

# **Natural Knowledge of God in Rahner's and Florensky's Philosophy of Religion**

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## **Tiivistelmä – Abstract**

This is a study of natural knowledge of God in Rahner's and Florensky's philosophy of religion.

Rahner and Florensky present a theory of knowledge, which is based on a metaphysical union of the knower with the known. Rahner recognizes the senses as the only source of knowledge for the human being who exists as a spirit in a body. Florensky considers sensual and intellectual intuition, as well as mystical union, to convey knowledge. Rahner's and Florensky's theories of knowledge have similarities with those of Aristotle and Pseudo-Dionysios.

Rahner's philosophy is founded on the metaphysics of Thomas Aquinas. He approaches knowledge of God through the analogy of being. He regards the human being as someone who asks about being, which is a Heideggerian approach. He makes a transcendental investigation, which inquires into the preconditions for knowledge of beings. Rahner regards a pre-apprehension of the Absolute Being as a precondition for knowledge of the world. The pre-apprehension does not convey knowledge of God, because He is not an object for human cognition. However, the Absolute Being is co-affirmed in all human knowledge as the light, which enables one to know objects of the world. Rahner regards God as a mystery, who recedes from the grasp of human perception. Rahner's philosophy does not construct a proof for the existence of God. He understands the human being as potentially obedient to God's Word. His philosophy does not define the content, time or location of God's revelation. However Rahner understands knowledge as self-presence, which is accomplished through knowledge of God's Word and ultimately in the beatific vision.

Florensky presents examples from the Holy Scripture, dogma, mathematics and symbolic logic, which defy modern rationalism. He regards the ultimate Truth as a unity of opposites. He regards the supralogical God to be transcendent for human attainments. He regards knowledge of persons as the highest form of knowledge. He explains true friendship as a mystical union, which is enabled by grace. He considers mystical union also as consubstantiality (*homousia*), which is a fundamental concept for the dogma of the Trinity. Florensky understands the creation as an expression of Sophia (Divine Wisdom). He identifies Sophia with the Mother of God, who represents God's intention in the creation. Her obedience to God enables the creation to unite with Him through Jesus Christ. The Orthodox Church represents the creation which seeks union with God. The union is accomplished through asceticism and spiritual friendship. God's glory in the creation can be perceived through the use of reason and the senses, which grace lifts to a spiritual level.

Both Florensky and Rahner understand knowledge of the creation as an experience of God's love. Florensky is concerned about spiritual knowledge, which is enabled by grace. Rahner, in turn, is concerned about a pre-apprehension of being as a precondition for human knowledge of the world and of God.

## **Avainsanat – Keywords**

**Pavel Florensky, metaphysics, natural theology, philosophy of religion, Karl Rahner**

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## Tiivistelmä – Abstract

Tutkimus käsittelee luonnollista tietoa Jumalasta Rahnerin ja Florenskyn uskonnonfilosofiassa. Rahnerin ja Florenskyn tietoteoriat perustuvat tietävän subjektin ja tiedon kohteen metafyyssiseen yhtymiseen. Rahner pitää aisteja ainoana tiedon lähteenä ihmiselle, joka koostuu sielusta ruumiissa. Florensky pitää aistillista ja intellektuaalista intuitiota, sekä myös mystistä yhtymistä tiedon lähteenä. Rahnerin ja Florenskyn tietoteorioilla on yhtäläisyyksiä Aristoteleen ja Pseudo-Dionysioksen ajatteluun.

Rahnerin filosofia perustuu Tuomas Akvinolaisen metafysiikkaan. Hän lähestyy tietoa Jumalasta olemisen analogian kautta. Hän käsittää ihmisen olentona, joka kysyy olemisesta, mikä on heideggeriläinen lähestymistapa. Hänen transsendentaalinen tutkimuksensa tiedustelee edellytyksiä inhimilliselle tiedolle olevasta. Hän pitää tiedon esiotetta Absoluuttisesta Olemisesta edellytyksenä tiedolle maailmasta. Tämä esiote ei välitä tietoa Jumalasta, koska Hän ei ole aistihavainnon kohde. Rahner pitää Jumalaa mysteerinä, joka vetäytyy inhimillisen havaintokyvyn piiristä. Rahnerin filosofia ei pyri todistamaan Jumalan olemassaoloa. Hän käsittää ihmisen potentiaalisesti kuuliaisena Jumalan Sanalle. Hänen filosofiansa ei määrittele Jumalan ilmoituksen sisältöä, ajoitusta eikä paikkaa. Rahner käsittää tiedon läsnäolona itselle, mikä toteutuu Jumalan Sanan tuntemisessa ja lopullisesti autuaallisessa Jumalan näkemisessä.

Florensky esittää esimerkkejä Raamatusta, dogmasta, matematiikasta sekä symbolisesta logiikassa, jotka uhmaavat modernia rationalismia. Hän käsittää perimäisen Totuuden vastakohtien yhteenlankeamisena. Hän pitää supraloogista Jumalaa transsendenttina inhimillisille pyrkimyksille. Hän pitää tietoa persoonista korkeimpana tiedon muotona. Hän kuvaa aidon ystävyyden mystisenä unionina, jonka saa aikaan armo. Hän käsittää mystisen unionin myös konsubstantiaationa (homoousia), joka on kolminaisuusopille perustavanlaatuinen käsite. Hän pitää luomakuntaa ilmaisuna Sofiasta (Jumalan Viisaus). Hän samaistaa Sofian Jumalanäitiin, joka edustaa Jumalan tarkoitusta luomakunnassa. Jumalanäidin kuuliaisuus Jumalalle mahdollistaa luomakunnan yhdistymisen Häneen Jeesuksen Kristuksen kautta. Ortodoksinen kirkko edustaa luomakuntaa, joka pyrkii yhdistymään Jumalaan. Tämä yhdistyminen on mahdollista askeesin ja hengellisen ystävyyden kautta. Jumalan kunnia luomakunnassa voidaan havaita käyttämällä järkeä sekä aisteja, jotka armo nostaa hengelliselle tasolle.

Molemmat Florensky ja Rahner pitävät tietoa luomakunnasta kokemuksena Jumalan rakkaudesta. Florensky käsittelee armon aikaansaamaa hengellistä tietoa. Rahner puolestaan käsittelee esiotetta olemisesta edellytyksenä inhimilliselle tiedolle maailmasta ja Jumalasta.

## Avainsanat – Keywords

**Pavel Florensky, luonnollinen teologia, metafysiikka, Karl Rahner, uskonnonfilosofia**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This thesis contributes to the comparative study of Eastern and Western philosophy of religion.

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### 1.1. The Question

This thesis asks to what extent is natural knowledge of God possible according to Rahner and Florensky. It studies knowledge of God based on natural human capacities of the mind and the senses. The mind includes the ability to think and reason about God.<sup>1</sup>

In order to answer the question it is necessary to assess multiple themes, which concern the relationship between the human being and God in Rahner's and Florensky's thought. The intention is not to give a comprehensive presentation and analysis of Rahner's and Florensky's philosophies. For example Rahner's metaphysics of knowledge and Florensky's sophiology are presented only in outline.

This study demands an assessment of how nature and grace is understood in modern Catholic and Orthodox theology. It also demands an assessment of Rahner's and Florensky's philosophical method. In addition it needs to assess their anthropologies and their understanding of human desire towards God. It also demands an assessment of their theories of knowledge and of the relationship between knowledge and love. Lastly it demands an assessment of Rahner's and Florensky's conception of God and of human knowledge of God.

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<sup>1</sup> Nesteruk explains that Greek patristic writers distinguished between discursive reasoning, "dianoia" and spiritual knowledge, "nous". Nesteruk 2003, 52-55

Thomas Aquinas regards the intellect a power of the soul. The active intellect makes material things intelligible. ST 1.79

Augustine regards the mind, which includes memory, understanding and will, as an image of the Trinity. On the Trinity, book X, chapter 12.

## 1.2. Method

The philosophy of Rahner and Florensky is studied through a systematic analysis of specific themes to the extent that it contributes to the assessment of natural knowledge of God. The study begins by treating nature and grace in modern Catholic and Orthodox theology, which contributes to the understanding of Rahner's and Florensky's philosophy. It discusses Rahner's and Florensky's method, understanding of the human being, grace and God. It treats their conceptions of desire, love, knowledge and truth. The analysis of these specific themes contributes to the understanding of natural knowledge of God in Rahner and Florensky.

## 1.3. Sources

The study is based on two early works by Rahner (1904-1984) and one early work by Florensky (1882-1937). Rahner's *Spirit in the World* was published in German 1939. It is based on his doctoral dissertation. It treats one question from *Summa Theologiae* by Thomas Aquinas, which concerns metaphysics of knowledge.<sup>2</sup> This study uses the English translation from 1968. It is based on a reworked edition, which was published in German in 1957. The second book by Rahner *Hearer's of the Word* is based on his fifteen lectures on the philosophy of religion. It was published in 1941. The study uses an English translation from 1969. These works present a modern Catholic conception of nature and grace, which has been regarded as a foundation for Rahner's theological writings.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> According to Sheehan, Rahner's doctoral dissertation was rejected because it interpreted Thomas Aquinas's metaphysics of knowledge according to modern philosophy, particularly Heidegger. Sheehan 1987, 6

The papal encyclical *Aeterni Patris* (1879) initiated a revival of the teachings of Thomas Aquinas, which became known as Neo-Thomism in Roman Catholic theology. During the reign of Pope John XXIII (1958-1963) the Roman Catholic Church became open also for other philosophical and theological approaches. Livingston 2006, 342–343

<sup>3</sup> However Kilby contends that Rahner's philosophy should be interpreted independently from his theology. Kilby 2004, 10

The collection of Rahner's writings *Theological Investigations* vol. 1–23 constitutes more than 8000 pages. In addition he published books and edited theological lexicons, handbooks and journals. He was appointed as a theological adviser for the Second Vatican Council. Vorgrimler 1986, 72–87

Florensky's *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth, An Essay in Orthodox Theodicy in Twelve Letters* was based on his candidate's and master's thesis at the Moscow Theological Academy. It was published in Russian in 1914. This thesis uses the English translation, which was published in 1997. Florensky describes his book as "a justification for God". The book attempts to make Orthodox faith reasonable for the modern educated person.<sup>4</sup> The book studies the metaphysical foundation of faith, friendship, knowledge and love, which is why it serves as a fruitful counterpart for Rahner's metaphysics of knowledge.

Secondary literature is presented in the list of references.

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<sup>4</sup> Pyman 2010,

The Bolshevik revolution shut down the Moscow Theological Academy, after which Florensky continued publishing studies in theology, iconography, philosophy, mathematics, physics and electromagnetics. He was executed by the Soviet state in 1937. Pyman 2010, xviii, 127, 209

## 2. NATURE AND GRACE

The question about natural knowledge of God demands a discussion about the boundaries between nature and grace. This chapter starts by an introduction to a modern Roman Catholic conception of nature and grace. It will be followed by a modern Orthodox conception of nature and grace.

### 2.1. The Debate About Nature and Grace Within Roman Catholic Theology

De Lubac published the book *Surnaturel* in 1946, which initiated a debate concerning Thomas Aquinas' understanding of nature and grace.<sup>5</sup> For centuries the original works of Thomas were interpreted through the commentaries of later Catholic theologians. Some theologians contended that humans can be totally content with a natural goal in their life. Such theologians claimed that a human being in his/her natural state exists in a world defined as pure nature. According to such views God, mystical experience and eternal life could be pursued within the state of "pure nature". However, through grace a person begins to long for a supernatural goal. He/she becomes open for the grace of God. According to De Lubac, such a dualistic understanding of nature and grace nature was not what the Church Fathers and the Scholastics intended. De Lubac writes that in Eastern theology the theory of "pure nature" does not exist. Ancient and medieval theologians viewed the human being as an image of God, who strove to become the likeness of God. According to De Lubac, Thomas adopted the concept of "nature" from Aristotle.<sup>6</sup> In Catholic theology "natural" means that which is appropriate to the nature of a being.<sup>7</sup> De Lubac contends that human beings and other beings differ in the way they relate to their ultimate destiny. Some theologians regarded human beings belonging to the natural order just like other beings. De Lubac explains that according to Suarez, a natural appetite "cannot

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<sup>5</sup> *Surnaturel* has not been translated into English, which is why this study relies on De Lubac's *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, which further develops the arguments presented in *Surnaturel*.

<sup>6</sup> De Lubac 1967, 152

<sup>7</sup> Beskow 1999, 127

extend beyond what is possible to the nature which feels it". De Lubac contends that this is contradictory to Thomas' conception of nature and grace.<sup>8</sup>

Theologians in the beginning of the twentieth century began to question the prevailing interpretations of Thomas, which were presented in Catholic teaching manuals. Theologians were returning to the original sources to find out what the Church Fathers and the Medieval theologians actually said. This movement is known as "ressourcement". De Lubac realized that according to Thomas, all humans have a natural desire to see God. He quotes Thomas: "Every intellect by nature desires the vision of the divine substance."<sup>9</sup>

According to De Lubac, the desire to see God is an integral part of being human. All humans are intended to be united with God. It does not mean that they are naturally determined to achieve this goal. The task of the human being is to advance towards God and ask Him to grant His grace to him/her. De Lubac contended that nature in a pure state is only a hypothetical situation, which was used to undermine the gratuity of grace in Catholic theology against the teachings of Jansen and Baius.<sup>10</sup>

De Lubac speaks of a twofold marvel of gratuity. Firstly God has granted existence through the creation. Secondly He has intended a supernatural destiny for the human being. De Lubac considers these as one act of God. These gifts precede any other gifts which God grants the creation.<sup>11</sup> Correspondingly to God's grace the human being desires to see his/her creator. Millbank explains that according to De Lubac, the human being is in a way suspended between nature and grace.<sup>12</sup>

Rahner considered the notion of "pure nature" as a remainder concept (restbegriff), which has only theoretical significance.<sup>13</sup> He also criticized De Lubac's conception of the human being, because it lacks a touching point between the human nature and grace. Rahner maintained that the concrete human experience includes a "supernatural existential", which is the human openness towards God. It does not belong to na-

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<sup>8</sup> De Lubac 1967, 148–149, 154

<sup>9</sup> De Lubac 1967, 8, Aquinas' *Summa Contra Gentiles* 3:57

<sup>10</sup> De Lubac 1967, 47–48, 55

<sup>11</sup> De Lubac 1967, 76,79,81

<sup>12</sup> Millbank 2005, 11

<sup>13</sup> Peter 1965, 87

ture and neither is it grace. De Lubac in turn regarded Rahner's "supernatural existential" unnecessary because the human being is a spirit, which is able to transcend nature. The human spirit desires to become the likeness of God.<sup>14</sup>

In De Lubac's thought the human nature looks beyond the natural order. De Lubac retrieved the Church Father's conception of human being as an image of God desiring the likeness of God.<sup>15</sup> However, he does not define the meaning of "the image of God" or "the likeness of God".

