"Infinite Openness to the Infinite"

Karl Rahner's Contribution to Modern Catholic Thought on the Child

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Three ironies characterize modern Catholic thought on the child. First, despite its many statements on the family, there has been little systematic consideration of the child in official Roman Catholic teaching.1 Second, the person who potentially has the most to contribute to remedying this lacunae is Karl Rahner (1904–1984)—a thinker regarded by many as the most important Catholic theologian of the twentieth century. However, Rahner wrote very little on children. Third, one essay in which Rahner discusses the theology of childhood is often cited for recognizing that Catholic teaching more or less assumes everyone knows what a child is; however, the essay's content has not been sufficiently mined in terms of Rahner's own substantive contribution to this topic. This is doubly ironic since the very foundation on which the essay rests—Rahner's theological anthropology—has had an enormous (though often unacknowledged) influence on contemporary Catholic approaches to the religious education of children.

This chapter examines these three ironies in detail in order to underscore the need for a more coherent Catholic social teaching on children. It will investigate what Rahner's theology of childhood can contribute toward providing a necessary theological foundation for our contemporary understanding of children and for discerning what our moral obligations should be toward them. Although its full import has not been always been recognized, the theology of Karl Rahner has already significantly influenced
Catholic religious education. An examination of Rahner's thinking on children therefore might provide important religious warrants for treating all children with respect and dignity, as well as serve as an impetus to develop better ways to foster and nourish the growth in Christian spiritual maturity of both children and adults.

The essay has three parts. First, I will highlight the neglect of children in official Roman Catholic teaching by examining the work of Todd Whitmore, a social ethicist. Whitmore provides an important summary of the fragmentary treatment of children in Roman Catholic social teaching and stresses the need for a more coherent teaching by illustrating how the dominant capitalist discourse of contemporary culture endangers children's welfare. Second, after situating Rahner's theology in the context of the paradigm shift that characterizes post-Vatican II Catholic theology, I will outline his important essay, "Ideas for a Theology of Childhood," as a potential resource for articulating an understanding of children that more adequately corresponds to the Christian vision. In this section I will also consider Rahner's views on original sin and baptism as they relate to children. In the third part of the essay I draw attention to modern Catholic religious education's indebtedness to Rahner's broader theological project, including his influence on the emergent field of "children's spirituality." By way of conclusion, I will summarize Rahner's contribution to modern Catholic thinking on children and will assess the extent to which his theology can provide a basis for a more coherent Catholic social teaching on children.

Children: A Neglected Theme in Catholic Social Teaching

Todd Whitmore claims that in its many statements on the family, Catholic teaching has concentrated mainly on the duties of parents with respect to the procreation
and education of children. While referencing children in a familial context is consistent with Christian anthropology's understanding of the social nature of the person, Whitmore argues that Catholic social teaching lacks systematic reflection on what a child is, and thus, children themselves remain an underdeveloped theme in Catholic teaching:

...although the rudiments are scattered here and there, there is no developed Catholic teaching on children like there is, say, on the conduct of war or the possession of private property....[There is] the assumption that we all know who and what children are and why we should care about them. Historical shifts in social views of children indicate that such views cannot be taken for granted.3

The first two sections of Whitmore's essay highlight the urgent need to develop a stronger Catholic social teaching by synthesizing the scattered fragments which deal with children.4 In section one, he provides a descriptive overview of the state of children in today's world, noting both the "silent emergencies" (disease, malnutrition, AIDS, poverty, etc.) and the "loud emergencies" (war, genocide, and an escalating "culture of violence") that characterize the plight of children today. The second part of Whitmore's essay reviews the two dominant discourses operative today that attempt to define who children are: 1) the rhetoric underlying much of the current children's rights discussion which some neo-conservatives have called "the autonomy project";5 and 2) the market logic of unrestrained capitalism.

Whitmore does not discuss the "autonomy project" in detail because he feels other authors already have provided an adequate assessment of it.6 However, he provides a comprehensive analysis of the understanding of children that is implicit in the second discourse, arguing that the unrestrained economic liberalism that characterizes global capitalism is based upon a "market anthropology" which sees children as commodities, consumers, or burdens. Both discourses have enormously negative consequences for
children which Whitmore regards as being in fundamental competition with a Christian, or more specifically, a Catholic, understanding of the human person.\textsuperscript{7}

In the prefatory remarks to this second section Whitmore acknowledges that Pope John Paul II has given cautious endorsement to market economies. However, he points out that the pope's encyclicals dealing with these matters stress the primacy of the whole person and the common good over individual interest. Furthermore, the market economies the pope supports are "circumscribed with a strong juridical framework."\textsuperscript{8}

Whitmore intends to delineate the destructive potential that capitalist market anthropology bears toward children and illustrate how Catholic social teaching provides a critical resource to counter it.

According to Whitmore, unrestrained capitalism puts material objects and individual self-interest before the welfare of persons and the common good. The market economy's worldview understands all things in terms of exchange, so that even human persons become "fungible objects." (169) Thus, the first characteristic of market anthropology is that the person is a \textit{commodity}. However, according to the teaching of \textit{Laborem exercens}, such instrumentalization and commodification (i.e., expressions such as "work force" or "cheap labor" are used by market economies as an impersonal force or a kind of "merchandise" that can be bought) is in direct conflict with Christian teaching.\textsuperscript{9}

A second characteristic of market anthropology stresses the person as a \textit{consumer}. One only has value in a consumer society if one can purchase commodities, since the market can expand only if people buy products. Advertising fuels this process by telling people they do not have worth unless they buy certain products. The third characteristic of a
market anthropology sees persons who cannot function as either a commodity or a consumer as burdens.

The implications of market logic for children seem obvious: they are either commodities and consumers—or burdens. In Whitmore's estimation the rhetoric surrounding reproductive technologies, which views children in terms of cost-benefit analysis, provides a good illustration of this logic. He cites the high cost of producing a child through reproductive technology—over $50,000 per live birth from in vitro fertilization—as a factor exacerbating the view of a child as an "investment" from which parents can expect a "return" in the form of a "quality" product. Selection of embryos with desirable characteristics contributes to this market ethos since failure to deliver "a product of suitable standard" can bring economic retaliation in the form of a legal suit. (171-72)

Another example of how market logic affects children's welfare is children's television. TV targets children as consumers by featuring programs with toys as main characters and hooking children into getting their parents to buy these commercial products. Even educational programming becomes marginalized by market-driven pressures, thus reducing the idea of public responsibility to profitability. According to the logic of the market, no person—child or adult—has "intrinsic worth," but just the same, children who are neither commodities nor consumers, are "non-entities" and any claim they make on society is understood as a burden. (175)

Building upon the Thomistic exitus et reditus structure (i.e., "everything comes forth from God and returns to God") that characterizes Catholic social teaching in general, the third and final part of Whitmore's essay attempts to formulate the
foundations for a Catholic teaching on children by correlating Aquinas' structural
dynamism of exitus/reditus with the theological virtues of faith, hope and love. While it
is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss in detail the documentary sources he uses,11
three significant insights concerning children emerge from Whitmore's analysis. First,
the idea of children as gifts of creation in the image of God follows from the belief that
everything proceeds from God (the exitus dynamic). Recalling that children are created
in the image of God thus relativizes the desires of prospective parents to have children in
their image and creates, at the very minimum, a strong presumption against the practice
of reproductive technology for profit, if it does not rule it out altogether. (177) Secondly,
children are signs of a future that extend beyond the self-interested desires of others since
the future toward which all human beings are headed is one with God at its center (the
reditus dynamic). The view that children are "destined for union with God relativizes the
immediate wants of adults." (178) This accent on the future also places emphasis on the
education and formation of children. Finally, because children are gifts from God and
destined to return to God, even our biological children are "ours only in trust" (including
those children who are not our own biologically). (179) Thus, according to Catholic
social teaching, children are not "burdens," but call for our love in the form of present
responsibility and stewardship.

With the help of Catholic social teaching's principle of "subsidiarity,"12 Whitmore
specifies our stewardship of children by determining an order of responsibility for them.
On the one hand, this principle argues against the direct intervention of large-scale
institutions into family life, based upon the idea that "the best associations or institutions
for providing care are those most proximate to the persons in question." (179) On the
other hand, subsidiarity affirms that large institutions have an obligation to support the smaller units. Thus, Catholic social teaching holds that family and society have complementary functions with respect to the stewardship of children.\textsuperscript{13}

Whitmore has done a great service in examining modern Catholic social teaching on the child. Not only does he expose the danger presented by a lack of a developed Catholic tradition on the nature of children and our obligations toward them, but he also points out how certain aspects of Catholic teaching could obscure or prevent the tradition from operating with its full strength. For example, he finds "an excessive natalism" in Catholic tradition on children that tends to focus on the gift of creation expressed in procreation at the expense of how the child as "gift" might be manifested at other stages of life.\textsuperscript{14} He admits that Catholic teaching never \textit{denies} that the gift of creation is ongoing; yet, Catholic teaching tends to speak of children as "gifts of life" only when focusing on procreation, especially with respect to the issues of artificial reproduction, contraception and abortion.\textsuperscript{15} Ironically, it is precisely this natalism, Whitmore argues, that drives couples to the extreme measures involved in conceiving through reproductive technologies: depleting their savings, mortgaging their house, and, in the case of women, taking hormonal treatments that severely disrupt their metabolism. (177-78)

Todd Whitmore's discussion of children in Catholic teaching begins with an epigraph taken from Karl Rahner's essay, "Ideas for a Theology of Childhood," where Rahner observes that scripture and tradition alike presuppose "that we already know precisely what a child really \textit{is} far more than they tell us explicitly or treat it as a distinct question."\textsuperscript{16} At the end of his essay, Rahner is cited again and Whitmore laments that, despite the extended treatment of procreative issues in Catholicism, there is no real
consideration of children "as a distinct question." Ironically, Whitmore leaves aside the question of what Rahner's essay can contribute to the subject of Catholic teaching on children. Before turning to this task, however, it will prove helpful first to situate Rahner's theology in terms of the development of modern Catholic theology and to review some of the chief characteristics of his theology.

