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CHRISTIANITY AND NON-CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS
IN KARL RAHNER'S VISION

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Abstract: In the context of the late modernity, Karl Rahner endeavoured to offer a theological solution to the current and complicated issue of the religious pluralism. What are the apriorical anthropological data of religions? Has God revealed Himself in a redeeming way also in the extra-biblical religions? Is it still possible to postulate a universal salvation way and an absolute religious truth? Is it possible to acknowledge other religions as ways of salvation and their prophets redeeming, at the same time calling Christianity the religion of salvation and Jesus Christ absolute Saviour? What justification and what entitlement still has the Christian apostolate if salvation is possible also in the other religions? And what could animate an "anonymous Christian" to wish to move from the implicit, anonymous belief, of which he is not aware, to the explicit one? In a world of religious diversity and „weak faith”, what strategies of “accommodation” and service should adopt “the little flock” to continue to be the soul of the world? Promoting a Christological-inclusivist perspective – according to which Christ is in the religions of the world and is their fulfillment, and not against or above them – and claiming the mystical apostolate of the good news of the universality of salvation, Rahner offered an answer to all these questions. His answer and the topicality of this answer are the subjects treated in this study.

Key Words: Christianity, religions, transcendence, “hearer of the Word”, absolute Mystery, universal will of salvation, seeking memory, absolute Saviour, “anonymous Christians”.

Homo religiosus as a “hearer of the Word”

The issues of the philosophy of religion (*Religionsphilosophie*) and of religious phenomenology (*Religionsphänomenologie*) were the concerns of the catholic theologian Karl Rahner (1904-1984) even early in his life. In his doctoral thesis in philosophy, *Geist in Welt / Spirit in the world*, Rahner presented the general data of the metaphysics of knowledge¹ and pointed out how they can be transcribed in the phenomenological plan. In his intimate structure, the human being is endowed with a universal and permanent noetical dynamism towards the absolute Mystery. This dynamism cannot be perpetually ascending unless we admit the reality of the boundless knowledge of the divinity.

The human being is not open only towards the world and existence, generally, but also towards the Being. The opening towards the Being and the willingness of the human spirit to hear and understand the Being's language were presented by Rahner in the other philosophical work written by him, *Hörer des Wortes / Hearer of the Word*², a work in which he wished to present the foundations of a philosophy of religion. For the German theologian, the philosophy of religion can mediate knowledge of the real relationship that unites the human being with the divine Absolute. Scientifically founded with the help of metaphysics, the philosophy of religion has the same foundation and the same object as metaphysics itself. Ultimately, the philosophy of religion and metaphysics, although distinct, meet in the metaphysical anthropology. And together, the philosophy of religion and the metaphysical anthropology, conceptually interpreting the existential relationship of the human being with divinity, describe how knowing God is possible, as well as human being's union with the supreme Being.

Certainly, any philosophy of religion, implicitly asserting the human subject, by this becomes a metaphysical anthropology. But if viewed from the point of view of its content, the philosophy of religion is nothing else but fundamental theological anthropology. At its turn, *teologia naturalis*, as an internal moment of general metaphysics, of ontology, is originally and permanently united with the metaphysical anthropology³.

As to the relationship of the philosophy of religion with the revealed theology, Rahner pointed out that the philosophy of religion, as a fundamental theological anthropology, cannot however determine a potential revelation of God or the content of this revelation. And this because God remains free in the act of His revelation, which is an absolutely unpredictable and free gift. Certainly, the human being has the inner willingness to hear the Word and to reach, by this free act, a deep understanding of his own existence, but we must not forget that the willingness to hear the Word is God's work, before being the man's work.

From this we understand that the philosophy of religion cannot found theology and that theology, as a Word of the God revealed to the human being, has its foundation in itself⁴.

Rahner expressed his conviction that there existed an original unity between the knowledge being, knowledge and the object of knowing. Any object of knowing has a certain degree of intelligibility. And, in point of fact, any entity can be an object of knowledge, because "the being of entities is intelligibility" and every creature has its own reason for being, bears a transcendent sense. Every entity is inwardly directed towards the human being, as a knowing being and as a transcendence of creation, in such a way that, by self-transcendence, "the being of entities and knowledge form an original unit"⁵. "The being of entities and knowledge are therefore correlative because they are *identical* in their foundation"⁶. In the end, knowledge is self-possession, the return of the knowledge being to his self or, in Thomist words, *reditio subjecti in seipsum*. Germinal or causal principles (*logoi spermatikoi*/rationes seminales), scattered in the world through the creative act, are re-gathered, through the act of knowing, in the human reason. And since these reasons of the world carry a sense, they are lights, the human being who possesses them in a cluster in his self is a luminous being⁷. But, of course, as subject, because the human being does not live solely through knowing, but also through will, emotionality and action, his entire being is luminous. The human being has all the reasons of creation in his self in a bundle and, as an emperor and priest, he gives them back humanized to the Logos, as a prosphoron offered to the heavenly High Priest.

In its ultimate essence, Rahner confessed, all knowledge is genuine when founded on love. The love for God is precisely "an interior moment of knowing", is "both *the prerequisite*, as well as its *foundation*"⁸. But if love were not real and possible, nor the discussion about the phenomenon, in general, and nor the particular one about the religious phenomenon would be possible. In the spirit of Rahner's hermeneutics, phenomenology follows theology, and not vice versa. The intimate relationship that exists between faith and data offered by evidence (phenomena), has been a milestone for Rahner in his research, according to E. Przywara. The phenomenon, as evidence presented through data, is, essentially, consistent with a "state of opening towards the revelation"⁹ given in the human transcendence. The human spirit is open towards the entirety of the being and of phenomena in the world and has in itself the ability to perceive Revelation¹⁰. As a spirit in the world and as a hearer of the Word, the human being is, therefore, fundamentally open towards the sacred and directs the entire creation towards the Divine.

The human being may know that, in his purity and wholeness, is a genuine spirit only when he can form a concept of God, at least analogous, concept which can make a religion possible¹¹. While, as long as the word "God" exists, there exists a religion, even though not in its purest form.

We know that religion, as a revelation of the mystery is not exhausted in the act of discovery and as a ultimate knowing of the sacred, goes beyond the empirical knowledge to a large extent. And then we legitimately wonder how we can get in touch and how we can analyze phenomena that depict hidden, secret realities? How can we know, therefore, the phenomenology of the sacred since phenomena can barely be noticed? In point of fact, more or less, this is the aporia of all religions. A religious phenomenon is possible inasmuch as it is perceived and understood to some extent. Which means that the religious phenomenology ultimately is a hermeneutics, an act of interpreting reality. But because it takes into consideration the complexity and mystery of the world, on one hand, and the "intellectual uncertainty" and the "suspension of thinking" before this mystery, on the other hand, phenomenology includes faith. Rahner deemed that a deeper understanding penetrated the innermost depths of a phenomenon and helped us find out that every phenomenon had its ultimate foundation outside it. And thus, every knowledge, exceeding its own boundaries is, ultimately religious,¹² because it begins from God and returns to Him.

