

STMM 500: CHRISTIAN ANTHROPOLOGY (3 credits)

Summer 2006

Anchorage, Alaska

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

An exploration from a Christian perspective of the mystery of human existence. Examination of the structures of human being: self-transcendence, finitude, freedom, destiny, relatedness, autonomy, growth and history. Special attention to the horizons that shape human life, to the roots of the possibility of religion, to grace and sin in human life, and to the work of the Holy Spirit in human life and creation. This course also serves as an introduction to some of the fundamental themes and methods of theological reflection.

GOALS OF THE COURSE

- To develop the ability to reflect theologically on the basic themes of the Christian faith in the areas of theological anthropology, grace, sin, and the Holy Spirit.
- To develop an understanding of the methods and themes of theological reflection in general, especially as they are used by some Twentieth Century Christian theologians.
- To reflect theologically on one's own experience of human life.
- To develop the ability to express one's theological reflections in written form in the light of theological texts and to critique and rework those reflections.
- To reflect on the pastoral implications of the themes of Christian anthropology.

TEXTBOOKS

- Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology, Volumes 1 and 2, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951, 1957.
 - In Volume 1 we will read only the section titled "Being and the Question of God", pages 163-210.
 - In Volume 2 we will read only the section titled "Existence", pages 19-96.
- Karl Rahner, Foundations of Christian Faith, Seabury, 1978.
 - In Rahner we will read only the first 5 chapters, i.e. up to page 175.
- Elizabeth Johnson, She Who Is, The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse, Crossroad.
 - In Johnson we will read pages 150-156 and chapters 1,2,3 and 7.

METHODS IN THE COURSE

I tend to think of my method of teaching as "interrupted lecture". I have an outline of the material we need to cover and will follow it. However, some of the best learning takes place when questions are asked. Feel free to ask them. I will referee whether they take us too far afield. The more the lecture becomes a discussion, the more I think we learn. I will take responsibility for keeping us on track and making the connections.

The reading in this course is difficult. There is not a lot in terms of page numbers, but there is a lot in terms of the weight of the material. In general, Tillich is fairly difficult. He says something once, hits the nail on the head with his way of saying it and moves on. So you have to spend time with each paragraph and sometimes with each sentence. It is helpful to try and make everyday applications of what he is saying. When I first read Tillich, I could read about 3 pages an hour.

Rahner, on the other hand, loves to keep rolling over the same central themes, but opening them in new ways. With him you want to keep reading and see if you can catch the pattern of his basic themes coming through again and again.

Johnson is the easiest to read of the three. She managed to avoid that heavy Germanic influence.

In order to help your reading, I am putting together a short commentary on the readings. I have finished it for the

section in Volume One of Tillich and am currently working on something similar for the chapters in Rahner. (this is as of January 5, 2006).

COURSE OUTLINE

- Session 1: Introduction. Basic definitions of the human.
- Session 2: Basic structures and dynamics of the human: the tension of embodiedness and self-transcendence. Read all of the section entitled Being and the Question of God in Vol. 1 of Tillich. Then go back and concentrate on the sections titled Finitude and the Categories (192-198) and the Ontological Elements (174-186).
- Session 3: Basic structures and dynamics of the human: raising the question of God. Reread all of the section entitled Being and the Question of God in Vol. 1 of Tillich. Then go back and concentrate on the following sections: Being and Finitude (186-192); Self and World (168-174); and sections on pages 198-210.
- Session 4: Gender and Anthropology: read Johnson, pages 150-156.
To speak of God: human experience and God language: read Johnson pages 3-57.
a short history of the theology of grace in the West. No required reading. Supplemental reading: Roger Haight, The Experience and Language of Grace.
- Session 5: Finish the short history of the theology of grace;
Karl Rahner's Christian Anthropology and Theology of Grace: read Rahner, chs. 1 & 2
- Session 6: continue Karl Rahner's Christian Anthropology and Theology of Grace; read Rahner, chs. 3-5
- Session 7: The dynamics of sin and evil; read Tillich, Vol. 2, pages 1-90
- Session 8: The dynamics of sin and evil continued; reread Tillich, Vol. 2, pages 1-90.
- Session 9: Grace and the Holy Spirit; read Johnson, chapter 7
- Session 10: continue Grace and the Holy Spirit: reread Johnson, chapter 7.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

- Class participation in discussion and reflection on the readings.
- Reading of assigned material in preparation for all classes.
- Three papers:
 - Due: session 6 (the second Monday):
Write a 2 page paper taking one of Tillich's three polarities (freedom and destiny, dynamics and form, and individualization and participation) and showing how it is central to an understanding of what it means to be human.
 - Due Session 10 (the second Friday):
Write a 2 page paper showing how the dynamics of sin (unbelief, hubris and concupiscence) distort the workings of the polarity about which you wrote your first paper.
 - To be emailed to me (mraschko@seattleu.edu) no later than the Friday, June 30):
Write a 3 page paper explaining how Rahner's notion of grace as God's self communication to us in love heals the distortions of what it means to be human that you described in your second paper.

REGARDING STYLE

- Papers must be typed, double-spaced, on standard 8 1/2"x 11" paper.
- Use 1-inch margins all round. Use 10 or 12 pt. type.
- Do not use right-hand justification as it leads to oddly spaced words.
- **Staple the paper in the top left-hand corner.** Do not use plastic covers or binders.
- Keep a copy other than the one you submit .

SOME OTHER SOURCES OF REFLECTION:

Ronald Rolheiser, The Restless Heart

Ronald Rolheiser, Forgotten Among the Lilies

Norman Chaney, Six Images of the Human.

Leo J. O'Donovan, A World of Grace.

Geffrey Kelly, Karl Rahner, Theologian of the Graced Search for Meaning.

James Luther Adams, The Thought of Paul Tillich.

David H. Kelsey, The Fabric of Paul Tillich's Theology.

Karl J. Armbruster, The Vision of Paul Tillich.