The Context for Rahner's Theology

The contribution of Karl Rahner to modern Catholic thought on the child must be viewed against the background of theology and church life that characterized Roman Catholicism for roughly the hundred years between 1850 and 1950. The dominant theological paradigm of this period is known as "neoscholasticism." Neoscholasticism was an attempt to return to the scholastic tradition of the middle ages, especially to the perennial philosophy of Thomas Aquinas, as a means of fending off Enlightenment attacks on the compatibility of faith and reason and the authority of the Roman Catholic church. In his encyclical, "On the Restoration of Christian Philosophy," Pope Leo XIII decreed that the philosophy and theology of Thomas Aquinas would be the only framework for Catholic theological investigation.

Unfortunately, it was not the authentic Aquinas who provided this framework, but a simplified, static, interpretation of Thomas' thought developed by later followers. Neoscholasticism required that prescribed language with "correct" terms, good for all cultural circumstances, be used to transmit the message of Christianity and ethical instructions that would apply to all people for all time. Questions and experiences that went beyond the framework of neo-Thomistic thought and language were assiduously
prevented from being the subject of theological reflection. Informers denounced theological divergences to ecclesiastical superiors. Books were consigned to an “Index of Forbidden Books” and withdrawn from bookshops.\textsuperscript{22} Local bishops employed harsh measures against dissident theologians, sometimes banishing them to monasteries, and often requiring their “obedient silence.” The pope was the only legitimate and competent preserver of the “deposit of faith.” The role of the professional theologian consisted in defending the teaching of the church. As a result of neo-scholastic dominance, the period between the two world wars was one of extreme rigidity in Catholic theology.

Rahner objected strenuously to the stultifying tendencies of neoscholasticism. He called it “Pian monolithism,” referring to the practices which entered the church after \textit{Pius IX} (d. 1878) and came to a climax with \textit{Pius XII} (d. 1958).\textsuperscript{23} In his estimation, these pontificates supported a thought system that “threatened to make the church an immovable monolith, a mass of rock, an absolute monarchy, in which everything was governed and decided by the ruler down to the smallest detail.”\textsuperscript{24} Rahner also abhorred “integralism,” a movement which bolstered neoscholasticism in its demands that everything traditional must be kept, "simply because it is old." Integralists held that obedience to the authority of the church was a supreme virtue and that the laity "were essentially on the receiving end of commands and have no real initiative."\textsuperscript{25}

The place a child occupied in the Catholic world under the sway of neoscholasticism was one of passive obedience. Like laity in general,\textsuperscript{26} children were under the control of clergy, parents, and teachers. Paramount for Catholic families was that children be baptized as soon as possible after birth, lest "original sin remain upon their soul" and they be "deprived of eternal salvation."\textsuperscript{27} Upon reaching "the age of
reason" (around age seven), children were treated as mini-adults in terms of moral responsibility.\textsuperscript{28} Education in the faith was carried out by means of the catechism which insured the uniformity of Catholic belief. As Michael Donnellan has pointed out,

By shaping the intelligibility of the Christian message for so many Catholics for so long a time, the catechism ultimately was better known than the Bible and more influential than any official Church document. The durability of the catechism was symbolic of the Church's own self-image as an unchanging society.\textsuperscript{29}

Growing up in Germany's Black Forest region at the turn of the twentieth century, Karl Rahner's own childhood and education was stamped by this predominantly defensive attitude against the modern world.\textsuperscript{30} But his early philosophical and theological studies as a Jesuit exposed him to a more authentic Thomism.\textsuperscript{31} His studies with Martin Heidegger, his engagement with the transcendental Thomism of Joseph Maréchal, as well as other types of philosophy, enabled him to break through the stultifying rigidity of neoscholasticism and reclaim Thomas the mystic, the Thomas who was "uncompromisingly progressive, if not actually revolutionary." The scholastic theologian to whom Rahner was indebted was not "that potted version…produced under Pius X in the so-called "Twenty Theses" published by the Congregation of Studies at Rome in 1914," but the Aquinas who "stands at the origins of that reflexive process in theology in which Christian faith explicitly recognizes the status of the world as autonomous and responsible for its own destiny."\textsuperscript{32} Rahner's theology was profoundly influenced by Aquinas' understanding of God, a God whom he characterized as not so much…him who inserts himself into the world, as it were perforating an otherwise closed system from without, but rather as the infinite incomprehensible mystery and absolute future, present intrinsically in the world all along as that which provides its ultimate consummation and so sustains its movement towards this from within.\textsuperscript{33}
If Rahner campaigned against neoscholastic theology, it was because he wanted to liberate scholastic theology.\textsuperscript{34}

In breaking out of the defensive mentality of neoscholasticism, Rahner belongs to a period of theological renewal in Catholic theology which reached a climax with the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). The Council not only effectively marked the eclipse of neoscholasticism but ushered in a "paradigm shift" which the Catholic church, to a great extent, is still negotiating.\textsuperscript{35} According to his biographer and former assistant, Herbert Vorgrimler, Rahner belongs to the “second generation” of this renewal movement. Other theologians likewise consider Rahner a theologian more "of" the Second Vatican Council than one who prepared the way for it.\textsuperscript{36}

Some Important Characteristics of Rahner's Theology

Although it is impossible to discuss Rahner's contributions to post-Vatican II Catholic theology in any detail here,\textsuperscript{37} a review of some key themes and methodological concerns that characterize his theology will aid us in appreciating his thinking on children. Despite the unfamiliar philosophical terms and interminably long Germanic sentence structure that predominate in his writings, Rahner's theology is first of all a \textit{pastoral} theology.\textsuperscript{38} Pastoral theology, according to Rahner, is not so much a matter of concrete application as it is a consideration of the "demands" that the pastoral situation makes upon theology as whole.\textsuperscript{39} His former student, Johann Baptist Metz, observed that Rahner "held himself accountable to everyday believers, particularly those beset by the doubts engendered by the precarious existence of Christian faith in the secularized, scientific-industrial societies of European modernity."\textsuperscript{40} In reflecting upon his own life,
Rahner commented that, "ultimately my theological work was really not motivated by scholarship and erudition as such, but by pastoral concerns. This likewise explains why a large part of my published work is filled with immediately religious, spiritual, and pastoral concerns." \[41\]

A second characteristic that flows directly from his pastoral concerns is the attention Rahner gives to fostering a new "mystagogy." \[42\] The "mystagogical" character of theology, the idea that learning what faith means comes from within one's own existence and experience and not merely by indoctrination from without, is of enormous importance for Rahner. \[43\] As a consequence, much of his theology takes the form of sermons, prayers, and meditations. \[44\] For Rahner, all theology "must lead…into the presence of the one, same, and only all-embracing mystery of God." \[45\] With respect to children, as we shall see, Rahner is concerned not only with what a child is in the sight of God, but how God, as mystery, is revealed in the experience of childhood.

Rahner wrote often of "the mysticism of everyday life" \[46\] and challenged his audience to look at what "is implicit, hidden, anonymous, repressed, or bursting forth from the center of all we do." \[47\] By surrendering to the mystery that embraces all of life—including the mystery of childhood—one opens oneself to the encounter with God. As the "asymptotic goal" of human experience, hidden in itself, the experience of God is not the privilege of the individual mystic, Rahner argued, but is available to everyone. \[48\]

I think that people must understand that they have an implicit but true knowledge of God perhaps not reflected upon and not verbalized—or better expressed: a genuine experience of God, which is ultimately rooted in their spiritual existence, in their transcendentality, in their personality, or whatever you want to name it. It is not a really important question whether you call that 'mystical' or not. \[49\]
Thirdly, in taking human experience as its starting point, Rahner makes use of a "transcendental method." Put simply, what this means is that Rahner wants to find the conditions for the possibility of experiencing God in human life. According to this method, human beings experience a fundamental openness (a self-transcendence) toward God in every truly human act. This unthematic, "transcendental" experience (as distinct from particular, "categorical" experience) lies at the very center of what it means to be human. It is the "horizon" for the offer of God's self-communication which is constitutive of human identity. A major theme that runs throughout all of Rahner's theology is that grace and revelation (the self-communication of God) are found in our human experience. As Harvey Egan explains,

Central to Rahner's thinking is the notion that what is at the core of every person's deepest experience, what haunts every human heart, is a God whose mystery, light, and love have embraced the total person. God works in every person's life as the One to whom we say our inmost yes or no. We may deny this, ignore it, or repress it, but deep down we know that God is in love with us and we are all at least secretly in love with one another….50

Because the divine self-communication of God presents itself always as "offer," human freedom is respected and God's grace and revelation remain gratuitous, thereby avoiding the pitfalls of the neoscholastic nature/grace debates.51

A fourth aspect of Rahner's theology that is helpful for understanding his thinking on children its indebtedness to the spirituality of St. Ignatius of Loyola.52 Rahner was a Jesuit, so it is not surprising to find Ignatian themes in his theology; however, the extent of this influence is often overlooked.53 The Ignatius' mysticism of "joy in the world" and "finding God in all things," have remarkable affinity with Rahner's reflections on childhood. Even if Rahner's preference was to lay special stress on the via negationis, since it is here that the human spirit most often experiences its proper transcendence,54 it
is worth noting that he did not think a "burned-out," "tired and disillusioned heart" is closer to God than a young and happy one.55