## **2.2. Nature and Grace in Modern Eastern Orthodox Theology**

Lossky's *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (1944) presents an Orthodox understanding of nature and grace, which has been developed independently from Roman Catholicism.<sup>16</sup> He rejects the theory of "pure nature", which is based on Aristotelian conception of the creation as "nature". Lossky sees that the creation is already an act of grace, which currently exists in a fallen state. He denies the possibility of a "natural beauty" for the creation. Instead the final end of the creation is deification. Lossky distinguishes between God's energies and His essence. God's energies are things, which can be known about God while His essence (ousia) remains unknown.<sup>17</sup> He contends that this thought was made famous by Palamas, but it exists already in the thought of Pseudo-Dionysios. Lossky explains that the Dionysian names of God such as "Wisdom", "Power" and "Love" manifest God's energies in the creation. Lossky explains that the energies are not God's acts but His modes of existence outside of His essence. God exists simultaneously in and outside of His essence. God's energies are distinct from God, but they are not separated from Him. He writes that the distinction between God's essence and His energies transcends all comparisons. Also the unity of God's essence and energies is greater than their distinction from each other. He explains that according to Palamas, grace or deifying illumina-

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<sup>14</sup> De Lubac 1967, 101–102

This thesis does not discuss Rahner's "supernatural existential" any further because the sources *Spirit in the World* and *Hearer of the Word* were written before Rahner developed the concept.

<sup>15</sup> De Lubac 1967, 84

<sup>16</sup> Coakley 2013a, 130–131

<sup>17</sup> Lossky 1957, 71, Lossky 2014, 76

tion is God's energy rather than His essence. Palamas calls God's energies "divinities", "uncreated light" or "grace".<sup>18</sup> Lossky underscores that the creation and God's energies are not interdependent. Creation ex nihilo is a free act of God, through which God's manifestation comes into being. Through God's energies created beings become manifestations of God's greatness.<sup>19</sup>

Lossky criticizes Scholastic philosophy for regarding everything outside God's essence as His external acts, which constitute created being. He contends that in Latin theology grace is a created effect, which God produces in the soul. Consequently human being cannot participate in the divine nature through grace in this life.<sup>20</sup> However Lossky's argument does not apply to Rahner's conception of grace. Lennan quotes Rahner:

God communicates himself to the man to whom grace has been shown in the mode of formal causality, so that this communication is not then the merely consequence of an efficient causation of created grace.<sup>21</sup>

According to Lossky, in Orthodox theology the effect of the presence of the Trinity is regarded as uncreated grace. The person truly receives the Gifts of the Holy Spirit.<sup>22</sup> Lossky regards the dogma of Christ's two natures necessary for the correct understanding of grace. In Christ the human nature is penetrated by Divine energies. This became evident in Christ's transfiguration on Mount Tabor. He maintains that all human beings are called to unite their human nature with the Divine nature through grace. Lossky considers the human being as an image of God, which has lost his/her likeness with God in the fall. Even if the human being has retained the will to unite with God, his/her nature is incapable of achieving it. Christ restored the human nature's ability to become the likeness of God. Lossky maintains that though Christ human nature becomes "pure nature", which is capable of receiving the Holy Spirit. Through the Holy Spirit the human person contains a human and a Divine nature as well

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<sup>18</sup> Lossky 1957, 72–73, Lossky 2014, 77

<sup>19</sup> Lossky 1957, 74–76, 80, 101

<sup>20</sup> Lossky 1957, Lossky 2014, 78

<sup>21</sup> Lennan 2012, 412 Rahner, Karl. *Some Implications of the Scholastic Concept of Uncreated Grace* (1939), *Theological Investigations*, i.334

<sup>22</sup> Lossky 2014, 81

as a human and a Divine will. He calls the process of becoming godlike "deification" (theosis).<sup>23</sup>

Lossky recognizes in the thought of Maximus the Confessor four degrees of grace: 1. the pagan world 2. the world, which lives according to revealed or natural law 3. the Christian world and 4. the deified saints, who have acquired a perfect union with God.<sup>24</sup>

Lossky as well as the modern Catholic theologians De Lubac and Rahner reject the theory of pure nature. De Lubac and Lossky regard the human being as an image of God, who desires the likeness of God. They both consider the creation as an act of grace. They both see that the human being is intended for a supernatural goal. However, this goal cannot be achieved by natural human capacities. It demands the involvement of God's grace. Lossky regards it as a process of deification (theosis) or illumination, through which the creation unites with God.

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<sup>23</sup> Lossky 2014, 81–83

<sup>24</sup> Lossky 2014, 83

### 3. RAHNER'S AND FLORENSKY'S METHOD OF APPROACH

#### 3.1. The Analogy of Being in Rahner

Rahner presents the following quote from Thomas (ST 1.84.7. resp. 3), which attempts to explain how knowledge of the physical world can be used to reach knowledge of the metaphysical God:

We know the incorporeal (non-worldly), of which there are no phantasms, through a comparison with the sensible, corporeal world of which there are phantasms. Thus we know what truth is by considering the thing about which we perceive a truth. But according to Dionysios, we know God as cause both by way of eminence and by way of negation. And in our present state of life we can also know the other incorporeal (non-worldly) substances only by way of (such) a negation or by some comparison with the corporeal world. Therefore, when we want to know something of this kind (non-worldly), we must turn to the phantasms of the corporeal world, although there are no phantasms of the thing itself.<sup>25</sup>

According to Thomas, created beings participate in the being of God analogically, because He is "the first and universal principle of all beings".<sup>26</sup> However, God is a being, who transcends this world. Properties, which are recognized in created beings have to be considered in their perfection when they are applied to God. This is called "by way of eminence" (via eminentia). For example God is the absolute good. Also certain properties have to be negated when they concern God. For example God is not limited in any way. This is "the way of negation" (via negativa).<sup>27</sup> Words, which concern created beings, do not have the same meaning (univocal), when applied to God. However, words do not have a totally different meaning (equivocal) when applied to God. Thomas considers language about God to be analogical. It means that words are not used neither univocally nor equivocally when applied to God.<sup>28</sup>

According to Jonsson, Thomas teaches that certain words can have the same meaning (univocal), when applied to both created beings and God. Such as "good" and "wise".

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<sup>25</sup> SW p. 11

<sup>26</sup> ST 1.4.3. resp.

<sup>27</sup> Jonsson 2008, 213, 218

<sup>28</sup> The Fourth Lateran Council teaches that the similarity between the creation and the creator is always exceeded by a greater dissimilarity. IV Lateran Council chapter 2.

Pseudo-Dionysios writes: "He is known to all from all things and he is known to no one from anything". DN 7:3 (872A)

This is "the way of affirmation" (via positiva). However, Thomas considers the properties of God to be inadequately reflected in created things, which is why the properties must be understood in their perfection when applied to God (via eminentia).<sup>29</sup>

Rahner uses the Thomistic transcendentals one, being, truth, good to refer to what is common to all beings (ens commune).<sup>30</sup> From these three "being" is the primary concern of his philosophy. Rahner develops the claim that being, intellect and will are interchangeable terms. He claims that a being pursues to fulfill its natural potentiality through knowledge.<sup>31</sup> His axiom is that being and knowing form a unity. Everything that exists can be known. Also being and truth form a unity. Truth refers to being, which means that truth is not just an idea in the mind. Truth refers to beings that exist through themselves (God) or about things which exist through another (creation).<sup>32</sup>

The analogy of being is central for Rahner's philosophy. It is founded on the unity of being and knowing. This method offers analogical knowledge of God, who is the Absolute Being.<sup>33</sup>

Being is an analogous concept and this analogy shows in the purely analogical way in which every single being returns to itself, can be present to itself.<sup>34</sup>

Rahner understands being as luminosity for itself. The degree which a being reflects on itself, is self-present, varies according to the intensity of being. Angels, humans, animals, plants and lifeless objects such as stones possess different degrees of being. In Rahner's view stones do not possess self-presence. They are only present to another. Instead God is perfectly self-present and luminous. The human being also strives to be luminous and self-present.<sup>35</sup> Through the analogy of being Rahner constructs his argument for the pre-apprehension of the Absolute Being.

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<sup>29</sup> Jonsson 2008, 219–220

<sup>30</sup> The Thomistic conception of the transcendentals is based on *The Divine Names* by Pseudo-Dionysios. Aertsen 2012, 15–28, 101

<sup>31</sup> SW 72–73, HW 83

<sup>32</sup> SW 59, 67–71

<sup>33</sup> SW 71–75

<sup>34</sup> HW 37

<sup>35</sup> HW 33–35, 39

### 3.2. The Spiritual Senses in Florensky

The term spiritual senses (*sensus spirituales*) was first used in the Latin translation of the works of Origen to signify non-physical perception. Coakley and Gavrilyuk distinguish between analogical and metaphorical language of perceiving God. Some see an analogy between sensual perception and a spiritual sensation about God. It means that there is some likeness between sensual perception and spiritual sensation about God. Others regard sense perception merely as a metaphor for knowledge of God. When using a metaphor there is no intention for similarity between the spiritual and sensual perception. Coakley and Gavrilyuk define spiritual senses as an umbrella term, in which the senses are associated with knowledge of God.<sup>36</sup>

Many chapters of Florensky's book are addressed to "a friend" and one to "my starets".<sup>37</sup> Florensky defines friendship as a mystical unity, which suggests that the spiritual senses have a role to play in the interpretation of his philosophy.<sup>38</sup> According to Florensky, the creation is free, but simultaneously it is responsible to God and capable of responding to His love.<sup>39</sup> Florensky sees that human knowledge concerns God's creation, which is why he claims that objectivity does not exist.<sup>40</sup> He maintains that a spiritual disposition is necessary for a correct understanding of icons. He explains that without faith the saints, who are depicted in icons, do not speak. He also talks of surveying "the spiritual treasures of the Church" through an "immediate experience". He presents an account of a man's mystical experience with St. Seraphim of Sarov, which includes an experience of spiritual light and spiritual smell. This experience affects the inner core of the human being. He also presents Pseudo-Dionysios's account of his visit to the Mother of God, during which he was illuminated by Divine Light and surrounded by the smell of amazing aromas. Florensky also talks of

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<sup>36</sup> Coakley and Gavrilyuk 2008, 1–8

<sup>37</sup> PGT, 10, 51, 80, 151, 285

"Starets" is a spiritual father in the Russian Orthodox tradition. PGT, 8–9

<sup>38</sup> PGT 297

<sup>39</sup> PGT 210

<sup>40</sup> PGT 192

"spiritual gaze" which enables one to apprehend the dogma of the Trinity. This in turn gives access to a spiritual understanding of reality.<sup>41</sup>

The higher the Christian ascetic ascends on his path to the heavenly land, the brighter his inner eye shines, the deeper the Holy Spirit descends into his heart - the more clearly then will he see the inner, absolutely valuable core of creation...<sup>42</sup>

Florensky regards truth, good and beauty not just as concepts, which are common to all beings. They originate in God and describe His creation. However, to be able to see truth, good and beauty in the creation demands the practice of prayer, asceticism and friendship:

Truth, Good and Beauty." This metaphysical Triad is not three different principles, but one principle. It is one spiritual life, but seen from different points of view. Spiritual life as emanating from "I", is the Truth. Perceived as the immediate action of another, it is Good. Objectively contemplated by a third, as radiating outward, it is Beauty.<sup>43</sup>

According to Florensky, the creation expresses truth, good and beauty, which originates in God. However, the human being would not be able to experience these things without spiritual light. Florensky discusses "the uncreated light", which reflected from the face of Jesus Christ on Mount Tabor. According to Florensky, the uncreated light revealed the Divine nature of Jesus Christ to the apostles.<sup>44</sup>

Florensky's understanding of spiritual knowledge includes both the senses and reason. Florensky considers the purification of one's soul through asceticism necessary for receiving the light of Divine knowledge. However, he maintains that grace is not limited to spiritual persons.<sup>45</sup> God offers it according to His will. Florensky writes:

Spiritual light is the light of the Trihypostatic Divinity Itself, the Divine

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<sup>41</sup> PGT 5, 21, 33, 47, 75, 264.

Florensky does not question the historicity of Pseudo-Dionysios' account. According to Rorem, the works which are accredited to the pseudonym Dionysios the Areiopagite date from late 5th to early 6th century. Rorem 1987, 1.

<sup>42</sup> PGT 216

<sup>43</sup> PGT 56

<sup>44</sup> The uncreated light became a central concept in Orthodox theology through "the Triads" by Georgios Palamas. Palamas 1983. The Triads III i. 9–36.

<sup>45</sup> PGT 73

Essence, which is not only given, but also self-given. Spiritual light is "the light of reason", the light that started to shine to the world at the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ...<sup>46</sup>

Florensky regards faith in God to be unreasonable for an unbeliever. In order for God to be reasonable one has to access God's reason. This is possible by a person who lives according to God's reason. Florensky writes: "Rationality is possible, because there is a Triradiant Lamp, and it is possible to the extent that it lives by the Light of this lamp."<sup>47</sup>

In Florensky's thought grace enables a person to see signs of God's presence in the creation. It draws the creation towards God and it also enables one to understand Divine truths. Florensky regards deification to affect the way reality is perceived. Grace can be experienced only by conforming oneself to grace through a spiritual disposition towards the creation.

