Welcome to this course in which we will explore the contributions of Karl Rahner to a contemporary spirituality. This means finding ways of living as effective human beings in the years ahead and of learning to deal with the great questions of meaning and purpose which brush us all, sooner or later. In religious language, it means submitting to the will of God, putting on the mind of Christ and becoming more responsive to the promptings of the Spirit. Theology should aid us in this task by making available for us the resources of our Christian tradition which can enlighten and enliven us. Spiritual theology is simply theology done well (systematically, rigorously, open to contemporary questions, in touch with tradition) and slanted toward guiding us to fuller human living and more effective action in spreading the Kingdom.

The theology of Karl Rahner seems especially helpful in working out a contemporary spirituality, since he responded to questions which still engage us and provided a comprehensive framework for dealing with them. To be effective, his thought must be translated from its origins in scholasticism and the modern German academic tradition into an idiom familiar to citizens of the USA. Our goal is to understand his theology so that it can illumine the challenges we face today in becoming better disciples of Christ, fully alive and able to make a contribution to humanizing our world.

To accomplish these goals we will read sections from his summary work *Foundations of Christian Faith* (ISBN 978-0824505239) (about 15-20 pages of required reading for each class). In class we will discuss the readings. My task is to help create a context for understanding Rahner’s main ideas and to suggest applications to the spiritual quest. This book is required and you should have your own copy.


For a grade you can either take a comprehensive oral exam (about 20 minutes) or write a paper (about 10 pages) which demonstrates an understanding of some aspect of Rahner’s thought and an engagement with material discussed in class. My suggestion is that you choose to do something that is personally enriching or useful in your work.

I am looking forward to exploring this material with you. Feel free to ask for advice and direction.
I. The Spiritual Quest Today

A. We are living through one of the great transitions in history cf. *Spirituality in Transition* by James Bacik (Sheed & Ward 1996); *The Secular Age* by Charles Taylor (Harvard University Press 2007); *Secularity and the Gospel* ed. by Ronald Rolheiser (Crossroad 2006).

B. Expressions of the quest
   1. A search for meaning in the midst of absurdity, commitment in the face of multiple options, a deeper life despite the temptation to superficiality, for a wholeness that overcomes our tendencies to fragmentation. cf. *Spirituality in Action* by James Bacik (Sheed & Ward 1997); *Googling God* by Mike Hayes (Paulist 2007).
   2. More explicitly religious expressions; Trinitarian - accountable to the Father who lavishes maternal care on us, put on mind of Christ, vehicles of the Spirit.

C. Guidance
   1. It helps to be guided by ideals or images of what this fuller life would be like. In many cases it is a matter of achieving a synthesis between apparently opposing tendencies. Thus we should strive for a committed-openness, a hopeful-realism, a reflective-spontaneity, a prayerful prophetism. cf. "Contemporary Spirituality" by James Bacik in *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality* edited by Michael Downey.

II. Background on Rahner

A. Biography - Born March 5, 1904, in Freiburg, Germany, the middle of seven children; in 1922, followed in brother Hugo’s footsteps and joined the Jesuits; 1924-27, studied philosophy in Feldkirch, Austria, and Pullach, near Munich, reading Kant and Marechal in addition to regular course work; 1927-29, taught Latin in Feldkirch; 1929-1933, studied theology in Valkenburg, Holland; 1932, ordained a priest; 1934, went to Freiburg to study to become professor of history of philosophy where he attended seminars of Martin Heidegger and did his doctoral dissertation under Martin Honecker which was rejected for being too influenced by Heidegger (later published as *Geist in Welt*); 1936, went to Innsbruck where he completed in one year his doctorate in theology with a dissertation on the Origins of the Church from the Side of Christ; 1937, began teaching theology at Innsbruck and gave summer lectures, later published as *Hearers of the Word*; 1938, Nazis abolished the theological faculty of Innsbruck and in 1939 Rahner was banished from the Tyrol and went to Vienna where he lectured and did pastoral work during the war. The last year he had to stay in a small village, (Mariakirchen in Lower Bavaria); 1945, started teaching dogmatics at Berchmanskollege near Munich and doing pastoral work there; 1948, called back to Innsbruck where he taught theology until 1964; during this time he was incredibly productive, involved in three important discussion groups dealing with ecumenism and religion and science, writing and lecturing, as well as editing large projects, including *Sacramentum Mundi and*
Quaestiones Disputatae series; he also had his troubles with church authorities, not being allowed to publish a book on Mary, forbidden by the Holy Office to speak on topic of concelebration ( kidded Paul VI ten years later about concelebrating Mass himself); forced in 1962 to submit everything he wrote to preliminary censorship in Rome ( John XXIII made him a Council peritus later that year, effectively lifting the ban and giving him freedom he enjoyed the rest of his life); during the Council he gave lectures and helped on the documents on Revelation, Church, and Church in the Modern World; 1964, he left Innsbruck and took Guardini’s chair in philosophy and religion at the University of Munich where he taught for three years; his course material became the basis for Foundations; 1967, he left Munich when the theology faculty failed to allow him to work with theology students and went to the University of Munster as Professor of Dogmatics until he retired in 1971; he then returned to Munich where he stayed until 1981, when he returned to Innsbruck; 1984, his 80th birthday brought him great honors; shortly after he became ill, summoning the strength to dictate a letter asking Peruvian bishops to protect Gutierrez and liberation theology; March 30, 1984, late in the evening, he died after becoming quite peaceful.