The divine revelation as a universal will of salvation

In Karl Rahner's vision, the history of salvation and the history of the world, although not identical, are coextensive. They are coextensive because the history of salvation is fulfilled in the broader universe of world history. They are different, because the universal history hosts not only the history of salvation, but also the history of perdition. In point of fact, history is the time of exercising freedom in a redemptional or losing way. In history – which enters God's biography through the Incarnation – the human being says Yes or No to God's universal will of salvation¹³.

When the human being does not willingly close himself towards God, then „he finds his salvation". And salvation is, actually, the very "fulfillment of man's transcendence"¹⁴. Even in the post-Edenic circumstances, namely when he is subject to immediate sin and guilt, the human being has the real possibility to meet God thanks to His effective and universal will of salvation¹⁵. Opposing the soteriological pessimism of Augustine and Calvin, Rahner claimed God's universal will of salvation at any time and in any cultural or ethnic space. Therefore, when he was received in full freedom, God worked in a redemptional way even beyond the history of the Old and the New Testament¹⁶. Even the Old Covenant recorded figures of pious pagans well pleased to God. And their piety was not the consequence of a natural revelation and of a philosophical knowledge, but the fruit of the supernatural revelation received, in freedom, through faith¹⁷. As a matter of fact, the very moral life of the human being belongs to the supernatural sphere. And who can deny the existence of moral life with any nation under the sky?

The Jesuit theologian did not share the exclusivist opinion according to which people may be saved only through “the historical verbal and strictly concrete revelation”, namely through the heavenly and biblical revelation. As a representative of the inclusivist view, he openly claimed the “possibility of a genuine history of Revelation outside the New and the Old Testament”¹⁸. Nevertheless, he did not overlook the wrong or merely human explanations of the original transcendental experience in the extra-biblical religions, or the lack of coherence and of continuity of particular moments within them. But even if such deficiencies existed,

“the Christian historian of religions does not need to conceive the religious history from outside Christianity and from outside the Holy Scripture as a mere history of man’s religious activity or downright as a degradation of the human possibilities of establishing a religion”¹⁹.

And this positive assessment requested by Rahner to the Christian historians of religions, “does not offend at all the claim of absolute of Christianity”²⁰.

The thoughts on the original Revelation gave the German theologian the possibility to highlight also other significant issues that define the human being as a “homo religiosus”. The Paradisiac, universal man was apriorically endowed with supernatural inner gifts and through these he was open *ab initio* towards the Revelation, he was *capax Dei*. In his deepest intimacy, the human being is a transcendental being²¹, open from the beginning towards Transcendence and towards the absolute Mystery. But Rahner could not speak about the human being as a transcendental being without equally speaking about a transcendental Revelation through which God implanted transcendentality in human being’s nature. Through this apriorical transcendentality, which is consciousness, and not science, God Himself dwells and conveys Himself to the human being²². Therefore, even since the dawn of humanity, the human being is the host of God’s self-communication (*Selbstmitteilung Gottes*) through grace and through revelation. But the human transcendentality does not mark only man’s closeness to the absolute Mystery, through grace, but also the radical ontological difference between the Creator and his creation. Although God is more intimate to us than we are to ourselves, He is the radically Other.

Since the transcendental Revelation exists simultaneously with the human being, Rahner spoke about a paradisiac beginning of it. But at the same time he claimed also a historical transmission of the original transcendental Revelation, despite the initial failure and guilt of the human being²³. As a matter of fact, this original guilt “has been from the very beginning and always covered and overcome by God’s absolute will to self-communicate Himself in seeing Jesus Christ and starting from Him”²⁴.

God's Self disclosure in the intimacy of the rational being through grace is universal, since Adam himself is the universal man and the "supernatural existential" (*das übernatürliche Existential*) is an inner constituent of nature. But God's Self-communication through grace to all the people does not take only the form of an extensive catholicism, but also the one of an intensive catholicism; the "whole", "complete" man is integrated in the work of salvation²⁵.

Rahner saw in any religion attempts of an objective expression of the original non-reflective revelation. Even in Paradise, the transcendental Revelation and the categorial Revelation coexisted, namely God's revelation in the conscience and in history, in the intimate human being and in the historical existence of man. God's transcendental, apriorical, not expressed in concepts Self-revelation always take a categorial, objective, aposteriorical and historical form of expression, even though such mediation does not have an explicit and thematic religious nature. There exists no religion in which we could not find particular, determined moments of a successful mediation of the transcendental Revelation, mediations that could make salvation possible in the dimension of historical objectivity²⁶.

"The searching memory" as a nostalgia for the absolute Saviour

Man's wish to unite with God and, implicitly, to be saved is embedded, therefore, in the "genetic code", in man's transcendentality. Since this union of the human being with God takes a concrete, historical form, Rahner deemed that where there is a desire for redemption and fulfillment there also exists a "searching memory", in pursuit of the Bringer of the absolute salvation, who, *per definitionem* and by necessity, is God and human being²⁷. This memory, Rahner suggested, does not exist solely at the level of the individual conscience, but also at the level of the collective conscience. Which means that there exists not only a "searching memory" of the human being, but also a "searching memory" of religions.

What is the characteristic feature of this "searching memory", its particularity?²⁸.

Memory commonly implies something already existing, something that does not need to be sought, as it is already deposited. But man can keep in memory what he lives and learns only if he has, in his subjectivity, "some aprioric structures" and „an aprioric principle of waiting, of seeking and of hoping"²⁹. Memory is not a *tabula rasa* on which history writes, arbitrarily, whatever takes place throughout it. It also has, surprisingly, an anticipatory function and a permanent opening towards the future; is not passively confined in the past, but "scrutinizes", "seeks" the Saviour in the horizon of the future³⁰:

"The memory of man's transcendentality elevated through grace, seeks hoping and anticipating in

history the event when the free decision is made and becomes tangible in a redeeming outcome for the whole history, and this precisely starting simultaneously from God's freedom and from the freedom of mankind and considering the entire history of mankind. But this sought-after and awaited event in this kind of memory is what we call the absolute Saviour; this is the anticipation of the *memory* which exists in each and every faith"³¹.