Stephen J. Duffy, The Graced Horizon, nature and Grace in Modern Catholic Thought.

Stephen J. Duffy, The Dynamics of Grace, Perspectives in Theological Anthropology.

James A. Carpenter, Nature and Grace, Toward an Integral Perspective.

Roger Haight, The Experience and Language of Grace.

James H. Evans, Jr., We Have Been Believers.

Anne E. Carr, Transforming Grace, Christian Tradition and Women's Experience

Wilhelm And Marion Pauck, Paul Tillich, His Life and Thought.

The following should give you a sense of some of the elements that are weighed in grading a paper:

The Superior Paper (90-100, i.e. A/A-)

Thesis: Easily identifiable, plausible, novel, sophisticated, insightful, crystal clear.

Structure: Evident, understandable, appropriate for thesis. Excellent transitions from point to point. Paragraphs support solid topic sentences.

Use of texts: the passages from cited texts are clearly understood, well expressed or explained, and use appropriately for the development of the thesis of the paper.

Logic and argumentation: All ideas in the paper flow logically; the argument is identifiable, reasonable, and sound. Author anticipates and successfully defuses counter-arguments; makes novel connections to outside material (from other parts of the class, or other classes), which illuminate the thesis.

Mechanics: Sentence structure, grammar excellent; correct use of punctuation and citation style; minimal to no spelling errors; absolutely no run-on sentences or comma splices.

The Good Paper (84-89, i.e. B+/B)

Thesis: Promising, but may be slightly unclear, or lacking in insight or originality.

Structure: Generally clear and appropriate, though may wander occasionally. May have a few unclear transitions, or a few paragraphs without strong topic sentences.

Use of texts: passages from cited texts are understood, but may not be clearly expressed or explained throughout. They support the thesis of the paper, but all the nuances may not be seen.

Logic and argumentation: Argument of paper is clear, usually flows logically and makes sense. Some evidence that counter-arguments acknowledged, though perhaps not addressed. Occasional insightful connections to outside material made.

Mechanics: Sentence structure, grammar strong despite occasional lapses; punctuation and citation style often used correctly. Some (minor) spelling errors; may have one run-on sentence or comma splice.

The Borderline Paper (78-83, i.e. B-/C+)

Thesis: May be unclear (contain many vague terms), appear unoriginal, or offer relatively little that is new; provides little around which to structure the paper.

Structure: Generally unclear, often wanders or jumps around. Few or weak transitions, many paragraphs without topic sentences.

Use of evidence: passages from cited texts not clearly understood, expressed or explained. The relationship between the text and the thesis of the paper is not always clear.

Logic and argumentation: Logic may often fail, or argument may often be unclear. May not address counter-arguments or make any outside connections.

Mechanics: Problems in sentence structure, grammar, and diction (usually not major). Errors in punctuation, citation style, and spelling. May have several run-on sentences or comma splices.

The "Needs Help" Paper (C/C-)

Thesis: Difficult to identify at all, may be bland restatement of obvious point.

Structure: Unclear, often because thesis is weak or non-existent. Transitions confusing and unclear. Few topic sentences.

Use of text: Cited texts not understood, explained or expressed. Not related well to the thesis.

Logic and argumentation: Ideas do not flow at all, usually because there is no argument to support. Simplistic view of topic; no effort to grasp possible alternative views.

Mechanics: Big problems in sentence structure, grammar, and diction. Frequent major errors in citation style, punctuation, and spelling. May have many run-on sentences and comma splices.

The Failing Paper

Shows obviously minimal lack of effort or comprehension of the assignment. Very difficult to understand owing to major problems with mechanics, structure, and analysis. Has no identifiable thesis, or utterly incompetent thesis.

In the section of his Systematic Theology titled “Being and the Question of God” Tillich is contemplating Being. Being is the main topic.

Being is what we attribute to something when we say that it “**is**”.

Tillich wants to know what we are talking about when something is said to BE.

He is doing ontology because ontology is the area of philosophy that deals with Being.

Thus in the text when he says anything is ontological, it has to do with this investigation of the nature of Being. Whatever he has to say about being should be able to be applied to anything that **is**.

Being, however, is so general, so universal a concept that it is hard to discuss. So Tillich moves to a second level of concepts that deal with the structures and dynamics of being. He finds that there are four levels or groups of such concepts:

- The categories of finitude
 - Time
 - Space
 - Causality
 - Substance
- The three polarities, each of which embraces 2 elements which are fundamentally related to each other:
 - Individualization and participation
 - Form and dynamics
 - Freedom and destiny
- The subject-object structure of being
 - Which upon further reflection includes the relationship of the self and the world
- The relationship of essence and existence

Each of these four groups or levels of ontological concepts is a priori, not a posteriori

A posteriori simply refers to the objects of our experience.

I see a blue sky, I hear a bird chirp, I feel the wind on my cheek, I ask questions about theology. The blue sky, the chirp, the wind, the theological question are the objects we experience. We come to them through our experience of seeing, hearing, feeling, thinking. What we know of them is a posteriori.

A priori realities are not the objects of our experience

They provide the very structure of our experience.

They must be given, they must be in place for there to be experience of anything.

Examples:

- Time is not an object we experience. We experience things in time.
- We do not experience space, we experience things in space.

- Form and dynamics are involved in every human experience. They shape how we experience things.
- There is always a subject and an object in our experience. We are the subject. What we see, hear, move, think about is the object of the experience. Even if we think about ourselves, we the subject think ideas (the object) about ourselves.

In every one of these structures Tillich is going to find both embodiment and self transcendence. Both are always present in any human experience.

- Most basically, embodiment means we have a body. But having a body also places us in this world at a particular time and in a particular place. It entails all the givens of our situation.
- Self transcendence is that element of a being a subject that keeps us moving beyond the given. This capacity of the subject to move beyond the givenness of the situation is infinite. There is no object, no experience which is finally able to satisfy our infinite self transcendence. We keep looking for more.
- Tillich believes that each of the ontological structures he discusses has implicit in it both embodiment and infinite self transcendence. The infinite quality of self transcendence implies the question, the search, the hunger and longing for God.
- But the self transcendence always moves out from our embodied situation. Thus the question of God will be shaped by the givens of our situation, by the concreteness of our experience.