B. Personality: humble, "growling charm," had "the church in his guts" (Metz); dedicated Jesuit; extremely responsive to concrete needs of others; volatile and able to express anger; sober realist; suffered from angst increasingly in late life; interested in ordinary things; liked earthy people and avoided the pompous; interested listener with ability to ask questions; tremendously energetic worker; did not want disciples; replied promptly to letters; sought help from others in meeting his responsibilities; often asked the well-to-do for money for the poor; did not drive but liked others to drive him fast and loved to fly; functioned as a "psychotherapist for humanity;" playful and childlike but didn’t have any hobbies; learned to express tenderness later in life; loved freedom; very outspoken; his correspondence with poet Louise Rinser (over 2,000 letters which are not published). She published hers in 1994 creating a stir in the German press.

C. His Central Insight
1. Rahner had an original intuitive understanding of human beings as essentially related to the Incomprehensible Mystery. cf. Encounters With Silence.
2. He works this out philosophically in Spirit in the World, where human beings are seen as infinite questioners whose knowledge can only be understood in relation to an infinite horizon; and in Hearers of the Word, where humans are on alert for a possible word from God in his history.
3. This fundamental understanding of humans as dynamically transcending everything finite in a drive towards the Infinite (self-transcendent) is like a powerful searchlight which Rahner uses to shine on a vast array of theological problems.

D. Two contributions - David Tracy says Rahner is among the five most influential Catholic theologians (Origen, Augustine, Aquinas, Bonaventure).
1. He helped rescue Scholastic Theology from its decadence by reinterpreting terminology and doctrines, refocusing on forgotten truths, suggesting new questions, applying doctrines to real life, giving impetus to Vatican II, etc.
2. He created a new paradigm for Catholic theology which includes these elements: (1) engagement with the contemporary world; (2) a careful examination of human experience which reveals a mystery dimension; (3) a reinterpretation of traditional Christian doctrines in a modern evolutionary context; (4) a refocusing of the Christian message showing its organic integrity (a Christocentric theology of grace and a theological anthropology illumined by Christ); (5) a sophisticated method of correlation.

E. Contributions to spiritual theology, i.e., theology directed towards personal growth, life of the spirit, effective living, etc. *Everyday Faith* pp. 185-190 (Aquinas as spiritual theologian).

1. An organic comprehensive theology which helps put individual questions in larger perspective.

2. A solid anthropology which guards against simplistic answers, wild swings between extremes (between naive optimism and cynical pessimism, for example) accepting latest fads, etc. He helps us to see ourselves as interdependent and essentially oriented to Mystery. His approach solidly grounds the effort to achieve deeper self-awareness.

3. A great sense of incomprehensibility of God which precludes exclusivist approaches to piety, efforts to manipulate or control God, making idols out of any finite means employed in the spiritual quest (Bible, doctrine, liturgy, etc.)

4. A realistic approach to sin and guilt which refuses to put them in a zone of silence but sees sin as an abiding dimension of human existence (an existential) which is always encompassed by a more powerful grace.

5. A theology of grace which avoids the extrinsicism of the past (grace as a supernatural with little influence on our conscious life) while maintaining the graturity of God's self-loving. This leads to a great emphasis on religious experience, finding God in the ordinary and everyday, being alert to the intimations of God's presence, etc.

6. His theology of revelation provides a way of avoiding exclusivism, of viewing world religions positively, of having a salvation optimism, even as regards atheists, while maintaining allegiance to and confidence in the Christian tradition as the high point of the revelatory process. This helps us to be open minded without being mindless relativists. It also encourages us to appreciate the concrete character of Christianity and to achieve a sense of the particular manifestations of God's presence.

7. His Christology helps us appreciate the humanity of Jesus, sense the importance of a personal relationship to Jesus Christ, understand the Incarnation in a non-mythological way, view the resurrection of Jesus in relation to our own longings for immortality, etc.

8. His ecclesiology helps us avoid ecclesioloetry while appreciating the need for supportive and challenging community and our responsibility to make the Church a genuine sign of the Kingdom.

9. His explicit writings on the spiritual life encourages us to achieve a hopeful realism and a responsible freedom as well as offering numerous practical insights into the process of achieving self-acceptance which is the main element in spiritual growth.
10. His sacramentology relates real life to liturgy and encourages us to avoid formalism in worship, to see sacraments, not as substitutes for faith, but as means of stirring up faith.

11. His moral theology reminds us that we experience a gap between who we are and who we ought to be, and that we are therefore called to continual growth. He gives us an existential ethics which emphasizes the unique call given to each of us by God and which places laws and general principles in this larger framework. This is helpful in avoiding legalism and extreme situation ethics.

12. While Rahner's theology can tend to privatism or individualism, it is possible to use his anthropology of interdependence, his teaching on the essential unity of the love of God and neighbor, his many contributions to the Christian-Marxist dialogue, his ideas on the ecclesial nature of Christian life as a basis for promoting a prophetic spirituality which is attuned to social injustice and which encourages work for social justice as an essential part of a Christian spirituality.

13. His eschatology encourages us to face death realistically, but with an ultimate hope in a God who will satisfy the deepest longings of our hearts and who will bring the whole of creation to a final fulfillment.

14. His many efforts to compose short creeds and to provide organic and comprehensive summaries of the Christian faith aid us in achieving an enlightened simplicity which sees Christianity as the essential response to the question we are.

F. Spiritual Writings

1. His theology in general has a pastoral or spiritual bent. The more scientific theology is, the more practical it will be. Thus his great work *Foundations of Christian Faith* can be read profitably from the perspective of the spiritual quest. The same can be said for the twenty three volumes of the *Theological Investigations*.