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<sup>46</sup> PGT 70

<sup>47</sup> PGT 347

Konstantinovsky explains that Evgarius Ponticus distinguishes between three kinds of light which the intellect possesses: 1. knowledge of the Holy Trinity 2. knowledge of incorporeal nature 3. contemplation of beings. Konstantinovsky 2009, 82

## 4. THE HUMAN BEING

### 4.1. Spirit in a Body (Rahner)

*Summa Theologiae* of Thomas Aquinas begins by treating God. After that he treats the creation and the human being. Rahner, on the other hand, makes "a transcendental turn to the subject" by lifting up the human being to the focus of his philosophy.<sup>48</sup> He practices philosophical anthropology which assesses the possibilities for natural knowledge of God by studying how the human being gains knowledge of the world.<sup>49</sup> Rahner's philosophy is also metaphysical anthropology, which studies the human being as a metaphysical being.<sup>50</sup> Rahner also contributes to a discussion within Catholic theology concerning the question as to whether the reception of revelation is possible for human nature or does the reception of revelation require an inner elevation produced by Divine grace.<sup>51</sup>

According to Rahner, the human being has a metaphysical foundation. The human being is not simply matter, which has achieved self-consciousness. According to Rahner, the human being is a finite spirit, which has been thrown into the world.<sup>52</sup> The mind does not have to make its way into the world, because the mind is in the world to start with. This establishes Rahner's starting point for natural knowledge of God. The human being is bound to the context in which he/she exist. The human spirit exists in a material body. According to Rahner, the body and the spirit are inseparable to the extent that the spirit receives all its knowledge through the bodily senses. The spirit can not be sensed because it belongs to the metaphysical order. The human spirit is open to the Absolute Being, which establishes the possibility of receiving God's grace. According to Thomas, the mind is the highest faculty of the human being. Rahner explains that according to Thomas the light of the mind participates in "the Light of the Absolute Spirit".<sup>53</sup> It can ask about God on the basis of its knowled-

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<sup>48</sup>Sheehan 1987, 1

<sup>49</sup> Mannermaa 1971, 9

<sup>50</sup> HW 75

<sup>51</sup> HW 6

<sup>52</sup> HW xi, 77

<sup>53</sup> HW, 77-78, ST I, q. 12, art. 1, resp., SW 226

ge of the world. The mind is oriented towards God in everything it does. According to Rahner, the orientation towards God makes the human being capable of receiving God's revelation if and when God offers it. Rahner considers the human being as someone who is free to listen to the Word of God. Until the human being experiences the immediate vision of God, the Word points towards God.<sup>54</sup> Rahner writes: "Metaphysical anthropology has reached its end when it has understood itself as the metaphysics of an obediential potency for the revelation of the supramundane God."<sup>55</sup>

According to Klauck, ancient gnostic cults considered the body as an obstacle for the soul to reach God. Matter was considered to be inferior to the spirit.<sup>56</sup> Rahner does not consider the material world an obstacle for knowledge of God. He regards the creation as a reflection of His love. Through the senses the human being is able to admire God's creation. The world is the starting point for the human quest for God. The world is the basis for analogical language about God. The world also defines the boundaries of human knowledge. According to Rahner, God is present in the world while being inaccessible to human cognition. The human being can direct him/herself as a spirit in a body towards God in this world.<sup>57</sup>

Thus every venture into the world shows itself to be borne by the ultimate desire for the spirit for the absolute being; every entrance into sensibility, into the world and its destiny, shows itself only the coming to be of a spirit which is striving towards the absolute. Thus man is the mid-point suspended between the world and God, between time and eternity, and this boundary line is the point of his definition and his destiny: "as a certain horizon and border between the corporeal and incorporeal (SCG II, 68)."<sup>58</sup>

The corporeal aspect of human existence implies that he/she exist in time and space. If God reveals Himself to the human kind, it must happen at a certain place and moment in history. Past, present and future are moments in which one can anticipate God's revelation.<sup>59</sup> The challenge for theology is how the transcendent, eternal and unchanging God can be known by a temporal and contingent being? Thomas quotes

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<sup>54</sup> HW 88

<sup>55</sup> HW 93,142

<sup>56</sup> Klauck 2003, 433

<sup>57</sup> HW 81,134

<sup>58</sup> SW 407

<sup>59</sup> HW 135–136

Aristotle: "The soul knows nothing without a phantasm."<sup>60</sup> According to Rahner, one must turn to the world in search for God.<sup>61</sup>

#### **4.2. Person as Image of God (Florensky)**

Florensky regards a person to exist in a relationship. The relationship with God establishes the true identity of the human person. It also establishes true knowledge about God.<sup>62</sup> He sees the human person as an image of God. However, the image remains hidden without a relationship with God. The image of God attains the likeness of God by a process which includes the purification of the mind and senses by the grace of God.

Florensky says that only through a spiritual life can a person know the essence of another person. Without it he/she knows only characteristics and concepts. A person can make a distinction between him/her and the other. This kind of identity is achieved through distinction from another. He calls this the law of identity, which can be expressed symbolically  $A = A$ . Science can observe a human being, but it cannot grasp his/her spiritual essence. Florensky speaks of spiritual knowledge, which enables to see another person as God's image: "...every I sees in the Divine image of another I its own Divine image as in a mirror."<sup>63</sup> This kind of knowledge demands openness for grace.

According to Florensky, God's creation forms a unity in God. Without unity it becomes fragmented and distorted. The fragmentation can be recognized in the law of identity, which affirms the self by rejecting the other. This approach is constitutive for rational knowledge. However, Florensky advocates a dynamic law of identity, which affirms the self by affirming the other. It includes the affirmation of both  $A=A$  and  $A= - A$ . The dynamic law of identity is founded on unity with another person. It

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<sup>60</sup> ST 1.q.84.a.7

<sup>61</sup> HW p.125

<sup>62</sup> PGT 59–61

<sup>63</sup> PGT 68

includes the ability to identify with another so that the self and the other both reflect the image of God.<sup>64</sup>

According to Florensky, the image of God is not just a spiritual dimension of the human being. It includes also his/her body: "Our body is in fact beauty, this image of ineffable Divine glory."<sup>65</sup> The whole human being including the body expresses truth, good and beauty. Through the spiritual life the whole human being participates in the life of the Trinity itself. He sees the human being as body and soul forming the image of God.

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<sup>64</sup> PGT 22–29, 44

<sup>65</sup> PGT 217

## 5. DESIRE

Nygren's thesis states that from Augustine onwards Christianity had lost the original Pauline understanding of love. Paul taught that God loves his creation without preconditions or demands. This kind of love is called "agape". It was evident in the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. However, the mystics of the Early Church adapted the term "eros" to describe human desire towards God. Nygren sees "eros" as love, which is motivated by self-interest. Nygren argued that Luther was able to rediscover the Pauline conception of true love and restore it into Christian theology. Christ's death on the cross expressed God's true love for the creation. Nygren regards "agape" and "eros" as contradicting terms.<sup>66</sup> Nygren's thesis has been criticized for a one-sided presentation of pre-Lutheran conception of love.<sup>67</sup>

Pseudo-Dionysios perceived the relationship between the human being and God in terms of ecstatic and erotic love. He was aware of how some people confuse love for God with human sexual desire. He described how both God and humans love the beautiful and the good. These concepts are perfected in God.<sup>68</sup> According to Pseudo-Dionysios, God loves the inferior, which He realizes by identifying with the creation.

But divine yearning brings ecstasy so that the lover belongs not to self but to the beloved. This is shown in the providence lavished by the superior on the subordinate. It is shown in the regard for one another demonstrated by those of equal status. And it is shown by the subordinates in their divine return toward what is higher.<sup>69</sup>

Perl explains that in the thought of Pseudo-Dionysios there is no difference between erotic and agapaic love. God's offering of Himself and the desire to acquire God are different moments of the same process.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Nygren 1966, 86–94, 167, 479–482, 627–628

<sup>67</sup> Coakley 2013b, 30

<sup>68</sup> DN 4:7, 12 (704B, 709C)

<sup>69</sup> DN 4:13 (712A)

<sup>70</sup> Perl 2007, 47

## 5.1. Desire in Rahner

Rahner treated the subject of natural desire for God some years prior to the publication of De Lubac's *Surnaturel* (1946). This subject was central for a reinterpretation of nature and grace in modern Catholic theology. Both De Lubac and Rahner contend that humans desire something which they cannot achieve by their natural means. It has to be offered to them by God through grace. This thought was not an invention, but rather a rediscovery of the thought of the Church Fathers and the Scholastics.

Rahner writes:

Thomas himself speaks of a natural desire for the immediate intuition of God. It is not quite certain what Thomas meant exactly by this expression. Every theologian who has written about it seems to have an interpretation. At any rate, it shows that Thomas admitted that there are, between our spiritual nature with its immanent dynamism (its desiderium) and the beatific vision, relations that do not merely derive from the fact that humanity has been called by grace to the immediate intuition of God, but that are previous to this invitation and rooted in human "nature".<sup>71</sup>

This is reminiscent of the twofold gift, which De Lubac talks about. He maintains that God has given the human being his/her existence and a call to the supernatural order at the same time. Rahner defines spirit "as desire (dynamic openness) for absolute everything" and as "desire, striving and action". He refers to Thomas, who says that the intellect has "a desire in itself as its own intrinsic drive". He claims that there is one final end for every desire. The desire is caused by a pre-apprehension of this end, which is truth. He calls truth also as absolute being. According to Rahner, spirit is the potentiality for reception of all being and the active desire for it.<sup>72</sup>

Thus in its pre-apprehension, the spirit already and always possesses in every act being in its totality, and seeks to fill up the formal emptiness of the being given in the pre-apprehension through the object of every individual act. Being as such in this material fullness, absolute being, is therefore the end and goal of the spirit as such. Every operation of the spirit, whatever it might be, can therefore be understood only as a moment in the movement towards absolute being as towards the one end and goal of the desire of the spirit.<sup>73</sup>

Rahner considers the human being as a spirit in a body. The created being exists in a limited form, in time and space. The human spirit desires to be complete joining with

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<sup>71</sup> HW 63

<sup>72</sup> SW 281–283

<sup>73</sup> SW 283

something that is not itself. He/she seeks to complete him/herself by participating in the absolute Being. According to Rahner, the human being desires more than the world can offer. He/she desires God's being.<sup>74</sup>

Rahner regards desire to be constitutive for the human spirit. It is a motivation for human activity in general. He/she has a fundamental desire to know and to love. The lack of knowledge and love makes the human being desire them in their fullness. The human attempt to be complete through objects of this world is not possible. Rahner says that human spirit ultimately seeks its fulfillment in God, who is the perfect unity of being and knowing.

## **5.2. Desire in Florensky**

According to Gavrilyuk, the reception of Pseudo-Dionysios in twentieth century Eastern Orthodox theology has not been researched thoroughly.<sup>75</sup> Oravec (2014) discusses agapaic and kenotic love in Russian religious thought.<sup>76</sup> His study disregards the subject of eros (desire). The prioritization of agape over eros was already promoted by Nygren. Also Slesinsky's (1984) and Andersson's (2008) studies on Florensky do not discuss the theme of eros.

Florensky makes only a few direct references to eros. However, he discusses human longing for God. He regards eros as a general expression for love. He claims that it is very little used in the Septuagint and does not exist in the New Testament. Florensky mentions that eros is used by Gregory of Nyssa, Nicolas Cabasilas, Symeon the New Theologian and other mystical writers to express a higher love for God. Florensky does not mention Pseudo-Dionysios. Florensky writes that the New Testament uses *philein* to express love in Christian relations and *agapan* to express love for God and for neighbor.<sup>77</sup> In the course of his book he often uses the general term love instead of the nuanced Greek terms.

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<sup>74</sup> HW 64, 120

<sup>75</sup> Gavrilyuk 2009, 177–190

<sup>76</sup> Oravec 2014, 264–292

<sup>77</sup> PGT 288, 291

Florensky regards the relationship between God and the creation as love. He explains that the superior God empties Himself of His divine qualities to participate in the inferior creation. Also the human being reaches out towards the superior God with his/her love.<sup>78</sup> A similar reciprocal love between God and the human being is present in the thought of Pseudo-Dionysios.<sup>79</sup>

For Florensky human longing has a spiritual, an interpersonal and a philosophical dimension. Humans long for God, friendship and the truth. In the introductory chapter *To the Reader* he claims that one can find comfort in saints, "the joy of forgiveness and the beauty of heavenly celebration". He sees that man's yearning for God leads him to light a candle in Church, to repent and to pursue God-likeness. Man's yearning for God includes also "infinitely deep intuitions of eternity". Florensky sees that man's sighing towards God is responded by gracious energy.<sup>80</sup>

Several chapters of Florensky's book begin by addressing an anonymous and absent friend.<sup>81</sup> Letter One (*Two Worlds*) distinguishes the existence of the visible and the invisible realities, which can be experienced through the feeling of loneliness, sorrow and longing.<sup>82</sup> In Florensky's philosophy longing for a friend has also metaphysical dimension. Human longing manifests itself also in a spiritual search for God:

But you are not with me, and the whole world seems deserted. I am alone, absolutely alone in the whole world. But my sorrowful loneliness aches sweetly in my heart.<sup>83</sup>

This quote describes a will or desire (eros) to unite with friend or God. The feeling of loneliness and longing pulls a human being towards the one who is longed for. Florensky explains that to desire another person as "thou" implies that someone is chosen as an object of desire instead of another. If love is put into question, for example through betrayal, then a demand is made to re-establish love. According to Florensky,

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<sup>78</sup> PGT 235

<sup>79</sup> DN 4:13 (712A)

<sup>80</sup> PGT 6

<sup>81</sup> Evagrius Ponticos discusses how a letter to a distant friend can conceal hidden meanings, which only someone with "a kindred mind" can understand. Letter to Melania. chapter 1.