Now to take a closer look at the ontological structures Tillich discusses

The Categories:

Each of these involves a creative relationship between

Embodiment and self transcendence

Embodiment: that which defines us here and now

Self transcendence: the capacity and longing for something more

Being and non-being

Which together make finite being

The tension caused by the creative relation of these factors is the source of anxiety. Tillich is so on with his notion of anxiety raised by the categories that there is a multi-billion dollar industry based on each category.

We are able to live through the anxiety because of courage

The question is what is the source of the courage? Tillich would equate courage with grace, the presence of God which gives us the something more we need to live well.

Time

Being: we exist now, at this moment

Non-being: the past is no longer, the future is **not** yet. This implies finitude.

Embodiment: our bodies place us now, at this moment

Self transcendence: we can move beyond the given time in which we are embodied. We can remember the past; we can imagine the future. We can long for a time yet to come.

Anxiety:

We long for the past, we hate to let some moments slip away to become nothing but memory

We long for the future: think of a 5 year old 3 days before Christmas.

What we ultimately long for given the questions raised by time: the eternal

Courage comes from those moments where we sense the presence of the eternal: those moments when something more was present, those moments that carry us through life, i.e. sacred times. Courage is the ability to affirm the present moment and live well in it.

Space:

Being: we are here in Anchorage or in Seattle University

Non Being: we are not there, at home, or at the Mariners' game. We can **not** be in two places at once. This implies limits, finitude.

Embodiment: our bodies place us here, in this place

Self Transcendence: we can think about other places, we can long to be in another physical place. We can long for places we have been before or have not yet seen. The place we now stand does bind our spirits.

Anxiety emerges from the threat of losing our place. Think of what it means to be homeless, to move away from the home you have known, to be sent into exile to a place that is not yours, to be a stranger in a strange land, to have your home, your space, invaded by another.

Courage: comes with the capacity to affirm where we are, wherever that might be and to live where we find ourselves. It comes from a sense of space that bears something more. Think of what it means to say a place is sacred, that there is something present here that is holy.

Causality

Causality deals with the question: why? Why did this happen?

Explaining the causes of something anchors it in this world by placing them in a nexus of origins and purposes. To not be able to explain the causes of something leaves it in the realm of contingency and pure accident. We desire and need to know why we did something or why

something happened to us. Unexplained events wear away at the human spirit.

Being: to be well anchored in this world in terms of causes and purposes that explain your existence, your life.

Non Being: to have no anchoring in reality; to be purely contingent, i.e. there is no good reason for something happening, or for your being here. To have no purpose in life.

Embodiment: to be the result of this configuration of causes and purposes. I am the child of these two people who are my parents. I am a priest or I am a married person for this or that reason.

Self Transcendence: the capacity to move beyond the given and ask why things are so.

Anxiety: To not know where we have come from. To not know why we exist. To have things happen to us with no explanation at all. Why did hurricane Katrina destroy my house? Why did my child die in that accident? The ultimate anxiety here is not to be the ultimate explanation of one's own existence: I did not give myself life, and one day it will be taken from me. In theological language this entails the recognition that we are creatures, the product of powers beyond us. We did not even give ourselves this day.

Courage: the capacity to live well in spite of the fact we are not ultimately in control of our lives. The grace to admit that we are creatures and to praise God, the creator who gives us the gift of our existence.

Substance:

That which makes a thing what it is and not something else.

It can be used to refer to the basic nature of a thing: this is a bird and not a tree. That is a cat and not a human being.

OR it can refer to things that do not define our nature, but rather things that define me as a unique human being. You do not understand me well unless you know that I am from Seattle, that I love to read theology and history.

Being: I am a human being. My little pet Chick is a bird, a sun conure. Those are our natures. I am from Seattle. Chick has a bad leg but is quite adventuresome in spite of it.

Non Being: I am not a bird and will never be able to fly like Chick. In spite of her love for chewing books, chick is not a human being and will never be able to read.

Embodiment: I am this

Self Transcendence: I can become something more... a theologian, a pianist, a mountain climber. I am not limited by what I am now.

Anxiety: in the face of the loss of what I am. What happens to the sense of self of an athlete who slows down with age, of a dancer who breaks a leg? What happens to a person who has trouble with retirement because they have always been (name the job)? What does it mean to lose your memory, the beauty of youth?

Courage: to affirm what we are here and now. To try something new. To face change well.

For Tillich each category raises the question of God in a different way.

Time: is there anything beyond the shifting sands of time: is there anything eternal.

Space: is there anything beyond the confines of spatial limitations, not threatened by the loss of one's place. Is there anything omnipresent?

Causality: is there anything that does not have its cause in something else? Is there anything which explains its own being (Tillich's term of aseity {Latin for from itself}). Is there anything which is not created but gives itself being.

Substance: is there anything that is not threatened with the loss of what it essentially is. Is there anything which is not threatened with the loss of its existence.

The anxiety around the categories is so real that each of them has produced a multibillion dollar industry that pretends to help solve the issue. Can you name the industries?

The Polarities:

Each of Tillich's three polarities contains two elements which circle each other like two dancers. They need each other for the dance to go on. With the categories the threat is the loss of being altogether: non being in the radical sense of losing one's existence. Here the threat is that the dance will cease and the two elements go spinning off and being is not lost but becomes distorted. The promise of the polarities is that when they find a balance with each other, life blossoms.

Freedom and Destiny:

Destiny: everything that goes to make up this moment about which you can no longer do anything.

The fact that you are short or tall, male or female

The fact you live in the 21st century and in North America

The fact that you come from this family, have these siblings, these parents.