2. These are works which are explicitly devoted to the spiritual life: *The Spiritual Exercises* (a commentary on Ignatius’ work which stresses its value in discerning the will of God in concrete matters and important decisions, 1965); *Encounters With Silence*, (a collection of simple prayers first published in 1937); *Watch and Pray with Me* (meditations on the Agony and Passion written in 1949); *The Eternal Year* (sermons for major feasts originally published in 1954); *On Prayer* (sermons on theme of prayer originally preached in 1946); *Opportunities for Faith* (a collection of sermons and addresses mostly given between 1968-1970 on a wide variety of spiritual questions); *Christian at the Crossroads* (a collection of articles mostly from the early 1970s); *Belief Today* (articles from the 1960s on the theology of everyday things, problems of faith today and the simplicity of Christianity); *A New Baptism in the Spirit; Confirmation Today* (1974); *Leading a Christian Life* (short meditations on the sacraments originally done in 50s and 60s); *The Priesthood* (material from a retreat given to priests in 1961); *Biblical Homilies* (short sermons mostly for Sunday liturgies given from 1953-1958); *Allow Yourself to be Forgiven: Penance Today* (1974); *Everyday Faith* (sermons and meditation on major feasts 1966); *Mary Mother of the Lord* (conferences given on Mary originally published 1956); *The Religious Life Today* (short articles on various aspects of religious life originally published in 1974); *Theological
Investigations, Vol. 3, 7, 8 and 16 (especially helpful on questions of the spiritual life); Meditations on Freedom and the Spirit, Seabury 1977; The Courage to Pray; Spirit in the Church 1979 (1st part is new - other sections are previously published books - Visions and Prophecies, Dynamic Element in the Church); Prayers for a Lifetime.


G. Suggestions for reading Foundations
1. Keep in mind the fundamental idea that we are oriented to Mystery
2. Read straight through the chapter without trying to figure out every sentence. Reread noting the points that strike you and wrestle with the difficult sections.
3. Make use of glossary of terms from World Of Grace (at end of book)
4. Distinguish transcendental (unthematic, implicit) which points to the deeper, unarticulated levels of experience and categorical (thematic, categorical or predicamental) which refers to the objectification's of experience.
5. Consult the chapter by chapter commentaries in World of Grace.
6. Reflect on Rahner's prayers and homilies (sections in the handout) which express points in Foundations in more poetic ways.

1. Hans Urs von Balthasar rejected Rahner's method of correlation and his transcendental approach as too subjective. Christian revelation does not confirm human experience but shocks it with the awesome message of Christ.
2. The liberationists (Metz) charge that Rahner's human questioner is not located enough in political, social, cultural context. Rahner took this
criticism very seriously (cf. Rahner’s introduction in *Apologetics and the Eclipse of Mystery*).

3. Postmoderns say the context has changed and we must concentrate on the Other and avoid subjectivism cf. Paul Lakeland *Postmodernity*.

4. Patrick Burke in *Reinterpreting Rahner: A Critical Study of His Major Themes* criticizes Rahner’s philosophy, especially his understanding of forming concepts in the knowing process.


1. Fundamental Theology is really part of systematic theology because the content of the faith is crucial to its credibility.

2. His book tries to present the faith whole and coherent.

3. He is doing a first level reflection (bypassing technical questions) because we cannot know enough (all are rudes) in our contemporary world.

Reading:

Required:  *Foundations* pp. 1-23

Recommended:  *A World of Grace* pp. 1-16, Reader pp. XIII-XXVIII; *Content of Faith* pp. 1-42, *The Practice of Faith* pp. IX - XV

Popular:  *Encounters with Silence*


SECOND CLASS - ANTHROPOLOGY AND SPIRITUAL GROWTH

From one perspective the first religious question is "Who am I" or "Who are We". Our conception of human nature is crucial for our outlook on spirituality. It relates to our optimism or pessimism about our desire for spiritual growth and determines many of the means we employ. A solid anthropology can help us avoid extremes and fads.

Rahner’s understanding of human beings as essentially oriented to the Holy Mystery and as being necessarily interdependent is central to all of his theology including its spiritual dimension. He has an original intuition of our relatedness to Mystery which is reflected in the prayers in *Encounters with Silence* (esp. pp. 3-10). This was worked out in a metaphysics of knowledge which showed that all our questioning and knowing demand an Infinite Horizon as a condition of its possibility. This is found in *Spirit in the World* which is difficult reading and only recommended for those who want to explore the philosophical roots of Rahner’s thought. *Hearers of the Word* is Rahner’s philosophy of religion which is based on his anthropology. It is easiest to read parts of this work translated by Joseph Donceal as found in the *Rahner Reader* pp. 1-65. Again this is very difficult reading. The fundamental points of his anthropology are contained in *Foundations* pp. 1-137 (esp. pp. 26-43). *Crossroads* pp. 11-20 has important insights into human nature. For a dialectical approach to Rahner’s anthropology see *Rahner’s Anthropology: The Basis for a Dialectical Spirituality* by James Bacik in *Being and Truth* ed. by Alistar Kee and Eugene Long (SCM London 1986).

Reading:

Required:  *Foundations*, pp. 26-43
THIRD CLASS - GOD AND PRAYER

Our conception of God is related to our self-image and our growth in the spiritual life. It is possible to have false or childish notions of God which distort or impede our human development. Our prayer life is directly influenced by our perceptions of who God is for us.