<sup>82</sup> PGT 10–13

<sup>83</sup> PGT 11

jealousy demands genuine love from "thou".<sup>84</sup> Florensky dedicates one chapter to jealousy. In Florensky's thought jealousy is an aspect of love. He regards it as an ontological concept, which originates in Divine jealousy.<sup>85</sup>

Florensky asks what drives man to seek metaphysical realities. In Letter Two he writes that man has a yearning for the Truth. He writes: "I do not have truth, but the idea of Truth burns me."<sup>86</sup> He sees philosophy as a search for the Truth. Desire is a power, which leads a person to discover truths of the creation. It also leads him/her to love another person. Thirdly desire leads towards God, who pulls the believer towards Him. According to Florensky, true love is not only desire, it is also prepared to suffer for another.<sup>87</sup> In Florensky's thought agape and eros work together towards knowledge of God. Through the many Greek words for love Florensky explains that God shows His love for the creation by going out of Himself into the creation. This is a free act of God, which can also be called grace. In return the creation longs for union with God, which can be called desire or love. The relationship between God and his creation can be expressed in terms of both desire and love in Rahner's and Florensky's thought.

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<sup>84</sup>PGT 336–337

<sup>85</sup> PGT 342 According to the English translation of DN 4:13 (712C) by Parker 1897, "jealous" is a name of God. Luibheid 1987 translates the same word as "zealous".

<sup>86</sup> PGT 30

<sup>87</sup> PGT 318

## 6. RAHNER'S METAPHYSICS OF KNOWLEDGE

This chapter does not attempt to present Rahner's metaphysics of knowledge comprehensively. It is discussed only in order to assess his conception of natural knowledge of God. In addition he is compared with other philosophers in order to clarify his stand point.

According to Kerr, ever since the time of Descartes philosophy has been concerned with epistemology. Kerr claims that without an adequate theory of knowledge the distinction between true and false concerning the world or God is not possible.<sup>88</sup> Rahner considers knowledge and truth to depend on metaphysics. "Metaphysics" means literally "after physics" or "beyond physics".<sup>89</sup> Metaphysics treats the first principles or causes of things. It attempts to find out what is being. Whereas metaphysics studies being, metaphysics of knowledge studies the relation between knowing and being.

Plato regarded knowledge as self-knowledge, which is attained through contemplation of the good. He regarded knowledge of the eternal ideas superior to sensual knowledge. For Plato knowledge is basically remembering the eternal ideas, which the soul has forgotten. Knowledge of the world offers a mere shadow of the eternal ideas. Aristotle, in turn, valued the knowledge of the world. For him the soul is inseparable from the body. He regarded knowledge as the actualization of universal forms in the objects which the mind perceives.<sup>90</sup> Aristotle maintained that the senses have to conform with their objects of knowledge. The mind can know material objects because it is able to abstract the sensed object. The form of the object is perceived in the act of returning to the image (*conversio ad phantasma*). The mind conforms to the image it perceives. He regarded the mind as a passive power, which receives knowledge of the world. The mind is like a clean slate (*tabula rasa*) before the senses offer knowledge of the world. He says that the mind has the potential to know everything that exists.<sup>91</sup> We shall continue into the thought of Rahner, who was influenced by the Aristotelianism of Thomas Aquinas.

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<sup>88</sup> Kerr 2002, 17

<sup>89</sup> Beskow 1999, 121

<sup>90</sup> Copleston 1946, 163–177

<sup>91</sup> Copleston 1946, 329, Aristotle, *On the Soul* 3.5–7.

## 6.1. Knowledge as Self-Presence

According to Rahner, knowledge is established through the metaphysical movement of the spirit, which reaches out towards an object and returns to the self. This is the fundamental activity of the mind in its pursuit of self-presence. The mind looks out into the world to gain full possession of itself.

Every activity, from the purely material up to the inner life of the triune God, is but a gradation of this one metaphysical theme, of the meaning of being: self-possession. Now this self-possession implies a double stage: an outward expansion, an extraposition of its own essence out of its own ground, an emanation - and taking-back-again, a reintegration of its essence that has stepped out of its ground and stands as it were revealed.<sup>92</sup>

Rahner's metaphysics of knowledge asks can the mind know anything that is not given by the senses. This question is stated by Thomas in *Summa Theologiae* book I, question 84, article 7. The title of the article reads: "Can the intellect actually know anything through the intelligible species which it possesses, without turning to the phantasms?"<sup>93</sup>

"The intelligible species" is a Thomistic term, which is similar to the Aristotelian concept "form". It is actualized in the object of knowledge. "Phantasm" can be understood as image, which the mind perceives about the object. Even though Thomas talks primarily about the sense of sight the problematic concerns the relationship between all senses and the intellect.<sup>94</sup> The question of Thomas is central for the whole Western philosophy. It does not only concern knowledge of the world. It ultimately concerns knowledge of God. Rahner asks if one can know anything about God without referring to things which are perceived in the world. For Rahner God and the world are both objects of the same human knowledge, which relies on the senses.

According to Annala, Augustine's Neo-Platonic stance was that knowledge attains towards the universal truths, which are illuminated directly to the mind by God. Augustine prioritized divinely illuminated truths over sensual knowledge.<sup>95</sup> Against such

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<sup>92</sup> HW 38–39 The theological system of Thomas includes the moments of emanation and return (*exitus-reditus*). Rorem writes that this was first pointed out by Chenu in 1939. Rorem 1993, 172–173

<sup>93</sup> SW 3

<sup>94</sup> SW 66

<sup>95</sup> Annala 1984, 2–4

claims Rahner explains that the human being cannot know anything purely intellectually in his/her current state of being. Rahner refers to Thomas who claims that angels can gain knowledge directly through the intellect. The angelic intellect participates directly in the creative knowledge of God.<sup>96</sup> Concerning human knowledge Thomas is influenced by Aristotle, who taught that the mind cannot know anything without turning towards images. The mind is able to know objects of the world by recognizing universal species in the actual objects. These objects define the limits and possibilities of knowledge.<sup>97</sup> According to Rahner, an exception is the immediate apprehension of God in the Beatific Vision, in which God Himself is present in the intellect.<sup>98</sup>

In opposition to modern epistemologies, which make a strict distinction between the subject and object, he contends that knowledge is principally self-presence.<sup>99</sup> Rahner maintains that self-presence is achieved through knowledge of the world. This is possible by the the knower becoming the being of the other. Rahner writes:

If according to the fundamental premise of Thomistic metaphysics of knowledge only that which is the knower itself is known as proper object, and if, nevertheless, there is to be a knowledge in which this known as proper object is the other, then both of these can be understood as simultaneously possible only by the fact that the knower itself is the being of the other.<sup>100</sup>

The unity of the knower and known should be understood as a metaphysical identification with the known object. The question as to how to overcome the gap between the knower and the object of knowledge is not relevant for Rahner. He sees the real problem to lie in how the knower which is united with the known can stand over against the known object. For Rahner the mind's unity with the known and the subject/object distinction are both necessary for real knowledge of the world.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> SW 343

<sup>97</sup> HW 37, 343

According to Thomas, the universals are not subsisting things. They have being only in the singulars. Thomas refers to Aristotle's *Metaphysics* VII. SCG 1:65

<sup>98</sup> SW 87

<sup>99</sup> SW 67-71

<sup>100</sup> SW p. 79

According to Pseudo-Dionysios, knowledge of the Truth is attained by the unity of the knower with the known. DN 7:4 (872D) Plato, Aristotle and Plotinus understand cognition as the union of the subject and object. Perl 2007, 89

<sup>101</sup> SW 75

For Rahner knowledge is based on three moments which are not in temporary order: sensuality, abstraction and return to the image. These moments take place simultaneously. Sensuality means basically that the senses offer raw material for the mind to process. In abstraction the mind is able to lift objects apart from the flow of sensual information. This is possible through the universal concepts, which are not known before they are actualized in the objects of knowledge.<sup>102</sup> Thirdly the mind perceives an image of something (return to the image). The mind does not look at everything, which the senses give. It decides to look at something, which it lifts apart from the endless flow of sensual information. When an object is seen, the mind and the senses have already gone through the three metaphysical stages.

According to Rahner, the human ability to know objects demands a prior conception of space, time, quantity and movement.<sup>103</sup> Knowledge of things demands judgement through the use of universal species, which the mind possesses. According to Thomas, the universal species are latent in the mind until they are united with a real existing object.<sup>104</sup> Judgement is a characteristic of the free will. It is human to make false judgements based on perception and prior experience.<sup>105</sup> This does not alter the fact that to know something demands the mind uniting with the known object. The objects of knowledge are real. However, knowledge of real objects is based on judgement, which is fallible. Rahner says: "(the human being) is in a certain way everything." The mind can unite with whatever is within its reach through sight, hearing, touch, smell and taste.<sup>106</sup> The mind extends towards an object and retracts to itself. One cannot reflect on this metaphysical process, which takes place in the mind and the senses, because it is the foundation for the ability to think and imagine.

In comparison to the Cartesian conception of the mind knowing independently of the body, Rahner maintains that self-presence is possible only by reaching out into the world. The world exists independently of the mind and one can gain certain knowledge of it through correct judgement. The mind is intimately united with the body

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<sup>102</sup> SW 121

<sup>103</sup> SW 97–107

<sup>104</sup> SW 267

<sup>105</sup> SW 130–131

<sup>106</sup> SW 60, 68

which is the basis for human knowledge. One can know material objects, because as a spirit one can abstract the species from matter and view its image (return to the image). Unlike Descartes, Rahner's philosophy does not allow a distinction between the mind and the world. Rahner maintains that the human being is a corporeal being, whose knowledge depends on the bodily senses. The next chapter discusses how this is related to the conception of the human being as the image of God.

## 6.2. The Image of God (Rahner)

Rahner's understanding of self-presence is based on the unity of being and knowing. In Thomist philosophy the perfect unity of being and knowing exists in God, who thinks and exists through himself.<sup>107</sup> He does not have to reflect on Himself through reaching out of Himself. When God reaches out into the world, He remains absolutely free and in full possession of Himself. The human being must reach out into the world in order to pursue self-presence. Because of the limitations of the human condition, perfect self-presence remains unaccomplished. Rahner sees that the accomplishment of self-presence demands an immediate vision of God. However God does not reveal Himself exhaustively in human history. Instead He communicates Himself through a "vicarious sign".<sup>108</sup> According to Rahner, this is the revealed Word of God, Jesus Christ.

And if Christianity is not the idea of an eternal, omnipotent spirit, but is Jesus of Nazareth, then Thomas metaphysics is Christian when it summons man back into the here and now of his finite world, because the Eternal has also entered into his world so that man might find Him, and in Him might find himself anew.<sup>109</sup>

This one of the few reference to God's revelation in Rahner's philosophy. His philosophy treats the foundations for faith (*preambula fidei*) without treating the subject of faith. Rahner argues that Jesus Christ has a role in the accomplishment of self-presence. Jesus Christ is the object of knowledge, which the human being can reflect

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<sup>107</sup> According to Thomas, God is subsistent being itself, *ipsum esse subsistens* ST 1.4. resp. 2 )  
Thomas sees no distinction between essence and existence in God.

He also calls God pure and infinite actuality, *actus purus et infinitus* ST 1,75 resp. 4.

<sup>108</sup> HW 93

<sup>109</sup> SW 408

upon to find out who he/she essentially is. Rahner's argument can be viewed through the notion of the human being as an image of God. The degree of self-presence depends on the co-operation of the human being with God. This can be interpreted through the notion of the image of God pursuing the likeness of God. The likeness of God has to do with Christ's obedience to the Father and His self-offering love. God exists as a relationship of love, who opens Himself to the creation. Christ motivates human behavior towards self-offering love. The human being aspires self-presence until he/she becomes the likeness of God. The mind's movement into the world and back to itself is constantly looking beyond this world. Self-presence, to know oneself as God knows him/her, remains unperfected in the current state of the human being as a spirit in a material world.

Rahner's *A Brief Anthropological Creed* which was published in *Foundations of Christian Faith* almost forty years after his philosophical works, gives support for the thought of self-presence through identification with Christ:

A person really discovers his true self in a genuine act of self-realization only if he risks himself radically for another. If he does this, he grasps unthematically or explicitly what we mean by God as the horizon, the guarantor and the radical depth of this love, the God who in his existentiell and historical self-communication made himself the realm within which such love is possible...<sup>110</sup>

Identification with Christ means imitating the self-offering love of the Trinitarian God. God's love was realized by Christ through His life and death on the Cross. This radical self-offer shows the extent of God's love for the creation. In Rahner's thought love is desire (eros) and also self-offering love (agape), which transforms the human being towards the likeness of God. Rahner's stance regarding the relationship between self-offering love and desire is in opposition to Nygren's, who regards eros and agape as contradicting terms.

Rahner's philosophy lays a foundation for God's revelation, by which one knows God as the Father, Son and the Spirit. His philosophical anthropology is in agreement with theological anthropology of the Church Fathers, who regarded the human being as image of God, who desires to become the likeness of God.

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<sup>110</sup> Rahner 1978, 456

### 6.3. Knowledge as Love (Rahner)

In *Hearer's of the Word* Rahner discusses God's love towards the creation. According to Rahner, the fact the world exists implies that God wanted it so. The creation is an act of God's free will. He could have decided not to create. Instead He and the creation exist in a relationship. A free and voluntary relationship in which one is open for another is called love. A loving relationship is based on communication and openness. God reveals Himself through His self-communication. The words "love" and "grace" can be used to express the free act, through which God reveals Himself. The creation itself is an act of God's love and His self-communication.

For the finite may be grasped only when it is understood as produced by divine freedom. Now God's free action is luminous only when we do not merely take it as a fact. We must also ratify it in our love for it, thus experiencing it, as it were, in its origin and its production. Thus love is the light of knowledge of the finite and since we know the infinite only through the finite, it is also the light of the whole of our knowledge. In final analysis, knowledge is but the luminous radiance of love.<sup>111</sup>

For Rahner God's love is already present in the act of the creation. Rahner regards the creation as God's voluntary act. In other words it is as an act of grace. God's grace can be recognized in nature, because all beings participate in the being of God. One can see God as the cause of all beings, the ground of being and the destiny of being.<sup>112</sup> However, without knowledge of God's revelation in Jesus Christ, knowledge of the Trinity is not possible.