Whether the "searching" memory, as a nostalgia for the absolute Saviour, objectifies in myths or in historical personalities, to whom the capacity of Bringer of absolute salvation is assigned, Rahner deemed it a completely secondary issue from the dogmatic point of view. The dogmatist would have the task to promote the study of the history of religions carefully and with a benevolent mood for one to be able to ascertain if and to what extent may such "saviours" exist in them"³². And given the evidence of such images of saviours (Rahner does not use quotation marks in this case!), we could deem them "some hints of the fact that man, always and everywhere impelled by grace, seek anticipating that event in which his absolute hope becomes irreversible from the historical point of view and acts as such"³³.

Jesus Christ in the non-Christian religions

The famous theologian wrote about the presence of Jesus Christ in the non-Christian³⁴ religions during the period of his theological maturity.

According to the Christian faith, Jesus Christ is that absolute Saviour sought and awaited by memory. Thanks to the Incarnation and to assuming the entire mankind in the human nature of the Hypostasis of the Word, every human being may truly meet Christ, because He permanently remains the concrete horizon of his fulfillment and salvation. Christianity affirms not only the presence of Jesus in the entire history of salvation, but also the salvation of the whole human race in Him. And salvation is a reality even when it is ignored or not realized. The Incarnation of God's Word in a human person is the "intrinsic and necessary moment of the universal reconciliation with God"³⁵, and this reconciliation "cannot be conceived without this hypostatic union"³⁶. Even more, Rahner wrote that "the mysteries of soteriology boil down to the mystery of the Incarnation"³⁷.

The premise of the possibility of supernatural faith in Revelation in all times and places, therefore also in the non-Christian religions, was explicitly worded by the Second Vatican Council (*Lumen Gentium*, 16). Starting from this, Rahner went further and asserted that the faithful and benevolent non-Christians receive – even though through inner revelation

and anonymously – God' supernatural will of salvation eschatologically embodied in Jesus Christ³⁸. And this becomes even clearer when we read the words:

“Whoever accepts his existence as a human being until the end (and before this, the existence of the one next to him), that one accepted the Son of Man, because in Him God accepted man. And when the Scripture asserts that whoever loves his neighbour fulfills the Law, these words represent the ultimate truth and this way, in every neighbour we always receive and love this *Extremely Close One*, who is also *The Farthest*”³⁹.

At the same time

“an absolute love that is radically committed and without reserves for a human being says an implicit Yes to Christ in faith and love”⁴⁰.

Entering time, through Incarnation, Christ is subject to certain determinations, as He is circumscribed to a nation, to a space and a certain time. And to assert, despite these determinations, that salvation in Christ has a universal significance is a scandal not only for the Jews, but also for non-Christians⁴¹.

The German theologian wondered, however, if the non-Christian religions had a real, positive contribution to the emergence of this universal supernatural faith in the Revelation and to what extent this would imply a faith in Christ Himself. Certainly, Rahner admitted a positive role of the non-Christian religions in acquiring entitlement through faith, hope and love. This does not mean, however, that non-Christian religions would be positioned on the same level as Christianity. And that in them would not exist degradations and bad influences on the salvation of their members. But, however, if a non-Christian religion lacked a positive significance in terms of the salvation of its members, this would mean either that nobody may be saved outside Christianity, or that whoever is saved achieves it from outside society and outside history. But salvation outside society and outside history contradicts even Christianity, which is the religion of salvation in Christ and within the Church, in history and in community. Private revelations, extraordinary illuminations (especially at the time of death) a.s.o. are examples of a work of God's revelation with the non-christian man who did not meet the Christian preaching, but cannot be taken as examples against the social nature of any religion⁴².

The historical lapse of time between Adam and Moses' revelation of the Old Testament, lapse on which the Old Testament keeps silence, cannot be deprived of a divine revelation. Similarly, Rahner suggested,

Revelation was present in all the concrete religions, despite the entire silence the Bible keeps in this respect. In point of fact, the Bible presents the Revelation disclosed by God to the chosen people and to Christians, offering to people the natural way to salvation, without excluding, however, the possibility of a revelation and salvation in the non-Christian religions.

Given the spatial and historical expansion of mankind, nor was the "postulate of a tradition of the original Revelation" found satisfactory to Rahner, which would explain the positive function of the non-Christians religions. God's universal and effective will of salvation, which includes also the "infralapsarian" situation (of the original sin), as well as the possibility of the redeeming faith in the Revelation, actually are the real premises of acknowledging the positive function (even though partial) of the non-Christians religions for the people who are not Christians⁴³ yet.

But, in order to clarify the actual way in which Christ is present in a non-Christian believer and in the non-Christians religions, Rahner resorted to the work of the Holy Spirit⁴⁴ and to the presence of the supernatural grace in the human being. Through the Holy Spirit – which is everywhere to fulfil everything – Christ is present both in non-Christians, as well as in the non-Christians religions. This Holy Spirit is the Ghost of Christ, the Ghost of the incarnated Son of God, the entelechy of the history of Revelation⁴⁵.

Since the answer offered by the Catholic school Dogmatics seemed confusing to him, Rahner planned to clarify the relationship between the grace of the Holy Spirit and the event of the Crucifixion of Christ the Saviour. He wondered whether the event of the Cross, already known in advance by God, "influenced" the transmission from always of the divine grace. And to solve this problem, he resorted again to God's universal will of salvation, will that existed *a priori* and "unconditioned by anything outside God, not even by the incarnation and by the cross of Christ"⁴⁶. Therefore, not the Incarnation and the Cross are the cause of the universal will of salvation, but God's universal will of salvation is the cause of the Incarnation and of the Crucifixion of the Son. Thus, the universal will of salvation appears as a cause, and the Incarnation and the Crucifixion as effects of this cause. Not Christ's work is the one that fulfils the divine will, but this divine will is fulfilled in Christ⁴⁷.

Unlike Urs von Balthasar, who stressed the importance of the Cross and of the expiatory death for all the sinners⁴⁸, Karl Rahner saw the Cross as a moment, a stage (along with the Incarnation and the Resurrection) of the universal salvation, wanted by God from eternity and, consequently, not caused by the sin⁴⁹. The universal will of salvation did not allow the exclusive reference to Christ, to His Cross, but places also the Cross in God's act of love for the entire mankind. Rahner suggested, in consonance with Saint Nicholas Cabasila, that on the Cross the Father was on man's side and that through the Cross, but not only through it, God showed His

“mad” love for man. Rahner stresses not one or another of the moments of the redemption, but the universal will of salvation, a will that includes and permanently brings together the objective salvation and the personal salvation, man’s salvation *in* Christ and the salvation of every man *with* Christ. The dynamism of Rahner’s thinking is, thus, quite real also in his Christology and soteriology. The horizon of man’s deification is kept by Rahner permanently open “for every human being that comes in the world”. God’s love worked salvation in Christ and is still working salvation until His Second Coming. Rahner does no longer stress unilaterally the universal salvation in Christ, in His Cross, the way catholic Christology often did, but inserts this event, through Incarnation, Resurrection and Pentecost, in the broader event of the universal will of salvation. This way also these words of his become clearer: “A will of salvation referred from the beginning only to Christ would be meaningless and would contradict the fact that even from the beginning Jesus Christ was conceived by the will of divine salvation as a saviour of the world”⁵⁰.

