession of decisions over a period of time. Thus, a metaphysical anthropology,

developed from a transcendental perspective, can arrive at the conclusion that human beings are essentially bodily, historical beings.

With this conclusion established on philosophical grounds and not simply as an empirical fact, Rahner goes on to argue that human beings, in order to be faithful to their nature as spirit in the world, must listen for a revelation of the true God that can only occur through human words uttered in historical experience. Human beings, structured by a spiritual dynamism and immersion in the material world, can only hear a potential word of God in concrete history and in no other way that bypasses the finite world. Rahner recognizes that God is free to speak a word to human beings in their history or to remain silent. A philosophy of religion rooted in his metaphysical anthropology can only show the possibility of divine revelation. It is the further task of theology to examine whether such a word has ever been spoken in human history.

Rahner's two early philosophical works generated a great deal of commentary. Reacting to some telling criticisms, close colleagues of Rahner urged him to rework this material. Although Rahner did not do so himself, he did allow Johann Metz, his student and friend, to make revisions to both *Spirit in the World* and *Hearers of the Word*, subsequently giving his approval to the results. For his part, Rahner moved from philosophy into the world of theology, devoting the rest of his life to teaching and writing in that field.

Philosophical Criticisms

Questions remain about the relationship between Rahner's earlier philosophical works and his later theological writings. Some critics find deficiencies in his metaphysics of knowledge and contend that they undercut the validity of his whole theological enterprise. Others see flaws in his philosophical anthropology, but argue that his vast theological corpus stands as an independent achievement with its own inner logic and coherence. Friendly commentators tend to assess the philosophical works more positively, and look for organic connections between his transcendental philosophy and his innovative reinterpretation of traditional Christian teachings. For me, the key to relating his philosophy and theology is found in his notion that faith is the highest achievement of reason. Rahner clearly did not think of philosophy as a neutral search for truth without presuppositions. His metaphysical anthropology and his philosophy of religion were not intended as an independent foundation for doing theology. In both his metaphysical and theological writings, Rahner gave expression to his faith conviction that we human beings are oriented to absolute mystery. The early philosophical books attempt to vindicate this conviction through a transcendental analysis of human knowing and loving, while the later theological writings explain and apply this faith stance in the light of Christian doctrine.

Toward a Christian Anthropology

Many of Rahner's spiritual insights are rooted in his theological anthropology. He never produced an integrated and comprehensive Christian anthropology, but his philosophical writing and his vast theological corpus are filled with insightful descriptions and analysis of human existence which help fill out his fundamental intuition that human beings are positively oriented to the infinite. In developing his anthropology, Rahner sometimes speaks with Heidegger of "existentials," which are formal general structures or characteristics of human existence. On other occasions, he simply describes various aspects of human nature or particular ways in which individuals experience themselves. It is possible to identify at least fourteen of these existentials scattered throughout his writings, which can then be organized into seven dialectical pairs.

1. The first thing to be noted about human existence is that we are persons and unique subjects. Our personhood is implied in our essential orientation to God and it directs our attention back to this primordial relationship, which grounds all particular relationships. While we are tempted to understand ourselves merely in terms of external causes, the term "person" reminds us that we are called to take up an attitude toward all external factors. In this experience, we are conscious of ourselves as unique

individuals who are greater than the mere sum of what empirical studies reveal about us. This is not a statement about one aspect of human existence, but indicates that we confront ourselves as a whole and experience our subjectivity as the *a priori* condition of every particular experience. We are responsible for ourselves and experience ourselves as subjects when we analyze our motives and behavior.

2. We are self-transcendent beings which suggests that we experience ourselves as striving to move beyond all limits while always searching for something more. We know this aspect of our existence especially in our ability to reach out to others in love as well as our frustrated search for the perfect lover and for love which is imperishable. However, we must remember that this existential points not merely to a particular experience, no matter how painful or exhilarating, but to our *a priori* openness to being in general, which forms the background for all individual experiences. In speaking of ourselves as self-transcendent, we are not referring to a particular type of activity, which proceeds from one part of us called the "soul," but to the fact that we human beings as a whole are driven and allured by a power greater than ourselves.