Rahner claims that one cannot know God in a neutral way and only afterwards decide whether to love God or not. Knowledge of God is an experience of love. Rahner considers freedom as a precondition for knowledge and for love.<sup>113</sup> To know something is possible only through the openness to the absolute being (esse). The mind is free to think and imagine whatever it wants on the basis of its knowledge of the world. Knowledge as love is based on the awareness that one's freedom to act and to think

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<sup>111</sup> HW 81

<sup>112</sup> HW 38–39, SW 339, 358, 360

<sup>113</sup> HW 86

reflects God's freedom and action towards the creation.<sup>114</sup> The human beings constitutive desire towards God determines what he/she should love in this world.<sup>115</sup>

Rahner talks of the right order of love, which is a reference to Augustine's teaching that temporal good in life should be regarded in the light of the eternal good, which is God.<sup>116</sup> To love the creation and other people as God's gift increases knowledge of God. On the contrary selfish desires are obstacles for loving other people and God. Rahner explains that through asceticism one is able to pursue a life, which accords with God's will.<sup>117</sup>

Rahner considers God to be the ultimate object of human knowledge. Only God can be the fulfillment of desires: the perfection of being, truth, good. Finite and limited accomplishments leave the human being incomplete. The thought that God creates the human being out of love implies that the human being is intended for a life with Him. Through freedom the human being reflects God's love towards the creation. By loving the creation a person is in a disposition to experience God's love in the creation. Rahner considers knowledge and love to be fundamentally connected in the creation. According to Rahner, one is able to see God's love in the creation prior to receiving His revelation in Jesus Christ.

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<sup>114</sup> HW 94

<sup>115</sup> HW 89

<sup>116</sup> On Christian Doctrine 1.27.28

<sup>117</sup> HW 85–86

## 7. FLORENSKY'S METAPHYSICS OF LOVE

Whereas Rahner attempts to explain the metaphysical foundation of knowledge of objects, Florensky inquires into the metaphysical foundation of love. According to Florensky, the human person is above the mechanical determinism of matter. The governing power of the universe is the Trinitarian God, who loves His creation. The human being has the potential to co-operate with God, which has a transformative effect on the creation. True love has a metaphysical foundation. However, the foundation of love is not accessible to the human being, because he/she exists in the physical realm.

### 7.1. Knowledge as Love

Florensky quotes Gregory of Nyssa's phrase "Knowledge becomes love" from the book *On the Soul and the Resurrection*.<sup>118</sup> This quotation refers to the mystical experience of God, when the virtues of faith, hope and love finally reach their goal. In the resurrection human knowledge of God is an experience of love. However Florensky does not discuss the resurrection, instead he is concerned with the unity of love and knowledge in the creation.

From God's point of view, the reason of a creature is God's kenotic love for creation. Entering by an indescribable act (in which the ineffable humility of Divine love and the incomprehensible boldness of creaturely love touch each other and co-operate) into the life of the Divine Trinity...<sup>119</sup>

Florensky sees the creation as a possibility to know about God. It expresses God's truth, goodness and beauty. The world is intended to be in a loving relationship with God. He regards love and knowledge as two aspects of the same experience. Florensky's theory of knowledge is based on the Triunity of God through consubstantiality. It concerns primarily persons and God.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> PGT 65

<sup>119</sup> PGT 235

<sup>120</sup> PGT 42–45, 56, 60

Knowing is a real going out of the knower out of himself, or (what is the same thing) a real going of what is known into the knower, real unification of the knower and what is known. That is the fundamental and characteristic proposition of Russian, and in general, of all Eastern philosophy...the heart and soul of this "going out of oneself" is the act of faith in the religious sense, in the Orthodox sense, for the true going out is precisely faith.<sup>121</sup>

This quotation makes a claim about how knowledge is perceived in Russian and all Eastern philosophy. However Florensky does not offer examples to support his argument. Florensky's quotation should be seen within the context of Russian religious philosophy, which opposes Western philosophy, such as Cartesianism and Kantianism.<sup>122</sup> Florensky is not presenting a scientific theory of knowledge. He is discussing mystical union within Eastern mystical theology. Florensky's conception of knowledge and faith is similar to the love, which Pseudo-Dionysios discusses regarding Paul. According to Stang, Pseudo-Dionysios regards Paul as an example of ecstatic and erotic love.<sup>123</sup> Pseudo-Dionysios writes:

This is why the great Paul, swept along by his yearning for God and seized of its ecstatic power, had this inspired word to say: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me." Paul was truly a lover and, as he says, he was beside himself for God, possessing not his own life but the life of the One for whom he yearned, as exceptionally beloved.<sup>124</sup>

According to Stang, Pseudo-Dionysios attempts to explain that Paul becomes open for the indwelling of Christ by going beside of himself. This enables Christ to enter Paul.<sup>125</sup> Perl writes that God's self-abandonment as ecstasy takes place in the erotic acquisition of a being. God exists only in the being of others. Perl writes that Pseudo-Dionysios sees no distinction between "eros" and "agape" and "procession" and "reversion".<sup>126</sup>

Florensky does not make explicit references to eros or ecstasy. However, there is a clear similarity between Pseudo-Dionysios and Florensky concerning knowledge and faith. It is unclear why Florensky does not mention Pseudo-Dionysios.

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<sup>121</sup> PGT 55

<sup>122</sup> The Slavophile philosophers Kireevsky, Khomyakov and also Soloviev opposed Western philosophy. Slesinsky 1984, 54-62

<sup>123</sup> Stang 2009, 17-18

<sup>124</sup> DN 4:13 (712A)

<sup>125</sup> Stang 2009, 18, also DN 4:12 (709B)

<sup>126</sup> Perl 2007, 47-48

According to Florensky, knowledge as love is metaphysical presence of another, which demands openness for another. Love reveals the innermost being of a person. Love has an aesthetic dimension: "...perceived in me by another, my knowledge of God is love of the one who perceives. Contemplated objectively, by a third, love of another is beauty."

According to Florensky, also faith demands opening oneself to another, namely God. Faith is experiencing the presence of God. This experience can also be called love. He regards knowledge of God to take place also through knowledge of a spiritual person. The observation of two persons knowing each other (loving each other) unites the observer into the dyad to form a triad. He sees that two are always in the presence of a third. The third can become the beginning for a new dyad, which becomes a triad through the presence of the Spirit.<sup>127</sup> Through love a person can reform him/herself. Love summons a person to deny his/her ego and become open for the other person. Love also lifts a person towards God and enables him/her to see the creation as God's gift.

Florensky's metaphysics of love is rooted in the mystical theology of the Eastern Church. According to Florensky, true knowledge is accomplished through union with another person or God. It is an experience of love, which is possible only through grace. The following chapter discusses the relationship between friendship and knowledge of God.

## **7.2. Ascesis, Friendship and the Church**

Florensky regards friendship and ascetism as paths towards knowledge of God. Ascesis which seeks union with God also seeks union with another person on a spiritual level.

The spiritual activity in which and by which knowledge of the Pillar and Ground of the Truth is given is love. This love is full of grace, manifested only in a purified consciousness. It can only be attained by long (O how long!) ascesis.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> PGT 68–69

<sup>128</sup> PGT 285

Florensky regards loving relations between two people to establish a metaphysical union with God. Only love, which is established by grace through a practice of self-rejection, is true love. Spiritual unity with another person forms a basic element of the Church.

The mystical union of two is a condition of knowledge and therefore of the appearance of the Spirit of Truth that gives this knowledge. Together with the subordination of creation to God-given inner laws, and with the fullness of chastity, this unity corresponds to the coming of the Kingdom of God (i.e. of the Holy Spirit) and the spiritualization of all creation.<sup>129</sup>

Florensky sees the spiritual person as existing in union with the creation and God. Florensky regards the Orthodox Church to be the context for real knowledge of God. Real knowledge of God is founded on the unity of the persons of the Trinity. The human person is called into union with God through participation in the life of the Church. It is a way of self-denial and love for another. To love another person is to love the image of God in him/her. Love is a continuous process towards the likeness of God, which is enabled by the Trinity. According to Florensky, the process of becoming the likeness of God remains incomplete in this life.

Knowing me as His creation, loving me through the Son as His "image", as His son, rejoicing in me in the Holy Spirit as His "likeness," God actively knows, loves and rejoices in me, for I am given to Him. Here, the source of knowledge, love, and joy is God Himself. But my knowledge of God, my love of God and my joy in God are passive, because God is only partly given to me and can be given only to the extent of my God-likeness.<sup>130</sup>

He maintains that two people form a basic structure in a Christian community. He explains that in a Christian marriage man and woman build each other spiritually. Also the apostles who travelled in pairs express the communal structure of the Church. According to Florensky, friendship is essential for spiritual growth. Friends support each other and act as mirrors. God's grace can re-establish the image of God, which is reflected in the body, deeds and words. The image of God is not an independent individual. He/she is a member of the Church and therefore participates in the Body of Christ. Friendship forms a spiritual unity between two people, which he also

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<sup>129</sup> PGT 308

<sup>130</sup> PGT 56

calls consubstantiality (homoousia). Friendship and love express the consubstantiality of the creation with God.<sup>131</sup>

Florensky contends that love for God demands obedience to His will. God's will seeks what is good for the human being and the creation. God's love can be imitated by seeking what is good for another person. He regards giving one's life for a friend as the highest form of agapic love. To let go of one's own interests for the good of another can be motivated by grace through which a person participates in the Trinity.<sup>132</sup>

Florensky stresses the unity of reason and experience. God is the most perfect being, who exists as Trinity. To know God demands union with God. To know God is also conforming to His will through self-denial. Spiritual knowledge of God can be experienced in the Church, for example in the Eucharist.<sup>133</sup> Florensky considers God as love, which can be experienced by knowing another person and the creation. The Church is the context through which knowledge of God is acquired. Initially all good flows from God to the creation through his love.

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<sup>131</sup> PGT 302–303, 314, 329

<sup>132</sup> PGT 326–327

<sup>133</sup> PGT 296, 316–318

## 8. KNOWLEDGE OF GOD IN RAHNER

### 8.1. God as Being

Heidegger brought "being" to the focus of modern philosophy. According to Heidegger human beings wonder why is there something when there could be nothing at all. He claimed that the question about being is the most fundamental question in philosophy. According to Kerr, Heidegger wanted to rediscover the ancient Greek concept of "being", which the Church Fathers and the Scholastics had Christianized by associating it with God. Heidegger did not want to define being neither as God nor as the source and destiny of existence.<sup>134</sup>

Also Rahner regarded the question about being to be constitutive for the human being. He writes:

...the question about being in its totality is the only question from which he cannot turn away, which he must ask if he wants to be at all, because only in this question is being in its totality (and so his own also) given to him, and this only as something questionable.<sup>135</sup>

Thomas Aquinas considers "He Who Is" as the most proper name of God.<sup>136</sup> Rahner makes a Thomistic distinction between "ens", "ens commune" and "esse". "Ens" designates real being. "Ens commune" designates common being, which is abstracted from real beings. It is a conception lacking determinations. "Esse" on the other hand designates God as the Absolute Being, who exists as the ground of all being. "Esse" is the innermost of in every existent. It is "the actuality of everything" producing all possible determinations. Rahner says that ultimately human knowledge attains towards being (esse), which is God.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Kerr, 2002, p. 88–89 According to Sheehan, Rahner followed Heidegger's lectures on German philosophy and metaphysics between 1934–1938. At the same time he was writing his dissertation, which was published as *Geist im Welt* (1939). According to Sheehan, Rahner deleted two references to Heidegger in the second edition of *Hörer des Wortes* (1963). Sheehan 1987, 5–6.

<sup>135</sup> SW 58

<sup>136</sup> ST 1.13.11

<sup>137</sup> SW 167, 174, 176, 390–391, 406

Rahner regards God as the Absolute Being (esse). However, Pseudo-Dionysios considers God as beyond being: "He doth not possess Being, but Being possesses Him; He is the Eternity, the Beginning, and the Measure of Existence, being anterior to Essence and essential Existence and Eternity, because He is the Creative Beginning, Middle, and End of all things." DN V, 101 (DN 824A)

According to Rahner, the creation expresses esse in a limited and determined way. Esse reveals itself to human beings in the objects of knowledge analogously. Esse as the fullness of being is never apprehended as an object. God (esse) remains a mystery. Esse is co-affirmed in all knowledge unthematically. God remains separate from the creation, yet the creation is totally dependent on Him (esse).<sup>138</sup>

Rahner explains that God's creative act does not include a receiver. Creation is "an immanent action of God" and "the free self-realization of God Himself", which remains completely in God. Rahner explains that God does not cause the creation in a way which would perfect His essence. The relation between God and the creation is not equivocal but instead analogical.<sup>139</sup>

Rahner says that the mind is constantly open to the transcendent God. He also claims that God cannot be known as an object in the world. Rahner denies the possibility of gaining immediate knowledge of God through the intellect. God is not an object of knowledge. However, God is the precondition for human knowledge.<sup>140</sup>

The God of Christianity has revealed Himself by becoming visible and hearable. He has the face and voice of Jesus Christ. Rahner, on the other hand, only approaches the subject of God's revelation. He practices natural theology, which had been defined by the teachings of the First Vatican Council. The council taught that certain knowledge of God is possible through the natural light of human reason from created things.<sup>141</sup> This knowledge is prior to God's revelation.