Finally, a word about Rahner's style of theological reflection is also in order here. Jörg Splett comments that it was Rahner's practice in his writings to allow himself to be confronted by the questions on which he reflected. Thus, in his essays, Rahner typically begins by giving an overview of a problem, mentioning previous attempts made towards its solution. Then, unencumbered and without prejudice, he circumscribes the delimited question, thematizing his problems with it—often not so much in order to arrive at a solution to the problem, but to disclose something deeper.56 This indirect reflection style gives Rahner's theology a meditative quality, in keeping with his mystagogical aims.57

Rahner's Theology of Childhood

Rahner's essay, “Ideas for a Theology of Childhood”58 represents a major contribution to Catholic theology and to Christian thought on the child in general. His theological anthropology, according to which human persons—including children—are fundamentally oriented towards God, is much in evidence here. The aim of the essay is not directly to assist parents, teachers, or others who are engaged in looking after children, but to offer some foundational reflections on the theological question: "In the intention of the Creator and Redeemer of children what meaning does childhood have, and what task does it lay upon us for the perfecting and saving of humanity?" (33)

The first section of the essay treats "the unsurpassable value of childhood" and presents childhood in terms of Rahner's transcendental theological anthropology and realized eschatology. The second section interprets the understanding of childhood in
Scripture and Christian tradition as being both realistic and idealistic. In the last section Rahner deals with the theological understanding of what it means to be a "child of God". The approach to childhood in this essay builds upon the central ideas that undergird Rahner's entire theological project: God as "incomprehensible, holy Mystery"; humanity as fundamentally graced; "time" as a process revealing both possibility and limitation.

The Value of Childhood

For Rahner, a person's relationship with God is operative at every stage of human growth and development; childhood being no exception. However, modernity's tendency is to interpret temporal existence in a linear fashion, using physical/biological categories that view life as a sum total of a series of stages. In this conceptual framework human beings move through "phases," such that, when one phase is exhausted, it leads on to the next and the previous stage's meaning dissolves into it. Childhood and youth simply "prepare" for the "greater" part of life, the future which lies ahead. When this future arrives (presumably, with maturity), childhood itself disappears. It is really only adult life that "counts."

Rahner finds this interpretation of personal lifespan particularly prevalent among Christians, which perhaps explains the Christian tendency to subordinate childhood to adult life. This view coincides with a commonly accepted concept of human history and time, and is not necessarily without merit, since there is always the danger of becoming fixated in a particular stage of life. However, Rahner believes that this is only part of the truth about childhood. Far more important for Rahner is that a human being is a "subject." The human person is not just caught up inexorably in the sweep of time, but at every stage of human existence, one is able to grasp oneself as a whole. The past is
retained as one moves towards a future, a future that is the result of what one has already worked out beforehand in the exercise of human freedom. To be a free human subject means that one can make present to oneself the whole of one's life, past and future. And it is important for Rahner to remember that, according to the Christian view, the totality of existence is redeemed. Thus, eternity is not a final "stage" toward which we advance in time, but the enduring validity of human existence lived in freedom. The goal toward which we advance (eternal life) is not "something added on" to this life. It is a gathering up of the totality of one's life, a gathering up in which one finds him or herself. Temporal existence is not brought along behind oneself, but is made present to oneself. 59 (34-36)

For Rahner, this way of conceiving the relationship between human existence and eternal life is as appropriate to childhood as it is to any other individual phase of human life. However, of all the phases of human existence, it is childhood that most suffers from the impression of being merely provisional, existing simply to shape adult life. Rahner maintains that childhood is not merely a stage in one's past; it is an abiding reality. It endures as "that which is coming to meet us," an intrinsic element in the single and enduring completeness of our temporal existence considered as a unity: "the eternity of the human person saved and redeemed." According to this vision, human beings move toward the eternity of this childhood, becoming the children we were as we gather up time into our eternity. Because the "decision" eternity requires of us bears upon our life as a whole, we may still have to go on living through our own childhood. 60 Viewed in this way childhood must always remain open as a question. Thus, Rahner concludes: "we do not move away from childhood in any definitive sense, but rather move toward the eternity of this childhood, to its definitive and enduring validity in God's sight." (35-36)
By now it should be clear that the experience of childhood in Rahner's thinking is "eschatological" as well as existential, since it enables us to appreciate the relationship of earthly life to eternal life. Childhood's significance is more than a matter of laying foundations for decisions which have eternal significance. Rather, it is that aspect of our personal history that can only take place in childhood. Using the analogy of a field which bears fair flowers and ripe fruits, Rahner asserts that the experiences which take place in childhood are ones that "can only grow in this field and no other, and which will themselves be carried into the storehouses of eternity." (36) The grace of childhood is not merely the "pledge" of the grace of adulthood. This is his way of saying that "values of imperishability and eternity are attached to childhood…to be discovered anew in the ineffable future which is coming to meet us." (37) The "ineffable future" coming to meet us is nothing less than God's own Self, already present in our humanity.

For Christians, Rahner writes, the child is a human being from the very beginning of her existence. A child does not simply grow gradually into a human being, she is a human being. (37) In the unfolding of one's personal history one simply realizes what one already is. Furthermore, since in Rahner's theology, being human implies an absolute immediacy to God, the child is intended to be, right from the start, a partner of God. Seeing the human being already present in the child, Christianity "protects the child while it is still in its mother's womb….It has reverence for the child, for the child is a human being." (38)

In Rahner's thinking the state of childhood is considered the beginning of the state of the human condition: "possessing itself yet exposed to the influence of the world and of history…it has still to become all things in the future. What is already present in the
child has still to be realised, to become actual in experience." The connection between
this beginning and one's full development is a mystery which every human person is
subject to and over which she does not have control. Only when one's final completion is
realized does one understand this origin of oneself. (38-39)

_Childhood in Scripture and Tradition_

Recognizing that an experience of duality permeates human existence, Rahner argues that Christianity conceives of childhood as having a beginning in two different senses. In the first sense, the child is not a pure beginning, unaffected by what has gone before her, but is historically conditioned by the situation into which she is born. The human history of guilt and gracelessness which is a factor in every human individual history also affects the child. This is what theology traditionally has called "original sin." However, Rahner's view is considerably more optimistic than that of Augustine, the Reformers, or even the Council of Trent, since he recognizes also that although children are born into a history of sin, they are also in their origins "encompassed by God's love through the pledge of that grace, which in God's will to save all humankind, comes in all cases and to everyone from God in Christ Jesus." (39) Nevertheless, in contrast to Rousseau and other romantics, Rahner does not view the child as "a sort of innocent arcadia, as a pure source which only becomes muddied at a later stage." (40) He accepts the Christian understanding of a child as already and inevitably the origin precisely of that person to whom guilt, death, suffering, and all the forces of bitterness in human life belong as conditions of his very existence. But...all this remains within the compass of God, of his greater grace and his greater compassion, therefore this realism with which Christianity reacts to the very origins of the human being in the child and its beginnings is far from being any kind of implicit cynicism. (40)
For Rahner, awareness of the guilt and tragedy that belong to the beginning of human existence comes about through a person's awareness of the blessedness of grace and the redemption which overcomes this guilt and tragedy. It is precisely this awareness that is brought about by the grace and redemption which a Christian experiences and to which one submits oneself.

The second observation that Rahner makes is that what is said about children in Scripture presupposes that we already know what a child is. It is our own experience (our contacts with children as well as the experience of our own childhood) that the New Testament assumes in telling us that we must "become as children," or that we are "children of God by grace." This is not unproblematic for, as Rahner recognizes, our experience is often "dark, complex, and conflicting in character." (40) His advice is "not to try to iron out the complexities, but to endure them," to be true to our own experience in arriving at an idea of what a child is. In so doing, one will remain true to the basic principle already articulated: that a child is a human being even in its incipient stages and, as such, she is divided within herself right from the beginning of her life, from the beginning onward.

According to Rahner, a genuinely Christian experience of childhood is both realistic and idealistic. Paul and Matthew both see the child as being immature and weak. At the same time, "the little ones" (contrary to the prevailing wisdom of Jesus' own time) are used to exemplify the attitudes necessary for the reign of God: a lack of false ambition, not seeking dignities or honors, modesty, and a lack of artificiality. Again, the possession of these characteristics does not mean that a child is "innocent." Rather, children are held up as examples because they are open and carefree in relation to God.
Jesus points to children as those who know that they have nothing of themselves on which to base any claim to God's help, and yet who trust that his kindness and protection will be extended to them. When Jesus says, "Of such is the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 19:14), he is not glorifying children, but is saying he identifies with them. Children are those who know they have nothing on which to base their claim to God's help. They, like Jesus, expect everything from God. (41-42)

In the last analysis, childhood is, for Rahner, a mystery. Along with being a beginning in the sense of being the absolute origin of the individual, a beginning which plunges its roots into a history over which the individual child herself has no control, childhood is the beginning of openness to God. Rahner calls this beginning "the future which comes to meet one." (42) But it is not until this future is actually attained that the beginning which is childhood can be seen in its full significance. Only in eternity is the purpose of childhood actually achieved. Only then does a child "comes to its own realization, as a beginning which is open to the absolute beginning of God who is utter mystery." (42) If we are able to preserve this state of being delivered over to the mystery, life becomes for us a state in which our original childhood is preserved forever; a state in which we are open to expect the unexpected, to commit ourselves to the incalculable, a state which endows us with the power still to be able to play, to recognize that the powers presiding over existence are greater than our own designs, and to submit to their control as our deepest good. (42)

This childhood, which characterizes the religious act of an adult, is a spiritually mature state, a graced state that perdures even in its moments of sadness and struggle:

[Even in those cases in which we weep and are overcome by dejection…even these tears we accept as they are sent to us, recognizing that the sadness which they express is ultimately a redeemed sadness. And when our powers are at an end, we realize in a childish spirit that our task too is at an end, since no one is tried beyond his own strength. When we take up this attitude, we make the mystery the protection and defense of our lives. We are content to commit them
to the ineffable as sheltering and forgiving, to that which is unspeakably close to us with the closeness of love. (42)

For adults to attain the openness of children (which is what the kingdom of heaven requires) conversion is necessary. Yet, this conversion is only to become what we already are—children. Paradoxically, none of us know what childhood means at the beginning of our lives. It is only at the end of a lifetime of God-given repentance and conversion that we will be able to realize that childhood in which we receive the kingdom of God and thus become God's children. As Rahner says, "we only recognize the child at the beginning of life from the child of the future. And in the light of this, once more, we can understand that childhood involves a mystery, the mystery of our whole existence."