3. We are knowers with an unlimited drive to understand but with finite capabilities. This means that human knowing involves, on the one hand, an infinite questioning, a transcending of all particular knowledge and a dissatisfaction with partial answers; and on the other, an immersion into the particularity of this world, a need to think in limited concepts and images and an inability to comprehend reality as a whole. As knowers we experience our growth in knowledge and understanding as an invitation to expand our experiences, to deepen our insights, and to improve our judgments.

4. We are called to live in a responsible freedom which means that we are unavoidably accountable for our lives as a whole. This points to a fundamental characteristic of human existence, in which we have the power to decide about ourselves forever. Freedom is not merely a neutral capacity to choose among alternatives nor is it simply the power to revise or reverse decisions. It is rather the capacity for the infinite, the power to do something of permanent validity, to make ourselves to be what we will be forever. Despite all determinisms in life, human beings have the power to take up an attitude toward themselves and thus to assume responsibility for the totality of their existence. As free creatures we are a single unified process of self-actualization through which we determine our eternal destiny.

5. We are historical creatures immersed in the world of time and space. Our existence in the world is not an accidental addition to our transcendence, but precisely the situation through which we actualize ourselves. Our historicity means that we find ourselves thrown into a world both of persons and things which have a power to shape our consciousness and determine our existence. At the same time, we are called upon to create our world, to use our time constructively, and to influence history. In all of this process we cannot escape the limitations implied in our creaturehood, our bodiliness, and our immersion in the rhythm of time. Our situation in life is always influencing and limiting our free disposal of ourselves. Any effort to live in total self-sufficiency or in a pure subjective interiority can only lead to frustration.

6. Human beings remain radically threatened by guilt and sin. Although we possess our existence from a power outside ourselves, it is still possible for us to be unfaithful by saying "no" to that infinite source which we call "God." Thus it can be said that the threat of personal sin is an abiding existential of human existence. In addition, sin and guilt co-determine the very situation in which we must freely actualize ourselves, so that in Christian terms we can speak of original sin as an existential which influences the whole of human history, although it is always surrounded by a more powerful grace. Thus there is in us a division or a self-alienation resulting from the fact that our freedom can never totally master or integrate all the elements which are given to us prior to our free decisions. While parts of an individual's personality are the product of free decisions, there is much that remains impersonal, unilluminated, unaffected by personal decision. Rahner calls the resulting split or lack of integration "concupiscence," which suggests we never become wholly absorbed either in good or in evil.

7. Human life is necessarily communal and social. We can only achieve authentic existence in relationship with other people. Self-realization and personal relationships grow in like and not inverse proportion. Our social orientation is not simply a secondary addition to our individual nature, but a constitutive dimension of our very existence. It is possible to specify this point by distinguishing certain dimensions in our communal life: As bodily creatures, we are related to a biological community or environment; as spiritual beings, we are related to various personal communities, such as family, neighborhood and state; as religious persons we are related to a church; and as individuals incorporated into Christ we are related to the whole human family.

8. We are the creatures who move inevitably toward death. Death should not be thought of merely as a biological event in which we are passively struck down by a force outside ourselves. It is rather a spiritual act by which we freely hand over our lives to the gracious mystery. Thus death is not just the separating of body and soul, but our great opportunity to ratify the general orientation of our lives toward the good and thus to reach our final fulfillment. Death appears to us as the final boundary of our lives, but the eyes of faith also discern it as the passageway into eternity. We know death not only as a future event but as an abiding reality which touches our daily existence. Within life we must live with death by accepting our creaturehood with all of its possibilities and limitations.

9. Personal existence survives biological death. We are called to a final eternal fulfillment of all of the deepest longings of our heart. Eternity is not a very long linear continuation of time, but rather the ultimate validity of our spiritual freedom which comes not after death, but through it. Thus we live with eternity in time as it shines through our experiences of generous love, steadfast fidelity and inner peace. It is precisely because we already know the hints of eternity in our lives that death is so threatening to us. Our deepest hope is that love is stronger than death and that our efforts in life have a final validity. Faith, which is expressed as belief either in the immortality of the soul or the resurrection of the body, grounds this hope and enables us to discern the intimations of eternity in ordinary life.