That fact that long ago you made this decision, married this person, went to this school, became an engineer or a teacher.

Freedom: the capacity to do something creative with what destiny has handed you. Note that freedom is so much more than mere choice of this or that. It entails imagination and the ability to act on what we imagine. But most basically freedom means that we are not stuck with what life has handed us. We can do something different, something creative, something new.

I can go back to school and start a new career.

I can deal with my anger and try to heal a broken relationship.

We can change the structures that govern this parish or this church.

Freedom does not operate well without destiny. Destiny provides a context for freedom. Freedom keeps destiny from caging us in to the givens of our lives.

The dangers of distortion:

Freedom becomes arbitrariness if it does not take destiny into consideration. It is foolish for me with my less than 6 foot frame to think I can play center for a professional basketball team. It would be foolish for me to start a serious relationship with a woman without seriously considering the fact I have made promises of celibacy as a priest. The same would be foolish for a married person. It would not be wise for me to try out for a choral group when I cannot read music.

Destiny can freeze us in the given. It can feel like fate, like we can do nothing about our lives and our circumstances. Life can overwhelm us and make us little more than victims.

When freedom and destiny relate well to one another, we take what life hands us and our own past decisions seriously and on the basis of those move creatively into the future.

Individualization and Participation:

The word to think of when Tillich speaks of individualization (NOT individualism) is integration. For Tillich any being's capacity for individualization depends on their capacity first the various aspects of their being and then through relationships to integrate into their lives the things around them.

A rock is not a highly integrative being. It does not have a great potential for what Tillich means by individualization. It does have some capacity for individualization, for it is a particular individual rock. But you don't see it interacting with other rocks a lot.

A tree, which unlike a rock is alive, interacts with its environment a great deal more than a rock. It needs the carbon dioxide in the air, it needs water, it needs nutrients from the soil. It integrates these into its being. Its capacity for individuation is greater than that of the rock because it can integrate more.

This is true to an even greater degree with an animal, whose environment can be much more than that of a tree, and who to some extent must

integrate its experience of that environment and react in some basic psychological ways.

Humans are the most integrative of the beings we have come into contact with. We have the capacity to take our lives and our being into our hands and draw the pieces together into a cohesive story and a unified sense of ourselves. We do this better on some days than on others. The threads we pull together into a unified being are physical, biological, ecological, biographical, psychological.

Participation:

When Tillich discusses participation, think of relationship. Go back through the examples given for individualization and look at the capacity for relationship in each. Rocks are not highly relational beings; humans are. We relate physically and biologically to the environment. But we also relate on an emotional and personal level with other human beings. Our relationships are not limited by physical presence. I still relate to my grandfather who died years ago, not in the sense that I talk to his ghost, but in the sense that a part of who I am today is the result of that relationship and I still carry his memory with me. I can relate to dinosaurs that lived millions of years ago just in my capacity to think and wonder about them. I can think about galaxies that are billions of light years distant. And I can draw all of this into a whole, into a meaningful sense of things that Tillich likes to call a world.

The thing to notice in this whole discussion is that beings that have a greater capacity for relationship also have a greater capacity for integration. And the opposite is true: the greater the capacity for integration, the greater is the capacity for relationship. Keeping the two in balance is the key to the polarity.

The dangers of distortion:

An overwhelming individualism that cuts itself off from others and from life experiences. The result of this would be loneliness and isolation. The self shrivels and shrinks. Think of the Marlboro man out riding the range, alone, with no one on the horizon to disturb his solitary life. He is in control, but the circle of his life is a rather narrow one.

On the other hand, the danger on the side of participation is to be overwhelmed by otherness. One seems to come apart as the many elements of one's life pull us in one direction and then another. The center cannot hold. The temptation is to surrender to the crowd, to join the fad movement, to surrender the self.

A second danger lies in not being able to pull the various parts of one's experience together, to have whole aspects of our stories (a traumatic event) or our psyches that we cannot pull together into a unity.

Some interesting implications:

Why is it usually a good idea for teenagers not to get married?

Why do people join cults?

Dynamics and Form:

Dynamics is impossible to define. The minute you do so, you've corralled it into a form. So when you try to think about dynamics, think of energy. Think of uncontrolled energy. The wild.

Think of a room full of two year olds without any supervision.

Think of hurricane Katrina.

Think of water outside of any container.

Pure dynamics is chaos.

However, even in these examples there is some hint of form or we would not be able to think about them.

Form:

Form gives shape to something. It takes the energy and channels it, gives it shape.

To see the two working together, think of two excellent dancers taking the energy of the dance and shaping it into something beautiful with the form of the dance. Think of a football team taking what is basically and awful lot of violent chaos and channeling it an effective play. Think of a preschool teacher channeling the energies of a group of energetic 4 year olds.

The dangers of distortion:

Dynamics without a good balance with form becomes chaotic. It has a tendency to overwhelm and destroy. It is also energy without direction so it simply dissipates. It constantly looks for what is new, and never seems to come to terms with the shape of things now. It is change for change sake. It is a whirlwind of change that can destroy everything we know and love.

The distortion of form is form for its own sake. It is to be overly in love with forms as we have them now. It is the temptation to stay with things the way they are now because we are afraid of the chaos that change implies. It embraces formalism for form's sake. It is legalism. It refuses to allow the Impressionists into the Louvre because it is not real art. It insists the liturgy cannot and will not ever change. The way we have done anything is the way it should always be done.

At the heart of the relationship of form and dynamics lies the issue of change, of revolution and reaction.

The Subject Object Structure of Being

The relationship of subject and object is what Tillich means on page 164 by “the basic ontological structure which is the implicit condition of the ontological question.”

The subject is the one who acts

Action can mean we do something in the world, where we manipulate the object

I threw the ball, she played the piano

Or it can be a bit more on the receptive/perceptive side

She watched the game

I listened to the music

In either case, in Tillich’s mind the subject is a rather centered being.

We draw our many experiences in the world into a whole that becomes my stream of consciousness, my story. This centered being Tillich calls the self.