Rahner shows how we come to know God by reflecting on our own experience as self-transcending creatures. This reveals God to be the Holy Mystery, the Incomprehensible One, the Source and Goal of our spiritual dynamism. He stands in the long apophatic tradition of those who have understood that God is beyond all our images and concepts and cannot be controlled by our wishes or our prayers. This sense of the ultimately mysterious or unknowable character of our God suggests many important ideas about prayer life -- our need to appreciate our absolute dependence on God, the limitations of words and images, the danger of routine in prayer, cultivating a sense of mystery, etc.

Reading

Required: Foundations, pp. 57-68, and 81-89
Recommended: Foundations, pp. 44-89; World of Grace, pp. 31-44; Content of Faith pp. 205-272; The Practice of Faith pp. 84-98, 64-68.
Other authors: John Shea, The God Who Fell From Heaven; Catherine LaCugna, God For Us; Elizabeth Johnson, She Who Is; and Quest for the Living God (Continuum 2007); Catechism pp. 19-23, 54-104.

FOURTH CLASS - THREATS TO THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

Sin and guilt radically threaten our growth in the spiritual life. There is a tendency today to put this topic into a zone of silence, but it must he faced. When sin is not dealt with, we are subject to a vague unexplained anxiety (Menninger). Talk of guilt raises the question of finding a proper asceticism which fits our needs today. What role does discipline play in the spiritual life?

Rahner insists that sin is an abiding presence in our world and that there is a proper Christian concern to struggle against the forces of evil. We live in a flawed situation and the evil tendencies of the heart are real. He insists, however, that grace has always been, from the beginning, a more powerful element in our human existence. Christianity is a religion of salvation, and it is important to sense our need for healing.

Reading:
Required: Foundations, pp. 90-106
Recommended: Foundations, pp. 90-115; Reader, pp. 310-313 and pp. 317-322 (nature of asceticism); World of Grace, pp. 50-63; Content of Faith pp. 526-542; The Practice of Faith pp. 107-119; Dulles, Models pp. 84-97 (Revelation as dialectical presence).
Popular: On Prayer, pp. 83-97 (prayer of forgiveness); Opportunities pp. 92-93 (facing our guilt); pp. 135-138 (dealing with sickness); & pp. 148-167 (priestly celibacy); pp. 177-193 (religious vows); pp.194-196 (daily sacrifice).
Other authors: Karl Menninger, Whatever Became of Sin; Fox, Mystical Bear; Niebuhr, Moral Man and Immoral Society and The Nature and Destiny of Man; Scott Peck, The People of the Lie; Rosemary Ruether, Sexism and God Talk; Catechism pp. 97-105, 454-458.
Journals: Phan, Peter "Is Karl Rahner's Doctrine of Sin Orthodox?" Philosophy and Theology, Vol. 9 (1995) p. 223-36. The Vol. 10 N1 issue of Philosophy & Theology has a number of articles on Rahner’s notion of the fundamental option: Ashley, Benedict Fundamental Option and/or Commitment to Ultimate End p. 113-141; O’Connell, Timothy The Question of Grundentscheidung p. 143-168; Porter, Jean Moral Language and the Language of Grace p. 169-198; Linnane, Brian Categorical and Transcendental Experience in Rahner’s Theology p. 199-266; Muldoon, Timothy Germaine Grisez on Karl Rahner’s Theology of Fundamental Option p. 227-254; Coffey, David Rahner’s Theology of Fundamental Option p. 255-284; Porter, Jean A Response to Brian Linnane and David Coffey p. 285-292.

FIFTH CLASS - RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

In our culture, we suffer from an eclipse of a sense of mystery in which the deeper dimensions of our existence are often obscured or distorted. We must learn to be on alert for
God’s presence in all areas of our experience. It is valuable to come to know what we habitually neglect, what illusions and distortions have become part of our psyche.

Rahner provides us with a theology of grace which reminds us that God offers the gift of the divine self to every human being (supernatural existential), and that this offer changes our real existential situation. This offer as accepted (justifying grace) modifies our very being and affects our consciousness. Grace is a constitutive element in all of our experiences. The experience of self is the experience of God. Thus, we have a solid basis for being on alert for God’s activity in our life. Rahner also provides us with many colorful descriptions of religious experience which are meant to strike responsive chords in us.

Reading:

Required:  
*Foundations*, pp. 117-133

Recommended:  
*Foundations*, pp. 116-137; *Reader*, pp. 173-199; *World of Grace*, pp. 64-75; *The Practice of Faith* pp. 57-83; *Content* pp. 355-388.

Popular:  
*Belief Today* pp. 13-43 (theology of the everyday); *Opportunities*, pp. 7-10, PP. 40 45, pp. 108-120 (God in the ordinary); *The Spirit in the Church*, pp. 3-31; *Encounters*, pp. 45-52 (God of my daily routine); *Religious Life Today*, pp. 71-76 (Excellent thoughts on religious experience in relation to charismatic movements); *Everyday Faith*, pp. 36-42 (good description of religious experience); pp. 54-70 (excellent article on seizing the moment); *Finding God in Ordinary Experiences*, pp. 130-134 (examples of misinterpretation of experience by great saints); pp. 193-195 (God in common experience); pp. 196-204 (cultivating, seeing and hearing - popular presentation of metaphor); *On Prayer*, pp. 45-55 (prayer in everyday life); *Eternal Year*, pp. 49-55 (on laughter).

Other authors:  
*Bacik, Apologetics and the Eclipse of Mystery*, esp. pp. 75-103; *Catechism* pp. 481-489.