10. Human persons are sexual beings. This does not refer simply to the generative faculty, but a quality which affects all aspects of human existence and partakes in our essential relationship to the absolute mystery. In other words, sexuality stamps our whole personality and is reflected in all our activities. It propels us out of ourselves and moves us to seek union with others. We relate to one another as males and females and actualize ourselves through these relationships not by abstracting from sexual differences, but precisely through them. Furthermore, it is in and through such loving human relationships that individuals achieve and manifest their love of God.

11. Human beings always remain dependent on the past, both as members of the human race and as individuals. The communal aspect of this dependency results from our necessary immersion in an interpersonal world and extends to the very origin of humanity which continues to influence the whole of human history. In addition, we are dependent on our own past since our exercise of freedom in the present is conditioned both by previous decisions and also by the elements in our nature which have escaped integration through free decisions. If we are to live wholeheartedly in the present then we must accept our past by celebrating our successes and transforming our failures. The past is a rich resource for self-understanding and self-improvement.

12. We are the beings who are responsible for creating our own future. This essential aspect of our nature has only emerged into consciousness in modern times with our increased ability to control our destiny. This phenomenon raises the question of our hopes and our relationship to the future. To a certain extent we can plan ourselves and shape our future. The future toward which we are directed, however, is ultimately not simply our own finite creation but is the work of God, the gracious One, who draws us into the future.

13. We are the beings who in order to fulfill ourselves must go out of ourselves into the world and must reach out in love to other human beings. This is not just a matter of psychological wisdom, but a proposition of theological anthropology which

maintains that human existence is structured in such a way that we can only actualize ourselves through interaction with our environment and especially other human beings. We are interdependent creatures who need others so that we can break out of the prison of selfishness and experience the liberation of caring for others. In turn we perform an important service for others by being receptive to their love.

14. We are the ones who, in order to achieve genuine fulfillment, must return to ourselves. To avoid self-alienation and a scattered piecemeal existence, persons must be quiet and turn inward in a process of self-discovery. We must attempt to order and integrate the vast amount of experience flowing from our encounters with the world of persons and things. Again, this is not simply a question of psychic health, but an essential characteristic of the spiritual creature. In fact, for Rahner, a being is spiritual precisely to the degree that it is able to accomplish the return to self or, in other words, to achieve self-presence. As finite spirits immersed in the world of matter, we have the power to step back and return to self in a process that makes human knowledge and all spiritual activities possible. It is in this achievement of self-presence that we actuate ourselves and demonstrate our distinctively human characteristics.

Organizing the Existentials

In examining Rahner's anthropological insights it is difficult to find a way to organize the material in a coherent fashion while being faithful to its rich diversity and complexity. Some have chosen a key category, such as "person," or "man of mystery," or "self-actualization" as the organizing principle. In the *Foundations of Christian Faith*, Rahner himself provides a theological ordering which describes successively human beings as persons, transcendent beings, responsible and free, historical, dependent creatures oriented to mystery, beings threatened by sin and guilt and finally, as the event of God's self-communication. Rahner did not intend this as a comprehensive theological anthropology, but as the basis for his theological reflections and as a limited contribution to a much-needed contemporary expression of the general characteristics of human existence. I find it more in tune with contemporary experience in the Western world to organize his statements about the fundamental structures of human existence into pairs of opposites that are dialectically related. For example, the proposition that human beings are individuals can only be properly understood when it is related to the statement that human existence is necessarily communal. This approach seems to me to be faithful to Rahner's own fundamental outlook, which appreciates the complex pluralism of human existence and recognizes the impossibility of surveying that pluralism from a simple organizing principle. On the other hand, Rahner does not favor simply setting two apparently opposed characteristics side by side without determining their fundamental relationship. Rather than settle for a simple juxtaposition, he is interested in determining the primordial unity of related entities. Applied to our attempt to organize Rahner's anthropological insights this means that we should not merely pair dialectically opposed statements, but also show how they ultimately flow from our essential nature as related to the mystery that envelopes and grounds our existence.

Dialectical Pairings

With this in mind, we can propose the following schema as a way of organizing the Rahnerian existentials.

1. We are the actively self-transcending beings who achieve our fulfillment precisely by accepting our contingency and submitting ourselves throughout our lives and in the act of dying to the gracious mystery.
2. We are unique individuals with an enduring, immortal, spiritual nature who can only realize our individuality by living out our communal nature in various personal communities. Both our individuality and our communal nature are rooted in our partnership with God which we share with all other human beings.