We also try to make sense of it all, to draw our experience of the world into a coherent whole. This centered sense of the whole is what Tillich means by a world.

The object is not simply something we act on or come to experience. It is what is sought by the subject in a particular experience.

If my action is listening to a piece of music, the object is the sense experience of the music.

If I move to another level of action and ask who composed the music I am listening to, the object is no longer the sense experience of the music, but rather what is sought in the question, “who is the composer.”

If I wake up to a bang in the night, the object of my sense experience is the noise. If I then ask what made that sound, I have moved to another level of action and am seeking an explanation of the noise I heard. My object now is the explanation of my sense experience.

It is rather important to recognize that you do not have a human subject except in relationship to an object. Human subjects do not exist and then go out and experience things. We are always caught up in experience. We do not exist except in relationship to something other, an object. We might be caught up in deep self reflection and entirely unaware of what is going on around us, but we are subjects in relationship to the object which is our thoughts about ourselves.

Secondly, it is important to realize that our sense of ourselves as subjects is shaped by the objects we experience. Our experiences in the world shape who we become and our basic sense of ourselves.

Human beings are BEINGS IN THE WORLD.

Tillich also warns against completely objectifying objects.

We have to objectify them to some degree to think or talk about them or to act upon them.

But we cannot reduce them entirely to objects.
This is especially true with other human beings.
Even more so it is true of God.

God cannot be reduced to an object, which means all language about God is by its very nature inadequate
This is also true about us as subjects. We are always more than we can say or objectify.
Finally, it is true about anything that exists. There is always something more about reality than we can capture, nail down, and control. That is why we need poets and need to nurture the poetic side of ourselves as subjects.

If we reduce everything we interact with to objects, to being simply things, something inside of us as subjects is lost.

Essence and Existence

Essence

By essence Tillich simply means that which makes a reality what it is. A bird has the essence of birdness, the sun has the essence of being a star. Essence is that set of qualities or potentials that a being must have to be that kind of being.

Essence can also imply value judgments when some being fails to live up to the potential in its essence. If one of the essential qualities of human beings is the ability to love and we meet a person who never loves anyone, we sense something is off in that person's life.

Existence

Existence for Tillich is at best an ambiguous term and for the most part a negative term. It entails disruption and self-destruction. In volume 2 Tillich will equate it with the results of sin. It is the failure to live up to the possibilities inherent in our essence.

The ultimate key to the section Tillich entitles "Being and the Question of God" is found in the first full paragraph on page 191. The paragraph merits a bit of meditation just on its own and then further meditation on how its claims are true in the light of each of the structures we commented on above. The following are the key claims being made:

- We are self transcendent and thus nothing finite can hold us or satisfy us. We are always looking for and long for something more.
- But we are finite and embodied. Finitude is our destiny.
- Our self transcendence takes place in embodied ways.
- The fact we are self transcendent means we already belong to and are related to something more in all our experiences.

It is this tension between embodied finitude and self transcendence that is the root of what Tillich means by anxiety.

KARL RAHNER An Introduction to his thought

Rahner's starting point = human experience

Rahner holds that all human knowledge is rooted in experience.

He goes beyond that to claim that anything inside of us, (spiritual, mental, emotional) has an experiential element.

Another way of getting at this is to say that we are anchored in the world, we are always relating to the world.

Rahner would push this further and claim (in the title of his most basic work) we are SPIRITS IN THE WORLD.

Rahner wants to know what structures and dynamics must be in place for such experience to be possible.

That is a fairly good first run at a description of what Transcendental Method (the method his school of theology uses) entails: an analysis of the structures and dynamics of what it means to be human such that we are both spirit and in the world.

For Rahner you only have the human spirit in the world. It does not exist as some kind of separate entity in some realm disconnected from this world.

A fundamental pattern in Rahner's thought is to find a unity in difference:

While an experience or a reality is one and remains one,

Intellectually we are able to make important distinctions about that experience.

Rahner will find distinctions in the factors that make up that unity:

Examples:

People simply experienced Jesus, later the Church learned to distinguish of the human and the divine in Jesus

People simply have experiences, later in reflecting on some experiences we abstract and distinguish between philosophical and theological elements:

Philosophy deals with the natural structures of human nature, especially as they are open to a possible relationship with God

Theology deals with that relationship with God.

The same pattern can be found in

the relationship of nature and grace in human experience;

in the relationship of secular and salvation history;

For Rahner human experience always involves two elements:

the transcendental (often the word existential is used in the place of transcendental): those structures and dynamics always present in human experience and which are necessary to make human experience possible.

the categorical: the concrete stuff of experience, i.e. its content.

If you are watching a football game, the categorical element is the game. The transcendental elements are all those things in human nature that must be in place for us to watch and understand a football game.

these two elements are always had together in human experience. You cannot have one without the other. The transcendental is very close to what we Rahner means when he talks about spirit. The Categorical is very close to the wider theme of embodiment that we have discussed.

Within human experience and knowledge there is another important distinction Rahner makes: the thematic and the unthematic.

the thematic: that which we are capable of bringing to expression and reflecting upon. All those things we know and can bring to mind and talk about fairly easily.

I can tell you what day it is today, what city we are in, who the President of the United States is.

the unthematic: things we know but may not be able to articulate.

For example, I know who I am, but I may not be able to bring the entire sense of myself to verbal expression. Our sense of ourselves is always more than we can say.

Rahner also includes here a basic sense of the presence of God in the midst of our experiences of the world. It's not what we are paying attention to and articulating, but it is there in the back of our awareness.

Also included would be a fundamental sense of what it means to be human and how to be human. For instance, we all know how to know, but can we give an adequate explanation of how human knowledge functions. We know what it means to be free, but can we give a full and adequate explanation of what freedom is.

a preconceptual, original "knowledge/experience" that has yet to be brought to expression and reflection.

Out of this would flow Rahner's theme that we are mysteries to ourselves.