(43)

_Becoming Children of God: The Fullness of Childhood_

Rahner insists that becoming "a child of God involves more than a metaphorical application of the human experience of being a child to one's relationship with God. Contemporary depth psychology and transcendental philosophical analysis recognizes that the experience of a secure childhood is necessary in order to have a basic trust in reality. This basic sense of trust has an impact upon our experience of God. While accepting the wisdom of this insight, Rahner cautions against exaggerating the necessity of a secure childhood for one's relationship with God:

It is perfectly possible that a lack of protection, a lack of that sheltering solicitude and security which comes from the love of one's parents, may actually serve to spur us on to the metaphysical quest for one who will provide us with our ultimate support, who will sustain us and protect us. (44)

However, Rahner admits that only a child who has been able to learn that the names 'father' and 'mother' stand for a protecting love will be able to use those names for God
and be able to recognize in God the very source of one's own existence, in whom one can be authentically oneself. (45) He is conscious that those who, as children, felt neglected or abandoned, may interpret that experience in an ultimate and metaphysical sense. These persons often then are not able to overcome subsequent experiences of life's hardships or psychological traumas by recourse to the experience of a secure childhood which gives assent to meaning and life, but will interpret such experiences as further projections of that experience of insecurity. Those who are engaged in religious education, spiritual direction, and clinical psychology know this only too well from their experience of dealing with people. This in itself underlines for Rahner how important the human experience of childhood is for understanding and experiencing the realities expressed by the transferred concepts of "child of God," "God the Father," "God the Mother," etc. (46-47)

Childhood is not a state that only applies to the first phase of our biological lives, but is "a basic condition," always appropriate to a human existence lived rightly. As an inherent factor in our lives, childhood

must take the form of trust, of openness, of expectation, of readiness to be controlled by another, of interior harmony with the unpredictable forces with which the individual finds himself confronted. It must manifest itself as freedom…as receptivity, as hope which is still not disillusioned. This is the childhood that must be present and active as an effective force at the very roots of our being… [T]he childhood which belongs to the child in the biological sense is only the beginning, the prelude, the foretaste and the promise of this other childhood, which is the childhood proved and tested and at the same time assailed, which is present in the mature man. (47)

It is the childhood of the mature person that is "the true and proper childhood" for Rahner; it is the fullness of that former childhood, the childhood of immaturity. What brings about the unity between these two childhoods is that both entail orientation to
God. As was noted above, this orientation is not merely metaphorical, the transference of a word from a biological context to a religious context. Rather, in the reality of human childhood, in its openness, its trustful submission to control by another, its courage to allow fresh horizons, one encounters as "already ipso facto an achieved and present fact" that transcendence of faith, hope and love in which the ultimate essence of the basic act of religion precisely consists. (48)

In the last analysis, therefore, human childhood is not transferred by some dubious process of metaphorical or poetic transference to a quite different reality which we called childhood of God, but rather has its ultimate basis in this itself, so that the latter is always and right from the first contained in the former, and finds expression in it….Childhood is only truly understood, only realises the ultimate depths of its own nature, when it is seen as based upon the foundation of childhood of God. (49-50)

These acts of transcendence (which are typical of the state of childhood), according to Rahner's theological anthropology, are characteristic of the fundamental religious orientation of the human person. They can be elevated to a religious act, and the ideas through which we apprehend the world can be elevated to the level of prayer. It belongs to the essence of such an act "that it should not come to rest at any other point except that of total self-abandonment to the incomprehensible infinitude of the ineffable mystery." (48) Thus, for Rahner, adults who maintain childhood as an elemental factor in their human nature and allow it to develop to the full and without limitation are truly religious.

In summary, Rahner defines human childhood as "infinite openness."64 Embracing the mature childhood of the adult, that "attitude in which we bravely and trustfully maintain an infinite openness in all circumstances…despite the experiences of life which seem to invite us to close ourselves," is essential for developing an authentic
religious existence. But the ability to maintain such an attitude is always a matter of the "self-bestowal of God," or what in theological language is called "grace." The adventure of being human, as Rahner describes it, begins with being a child in the biological sense and continues in "remaining a child forever, becoming a child to an ever-increasing extent, making (one's) childhood of God real and effective in this childhood…." (50)

Original Sin and Infant Baptism

Rahner's thinking on original sin and baptism has become extremely influential in post-Vatican II Catholic theology. The neoscholastic textbooks had taken it for granted that an unbaptized child was guilty of original sin and that baptism was necessary for salvation because it "took away original sin." Rahner's brief allusion to the existence of original sin in "Toward a Theology of Childhood," indicates that he also held that children were affected by original sin as part of the universal human condition. However, he stressed that the divine self-communication of God, "who alone is essentially holy, is grace antecedent to the free decision of a creature who is ambivalent and therefore not holy by his very essence" (emphasis mine).

Rahner lamented the atrophy of the doctrine of original sin. He felt the doctrine had largely become "a catechism truth" for modern persons, a topic mentioned at its proper place in religious instruction and then forgotten in daily life and average preaching. Original sin does not have much formative influence in a contemporary person's conception of reality, where death and concupiscence are felt to be a "natural" part of human experience. Rahner also realized that, for most Catholics, baptism was
regarded as "annulling original sin more or less in such a way that the latter is only felt to be a vital problem as regards unbaptized children."\(^{67}\)

Rahner's response to this modern pastoral situation was to explain that original sin is only "sin" in an analogous sense.\(^{68}\) It is not sin in the same sense as personal sin.\(^{69}\) However, since it involves something "that should not be," it ought to be regarded as sin.\(^{70}\) The doctrine of original sin is an attempt to express the role sin plays in a human life prior to one's exercise of freedom. In this sense, every human being is "situated" in a condition of prior human sinfulness that affects his or her free decisions. To put it another way, Rahner would say that every human person is born into the world under the influence of two competing forces: the power of God's redeeming love in Christ and the power of sin opposed to Christ. However, although these two forces are fundamental, they are not equal.\(^{71}\) Original sin is not prior in time to Christ's redemptive action. Therefore "original sin" cannot be regarded as more universal and efficacious than the effects of "original redemption" deriving from Christ (Rom 5: 15-17 is cited as scriptural evidence). For Rahner, nevertheless, they are two "existentials"\(^{72}\) of the human situation in regard to salvation, which at all times determine human existence.\(^{73}\) Human beings lack God's sanctifying Spirit, precisely because they are members of a sinful human race. However, since it is God's will that humans should have this sanctifying Spirit, the absence of the Spirit is contrary to God's will. But this lack which ought not to exist is sin only in an analogous sense, as the "state of what ought not to be."\(^{74}\)

Rahner's theology emphasizes baptism as a sacramental entrance into the Church and thus into the fullness of Christian life.\(^{75}\) Baptism "imparts that life which God gives us through his self-communication…in order to make us capable of eternal life in
immediate unity and community with God. Again, Rahner recognized that a number of modern persons are troubled by baptism. "They ask why baptism, and even baptism of infants exists, when we know, or at least hope, that God leads to eternal salvation every person of good will, hence also non-Christians, 'heathens,' and even atheists (if they obey the voice of conscience)."

Rahner uses the example of the relationship between "dispositions" and "gestures" to explain why the universal offer of grace to humanity does not negate the importance of baptism. He observes that the love of one person for another, considered as an inner disposition, differs from the glance, the gesture, the caress, with which one might express one's love. Yet, the inner disposition of love fully develops only if it is also expressed and 'embodied' in bodily gestures. So, too, the solidarity several people might feel is an inner disposition. But that solidarity often becomes wholly itself only when these people share a common meal. To refuse baptism when it is possible to be baptized is like a person refusing to grow because it is said that even as an embryo one is already a human being. It is like refusing a concrete act of love while at the same time, affirming one's love. Baptism, then, is also an effect of grace, since the baptized person brings the grace of God that has already freely been accepted. Where a problem is created, of course, is the case of children.

In defending the practice of infant baptism, Rahner reviews the history of Catholic theological arguments, beginning with the Council of Trent against the Anabaptists (no re-baptism or ratification of baptism is required when children reach the age of reason), to the argument from analogy (which held that just as original sin was contracted without personal fault, so the faith underlying infant baptism was the "alien"
faith of parents, sponsors, or the whole church), to a further clarification which realizes
that even the capacity for faith is always the gift of God's grace. It is this insight which
settles the matter for Rahner,

\[\text{…once we perceive that we are graciously enabled to perform free, salutary acts by God's pure gift, which in fact precedes all human activity, though not necessarily by a priority of time. This salvific will of God for each individual, which must first bestow life before life can develop and fulfil itself, is addressed to the child at his baptism, as a gift and an obligation, in terms that are historically and ecclesially tangible, because the reality of that gift and obligation does not derive from the assent of his faith.}\]

Rahner would not maintain, as some would, that if baptism makes one a member
of a visible church then, one ought to be able to choose such membership freely,
something a child cannot do. Rahner's reply is that when we are born,

\[\text{we may accept or we may hate our existence, but we cannot get rid of it. Human freedom is always unquestionably a reaction to something that we have not chosen...so if in baptism that which a human person really is becomes manifest—namely the creature loved by God, destined to receive divine life—then freedom does not suffer any injustice, because, with regard to God and the world, it is always a responsive freedom that never has the first word.}\]

The Church understands herself as the historical and social manifestation of the fact that
all persons are called by God. To say that in baptism one becomes a member of the
church simply concretizes the standing invitation addressed to everyone by God.
Certainly, the inner presence of grace can exist without the appropriate outer embodiment
and manifestation (i.e., in "baptism of desire" and "perfect contrition"), but this does not
mean that it is "something left up to individuals."