Journals:  

**SIXTH CLASS - REVELATION PARTICULAR AND UNIVERSAL**

One of our problems today is to overcome the exclusiveness of the past and to be open to truth and goodness wherever it is to be found. How are we to do this without falling into a mindless relativism? How are we to maintain our commitments to our own religious heritage while being open to the world’s great religious traditions and the insights of other disciplines? Another type of problem today is how to acquire a taste for the particular, a sense that the Absolute Mystery reveals itself in the concrete and the particular. We must find a proper perspective in which the Bible, Church, Sacraments, Doctrine, etc. are recognized as limited, but vital, in their task of pointing to or symbolizing the Holy Mystery.

Rahner’s theology of revelation is extremely valuable in helping to solve these problems. God’s self-communication to everyone produces a universal revelation which is reflected in the world’s religious traditions and the insights of human beings. Christians maintain that the fullness of revelation occurred in and through Jesus of Nazareth, the definitive Prophet. His gift of the Spirit makes all things potentially revelatory. All religious objectifications can
symbolize this abiding presence of the imminent God. Rahner’s open-minded approach is often discussed under the heading of the "anonymous Christian."

Reading:

SEVENTH CLASS - PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP TO JESUS CHRIST.

Christian spirituality is not merely a philosophy of life or an acquired wisdom, but involves a commitment to Jesus Christ as the Absolute Savior. Spiritual growth demands development of a personal relationship to Jesus. This is difficult if the true humanity of Jesus is denied or obscured. It is also impeded if there are great doubts about what we can know of the historical Jesus.

Rahner provides us with a Christology which stresses the humanity of Jesus and tries to avoid mythological sounding explanations of the Incarnation. He has insisted that we must go beyond the formulas of Chalcedon and find new ways of explaining Jesus as true God and true man. He answers the problem of the relationship between the Christ of faith and the Jesus of history by insisting that Jesus understood himself as the Absolute Savior, and so did the early followers. He presents the Resurrection within the framework of our own desire for immortality and insists on the possibility of establishing a genuine relationship with Jesus Christ.

Reading:
Popular: *Encounters* pp. 11-17; *Eternal Year* pp. 97-104; *Everyday Faith*, pp. 90-95, pp 21-83 (meaning of Easter and Resurrection); *Eternal Year* pp 19-26 (good and poetic on human longings and meaning of Incarnation) pp. 82-95 (Meaning of Resurrection); *Spiritual Exercises* pp. 97-168 & 217-250 (Incarnation and following Jesus) - this may be the best material for this class on popular level
I. The relationship between a transcendental and categorical Christology.

A. Transcendental Christology is an effort to develop an a priori idea of the god-man and to establish the conditions of possibility for faith in Christ.

B. Categorical Christology deals with the historical Jesus, the biblical accounts, our concrete relationship with the risen Lord.

C. The transcendental makes it possible to hear the historical message of Jesus without thinking it is mythological, alien, unimportant, etc. The need and desire for the transcendental arises only because of the historical encounter with Jesus as the Christ. The real starting point is faith in Christ. A transcendental analysis can't establish faith but it can help vindicate one's belief in Christ.

II. Categorical

A. We can start with faith in Jesus as the Absolute Savior, i.e., in encountering him, God is irrevocably present for our salvation. This relationship to Jesus is self-validating and reflection on it can never fully capture it. Even those who reject or are unaware of the relation are still involved in it. pp. 203-206.

B. Rahner thinks there is much we can know about the historical Jesus but a sufficient minimum is that he understood himself as the Absolute Savior, the definitive prophet through whom the kingdom would come. p. 228-264 incl. c & d below.

C. Jesus thought the kingdom of God was near, used the apocalyptic language of imminent expectation, did not personally synthesize the notion of "soon" and the unknown character of the coming of the kingdom, but was not in error because humans need an unknown future and his approach was a good way of responding to the nearness of God and the need for personal decision.

D. Jesus was a miracle worker (they are presupposed by the authentic sayings and they are not denied by Talmudic sources).

E. Our relationship to Jesus is an unfinished task. "A person is always a Christian in order to become one" p. 306. We must strive for a personal and intimate love for Jesus Christ but this shouldn't be a substitute for other frustrating relationships. The God-man Jesus continues to be the mediator. By loving him in others we can come closer to God. Jesus is the concrete absolute and worthy of a genuine human love. pp. 305-311.

III. Transcendental

A. Incarnation must he shown to be an intrinsic possibility within an evolutionary view of the world. God is the source and goal of the one united material-spiritual evolving world. Matter develops toward spirit and humans are the result of this process and they now freely move this process towards a final fulfillment in which God’s self-giving is fully accomplished. The idea of the absolute savior is one who appears in history and manifests the irrevocable character of this process. We can think of a point in the dialogue between God and human beings where the giving and the receiving are absolute and this victorious success is historically manifest in an individual assuring the final victory, even though the dialogue continues. This individual would be the absolute savior and the inseparable meeting point is incarnation and the results for us are redemption and the victorious manifestation resurrection. pp. 178-203.
B. Steps in working out a transcendental Christology: 1) humans are self-transcendent beings; 2) we hope that the mystery gives itself as fulfillment; 3) this hope is mediated historically; 4) we search in history for signs of hope which are final and irreversible; 5) this can happen only in a human being who surrenders totally in death and who in doing this is accepted definitively by God. pp 206-212.

C. We should try to clarify what we mean by incarnation of God, the Word became flesh, and God became man. We are oriented towards mystery and have an obediential potency for hypostatic union. Becoming suggests that God can become something, can change in another and is involved in self-emptying and that this is a perfection. The Logos, in emptying himself, creates the humanity of Jesus by assuming it. Thus Christology is the highest expression of anthropology and we are preserved from a docetic view of Jesus which denies his true humanity. Anyone who accepts his existence in patient silence is saying ‘yes’ to Christ. pp. 212-228.