Rahner stresses not the expiatory sacrifice directed towards the Father, but the vivifying and deifying work of the Holy Spirit, directed towards man. This change of focus allows us to see the effects of the “anthropological turn” right in the heart of christology and to glimpse in Rahner’s theology the beginning of a “pneumatological turn”. These “turns” of Rahner’s towards man and the divine grace⁵¹ underlie his subsequent developments in the field of the interreligious dialogue.

The Incarnation and the Cross are, for Rahner, the cause of the communication of the Holy Spirit towards the world, which allows him then to assert that the Spirit is that of Christ, has an intimate relationship with Christ. But not only the Son is the “cause” of the Spirit, but also the Spirit is the “cause” of the Son. This intertwining and reciprocity between the Son and the Spirit, allowed Rahner to conclude that, through the Holy Spirit, Jesus is always and everywhere present in the entitling faith (*im rechtfertigenden Glauben*), but also that the Spirit always and everywhere supports the entitling faith in any faith⁵².

The Christian evaluation of non-Christian religions

Living in a late modernity marked by the religious pluralism, a world in which everyone becomes everyone’s neighbor, for the better or for the worse, Rahner inevitably also posed the issue of the authenticity of non-Christian religions⁵³. He wondered what was the criterion according to which we validate a religious experience as genuine? How do we know that a religion is the true one, fully wanted by God, constantly and permanently guided by Him? Then, on the basis of which criteria do we establish God’s real presence in personality or in a moment of the history of a religion? And all these questions inevitably lead to the essential question of Saint Paul: how do we distinguish spirits?

Assuming such a difficult task, Rahner realized he risked very much. He risked to be misunderstood both by those within Christianity, as well as by those outside it. As a very brave theologian, however, he took this risk.

On the one hand, evaluating the other religions from the Christian point of view and introducing a hierarchy of the religions cause reserves and criticism from non-Christians. On the other hand, asserting the existence of genuine religious experiences outside Christianity, of God's work in non-Christian religions, through the supernatural revelation, of the "anonymous Christianity" and of "anonymous Christians", as well as asserting the possibility of salvation for those who live "extra ecclesiam", were all challenges and reasons for "scandal" for some Christians.

Rahner noticed that man was trained and formed within a community and due to this, the community influence, the stylistics of the training environment were found in the intimacy of his being. To a large extent, man interprets and lives life following the historical interpretations of the social environment where he is born and trained. And this applies also to matters of his faith. Because faith is not only revelation, but also tradition. And don't we get revelation most often through tradition? Don't we get the belief as a sacred tradition of the community in which we are born? If so, given this reality, isn't it obvious that, before choosing our faith, it is already chosen for us? Isn't it obvious that it is a dowry that is bequeathed? Any self-interpretation of the individual religious existence is, ultimately, according to Rahner, marked by the influence of the community⁵⁴. But let us not forget, however, that beside the dowry received from a small community, Rahner spoke also about a dowry which man inherits "from the single humanity into the unity of his history". This universal dowry, which is previous to the specific, local one, is the "original transcendental revelation"⁵⁵. And only starting from this original transcendental and supernatural revelation, Rahner dared to do the evaluation of the categorial revelations, materialized in the various non-Christian religions. In point of fact, for him the religious authenticity is the full consonance between the original transcendental revelation and the historical categorial revelation.

The catholic theologian believed we could not speak about a unification, in one history of revelation and salvation, of the various religions of the world. But, nevertheless, all the religions seek the ultimate unitary structure, a unitary and unifying meaning. For the Christians, that is Christ.

A key to structure in an unifying way the universal history of the revelation that is present in the non-Christian religions is offered neither by the historians of religions, nor even by the Old Testament. The pre-Bible period of the revelation and salvation, about which the Bible itself terrifies, is obviously unclear, not structured and even disarticulated as a history of revelation. However, from the Old Testament we learn that the

God of the Covenant guides, through patriarchs and prophets, the entire history and this history, although marked by guilt, is oriented towards Christ⁵⁶. Then,

“the Scripture itself does not allow us to perceive the continuity and the epochal organization of a particular history of the revelation elsewhere but in the religious history of a small people in the Middle East, while we do not have a possibility as clear and sure with respect to the history of other religions”⁵⁷.

Therefore, the Old Testament does not hold in itself the unifying meaning and does not offer alone the solution to the structuring of the entire history of revelation. But it pointed out that the solution existed and that it would be offered in the future in the person of the Messiah. Rahner believed that only starting from Christ we truly know what is still valid for us both in the Old Testament, as well as in the extra-biblical religions. To disregard Christ means to deprive us of the unitary concept to which the Scripture leads us.

The Foundations of Christian Faith includes a subchapter entitled “Jesus Christ, discerning criterion”, inserted in the chapter dedicated to Revelation. From this subchapter we learn that only Jesus Christ “is not subject, in principle and effectively, to a historical degradation, to a deteriorating interpretation”, as only Him is the “plenary, unsurpassed event of the historical self-objectification of God’s self-communication addressed to the world”⁵⁸. Therefore, in the concrete religious history we have a discerning criterion in Jesus Christ the crucified and resurrected One. This discerning criterion remains valid and functional also with respect to the Old-Testamental and extra-biblical revelation. The criteria used by the historians of religions prove to be insufficient to distinguish between the genuine religious events and those corrupt and spoiled⁵⁹. Only through the belief and life in Christ we acquire the criterion to effectively distinguish the genuine devoutness. Because only in Jesus Christ all the existential searches and struggles and all the questions of the human being find a solution and an answer.

“Anonymous Christians” or On the salvation of non-Christians

Convinced of the soteriological effectiveness of non-Christian religions and noticing that more and more people live *extra Ecclesiam*, Rahner meditated on the work of grace within those who are outside the Catholic Church. The theory of the “anonymous Christianity” and of the “anonymous Christians”⁶⁰ came to light, therefore, from Rahner’s wish to find a connection bridge with the world outside the Church⁶¹ and to clarify how God’s universal will of salvation actually materializes (I Timothy 2,4).

This theory caused an intense interest from the beginning, but also a harsh and sustained criticism⁶².