Rahner admits that the New Testament does not mention baptism of children, but
that the church has clung to the correctness and meaningfulness of this practice. This is
not the same as saying one is "obliged" to baptize children. However, if in baptism what
a human person really is becomes manifest, "namely, the creature loved by God, destined
to receive divine life," then it becomes important that parents be committed to accepting responsibility for enabling their children to accept in faith, hope and love the love of God that is offered to them throughout their lives. The position that, except in danger of death, the Catholic church does not allow a child to be baptized unless there is a guarantee of his or her Christian upbringing is based upon this understanding of baptism.82

With regard to the fate of unbaptized children, Rahner adamantly rejected the doctrine of "limbo," a theory that, even as recently as the Second Vatican Council, conservative neoscholastic theologians wanted to define as church dogma.83 He was incredulous that the authors of the preconciliar schema could profess to know with such certainty what eternal reward awaited unbaptized children and was especially incensed about the pastoral difficulties created by such reasoning.84

According to Rahner, as an invitation to accept God's love, the baptism of children reaches its real meaning and completion when eventually they accept this love of God which is offered to them in faith, hope, and love on a daily basis in their adult lives.

The decisive question is not whether, through the love and fidelity of their ordinary Christian life, they accept God's self-donation offered to them when they were children or whether, time and again, explicitly in Christian freedom, they ratify the baptism they received as children. The ultimate and decisive acceptance of baptism in personal freedom takes place throughout the length and breadth of human and Christian life.85

Rahner and the Religious Education of Children

One of the legacies of Rahner's theology is the impact that his theological anthropology and his re-thinking of the relationship between nature and grace has had on the contemporary renewal of catechetics in Roman Catholicism. A brief, historical overview of approaches to the religious education of Catholic children in the twentieth
century will help contextualize Rahner's contribution, as well as provide important background for the rich resource that this aspect of pastoral practice offers for a more developed Catholic teaching on children.

*Catechetics in Recent Catholic History*

The history of catechetical renewal in twentieth century Roman Catholicism is bound up with several other renewal movements in the church that both paved the way for and were legitimized by the Second Vatican Council. The liturgical and biblical movements, the social movement known as "Catholic Action," and the *nouvelle Theologie* which emphasized a return to Patristic sources (*ressourcement*), all played a key role in reforming catechetics.86 At the beginning of the twentieth century, outside of Sunday preaching, catechetics in most of the Catholic world was centered upon children. Question and answer catechisms were the chief means of "passing on the faith." Robert Hurley describes this as a "magisterial process" because it assumed that "verifiable information would be taught in a didactic fashion by a competent instructor":

Catechisms had evolved into doctrinal summaries that were replete with abstractions, far beyond the psychological capacities of children in primary and elementary grades. These texts, tending towards rationalism and legalism, were often tainted with anti-Protestant polemics. The catechetical process was cut off from the child's family life and was most often considered the task of professionals in the field, such as priests, sisters, brothers and lay teachers. Moreover, catechesis had become estranged both from the parish and from the rhythms of the liturgical year.87

The catechetical renewal which began shortly after the turn of the century had three phases.88 The first was occupied with the quest for a more effective *methods*. In German-speaking countries the "Munich Method," was popular. Based upon insights from German educational psychology, it never really caught on in the U.S. because of its emphasis on passive learning. In France, Bishop Ladrieux, the bishop of Dijon, wrote a
pastoral letter in 1922 that became a kind of manifesto for a catechetical there. He observed wryly, that "instead of going in directly by the open doors of the child's imagination and sense perception, we waste our time knocking on the still bolted doors of his understanding and his judgment."\(^8\) A few years later Chanoine Dupont set forth the outline of a catechism session:

The point of departure should be a picture shown to the children or a story told to them. They should then be asked to express themselves freely and let their hearts speak up. Little by little, with delicacy and tact, they should be guided toward the discovery of the catechism formula or the prayer text which the picture shown to them at the beginning suggested in the concrete.\(^9\)

A pedagogical method which had been developed earlier, known as the "activity school," was appropriated by French catechists in the mid 1930's. They advocated group work, singing, recitation of verse, and games or projects. Involving the children in preparing the equipment needed for the lesson was also viewed as valuable since "a truth can be understood only in so far is it is personally experienced."\(^1\) Another innovation involved getting the children to enter into the spirit of the liturgical season, "for example by having them work together on the staging of a show based on the mysteries of Christmas or Easter."\(^2\)

Madame Lubienska de Lenval's approach to Christian formation involved a system of teaching in which gestures and attitudes inspired by both Bible and liturgy were designed to foster the awakening of a balanced religious sense. Similarly, Madame Damez, brought out very strongly the need to arouse "the essential religious activity, prayer." She argued that catechism teachers ought to guide their four-or five-year-old-pupils toward a meeting with God. By praying in their presence and with them, by
creating an atmosphere of silence and by preserving an attitude of reverence, teachers can "set free the flight of the Christian child toward God." 93

The attempts to find more effective methods of religious education in this first phase tried to make the teaching of religion something active: by introducing various activities to sustain a child's interest (drawing, singing, acting out scenes); by introducing the child to liturgical life; and most especially, by awakening that supreme religious activity: prayer. Even the "Munich method," though not entirely successful, signaled the beginnings of a defection from the defensive attitudes of the Counter-Reformation that characterized pre-Vatican II Catholic religious education.

The second phase of catechetical renewal developed somewhat in reaction to the first phase. This period, which also saw the convergence of the catechetical, liturgical and kerygmatic movements, each of which sought to "return to Christ" as the central focus of Christianity, advocated more emphasis on content. A name that stands out in this period is Josef Jungmann, S.J. (1889-1975). Although better known for his contribution to liturgical studies, Jungmann became identified with the "kerygmatic theology" movement, so-named because its followers stressed the "Christian message" (kerygma). Welcoming the kerygma as "good news" was thought to be more important than the orthodox interpretation of certain doctrines and proper teaching methods. Not surprisingly, Jungmann's views were considered suspect by the Vatican's Holy Office and his book, Die Frohbotschaft und unsere Glabensverkündigung (1936), was withdrawn from circulation. As a result, it did not appear in English until 1962. In the U.S. his writings were made known through the lectures of visiting scholars, especially Johannes
Hofinger. Since Jungmann taught at Innsbruck during the same period Rahner, there has been speculation about whether his thinking in any way influenced Rahner.

In fact, Rahner clearly distanced himself from "kerygmatic theology," although some authors recently have proposed that the situation might be more complicated than this.\(^94\) However one might construe his relationship to Jungmann, Rahner's objection to kerygmatic theology needs to be understood in the context of the discussions concerning the reform of seminary education that were being carried on at the time:

There was a time, in the 1930s, when a theory was developed in Innsbruck which advocated a dual education for future priests: there would be a 'kerygmatic theology' which would directly serve the task of preparing priests to preach. There would also be another scholarly theology based more upon philosophical and theological reflection. I never accepted this theory, although I grant in practice there can be variations in theology and pedagogy.\(^95\)

Certainly, Herbert Vorgrimler is willing to use the term "kerygmatic" to describe Rahner's theology, if that simply means simply it is always wholly concerned with the religious basis of the human situation:

Seen from this standpoint, his theology may be described as 'kerygmatic theology,' but the term is liable to be misunderstood. For Rahner it does not mean that alongside the necessarily abstract and dry, strictly scientific theology, there must be a diluted form 'for wider circles'; nor does it mean that he is opposed to subtle, highly specialized theological studies. It is simply a difference of horizon.\(^96\)

Other reactions against the kerygmatic approach came primarily from missionaries and catechists in the developing nations who did not doubt that the word of God was "good News," but advocated for the inculturation of preaching, catechesis, and liturgy. A series of "International Catechetical Study Weeks" was organized under the direction of Johannes Hofinger between 1959-1968.\(^97\) The last one held at Medellin challenged catechetics to address the political and socio-economic order which shapes
religious attitudes. It also called for the endorsement of pluralism as a positive value in catechetical activity and enacted a resolution that this principle be recognized in The General Catechetical Directory.\textsuperscript{98}

The third phase of catechetical renewal, which corresponds to the present, post-conciliar period, represents a broadening out of educational ministries. These include retreats, youth ministry, adult education, pre-school religion programs based upon Montessori methods, the use of new instructional technologies, such as educational television and video, and a growing emphasis on the role of the community brought about by the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA). Today the debates over content and method are not as strong, perhaps because of increased emphasis on adult religious formation.\textsuperscript{99}

\textit{Rahner's Particular Contribution}

Rahner himself wrote very little about the practical and existential situation of children in the family, church and society. Yet, his own early pastoral experience,\textsuperscript{100} and the over-arching pastoral concerns of his theology which I have discussed above, indicate his awareness of the challenges facing those entrusted with handing on the faith to the next generation. In a few interviews Rahner talks with adolescents (high school age) and he wrote a series of letters to young adults about the concrete challenges of contemporary Christian life.\textsuperscript{101} His Christmas meditations\textsuperscript{102} reflect upon the coming of God as a child, but they center more on the doctrine of the Incarnation than on the child in any existential sense.\textsuperscript{103} However, two essays, one written several years before Vatican II and the other from 1970, provide evidence that Rahner was concerned about children's religious development.
In the 1970 essay, "Faith and the Stages of Life" Rahner addresses the needs of younger children, and questions whether a catechism is the appropriate medium for the religious initiation of a child. Here Rahner shows himself to be fairly astute about child developmental issues and suggests that content in religious education should be approached more carefully:

When religious education is conducted in such a way that ten to twelve-year-old children have already heard everything once, what they can actually assimilate existentially has not been presented in adequate depth and vitality, nor with the promise of anything new still to come in their faith experience or in religious instruction in later stages of development. It is scarcely any wonder, then, if this age marks the beginning of a period of decline in a knowledge of the faith.