3. We are spiritual beings who transcend all particular objects in a movement toward the infinite; and at the same time we are physical, sexual, historical beings immersed in the world of time and space who can only move toward the infinite in and through finite realities. We are finite, embodied spirits, dynamically related to the infinite mystery.
4. We are personal subjects who as a unified whole transcend all the particular elements that make up our nature; and at the same time, we are beings who are threatened by the self-alienation of sin and guilt, and who are unable to unify completely the disparate elements in our nature. Our personhood flows from our relationship with the Deity, while our alienation is rooted in our inability to respond fully to the divine summons to partnership.
5. We are infinite questioners and receptive knowers who only achieve the fullness of knowledge in a free loving response to the absolute mystery. Knowledge and the freedom implied in the genuine love are both rooted in a primordial unity or personal center from which we respond freely and with awareness to the ultimate source of our being.
6. We determine ourselves and shape our future, but only under the influence of prior determinations supplied by the history of humankind and our own previous free decisions. We interact in the present with particular realities influenced by both our dependence on the past and our anticipation of the future. Ultimately, our temporality is rooted in our dialogue with the gracious God who is the dynamism and the goal of human history.
7. We are the ones who can only take possession of ourselves by reaching out to other people and things. Conversely, we can function effectively in the political or social sphere only out of a rich interior life. As unified creatures we can fully actualize ourselves only through a twofold movement of going outside of ourselves drawn by the absolute mystery, and returning to ourselves sustained by that same mystery.

Spirit in the World

When we examine these pairs of opposites it seems possible to combine them into two comprehensive statements which are also dialectically related. Thus, on one side, we have all the characteristics which involve openness and dynamism: we are spirit, self-transcendent, individual persons, the infinite questioners, free and immortal. On the other side, we find the traits that reflect some type of limitation: we are at the same time contingent, communal, material, finite, historical, sexual, temporal, concupiscent and subject to death. If we use the word "spirit" to summarize the first group of characteristics, and "world" the second, we arrive at Rahner's own characterization of human existence as spirit in the world. "Thus, we are," he writes, "the mid-point suspended between the world and God, between time and eternity, and this boundary line is the point of our definition and our destiny. . . ." Of course, "spirit" and "in the world" are not just two existentials accidentally related, but they imply each other and one cannot exist without the other. The finite spirit must become sensibility and be immersed in the world if it is to realize itself.

If we can summarize the existentials in the dialectical phrase "spirit in the world", then we must still make sure it is understood in terms of our essential relationship to the absolute mystery. We are properly understood as spirit in the world only when we realize that our encounters with the absolute mystery come precisely in and through finite reality.

A Dialectical Spirituality

Rahner's dialectical anthropology provides us with a solid and comprehensive basis for working out an approach to the spiritual life which fits the experience of persons in the contemporary Western world. Today so much of the spiritual struggle is to bring apparently opposite and competing tendencies into an integrated system. At our best we strive for a wholeness which refuses

to negate authentic aspects of our human existence. A theological anthropology which recognizes the danger of collapsing one or the other competing poles and celebrates the ideal of a lifelong quest for integration is a valuable resource indeed for today's spiritual journey.

A contemporary dialectical spirituality which is rooted in current experience and in a solid anthropology celebrates a distinctive set of ideals. These ideal characteristics can be expressed in terms of paired opposites in order to reflect our lifelong struggle for integration and to suggest the hidden, often paradoxical, connections between the polarities. Without going into great detail, let us examine some of these ideals or contemporary virtues.

Committed-Openness. We must guard against both a mindless relativism, which judges one position to be as good as another, and a narrow exclusivism which tries to monopolize truth and goodness. Instead we need a free and intelligent commitment to our particular standpoint, which in turn will enable us to pass over with confidence to the standpoints of others in a search for meaning and value greater than we now possess. For example, we should strive to root ourselves so firmly in our religious tradition that we possess the confidence to be open to truth and goodness wherever it is found. A commitment to our religious heritage, which is based on a genuine understanding and appreciation of both its strengths and weaknesses, is precisely what will enable us to enter into a fruitful dialogue with other traditions.