Rahner believes that unthematic realities are better understood (obviously) and better lived when they are made thematic. Much of his early work is to try to make thematic the fundamental structures and dynamics of what it means to be human, and how we are related to God.

The transcendental elements of human experience tend to remain unthematic because we tend to concentrate on the stuff or content of human experience. Rahner and commentators on Rahner will often refer to this as transcendental experience. What is really meant is the transcendental element of human experience.

Transcendental elements in human experience

An object

do not think of the object as necessarily something out there in the world. It might be, but that is only one possibility. An object is anything the mind is operating on. It could be a memory, a theory, a product of our imagination, a hypothetical question, etc. etc.

Self awareness:

the self's consciousness of itself as it operates. We may not be paying any attention to this, but it remains present in any human activity.

Self-transcendence: the ability to move beyond what is given in experience, the ability to ask new questions, to move toward wider and wider contexts in our consideration of things. The drive of the mind toward the infinite.

A given horizon.

There are two types of horizons Rahner will discuss:

The proximate or historical horizon within which we live, i.e. our world of meaning, our culture, or worldview. What we are able to ask about, know about and talk about from where we stand in history.

the absolute or transcendental horizon: that toward which the human spirit moves in self transcendence.

the human spirit is not ordered toward any finite object as its final goal and fulfillment. Nothing finite can hold it. It can always ask the next question, seek the next experience, imagine something more. Toward what is it moving when it transcends the given. Rahner calls it the absolute horizon, or Being-Itself. I.e. God.

It is this dynamism of infinite self-transcendence that Rahner is referring to with the term spirit.

VORGRIFF/pre-apprehension of Being

these are two terms Rahner uses to talk about human self-transcendence's relationship with Being. It simply means that human self-transcendence is somehow already in relationship with Being or else it could not seek it. (See Tillich Vol. p. 191) (Vorgriff is simply German for pre-grasping.)

this pre-apprehension of being is pre-conceptual, pre-reflective, and unthematic, but it is a constant presence in consciousness. It is a

necessary condition of human knowledge because it allows us to get beyond the immediate experience of the object.

Being for Rahner is not a thing out there in the world (as a naive realism would imply);

nor is it simply a mental category (as Kant held).

It is the ground or goal toward which human self-transcendence moves in every act of knowledge and, put more widely, every human act.

Thus Rahner holds we can know reality. We are able to move beyond pure sense perception and judge whether what we know has being, i.e. is true. We are able to do this because the human mind does not remain caught in a simple relationship with what it knows through the senses, but moves through what the senses present and dynamically moves beyond what the senses present so that from the horizon of absolute Being it is able to ask questions of meaning and insight and affirm the answers as true or false.

We can know reality.

Abstract knowledge is knowledge of reality.

Knowledge is a dynamic not a static process.

Rahner does not say the following but it can be inferred from the above:

the same dynamism can be applied to the human movement toward truth, beauty, goodness, justice, and love.

Because it is the movement toward the absolute horizon of being which enables human self-transcendence, and because Rahner identifies this absolute horizon with God, there is an openness and a search for God that goes on in every truly human act. Any relationship with God, therefore, is not extrinsic, i.e. something alien to our humanity, nor is it confined to a special area of experience, a some religious thought would confine it. The openness to a relationship with God is an unthematic element in every human experience.

Rahner's language for this is to say that we are Hearers of the Word, i.e. if God in God's freedom should speak and reveal God's self, human beings have the capacity to hear.

This does not mean God has to speak; God remains free to reveal God's self or not.

This openness to God is not a particular experience, but is the ground of all human experience.

Because self-transcendence only takes place in union with something categorical, this dynamic movement of the human spirit toward God only takes place in embodied ways, i.e. within the concreteness of human history and personal story.

The Vorgriff is a dim constant anticipation of a positive fullness of infinite reality as the horizon all human knowing and freedom. Another possible interpretation is that we transcend toward Nothing. That ultimately there is a void at the core of all reality. The latter leads to a much more negative evaluation of human life and to despair. Interpreters of Rahner appeal to human experience and ask which attitude is more basic in human experience. The issue cannot be settled by logical proof, but only by an appeal to the quality of experience. One such an appeal is to our ability to laugh in the face of the tragic side of life and to continue to hope.

When Rahner discusses PURE human nature without considering grace, he talks about this movement toward God as “asymptotic.” Asymptotic means that the movement keeps approaching God, but never arrives. Like the horizon on earth or the end of rainbow, the horizon can never be reached by a finite being.

God remains mystery.

God is never had as an object of experience.

FREEDOM

Freedom in Rahner's thought is not a particular experience. It is not the experience of choosing this over that. Freedom is an element in every human experience. It is rooted in our ability to transcend the given, to understand the given from wider and wider perspectives, to imagine something other than the given, and to act on those other possibilities. Freedom is thus anchored in that fundamental element of all human experience, self-transcendence.

Freedom is a part of every human experience, because in every experience we take a stance in the face of what is given to us in life. We affirm what is given or we seek to change it, but we always take a stance.

The primary object of freedom is the self. In every human moments we decide who we are in the midst of what life has given us. We are self-constituting, self-creative. We are responsible for what we have become and are becoming.

Within freedom there is both a transcendental element and a categorical element. The transcendental element is the dynamics and structure of self-transcendence which makes freedom possible. The categorical element is the stuff upon which our freedom works, the content of our history and our life stories. You cannot have the transcendental without the categorical upon which it operates. Again, the human spirit is always embodied.

In Rahner's thought the reality of God constitutes our humanity. Without God as the horizon and goal of our self-transcendence that self transcendence would not be possible. It is in the face of the reality of God that human beings raise the question of the whole, of the ultimate meaning of things, and come face to face with the finitude of ourselves and our world.

Without the reality of God, Rahner believes human life would shallow out. It would lose its depth, its drive, its passion for the ultimate, its ability to reach beyond the given.