Concerned that children were being forced to become miniature adults in the area of religion, "simply for fear of not being able to reach them later," Rahner recommended that certain biblical passages (i.e., the Genesis stories) be presented to children only when they can better appreciate the poetic-mythical character of the narratives, when they are able to distinguish content from form. Similarly, he saw disadvantages in introducing children to certain religious customs, such as altar serving or singing in the choir. He worried that these activities would be regarded as "children's activities," ones that would be outgrown eventually and put aside. Rahner suggests that these activities be presented as "privileges," for which a child one day becomes "old enough." (125)

Some years ago, a German religious educator, Michael Langer, presented a compilation of Rahner's writings that had relevance for the religious socialization of youth in an increasingly secularized culture. Although the majority of these writings are more oriented to ministry with young adults rather than children, Langer praised Rahner's boldness in addressing the pastoral needs of the young. He singles out for special mention the earlier of Rahner's two essays mentioned above, "The Sacrifice of
the Mass and an Ascesis for Youth."\textsuperscript{107} Despite the fact that it was written in 1957 and employs pre-conciliar terms that are no longer meaningful to most Catholics,\textsuperscript{108} this essay demonstrates Rahner's abiding concern for youth catechesis. For example, Rahner warned against putting too much emphasis on the Mass for young people. He encouraged the development of a "Mass of life," or a "people's Mass," that would be age-specific and more appropriate for those under twenty-five. The essay reveals clearly how, early on, Rahner understood that there were stages of religious development which correspond to the different stages in human biological development. Thus, he encouraged the co-ordination of the presentation of religious truths according to these phases of development and voiced the regret that, aside from a few requirements of Canon Law from which one is exempted before age seven, twenty-one and after age fifty-nine, "as soon as children cease to be children in the narrower sense they begin to be regarded simply as undifferentiated Christian people."\textsuperscript{109}

Langer also observes that from 1964 through 1977 Rahner undertook the composition of what he called "short formulas of faith." These brief credal statements attempted to express Christian faith in a way that corresponded to the present cultural situation. Several "short formulas" are included in the Epilogue to \textit{Foundations of Christian Faith}.\textsuperscript{110} Although probably not intended for small children, Langer encouraged religious educators to follow Rahner's example and employ such "short formulas" as a way of overcoming the "faith deficit" that young people experience.\textsuperscript{111}

\textit{The Impact of Rahner's Theology}

More significant than any individual writings on the catechesis of children and youth, however, is the impact that Rahner's whole theological project on post-Vatican II
Catholic religious education. He is seldom mentioned by name in this connection, but Rahner's theology, when taken as a whole, particularly his central focus on God's self-communication in human experience and his concern for "a new mystagogy," deserves greater recognition from Catholic religious educators. It may well be that his ideas have so permeated modern Catholic theology that they have become part of the very air religious educators breathe.

Maria Harris, for example, recalls the beginning days of post-Vatican II religious education in the U.S. and the enormous impact of Rahner's theology. In the mid-1960s she joined the religious education staff of the Catholic diocese of Rockville Centre, New York, where her major work was in-service education with directors of religious education (DREs). She saw their number grow from four in 1967 to one hundred seventy-eight in 1973. Reflecting on how today these men and women fill every conceivable pastoral role, she notes in particular the influence of Karl Rahner:

Back then…especially in Catholic circles, the majority of people in individual parishes were only at the start of a world shaking awareness of new possibilities for being 'Spirit in the world' – a phrase of Karl Rahner's. Women and men were signing up for masters programs like the one our diocese was initiating and were reading Rahner. [...T]he laity were crowding the many educational programs we were running because they were experiencing a new kind of community. They wanted deeper theological understanding for themselves and yearned for non-rote teaching and a broader religious education for their children.

While Harris merely suggests that Rahner's thought helped spark a new era among U.S. Catholic religious educators, Georg Baudler adamantly insists that "the entire renewal of religious education, especially that documented by the [German] synod's final document on religious instruction in the schools, would be unthinkable without Karl Rahner's renewed formulation of the relationship between nature and grace." Baudler maintains that without the new horizon of theological reflection (often
called "the anthropological turn") that is exemplified in Karl Rahner’s theology of revelation and grace, recent pedagogical theories adopted by religious educators would not be possible.\textsuperscript{115}

Likewise, another German religious educator, Roman Bleistein,\textsuperscript{116} cites Rahner’s vision of a "new mystagogy," as an illustration of how Rahner realized long ago what many religious educators are coming to understand only today, namely that the cultivation of a sense of mystery (in the sense of mystagogy) is essential for children's religious education and for fostering their spirituality. A prime example is the work of David Hay, the director of the British Children's Spirituality Project at Nottingham University who has used Rahner's theology to ground his research into the spirituality of children.\textsuperscript{117}

Hay and his colleagues are challenging the dominance of cognitive developmental theory (i.e., Piaget,\textsuperscript{118} Goldman,\textsuperscript{119} Kohlberg\textsuperscript{120}) in the field of religious education which, they believe, "come[s] close to dissolving religion into reason, and childhood religion into a form of deficit or inadequacy."\textsuperscript{121} Instead, they endorse the spiritual potentiality within every child no matter what the child's ability or cultural context:

Our position is akin to that of Rahner. We conceive of an innate spiritual capacity in childhood, but recognise that this may focus in particular ways and take different and changing forms as the child's other capacities develop.\textsuperscript{122}

Hay takes issue with developmentalists who are "stuck at the level of God-talk" in their exploration of children and religion. These researchers focus on the language children use as the criterion for identifying religious experience. Hay objects to considering only what children say about God (which leads to the conclusion that childhood religion is immature and inadequate) because language, like all conceptual
reflections, always fails to capture the experience. Researchers, Hay argues, need to take a different direction. They need to focus on children's perceptions, awareness of and responses to those ordinary activities that Peter Berger calls "signals of transcendence." Given the lack of such a research tradition, Hay and his colleagues find resonance in Rahner's transcendental theology. They frequently cite the following passage from Rahner in order to substantiate the difference between religious "knowing" and the ability to capture spiritual experience in words:

> And even if this term [God] were ever to be forgotten, even then in the decisive moments of our lives we should still be constantly encompassed by this nameless mystery of our existence…even supposing that the realities which we call religions…were to totally disappear…the transcendentality inherent in human life is such that [we] would still reach out towards that mystery which lies outside [our] control.

Hay believes that because modern technological society ignores the spiritual dimension of a child's life, in time, this dimension will become repressed. Rahner's theology is therefore extremely relevant for parents, preachers, and religious educators who, according to Hay, must direct children's attention to areas of experience that are ignored, misinterpreted or trivialized by the surrounding culture.

**Conclusion**

This examination of Rahner's theology of the child, as well as his reflections on original sin, infant baptism, and children's religious development, lead to the following observations and conclusions concerning his contribution toward a more coherent Catholic teaching on children. First, Rahner provides a two-fold view of childhood: 1) he contributes an important definition of the child as "infinite openness to the infinite"; and 2) he understands childhood as an abiding quality of human existence that, when entered
into and embraced, makes us receptive to Jesus' vision of the realm of God. Already as a child, a human being is a "subject" who enjoys an immediate relationship with God that is actual and not merely potential. As the beginning of human transcendentality, childhood, for Rahner, constitutes both the quality which enables us to love and to be responsible, and the state of spiritual maturity that characterizes our participation in the interior life of God and makes possible the experience of genuine human community.

Second, according to Rahner, a child has value in its own right and is not simply a stage one passes through on the way to becoming an adult. This view stands in sharp contrast to the market anthropology of late twentieth century capitalism, which regards children as commodities or consumers and evaluates their worth according to cost-benefit analyses. The implication of Rahner's theological anthropology of the child is clear: children are not objects to be bought, sold, or used, but, according to the example used by Jesus in the gospels, they are the paradigm for a new ethos characterized by mutual trust and interdependence.

Third, Rahner's understanding of childhood as a "basic condition," or "existential," that remains throughout the whole of one's life, provides a needed corrective to the "excessive natalism" of much official Catholic teaching that focuses solely on the incipient stages of human life. The definition of the child as a full human being from its very beginning implies that a child is a "sacred trust" to be nurtured and protected at every stage of its existence. Therefore, an important implication for Catholic social teaching, which derives from Rahner's transcendental notion of enduring childhood, is the promotion of the dignity and welfare of children as an ethical demand that is equal in importance to the protection of fetal life. In particular, the basic openness
that characterizes the essence of a child must not be compromised or betrayed by those to
whom the care of children is entrusted. Not only are violations of this trust injurious to
the child itself, but, as Rahner points out, there are tragic, long-term effects on the adult
whose basic sense of openness and trust is destroyed in childhood.127

Fourth, while Rahner's theology has begun to be more widely appreciated by
religious educators for breaking through the abstract, defensive, neoscholastic
overemphasis on content, to a more "subject-centered" (in the sense of child-centered)
catechesis, researchers in the emerging field of children's spirituality are forging a new
application of his insights. They have recognized that the cultivation of the child's
natural sense of wonder about such fundamental human experiences as friendship, love,
death, sex, sadness, joy, success, failure, etc.—experiences that contemporary culture
trivializes, misinterprets, or ignores—is vitally necessary for the encounter with the
"gracious mystery" that, for Rahner, characterizes both the experience of God and of the
self.128 Today, this aspect of Rahner's theology is being utilized to advocate the
development of the child's innate spirituality and to re-envision children's religious
education as "a new way of seeing" in a world that is becoming increasingly devoid of
mystery.