By “anonymous Christianity”, the Jesuit theologian designated “the inner forgiving and deifying grace before baptism”. In another context, answering the question whether there existed an “anonymous Christianity”, Rahner specified:

“Certainly. «Anonymous Christianity» means a man living in God's grace and to work his salvation outside Christianity explicitly established. Absolutely obviously, an Evangelical Christian is not an «anonymous Christian». But a buddhist monk, let's say, or anyone else, who follows his conscience, works his salvation and lives in God's grace, about this one I must say he is an anonymous Christian”⁶³.

By the phrase “anonymous Christian”, Rahner told us he designated

“the man who, even according to the doctrine of the Church, may possess the sanctifying grace, therefore he may be entitled and sanctified, he may be son of God, heir of heaven, may be gracefully ordained towards the eternal supernatural salvation, before having received a confession of faith and the Baptism”⁶⁴.

To justify the “anonymous Christians” from the ethical point of view, Rahner resorted to the parable of the Last Judgment (Matthew 25). Jesus identifies with all the poor, the sad and the abandoned people, and he who helps one of “the least of these” meets Christ Himself and may be called an “anonymous Christian” even though he is unbaptized or an unbeliever.

From the *Foundations of Christian Faith* – that expounds his theology systematically and resumes the theory of the “anonymous Christians” in the most balanced terms – we learn that the sanctifying grace, as a fruit of the universal salvation in Christ, makes any man to be an “anonymous Christian” before being baptized:

“There exists an anonymous, implicit Christianity [...] there exists, undoubtedly, a relationship somewhat anonymous and still real of the individual with the concrete dimension of the history of salvation – and therefore with Jesus Christ – in that one who has not lived yet, in faith and in sacrament, the entire concrete historical experience (and explicitly reflected) of this historical-redemptive reality”⁶⁵;

“People that have no historical connection with

the explicit preaching of Christianity, but who possess God's supernatural self-communication through grace, as an existential, are «anonymous Christians»”⁶⁶.

This theory wishes to hold together God's Self sharing in the divine grace and in Jesus Christ with the human transcendence and with man's wish for self-improvement. Since the grace and the truth came through Jesus Christ, and since He embraces the entire world and each and every man, this means we can speak about the “anonymous Christianity” and, consequently, about “anonymous Christians”. Understood this way, the theory of the “anonymous Christians” seems an extension and a pastoral-missionary implementation of Christology and pneumatology; it is, more precisely said, a Christo-pneumato-soteriological teaching; it is founded on God's universal will of salvation, God Who shared Himself (*Selbstmitteilung*) eschatologically in Christ, and on the “supernatural existential” as a working grace in every human being.

On the Cross, the Saviour died for men's sins and for the redemption of all and this way every man becomes an “anonymous Christian” “on the deeper level of his existence”. But, nevertheless, we cannot say that any man is practically an anonymous Christian. God, in His universal will of Salvation, as intercessor of the salvation of all the people and as a soteriologically final and eschatological YES, makes from every man a virtual anonymous Christian. But even though God does everything for our salvation, He makes us Christians in Himself, He adopts us, not every man receives this adoption as son. Christ's work, therefore, is not sufficient to designate someone “an anonymous Christian”. For this, also man's response is required.

But what exactly must actually do a non-Christian to become “an anonymous Christian”?

The first requisite is not to deny and not to reject his orientation towards the absolute, towards God and towards his neighbours. Every man that accepts the sacred mystery and conducts his life in relation with it has the grace of Christ and we may say about him that he is an “anonymous Christian”⁶⁷. Then, to become an “anonymous Christian”, the non-Christian must freely accept God's self-offering in grace through faith, hope and love. Which means, however, that, according to Rahner's glossology, “an anonymous Christian” is the

“pagan, after the beginning of the Christian mission, who lives in the atmosphere of Christ's grace through faith, hope and love, but who knows nothing explicitly about his existential affinity, through the merciful salvation, with Jesus Christ”⁶⁸.

Commenting the Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*, 16), in

which the Second Vatican Council presented the position of the Roman-Catholic Church towards the non-Christians and their salvation, Rahner pointed out that

“every man, who does not act against his conscience, would not be only a man of honour and a humanist, but also justified and holy inside, would already hold that asset of salvation, the grace, along with the hope of the eternal life, which has a major importance even for the Christian baptized in the Church. Whether such Christian doctrinal belief is summarized in the key word «anonymous Christianity» is, eventually, irrelevant”⁶⁹.

In favour of Rahner's theologumena it has been stated that, remaining faithful to the teaching of the Catholic Church about the necessity of explicit faith in the Holy Trinity and in Jesus Christ, of the Baptism and of church membership, Rahner had an actually critical position towards the elitist spirit of those Catholics who believed that salvation was only for them⁷⁰. He did not plan to teach a different teaching about salvation than that preached by the Catholic Church, but he wanted to remove a pessimistic and exclusivist soteriology by stressing an universal and optimistic soteriology. The Catholic theologian wished, therefore, to reject the catastrophic dimension of the original sin and the eternal damnation of some people through divine decision and to emphasize God's universal will of salvation and man's responsibility⁷¹.

Rahner identified man's self knowing with knowing God⁷², the love for the neighbour with the love for God⁷³ respectively. And the conclusion that came into prominence then, based on these deductions, was that a deep and genuine self knowing is knowing God, and true love for our neighbour is the love of God Himself. Deeper self-knowledge is deeper knowledge of God, and embracing his neighbour in love, He man embraces God. This extraordinary vision reminds us that for Rahner theology is anthropological and the anthropology is theological in Jesus Christ. Our Christian identity is not given solely by the belonging to a creed, but also by the deed of merciful love (Matthew 25). That is why orthodoxy is orthopraxical. It righteously believes in God the One who acts righteously, fulfilling God's commandments. In the love for our neighbour, we love God (I John 3, 20), Christ, even if, for various reasons, we do not know Him or we ignore Him. Through the genuine love of his neighbour, the man becomes Christian, but, since he does not know and does not confess Christ, he remains “an anonymous Christian”. Fulfilling the commandment of love in deed, not in word, the man is Christian, but not knowing himself in this capacity, he remains “an anonymous Christian”. Certainly, a *complete* Christian is the one who loves his neighbour and confesses Christ as his Saviour.

Rahner always spoke about the necessity of the Christian mission and about the fulfillment of the “anonymous Christianity” in the institutional Christianity. He did not wish Christians to ignore this capacity. That is why, he warned that the missionary ankylosis, excess of authoritarianism, clericalization, triumphalism, defeatism and ghettoization are all real obstacles on the path of getting awareness on the faith completeness and of getting out of the innocent ignorance in which the “anonymous Christians” are. It is the “anonymous Christians” who are guilty of their ignorance, but often comfortable sufficiency, elitism and the arrogant belief of Christians that they would be the “new chosen people” and the exclusive heirs of the kingdom. In point of fact, Rahner's theory is also a criticism against to the hypocrisy and to the exclusivism of Christians that believe salvation would somehow be the property of men and was left to them for their administration: “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the door of the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let to enter those who are trying to.” (Matthew 23, 13).