This is often phrased in terms which claim that the word "God" makes human language possible. Otherwise we are caught in Hobbes' description of language, which is not much more than a putting together of concepts in new patterns.

We must come before the Mystery of God to find our fullness. Here Rahner answers one of the great critiques of religion in the modern period. It has often been claimed that the notion of God robs us of our humanity by religions telling us what to think and what to do and by projecting basic human qualities onto God rather than ourselves. While that may have been done by institutional religion, Rahner does not believe that that is what true religion does. He believes that without the Mystery of God human freedom, human searching and questioning, human self-transcendence are not possible.

GOD LANGUAGE

Because of the union of the transcendental and categorical in all human experience (in other terms, the unity of spirit and body), God is sought through our self-transcendence only in the concrete fabric of our lives. We seek God in this situation here and now, not off in some abstract place away from life. Thus our language and experience of God are always caught up in the finitude of our situation, personally and culturally. Thus language for God is always symbolic, analogical, metaphorical, parabolic.

CREATURELINESS

The notion that we are creatures emerges from our experience of self-transcendence. The fact that we did not make ourselves or the world in which we live is something we arrive at by moving beyond the given and asking questions. Creatureliness refers not only to the fact that we are not our own origins, but to the fact that we are aware of our finitude.

Because of the pre-apprehension of Being (or in German, the *Vorgriff*), human beings are self-transcendent and radically open to the infinite.

In fine Thomistic and Aristotelian fashion, Rahner also refers to this as the work of the agent intellect, that part of ourselves or our mind which moves beyond the given toward the horizon of Absolute Being.

Because of the *Vorgriff* a relationship with God is possible without having to break in on a finite structure which is closed and complete in itself and in no need of a relationship with God. Rahner does not believe in the closed world of Hobbes and Hume.

Obediential Potency is the technical term Rahner uses to speak of this natural openness we have to God. It refers to the potential we have to hear the Word of God should God in his freedom choose to speak.

GRACE

For Rahner there is no such thing as PURE human nature. Such a thing is an abstraction. The human situation as we know it in our experience is shaped not only by the dynamics and structure of human nature, but also by the gift of grace.

Note that grace is a gift. It is not a given with human nature. It is freely bestowed by God. Grace is not due to the human even though the human is radically open to it. Rahner thus avoids the ancient heresies of Pelagianism and Semi-Pelagianism, both of which claimed that human beings could earn grace through moral merit so that God owed us grace. A more modern form of the heresy would claim that grace is due to us because of our nature. The key is to maintain the freedom of God in the relationship between God and human beings.

The Locus of Grace

In Rahner's thought grace is not another object that is given. It is not some kind of spiritual stuff. Grace is rather a transformation in the dynamics of the human spirit. In the abstract reality of pure nature the human spirit moves toward the Absolute Horizon (or Being Itself) in an asymptotic manner. God remains the distant horizon of human self-transcendence.

In grace human life, however, that horizon is no longer infinitely distant. It becomes infinitely close. What the human spirit moves toward is a presence that is closer than any object can ever be, but which itself is not an object.

In very technical language, human beings know by abstracting the form of something from the experience of the reality. The mind then is shaped by the form. For instance, in coming to know a table or a dog the mind abstracts the form of tableness or dogness from the experience by moving toward the absolute horizon from the midst of the concrete experience we are seeking to understand. From that absolute horizon we gain the self-

transcendence necessary to step back from the immediacy of a stimulus response relationship with the experience. We are thus able to abstract from the experience the form of what we have observed. The formal cause (dogness or tableness) now not only shapes the thing we are looking at, but also shapes the human mind that has come to know it.

In a graced situation the human is shaped not only by the form of the object but also by the presence of God given in infinite closeness. The situation is shaped by the presence of God. God is not an object but is a presence within the encounter with the object. Thus Rahner calls grace a quasi-formal cause. "Quasi" means he is struggling for language to talk about grace, and it is somewhat like formal causality; "formal causality" means that the encounter with a concrete object takes place within an arena that is also shaped by the presence of God. God is not the object, but is present in all human knowing.

Rahner analyzes all this from the point of view of human knowing, but a quick analogy can be drawn to all human activities that are shaped by self-transcendence: the search for beauty, truth, goodness and justice, love, being, and life.

For Rahner our very presence to ourselves in our encounter with and in the world is transformed and includes the presence of God. Notice that it is more like self-presence than the presence of an object.

It is very important for Rahner both

that God is never an object given within our finite world;
and that God is present only in the midst of an encounter with our world. The human encounter with God takes place in and through our finite, historical experiences in this world. Remember the title of Rahner's first doctoral thesis, **Spirit in the World**.

One can see here the importance of the theme of embodiment in all of the dimensions we saw earlier in class. Both the search for God and the presence of God are found within the finite reality of history and materiality. WE ARE EMBODIED SPIRITS, ALL SPIRITUAL ACTIONS TAKE IN PLACE IN AND THROUGH OUR EMBODIMENT IN SPACE AND TIME.

This is why the principle of **sacramentality** is so important in Rahner's theology. On a most basic level, sacramentality refers to the fact that our relationship with God must be mediated by finite reality and that finite reality is capable of that mediation. The locus of our encounter with God is through the world, through the rest of creation.

This is because we are sacramental beings. By that I mean that our spirits function only in and through the created world, in time and space and matter.

Everything in the human heart, the human mind, the human spirit gets there through our encounter with the rest of creation and thus through historical, material reality, and is realized by us only through historical, concrete expression.

We find God in and through our encounter with the world, and we live that encounter and bring it to expression in the realm of history and matter, in concrete deeds, actions, and thoughts. Thus our relationship with God is actualized through liturgy, symbols, gestures, actions.

For Rahner grace is a supernatural existential. This is a common term in Rahner's theology, and again it is key.

By supernatural Rahner simply means that it is not a part of our nature. It is something given freely by God is not due to us. Nor is it an element within the rest of nature which we can simply go out and appropriate in some way. It is from beyond the dynamics and structures of creation.