Finally, in much the same way that the exitus/reditus dynamic functioned for
Thomas Aquinas in the Summa Theologiae, Rahner's notion of the child as "infinite
openness to the infinite" and his concept of childhood as an inherent factor in our lives,
offers a profoundly important theological anthropology for a Catholic social teaching on
children. Rahner's theological anthropology reminds us that our obligation is not only to
nurture the children who are given to us and all that belongs to them as children, but that
we, too, again and again, must become that child which we were in the beginning. It invites those of us who are adults to allow our childhood trust, openness, expectation, and readiness to be controlled by another to be released, "not as a fond or bitter memory, but as a facet of what we hope to become."

As Rahner reminds us:

It is only in the child that the child in the simple and absolute sense of the term really begins. And that is the dignity of the child, his task and his claim upon us all that we can and must help him in this task. In serving the child in this way, therefore, there can be no question of any petty sentimentality. Rather it is the eternal value and dignity of [the human being], who must become a child, that we are concerned with, [the human being] who only becomes a sharer in God's interior life in that [s]he becomes that child which [s]he only begins to be in his own childhood.
Notes

1 In this paper "official Roman Catholic teaching" refers to statements produced by the hierarchical magisterium (the teaching office of the pope and bishops) of the Catholic church. These statements may be issued by ecumenical councils, synods, and individual popes and bishops. For an extended treatment of this topic, see Richard Gaillardetz, *Teaching with Authority: A Theology of the Magisterium in the Church* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1997); Ladislas Örsy, *The Church: Learning and Teaching* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1987); Francis A. Sullivan, *Creative Fidelity: Weighing and Interpreting Documents of the Magisterium* (New York: Paulist Press, 1996).


4 For those unfamiliar with the term, "Catholic social teaching" refers to those official statements of popes, bishops, synods and councils that deal with the political, social, economic and international order. Although the Catholic social tradition can be traced back to the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures and the writings of patristic and medieval theologians such as Augustine and Aquinas, modern "Catholic social teaching" is usually regarded to have begun with Pope Leo XIII's 1891 encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*. Encyclicals (papal letters addressed to the whole world) are the usual means of transmission for Catholic social teaching, although other ecclesial (episcopal conferences, synods, and councils) have also contributed to this body of thought.

5 See above, n. 5.

6 Whitmore, "Children," 168.


8 See Pope John Paul II, "Laborem exercens," in Gregory Baum, *The Priority of Labor* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982). In addition to the text of the encyclical, Baum provides an excellent commentary on this encyclical.

9 Derived from a neo-Platonic way of viewing the world, the exitus/reditus (exit and return) dynamic is the overarching structure which Thomas Aquinas gave to his *Summa theologiae*. The French Dominican, M.-D. Chenu (1895-1990), is credited for noticing the centrality and dynamism of this pattern. See, Marie-Dominique Chenu, *Toward Understanding St. Thomas* (Chicago: Regnery, 1964) and Thomas F. O'Meara, *Thomas Aquinas: Theologian* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1997), 53-63.

10 These sources include: Leo XIII's *Immortale dei* (#6, 20) and *Rerum Novarum* (no. 11); Pius XII's 1942 "Christmas Address;" John XXIII's *Pacem in terris* (no. 121) and *Mater et magistra* (nos. 227-232); Vatican II's *Gaudium et spes* (no. 52); Paul VI's *Octogesima adveniens* (no 16, 24); *Populorum progressio*
The notion of subsidiarity was first defined in modern Catholic social teaching by Pope Pius XI in his encyclical, *Quadragesimo anno* (1931) (ET: “In the fortieth year”).

12 The notion of subsidiarity was first defined in modern Catholic social teaching by Pope Pius XI in his encyclical, *Quadragesimo anno* (1931) (ET: “In the fortieth year”).

13 See, Pope John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio*, no. 45. But see also, Gudorf's critique of this document. Cf. n. 5 above.

14 Whitmore, "Children," 177. Whitmore does not discuss the possible reasons for this narrow emphasis; however, feminist theologians have suggested that much of the problem is due to the exclusion of women's, especially mothers', experience and participation in the formulation of these teachings. See Bonnie Miller-McLemore's discussion in Chapter XX of this volume. See also, Christine Gudorf's discussion (above, n. 5) of the hierarchically ordered family model in Catholic teaching and its negative effects on children.


17 This simply may be due to the fact that Whitmore is distinguishing between "official" teaching of the Catholic church produced by the *magisterium* (councils, popes, and bishops) and not the "teaching" of theologians. However, there is no magisterial teaching that does not depend in some degree upon theology (illustrated, for example in Whitmore's appreciation of the Thomistic structure of Catholic social teaching). For example, as we are arguing in his essay, Rahner's theology has found its way into the pastoral practice of postconciliar Catholicism, even if it is not cited explicitly in the official pronouncements of the magisterium.

18 With few exceptions, the seminary education of priests and the religious instruction and preaching to which ordinary Catholics were exposed were dominated by neoscholasticism at least until the early 1960s. The Second Vatican Council (1961-65) marked the definitive end of neoscholastic hegemony in Catholic theology. See, Gerald McCool, *Catholic Theology in the Nineteenth Century: The Quest for a Unitary Method* (New York: Seabury, 1977) and Benedict Ashley, s.v. "neoscholasticism," in Richard P. McBrien, ed., *The Harper Encyclopedia of Catholicism* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1995).

19 "Neoscholasticism" is not synonymous with "neo-Thomism." The former term is the broader category, since Bonaventure and Scotus, along with Thomas Aquinas, can be classified as "scholastics." For an excellent discussion of neoscholasticism in relationship to neo-Thomism, see O'Meara, *Thomas Aquinas: Theologian*, 167-75.

20 *Aeterni Patris* (August 4, 1879)


22 Vorgrimler, *Understanding Karl Rahner*, 53. The last official edition of the Index was issued in 1948 with a total of about 4,000 titles. The Index was abolished by Paul VI in the mid 1960s.

23 Rahner also used other terms for the kind of theology that predominated between Vatican I and Vatican II. For example, "Denzinger theology" referred to theological conclusions deduced from the *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, a comprehensive catalogue of official pronouncements of popes and councils, edited by Heinrich Joseph Denzinger in 1854. See Rahner's "The Prospects for Dogmatic Theology," *TI*, Vol. I, 3. He also used the term "textbook theology" to describe the treatises used in seminary courses. The "manuals," as they also were called, comprised a veritable theological genre which aimed to 1) "offer a defense of the Catholic faith against the rationalism inspired by the Enlightenment," and 2) "offer a systematic, internally coherent presentation of Catholic doctrine...alternative to the problematic systems inspired by philosophical idealism." See Richard Gaillardetz, "manualists," s.v., in Richard P. McBrien, ed., *The Harper Collins Encyclopedia of Catholicism* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1995).


26 In the nineteenth century, Lord Acton commented that the laity's role was to "pray, pay, and obey." Todd Whitmore notes that the laity are often characterized as "children" in Roman Catholic church documents. See Todd Whitmore, "Children," 162.
"Limbo," a theological postulate that never has been defined as a dogma by the Catholic church, was developed to explain that those, such as infants, who through no fault of their own, died unbaptized, could still be saved from eternal damnation, but would be deprived of the vision of God in some nebulous eternity "on the edge" (the literal meaning of "limbo") of heaven. See Cristina Traina's discussion of this topic in Aquinas' theology in Chapter XX of this volume.

This concept is derived from Aquinas. Around the age of seven, children were commonly thought to have reached the age of moral discretion. See Cristina Traina's discussion of the Thomistic understanding of children's moral responsibility in Chapter XX.


Rahner describes his childhood as being ordinary, unremarkable and typical of the German middle-class at the turn of the twentieth century. See Karl Rahner, I Remember: An Autobiographical Interview with Meinold Krauss (New York: Crossroad, 1985), 20-34.

Rahner entered the Jesuits in Feldkirch (Voralberg, Austria) at age 18. For an account of his vocational decision and the nature of his philosophical and theological studies, see Karl Rahner, I Remember, 41-48. See also, Karl Rahner, in Paul Imhof and Hubert Biallowons, eds., Faith in a Wintry Season (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 15-38 and Paul Imhof and Hubert Biallowons, eds., Karl Rahner in Dialogue, (New York: Crossroad, 1986), 12-15; 255

All of these quotations are taken from Rahner's essay, "On Recognizing the Importance of Thomas Aquinas," TI, Vol. XIII, 3-12. See also the lengthy interview in which Rahner discusses his views on Aquinas and his interpreters, including Rahner's perceptions of liberation theology, in Faith in a Wintry Season, 41-58.

For my part I don't want to do much more than to release the inner dynamism that still exists in the ordinary, apparently sterile, homogeneous (in the pejorative sense) scholastic theology." See Karl Rahner, Faith in a Wintry Season, 17-18.

It is beyond the scope of this essay to give a complete account of Vatican II's impact on the Catholic church. Rahner himself offered periodic assessments of the Council. See, for example, "Basic Theological Interpretation of the Second Vatican Council," TI, Vol. XX, pp. 77-102; "Forgotten Dogmatic Initiatives of the Second Vatican Council," TI, Vol. XXII, pp. 97-105. Towards the end of his life, Rahner grew pessimistic about the way some forces in Catholicism were attempting to short-circuit the reforms of Vatican II. See his reflections in Faith in a Wintry Season, 39, 74-78.