D. Steps in an ascending Christology: 1) we have a natural desire for vision of God and must look for this in history 2) idea of absolute savior must involve God giving himself irreversibly and a person freely and totally accepting this 3) Jesus is the one who has done this consciously and actively 4) this event can only be final and irrevocable if God lives it out as his own history 5) this ascending Christology implies that Jesus is the son of God pp. 298-302.

IV. Particular Issues

A. Miracles
1. Given the climate of our times they are not very helpful apologetically. It is better to concentrate on the one comprehensive miracle of the resurrection pp. 255-264 (includes No. 2 in the next point).
2. We can find a horizon for understanding them if we recall that 1) the material world can and does manifest the spiritual 2) the laws of nature are already encompassed within God’s self-giving 3) miracles happen when a person is open through faith and thus a specific constellation of events more or less remarkable manifest the divine self-giving to him. 4) they are highly individualized calls to specific persons and will impress some more than others.

B. Theology of death and resurrection- pp 264-285
1. There is a hermaneutical circle involving original events and their interpretation which can’t be eliminated but must be made intelligible. You can’t get back to a pure uninterpreted experience.
2. Resurrection does not mean resuscitation of a body (primacy should not be given to the empty tomb), nor a neutral survival of a person, nor the continuance of an idea but the validity of the life and message of Jesus, the vindication of his claim to be absolute savior.
3. Resurrection should be presented in light of our own desire for a final fulfillment for our lives, of a continued fulfilled existence in the face of death. The resurrection of Jesus illumines this experience.
4. The fact of faith in the resurrection of Jesus is remarkable in itself. It is dependent upon the apostles not as objectively credible witnesses but as heard within the horizon of our own hopes.
5. Appearances are constructed reports of an original experience of the powerful Spirit of the living Christ (rather than imaginative visions) in
which Jesus and his concrete claim is vindicated. They see Jesus as the final prophet because the last word has been spoken, as the definitive presence of God.

6. The death of Jesus is not well explained in terms of sacrifice but on these premises: 1) human history is a single unified history, 2) God wills to speak a definitive word in history, 3) God's offer of himself is final only if accepted irrevocably, 4) acceptance can become final only in death, 5) this response must be visibly accepted by God in resurrection. Thus, “we are saved because this man who is one of us has been saved by God and God has thereby made his salvific will present in the world historically, really and irrevocably.” p. 284

V. Classic Christology pp. 285-293

A. As developed at Nicea, Ephesus, and Chalcedon, we have a descending Christology which develops the notion that God in his Logos became man. The eternal Logos assumes the complete human nature of Jesus in the hypostatic union. The essence of this union was never officially defined. There is an interchange of predicates; it is true to say the eternal Son of God died. The classic soteriology was developed by Anselm of Canterbury. Jesus as a divine being could offer infinite satisfaction to God for the infinite offense of sin against him.

B. Enduring value
   1. This keeps us from reducing Jesus to another provisional prophet or religious genius.
   2. Reminds us that God has given himself absolutely in Jesus.

C. Limits
   1. God coming down from above sounds mythological.
   2. Jesus is God leads to monophysitism. The ‘is’ does not mean identity.
   3. It doesn’t explain the unity in Jesus—if in terms of divine person then he ceases to be a human person.

VI. Searching Christology pp. 293-305

A. Apologetics addresses itself to persons presumed to be already living out a positive relationship to Christ.

B. Thus we can appeal to these experiences
   1. The desire for perfect love is a search for a God-man who as person can be loved with the absoluteness of the love of God.
   2. Acceptance of death implies acceptance of one who has conquered death.
   3. The hope for wholeness is a hope for what we mean by incarnation and resurrection.

VII. Jesus Christ in Non-Christian Religions pp. 311-321

A. There must be a presence of Christ throughout the whole history of salvation if he is the absolute savior and this will be manifest in the history of religions. This presupposes 1) the universal salvific will of God which implies a universal revelation and faith 2) world religions play a positive role in salvation process.
B. Christ is operative in non-Christians through his Spirit. Incarnation and cross are the final cause of God’s universal self-giving in the Spirit which is always oriented towards a definitive historical manifestation. Thus the Spirit which is the efficient cause of incarnation and cross is intrinsically related to Jesus.

C. The man of faith anticipates and searches for the absolute savior in history.

EIGHTH CLASS: COMMUNAL DIMENSIONS OF SPIRITUALITY

How do we combine our desire for self-actualization and growth as an individual with being a member of a community? How can we show that authentic Christian living has an ecclesial dimension? A contemporary spirituality demands that we learn to live in a pluralistic world and avoid the distortions which come with an excessively isolated existence. How can the Church be more responsive to our need for challenging and supportive community?

Rahner shows that our nature and the essence of Christianity demands an ecclesial expression. He sees the Church as the sacrament of the Kingdom and stresses the need for renewing our Church so it is a community where spiritual growth is fostered, equality celebrated, love made real. This may require radical reforms. Some of his best suggestions along this line are in The Shape of the Church To Come written in the early 1970s. His theology stresses that we can achieve our full potential and avoid the dangers of our own egoism only by being involved in a larger community.

Reading:

Required reading: *Foundation* pp. 389-401


Popular: *Opportunities* pp. 204-211 (dialogue in the Church); 214-22 (experiments in the Church); *The Religious Life Today* pp. 29-42 (Characteristics of a Christian community- a fine article); *Eternal Year*, pp. 19-26 (poetic statement of human longings and the meaning of Incarnation); pp. 82-95 (meaning of Resurrection).