Christians pretended they did not understand that Rahner proved lenient to the neighbour from afar, as one to whom little was given, and harsher with the neighbour next-door, who was given a treasure of whose value he is not well aware. From this perspective, Rahner is rather an apostle to the Gentiles, a Paul, and not a Peter, apostle of his own people. In his entire pastoral theoretical and practical activity, Rahner not only proposed to others, but he himself endeavoured “to conquer as many people of the virtual Church as possible for the real Church”⁷⁴.

The concept of “anonymous Christianity”, as wished by Rahner, is not a hermeneutical principle that allows the reduction of the essential of the revealed theology from the wish to win over the weaker ones, for the vain desire for success. It is known, for instance, that Rahner pleaded for an intensive christianity, of the emotional, and avoided cheap triumphalisms, such as those offered by statistics.

As noted by L. Elders, “the anonymous Christianity” is not a Christianity that neglects its apostolic vocation, its mission through word and through Sacraments⁷⁵, but is an optimistic Christianity, sensitive to the earthly and heavenly destiny of those who do not know Christ and His Gospel yet, a Christianity that is always “in search for the lost sheep”.

Assessed from the dogmatic perspective, the theory of “anonymous Christians” is a theologumenon that harmonizes data offered by the revelation and by the ecclesiastical Magisterium. It reunites elements of anthropology, Christology, pneumatology and soteriology. As a matter of fact, by his theory, Rahner wished to interpret and to draw all the consequences possible from the Constitution of the Second Vatican Council about church (*Lumen Gentium*, 16).

“Habitation” (Syn)theses or open conclusions in the horizon of hope

As image of God, as “being of transcendence” permeated by grace, as “hearer of the Word” universally revealed, as holder of the memory that seeks the absolute Saviour and as a new creature in Christ the Redeemer, man is from eternity and for ever “homo religiosus” and being of the fulfilling dialogue.

Responding with an “open catholicism” to the delicate challenge of religious pluralism, Rahner developed a “soteriological optimism” based on God’s universal will of salvation and on the belief that God, although revealed Himself fully in Jesus Christ, He revealed Himself in all the religions of the world, for every human being to be saved. For Rahner, God’s supernatural revelation is coextensive with the world’s history and not only with the biblical revelation. If it weren’t so, the universality of the will and of the divine work of salvation could not be justified anymore.

In the scrutinizing memory of every human being and in every religion is implanted the nostalgia of the Bringer of the absolute salvation. In consonance with St. Maximus the Confessor, who spoke about a future Christological nostalgia, the Jesuit theologian expressed his belief that mankind was irreversibly led towards Jesus Christ, the absolute Saviour.

According to Rahner’s theory of “anonymous Christians” – thanks to God’s universal will of salvation, to the divine grace (as a “supernatural existential” inside human nature), to the universal redemption (accomplished through Christ’s Incarnation, Death and Resurrection) – also non-christians may be saved, through the merciful love to their neighbour, and even non-believers who listen to the “claiming voice of conscience”. But their salvation is still *through* and *in* Christ. Certainly, for the famous theologian, the move from the “anonymous Christianity” to the explicit one brings a more intense participation and God sharing. But for this “grace over grace” sharing to be accomplished, Rahner did not propose only the solution of the interreligious dialogue, but also the one of the mystical apostolate, through which qualitative conversions may be achieved. Like cardinal J. Ratzinger, Rahner was convinced that dialogue is not a conversation in which truth is abandoned for the sake of love, but a conversation animated by the love in truth. Dialogue and mission are not divergent, but convergent, do not annihilate each other, but enrich each other. To proclaim Christ to one pertaining to another religion, actually means to immerse him in the depths of the Logos that animate his own religion and which offers the unity beyond contradictions and separations.

When he described the “diaspora situation” in which faith, Christianity and Church are, Rahner started from the observation that the late modernity brought a diminution in the number of believers and a social supremacy of secularism and secularization. “The recent man” does

not deem his religious dimension fundamental and the social relevance of religion and, therefore, the divine social prestige has diminished substantially. Not only Christians become “a little flock”, but the believers, in general, are fewer and fewer. The rough waters of secularism and secularization are increasingly invading the island of faith. Mundanization darkens the world more and more. “The weak faith” relativizes the truth more and more intensely, consistently undermining its uniqueness.

But “the diaspora situation” of faith, of Christianity and of the Church is seen by Rahner without pessimistic accents and without defeatist inhibitions, although he was reproached a distressing tone in describing this situation. The Church does not choose the time in which it lives and that is why any situation must be regarded as an “inherent necessity of the history of salvation”. In any world he would be born and would live, the human being should not forget that the YES of salvation was irrevocably uttered and that this universal decision of salvation, definitively and eschatologically accomplished in Jesus Christ, is a permanent invitation addressed to man's freedom that leads him to perdition or to salvation. Rahner's assurance came from the belief that although the evil is a reality sown in the world field, similarly to the weeds in the field, and people have to live in its presence (not with it!), the final victory is God's and of those who believe in Him. To be in a “diaspora situation” is not a reason to panic, to despond, to resort to ghettoizing withdrawals, but a reason of purification and of mystical deepening of faith. Rahner rejected any Manicheic escapes from the world and recommended “strategic adjustments and appeasements” with the world, as, for instance, the renewing change of the Church structures (from the excessive centralism towards communion, from the legal towards the sacramental and from the universal towards the local), the proclamation of faith in essentialized confessions of faith, the gains in mystical spirituality achieved from a more internalized faith and a spiritual apostolate of the loving good news, which should not so much aim at increasing the number, but the quality of the Christians.

Undoubtedly, Karl Rahner had the undeniable merit of having analyzed lucidly, realistically and without fear the religious diversity of the late modernity and of having insistently recommended – as optimistic solutions of mutual “accommodation” of the believers together, on one hand, and theirs with the secularized world, on the other hand – dialogue, the mystical deepening of faith and the proclamation of the joy of meeting the loved One.

Notes:

¹ The issue of the human knowing and its opening towards the sacred, towards mystery, as well as that of the possibility to found a philosophy of religions were the topics of the first works published by Rahner: *Geist in Welt. Zur Metaphysik der endlichen Erkenntnis bei Thomas von Aquin* (Innsbruck/Leipzig: Verlag Felizian

Rauch, 1939), republished in Karl Rahner, *Sämtliche Werke* (SW) 2, Karl Lehmann, Johann Baptist Metz, Karl-Heinz Neufeld, Albert Raffelt, Herbert Vorgrimler (eds.) (Freiburg im Breisgau Verlag Herder), 54–302 and *Hörer des Wortes. Zur Grundlegung einer Religionsphilosophie* (München: Kösel-Pustet Verlag, 1941), republished in SW 4, 2–282.