The most important theologian of Vatican II was Yves Congar, for much of the agenda of the Council had been his agenda since the beginning of his ministry in 1932. The important theologian after the Council, however, has been Karl Rahner. The bibliography of writings by him and on him...indicate his broad, vast influence," writes Thomas F. O'Meara in "Karl Rahner: Some audiences and sources for his theology," Communio 18 (1991):237-38. Rahner seems to agree with O'Meara's assessment: "I did not exercise any great influence at the Council....It is true that I attended almost all of the meetings of the Theological Commission and that I collaborated with the other theologians. As you know the most important schemata of this commission were on the Church and revelation. I was a member of certain sub-committees that worked on these, but my contribution was not great." See Karl Rahner in Dialogue, 20.

It is estimated that Rahner authored more than four thousand written works. See Harvey Egan, "Translator's Foreward" in Karl Rahner, I Remember: An Autobiographical Interview (New York: Crossroad, 1985),1.


See "The New Claims Which Pastoral Theology Makes Upon Theology as Whole," TI, vol. XI, 115-36. For detailed examples of Rahner's pastoral theology, see the four-volume Handbuch der Pastoraltheologie (Freiburg: Herder, 1966) in which Rahner was a key collaborator. Rahner states that this handbook was developed precisely to combat the view that pastoral theology was confined to homiletics, catechetics, and pastoral liturgy. Rahner concurred with Friedrich Schleiermacher in preferring the term "practical theology" to describe the kind of theology he was engaged in, since the term "pastoral" suggests that it is only the clergy who are responsible for the Church's active work.

41 Karl Rahner in Dialogue, 256.
42 The term "mystagogy" is derived from the Greek, muein, "to instruct in the mysteries" and refers to the period after baptism when newly baptized Christians (neophytes) were instructed how to live the Christian life. In the early church the "mystagogia" were instructions or homilies on the sacraments of Baptism, anointing, and Eucharist.
44 "I would say that I have always done theology with a view to kerygma, preaching, pastoral care. For that reason, I have written relatively many books on devotion in the standard sense such as the book On Prayer and Watch and Pray with Me." (Karl Rahner in Dialogue, 256). See also William Dych, Karl Rahner, 28. and Harvey D. Egan, Karl Rahner: Mystic of Everyday Life (New York: Crossroad, 1998), 80-104.
45 Karl Rahner, I Remember, 57.
47 Harvey Egan, Karl Rahner, 76-77.
48 Rahner acknowledged, however, that the process of reflecting upon this experience "varies greatly from one individual to another in terms of force and clarity." See Karl Rahner, "The Experience of God Today," TI, Vol. XI, 153. Also important for understanding Rahner's essay on the theology of childhood is his concept of "eternity" and its relationship to "temporal" existence. See "Eternity from Time," TI, Vol. XIX, 169-77.
49 Karl Rahner, Faith in a Wintry Season, 115.
51 A good summary of this debate which includes the contributions of Henri de Lubac and Karl Rahner can be found in Robert J. Hurley, Hermeneutics and Catechesis: Biblical Interpretation in the Come to the Father Catechetical Series. (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1997), 167-181.
53 Exceptions include Donald Buggert, William Dych, Harvey Egan, Mary E. Hines, Leo O'Donovan, and Thomas O'Meara. In his later years Rahner commented that "in comparison with other philosophy and theology that influenced me, Ignatian spirituality was indeed more significant and important…[T]he spirituality of Ignatius himself, which one learned through the practice of prayer and religious formation, was more significant for me than all learned philosophy and theology inside and outside the order." See Karl Rahner in Dialogue, 191.

For Rahner's understanding of "eternity" and its relationship to "temporal" existence, see "Eternity from Time," TI, Vol. XIX, 169-77.

Rahner's point is difficult to grasp unless one keeps in mind his overall transcendent theological project. He wants to emphasize that, due to the "situatedness" of human freedom (i.e., a childhood that can include deprivation such as poverty, violence, abuse, bad parenting, etc.), even one who is an adult might still be working out eternally significant dimensions of childhood although one is biologically beyond that stage.

The duality that Rahner refers to here is the lack of integration that is traditionally referred to as "concupiscence." Not to be confused with sin, it refers to the dissonance human beings experience in being unable to master or integrate all the elements which are given to us as a part of our reality prior to our free decisions. For further discussion of this idea, see James Bacik, "Rahner's Anthropology," 172.

See Dawn De Vries' discussion of this view of children elsewhere in this volume, in Chapter XXX.

For Paul, he cites: 1 Cor 3:1; 13:11; 14:28; Gal 4:1-3; Eph 4:14; Heb 5:13. See Mt 11:16ff for the parable of the children in the marketplace. See also, Judith Gundry's discussion of these biblical texts in Chapter X of this volume.

In Nathan Mitchell's estimation, Rahner views a child as "a sacrament of that radical openness to the future which is a characteristic posture of the Christian believer precisely because the child reveals not only what we once were, but what we will be." See Nathan Mitchell, "The Once and Future Child," 428.

See, for example, Thomas A. Smith's assessment in The Harper Collins Encyclopedia of Catholicism, s.v. "original sin." Rahner's theology exerted great influence both on Catholic sacramental theology and liberation theology. See, for example, Mark O'Keefe, What are They Saying About Social Sin (New York: Paulist Press, 1990).


While there are clearly basic similarities between them, here Rahner ultimately differs from Augustine, who never sufficiently differentiated between original sin and the voluntary, personal sin for which one can be held accountable.


It is interesting to note that although the revised Rite of Baptism for Children provides a ritual in case of danger of death, it also includes the "Rite of Bringing a Baptized Child to the Church" which should be celebrated if the infant survives.


Rahner wrote to König: "How does one help people of today understand that God—who surely has a universal, saving will—in the time before Christ would allow children who died as infants into heaven, but since the New Covenant, through no fault of theirs or others, simply because He has gotten into a bind with his baptismal command, refuses them entrance? How is one to make clear to people today that the authentic, universal saving will of God is available to children, if one is doomed to founder on an obstacle that God Himself and his saving will has created?" See Karl Rahner, "Konzilsgutachten," 106-07. I am grateful to Eckhard Bernstein for his help in translating Rahner's German here.


Du Pont's method was published in Belgium in as *Pour apprendre la religion aux petits* (Tamines: Duculot, 1929).

This was the approach of Marie Fargues, *Les méthodes actives dans l'enseignement religieux* (Paris: Edition du Cerf, 1934).


These seminars took place at Nijmegen (1959), Eichstätt (1960), Bangkok (1962), Katigondo (1964), Manila (1967) and Medellín (1968).


It is beyond the scope of this essay to give an assessment of the contemporary state of religious education in the Roman Catholic church. However, as a college professor who teaches mainly Catholic undergraduates, I and many of my colleagues have become increasingly concerned about the imperiled state of children and youth catechesis. Many baptized and confirmed Catholic students arrive at college theology courses today without even a rudimentary understanding of "the Christian story," let alone an understanding of the Bible and church tradition. Ironically, although more emphasis is being put on parental responsibility for the religious education of children, local parishes and dioceses have cut budgets for adult religious education.
Rahner spent most of the war years (1938-1945) as a member of the diocesan Pastoral Institute in Vienna. During the last year of this period he served as a parish priest in the Bavarian village of Mariakirchen.


Rahner’s Christmas meditations remind one of Schleiermacher, who also used Christmas as an occasion for reflecting on human experience as the locus of divine encounter. See Dawn DeVries’ discussion of *The Celebration of Christmas: A Conversation* in "Schleiermacher and the Religious Significance of Childhood” in this volume. Although Rahner nowhere acknowledges Schleiermacher as an influence on his theology, this similarity has been noticed by others such as Daniel Donovan. Donovan, for example, in reviewing Volumes XVII and XX of the English editions of Rahner’s *Theological Investigations*, says “In spite of all the obvious differences, there is much …that is reminiscent of Schleiermacher. Rahner’s philosophical categories are certainly not those of his great Protestant predecessor. The experience, however, to which he points, the primacy that he attributes to it, even the formulations that he uses to evoke it in his more personal and spiritual writings, bear a striking resemblance to what lay at the heart of Schleiermacher’s theological revolution.” See Daniel Donovan, “Vintage Rahner,” *Cross Currents* 33 (1983-84), 387. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza also has noted the similarity of the two thinkers. See his forthcoming article in *Modern Theology*.


For example, "ascesis for youth," might better be rendered "spirituality" today.


Although many authors have commented on the pastoral thrust of Rahner's theology, in my research I could only find two sources in English that discusses the implications of Rahner’s thought for religious education. See James B. Dunning, "Human Creativity: A Symbol of Transcendence in Contemporary Psychology and the Theology of Karl Rahner: Implications for Religious Education," (Ph.D. diss., The Catholic University of America, 1973) and Robert J. Hurley, *Hermeneutics and Catechesis*.


121 David Hay, "Children and God," 1270.

122 David Hay, Rebecca Nye and Roger Murphy, "Thinking about Childhood," 60.

123 A compelling example that Hay et al. use is the profound religion of people who are mentally retarded. See David Hay, Rebecca Nye and Roger Murphy, "Thinking about Childhood, 56.


126 See James J. Bacik, "Rahner's Anthropology: The Basis for a Dialectic Spirituality," pp. 168-72 and above, n. 72 for a review of Rahner's concept of "existential."

127 This is borne out by contemporary clinical practitioners' interest in adult recovery of the "inner child."


129 This phrasing belongs to Nathan Mitchell, "The Once and Future Child," 427.

130 Karl Rahner, "Ideas," 50.