Reflective-Spontaneity. In our culture we are in danger of falling into either an excessive and paralyzing introspection or a superficial, unexamined immersion in the activities of life. Our ideal instead should be to combine a spontaneous immersion in the present moment with periodic self-examination, which in turn frees us to live more fully in the now. We want to live in a self-forgetful way, but this requires self-examination. It is desirable to be attentive to our current experience, but this seems to be facilitated by regular meditation. Our goal is to participate wholeheartedly in the events of our lives, but we need insight and understanding to do so. We need to find a proper frequency and method for our reflective times so that they don't increase our anxiety and preoccupation with self, but rather help free us to listen to the God who speaks to us in the present moment.

Hopeful-Realism. Our culture seems to present the temptation to swing from a naïve optimism to a cynical pessimism as ideals are tarnished and dreams unfilled. In reaction we must strive for a spiritual maturity which is in touch with reality, including its dark and tragic dimension, but which maintains a lively confidence in the ultimate triumph of good over evil. At the same time, we must be aware of the signals of hope in our everyday experience which remind us of God's final victory over suffering.

Enlightened-Simplicity. Some people find themselves fixated in a childish religious outlook which ignores the ambiguity of life and runs on emotion divorced from reason. Others are trapped in a pseudo-sophistication in which a little bit of knowledge has obscured the whole point of authentic religion. We ought to avoid these tendencies by striving for a spirituality which includes a purity of heart founded on an adequate theology, a humble charity based on insight, an uncomplicated lifestyle intelligently chosen, and an utter dependence on God matched by a creative use of our talents. We want to have an adult understanding of our faith, but one which recognizes it as the simple good news that there is a gracious God who loves us despite our unworthiness.

Prayerfully-Prophetic. It is not uncommon today to find people very serious about prayer, but lacking concern for the needs of the oppressed and disadvantaged. On the other hand, some people, serious about improving our world, find prayer irrelevant to that task. To avoid such one-sidedness, it seems important to develop a prayer life which intensifies our awareness of social injustice and moves us to prophetic action on behalf of those oppressed. At the same time, involvement in the struggle to humanize our world should send us back to prayer where we recall our dependence on God and seek new energy and strength for the struggle.

These characteristics of a dialectical spirituality are not exhaustive and obviously need further explanation and exemplification. However, they do set a tone, map a direction and indicate a task. I believe there are growing numbers of people

who find this dialectical approach closer to their experience and a more reliable guide in their quest for meaning, commitment, integration and a richer human life.

Prayers

In his homilies and prayers, it is clear that Rahner's anthropology does not derive merely from a philosophical analysis of human existence but is rooted in the Christian conviction that we are hearers of a saving word from the Lord. In *Prayers and Meditations* Rahner recognizes that we are a "frightful puzzle" to ourselves and "no amount of questioning" can fathom the depths of our relationship to "the God of free favors." Like Augustine, Rahner understands the restless heart. "We are all pilgrims on the wearisome roads of our life. Every end becomes a beginning. There is no resting place or abiding city. Every answer is a new question. Every good fortune is a new longing." Responding to the Freudian emphasis on the power of our unconscious inner drives, Rahner claims that the "writhing coil" of our cravings really points to "a thirst for infinity," which our Creator placed "in the very depths of our nature." It takes eyes of faith "to see behind and through all these dark forces a much more powerful force --the power of the presence of the Holy Spirit."

In his insightful book *The Love of Jesus and the Love of Neighbor*, Rahner rejects "an autonomous anthropology," which leads to the individualism that plagues western society, in favor of "a communion anthropology," which recognizes the solidarity of the human family and the interdependent character of human existence. This anthropology views love of neighbor as "a sacred inexorably enjoined duty" which is always "embraced and borne up by the absolute mystery of the infinite God." A Christian anthropology has "the improbable optimism" to assert that "average human beings" who "ply their way through life" can rise above "the miserable narrow anxiety of their existence" and "the banality of everyday life" by loving others in simple unselfish acts of kindness, understanding and compassion. By "daring to risk" our own autonomy and freedom in genuine acts of love, we enter "into the unfathomable, unbounded dwelling place of God."

Rahner's Christian anthropology, which highlights our orientation to Mystery and our essential interdependence, will continue to provide spiritual searchers in the twenty-first century with a valuable alternative to the self-contained humanism and the excessive individualism so prevalent in our culture.