² About this book of Rahner's, which Urs von Balthasar deemed "the most beautiful book" of his, one can say the same words with which was labelled the most important work of Martin Heidegger: "*Sein und Zeit* is a book about man, only to the extent it starts like a research on the being. It becomes a speech about man in the light of a speech about being. Things happen here somewhat similarly to the Augustinian theology: you discover God after you have gone through your being from one end to the other." – Martin Heidegger, *Ființă și timp*, transl. by Gabriel Liiceanu and Cătălin Cioabă (Bucharest: Ed. Humanitas, 2003), 590.

³ Rahner, *Hörer des Wortes*, 214–215 and 218.

⁴ *Hörer des Wortes*, 221–222 and 226.

⁵ Rahner, *Hörer des Wortes*, 51.

⁶ Rahner, *Hörer des Wortes*, 52.

⁷ Rahner, *Hörer des Wortes*, 52.

⁸ Rahner, *Hörer des Wortes*, 127.

⁹ E. Przwara, "Die Problematik der Neuscholastik", *Kantstudien*, 33 (1928), 92.

¹⁰ Rahner, *Hörer des Wortes*, 197; SW 31, 3.

¹¹ Rahner, *Hörer des Wortes*, 217.

¹² Louis Roberts, *Karl Rahner. Sa pensée, son oeuvre, sa méthode* (Paris: Mame, 1969), 210.

¹³ SW 10, 593–594, 596; Cf. Karl Rahner, *Tratatul fundamental despre credință. Introducere în conceptul de creștinism*, transl. by Marius Taloș (Târgu-Lăpuș: Ed. Galaxia Gutenberg, 2005), 223.

¹⁴ Rahner, *Tratatul fundamental despre credință*, 223.

¹⁵ Rahner, *Tratatul fundamental despre credință*, 228.

¹⁶ Rahner, *Tratatul fundamental despre credință*, 230; Cf. SW 10, 596.

¹⁷ SW 10, pp. 594–595; Cf. Rahner, *Tratatul fundamental despre credință*, 230.

¹⁸ Rahner, *Tratatul fundamental despre credință*, 240.

¹⁹ Rahner, *Tratatul fundamental despre credință*, 241.

²⁰ Rahner, *Tratatul fundamental despre credință*, 242.

²¹ Rahner resorted to philosophical terms, such as „transcendental”, „transcendentality”, „transcendence” (which he uses sometimes improperly!), to designate what the Holy Scripture called “the image of God”. When it is written with a capital letter, the term “Transcendence” designates God and man's likeness to God.

²² Rahner, *Tratatul fundamental despre credință*, 260.

²³ Rahner, *Tratatul fundamental despre credință*, 249–250.

²⁴ Rahner, *Tratatul fundamental despre credință*, 250. By this vision, Rahner takes a distance from the Augustinian and Anselmian soteriology and gets closer to the conception of St. Maximus the Confessor and, more recently, of Pr. Dumitru Stăniloae with respect to salvation.

²⁵ Rahner, *Tratatul fundamental despre credință*, 262.

²⁶ Rahner, *Tratatul fundamental despre credință*, 263–264.

²⁷ SW 22/1B, 914; Cf. Rahner, *Tratatul fundamental despre credință*, 456.

²⁸ Both the term, as well as its meaning remind us the view about time of Saint Maximus the Confessor, whose thinking influenced Rahner particularly in his

Christology. See in this respect: Brock Bingaman, "Karl Rahner and Maximus the Confessor: Consonant Themes and Ecumenical Dialog", *The Heythrop Journal*, LV (2014), 353-363; Hans Stickelberger, "Freisetzende Einheit. Über ein christologisches Grundaxiom bei Maximus Confessor und Karl Rahner", in Felix Heinzer, Christoph Schönborn (eds.), *Maximus Confessor: Actes du Symposium sur Maxime le Confesseur*, Freiburg, 2-5 septembre 1980, Freiburg/Schweiz, Ed. Univ., 1982 (Paradosis, 27), 375-384.

²⁹ SW 22/1B, 915; Rahner, *Tratatul fundamental despre credință*, 457.

³⁰ SW 22/1B, 915; With Saint Maximus the Confessor, "the seeking memory" is the "nostalgia of things to come", namely the eschatological nostalgia.

³¹ Rahner, *Tratatul fundamental despre credință*, 459.

³² Rahner, *Tratatul fundamental despre credință*, 459.

³³ Rahner, *Tratatul fundamental despre credință*, 460.

³⁴ With this title, Rahner published his study initially in G. Oberhammer (ed.), *Offenbarung, geistige Realität des Menschen. Arbeitsdokumente eines Symposiums und Offenbarungsbegriff in Indien*, Wien, 1974, 189-198; republished then also in SW 22/1B, 908-917. Rahner did not present Christ's presence in the non-Christian religions *a posteriori*, as a historian of religions, but *a priori*, as a dogmatist (SW 22/1B, 908).

³⁵ Karl Rahner, *Schriften zur Theologie V* (Einsiedeln: Benziger Verlag), 209.

³⁶ Rahner, *Schriften zur Theologie V*, 208.

³⁷ Rahner, *Schriften zur Theologie IV*, 89.

³⁸ Rahner, *Tratatul fundamental despre credință*, 448.

³⁹ Rahner, *Tratatul fundamental despre credință*, 335-336; *Schriften zur Theologie IV*, 154.

⁴⁰ Rahner, *Tratatul fundamental despre credință*, 425. Rahner spoke even about "a radical identity" between the love for God and for our neighbour (*Schriften zur Theologie VI*, 282) and believed that "the explicit categorial love for the neighbour was the primary act of the love for God". (*Schriften zur Theologie VI*, 296)

⁴¹ Rahner, *Tratatul fundamental despre credință*, 447.

⁴² SW 22/1B, 910; Rahner, *Tratatul fundamental despre credință*, 450.

⁴³ SW 22/1B, 911; Rahner, *Tratatul fundamental despre credință*, 451.

⁴⁴ Evelyn Maurice remarked that now is the "first time when Rahner tackled the issue of the Holy Spirit in his Christological synthesis", in *La Christologie de Karl Rahner* (Paris; Desclée, 1995), 216.

⁴⁵ SW 22/1B, 912-913; Rahner, *Tratatul fundamental despre credință*, 452-453. In point of fact, the issues opened by Rahner with respect to the non-Christian religions and to their positive role in the salvation of their members, is closely related to anthropology, Christology and to the theology of the divine grace.

⁴⁶ Rahner, *Tratatul fundamental despre credință*, 454.