A. The Church is a community of believers in Christ who constitute the historical continuation of the risen Lord. Christianity is necessarily ecclesial because human beings are social creatures and God’s grace touches all dimensions of life and seeks visibility. pp. 322-325

B. The Church was founded by Christ through his assembling of the Twelve and commissioning of Peter. Concrete developments were the work of the Spirit and the efforts of the early Christian community. pp. 326-335
C. The Church in the New Testament is seen as the one church of Christ, visible and invisible. Various images are employed and the pattern we know is not complete until the second century. pp. 335-342

D. A full Christian life involves participation in the Church because we work out our salvation in history and because Christ’s message is authoritative and confronts us as an objective reality. pp. 342-346

E. In our modern situation we need an indirect way of vindicating the Catholic claim to be the Church of Christ. We begin with our current existence as Catholics and ask if there is good reason to leave it. We have close historical continuity with the apostolic church and a similar structure. The three major notions of the Reformers: grace alone, faith alone, Scripture alone can be realized within the Catholic Church. pp. 346-36

F. Scripture is the book of the Church produced by the early Church and the governing norm for the continuing life of the Church. pp. 369-378

G. The Church’s teaching office. Catholics hold that when the teaching authority presents an ultimate demand in the name of Christ that God’s grace keeps them from losing the truth of Christ. Papal infallibility ascribes to one man what was always held for the Church as a whole. pp. 378-388

H. Christian life in the Church. We are the Church and should love it with a sober realism about its faults. Laws are important but should be seen in context. The Church is the circle of believers who proclaim that God’s love is victorious everywhere. pp. 384-401

II. Characteristics of the local church- The following points are taken from The Shape of The Church To Come, see also Theological Investigations. Vol. 14.

A. We should be a community of people who have made a free decision to belong, accepting our situation as a minority grouping, aggressive in our response to the pagan world. “It means more to win one new Christian from what we may call neopaganism than to keep ten old Christians.” p. 32

How can we foster free adult commitment to Christianity’?

B. We should be a community which attempts to avoid polarization and tries to construct a healthy pluralism in which various groups hold strong convictions but show tolerance and charity toward other groups. Each group ought to be struggling also for a healthier understanding of the other group. For example, why should not one group invite representatives of another group to its meetings and let them speak there? p.42

How do we handle polarization in our parishes?

C. We should be a declared Church in which pastors realize that the Spirit is at work in all its members, that the charismatic element can not be completely regulated, that leadership is credible only when it manifests the Spirit. The pastor will gain recognition of his office by being genuinely human and a Spirit-filled Christian, one whom the Spirit has freed for unselfish service in the exercise of his social function in the Church. p. 58. Suggestions: get rid of the trappings of office, don’t act secretly, let people know who advisors are,
have courage to admit mistakes and change decisions, admit value of experimentation.

How do we deal with our tendencies to manipulate or control others?

D. We should be a church concerned with serving. The Church is the sacrament of salvation for a world where most people are saved without explicit relationship to the institutional Church. Sin invades social structures and the parish should fight injustices even when it is to its own detriment. Office-holders and clerics particularly are liable to become ecclesiological introverts. They think of the Church, not of people. p. 61. This means we should be a Church with the courage to give concrete directives about sociopolitical action. We must not put forward merely colorless principles which upset no one. Social sin is a reality and we must be ready to challenge unjust social situations in a concrete way. This will produce divisions in a parish but this is better than avoiding conflict by sticking with vague principles. p. 126

E. We should be an open church. Membership will be more fluid and it will be harder to decide if various opinions are orthodox or not. From a theological standpoint, returning to the Church by no means always has to be the homecoming of the prodigal son, the finding of the lost sheep p. 74. Today the average person cannot succeed in forming an outlook which is objectively free from heresy. Suggestions: we need to help official members appropriate more of the faith but this must be done not by appealing to authority but by drawing on the parishioner’s fundamental Christian convictions: "there is no point in giving a person who is now in touch with the Church, but has some reservations, the impression at every moment that he is really a tolerated ‘guest’ and not a full member of this believing community and society." pp. 100-101.

How much acceptance of Catholic teaching do we demand for those wishing to join the Catholic community?

F. We should be a community with a rich spiritual life. For priests, because of the assumptions of society the familiarity of our calling and the livelihood it secures, Christianity is almost too easy. We should use our imagination to see what Christianity means for the factory worker and the homemaker. How do we make God and Jesus real for them in their situation? Don’t try to console when there is no hope for consolation. Don’t ‘solve’ life’s problems when their sole ultimate solution lies in God’s incomprehensibility, his nature, and his freedom. p.84

How do we move beyond mere technique and organizational concerns to foster the spiritual life of the parish?

G. We should be a church with a proper ecumenical objective. "A realistic estimate of the unity which can be achieved is not very different in practice from the relationship which now exists between the Churches as a result of ecumenical efforts. This is not always appreciated because people overlook the fact that the future Church will in any case be much more pluralistic than our Church has palpably been juridically and in terms of sociology of religion since
the Reformation period.” p. 103. If we leave aside the papacy… then it seems
to me that there are no further obstacles of a theological or confessional
character to divide the denominations.” “Could we not consider full unity of
faith and theology as a consequence of institutional unification, particularly
since the latter need not mean institutional uniformity based on dogma as
hitherto envisaged by the Code of Canon Law?” pp. 104-105

H. We should have more Christian communities based on voluntary association
and not simply geography. “The priest as leader of a local Christian community
does not need to be regarded as a mobile state official who is moved,
promoted, acts as representative of a state which confronts a particular group of
human beings as an alien factor armed with power, and alone ‘organizes’
them” p. 110. ‘...it is obvious that the community may present to the bishop a
leader who comes from among themselves and has the necessary qualities for
leadership and that he rightly receives ordination, even if he is married.” p.
111. The leader of the community should preside over the Eucharist and in the
modern Western world there is no reason why this couldn’t be a woman. p. 114

How do we see the role of women in our parishes?