Existential is term Rahner picks up from the philosopher Martin Heidegger. It simply means something that is always given in human experience. It usually refers to those dynamics and structures which must be a reality for experience to take place at all, and thus usually refers to elements that make up human nature and experience. Rahner is arguing that human experience always has another element to it which is the presence of God. He is arguing that the grace of God is universally offered in every human situation from Adam and Eve (or the first ape that fell out of a tree on its head and got up asking what it meant to be human) down to the last baby that was born a few moments ago. Grace is always offered to the human. No historical period is devoid of it. No particular human life goes without it. God's offer of grace is universal.

Some cautions, however.

It is offered but not always accepted. Sin is still a reality for Rahner.

The offer is unthematic. It takes place in the depths of human experience in the world and in history and is not an object on its own. One of the great struggles of the human spirit is to make it thematic.

Some implications:

God is present in all of human history. No period is lacking the presence of God or God's grace.

Rahner takes a positive view of all human religions. All of them seek to bring this hidden presence of God in the depths of human experience to thematic expression. The expressions in various religions are not always adequate, however. Religions can fall short in expressing grace.

Throwing virgins into volcanoes or offering child sacrifice may not be the fullest finite expression of who God is and how we are related to God. But at the core of every religion there is some element of truth and grace at work even if it is simply the struggle to bring those to expression.

The fullest expression of the presence and grace of God for Rahner is the human life of Jesus. For Rahner, nothing has or will surpass Jesus as the expression of God's grace.

The history of Israel is a gradual preparation for and a growing toward the fullness of the full presence of God in Jesus.

Not only religion but culture (world's of meaning) are expressions of the search for and the presence of God. As a culture searches for truth, beauty, justice, life, and love it both searches for something infinite and finds within its cultural expression something of the presence and grace of God.

Think of the ministerial implications: God is to be found within cultural expressions. One of the tasks of ministry would then be to bring that spiritual depth of a culture to religious expression.

Salvation history and secular history thus have an interesting relationship. They cannot be reduced to one another, but there is a unity in difference between them. Secular history has hidden deep within it something of salvation history, the presence of God which is seeking historical, finite expression. Salvation history (the history of Israel, Jesus and the church ((and one might include the history of the world religions)) is an element within secular history (you can read chapters on Israel and Christianity in secular history books), but it is also bringing to expression something that is present within the wider universal history of the human race.

This is not to say that everything in culture and religion is blessed and holy. It can also be influenced by sin. One of the roles of true religion is to bring to expression the presence of God that is deep within culture; but another equally important role is to prophetically challenge the sinfulness that is also present. Life and history are ambiguous (a term from Tillich).

The basic metaphor for grace

Grace is usually viewed from two perspectives.

At times it is viewed as forgiveness. It is what is given in the redeeming act of God. Sin is forgiven and human life is made whole in the redeeming work of God. Here grace is closely tied to the doctrine of justification.

Within the Roman Catholic tradition since the time of Thomas Aquinas

grace has also been viewed as an elevation of human nature. It is seen as a super-nature given to us so that we might do what our human natures in and of themselves cannot do: share in the very life of God. This potential or capacity is given to us and transforms our nature, building upon it so that it is capable of more. Not only can we then share God's life and enter heaven, but because of the new powers grace gives with this supernature we can perform acts of faith, hope and charity. We are capable of those acts only because this supernature gives us the new capacity or potential for them. In this view grace quickly becomes a thing, something we have or are.

Rahner recognizes the validity of each of these two approaches to grace, but he also searches the early traditions of the Church and finds a deeper sense of grace.

Both of the above two notions of grace he calls created grace because they are the products of God's actions upon us in the course of our lives. What Rahner finds in the tradition is a notion of uncreated grace, which is not the product of an act of God, but the very reality of God's self given to us in relationship. It is uncreated because God is uncreated.

Grace, then, at its deepest level for Rahner is the presence and self gift of God to human beings. It is a gift of self, and the only metaphors that are adequate for it are relational metaphors. Just as lovers give themselves to one another, so God gives God's self to us.

Some interesting corollaries:

In Rahner's thought this self-gift of God defines God's very nature. In short, God is love. Note that that means God is not someone who loves or is loved, but God is the relationship with love.

Thus God cannot be a single person. There must be someone else present in the very nature of God. God is Trinity.

It is worth reflecting on the last parable in MT 25 where Jesus says that as long as we did something for the least we did it for him. What is it about acts of love that make God present?

The finite reality that brings grace or the presence of God to its fullest expression are historical actions of Love. It is in loving one another that God's presence is actualized within finite history, that it comes to clearest expression, greatest realization, and fullest effectiveness.

This is why married love and parenting are sacred. They are probably the places in life where those involved in them come to know who God is most clearly, and where God's action is most clearly expressed and made effective.

This is why marriage is sacramental.

Notice in Rahner's thought that it is God's presence that makes us most human. Religion does not take away our humanness nor call us from it to something else. Rather it is where we are most human that our relationship to God is to be found and where it is most effective in our lives. It is where our search for truth, beauty, love and justice run most deep that God presence runs deepest and truest in our lives. It is at our most human that we most approach God. It is there that the life of God which is love (and truth and beauty) is found.

Just as the presence of God can be unthematic and struggling toward thematization within human life, so to our response to God can be unthematic. A yes or no to God's self offer need not be explicit. One can reject God by rejecting justice, truth, beauty, and love even while one is still regularly going to Church. Another may never darken the doors of the Church and still be saying yes to God unthematically by the way they are living their lives.

Another unity in difference in Rahner's thought is that between grace and nature. While he can distinguish the two theologically, in actual human experience the two pervade one another at all time and in all places. A very Rahnerian expression would be to claim that we live in a world of grace (the title of O'Donovan's book). Another image Rahner uses claims that grace is like the air we breath or the water of the ocean to a fish. Grace is the element that is with us always but is difficult to notice. It is too close to us.