⁴⁷ Rahner, *Schriften zur Theologie V*, 215. U v. Balthasar saw here a detachment of "God's will of salvation in Christ" from "Christ's work that fulfils the will of salvation", in *Cordula ou l'épreuve décisive* (Paris, Beauchesne, 1967), 85.

⁴⁸ "Interview Geist und Feuer. «Ein Gespräch mit Hans Urs von Balthasar»", *Herder, Korrespondenz*, 30 (1976), 76.

⁴⁹ Presenting the excellent manner in which V. Holzer noticed and described the difference between U. v. Balthasar and K. Rahner, Bernard Sesboué wrote: "Il y a bien quelque chose d'irréductible dans leur pensée à propos du rapport entre l'homme et Dieu: V. Holzer situe Balthasar du côté de la discontinuité, et Rahner du côté de la continuité; en d'autres termes, le premier est placé du côté de la

«non-déductibilité» et l'autre de la «déductibilité», sans que chacun oublie pour autant le pôle complémentaire [...]. Balthasar accentue les ruptures et les seuils, les drames; Rahner souligne les dynamismes unificateurs. La sotériologie de Balthasar est à dominante rédemptrice, celle de Rahner à dominante divinisatrice, dominée par le concept d'«autocommunication de Dieu».” – “Foreword” to Vincent Holzer, *Le Dieu. Trinité dans l'histoire. Le différend théologique Balthasar-Rahner* (Paris: Cerf, 2007), 9. We would add that Balthasar, still giving importance to the theory of satisfaction, stresses the sacrificial aspect of redemption, while Rahner gave a special importance to the ontologic aspect of redemption and to the event of the Resurrection in man's deification. Then, Balthasar is closer to Augustine, who saw the Incarnation as caused by the man's sin, and Rahner closer to St. Maximus the Confessor, to Duns Scotus to Father Dumitru Stăniloae, who believed that Incarnation would have happened anyway, as required by the wish of creation of fulfillment in Christ. – See Rahner, *Schriften zur Theologie* IV, 160, 170, 313.

⁵⁰ Rahner, *Tratatul fundamental despre credință*, 454.

⁵¹ Karl Lehmann deemed that “the experience of the divine grace occupies the central position” in Karl Rahner's theology, in *Rechenschaft des Glaubens. Karl Rahner Lesebuch*, Karl Lehmann, Albert Raffelt (eds.), (Zürich/Köln: Benzinger Verlag; Freiburg/Basel/Wien, Verlag Herder, 1979), 37.

⁵² SW 22/1B, 914; Rahner, *Tratatul fundamental despre credință*, 455-456.

⁵³ The major studies written by Rahner about the non-Christian religions are: “Weltgeschichte und Heilsgeschichte”, in SW 10, 590-604; “Das Christentum und die nichtchristlichen Religionen”, in SW 10, 557-573; “Jesus Christus in den nichtchristlichen Religionen”, in SW 22/1B, 908-917; “Über die Heilsbedeutung der nichtchristlichen Religionen”, in SW 22/2, 345-351; “Einzigkeit und Dreifaltigkeit Gottes im Gespräch mit dem Islam”, in SW 22/1B, 656-669; “Ist das Christentum «eine absolute Religion»?”, in SW 10, 557-573; “Islam und Christentum in einer säkularisierten Welt”, in SW 28, 665-668; “Der Gott des Christentums und des Islams”, in SW 22/1B, 656-669.

⁵⁴ Rahner, *Tratatul fundamental despre credință*, 247. In the monograph dedicated to Rahner, Louis Roberts wrote: “A religion socially established is a part of human's existence. In a certain sense, the human being can be himself only when his religion has a social structure. Hence, man is obliged to seek a religion in a social expression”, in *Karl Rahner, sa pensée, son œuvre, sa méthode*, 220.

⁵⁵ Rahner, *Tratatul fundamental despre credință*, 249.

⁵⁶ Rahner, *Tratatul fundamental despre credință*, 251-255.

⁵⁷ Rahner, *Tratatul fundamental despre credință*, 256.

⁵⁸ Rahner, *Tratatul fundamental despre credință*, 242.

⁵⁹ Rahner, *Tratatul fundamental despre credință*, 243.

⁶⁰ This topic was presented by Rahner in several studies, republished in SW 22/2, Teil C, 283-353. In “Überlegungen zum «anonymen Christentum»”, Karl Heinz Weger pointed out that, before being worded, the theory of the “anonymous Christianity” was anticipated in Rahner's youth studies re “Transcendental experience”, “Supernatural Existential”, “Universal History of Revelation and Salvation”, “Ability of knowing grace” etc., in *Wagnis Theologie. Erfahrungen mit der Theologie Karl Rahners* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1979), 499.

⁶¹ R. Lennan, *The Ecclesiology of Karl Rahner* (Oxford: University Press, 1995), 43.

⁶² Both the interest towards this theory, as well as the objections raised against it are excellently presented in the monograph we owe to Bishop of Hildesheim,

Nikolaus Schwertfeger: *Gnade und Welt. Zum Grundgefüge von Karl Rahners Theorie der „anonymen Christen“* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1982), 2-20. See also SW 22/2, 326, notes 1-8.

⁶³ SW 31, 204.

⁶⁴ SW 22/2, 315. As Jeannine Hill Fletcher pointed out very well in “Rahner and religious diversity”, “Rahner invented this term to describe the ontological status of all persons who fulfil their human nature by accepting transcendence as a gift of God, while they remain aware of its source”, in *The Cambridge companion to Karl Rahner*, eds. Declan Marmion and Mary E. Hines (Cambridge: University Press, 2005), 242.

⁶⁵ Rahner, *Tratatul fundamental despre credință*, 439.

⁶⁶ Rahner, *Tratatul fundamental despre credință*, 266.

⁶⁷ Cf. SW 22/2, 288.

⁶⁸ SW 22/2, 328.

⁶⁹ SW 22/2, 352.

⁷⁰ See Filipe J. Couto, “Zur antielitären Tendenz der Theologie Karl Rahners”, in *Wagnis Theologie*, 467-486.

⁷¹ Cf. Filipe J. Couto, “Zur antielitären Tendenz der Theologie Karl Rahners”, in *Wagnis Theologie*, 474-475.

⁷² Rahner, *Schriften zur Theologie* X, 136.

⁷³ Rahner, *Schriften zur Theologie* X, 138.

⁷⁴ SW 22/2, 283.

⁷⁵ L. Elders, “Die Taufe der Weltregionen. Bemerkungen zu einer Theorie Karl Rahners”, in *Theologie und Glaube*, 55 (1965), 124-131; See also “Anonymes Christentum und Missionsauftrag der Kirche”, in SW 22/2, 312-325.

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