NINTH CLASS CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

The spiritual life demands a responsible freedom which avoids the extremes of merely
following laws and doing whatever feels good. Christians must develop a hopeful realism which
avoids a naive optimism that refuses to face the dark side of life and a cynical pessimism that
misses the signals of hope available in our world. This can be done only with solid confidence in
the power of God. A contemporary spirituality is credible only if it involves love of neighbor and
concern for social justice. Our prayer life should lead to a prophetic stance in our world.

Rahner suggests the need for a piety in touch with the dark side of life and enlivened by
hope in the presence of God and the greater power of grace. His ideas of freedom and personal
responsibility help to put laws and principles in proper perspective. He reminds us that love of
God and neighbor are essentially united and that today the love of neighbor is what makes
Christianity credible.

Readings:

Recommended: Foundations pp. 402-430; Reader pp. 255-262, 239-244; Content of
Popular: Opportunities pp. 199-203 (trust and self-criticism in relationships); Everyday
Faith pp. 154-159 (married love); Encounter pp. 61-68 (ministry to others); On Prayer pp 31-44 (loving God and neighbor- some helpful ideas on love); Eternal Year, pp. 97-104; Spiritual Exercises pp. 97-
108 and pp. 217-250 (incarnation and following Jesus) - this may be
the best material for this class on popular level.

Other authors: Teihard de Chardin, Divine Milieu; Harding, Free and Faithful In Christ
(3 Vol.); Catechism pp. 421-611; Timothy O’Connell, Principles of
Catholic Morality; Joseph Martos, Doors to the Sacred; James Bacik,
Catholic Spirituality, It's History and Challenge.

Journals: Leijssen, Lambert, "Rahner's Contribution to the Renewal of
TENTH CLASS - DEATH AND HOPE

We live in a culture which tries to shield us from the harsh realities of sickness, old age and death. An authentic spirituality must overcome this tendency and move us to face the fact that we are contingent creatures moving toward death. Hope in the fulfillment of our longings, for life after death, for a victorious outcome to the process of history can aid us in resolutely facing our own death and the death of our loved ones. Rahner gives us a very realistic, but positive notion of death as our most free moment when we are called to hand ourselves over to the Gracious Mystery. His theology of hope is both individual and communal and is based on the Christian conviction that the final victory is assured.

There are privatistic tendencies in popular piety today. Actually, work for social justice must be a constitutive element in any authentic Christian spirituality. This requires awareness of the sufferings of others and intelligent effort to humanize our world. Differences will surely arise in approach, and dialogue among people of good will is essential.

Rahner has made important contributions in this area especially in his efforts to dialogue with Marxists. He emphasizes the relative character of current institutions, the unknowable character of the future, the need to work with God in spreading the Kingdom, and hope in the ultimate triumph of God’s grace.

Our spirituality is often fragmented. Christianity sometimes appears as an unrelated series of doctrines and laws. Theology seems to give us bits and pieces but no coherent approach. We need an enlightened simplicity which sees Christianity as the response to the questions that we all are.

Rahner helps us with this problem by giving us a comprehensive and organic theology, by isolating essential themes, by reminding us of the hierarchy of truths and practices. His whole book *Foundations* is an effort to respond to this problem. His call for simpler life styles attacks the problem from another angle.

Reading On Death:

**Required:** *Foundations* pp. 431-444

**Recommended:** *Foundations* pp. 431-447; *The Theology of Death* pp. 169-186; *Reader* pp. 352-361; *World of Grace* pp. 153-168; *Content of Faith* pp. 609-661; *The Practice of Faith* pp. 242-312.

**Popular:** *Opportunities* pp. 3-6, 21-24, esp. 25-36 (our death and the death of Christ); 46-50, 139-144 (doctors and death); *Religious Life Today* pp 77-84 (challenge of growing old); *Everyday Faith* pp. 207-21 (prayer for hope); *On Prayer*, pp 98-109 (one section on death).


Reading on Social Responsibility:

**Required:** *Foundations* pp. 444-447


**Popular:** *Opportunities* pp 94-107 (social responsibility) : *Everyday Faith* pp. 101-123 (love of God and neighbor) pp. 135-141; (call to lay initiative in
the world); pp. 142-153 (survey of attitude of Fathers toward injustice in the world); *Encounter* pp. 61-68 (ministry to other); *On Prayer* pp. 31-44 (loving God and neighbor — some helpful ideas on love).

Other author: Baum *Religion and Alienation*; Gutierrez, *Theology of Liberation*; Alves, *Theology of Human Hope*; Rosemary Ruether *Sexism and God Talk*; John Milbank *Theology and Social Theory*; Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*.

**Reading on Christian Faith as a Whole:**

- **Required:** *Foundations* pp. 448-460
- **Recommended:** *Content of Faith* pp. 45-72; *Practice of Faith*, pp. 37-41, 296-305.
- **Popular:** *Opportunities* p. 79-82; *Belief Today* pp. 93-128; *Religious Life Today* pp. 1-61 (outline of short creed).