According to von Balthasar, the First Vatican Council does not define the content of natural knowledge of God. Neither does the council explain if it is discussing the fallen nature or nature as God intended. The council does not explain if it is talking about "pure nature", which is a hypothetical model or "concrete nature", which is nature as it is. According to von Balthasar, the Council simply teaches that the human being has a capacity to gain certain knowledge of God from created things.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> SW 179, 181

<sup>139</sup> SW 339,358, 360

<sup>140</sup> SW 219–220, 226

<sup>141</sup> Dei Filius Chapter II

<sup>142</sup> von Balthazar 1992, 304

Natural theology knows God through His effects in nature. In Rahner's philosophy God's Trinitarian nature remains hidden. In the works *Spirit in the World* and *Hearer's of the Word* Rahner remains a philosopher, who asks about being. Later in life Rahner criticized theology, which does not take into account the Trinitarian nature of God. Rahner criticized the distinction, which Thomas made between God as One and God as Trinity. Rahner saw that an emphasis on the oneness of God lacks what is essential in Christianity, namely the incarnation and the Triune God.<sup>143</sup> Kerr explains that Vladimir Lossky criticized Thomas Aquinas for a similar reason.<sup>144</sup>

It is reasonable to ask why Rahner does not discuss God's revelation in Jesus Christ. He follows the Roman Catholic tradition, which makes a distinction between natural theology (philosophy) and theology of revelation. In *Hearer's of the Word* he denies that the task of philosophy of religion is to establish a natural religion or to define the content of God's revelation. His philosophy makes an argument for the possibility of God's revelation, which he defines as "the free personal self-manifestation of a Divine Thou". Humans have a potential to hear God's message. The message cannot be anything which one cannot comprehend. God uses human reality to communicate Himself. Human senses are necessary for receiving God's message which takes place in the world. If and when God decides to reveal Himself it will not be anything totally alien to humans.<sup>145</sup>

Kerr explains that Karl Barth regarded natural theology based on the analogy of being as erroneous. He saw it as contradicting God's revelation. He regarded God as totally different from the created being.<sup>146</sup> Rahner was aware of Barth's stance. He argues that the task of philosophy of religion is to show that the human being has "a positive openness" for a possible revelation of God. He claims that he is not constructing a natural knowledge of God.<sup>147</sup> It seems that Rahner sees a potential continuity between human nature and grace. In other words human nature becomes perfected by

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<sup>143</sup> Rahner 2001, 15–21

Kerr claims that Thomas' emphasis on the oneness of God was directed against the dualism of the Cathars. Kerr 2002, 39–40

<sup>144</sup> Kerr 2002, 182–183, 237–238

<sup>145</sup> HW 8, 152

<sup>146</sup> Kerr 2002, 35–37

<sup>147</sup> HW 19

grace.<sup>148</sup> Expressed in Thomistic terms, ultimately the human being is perfected through a union with God in "the beatific vision".<sup>149</sup>

Rahner argues that even if God decides to remain silent, He is present in the creation in a concealed way. He is the ground of existence and the ground of knowledge.

For to know God as the ground of the existent does not mean: to know that God (as already known beforehand) is the ground of the thing, but: to know that the ground, already and always opened simultaneously in knowing the existent as being, is the Absolute Being, that is, God, and thus to know God for the first time.<sup>150</sup>

Rahner calls God "the ground of being", which implies that He sustains the existence of the creation. God creates out of free will. He is not determined nor bound by the the creation. God as the Absolute Being and the ground of being acts out of love. God as the origin and ultimate destiny of the creation is not distant from it. He is waiting to be discovered in the creation. Rahner's philosophy brings the human being to where he/she already is. The human being is a spirit in a body, who has to make his/her way towards God with limited capacities. God responds to the human search for God, because He loves what He creates.

Thus the contingent is understood in God's love and only in it; the finite contingent being becomes luminous in God's free love for self and for what God freely creates.<sup>151</sup>

Natural knowledge of God acquired through the creation reveals God in a limited way. The contingent acquires its meaning through God's voluntary act to create. This tells about God as a free being, who pursues a loving relation with His creation. The human being, in turn, has the potential to listen to God.

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<sup>148</sup> Augustine writes: "For it is His image in this very point, that it is capable of Him, and can be partaker of Him; which so great good is only made possible by its being His image". *On the Trinity* XIV:8., Thomas writes: "Since therefore grace does not destroy nature but perfects it, natural reason should minister to faith as the natural bent of the will ministers to charity." ST 1.1.8.2.

<sup>149</sup> SW 87

<sup>150</sup> SW 393

Rahner's stance is similar to that of Pseudo-Dionysios, who regards the creation as an appearance of God (theophany) without identifying it with God (monism) Perl 2007 33–34.

<sup>151</sup> HW 81

## 8.2. Transcendental Experience

According to Rahner, the study of the constitution of human knowledge gives answers about God. He calls this a "transcendental investigation". This term originates in the thought of Kant. Kant wanted to determine the boundaries of human knowledge concerning metaphysical beings. Copleston explains that Kant investigated the a priori conditions, which are necessary for knowledge of the world. For example Kant regarded the conception of space, time and causality to exist in the mind prior to any knowledge based on sensual experience. These a priori categories shape human knowledge of objects in such a way, which makes it impossible to say what things-in-themselves are. According to Kant, both things-in-themselves and metaphysical realities are inaccessible to the human being. The mind does not know anything, which is not received through the senses. Kant persisted that analogies do not constitute knowledge of God. Kant maintains that the idea of an absolute being does not imply that such a being exists.<sup>152</sup>

Fiorenza explains that Rahner's philosophy can be regarded as a response to Kantianism, which denies the possibility of traditional metaphysics.<sup>153</sup> According to Mannermaa, Rahner was influenced by Maréchal who pursued to integrate Kant's transcendental method with Thomism. According to Maréchal, the a priori determination of perception in the subject was already acknowledged by Aristotle and Thomas, which is why their method for affirming an object could be transposed into Kant's method (and vice versa). Rahner makes a transcendental investigation which asks:

What is the transcendental condition that enables the knowing subject to discover that the quiddity is unlimited, although it is experienced as the quiddity of one single individual?<sup>154</sup>

Rahner studies the a priori conditions, which are necessary for knowing sensual objects.<sup>155</sup> However, his conclusions differ from those of Kant. He finds out that the mind perceives a thing, which has been abstracted from the flow of sensual information. The mind turns to the abstracted image in order to see it as an object (conversio

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<sup>152</sup> Copleston 1960, 270–271, 296

<sup>153</sup> SW Introduction by Fiorenza, xliii–xlv

<sup>154</sup> HW 46

<sup>155</sup> Mannermaa 1971, 13–14

ad phantasma). According to Rahner, the mind has a conception of space, time, quantity and mobility. He maintains that the mind has also an a priori power, which pre-apprehends God in everything it knows.<sup>156</sup> Having established the a priori conditions for knowledge Rahner attempts to define the boundaries of human knowing. He points out that the mind perceives all objects as deprived of the fullness of being. The mind perceives finite beings in the anticipation of the infinite being. The ultimate object of human knowing is the infinite being.<sup>157</sup>

For Rahner the transcendental experience is the ability to transcend time and space. This experience is simultaneously the a priori condition for knowing anything at all. In the act of knowing objects one transcends them. One looks beyond them towards the infinite.<sup>158</sup> Rahner writes:

This transcending apprehension of further possibilities, through which the form possessed in concretion in sensibility is apprehended as limited and so is abstracted, we call pre-apprehension ("Vorgriff").<sup>159</sup>

Kilby criticizes Rahner's claim that to be able to question about being or to be able to know objects, demands a transcendental experience, which Rahner calls a "pre-apprehension". According to Rahner, to be able to ask about being is possible only because one is in the presence of the absolute being (God). Human knowledge is preconditioned by metaphysics. Kilby claims that such an argument would demand that all other explanations for human knowledge could be cancelled out. However, Rahner does not offer alternative explanations, which he could counter argue.<sup>160</sup>

Kilby confronts Rahner by using Coreth's method of retorsion. Retorsion is a method for validating an argument by demonstrating the self-contradiction in the counter argument. According to Rahner, all judgements, whether true or false, are possible only because one transcends particular objects and sees them in the light of the totality of being. According to Kilby, to argue against the transcendental experience as a precondition for judgements is *not* self-contradictory. This is because there is no certainty that the transcendental experience is the pre-condition for making

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<sup>156</sup> HW 47–51

<sup>157</sup> Kilby 2004, 32–38

<sup>158</sup> Kilby 2004, 34

<sup>159</sup> SW 142

<sup>160</sup> Kilby 2004, 47

judgements.<sup>161</sup> There are also other theories for how judgements are established. Science investigates these questions through natural theories, which do not take into account the transcendental experience as openness to the absolute being (esse).

In Rahner's thought human intelligence is not just logic, which can be reproduced by computers. It includes a desire towards the transcendent God and the pursuit to know Him through the things, which one experiences. The human being is free to love and receive God's grace. The ability to stand between God and the creation is a unique human characteristic. Rahner's metaphysics of knowledge, which considers the transcendental experience as the pre-condition for knowledge of the world, might be able to contribute to the development of cognitive science (for example). The understanding of the human being as a spirit in a body would demand the incorporation of metaphysics with science.

### **8.3. Pre-apprehension of Being**

According to Rahner, God is the ultimate question for the human being. This question reaches into metaphysics.<sup>162</sup> According to Sheehan, Heidegger regarded theistic answers to the question about being as an attempt to avoid the question. For him being is a mystery without references to God.<sup>163</sup> Rahner on the other hand follows Thomas who says that the object of metaphysics is common being (ens commune). In Thomistic philosophy common being (ens commune) and God (esse) remain distinct. In Thomistic philosophy the principle behind common being is God.<sup>164</sup> The distinction between "esse" and "ens commune" secures the total transcendence of God for philosophical inquiries. The human mind cannot reach the Absolute Being in its current state. God remains an open question despite the development of science and technology.

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<sup>161</sup> Kilby 2004, 47

<sup>162</sup> SW 57–59

<sup>163</sup> Sheehan 1987, 272–317

<sup>164</sup> SW 388–389

According to Rahner, Thomas considers metaphysical knowledge to depend on three factors: excess comparison and removal.<sup>165</sup> The mind has an ability to compare a sensual object and a metaphysical object (comparison). The mind imagines a metaphysical object by removing and negating the determinations of a sensed object (removal). This is possible because the mind already reaches beyond the physical order to the metaphysical through the excess. The excess is not an intellectual intuition of a metaphysical object.<sup>166</sup> It is openness to the absolute being (esse). Through this openness the mind is able to know objects of the world. This includes the ability to distinguish the truth about the world.<sup>167</sup>

Rahner maintains that the openness towards the absolute being (excessus) is a pre-apprehension of God.<sup>168</sup> The question remains as to what extent is natural knowledge of God possible given that God is not an object in the creation. He is an infinite being, who is not dependent on anything. The human being cannot grasp God. He/she can love Him and receive His love. Rahner maintains that in search of God one must turn to his/her experience of the world. Rahner maintains that God is present in knowledge, which is based on the experience of the world. However, God's presence is analogous.

...I only wanted to point out this Thomistic statement that the metaphysical and the material do not participate in a natural genus. (ST I, q.88, a.2, ad 4; q.66, a.2, ad 2; In Boeth de Trin. q.4, a.2, corp.; De Natura Generis cc. 6-7, 9, 14) A more thorough investigation of this point would show that the analogy of being in Thomas is not merely a construction designed to help towards the conceptual, negative definition of the essence of God, but already has its starting point where the experience of the world is transcended in a pre-apprehension through excessus and negation. In fact the concept of being is not first of all univocal, in order then to be expanded analogously afterwards, but as the form of the pre-apprehension it is analogous and becomes univocal in the conversion to the phantasm as the being of material things. The analogous is the ground of the univocal, and not vice versa: "Everything univocal is reduced to a first one which is not univocal but analogous, and this is being." (ST I, q.13, a.5, ad 1.)

Rahner contends that God and the human being exist in totally different orders. The concept of being is not the same (univocal) in God and the creation. If it was univocal God's being would be similar to the being of created beings. He does not say that

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<sup>165</sup> In ST 1.1. 7. Thomas refers to DN 1.

<sup>166</sup> SW 52-53

<sup>167</sup> SW 54

<sup>168</sup> SW 394, HW 59

God and the human being are equivocal. That would mean that their being has nothing in common. Instead Rahner maintains that God can be known through analogy. It means that there is something similar in God and other beings, but His difference exceeds his similarity with other beings. He maintains that God is present in the act of the mind transcending the particular objects of the world. To be able to see limited beings demands the Absolute Being, which is constantly present in all knowledge. Rahner claims that the mind is constantly open to the Absolute Being. This he identifies with "excessus" of Thomas. All beings share the concept of being. However, they receive their being from the first principle, which is God. God's being is analogous to created beings. However, God is not just an analogy. He is not just in the mind. He is the ground of being. He is pre-apprehended unconsciously in every object of knowledge. He is the Absolute Being who is present and absent at the same time. God's being is not the conclusion of analogy of being. God's being is the foundation for the quest for God.<sup>169</sup> In every act of knowing one is invoked to continue searching for God who, despite attempts, remains a mystery.

Rahner maintains that the pre-apprehension of being is not an "a priori" proof of God's existence. The pre-apprehension of being functions as a condition for knowing objects. Being itself can be known through negation in the form of objects.<sup>170</sup> One is aware of the limitedness of objects in the light of the absolute being. However, the absolute being is not an object of knowledge, which could be proven.

According to Rahner, one would not be asking about being if he/she did not have some prior knowledge of it. The question about being is present in every finite object of knowledge in the world. One is constantly looking ahead towards the absolute being, which is inaccessible. The absolute being, which Rahner identifies with God, resides from human perception and transcends all concepts, which are ascribed to Him. Rahner writes : "And so it remains true: the highest knowledge of God is the "darkness of ignorance."

Boersma maintains that one of the major achievements of the ressourcement movement was the retrieval of the Patristic thought of God as mystery. Boersma claims that this thought was influenced primarily by the thought of the Eastern Church Fat-

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<sup>169</sup> SW 402

<sup>170</sup> SW 180–181

hers.<sup>171</sup> Rahner's argument for the pre-apprehension of being regards God as a mystery. This way Rahner seems to approach the mystical theology of the East.

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<sup>171</sup> Boersma 2012, 160

## 9. KNOWLEDGE OF GOD IN FLORENSKY

### 9.1. Limits of Rationality

A chapter at the beginning of Florensky's book is named *Doubt*.<sup>172</sup> It confronts the skepticism and rationality, which has characterized Western philosophy after Descartes. He claims that the truths of reason without reference to experience do not offer knowledge of God. Florensky regards God as a real existing being. However, His existence cannot be proven through the methods of science. Science is based on knowledge through concepts. He claims that a living person, be it a human being or God, transcends all concepts. Conceptual knowledge concern only things.

Florensky begins his search for knowledge of God through doubt, which Descartes used to arrive in certainty that he exists (I think, therefore I am). Because Descartes did not trust his senses, he could not affirm that anything exists outside of his mind. Through reasoning Descartes became certain that God exists. For Descartes the proof of God's existence was based on a version of the ontological proof, which Anselm of Cantenbury formulated in the Middle Ages.<sup>173</sup> Descartes' ontological proof claims that a most perfect being has to exist, because in addition to having all perfect properties, his existence is his perfection. Descartes' proof of God is not based on sensual experience. It is founded on pure reason. Descartes relied on the truths of reason, for example mathematics.<sup>174</sup> In order to oppose Descartes, Florensky presents examples which demonstrate that the methods based on pure reason are limited concerning knowledge of the world and God.

According to Florensky, the absolute Truth is antinomical. Antinomies are mathematical, logical or theological truths, which contradict each other.<sup>175</sup> Florensky took the

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<sup>172</sup> PGT 14

<sup>173</sup> Anselm maintained that the greatest possible being must exist extra-mentally. Otherwise it would not be the greatest possible being. Copleston 1950, 166  
Rahner explains that Thomas Aquinas objected to Anselm of Cantenbury's ontological proof for the existence of God, because according to Thomas, knowledge attains towards being (esse). SW 160.

<sup>174</sup> Copleston 1957, 90–115

<sup>175</sup> PGT 121–123

idea of antinomy from Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and applied it to his own theory concerning knowledge of God.<sup>176</sup> Florensky's main example of antinomy is the dogma of the Trinity, which states that three persons exist as one substance.<sup>177</sup> He contends that knowledge of God must advance beyond conventional reason towards the supralogic of God:

The closer one is to God, the more distinct are the contradictions. In heavenly Jerusalem there are no contradictions. Here on Earth there are contradictions in everything; and they can be removed neither by social reorganization nor by philosophical argument.<sup>178</sup>

Florensky sees that human reason is not the highest faculty in the universe. Through faith one is able to see that a higher reason is behind the universe. This higher reason exists as Trinity, which one can know only by participating in Him. However, to reach the Trinity one must walk across a bridge from the land of reason to the land of faith. According to Florensky, there is no certainty that the bridge will withstand. The only way to know this is by crossing the bridge through faith.<sup>179</sup>

Florensky regards knowledge as a judgement of truth. To make a judgement of truth demands the unity of intuition and discursion. He presents three kinds of intuition.<sup>180</sup> He sees that the senses offer intuition of objects. Secondly the mind can achieve certain intuition of the self as a subject. This is reminiscent of Descartes' axiom "I think, therefore I am". Thirdly mystical intuition offers an experience of the unity of the subject and the object. Mysticism includes the pursuit of union with God. These three modes of intuition do not constitute knowledge unless they are reasonable to the mind. The Truth as intuition-discursion is a co-operation between the senses and reason.<sup>181</sup> Reason must be able to explain what is given through the senses or directly through the mind (intellectual intuition). This is reminiscent of the Thomistic definition of truth as "adequatio intellectus et rei".<sup>182</sup> It means that the truth is the conformity of the mind with a thing. For Thomas truth concerns being (*esse*). However, Flo-

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<sup>176</sup> PGT 114

<sup>177</sup> PGT 121

<sup>178</sup> PGT 117

<sup>179</sup> PGT 50–51

<sup>180</sup> PGT 21

<sup>181</sup> Pseudo-Dionysios also makes a distinction between discursion and intuition. DN 1 (588b), 5 (817B)

<sup>182</sup> ST 1:16

renskey does not seem to accept the Thomistic claim that the mind is empty without the images, which originate in a sensual experience. According to Slesinsky, Florensky considers intellectual intuition and mystical experience to constitute truth.<sup>183</sup>

Florensky explains that the rational human mind attempts to explain experiences through causality. To find the first cause, the foundation, is to arrive at a certain truth. This sort of approach can be applied to all events which have a cause within the creation. However, this does not apply to a mystical experience of God. God is the self-proving subject, which does not have an outside cause. God is the absolute Truth. He writes: "Essential knowing of the Truth, i.e. communion with the Truth itself, is therefore the real entering into the interior of the Divine Triunity."<sup>184</sup>

Knowledge of the Truth (God) is difficult to mediate to another person. Only God can prove himself. Without proof God remains an object of faith. Faith anticipates that it will become knowledge of God, an experience of a self-proving subject (intuition-discursion). Florensky does not regard faith as inferior to knowledge. Faith is already an experience of God through grace. Through faith one participates in eternity already in this life. Knowledge of God is more than thoughts. It is attained through His presence in faith.<sup>185</sup>

## **9.2. The Poet of Scientific Language**

According to Pyman, Florensky achieved a degree in mathematics prior to his theological studies. He was also fascinated by the developments in modern science.<sup>186</sup> He uses mathematical and scientific language in his philosophy, which gives the reader the impression that he is offering scientific arguments for the existence of God. For example he refers to "actual infinity", which is an innovation by the mathematician Georg Cantor.<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> Slesinsky 1984, 98

<sup>184</sup> PGT 56

<sup>185</sup> PGT 70

<sup>186</sup> Pyman 2010, 186–187

<sup>187</sup> Jonsson 2008, 342 ft. 71

Thus, if the Truth exists, it is real reasonableness and reasonable reality. It is finite infinity and infinite finitude or - to use a mathematical expression - actual infinity, the infinite conceived as integral Unity, as one Subject complete in itself. <sup>188</sup>

This quotation says "if the Truth exists", which reveals that Florensky is not attempting a proof for the existence of God. He is merely making an analogy between "actual infinity" and God. He attempts to make an appeal to reason for the existence of God by using scientific language. Further on he writes: "An infinite Unit is transcendental for human attainments".<sup>189</sup> Florensky's argumentation does not say anything that Pseudo-Dionysios and Thomas did not already say. They maintained that human reason can make analogies about God based on the creation. However, analogies cannot reach God's essence.<sup>190</sup>

Bronnikov writes that Florensky was influenced by Russian Symbolism. According to Bronnikov, he uses mathematical terminology but gives it a new meaning in his philosophy. He imagines metaphysical realities, which are beyond the reach of human capacities. In Florensky's thought a scientific term can be regarded as a symbol for science. By using scientific terms he is pursuing an symbolic integration of science with faith. This way Florensky attempts to explain for the modern person that faith and reason do not contradict.<sup>191</sup>

Florensky introduces a logical problem presented by Lewis Carroll to discuss contradictions between faith and rationality.<sup>192</sup> He explains that a rationalist considers contradictions in the Holy Scripture and the dogmas to prove their non-divine origin. However, a mystic, who is in a state of spiritual illumination, regards these contradictions to prove their divinity. A mystic can see "a higher unity" behind these contradictions.<sup>193</sup> Florensky's use of symbolic logic does not solve these contradictions. Ne-

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<sup>188</sup> PGT 33

<sup>189</sup> PGT 34

<sup>190</sup> ST 1.84.7. reply 3, DN chapter 1

<sup>191</sup> Bronnikov 2015, 92, 112–113

In this light Florensky's commitment to the development of science in the Soviet Union does not contradict with his religious conviction. However the Soviet state disapproved of his conviction. Pyman 2010, 129–130,162

<sup>192</sup> Florensky presents the logical problem as: "q implies r; but p implies that q implies not-r; what should be concluded from this?" PGT 355

<sup>193</sup> PGT 358

vertheless, through the use of symbolic logic he attempts to make an appeal to reason.<sup>194</sup>

### 9.3. God as Trinity

Florensky discusses how the human being can approach the question of God through rationality. He considers rationality to be incapable of reaching full knowledge of God. Human reason attempts to approach God through theoretical models, such as the Trinity. He acknowledges that the Trinity is problematic for the rational mind. In modern thought the identities of the subject and object remain distinct. However, ancient philosophy regarded knowledge as union of the knower with the known, which according to Florensky, is present in the concept of the Trinity.

He regards the Trinity as something that the Church Fathers discovered about the objects of the Christian faith. In the Council of Nicea (325) they resolved the question how the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are divine and co-exist as one God. According to Florensky the Church fathers did not deduce the Trinity through logic, because God is beyond the grasp of human logic. Florensky sees that the Trinitarian God can be approached only by the assistance of God through grace. Knowledge of the Trinity can be achieved only by participation in the Trinity itself. This takes place through the involvement of grace in a religious experience.

Generally truth is considered as something which can be affirmed through a chain of proof. The chain either continues to infinity or ends in a foundation. Florensky claims that the persons of the Trinity affirm each other. The chain of proof is interconnected within the Trinity, which is why God is called the self-proving subject and the Truth. He regards God as the Truth, who can be known as love. God as Truth remains incomprehensible for the rational human mind.

The Truth is a sun that illuminates both itself and the universe. Its abyss is the abyss of power, not of nothingness. The Truth is immobile motion and moving immobility. It is the unity of opposites, *coincidentia oppositorum*.<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> Gregory of Nyssa discusses science and theology in *On the Soul and the Resurrection*. Ephrem the Syrian practiced theology through poetry.

<sup>195</sup> PGT 33

Florensky is primarily interested in what constitutes the intra-Trinitarian relationship, which allows God to exist as one substance in three persons. He discusses the Greek term "homoousios", which is translated as consubstantiality. In the Nicene Creed it was a decisive term for describing the relationship of the Father with the Son. It attempts to express that Christ is not only similar with the Father. Instead He has the same essence with the Father. The persons of the Trinity exist as unity. However, they do not merge into each other to become one. God is not the One of Neo-Platonism, He is the Trinity of Christianity. Consubstantiality is the principle of true knowledge. Knowledge is union in a metaphysical sense. According to Florensky, love is the essence of God.

God would not be absolute love if He were love only for another, for the conditional, for the corruptible, for the world. For then God's love would depend on conditional being and would thus be accidental. That is, love is God's essence, His own nature and not only His providential relationship, which is proper to Him.<sup>196</sup>

Florensky's Trinitarian God seeks a relationship with the creation. It is a relationship based on free will and love, which manifested itself in Jesus Christ. The life of Christ is not a theme for Florensky. He only discusses how the love of Christ affects human relations. The ascetic and sacrificial love of Jesus serves as a prototype for humans. Only because God sent His Son into the world one can have a relationship with Him through the Spirit. According to Florensky, love is the power which brings one into an intimate contact with God.

From God's point of view, the reason of a creature is God's kenotic love for creation. Entering by an indescribable act (in which the ineffable humility of Divine love and the incomprehensible boldness of creaturely love touch each other and co-operate) into the life of the Divine Trinity...<sup>197</sup>

Florensky treats the Trinity as the foundation for true knowledge. Knowledge of God is attained through participation. By participating in the Trinity through faith one is in a disposition to know about God and the world.

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<sup>196</sup> PGT 54

<sup>197</sup> PGT 235

Slesinski explains that the Orthodox theologian Georgy Florovsky criticized Florensky for disregarding the incarnation in his writings.<sup>198</sup> It seems that Florovsky did not take into account Florensky's theory of Sophia, which is founded on the incarnate Word of God (Wisdom). The next chapter discusses Sophia, which attempts to explain the relationship between the creation and God through the personification of God's Wisdom.

#### **9.4. Sophia**

Florensky considers truth, good and beauty in the creation to originate in God's Wisdom (Sophia). His conviction is that the creation is intended for union with God. The relationship is based on consubstantiality, which is an intimate union of the divine with the creation. However, this is not possible for the creation, which transgresses against God. Sophia is the name for the creation, which is obedient to God and which resonates with His reason.<sup>199</sup>

Florensky contends that God created the world out of nothing. The creation happened through the Wisdom of God (Sophia). Sophia as a mediating element between God and the Creation is present in different philosophical systems. For example in the Jewish Kabbalah God's Wisdom is personified as a female. Pseudo-Dionysios regarded Wisdom (Sophia) as a name of God. He regards God as Wisdom who transcends all created wisdom.<sup>200</sup> Florensky describes Sophia as the fourth hypostasis in God.<sup>201</sup> This claim has been regarded theologically controversial. Some consider it as defying the dogma of the Trinity. However, Florensky regards Sophia as a created hypostasis and therefore not a part of God's essence. He regards Sophia as the creation which seeks a relationship with God. She is the unfallen nature of the creation. Simultaneously the creation has a fallen nature which revolts against God. Sin causes destruction and fragmentation in the creation.<sup>202</sup> The re-uniting and sanctifying element in the creation is Sophia. He regards Mary, the Mother of God, as representing huma-

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<sup>198</sup> Slesinski 1984, 125n

<sup>199</sup> PGT 252–253

<sup>200</sup> DN 7:1 (865B)

<sup>201</sup> PGT 252

<sup>202</sup> PGT 126–129

nity, which submits to the will of God. Through her humanity began its return to God. The return towards God takes place through the Church. The Church draws the whole creation back to God through a process of deification. This process is enabled by the co-operation of the human being with God's grace. Florensky associates the Word of God (Jesus Christ), the Church, Mary, and Sophia with the creation as it was intended by God. God's incarnation resulted in an intimate union of God with the creation.<sup>203</sup> Humanity is holy to the extent that it participates in the sanctifying power of Jesus Christ. This is the function of the Church. Humanity is a sinner to the extent that it revolts against God. The consequence of sin is death and destruction.

I repeat again and will not tire of repeating that Christian ascetism and the absolute valuation of creation, virginity and the bearing of spirit, and the knowledge of Divine Wisdom and love of the body, asceticism and knowledge of absolute Truth, the distancing of oneself from corruption and love are antinomic sides of one and the same spiritual life...<sup>204</sup>

Orthodox theology teaches that God created the world through His Wisdom, which is personified as Sophia and eventually in the New Testament as the second person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ (Logos). Orthodox theology teaches that the first man Adam fell into sin and as a consequence the whole creation suffers. In this light it is difficult to understand Florensky's claim, that the creation has an unfallen dimension, which is called Sophia. Florensky associates Sophia with Mary, who was obedient to God, which enabled God to become man in Christ. He associates Mary with purity and virginity. Her special role was treated already by the Church Fathers. According to Louth, the Fall of Adam is interpreted differently in the East and the West, which is why the human nature is conceived differently in these traditions.<sup>205</sup> Florensky does not discuss Mary's human nature. Mary initiated a process by which the creation began a return to God. She gave birth to the Son of God, in whom human nature was restored in order to be united with God. Through Mary God carried out His plan to restore the union between the Divine and the creation.

...the Virgin in the strict sense of the word is Mary, Virgin full of grace, filled with grace (Luke 1:28) by the Holy Spirit, Full of His gifts, and, as such, She is the

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<sup>203</sup> PGT 237, 253

The council of Chalcedon teaches that Jesus Christ has a human and a divine nature. The redemption of the creation demands that the divine participates in the creation. Kelly 1976, 339-340

<sup>204</sup> PGT 255

<sup>205</sup> Louth 2013, 73

True Church of God, the True Body of Christ. The body of Christ came out of her, after all.<sup>206</sup>

Florensky's sophiology is a combination of Biblical and patristic teachings. It contends that participation in God's Wisdom means pursuing a life of holiness, which includes love for God and for the creation. It also means searching for reason in created beings, which originates in Sophia.<sup>207</sup>

According to Louth, Sophia is considered suspicious by many Orthodox theologians.<sup>208</sup> Pyman explains that an Orthodox synod accused Florensky's friend Sergei Bulgakov of heresy for his sophiological writings in 1935.<sup>209</sup> In this light Florensky's decision to exclude the chapter on Sophia in his master's thesis, is understandable. However, the chapter was included in his book *The Pillar and ground of the Truth*.

Slesinsky sees two theological dangers in Florensky's theory of Sophia: gnosticism and pantheism. He explains that gnostic theories about the creation posit an intermediary being between God and the creation. However, Florensky does not regard Sophia as an intermediary. He identifies Sophia with the creation, which has been created out of nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*). The accusation of pantheism is also noteworthy. Pantheistic theories about the creation identify God with the creation to an extent that they become interdependent. According to Slesinsky, a theory of analogy in Florensky's philosophy would have cleared it of any accusations of pantheism. Florensky distinguishes between Divine Sophia, which is God's wisdom and created Sophia, which is created wisdom. He writes: "One in God, she is multiple in creation".<sup>210</sup>

If their relationship is understood to be analogous it means that propositions concerning Divine Wisdom on the basis of the created wisdom apply imperfectly to the former. Created beings participate in God's being only analogously. This implies that God remains transcendent and absolutely free in His relation with the creation.

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<sup>206</sup> PGT 253

<sup>207</sup> Milbank has brought Sophia into Western theological discourse. See Milbank 2009.

<sup>208</sup> Louth 2013, 44

<sup>209</sup> Pyman 2010, 254

<sup>210</sup> PGT 239

According to Slesinsky, this is the way Florensky's intended Sophia to be understood.<sup>211</sup>

In Florensky's sophiological system God seeks a relation with the creation through His Wisdom, which emanates into the creation and pulls it back into Himself. The creation responds to God's Wisdom through participation. Sophia is Jesus Christ, Mary and the Church. It is present in all created beings, which resonate with God's Wisdom.

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<sup>211</sup> Slesinky 1984, 193–194, 206–209

## **10. CONCLUSION**

The aim of this thesis is to find out to what extent natural knowledge of God is possible in the philosophy of Rahner and Florensky. The study has limited the sources to just one book by Florensky and two books by Rahner. These books were written in the early years of their academic careers. Florensky's book was published more than twenty five years prior to Rahner's books. Rahner constructs his philosophy through the analogy of being, which is based on the unity of being and knowing. Florensky, in turn, regards spiritual knowledge about truth, good and beauty in the creation to refer to God. In Rahner's and Florensky's thought the human being longs for his/her creator. He/she anticipates a response from God, which comes as grace.

### **10.1. Rahner**

Rahner was a contemporary of De Lubac and Lossky. Rahner and De Lubac participated in the ressourcement movement, which sought to study the original writings of the Church Fathers and the Scholastics. The beginning of the thesis presented De Lubac's conception of human nature. De Lubac contends that the human being looks beyond the creation towards God. Human nature becomes perfected through a supernatural gift, which is called grace. Grace is not a natural determination of nature. However, human nature itself is a gift and intended for a supernatural destiny. De Lubac maintained that according to Thomas Aquinas, the human being has a natural desire for the Beatific vision. This thought reflects the patristic thought of the human being as image of God desiring the likeness of God, which is also present in Rahner's and Florensky's philosophy.

Rahner regards the human being as someone who asks about being. He/she would not ask about being if he/she did not have a prior knowledge of it. He uses the analogy of being to explain that being and knowing form a perfect unity in God. The created being desires to become like God through self-presence. The human being gains self-presence by knowing things outside of him/herself. Knowledge of the world offers natural knowledge of God, because He, as the creator and sustainer of the creation, is known for the first time through the objects of the world. However, God is not identical with the creation. The relationship between God and the creation is analogical.

Analogical knowledge of God does not reach God as He is (esse). The similarity between God and a created being is exceeded by a greater dissimilarity. God remains transcendent for human nature.

Rahner regards natural knowledge of God to be possible, because the human being has access to the reality, which is outside of him/herself. The human intellect is able to make judgements about the truth, which concern being. The human intellect is empty without images which it can observe. Knowledge is attained only by receiving images through the senses. Knowledge includes three moments, which are not in temporal order: sensuality, abstraction and return to the phantasm. When the mind observes an object these moments have already taken place. In the image the universal species, which the mind possesses, is actualized and seen for the first time. God as the absolute being is the ultimate goal of human knowledge. However, in the Beatific Vision God Himself is present in the human intellect instead of the species.

Rahner regards the creation as grace, because God could have decided not to create. He understands the creation as an expression of God's love. The right order of love means that the human being sees God as the ultimate source and object of love. He regards asceticism as reassessment of one's desires. By loving God and the creation one participates in God's love. The creation is the place where one must look for God. Rahner regards God as an ever receding mystery, who can be experienced through love. Rahner's understanding of God as mystery links him with the ressourcement movement and the mystical theology of the East and the West.

Rahner regards the transcendental experience as a precondition for human knowledge. Every object of knowledge is considered limited with respect to the absolute being, which is pre-apprehended in all knowing. The pre-apprehension of being does not offer objective knowledge of God. It is the light which enables one to gain knowledge of the creation.

Even though the transcendental experience cannot be proven, Rahner offers an alternative to natural explanations for human consciousness and cognition. A dialogue between the metaphysics of knowledge and natural science could contribute to the understanding of human intelligence.

Rahner's philosophy is not an alternative to theology. He builds a philosophical foundation for the possibility of the human being receiving God's revelation. According to Rahner, God's revelation in Jesus Christ establishes human self-presence. Through Christ one can find out who he/she really is. This thought is similar to the notion of human being as an image of God, who desires the likeness of God.

## **10.2. Florensky**

Florensky published his book more than twenty five years prior to Rahner. He explains the relationship between God and the creation in terms of love, which is reminiscent of the Dionysian understanding of ecstatic and erotic love. However, Florensky does not refer to Pseudo-Dionysios in his treatment of love. His influence in Florensky's thought should be further studied.

Florensky's opposition towards Western rationalism is a characteristic of Russian religious thought. He contends that reality includes dimensions, which the human reason can not conceive. According to Florensky, the human being is unable to achieve full knowledge of the Truth. He sees knowledge of the Truth as an antinomy. In other words contradictory truths are united in God. He claims that God is supralogical and therefore beyond human reason. Florensky opposes a strict separation of subject and object, which characterizes modern philosophy. His epistemology is based on the conception of knowledge as the knower going out of oneself into the known or (the same thing) the known coming into the knower. A similar conception is present in the thought of Pseudo-Dionysios also. According to Florensky, spiritual knowledge concerns persons instead of things. He opposes a Cartesian conception of knowledge, which is based on pure reason without reference to the world. According to Florensky, knowledge of the Truth is founded on the unity of intuition and discursion. Truth is the correlation of reason with sensual, mystical or intellectual experience.

Florensky regards the creation as a unity. However, sin causes fragmentation in the creation. Sophia is the name for the creation, which seeks God-likeness. Florensky identifies Sophia with the Mother of God, God's Word and the Church. Through Sophia the creation expresses truth, good and beauty, which is perfected in God. Florensky regards the Church as the path towards knowledge of God. It represents the unity

of the creation. Through grace one acquires a disposition to perceive the creation as a reflection of God's love. Without the spiritual senses, true knowledge of God nor of the creation is possible.

Florensky regards friendship necessary for spiritual life. Through friendship and asceticism the person as image of God can pursue the likeness of God. This demands a loving disposition towards the creation. Asceticism demands self-denial and openness towards the other. It includes faith, through which one participates in the Trinity. Faith is a gift, which can not be demanded. In other words it is an act of grace.

Florensky's philosophy makes an appeal to reason and sensual experience. He maintains that the human being is unable to know God in his/her natural state. Florensky regards the religious experience to offer knowledge of God. Only through faith one becomes a participant in the Trinity. Through participation in the Trinity human reason and the senses offer spiritual knowledge.

The following subchapter presents the commonalities and differences between Rahner's and Florensky's understanding of natural knowledge of God.

### **10.3. Natural Knowledge of God in Rahner and Florensky**

Both Rahner and Florensky consider the creation to have come into existence out of nothing. The creation is a free act of God, which can be called grace and love. Both Rahner and Florensky regard the human being to seek union with God, which is accomplished through desire and self-offer.

The epistemological problem concerning a gap between the subject and object is not relevant in Rahner's and Florensky's theory of knowledge. Rahner considers knowledge of objects to be founded on the unity of the knower with the known. His theory of knowledge is founded on the conception of the human being as spirit in a body, who is constantly open for the absolute being.

Florensky's epistemology concerns mystical knowledge of God and of another person, which is based on the unity of the knower with the known. According to Flo-

rensky, knowledge of things and concepts is inferior to knowledge of God and persons.

They both consider knowledge of the world to be possible through natural human reason. Both Rahner and Florensky present a theory of truth. According to Rahner, truth is another name for being. Whatever exists is true. All beings participate in the being of God analogically. Florensky, in turn, regards reason combined with the intellectual intuition, the sensual intuition or mystical union to constitute truth. Whereas Rahner maintains that knowledge relies on the sensual experience, Florensky considers also intellectual intuition and mystical union to constitute knowledge. He considers the absolute Truth (God) as an antinomy. He cannot be grasped by human reason. They both regard the essence of God to remain outside the reach of the human being's natural capacities.

Rahner's develops an argument for natural knowledge of God. According to Rahner, the creation offers natural knowledge of God, because He is first known in the created things. This knowledge can be achieved through the prioritization of God over created objects. He regards the creation as an expressions of God's love. Human love towards God and the creation is a reflection of God's love.

Rahner sees an analogical relationship between the Absolute Being and the created being. He argues that the human being has the potential to listen to the Word of God. This is possible through the pre-apprehension of being. God is pre-apprehended in all knowledge. The pre-apprehension of being is not a proof for the existence of God. God remains a mystery for the human being in his/her natural state. Rahner regards God's Word, that is, Jesus Christ, as the answer to human aspiration for self-presence. However, God's revelation in Jesus Christ is an act of grace, therefore beyond natural knowledge of God.

Florensky considers the human being to long for God-likeness. Florensky explains the relations between the creation and God through the theory of Sophia. Florensky regards the created Sophia to participate in Divine Sophia analogically. Truth, good and beauty in the creation express Sophia. Through faith the creation can be perceived as unity, which pursues union with God. Through the use of the spiritual senses the Divine can be perceived in the creation. Florensky's philosophy considers God as

Trinity. It takes into account God's revelation in Jesus Christ. Florensky is concerned with the deification of the creation through grace.

Florensky regards friendship to exemplify the unity of the creation. Friendship and ascesis are paths towards deification. To know God is to unite with Him in a mystical experience. He regards this union as an experience of love. Without the presence of grace a person and God remain a mystery for the human being. Natural human reason and the senses cannot reach knowledge of a person or God. Florensky follows the patristic teaching of the human being as an image of God seeking the likeness of God.

Both Rahner and Florensky consider God as free and independent from His creation. Their main difference is Rahner's exclusion of God's revelation in his philosophy, which subsequently, does not permit the treatment of the Trinity. Florensky, in turn, includes God's revelation in Jesus Christ, which allows and him to treat the persons of the Trinity. This enables him to present a spiritual world view.

To sum up, Rahner and Florensky practice philosophy of religion from different backgrounds. Rahner's approach is based on the teachings of the the First Vatican Council. He pursues natural knowledge of God based on created things. He argues that knowledge of the creation offers a pre-apprehension of God, which does not constitute objective knowledge of God. Florensky's philosophy, on the other hand, takes into account faith in Jesus Christ. His philosophy concerns the creation, which is effected by grace. They both consider the creation as an act of God's love. They both regard knowledge of the creation to point towards the transcendent God. For Florensky truth, good and beauty offer spiritual knowledge of God through grace. Rahner, on the other hand, treats analogical knowledge of God as philosophy, which precedes faith. They both maintain that without the involvement of grace, knowledge of God is only philosophical. The human being cannot know the essence of God in his/her natural state. Both Florensky and Rahner consider the human being to reach his/her natural goal only through grace. They both regard knowledge of God as Trinity to be possible only through God's revelation in Jesus Christ.

## **ABBREVIATIONS**

DN	Divine Names
HW	Hearer of the Word
PGT	The Pillar and Ground of the Truth
ST	Summa Theologiae
SW	Spirit in the World

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